

About Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or governmental body. The agreement limits certain uses on all or a portion of a property for conservation purposes while keeping the property in the landowner's ownership. The easement is nearly always perpetual—applying to all present and future owners of the land—and is recorded at the County Recorder of Deeds office.

The restrictions contained in an easement are tailored to the particular property and to the goals of the landowner and conservation organization. An easement might state, for example, that no building or road may be placed within 200 feet of a stream passing through a property; however the easement might allow for a house to be built elsewhere on the land. Another easement might support farming but forbid development. Yet another easement might prohibit all activities except for sustainable forestry and recreation. The flexibility of the easement tool is endless.

Most conservation easements held by land trusts are donated by landowners who wish to protect a beloved place. In rare cases, they are sold at a bargain price or fair market value. Federal tax benefits are available to easement donors whose donations meet IRS requirements.

About ClearWater Conservancy

The mission of ClearWater Conservancy is to promote conservation and restoration of natural resources in central Pennsylvania through land protection, water resources protection, and environmental outreach to the community.

ClearWater has conserved over 600 acres of land with easements, and an additional 2,400 acres have been protected through conservation partnerships. Conservation easements include Millbrook Marsh, Thompson Woods Preserve, Rhoneymeade, and several private farms. Streamside riparian easements are ClearWater's newest conservation focus as part of our long-term vision of a Ribbon of Green connecting the headwaters of Spring Creek to Bald Eagle Creek and beyond.

*Everyone working together to conserve natural beauty
and the environment in the heart of Pennsylvania*

Written by Anne Marie Toccket
Edited by Jennifer Shuey

Special thanks to project partners:
Elsa Lisle, Amos Goodall,
PennTerra Engineering



ClearWater Conservancy

2555 North Atherton Street
State College, PA 16803
(814) 237-0400
www.clearwaterconservancy.org

ClearWater Conservancy

Stories of Land, Water, and People

A Love of the Land

The Elsa Lisle Story

“I just like to imagine,” says a shaky but determined voice, “that a visitor, driving down College Avenue, would notice my property and see it as it has always been.”

The voice belongs to Elsa Lisle, a 92-year-old resident of State College.

The property she imagines is the piece of land which she has owned since moving to the area in 1972. This lovingly-tended patch of wildflowers, specimen



Elsa Lisle is all smiles with her attorney, Amos Goodall, at the completion of the conservation easement with ClearWater Conservancy.

plantings, and trees is just downstream from the village of Lemont and partially bordered by Spring Creek. For Ms. Lisle, and for the community as a whole, the land she owns is vitally important as a link in the

larger “Ribbon of Green”.

Ms. Lisle, a nature lover who has a penchant for gardening, recently signed

a conservation easement with ClearWater Conservancy, a legal agreement which ensures that the land she owns will never be developed with houses, commercial businesses—or, as Ms. Lisle herself puts it, “anything but what’s already there.”

‘What’s already there’ refers to 155 species of plants and flowers—some of which are rare and/or endangered, as well as the only structure on the property, which is the former residence of Ms. Lisle. She recently suffered a stroke and was forced to move to a retirement community, but her memories of her house and land remain vivid. She remembers just how long it took her to mow her own lawn—about six hours—as well as the sound of the bubbling creek and the starry sky on



Elsa Lisle’s wildflower meadows reach down to the banks of Spring Creek and are now protected riparian habitat in ClearWater’s “Ribbon of Green”.

“I looked at that beautiful view every single day.”

clear nights. She describes her home and its furnishings—mostly floral—in dramatic detail, but one feature is mentioned again and again: her cherished view of Mount Nittany.

“When the house was designed, it was built with that view in mind,” remembers Ms. Lisle. “I looked at that beautiful view every single day. That’s another reason I chose to conserve rather than sell.”

ClearWater first contacted Ms. Lisle back in 1994 as part of an effort to reach out to landowners along the main stem of Spring Creek to discuss conservation options. ClearWater had recently completed the first phase of what would eventually become the Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan and enable Spring Creek’s listing on the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Rivers Registry.

That first impression stuck with Ms. Lisle, and in 2003, through her attorney Amos Goodall, she expressed an interest in permanently protecting her land and invited volunteers from ClearWater’s Land Conservation & Stewardship

Committee to visit the property and determine its conservation value.

The committee recommended pursuing the project and upon receiving funding for a Riparian Conservation Program from the state Department of Environmental Protection in 2004, ClearWater decided that the Lisle property should be the organization’s first riparian easement.

The purpose of the conservation easement is to assure that the property will be retained forever in its scenic condition and as a vegetated buffer of Spring Creek for natural resource conservation. It will continue in its existing residential use but will not be converted to commercial or industrial uses.

As a long-time family friend and the lead committee volunteer on this project, Jerry Wettstone knew the lifelong interest Ms. Lisle has had in Spring Creek and the wild plants and animals on her land. “This conservation easement ensures that the land she loves will be protected and cherished forever”.

For Ms. Lisle and many other landowners in the area, ClearWater Conservancy’s plan for a “Ribbon of Green” not only preserves something very dear to them—but also serves the larger purpose of providing the community with a more beautiful environment in which to live, work, and learn.

This community is very dear to Ms. Lisle. She moved to State College to be a

librarian, after graduating from the University of Kentucky and later Columbia University, and soon fell in love with the town and its surrounding areas. An avid outdoorswoman, Ms. Lisle has been a dedicated member of ClearWater Conservancy, church organizations, and a local hiking group.

Although she is not able to maneuver with quite the same ease as she once did, Ms. Lisle has ensured that the life she built for herself in State College did not change dramatically when she moved into an assisted living environment. In fact, she transported some of the furniture from her home, along with some of the wildflowers from her land, to her room in the nursing home.

And the most important feature of all is still present, and by no accident; that, of course, being a clear, crisp view of Ms. Lisle’s treasured Mount Nittany on the horizon.



“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.”

~ Robert Louis Stevenson