

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.

Since 1957, the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association has been the leader in protecting the open space of the Wissahickon Valley, enhancing its water quality, and in educating people of all ages about environmental concerns. Visit www.wva.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 fosters public understanding of conservation issues, advances public policy and provides land trusts and local governments with resources and training to more effectively conserve land. It is comprised of more than 70 voting conservation organizations. Visit www.conserveland.org



*It really boils down to this:
that all life is interrelated.
We are all caught in an
inescapable network of
mutuality, tied into a single
garment of destiny.
Whatever affects one
directly, affects all
indirectly.*

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.



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—R.Kennedy



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Pennsylvania's Land Trusts Conserving our Commonwealth

Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association

A Ribbon of Blue, A Ribbon of Green

One by one, the fields and farms of Ellen Lea's childhood are disappearing.

"We grew up with open land," Ellen said. "It's ingrained in us."

"When we were children, my mother would point out places and say, 'this used to be a field and that one a farm,' and we would think, 'Oh mom you're so old,'" Ellen said. "I find myself saying the same thing to my children but now, it's everyday instead of once a year. It's happening so much faster now."

Ellen and her brothers had spent their childhood days riding horses, frolicking in fields or chasing crawfish in the Wissahickon Creek. Their great uncle's farm was a 300-acre natural playground, not only for them but also for other children and adults who lived in the area.

At that time in Montgomery County, land was still open, and people less conscious of property lines.



Walking on the Upper Wissahickon Creek

Ellen's mother, Jane O' Neill, inherited her bachelor uncle's farm and found herself fielding calls from developers offering big money. As she counted the new developments consuming the land around her, she began to wonder about her property's future.

Jane decided to ask her children how they felt about preserving the land.

The family's unanimous decision was to forgo their inheritance and make a multi-million dollar gift to the community.

The land was donated to the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association. It is a welcome addition to the Association's 22-mile strip of

permanently protected land along the creek, aptly named the Green Ribbon Preserve.

For more information, visit www.conserveland.org