

Wanna Get WILDS???

By Rick Jones

We have a very special opportunity as part of this year's NCC Convention Celebration – ANIMAL HOUSE. Convention attendees will have the opportunity to register for custom tours of the **Columbus Zoo's The Wilds**, located just 21 miles from our National Museum of Cambridge Glass. A special treat is that the first group tour of The Wilds will be **led by our very own Friend of Cambridge, Sharon Miller**, who is also an NCC Board Member (and current Secretary). Sharon has been working part-time at The Wilds, which is an over 9,000 acre Conservancy.

The Wilds has a fascinating history. According to Wikipedia, it is now the largest wildlife conservation center in North America. It is located on land that was formerly used for strip mining. It was mined for coal from the 1940's to the 1980's. As that industry was beginning to wind down, the government passed the Federal Reclamation Act (1971) which required contouring, topsoil and erosion control plantings.

In the late 70's, an idea emerged to convert this property into The Wilds as a private-public partnership involving the Ohio Departments of Natural Resources and Development, the Ohio zoos and the private sector. By 1984, The International Center for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Inc. was formally incorporated as a 501(c)(3) corporation. They were gifted 9,154 acres of land by the Central Ohio Coal Company, a subsidiary of the American Electric Power Company (ironically, the company we bought our museum building from).

Property development began in earnest. The Visitor Center was completed in 1989, the first perimeter open range fencing installed by 1990 as was an Animal Management Facility and the first animal was released into the wild in 1992. By 1994, The Wilds was ready to open to the public. The facility received a major boost in 2001 with a legal relationship formed with the Board of The Columbus Zoo, lead by their legendary curator Jack Hanna. In 2007, he premiered his television show segment - Into The Wilds, of course featuring The Wilds. By 2012, The Wilds was welcoming over 100,000 visitors a year.

Tours of The Wilds cost \$30 a person. The tour lasts approximately 2 and a half hours and, as I said, tour one will be led by Sharon. If we get more than 30 registrants, additional tour directors will be scheduled. Sharon recommends you fill your gas tank before coming as there are no gas stations close to the facility. Also, parking is \$6.00 and they take credit cards.

I have already promised Sharon that I will be the first person to register for this tour and I hope you will quickly follow suit so we can begin to get counts for the tour. Our NCC private tour is currently planned to start Wednesday at 1:30 pm. Plus, we are asking members to arrive by 12:00 so they can grab a bite at the snack bar and get organized for the tour. We will be done in plenty of time to make Cambridge for dinner. This is a "rain or shine" event and will not be cancelled in the event of showers.

For more information on The Wilds, go to **www.thewilds.columbuszoo.org**. The Wilds is located at 14000 International Road in Cumberland OH. For those of you who have GPS, you can use this address for directions.