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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newly named ‘West Harbor Preserve’ becomes the Park District of Ottawa County’s first park

Catawba Island Township, OH, Jan. 3, 2024 – Respected regional land trust, the Black Swamp Conservancy, has donated an undeveloped 12-acre parcel of land to the Park District of Ottawa County (PDOC), that includes a broad marsh and a quarter mile of shoreline on Lake Erie’s West Harbor. The parcel, located in Catawba Island Township, will be the future site of a park maintenance facility and will include a kayak launch, walking trails, a parking area, and habitat restoration projects. It is the first park area owned by the Park District of Ottawa County and will be named the West Harbor Preserve.

The 12-acre parcel is one of two strategic pieces of conservation land on Catawba Island that were purchased earlier this year by the Black Swamp Conservancy through a grant from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund. The other property contains more than 19 acres of mature hardwood forest and will be retained by the Conservancy for migratory bird and wildlife habitat.

“On December 21st, 2023, we had a milestone moment for the Park District. It has been 31 years since the inception of the Park District, but we can now say we own property to develop our first park area,” said Jannah Wilson, executive director for the Park District of Ottawa County.

“Working with the Black Swamp Conservancy has been a great experience and we look forward to a strong partnership for years to come as we work together to reestablish the natural riparian habitat. Most importantly, we are grateful for the support from Ottawa County taxpayers. Projects such as this are made possible through the Park District’s current 10-year .6 mill operating levy which was passed by Ottawa County voters in November 2020. The operating

levy will continue to support the Park District as we develop amenities and maintain the property now and in the future.”

The Park District of Ottawa County, first established in 1992, will be issuing a request for proposals (RFP) for a park master plan and preliminary engineering design, Wilson said. Development of the West Harbor Preserve will take up to two years, during which time the Preserve will not be publicly accessible. Located in Catawba Island Township on a body of water known locally as “the inner harbor,” the protection of the 12 acres prevents the land from being lost to development, said Ellie Schiappa, conservation associate for Black Swamp Conservancy, in a West Harbor Preserve Documentation Report. Preserving this open space for perpetuity ensures this essential property is protected from development pressures.

“The Conservancy is pleased to donate this property to the Park District of Ottawa County. That this project represents the Park District’s first owned land is all the more exciting, said Rob Krain, executive director of Black Swamp Conservancy. “Our organization often takes the lead on acquiring important lands, like this one, and gifting them to local entities to manage for public use. We’ve done similar projects with Catawba Island Township, Danbury Township, Sandusky County Park District and many other partners.”

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About Black Swamp Conservancy: Black Swamp Conservancy is a land trust dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural habitats and family farms in northwest Ohio for the benefit of current and future generations. The Conservancy does this to preserve the heritage, habitats and waters of northwest Ohio. Since its founding in 1993 the organization has permanently protected more than 22,500 acres of wetlands, woods and working lands across Northwest Ohio. www.BlackSwamp.org

About the Park District of Ottawa County: The mission of the Park District of Ottawa County is to connect, enhance and protect the natural, scenic, environmental and cultural resources of Ottawa County for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. The Park District is led by a five-person Board of Park Commissioners appointed by the Probate Judge of Ottawa County. The Board of Park Commissioners approves policy, financial and strategic planning decisions. The Executive Director/Secretary works directly with the Board and is responsible for day-to-day operations of the Park District. The Park District of Ottawa County was established under Ohio Revised Code Chapter 1545 and functions as a separate political subdivision under the State of Ohio. Park systems established under Chapter 1545 strive to develop parklands and outdoor recreation amenities for local communities. www.ottawacountyparksoh.org.