



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT on Programmatic Accomplishments 2024

This report does not cover WeConservePA's substantial public policy advocacy work.

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## Protecting Parks and Other Public Open Space

People rely on their parks and other public open spaces as places of comfort, rest, and renewal in their lives. They expect that these places will always be there for them.

Local governments can take measures to leverage generally supportive law to maximize the protections for the parks and open spaces in their purview, whether the lands have just been acquired or been held by the municipality for some time. They can also take precautions to ensure that sensible reservations and exceptions to protections are made at the time of acquisition.

WeConservePA has substantially expanded and refreshed its resources to help local government officials and advocates permanently and appropriately protect parks and other public open spaces. The following resources and other publications are now available in the [Defending Conservation Collection](#) at the [WeConservePA Library](#).

**new guide!**

### **Ensuring the Permanence of Parks and Other Public Open Space: Safeguards for Lands Entrusted to Local Government**

Over the course of 15 pages, [Ensuring the Permanence of Parks and Other Public Open Space](#) walks the reader through the legal frameworks that, depending on the circumstances and choices

made, more or less protect the lands held by government for conservation and outdoor recreation purposes. From the guide's preview:

How can local governments establish clear and appropriate protections for the parks and other public open spaces in their purview? How can citizens defend public lands from inappropriate use or liquidation. This guide reviews applicable legal principles and tools to help minimize misunderstandings that may lead to conflict and litigation.

**new model!**

### **Model Declaration of Public Trust for Conservation Easements**

How permanent are conservation easements held by local government? In response to this challenging question, WeConservePA developed a new tool for local government officials—the [Model Declaration of Public Trust for Conservation Easements](#)—to ensure that conservation easements acquired by municipalities are as durable as expected by their proponents.

**new edition of model**

### **Model Declaration of Public Trust**

Local government officials can use the easily customizable [Model Declaration of Public Trust](#) to ensure there is no doubt of the lands' dedication to park or other open space purposes—now or in the future—and explicitly state any reservations, exceptions, or limitations applicable to the dedication (for example, allowing for utility lines to run underground or helping with offsite stormwater management). While the first edition (2018) of this model functions quite well, this new edition features improvements to both model and commentary.

**new edition of guide**

### **Parks in Perpetuity: The Protections Provided to Parks and Other Public Open Spaces Under Pennsylvania Law**

If you don't want to read 15-page [Ensuring the Permanence of Parks and Other Public Open Space](#), this newly updated [four-page guide](#) offers a quicker, lighter review of the subject.

## **Reducing Liability**

WeConservePA created a new guide and refreshed three other guides and models regarding liability, all available in the [Reducing Liability Collection](#) at the [WeConservePA Library](#).

**new guide!**

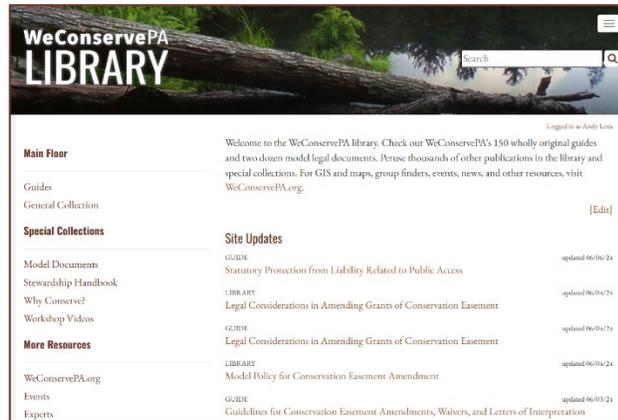
### **Statutory Protection from Liability Related to Public Access**

WeConservePA added a seventh guide to its collection of resources regarding the management of liability. Public access to land for recreational use raises concern about the possibility of visitor injuries and the potential for the owners or managers of the land to then be held liable. The 6-page [Statutory Protection from Liability Related to Public Access: Pennsylvania Law Supports Opening Land to the Public](#) reviews the Pennsylvania statutes that provide overlapping layers of protection from such liability.

### new edition of model

## Model Release of Liability Form

A well-designed release of liability form signed by a volunteer or participant in an activity can reduce liability risks of the organizing or hosting organization. WeConservePA updated its [model release form](#) to help minimize this risk. The previous edition is still good, but this version's tweaks ensures that it is absolutely the most effective document possible.



### new edition of guide

## Release of Liability Form: A Tool to Reduce the Risk of Claims for Personal Injury or Property Loss

WeConservePA updated the 8-page companion guide, [Release of Liability Form: A Tool to Reduce the Risk of Claims for Personal Injury or Property Loss](#), which explains how releases work and serves as a commentary to the model including optional provisions to add to the model.

### new edition of guide

## Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access

WeConservePA refreshed its 7-page introductory guide to this subject, [Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access](#), which was first published in 2011. From the guide's preview:

Public access to land for hiking, bird watching, hunting, and other recreational activities raises the possibility of a visitor getting injured and for the owners or managers of the land to then be held liable. Landowners and public access easement and lease holders can take practical steps to minimize the risk of liability.

## Related Resources

WeConservePA's other guides in the [Reducing Liability Collection](#) include:

- [Guide to Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act: A Law Limiting the Liability of Those Who Open Their Land to the Public](#) (6 pages)
- [Overview of Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act](#) (2 pages)
- [Indemnity Agreements and Liability Insurance: Protection from Claims Brought by Third Parties](#) (8 pages)
- [Separate Entity to Hold Riskier Properties](#) (3 pages)

## Guiding Sensible Conservation Easement Amendments

WeConservePA expanded and refreshed the guidance it maintains in the [Conservation Easement Amendment Collection](#) at the [WeConservePA Library](#).

**new model!****[Model Policy for Conservation Easement Amendment](#)**

Every easement-holding land trust should have a policy to help guide responsible consideration of potential amendments to grants of conservation easement. WeConservePA produced the one-page [Model Policy for Conservation Easement Amendment](#), together with its expansive [Guidelines for Conservation Easement Amendments, Waivers, and Letters of Interpretation](#) (see below), to assist land trusts in establishing or updating such a policy and, most importantly, acting responsibly and productively in their easement decision-making.

**new edition of guide****[Guidelines for Conservation Easement Amendments, Waivers, and Letters of Interpretation](#)**

This 20-page resource serves as a guide to responsible decision-making regarding potential amendments of grants of conservation easement. It may be used on its own or in combination with WeConservePA's [model policy for amendment](#). From the guide's preview:

Conservation easements are intended to last—to ensure protection of important resources, no matter people's whims—through the decades and centuries. However, the world changes and so do understandings of how best to meet conservation objectives. A land trust must be prepared to address these changes in order to ensure that its conservation work is effective while assuring its supporters and the public that it is a reliable agent of conservation.

**new edition of guide****[Legal Considerations in Amending Grants of Conservation Easement](#)**

WeConservePA completed a new edition of its groundbreaking 2014 guide, [Legal Considerations in Amending Grants of Conservation Easement](#). From the 18-page guide's preview:

There is no shortage of confusion regarding how the law actually bears on the amendment of grants of conservation easement. This guide analyzes the law and informs easement holders, particularly private land trusts, of legal matters to consider under Pennsylvania law and the Internal Revenue Code when making decisions regarding the amendment of grants of conservation easement .

**Related Resources**

WeConservePA's other amendment-related guidance includes the following:

- [Drafting an Amendment and Restatement of a Grant of Conservation Easement](#)
- [Amend OR Amend and Restate: Matching Approach to Situation When Making Changes to a Conservation Easement](#)
- [Model Amendment of Grant of Conservation Easement and Declaration of Covenants with Commentary](#)
- [Adding to Land Under Conservation Easement](#)

## Funding Conservation Easement Stewardship

WeConservePA published a new guide, revised one model document, and refreshed two other guides to assist land trusts and landowners in making financial arrangements regarding conservation easements to ensure that a land trust has the financial means to uphold an easement's conservation objectives in perpetuity. These can be found in the [Private Transfer Fees & Stewardship Funding Arrangements Collection](#) and are described briefly below.

**new guide!**

### **Placing Transfer Fees in Grants of Conservation Easement**

Provisions requiring payments by owners of eased land to the easement holder upon each transfer of the land (or other triggering event) may be placed in the document that grants a conservation easement. This guide suggests best practices and provides sample provisions to maximize the effectiveness of this strategy for funding easement stewardship. 5 pages.

**new edition of model**

### **Model Stewardship Funding Covenant with Commentary**

WeConservePA crafted the [Model Stewardship Funding Covenant](#) to assist land trusts and landowners in securing a landowner's commitment to future contributions and/or extending financial obligations to future landowners to ensure that the easement holder has adequate funds to steward a conservation easement in perpetuity. 31 pages.

**new edition of guide**

### **Stewardship Funding Arrangements: Supporting Easement Holders in Carrying out Their Conservation Duties**

WeConservePA developed the guide [Stewardship Funding Arrangements](#) to describe the many arrangements available to a landowner and holder for ensuring that the holder receives the level of financial support necessary to responsibly manage its stewardship obligation in the long term. 12 pages.

**new edition of guide**

### **Legal Considerations for Stewardship Funding Arrangements: Binding Present and Future Landowners to Present Promises**

WeConservePA developed [Legal Considerations for Stewardship Funding Arrangements](#) to explain the challenges, both legal and practical, of collecting contributions over time from owners of conserved land. 18 pages.

**new edition of guide**

### **Funding Conservation Easement Stewardship: Your Role as the Land's Owner and Conservation Champion**

WeConservePA also refreshed its guide that land trusts can use to educate landowners (as well as staff and board members) on the stewardship funding needs of easement holders: [Funding Conservation Easement Stewardship: Your Role as the Land's Owner and Conservation Champion](#). 2 pages.

## Researching, Developing, and Improving Guidance

In addition to the guidance noted above, WeConservePA researched, developed, and posted four other new guides and also published a major new edition of the [Stewardship Handbook](#) in partnership with other conservation organizations:

### [Making Restricted Gifts: Impacts of Restrictions on Charitable Tax Deductions](#)

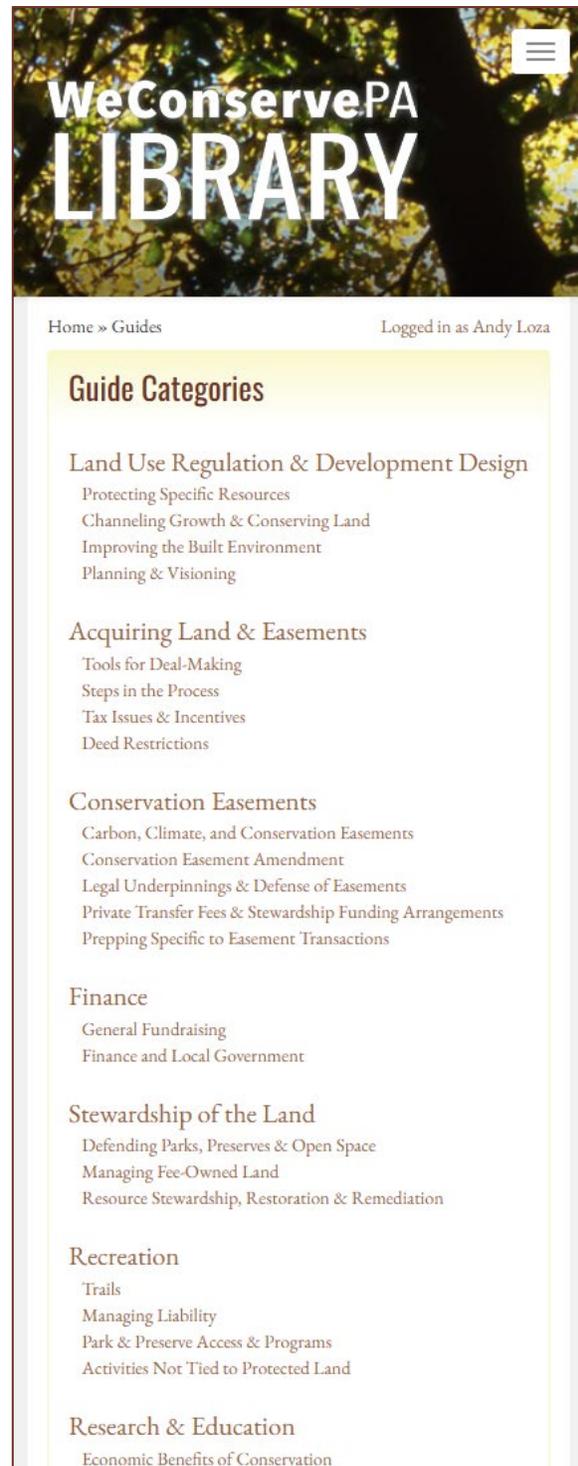
The five-page guide [Making Restricted Gifts: Impacts of Restrictions on Charitable Tax Deductions](#) complements and builds on the guidance provided in the guide [Restricted Gifts: Considerations in Accepting, Managing, and Soliciting Gifts for a Specific Purpose](#). Donors of land, cash, or other property may desire to place restrictions on a gift to ensure it is used only for specific purposes. The guide addresses how such restrictions might limit or disallow a charitable tax deduction and what a donor should consider before making a restricted gift.

### [Estoppel Certificates, Compliance Statements, and Conservation Easements](#)

A prospective buyer of eased land may want the owner of the land to provide them a guarantee that the easement holder won't pursue claims against them for violations that predate their interest. A mortgage lender may want a guarantee that there are no violations that could jeopardize payback of their loan. This three-page guide describes how a holder can responsibly provide sufficient assurance. It also provides background for WeConservePA's [Model Compliance Statement](#).

### [Beneficiaries and Backup Holders: Providing Third Parties with Rights but Not Responsibilities Regarding Conservation Easements](#)

A grant of conservation easement may provide rights to a party other than the landowner and easement holder in accordance with the needs and wishes of those involved in the transaction.



Unlike for the holder, such rights received by the “beneficiary” do not come with obligations. The six-page guide [Beneficiaries and Backup Holders](#) explores beneficiary arrangements.

### **Acting on Owner Requests for Review, Waiver, and Interpretation Regarding Conservation Easements**

What considerations guide a conservation easement holder’s processing of a landowner’s request for the holder to: approve an action subject to the holder’s review; waive the holder’s right to enforce one or more restrictive covenants in a temporary accommodation to the owner; or interpret the terms of the grant of easement as applied to a particular situation? This six-page guide provides direction for responding to landowner requests.

### **Stewardship Handbook**

The greatly expanded third edition of the [Stewardship Handbook](#) provides land trusts, local governments, and other landowners information on planning and implementing stewardship practices on natural lands. Its 25 chapters range from reviewing key concepts in land stewardship to providing practical guidance to address specific management challenges (e.g., geese, invasives, hazard trees, recreational use). Natural Lands, Continental Conservation, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy developed the Handbook’s content. WeConservePA built the infrastructure at the WeConservePA Library to organize and house the guidance and adapted the material for the web interface. The [Stewardship Handbook](#) can be accessed directly from the WeConservePA Library [homepage](#).

### **26 Guides Refreshed**

WeConservePA has developed more than 160 guides—most featuring wholly original content—in the past sixteen years. Keeping them accurate, relevant, and helpful requires regular review of their subject matter and updates to address changes in the law, gaps identified in the guidance, and new research and understandings in the field. WeConservePA refreshed 26 of these guides in 2024. Listing their titles does not communicate the days, hours, research, deliberations, writing, and editing involved in upgrading many of them. Nevertheless, the titles of the refreshed guides (including those described in more detail above) are as follows:

- [Seller Take Back Financing](#)
- [Conservation Easements in Court: A Review of Conflicts and Litigation Outcomes in Pennsylvania](#)
- [Installment Agreement](#)
- [Model Documents Overview](#)
- [Restricted Gifts: Considerations in Accepting, Managing, and Soliciting Gifts for a Specific Purpose](#)
- [Reducing Pennsylvania Inheritance Tax](#)
- [Co-Holding Conservation Easements: Considerations for Good Management and Conservation Outcomes](#)
- [Public Dedication of Land and Fees-in-Lieu for Parks and Recreation in Pennsylvania](#)
- [Who Has Standing? Conservation Easements in Pennsylvania Courts](#)
- [Cost of Community Services Studies](#)

- [Guide to the Conservation and Preservation Easements Act: Pennsylvania Act 29 of 2001](#)
- [Land Trust Accreditation](#)
- [Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access](#)
- [Release of Liability Form: A Tool to Reduce the Risk of Claims for Personal Injury or Property Loss](#)
- [Guidelines for Conservation Easement Amendments, Waivers, and Letters of Interpretation](#)
- [Gift of a Future Interest in Real Estate: Reserved Life Estates Keep Owners in Control During Their Lifetimes](#)
- [Legal Considerations in Amending Grants of Conservation Easement](#)
- [Clean and Green: Pennsylvania's Preferential Tax Assessment Program](#)
- [Crowdfunding for Land Trusts](#)
- [Closing: Finalizing Real Estate Transactions](#)
- [Parks in Perpetuity: The Protections Provided to Parks and Other Public Open Spaces Under Pennsylvania Law](#)
- [Funding Conservation Easement Stewardship: Your Role as the Land's Owner and Conservation Champion](#)
- [Stewardship Funding Arrangements: Supporting Easement Holders in Carrying out Their Conservation Duties](#)
- [Legal Considerations for Stewardship Funding Arrangements: Binding Present and Future Landowners to Present Promises](#)
- [Agricultural Security Areas](#)
- [Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program](#)

## Building and Improving Models for Conservation

WeConservePA has developed and maintains two dozen model legal documents to help non-profits and governments be effective and efficient in their endeavors. The easily adaptable models and their expansive commentaries enable attorneys to focus their time (and billings) on customizing the models to specific situations rather than reinventing the wheel for their clients. Each model involves extensive research and analysis of best practices, scrutiny by legal professionals, and user review.

WeConservePA produced two new models and completed updates to five others. Five of these seven were reviewed above:

- [Model Stewardship Funding Covenant](#)
- [Model Declaration of Public Trust for Conservation Easements](#)
- [Model Declaration of Public Trust](#)
- [Model Release of Liability Form](#)
- [Model Policy for Conservation Easement Amendment](#)

The other two models are addressed below.

## Model Compliance Statement with Commentary

The Model Compliance Statement is a new model and was produced by WeConservePA as a companion publication to the new guide [Estoppel Certificates, Compliance Statements, and Conservation Easements](#).

A prospective buyer of eased land may want the owner of the land to provide them a guarantee that the easement holder won't pursue claims against them for violations that predate their interest. A mortgage lender may want a guarantee that there are no violations that could jeopardize payback of their loan. The assurance needed could be achieved by the easement holder providing an estoppel certificate; however, this is problematic. The [Model Compliance Statement](#) is generally the appropriate and responsible response to a request for assurance.

## Change to §1.07(b) of Model Grant of Conservation Easement

WeConservePA completed a review of the [Model Grant of Conservation Easement and Declaration of Covenants](#) in light of recent court decisions regarding grants of easement receiving a federal tax deduction. As a result, and after a public review period, WeConservePA replaced the model's §1.07(b) with the following text to improve clarity:

**Conservation Purposes.** The undersigned Owner or Owners have granted the Conservation Easement exclusively for conservation purposes (as defined in §1.170A-14(d) of the Regulations). The applicable conservation purposes are described by the Conservation Objectives and supported by the binding covenants established by this Grant. The Baseline Documentation may identify other information supporting the achievement of the conservation purposes.

No other changes were needed or desirable.

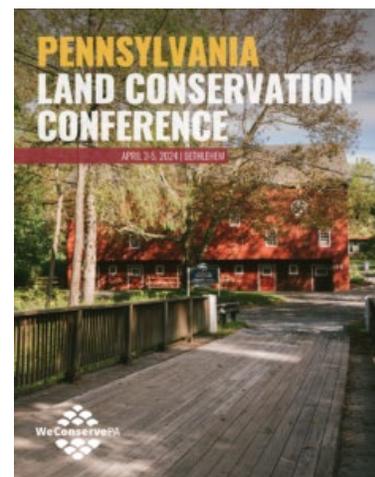
## Connecting, Educating, and Inspiring People

WeConserve organized and delivered 27 educational conferences, seminars, workshops, roundtables, and lectures open to anyone—four in-person and the remainder online—in 2024. WeConservePA records many of these events, particularly the online ones, when appropriate to the context and agreeable to the presenters. Beyond WeConservePA-organized events, staff presented a workshop for PSATS and two programs for local municipalities.

WeConservePA tracks far more detail—multi-page reports for some events—than what is presented below. *Contact Emily Gates ([egates@weconservepa.org](mailto:egates@weconservepa.org)) for these reports, for access to recordings, to suggest a topic or presenter for a future program.*

### Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference

In spring of 2003, 130 people gathered in Bethlehem for the first “Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference.” Twenty-one years later, the conference made its return to Bethlehem with a record-breaking 426 attendees!



The three-day conference (April 3 to 5) provided 75 hours of instruction with 38 classroom sessions, six mobile seminars, and 90 presenters. People rated the overall event a 4.8 out of 5 (5 being excellent) on average.

First-time attendees accounted for 186 of the participants, and 140 organizations were represented. WeConservePA thanks the conference hosts, planning committee members, sponsors, presenters, exhibitors, and attendees who all contributed to the event's success!



### Land Protection and Stewardship Group Gathering

On July 11, WeConservePA held a half-day gathering of land protection and stewardship professionals. The gathering was hosted by Berks Nature at The Rookery at The Nature Place. The four dozen participants covered a large range of topics addressing both conservation easement and fee land planning, acquisition, and management.

### Environmental Advisory Council Network Conference

WeConservePA's annual online conference for environmental advisory councils was held on Saturday, February 24. The event drew 186 registrants with 39 EACs represented as well as an additional five municipalities without EACs (and 14 other organizations). The event, which offered 7.5 hours of training, rated a 4.5 out of 5 on average in evaluations.

### Environmental Advisory Council Fall Gathering

WeConservePA's [2024 EAC Fall Gathering](#) was held on Saturday, October 5, at Temple University Ambler. Hosted by the Montgomery County Planning Commission, the planning committee also included Lansdale Borough EAC, Upper Gwynedd Township EAC, and Towamencin Township EAC. The all-day event provided EAC volunteers, municipal staff, and elected officials with training on a range of topics during concurrent sessions, as well as ample time for connecting with one another. The event drew 85 attendees, representing 47 unique organizations, including 28 EACs. The event was rated a 4.5 out of 5 on average in evaluations.

### Conservation Easement Seminar

The Conservation Easement Seminar was held at the headquarters of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy on October 17. The 24 participants—including newcomers and experienced easement users—from 13 organizations—immersed themselves in a day of training and discussion regarding conservation easements. Session topics ranged from the fundamentals of conservation easements to more advanced topics such as implementation of private transfer fees. The participants rated the event a 4.6 out of 5 on average in evaluations.

## Online WeConservePA Educational Events

Including the EAC Network Conference, WeConservePA delivered 23 online, training and educational programs in 2024.

Event	Date	Reg- ist- rants
Why Municipalities Should Consider a Utility Scale Solar Ordinance	1/22/2024	46
Supporting Conservation Workflows with ArcGIS	1/23/2024	17
Building Reliable Support for Land Preservation	1/30/2024	14
What is a Title Commitment and How to Read It	2/1/2024	11
The Pennsylvania Outdoor Corp: Workforce Development for the Benefit of Conservation and Outdoor Recreation	2/8/2024	88
Land Protection and Stewardship Roundtable: Conservation Easement Recordkeeping	2/22/2024	54
TerraFirma: Helping PA Land Trusts Uphold the Promise of Lasting Conservation	3/5/2024	14
Graphic Grammar: Design Advice from A Guy Who Can't Draw	3/6/2024	10
Strategic Planning: Defining an Approach to Align Mission and Relevance	3/20/2024	8
GIS Options for Environmental Advisory Councils	4/16/2024	44
NRCS Funding Opportunities for Conservation Easements	4/25/2024	32
Environmental Advisory Councils and Environmental Justice (PSATS hosted)	5/9/2024	?
Legal Considerations for Amending Conservation Easements	6/4/2024	36
Model My Watershed: An Introduction for EACs	6/27/2024	18
Protecting Parks and Open Space in Perpetuity	7/25/2024	31
Declarations of Public Trust: Clear Intentions and Strong Protection	10/1/2024	9
Federal Funding and the Tools to Find It	10/10/2024	55
Landscape Users Group Meeting	10/22/2024	39
Property Review: Selection Standards and Criteria	10/29/2024	25
Resurrecting a Native Trail Landscape	11/7/2024	9
Natural Burial: Connecting People with Land from Cradle to Grave	11/12/2024	13
Pass-Through Projects: A Land Conservation Roundtable	11/19/2024	15

While real-time attendance was somewhat low for some of these events, subsequent viewings of the recorded sessions substantially boost their impact.

### Looking Further Ahead

September 21-23, 2025: Pennsylvania Greenways & Trails Summit in Harrisburg

April 29 – May 1, 2026: Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference in Lancaster

*See all published, upcoming events at [WeConservePA.org](https://www.WeConservePA.org)'s [Learn & Network page](#).*

## Communicating News and Information

### Email Communication

WeConservePA's mass email communications include e-newsletters and, for matters benefitting from particularly focused attention, single subject emails. The frequency and timing of these emails are largely governed by current events, but staff follow a rough guideline of producing each of the e-newsletters once a month and using single-subject emails sparingly.

WeConservePA presently has 6,456 unique, confirmed mass email subscribers (with all inactive addresses purged monthly and no double-counting of people subscribed to multiple newsletters). WeConservePA sent 142,073 e-newsletters in the past year with a 47% open rate. WeConservePA sends e-newsletters under several banners:

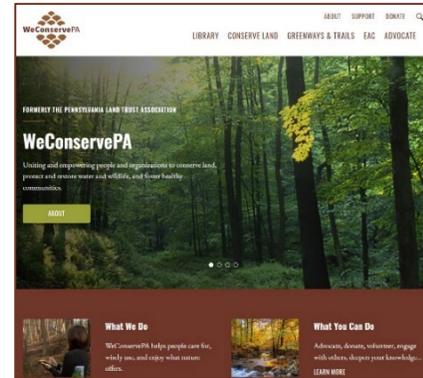
- **Conserve Land Update** reports news of significant new tools, guidance, events, issues, or other matters impacting conservation statewide.
  - 5,345 subscribers
- **Project & People News** reports on land conservation projects and the people working and volunteering in conservation throughout the state.
  - 5,543 subscribers
- **Greenway & Trail News** reports on what's happening regarding greenways and trails in Pennsylvania.
  - 2,294 subscribers
- **EAC Network** reports to environmental advisory council members and other EAC supporters on WeConservePA news of interest.
  - 1,309 subscribers
- **Conservation Advocate** addresses matters of public policy.
  - 2,576 subscribers

## Other Communication Channels

[WeConservePA.org](https://www.weconservepa.org) is updated most weekdays with the latest news and information. New and improved content is posted to the [WeConservePA Library](#) on an ongoing basis with the updates itemized on the site's homepage.

WeConservePA maintains [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.keystonefund.org) and [ESfund.info](https://www.esfund.info) as distinct educational sites without WeConservePA branding. (We do not want to give the impression that WeConservePA controls the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund or Environmental Stewardship Fund.)

WeConservePA also posts information to LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.



## Recognizing Conservation Excellence: Lifetime Leadership Award

WeConservePA's Lifetime Conservation Leadership Award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to conservation in Pennsylvania over the course of their life. Since 2004, the award has honored both conservation professionals and volunteers for their commitment to and leadership in conservation.

*Steven J. Schiffman, Esq. (Steve to those who know him) was honored with the 2024 Lifetime Conservation Leadership Award on April 4 at the Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference in Bethlehem during the Thursday night dinner.*



Schiffman has for decades given generously of his time to and shared his extraordinary breadth of knowledge with conservation organizations and causes, helping with myriad issues big and small. Steve has been a leader in the conservation movement, from identifying litigation where WeConservePA involvement could make a difference for conservation to lecturing on complex legal subjects at Pennsylvania and national training events. He has engaged in countless behind-the-scenes, ad hoc task groups and conversations addressing the threats and opportunities for conservation. See the WeConservePA website [for more details](#).

## Mapping, Analyzing, and Reporting

WeConservePA developed, expanded, and refined our conservation-related databases, analytical tools, and other mapping and GIS information, which are available for all to use via the [GIS & Mapping page](#) at WeConservePA.org. In addition to providing more general education and help to organizations, WeConservePA continues to directly assist organizations with their specific mapping and geographic analysis needs. *Contact Irina Beal, WeConservePA's GIS analyst, at [ibeal@WeConservePA.org](mailto:ibeal@WeConservePA.org) for assistance.*

### Public and Privately Conserved Lands

WeConservePA updated our immense, comprehensive [geodatabase of publicly and privately conserved lands](#) on an ongoing basis.

### Local Municipal Open Space Referendums

WeConservePA analyzed and applied geographic information to TPL's [LandVote](#) data to produce the [Local Municipal Open Space Referendums in Pennsylvania: 2023 Status Report](#). It includes numerous maps and charts describing the 157 open space referendums offered to voters at the local municipal level between 1996 and 2023.

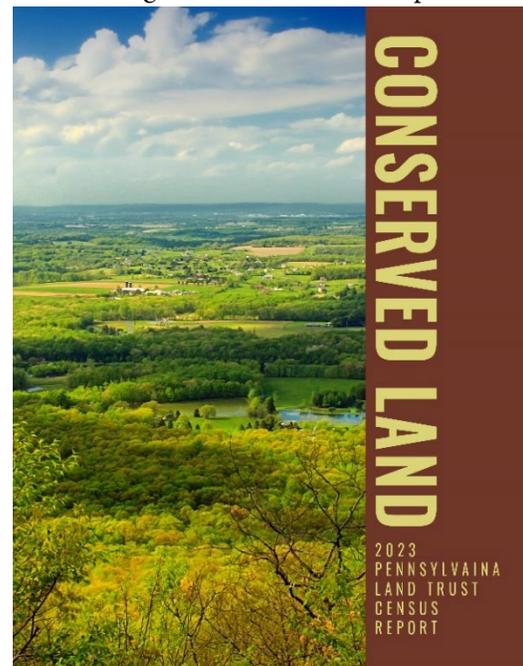
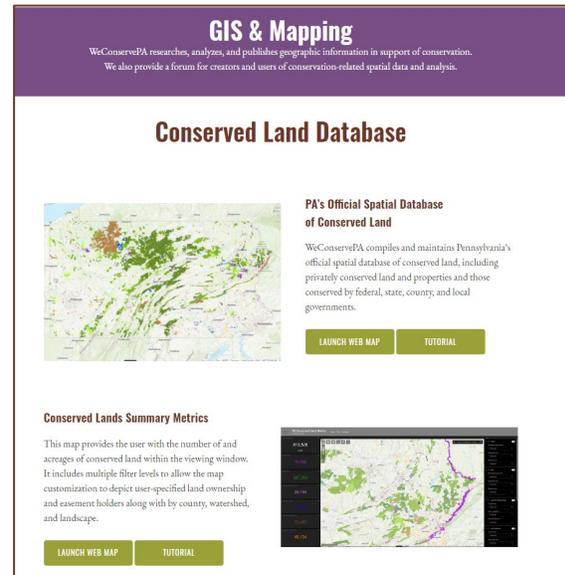
Pennsylvania Act 153 of 1996 ("Open Space Lands, Acquisition and Preservation") authorizes local governments (excluding counties) to establish earned income and real estate taxes specifically dedicated to the acquisition of land and easements for the purpose of providing open space benefits. Such taxes are established through voter referendum. The voter-approved taxes may exceed the standard limits on tax rates placed on local government. Under separate statutory authority, local governments may also borrow money (including issuing bonds) to fund open space acquisitions. This borrowing may occur with or without voter approval depending on circumstances.

In this report, WeConservePA reviews the voting outcomes of and monies generated by these open space tax and bond referendums.

### 2023 Pennsylvania Land Trust Census

WeConservePA completed the 2023 land trust census and [published the 16-page census report](#). Headlining information includes that:

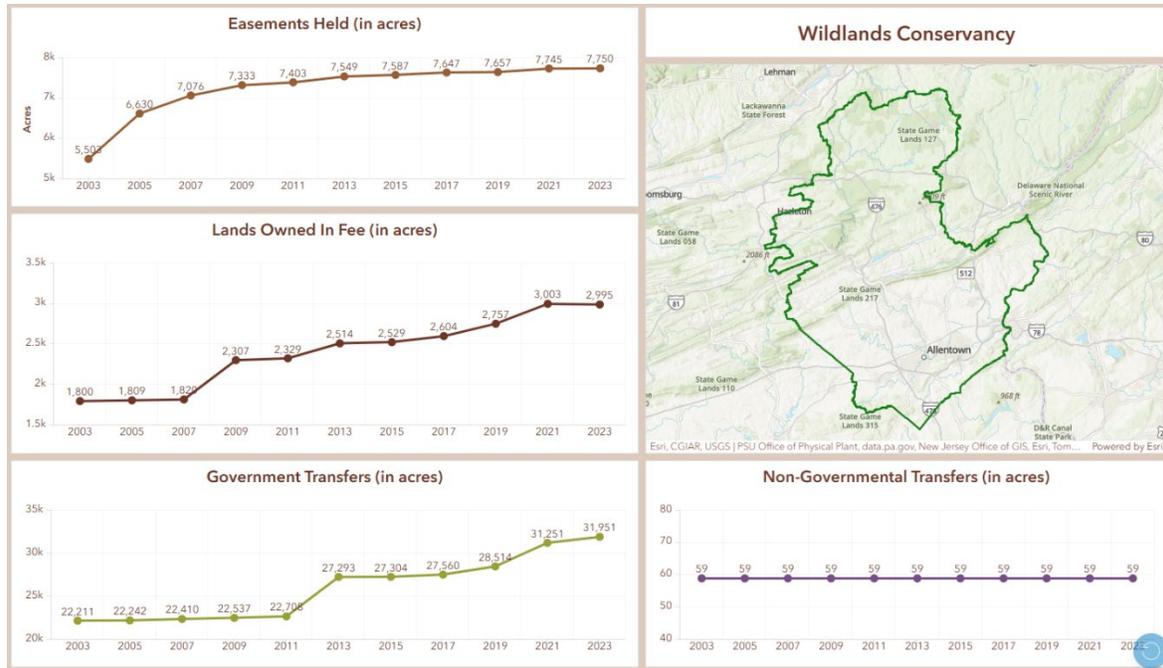
- Land trusts are conserving on average 51 acres a day in Pennsylvania—18,763 acres each year.



- Sixty-eight land trusts hold conservation easements, 69 own land, and 46 have conveyed land to state and local governments for conservation purposes.

### Dashboard of Individual Land Trust Conservation Success

WeConservePA’s ongoing refinement of conservation data now allows for relatively accurate portrayal of the history of land conservation transactions by Pennsylvania land trusts collectively and individually going back to 2003. To make this information accessible to all, WeConservePA created a dashboard, accessed from [WeConservePA.org/gis](http://WeConservePA.org/gis) or directly at WeConservePA’s [ARCGIS application page](#).



## Directly Assisting Organizations and People

### One-on-One Assistance

WeConservePA staff directly assisted people from dozens of conservation organizations, local governments, and trail groups in 2024. This assistance took place via phone, email, or in person depending on the need and context. Whether a matter took seconds, minutes, or days to resolve, no request was left unaddressed.

### Launch of the Conservation Law Program

WeConservePA’s [Conservation Law Program](#) formally launched in May 2024 to help those making conservation happen with legal questions and issues. Led by Justin Hollinger, Esq., WeConservePA’s legal director, the Program includes the following elements:

- **Consultation.** The staff and volunteers of land trusts, local government open space programs, environmental advisory councils, and other organizations working to conserve land and provide outdoor recreational opportunities may contact the Program to consult on their issues and obtain general legal information.

- **Direct Representation.** For a modest number of qualifying organizations, the Program offers direct client services. Assistance may include direct legal advice, transactional representation, document review and drafting, and help with other project and organizational matters. (WeConservePA does not seek to supplant attorneys assisting organizations in conservation matters but recognizes that gaps exist in local services and expertise.)

The Program also:

- **Brings together legal experts.** When new or challenging legal questions affecting conservation emerge in the Commonwealth, the Program provides a forum to air perspectives, build consensus where desirable, and discern best approaches to advance conservation.
- **Delivers educational programs.** WeConservePA is accredited to provide continuing legal education programs in Pennsylvania.
- **Improves technical guidance for all.** Conservationists in Pennsylvania and nationwide look to WeConservePA's model legal documents and guides, as well as the [WeConservePA Library](#)'s thousands of other documents, to assist with their conservation endeavors and challenges. Many of these WeConservePA resources are the result of novel (and not-so-novel) questions and issues that emerge from discussions between practitioners and WeConservePA staff. The Program ensures that users of these resources continue to benefit from up-to-date, reliable, accessible, and legally sound guidance.

Staff and volunteers with WeConservePA member organizations and those with established relationships may contact Justin Hollinger, Esq., directly at [jhollinger@weconservepa.org](mailto:jhollinger@weconservepa.org) for support or to discuss any of these program elements. To obtain optimally informed assistance, people are encouraged to first submit an intake form. Non-member organizations without a prior relationship must submit the intake form to better ensure efficient assistance for all.

In 2024, the Conservation Law Program provided:

- Legal consultation and assistance to 30 nonprofits and local governments on 45 distinct issues and questions.
- Legal representation to four organizations.

Additionally, the Program had discussions and meetings with roughly two dozen landowners to help them understand conservation norms and mechanics and facilitate their connection with relevant local land trusts.

## Conservation Easement Assistance Program

In 2024, WeConservePA awarded 23 Conservation Easement Assistance Program (CEAP) grants of up to \$8,000 apiece to 11 Pennsylvania land trusts, providing the organizations the means to use best practices in their easement projects. WeConservePA administers CEAP to increase the quantity of special places protected as well as increase the quality and long-term viability of easements. The grants are broken down as follows:

Organization	Project Name	Project Type	County	Award \$
Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy	Brucklacher Conservation Easement	Acquire New	Tioga	4,149.06
Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy	Levan Conservation Easement	Acquire New	Columbia	8,000.00

Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy	Shade Hollow Conservation Easement Restatement	Amend/Restate	Clinton	5,118.77
Tinicum Conservancy	Andreassen Reedy Conservation Easement	Acquire New	Bucks	7,500.00
Brandywine Red Clay Alliance	Nunn Easement	Acquire New	Chester	4,597.50
ClearWater Conservancy	Snyder Little Sugar Valley	Acquire New	Centre	8,000.00
ClearWater Conservancy	Colerain Forges Mansion	Acquire New	Huntingdon	8,000.00
Farm and Natural Lands Trust of York County	Miller Plant Farm #1	Acquire New	York	7,507.50
Heritage Conservancy	Laurel Crossing	Acquire New	Bucks	3,000.00
Heritage Conservancy	Weisel	Acquire New	Bucks	3,000.00
Farm and Natural Lands Trust of York County	Barstow & Clarke	Acquire New	York	7,525.00
Land Conservancy of Adams County	Matthews property	Acquire New	Adams	4,997.21
Wildlands Conservancy	Neff Conservation Easement	Acquire New	Northampton	8,000.00
North Branch Land Trust	Croll Easement	Acquire New	Schuylkill	2,710.00
Wildlands Conservancy	Lily Lake	Amend/Restate	Lackawanna	8,000.00
Wildlands Conservancy	Bartholomew CE	Acquire New	Northampton	8000.00
French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust	Edwards West Vincent	Acquire New	Chester	4,434.62
Farm and Natural Lands Trust of York County	Clymer / Sajer Landscape	Acquire New	York	8,000.00
Farm and Natural Lands Trust of York County	Haldeman / Renee Real Estate Landscape	Acquire New	York	7,558.75
North Branch Land Trust	Sedor	Amend/Restate	Luzerne	2,622.00
Berks Nature	Ruth Fetterman Woodland Easement	Acquire New	Berks	8,000.00
Berks Nature	Gorrin-Fetherolf Easement Amendment and Restatement 2024	Amend/Restate	Berks	7,925.56

## Forest Management Plan Grants for Eased Land in Pennsylvania's Portion of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

During 2024, WeConservePA is [providing grants](#) to land trusts to support the completion of land assessments and resource management plans for largely forested lands already under conservation easement. Subject lands must be in the Pennsylvania portion of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

WeConservePA made grant commitments to the following organizations in the indicated amounts:

- Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy \$36,200
- Land Conservancy of Adams County \$26,500
- Lebanon Valley Conservancy \$4,100
- North Branch Land Trust \$5,800

All applications submitted to WeConservePA resulted in grant awards.

WeConservePA hopes that in 2025 it can again accept [applications for funding](#).

## Advancing Trails

With support from DCNR and the Federal Highway Administration, WeConservePA provides trail education to advance trail development and maintenance as well as encourage public use. In addition to the trail-oriented work described earlier in the report, WeConservePA conducted the following activities.

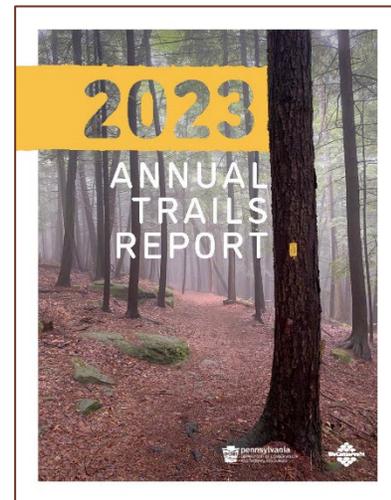


### Trail of the Year

DCNR’s Trail Advisory Committee selected the “Trails at Jakes Rock” as the [2024 Trail of the Year](#). WeConservePA managed the design and production of the Trail of the Year trail head marker, posters, and postcards in recognition of the designation.

### Annual Trails Report

WeConservePA produced Pennsylvania’s [Annual Trails Report](#) for DCNR. The report summarizes advances in expanding and improving the state’s networks of trails, highlights the “Top Ten Trail Gaps,” and shares stories of how trail projects have benefited communities.



### Trail Grants

WeConservePA granted \$4,622.46 to the Warren County Chamber of Business for trail education tied to the 2024 Trail of the Year award. WeConservePA also awarded grants to ten other organizations for ten Regional Trail Workshops in 2024 and reimbursed organizations for their expenses in the amounts shown in the table.

Applicant	Project	Award \$
Haverford Township Parks & Recreation	Haverford Adopt-a-Trail Stewardship Workshop	4,050.47
Clean Air Council	Circuit Trails Maintenance Workshop	5,000.00
Venture Outdoors	Three Introductory River Paddles; One Educational Night Paddle	3,382.08
Lacawac Sanctuary Foundation	The Ultimate Introduction to Hiking Workshops: Essentials of Outdoor Safety Awareness and Introduction to Map and Compass Workshop	1,200.00
Lancaster Conservancy	Volunteer Land Steward Training Series	5,000.00
Asbury Woods Nature Center	IMBA Sustainable Trail School	4,480.00
LandForce (Pittsburgh Conservation Corp)	Trail Reroutes and Drainage School	4,450.00
Southwest PA Climbers Coalition	Technical Trails Workshop	5,000.00

EPTA	Western PA Trails and Greenways Summit	4,693.44
EMHR	Eastern PA Greenways and Trails Summit	5,000.00

3/20/2025

**WeConservePA helps people care for, wisely use, and enjoy what nature offers. We help organizations and individuals to effectively and efficiently conserve land, protect and restore waterways, implement sustainable practices, and connect people to the outdoors. We foster understanding of conservation and advocate for pro-conservation governmental policy to promote a high quality of life for all.**

