



Unprecedented Opportunity

American Rescue Plan,
investing in conservation

Serving PA's EACs

Helping them help
one another

Full Ecology

Repairing our relationship
with the natural world



Alice Walker wrote, *“In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they’re still beautiful.”*

I appreciate this quote at face value and metaphorically.

WeConservePA has bent in all manner of ways since its founding to address the

needs of conservationists and work for pro-conservation public policy. We continue to twist through this Covid era.

In 2021, we’ve worked in court, the legislature, and the governor’s office on matters at hand ranging from easement defense to public trails to conservation investments. We immersed ourselves in the details of the American Rescue Plan so that we might better communicate the tremendous conservation opportunity presented by it.

To address arising needs and evolving law and best practices, we produced a dozen new and updated guides and model documents. To deal with breaking as well as perennial issues, we held online workshops and roundtables (addressing industrial solar development, equity and inclusion, and more). Adapting to the circumstances particular to each, we held two conferences online and one in person.

WeConservePA is by no means perfect, but perhaps we touch perfection in not letting challenges get in the way of our striving to understand and address the needs of conservation professionals and volunteers.

Best wishes for your holidays.

Andy Loza
Executive Director



For decades, advocates for conservation and outdoor recreation have worried that not enough people were availing themselves of or even aware of the myriad preserved natural areas and parks in their own communities. Now, we face a paradigm shift – one of many sparked by the global COVID pandemic. Beginning in March of

2020, as lockdowns took effect, people across Pennsylvania and the country turned to the outdoors in unprecedented numbers. They sought places to exercise, shake off cabin fever, and find solace. At PA State Parks, visits increased 26% in 2020. Many land trusts reported that use of publicly accessible preserves doubled or even tripled during the same period.

As we return, albeit haltingly, to our more normal activities, there are signs that many who embraced time in the outdoors last year are continuing to make time for nature. The trend is a powerful affirmation of the value of the investments that the Commonwealth, counties, and communities have made in parks, trails, and open space.

The funds distributed as part of the American Rescue Plan present a rare opportunity for municipalities and the Commonwealth to make significant new investments in the parks, open spaces, and trails residents clearly love and need; places that help keep us physically and mentally healthy, make meaningful contributions to our economy, address myriad environmental challenges, and improve our overall quality of life.

Oliver Bass
Chair, board of directors

BE A MENTOR OR MENTEE

WeConservePA seeks to connect seasoned professionals in Pennsylvania’s conservation movement with younger or less experienced professionals in mentor-mentee relationships. Mentees receive guidance and support as they develop professional skills, set goals, and navigate career choices. Mentors hone their leadership and communication skills, and benefit from exposure to fresh perspectives and new ideas. Help cultivate and empower a new generation of conservationists. Contact Hilary Hirtle at hhirtle@WeConservePA.org for more information.

Front cover photo: Nicholas A. Tonelli



Photo: Lindsay Dill

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) has provided Pennsylvania counties, cities, boroughs, and townships with \$6.15 billion in federal funding. Half was distributed amongst nearly every local government in the state this past summer; the second half comes next year.

Governments have until 12/31/2024 to obligate the funds to projects and programs and until 12/31/2026 to spend it all. They will use some of it to replace lost tax revenue or address immediate COVID-19 matters, but in most if not all jurisdictions, an unprecedented amount of money is now available to invest in projects that improve the lives of citizens.

The law provides local governments tremendous latitude in deciding how to spend ARP funds. The federal guidance on allowable expenditures is no picnic to decipher, but the law and the Treasury Department's intent to give governments great flexibility is clear. The charitable conservation organization

WeConservePA wished there to be no doubts that this flexibility extended to land conservation, waterway restoration, and park and trail projects, so it sought analysis from a law firm with deep experience in regulatory affairs and as legal counsel to local governments. The resulting legal opinion letter confirms that investments in parks and other public outdoor recreation spaces, natural infrastructure to prevent pollution and manage stormwater, and land and easement acquisitions in support of these efforts are among the eligible expenses.

▣An unprecedented amount of money is available to invest in projects that improve the lives of citizens.▣

Such investments are allowable under the law, and they have the virtue of improving lives for years, decades,

and—in some cases—centuries to come. Rather than providing a temporary good, many conservation-related investments deliver outstanding public benefits day in and day out forever. When land is purchased for a park, trail, or other public open space, that land will be there for the public in perpetuity. When land is conserved so that it can absorb stormwater and filter pollutants from developed areas that will otherwise runoff into streams, the flood reduction and water pollution prevention benefits are permanent.

Likewise, planting forest buffers along streams to prevent flooding and pollution, restoring the natural flow of waterways, and planting trees in urbanized areas improve lives. Their benefits actually increase with time: the trees grow, provide shade, and absorb pollution; long-absent fish and wildlife return to improved habitats.

New and rehabilitated park infrastructure and trails—which do degrade with public use and weather—

do not enjoy the same longevity, but they nevertheless provide years of enjoyment to the public before needing substantial reinvestment. And they, like the other conservation projects, deliver economic returns far greater than the monies invested in the projects. (This is still true when maintenance costs are factored into the analysis.)

Conservation investments have always been a good deal for local governments because of the exceedingly high level of economic (including enhanced tax revenue), social, and environmental benefits returned to the communities. Now that ARP has provided the money, the case for making these investments is even stronger.

Trails, parks, and conserved open spaces make communities more attractive places to live, work, and play. They provide low or no-cost recreation, decrease health costs by encouraging exercise, reduce air pollution, and absorb stormwater. Homebuyers prefer homes close to opportunities for outdoor recreation and greenery. Houses built near trails, parks, and other conservation areas sell for appreciably more than those further away—a benefit both for homeowners and for a municipality's tax coffers.

The public use of parks, preserves, and trails doubled and more with the onslaught of COVID-19. Higher levels of use now appear to be the new norm. This has accelerated wear-and-tear on Pennsylvania's 6,100 local parks and 12,000 miles of trails. Municipalities can utilize ARP funds to address the resulting increased maintenance and rebuilding needs.

ARP offers municipalities a unique opportunity to boost investments in projects that Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support

Local government officials have the enthusiastic support of Pennsylvania voters—Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike—to invest in parks and other natural infrastructure. Polling from last fall found that 87% of likely voters agree that even with [what was then] a tight budget, we should still find the money to invest in protecting Pennsylvania's land, water and wildlife; that protecting water quality and land

in Pennsylvania is critical to keeping the state's economy strong (90% agree); and that it is more important than ever to have parks, preserves, and other public spaces where we can safely enjoy the outdoors (91% agree).

93% of Pennsylvanian voters agree—68% strongly—that “we have a moral obligation to take care of our environment.” Whether the focus is protecting waterways, wildlife and natural areas conservation, the importance of parks and open spaces, or preserving productive farms, an overwhelming majority of Pennsylvanians find these matters to be “very important.” [TargetSmart survey of 1,332 likely voters conducted September 20-27, 2020; credibility interval of +/- 3.0%]

ARP offers municipalities a unique opportunity to boost investments in projects that Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support, can be implemented now, and will continue to deliver value for decades to come. From nature-based solutions that prevent flooding and stream degradation to parks and trails for recreation, ARP dollars can make a tremendous difference in the lives of all.

Do you know of a municipality or county that has utilized ARP funding for conservation or recreation? Please let Lina Berón Echavarría know at lbechavarria@WeConservePA.org so that we may use this information as an example to others.

If you want your local government to invest American Rescue Plan funds in conservation-related projects, now is the time to act.

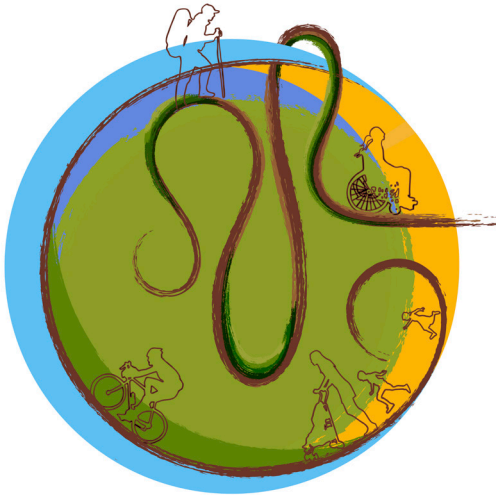
- If you are a concerned citizen, it is time for you, and your friends and neighbors, to talk with your local government officials about projects that can benefit your community. Officials are unlikely to fund projects that they don't know about or that they don't know people care about.
- If you are an elected official, it is a matter of identifying and prioritizing projects and then planning the expenditures. As described above, you have tons of flexibility in choosing appropriate expenditures.

The law firm of Hawke McKeon & Sniscak LLP has produced a 8-page opinion letter for WeConservePA to help guide local government officials regarding American Rescue Plan spending.

If your county or local municipal government leaders are unsure about the legality of using ARP funds for conservation-related projects, WeConservePA encourages you to share this letter with them.

Find it at [WeConservePA.org/advocate](https://www.WeConservePA.org/advocate).

NEW GUIDANCE: TRAILS FOR ALL PEOPLE



WeConservePA's manual, *Trails for All People: Guidance for Accessibility and Inclusive Design*, explores best management practices for pursuing the inclusive planning, design, construction, and management of pedestrian trails that are usable by all people, including people with disabilities, to the greatest extent possible within the constraints presented by the terrain and the intended trail experience for users. It follows the principles that everyone should have access to trail opportunities and that the planning and design of trails should account for the great variation in abilities,

cultural backgrounds, and other facets of the human condition.

First published by WeConservePA in 2014 under the title "Universal Access Trails and Shared Use Paths: Design, Management, Ethical, and Legal Considerations," this greatly improved and expanded edition features extensive additional content including a new chapter dedicated to signage, a new section on inclusionary planning that goes beyond disability-related issues, new case studies, and many new and improved illustrations. In addition, much of the original text is updated. 133 pages. Access at WeConservePA.org/tools.

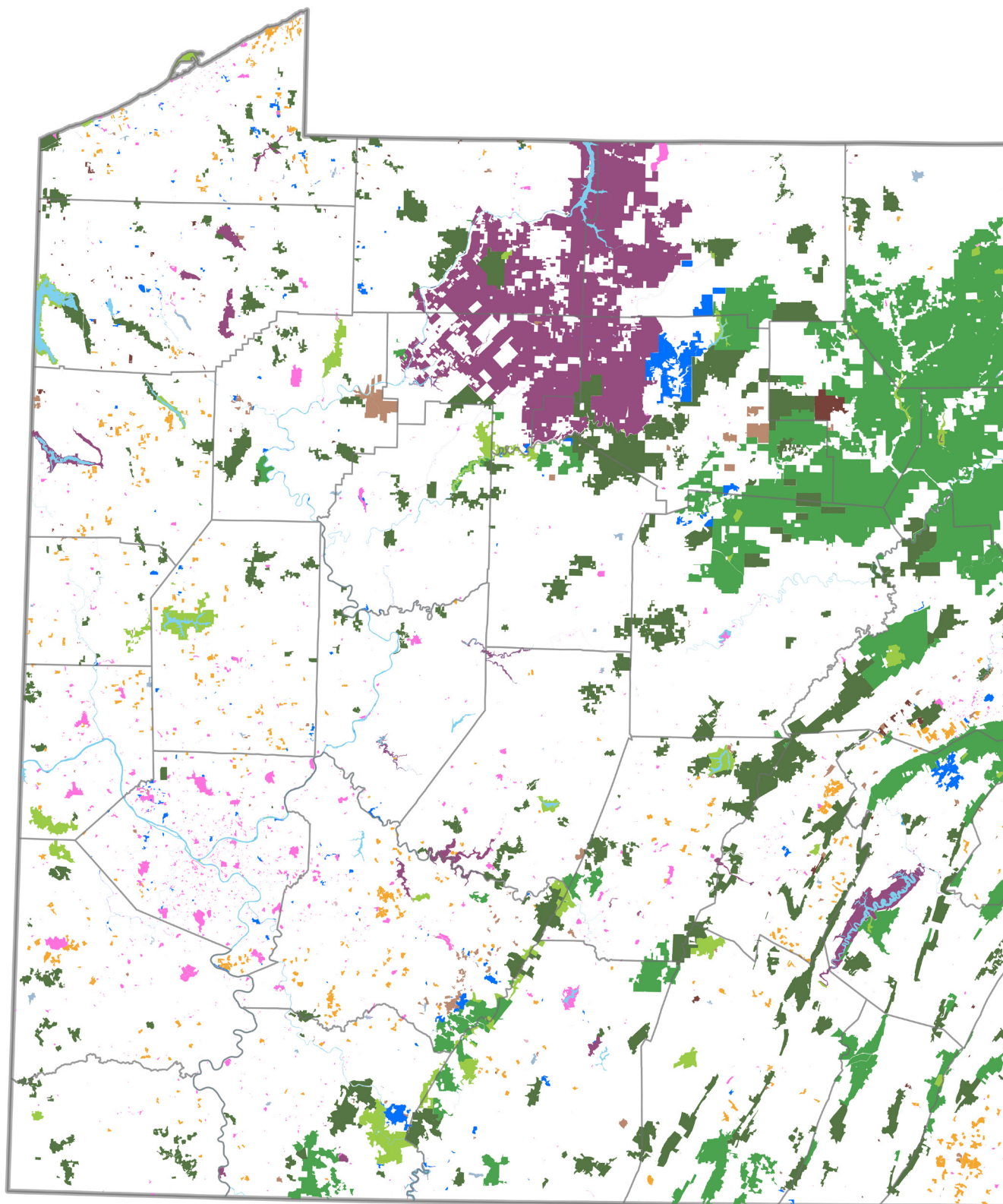
THAT'S A WRAP! ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL PA GREENWAYS & TRAILS SUMMIT IN THE BOOKS







WeConservePA thanks everyone who made the 2021 Pennsylvania Greenways & Trails Summit a success. Held in Erie over the course of three days, September 19-21, we welcomed over 190 participants. Thirty-seven individual workshops and four mobile seminars provided over 50 hours of training spanning a variety of trail topics ranging from trail planning to expanding access.

We are grateful to the members of the local planning team, and look forward to the next biennial summit in 2023!

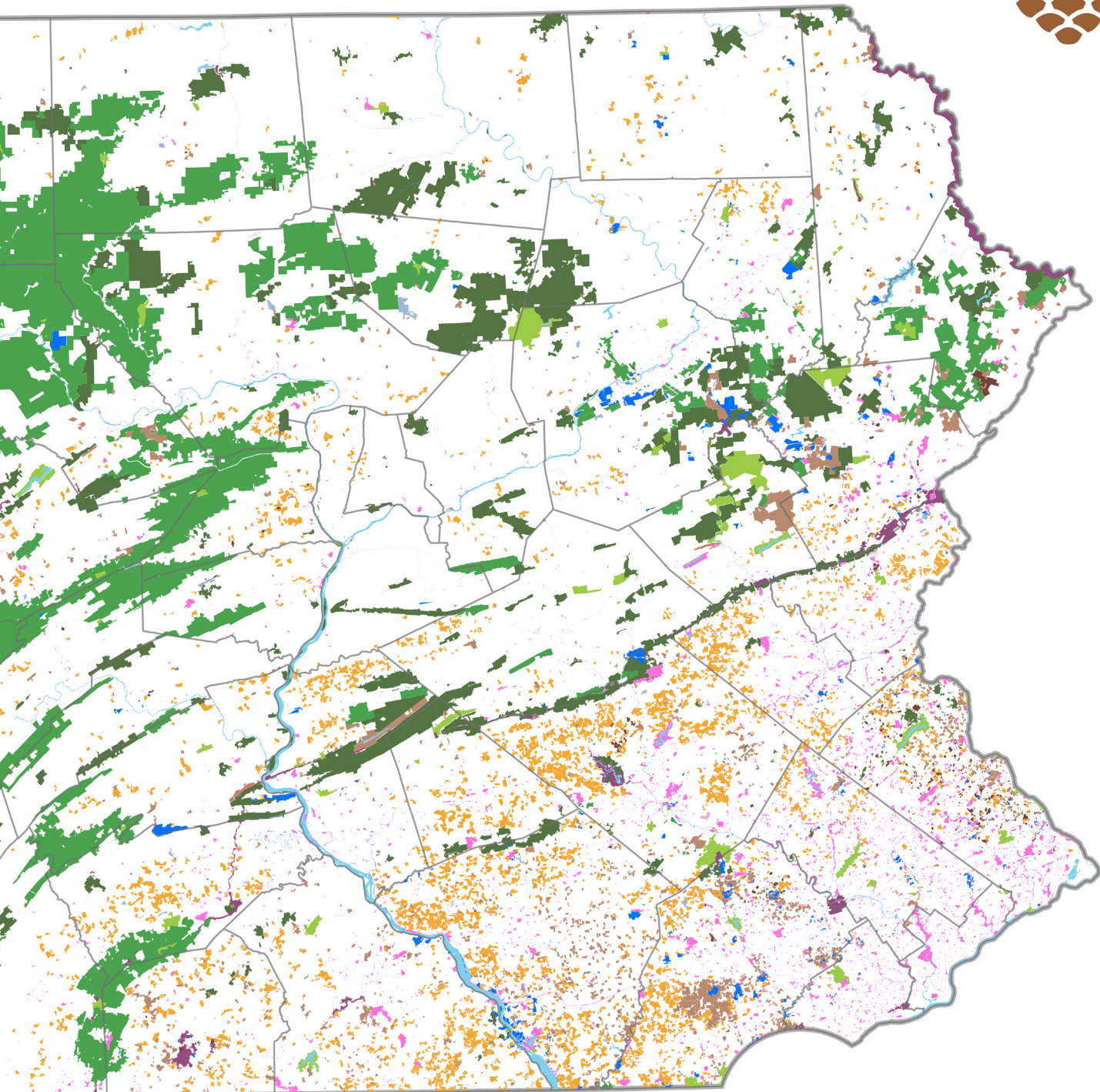


CONSERVED LANDS REPORT 2021



 Federal 1,352,100 acres	 State Game Lands 1,530,700 acres	 Historical & Museum Commission 1,800 acres
 State Forests 2,211,300 acres	 State Parks 283,900 acres	 Local Parks & Open Space 260,300 acres

* Other government-held conservation easement owners: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Park Service, and others.



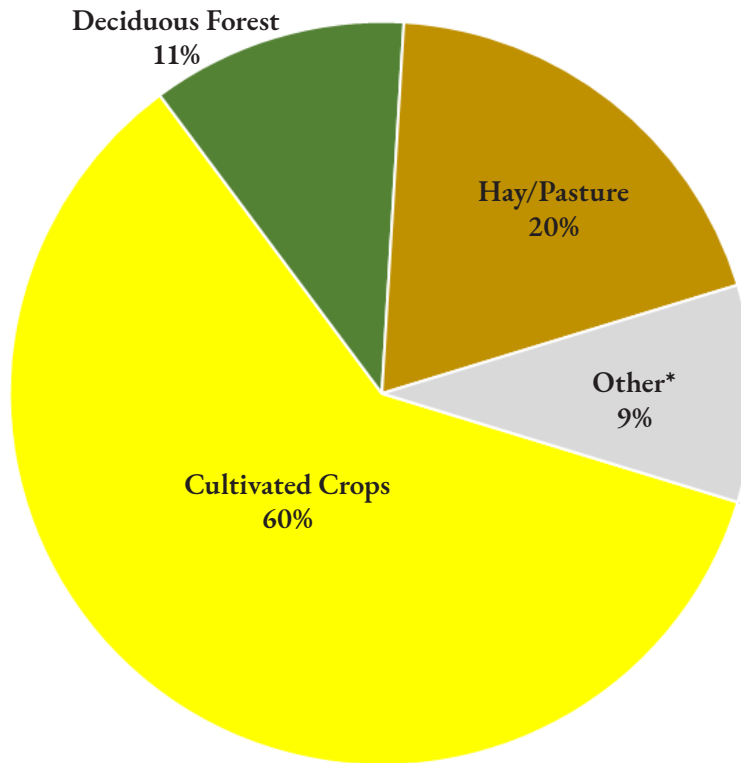
PA Fish & Boat Commission
32,500 acres

Land Trust Lands
144,000 acres

Land Trust Conservation
Easements 317,800 acres

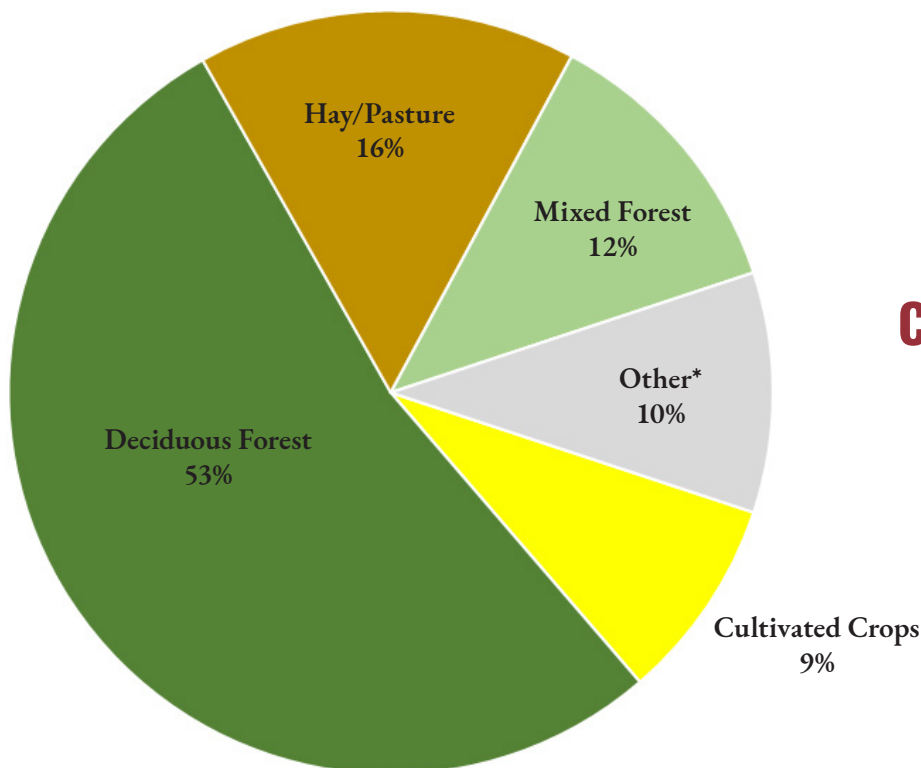
County/State Agricultural
Easements 595,300 acres

Other Government-Held
Conservation Easements*
44,500 acres



LAND TYPES CONSERVED WITH PA COUNTY/STATE AGRICULTURAL EASEMENTS

**Other includes: mixed forest, woody wetlands, barren land, developed open space, emergent herbaceous wetlands, evergreen forest, herbaceous vegetation, and shrub/scrub.*



LAND TYPES CONSERVED WITH PA LAND TRUST CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

**Other includes: woody wetland, shrub/scrub, herbaceous vegetation, evergreen forest, emergent herbaceous wetlands, developed open space, and barren land.*

2021 was a year for lots of changes in land trust leadership. WeConservePA welcomes the following people to their new roles:

Abbie Kessler

Executive Director

The Land Conservancy
for Southern Chester
County

Courtney Reimann

Executive Director

The Lebanon Valley
Conservancy

Bill Kunze

President & CEO

Heritage Conservancy

Kate Etherington

Executive Director

Willistown Conservation
Trust

Ellen Ferretti

Executive Director

North Branch Land Trust

Keep up-to-date with people news in the land trust community. Sign up for our Project & People e-newsletter at WeConservePA.org/get-informed.

REMEMBERING DR. JIM FINLEY



Jim Finley (center). Photo: Carl Martin, Wildlands Conservancy

The staff and board members of WeConservePA are deeply saddened by the sudden and devastating loss of Dr. Jim Finley this past October. Jim was a warm and caring person and passionate about forests and forest conservation. His passing is a terrible loss for the many people he touched and for all the conservation he would have helped move forward in the coming years.

Jim served on WeConservePA's Policy Council and was a hugely appreciated educator at Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conferences and other WeConservePA events. He also served on the boards of WeConservePA member organizations the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and the Foundation for Sustainable Forests.

Promoting and educating on sound forest practices and advancing forest conservation was both a vocation and avocation for Jim. Jim educated tens of thousands of private forest landowners and mentored hundreds of students and professionals in addition to contributing to forest scholarship.

Jim retired in 2017 after 42 years working for Penn State. At that time, he was the Ibberson Professor of Forest Resources, Director of the Center for Private Forests at Penn State (which he founded in 2011), and Pennsylvania extension forester. During his tenure at Penn State, he conducted research and extension education programs focused on people and sustainable forest resource management on private forestland. He was the co-founder of Penn State's Human Dimensions of Natural Resources and the Environment dual title graduate degree program, and senior research fellow for the Pinchot Institute for Conservation.

SERVING PA'S ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

WeConservePA helps environmental advisory council volunteers help one another and supports the establishment of new EACs.

JOIN THE EAC NETWORK FORUM

The EAC Network forum provides a space for those involved in EACs to bounce ideas off each other, work together to answer each other's questions, and solve problems together. Join at WeConservePA.org/eac.

EAC NETWORK CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 26, 2022 | VIRTUAL

The EAC Network Conference is the training and networking event for those already engaged in or interested in establishing an environmental advisory council in their municipality, as well as municipal officials and staff. Sessions at the 2022 EAC Network Conference include:

- *Building a Successful EAC, Capacity Building for EAC*
- *Protecting Our Forests, Air, and Water Resources: Options for Municipalities*
- *Lawn Conversion and Green Infrastructure: What, Why, and How?*
- *and more!*

Registration for the EAC Network Conference includes a full day of training, opportunities for networking with peers, and access to digital content and resources. Learn more at WeConservePA.org/events.



What is an EAC?

Consisting of three to seven members appointed by the local government, an EAC can undertake a variety of conservation projects. It can also research issues and advise local government officials to help inform decision-making regarding the environment.

Any municipality in Pennsylvania may establish an environmental advisory council to tap the skills and volunteer energy of its citizens.

WECONSERVEPA UPDATES EAC HANDBOOK

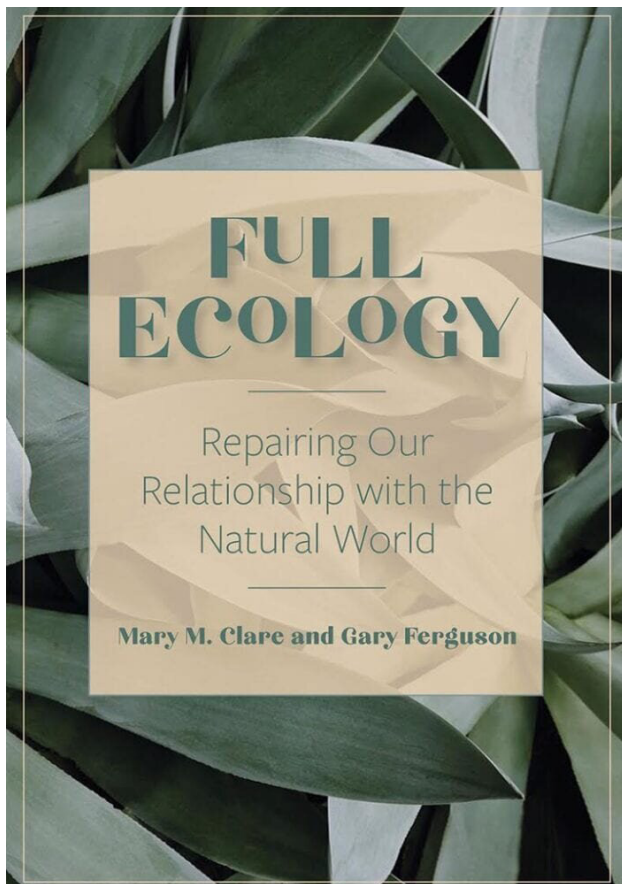
The EAC Handbook helps users understand how to establish and structure an EAC, provides guidance on operating an EAC, describes potential activities for an EAC to engage in, and explains how to interact with municipal governing bodies and communities.

First published in 1996, this updated edition features an expanded section on EAC projects and activities, revised and improved text, and the availability of the handbook in a web format. Access at WeConservePA.org/eac.

2022 CONFERENCE KEYNOTE, GARY FERGUSON & MARY M CLARE

Best-selling nature author Gary Ferguson & social psychologist Mary M Clare will deliver the 2022 Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference keynote address. Their riveting workshops, retreats, and keynote addresses are grounded in an innovative blend of cutting-edge biology, storytelling and social science. Offered internationally, these programs are designed to help us step into living more deeply - to open up to our natural intelligence and resilience. Or as Dr. Clare describes it, "We're here to inspire people to reclaim their human nature." The couple's book, *Full Ecology – Repairing Our Relationship With the Natural World*, has been hailed by internationally renowned environmentalist Paul Hawken as "one of the most important books ever written on the climate crisis."

The Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference will be held March 16-18, 2022. For more details visit WeConservePA.org/conference.



Full Ecology is available at all major booksellers.

WINTER LECTURE JANUARY 25, 2022 | VIRTUAL

Join WeConservePA for *Boots in the Field, Boots in the Lab: Updating the Conservation Status of Rare Plants Throughout Pennsylvania*, a lecture given by Dr. Tanisha M. Williams, Burpee Postdoctoral Fellow in Botany at Bucknell University. The lecture will happen in conjunction with WeConservePA's annual meeting. Register at WeConservePA.org/events.





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LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARD

Submission deadline: November 30

Organizations are invited to submit their nomination for a county or municipality to be recognized.

Nominate at [WeConservePA.org/award](https://www.WeConservePA.org/award)

WECONSERVEPA PUBLISHES NEW GUIDES

- *Eminent Domain and Conserved Land in Pennsylvania*
- *Deed Restriction Versus Conservation Easement*
- *Restricting Development to What Is Approved in a Subdivision and Land Development Plan*
- *Working Forest Conservation Easement*
- *Who May Get Involved in Conservation Easement Management Decisions?*

Find them at
[WeConservePA.org/Tools](https://www.WeConservePA.org/Tools)

MARCH 16-18, 2022

Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference

GETTYSBURG

[WeConservePA.org/conference](https://www.WeConservePA.org/conference)

