

The Western Reserve - The Land and Its Riches
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Before the land was bounded by the surveyor's rod, the Western Reserve was endowed with tremendous biological wealth and diversity. This land was formed of the sediments of ancient seas, uplifted by tectonic forces and shaped by water. It was sculpted by the advances and retreats of glaciers and dissected by rivers and streams.

The land was mantled and shrouded in forest, a forest of great antiquity. Centuries-old trees towered skyward, their broad-based trunks limbless and straight below their crowns. The canopy was unbroken but for the actions of wind, lightning, disease and beaver which created openings. This provided the forest with structural complexity and floral diversity. Low-lying and poorly drained areas supported swamp forests. Marshes occupied the estuaries at the mouths of the primary rivers. Pockets of prairie and boreal flora dotted the land where suitable conditions prevailed.

The variety of habitats found in the Western Reserve provided niches for a wide assortment of wildlife. Deer, elk, bison, wolf, cougar, bear, bobcat, otter, porcupine, and beaver are examples of the larger mammal forms. Wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and bobwhite were present in the forests. Large numbers of migrant waterfowl and shorebirds frequented the marshes and shore. The sweet waters of Lake Erie and its tributaries teemed with fish and mollusks. Bald eagles, herons and egrets fished the wetland habitats.

More so than perhaps any other creature, the passenger pigeon epitomized the wealth of the land. These large relatives of the mourning dove were nomadic mast specialists which foraged widely through the region on the fruit of oaks and beech. When the mast crop was good, they nested in huge numbers. At the onset of the 19th century, the passenger pigeon was thought to be one of the most numerous birds in the world. Flights in Ohio alone were estimated in the billions. The Western Reserve was located in the midst of its breeding range. Only a land of great biological riches could support such a great population of birds. This was the country as it existed before its wholesale conversion to agriculture and settlement in the 1800s.