

About Land Trusts

Land trusts are charitable organizations that conserve land by purchasing or accepting donations of land and conservation easements. Land trust work is based on voluntary agreements with landowners and creating projects with win-win outcomes for communities.

Nearly a hundred land trusts work to protect important lands across Pennsylvania. Governed by unpaid boards of directors, they range from all-volunteer groups working in a single municipality to large multi-county organizations with a dozen or more staff. They depend on landowner goodwill, member support and other donations for their continuing efforts.

Some land trusts address a wide variety of conservation needs. Some focus on a single conservation priority. Land trusts may conserve land to protect our rivers, streams and groundwater. They may protect community open space for new parks, scenic views, wildlife preserves or neighborhood gardens. They may conserve productive farmland or working forests. Some focus on protecting biodiversity while others preserve traditional hunting grounds.

Regardless of size or conservation focus, Pennsylvania's land trusts share a commitment to conserving natural resources for the people of today and for the generations not yet born.



The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's mission is to enrich the human relationship with the natural world by saving the places we care about.

Visit www.paconserv.org

Conservation Options

Land trusts and landowners as well as government can access a variety of voluntary tools for conserving special places. The basic tools are described below.

A land trust can **acquire land**. The land trust then takes care of the property as a wildlife preserve, public recreation area or other conservation purpose.

A landowner and land trust may create an agreement known as a **conservation easement**.

The easement limits certain uses on all or a portion of a property for conservation purposes while keeping the property in the landowner's ownership and control.

Landowners can **donate** land and easements. These charitable gifts may qualify the donor for federal tax deductions. In unusual cases, the land trust may offer to **purchase** a property interest for an agreed-to price using donations from others.

A land trust can acquire a property, place a conservation easement on it, and then sell it to a **conservation buyer**—someone who wants to own a conserved property.

Sometimes a municipality or state agency wishes to conserve a property but can't meet the financial or timing demands of the landowner. A land trust can help by **acquiring and then donating or selling** the land to the government when the government is ready.



The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association promotes voluntary land conservation by supporting land trusts and building a positive climate for conservation in Pennsylvania.

Visit www.conserveland.org

There is nothing like a dream to create the future.

—Victor Hugo



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Pennsylvania's Land Trusts
Conserving our Commonwealth

Western Pennsylvania
Conservancy

The Power of Vision

The Moraine State Park Story

A convergence of glaciers 14,000 years ago gave Muddy Creek its hills and valleys. Industry gave it its scars.

A meeting of minds in the 1950s transformed the land yet again.

Community leaders envisioned a beautiful park rising from Muddy Creek Valley's mine-scarred surface. And they spent endless hours to make it happen.

Half a century later, Moraine State Park is one of Pennsylvania's most visited parks.

"Moraine State Park is definitely the main attraction in our \$65 million dollar tourism industry," said Linda Harvey, president of the Butler County Chamber of Commerce.

The lake that wasn't there

The idea of Moraine State Park grew from one man's vision.

Jane Preston remembers her husband, Dr. Frank Preston, a prominent glass researcher and avid naturalist, becoming enamored with the idea of recreating an ancient lake at Muddy Creek.

Glaciers had once come as far south as the

Muddy Creek Valley, dumping Canadian rocks at the end of their reach—a terminal moraine. Water pooled behind the rocks and ice, creating prehistoric lakes. Frank wanted to map the extent of the terminal moraine, which would tell him the ancient lake boundaries.



A summer day at Moraine State Park



Dr. Frank Preston in 1961

“The critical thing was having the gas to get out there. He couldn’t do detailed survey work until we could get gas,” Jane explained. Gas was rationed during World War II.

After the war, Frank and Jane would take day trips to Muddy Creek.

“I went along to drive and he would tell me where to stop. I’d get out and pick apples. Frank would study rocks. There were fields with Canadian stones, and there were fields of local stones. It was fun.”

Preston’s visits to the valley became routine. And his fascination with the ancient lake grew into a vision of creating a grand state park and recreational lake for the people of western Pennsylvania. “He saw the big picture. He always could,” Jane recalled.

Devastation

Preston sought out a local attorney who had similar values as he. George Kiester was concerned with the past life of the landscape—albeit a much more recent past than Preston. Kiester, who later became Judge Kiester, is a native of Butler County. When he returned from law school to settle down, he saw a countryside he didn’t recognize.



Judge Kiester retired from the bench in 2003 at age 91

The mining industry had discovered the rich resources tucked into the region’s hills. Quarries and strip mines left voids in the land where woods and fields once lay. Streams were poisoned with mine drainage.

“This area I used to tramp through as a youngster was devastated,”

Kiester said. “When I first came back, the mines were all over the place.”

Kiester rallied residents and elected officials from Butler County to Harrisburg to make the industry more responsible. It was this work that attracted the attention of Preston.

“I guess I developed a reputation.”

The two men met daily for lunch, discussing strategy for the creation of “Muddy Creek State Park.”

“He sold me on the concept,” Judge Kiester said. “I was convinced and I still am. We wanted to preserve some of the land for the public good and not have it all be developed.”



The land trust

Preston first broached making his vision a reality at a 1948 meeting in Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum. There, while discussing scientific matters with friends, the topic turned to the nature of the glacier-carved landscape of Muddy Creek Valley. Preston expressed his feeling that the geological and ecological resource should be shared with others by creating a public park.

He wrote then of his interest in donating land to a park endeavor:

“I acquired only a few miles of railroad track and a few hundred acres in addition, and I offered to transfer these to an organization, whatever organization it might be, willing to accept responsibility for it.”

Three years later, Preston found a place for his holdings with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The group had recently evolved from the Greater Pittsburgh Parks Association to serve all of western Pennsylvania. The Conservancy adopted Preston’s vision, embarking on a campaign to raise funds and buy land in Muddy Creek.

The Conservancy hired Carl Leathers, a man who was familiar with the farmers and other landowners in Muddy Creek Valley. He spent years knocking on doors and making land deals. Much of the valley farmland was too wet to grow crops well. Many a farmer had retirement or a move to better ground on their mind.

Preston too would scour the landscape looking for eager sellers. His hikes now included a new piece of equipment: his checkbook. Preston showered the Conservancy with gifts of land as well as royalties from his oil wells.

While Leathers, Preston, and another early Conservancy member, Dr. Graham Netting, were land-banking the valley, others like Kiester were busy spreading the park vision, speaking at community meetings, Rotary Clubs and anywhere else people might listen.

Public support swelled as did the Conservancy’s dues-paying membership, which mushroomed from 1,000 to six thousand.

But for the bold vision to be realized, local support needed to be translated into state support. Harrisburg had to be convinced to create a state park in the Muddy Creek Valley.



From private to public

Kiester and a group of influential men from Butler County risked their lives to gain the state’s commitment. On an early January morning in 1960, ice glazed their path to Harrisburg. Snow plastered their windshield, turning the world white, as the men strove to keep their appointment at the capital.

The determined group reached their destination, impressing Harrisburg with both their arrival and subsequent presentation. State support for the park was had.

Soon, government funding began flowing to complete what Preston and the Conservancy had begun. The Conservancy transferred the 3,000 acres it had acquired to the Commonwealth, and the state set out to fill in the gaps.

The former Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters and former Department of Mines and Mineral Industries sealed deep mines, back-filled and graded strip-mined areas, and plugged gas and oil wells. Soil was treated with fertilizer; grass, clover and thousands of trees were planted throughout the property.

Moraine State Park, complete with a recreated ancient lake, opened in 1970.

Since then, millions have come and gazed at Lake Arthur from serene shores. Families and community groups picnic on the broad lawns. Children scamper on the beach and play in the water. Couples bicycle and walk the trails. Boaters unfurl their sails to race across the lake, while anglers hook what lives within.



Western Pennsylvania Conservancy conveys its Muddy Creek Valley properties to the Commonwealth in 1966

Even in the early years, Moraine State Park’s popularity surprised the visionaries who labored for its creation. In his book, *50 Years of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy*, Netting wrote:

“All who helped create this park underestimated how greatly it was needed. We envisioned visitor attendance of 200,000 the first year; instead 652,690 came in 1969, even before the park was officially dedicated.”

A million people now visit Moraine State Park each year.