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Linn Log

SUMMER 2024

New Acquisition: Spruce Run Tract

Photo by Jeff Trop

The Conservancy is proud to announce the purchase and protection in perpetuity of an especially important 96-acre tract of forested land and waterways in Union County in the Susquehanna River/Chesapeake Bay watersheds. We have been working since September 2021 to acquire the parcel, an inholding within Bald Eagle State Forest, from Pennsylvania American Water Company. The Conservancy will now transfer the parcel to PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)/Bald Eagle State Forest. Ecologically important features include habitat supporting rare bat populations, a dense network of streams designated as exceptional value waters, and wetlands/vernal pools that host diverse amphibians.

The Spruce Run tract supports a diversity of forest types, about half of them dominated by oak stands, another third having a dominant conifer component, and the remainder consisting of a mix of black birch, tuliptree, and emergent wetland forest types.

These forests occur on a strip of land surrounding a portion of the 14-mile Spruce Run, a tributary of Buffalo Creek, and contain a high percentage of wetland species. Several intermittent streams and associated spring seeps exist on both the north and south facing slopes of the landscape. Many of these intermittent streams and spring seeps flow downhill forming deep hollows and eventually drain into Spruce Run. Waterways in the tract provide excellent source water protection for public drinking water at Spruce Run Reservoir, a body of water less than 1 mile downstream from the parcel that provides drinking water for over half of Union County residents.

The parcel also offers low-impact public recreation opportunities, including birding, hiking, and angling – and the streams contain naturally reproducing trout, are approved for fishing, and are rated “excellent” for angling. DCNR has identified the parcel as a Natural Heritage Area Supporting Landscape, a

designation for areas that surround or are adjacent to core habitat supporting species and natural communities of conservation concern. As such, the Spruce Run parcel can accommodate some recreation while also maintaining vital ecological processes, including habitat linkages that allow for plants and animals of concern to shift and move across the landscape.

Transfer of the property to the perpetual care of PA DCNR, and out of the Conservancy's ownership, is scheduled to take place this summer.

The project was made possible through funding from the Hamer Foundation, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Allegheny Group of the Sierra Club Huplits Grant, and, YOU, our dedicated donors and supporters.

Jeff Trop, Chad North, Diane Donato, and Beth Capaldi contributed to this article.

Linn Log

Mission of the Merrill W. Linn Land & Waterways Conservancy

To preserve and protect significant ecological sites in Union, upper Northumberland, and neighboring counties and to engage the public with conservation issues that affect the health of our environment.

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The Merrill W. Linn Land and Waterways Conservancy was founded in April 1988 in memory of Merrill W. Linn, a local attorney and avid outdoorsman, who spent much of his life exploring the woods, streams, fields, and byways surrounding his native Lewisburg, and sharing that experience and knowledge with others.

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2024 Adventure Programming The Great American Backyard Campout

The 2024 Great American Backyard Campout was hosted at Glacier Pools Preserve Friday, June 28 through Saturday, June 29. With more than one hundred participants, both young and old, and experienced and first time campers, the event was a huge success.

On Friday evening participants met the canines and their companions from the STRIKE K-9 Search & Rescue team during a presentation about "What To Do If Lost in the Woods". Participants enjoyed using binoculars for birding with Seven Mountains Audubon and with help from Bucknell University's Professor Steve Jordan, collected and identified insects including a Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly from the wildflower meadow. Lunar's Outdoor Adventures offered a gear check and Q&A session for all things



Campout community campfire.

adventure before campers headed out on the half mile trek to the campsite. Colorful tents of all shapes and sizes were erected during the twilight hour and soon after, our master of ceremonies and youngest member of the Linn Conservancy, CJ Stewart, lit the community campfire using primitive fire building skills. Mountain pies and s'mores



103 people attended the Great American Campout. The youngest person was 4 months old and the most senior was 79.

were enjoyed by all followed by a night hike led by Michael Gross of Glacier Pools Preserve and an owl expert, Wayne Laubscher from the Lycoming Audubon Society. It was too cloudy for stargazing, but



Headlamps glowing on the night walk.

several campers boasted of the opportunity to see a twinkling star as the whippoorwill called in the night.

Campers slept soundly through the morning rain showers, emerging from their tents upon smelling the fresh aroma of coffee. While enjoying breakfast, individuals meandered through a "Migration Challenge" where they discovered the importance of conservation easements, agricultural preservation lands, native plant gardens, conservation/preservation/restoration practices and the value of "linking landscapes" through the Linn Conservancy's Linking Landscapes initiative. Morning workshops included geocaching with Dan Trucken-



CJ says, "SEE you next year!"

Miller, bird watching with Bill Tyler of Seven Mountains Audubon, and nature art with Sara Street from Rider Park where participants painted wood cookies, rocks and canvases to take home. It was a grand adventure for all and we look forward to next year!

Report: Becky Stugart; Photos: Becky Stugart, Stacie Kilgore, Carol High, Claire Campbell

Buffalo Creek Watershed: Paths to the Past

Bucknell Professor of History Claire Campbell gave members of the Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance a fresh perspective on their waterway's place in local history at the organization's annual meeting in early April. Her presentation—"Path to the Past"—explored how the study of water can lead to a better understanding of environmental history in the region. It explored four concepts (1. Improvements, 2. Palimpsest, 3. Second Nature, 4. Backyard Nature) that help situate the Buffalo Creek watershed in a wider landscape of environmental change.

Improvements, one of the most fundamental tenets of early America, meant the application of labor, capital, and technology in order to rend nature ordered, productive, and profitable. The mills on tributaries of Buffalo Creek and other waterways were one of the most common expression of improvements in this area. Campbell quoted historian Brian Black who wrote, "Nature was put to work by Americans in the nineteenth-century with a scale and scope unrivalled in world history."

Palimpsest is a metaphor borrowed from medieval manuscripts written on parchment that was used and reused, erased, and written upon again. "The palimpsest reminds us there are many layers of past use and occupation. We might find clues in place or street names (like Mill Street) or paths of transportation, like the Buffalo Valley Rail Trail," Campbell said. She quoted Ben Marsh who observed, "this gives us a 19th century perspective on the landscape; and perhaps a greater appreciation for the rural world around us."



Buffalo Creek at North Fourth Street in Mifflinburg overflows its banks on a cold day in 1935. The Hassenplug Covered Bridge provided safe passage then as it does nearly 90 years later. Today, this is the site of the Conservancy-protected Koons property and trail.

"At the same time, past use can leave artifacts of infrastructure that narrows our choices," Campbell said. "For example, a factory complex—with footprints of fuel storage, rail tracks, contaminated soils, and compacted earth—is most easily converted to a shopping complex with parking, which is

really compacted earth with a layer of fossil fuel on top!

"The concept of *second nature* reminds us the nature we encounter has been made and remade by human actions and, even if green or blue, is regrown and restored," she said. Consider the wholesale clearcutting of Pennsylvania woodlands in the late eighteen-hundreds and early nineteen-hundreds. Credit the second-growth restoration of parks and public lands to environmentalists, such as Raymond B. Winter, and the young members of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

"There is no place on earth that has not been affected by humans, in the Anthropocene, especially now with climate change. But there is value in the local, in finding '*backyard nature*,'" Campbell said. Dr. Campbell sees backyard nature as a spectrum. To her it might mean organized green space—floodable spaces often become early designations for municipal parks and playgrounds, like Riverwoods or Haney Park. Or it might just mean prowling a riverbank.

Local waterways and landscapes can be small and meaningful; they can help us to understand in concrete ways enormous and difficult concepts like climate change. They also connect us with each other in a community, and to our past.

The Living Dead: Deadwood Sustains Forest Wildlife

Contributed by Warren Abrahamson

I've always liked snag trees (dead-standing trees) – their trunks and branches have an aesthetic beauty of their own. What a delight to watch a kingfisher or osprey fly from a snag while fishing, listen to a mockingbird sing from its perch on a snag, or see a screech owl peering out from a cavity in a dead oak.

Dead trees and deadwood are quickly colonized by dead-wood eating insects like beetles that create artistic tunnels beneath decaying bark. Such animal and deadwood interactions bring deadwood another kind of living.

Most think that dying trees, dead trees, and deadwood in forests are unsightly and imply that a forest is less healthy. Yet ecological studies repeatedly demonstrate the importance of deadwood to forest biodiversity. In addition to storing carbon and slowly releasing nutrients to the forest floor, deadwood provides wildlife with both room and board.

Pennsylvania's "Breeding Bird Atlas" reports that 35 of the 190 breeding bird species are cavity nesters. Most don't excavate cavities, rather they use existing cavities in snags. Cavity-using birds range from the black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, red-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, and downy, red-bellied, and pileated woodpeckers to wood ducks and hooded mergansers, and even birds of prey like the American kestrel and screech, barred, and saw-whet owls. Ruffed grouse and eastern towhees nest under partially elevated decaying logs and woodpeckers, along with skunks and black bears repeatedly return to rotting log "cafeterias" for meals.

Twenty species of Pennsylvania's mammals use snags and dead parts of living trees including seven bat species, four species of squirrels, chipmunks, deer & white-footed mice, opossums, porcupines, raccoons, long-tailed weasels, and if a big dead tree or log, foxes, coyotes, and black bears.

Hands down, invertebrate animals have the greatest diversity of deadwood-dependent species. They help decompose deadwood and recycle nutrients to living plants. The intricate burrows engineered by beetles appear after bark has been removed from deadwood by a woodpecker and winged termites or ants can be seen emerging from rotting logs.

Few people are aware of how much biodiversity depends on deadwood – the "living dead" as we might call it. If we had an appreciation of the intricate species networks involving snags, logs, decomposition, and wildlife, we would value deadwood in our forests. Here in the Northeast, dead trees and deadwood provide resources for roughly a quarter of forest vertebrates.

The Linn Conservancy encourages landowners to protect standing dead trees unless they pose threats to buildings, powerlines, and the like. Several Linn Conservancy-held conservation easements restrict harvest of standing dead trees including the easement on the land my wife and I own. Our forest stewardship aims to promote traits of old growth forests including keeping dead standing trees, logs, and other deadwood on the forest floor. The many cavities in our forest's dead standing trees provide nest sites and rotting logs offer refuge for salamanders, shrews, and mice and cafeteria-style meals for many mammals.

Young forests lack the complex structure and rich biodiversity of mature forests. As wildlife specialists Jerry Hassinger and Jack Payne have written, "Can you afford to provide some wood for wildlife habitat, to leave some dead and dying trees, as well as a few hollow logs, on every acre? Considering the many rewarding values of wildlife that depend on this resource, the question might better be phrased "Can you afford not to do this?"

Thank You!

2024 Spring/Summer Volunteers

Adventure Programming:

- Sister Missionaries from Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Northumberland - Various Projects
- Union Co. Public Library -Nature Exploration Packs
- Blake Stefan, Bucknell University, Work Study and Volunteer - Nature Painting, PRE
- Stacie Kilgore, Neighbor of GPP - Great American Backyard Campout (GABC)
- Coleton Kilgore, Neighbor of GPP- GABC
- Dustin Wentzler, Donor - GABC
- Hannah Gaibor, Susquehanna University Student Volunteer - Social Media
- Elsa Fellon, MLC Junior Ambassador - Social Media
- Ellen Chamberlin, Bucknell University Guest Speaker - Nature's Explorer Program
- Kelly Salyards, Bucknell University Guest Speaker (+2 student volunteers)- Nature's Explorer Program
- Michael Kuriga, Guest Speaker - Living Landscapes
- Sara Street, Rider Park Manager & Guest Speaker - Wildflower Program Series, Tree Walk Series, and Volunteered at Nature Painting
- Chris Martine, Bucknell University Guest Speaker - Tree Walk Series Living Landscapes Program
- Claire Cambell, Bucknell University Guest Speaker - Living Landscapes Program, GABC
- Irmgard Seidl-Adams, Bucknell University Guest Speaker - Wildflower Program Series
- Bill Tyler, Seven Mountains Audubon Guest Speaker - Great American Backyard Campout
- Wayne Laubscher, Lycoming Audubon - Guest Speaker - Great American Backyard Campout
- Steve Jordan, Bucknell U. Guest Speaker -GABC
- Vince Fayock, Donor - GABC
- STRIKE K-9 Rescue Team - GABC

Annual Member Soiree:

- Thom Rippon for donating event space at One Barn Farm
- Event Coordinator, Jenna Pick, for donating her time in helping us coordinate the event
- Nine Degrees of Syncopation for donating their time as the event's musical guests
- Lance Miller for underwriting the first drink of the evening for attendees and Adrienne Hobbins for guest bartending
- Union Cellars for discounting wine

Volunteer Day at Dale's Ridge Trail:

Heather Adams, Brian Auman, Stacey Balliet, Andrea Cumpston, Coralyn Davis, Chris DeMers, Thomas Duck, Linda Elton, B Thomas Fantaskey, Joseph Garrigan, Katherine Hannaford, Carol High, Amanada Kline, Brent Kline, Cora Kline, Karin Knisely, Amy Levan, Seamus McOwen, Scherry Moore, Charles North, Andrew Pratt, Steven Schoenfelder, Jimmy Snow, Chaz Stefan, Becky Stugart, Vicki Sun, Annette Turner Koppenhaver, Gary Koppenhaver, Brian Vargo, Scot Wagner, Sara Waldron

Native Plant Garden Clean-up:

Cub Scout Pack 3538 (Lewisburg) members, den leaders Tiffany Ranck and Marissa Mitchel, and family members picked up a winter's accumulation of twigs, dead leaves, and other plant debris; got down to some serious weeding; and gave the 80' x 20' garden a thick blanket of mulch.

Generous Gift



On June 10, the Linn Conservancy received an unexpected gift of \$24,718.20 from the Irmgard M. Hartung Charitable Remainder Trust. Irmgard (Irm) and Charles (Chuck) Hartung, long-time residents of Lewisburg, were deeply passionate about conservation and desired for others to steward the Earth's resources wisely. So in 2007, they named the Conservancy as one of their beneficiaries. After Chuck's and Irm's passing in 2017 and 2023 respectively, the remaining funds were distributed according to their wishes. We are eternally grateful for their foresight and generosity in supporting our mission to preserve and protect our local lands and to teach people how to be good stewards of our shared natural resources. *If you have included The Linn Conservancy in your will, please let us know so we can say THANK YOU during your lifetime.*



The annual member soiree was held at One Barn Farm, Mifflinburg, on May 1.

Leadership Transitions

The Conservancy's Board of Directors has seen a number of recent changes. Diane Donato (President and Linn Log editor), Adrienne (Gemberling) Hobbins, Karen McGrath, and Matt Roberts have stepped off. Beth Capaldi and Lance Miller are now serving as President and Vice President, with Tom DiStefano, Chris Martine, and JT Ptacek being appointed as new members.

The Buffalo Creek Watershed Association has also appointed new Co-Chairs, Alex Brevig and Sandy Costello, who are replacing outgoing Chair Dave Staebler.



31 volunteers came out to remove invasive species and help re-route the "switchback" section of the Dale's Ridge Trail on April 13.

Upcoming Programs

Saturday, August 3: Nature Scavenger Hunt. 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM. Location: Shikellamy Marina, 401 Bridge Avenue, Sunbury, PA. This is a free activity. All ages welcome. Parent(s) required to accompany children. Registration encouraged.

Tuesday, August 6: Nature Scavenger Hunt. 5:00 PM – 9:00 PM. Location: St. Mary's Park, Lewisburg, PA. Lewisburg's National Night Out. This is a free activity. All ages welcome. Parent(s) required to accompany children. Registration encouraged.

Friday, August 9: Degenstein Library Outreach – Dale's Ridge Trail Adventure. 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM. Location: Dale's Ridge Trail, 1471 Strawbridge Road, Lewisburg, PA. Participants are encouraged to bring a picnic lunch. All ages. Registration encouraged. Please register with the Degenstein Library in Sunbury by calling 570-286-2461 or sending an email to info@degensteinlibrary.org.

Saturday, August 10: Nature Scavenger Hunt @ Union County West end Fair for Children's Day. 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM. Location: 1111 PA-235, Laurelton, PA 17835. This is a free activity. All ages welcome. Parent(s) required to accompany children. Registration encouraged.

Saturday, September 7: Tour of Acid Rain Mitigation Site on Buffalo Creek. 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM. Living Landscape Program. Location: Gated entrance between cabins located at 1490 and 1545 Buffalo Flat Road, Millmont, PA. All ages welcome. Parent(s) required to accompany children. Suggested donation of \$5 per participant. Registration required.

For the full list of upcoming programs with more details and to register, visit linnconservancy.org/registration/ or scan that QR code!



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS, 2nd Quarter, 2024

Allentown: Elizabeth Helsel; Cherry Hill, NJ: George Sanders; Danville: Kelly Graboski, Carla Horne, Victor Marks; Lewisburg: John Bravman, Grace Clark, Sheri and Tristan Stayton, Lydia Storey, Bernita Wert, Tristan and Lori Wilhelm; Middleburg: Zach and Emily Stotter; Milton: Raymond Young; Muncy: Adrian Whipple