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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Three Franklin County Conservation Projects Awarded Mini-Grants

Three Franklin County conservation projects will be a little closer to completion thanks to Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District. The organizations awarded the first annual Conservation Fund mini-grants are Hamilton Township for the installation of two rain gardens at the community center, the Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland Council's Camp Ken-Jockey for planting native vegetation to enhance its new natural-play space and the Wilma H. Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park for planting native trees and shrubs along the Olentangy River to mitigate streambank erosion and invasive plants.

Hamilton Township's rain gardens will be planted in front of the building, intercepting substantial runoff from two downspouts and refreshing the aesthetics of the building's entrance just in time for Memorial Day. The rain gardens will consist of flowering perennials, grasses and shrubs that will capture and infiltrate over 62,000 gallons of rainwater annually, while creating important habitat for pollinators and birds. Rain gardens can lessen the effects of flooding and streambank erosion by reducing the amount of stormwater runoff entering a stream.

The natural play space at Camp Ken-Jockey is designed for secure, enjoyable and engaged educational play in a natural setting for Girl Scouts ages 6 to 18. The proposed area for the natural play space is an open, sloped field between a constructed pond and a natural creek, and will assist in absorbing stormwater runoff. The Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland Council are funding the installation of a constructed streambed area in spring 2013 and the Conservation Fund mini-grant adds to the project by allowing the purchase of native Ohio plantings around the streambed and in the wildlife areas, including trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses. Installation labor for the planting will be available through campers and volunteers.

Lynn McCready, interim director of OSU's Wilma H. Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, feels that the mini-grants fill a need in local conservation.

"We traditionally conduct several honeysuckle removals each year in the riparian corridor adjacent to the Olentangy River, but our budget has never allowed infill planting in these remediated areas. This resulted in invasives re-establishing in these sections within a year or two. The Franklin Soil and Water mini-grant has allowed us to go one step further and plant a mix of replacement woody species that, once established, will make it more difficult for honeysuckle, garlic mustard and other invasive species to regain a foothold. We're grateful for a solution that will allow us to expand our efforts into new areas - rather than continue to remediate the same spots year after year. There's a real need for

small grants to help achieve specific restoration goals on projects where the larger federal and state grant programs just aren't appropriate.”

The Conservation Fund mini-grants promote on-the-ground conservation, especially small or on-going projects that may not meet the criteria of larger grant programs. Franklin Soil and Water will provide up to three grants of up to \$1,500 annually, to assist in the protection and improvement of soil and water resources in Franklin County. The funds are generated from the Franklin Soil and Water annual meeting and silent auction, the annual tree and fish sale and donations received throughout the year for the Conservation Fund. For instance, over 10% of the mailed-in orders for the 2013 tree and fish sale included donations to the Conservation Fund. Applications for funding will be accepted from January through March of each year, and proposals will be reviewed by members of the Franklin Soil and Water staff and Board of Supervisors.

The mini-grants are available to schools, local governments and nonprofits, such as watershed organizations and civic associations. Organizations may apply for up to \$1,500. The project must align with Franklin Soil and Water’s mission to promote responsible land use decisions for the conservation, protection and improvement of soil and water resources. Examples of appropriate projects include tree planting, rain garden installation, habitat improvement, and sediment and erosion control measures including vegetative stream bank stabilization.

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Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District is the natural resource agency in Franklin County with the sole purpose of promoting conservation and responsible land use for better water quality and natural resource management. This is accomplished through establishing partnerships, providing technical guidance and targeted environmental education.

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