

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 Allegheny Land Trust helps local people save local land that contributes to the scenic, recreational, educational and environmental wealth of our communities.

Visit www.alleghenylandtrust.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

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*Nature is part of us,
as we are part
of Nature.*

-Edward O. Wilson



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Pennsylvania's Land Trusts
Conserving our Commonwealth

Allegheny
Land Trust

Dead Man's Hollow

Alive and Well

The Dead Man's Hollow Wildlife Preserve—400 acres of protected forest and stream—provides peace and quiet to its visitors. Factories, strip malls, roads and traffic seem a world away.

People walk the trails and absorb the surroundings even as a cool November rain falls. The steel grey sky provides a backdrop for the brilliant yellow of slowly fading sycamore trees.

One hiker paused, leaning on his well-worn walking stick, before using it to whack a clump of plants.

“This is Japanese knotweed,” David Pencoske explained. “It isn't native to Pennsylvania and it crowds out plants that belong here.”

Pencoske, a native of nearby White Oak, is a volunteer steward of the land. He spends his free time hiking, scouting out non-native plants and uprooting as many as one man can.

“I spend so much time in the Hollow,” Pencoske said. “The mountains in White Oak where I live were all lumbered off and roads and buildings were put up. Everything is developed.”

Until recently, Dead Man's Hollow too could have been developed. However, the Allegheny Land Trust, a nonprofit

land conservation organization, worked diligently to permanently secure this peaceful green space. They succeeded and now own and manage the Hollow as a wildlife preserve.



The preserve has two-and-half miles of trails.

The sights, sounds and activities of civilization surround but seldom intrude into the Hollow. The modest homes of Lincoln and Liberty Boroughs border much of the wildlife preserve. A hundred yards away, just across the Youghiogheny River, sits the City of McKeesport. Having lost half its population since the decline of Big Steel, the city deals with challenges common to small cities throughout the northeastern states.

A mile away in the opposite direction, US Steel's Clairton Coke Works converts 18,000 tons of coal into coke for steel production each day. The largest coke operation in the United States, the massive facility dominates three miles of riverfront.

At one time the Hollow was an industrial center. It was the site of a 19th century quarry and an early 20th century factory. Until the late 1920s, the Union Sewer Pipe Company manufactured clay sewer pipes here. The operation supplied almost all the cities of Pennsylvania, New York and New England. If one could spy into those years from the tops of today's tall trees, the view would be dominated by acres of flattened muddy storage yards, huge coal fired kilns, rails and road.

However, with the pipe company's end came a new beginning. The site became the play yard of children. For some, it became a place to dump garbage, for others, a place to hunt. And as the decades passed, a forest grew.



David Pencoske (left) volunteers much of his time at Dead Man's Hollow.

When the Allegheny Land Trust announced its intention to conserve the land at Dead Man's Hollow in 1995, Pencoske was skeptical. The Hollow was less than pristine, not what most people considered worth saving. He was so intrigued that he volunteered to help clean up the Hollow, a job he is still working.

The land trust

In 1994, The *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory*, a study commissioned by the County of Allegheny, identified Dead Man's Hollow as one of the most significant unprotected natural areas in the county. Like the rest of this urban county, the Hollow had been logged and otherwise used. However, it was special in that it hadn't been crisscrossed with roads and utility lines.

The Allegheny Land Trust reviewed the County's finding. It found that there was little protected open space in the area. It also recognized that the Hollow included a stretch of riverfront that would probably be needed for the planned 152-mile Great Allegheny Passage walking and bicycling trail.

Considering all this, the Allegheny Land Trust decided to make conserving the Hollow its top priority. The organization reached out to the private landowners and initiated negotiations to purchase the largest parcels comprising the Hollow.

“Lincoln Borough is very proud of the conservation of Dead Man's Hollow. It's something that should be done everywhere.”

~Ronald Rosche
Past President and Councilman for 17 Years,
Lincoln Borough

By 1998, the Trust had purchased and permanently protected 396 acres—the better part of this wooded stream valley.

The purchases were funded through grants from the County of Allegheny, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund,* the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation and the support of many individuals and businesses.

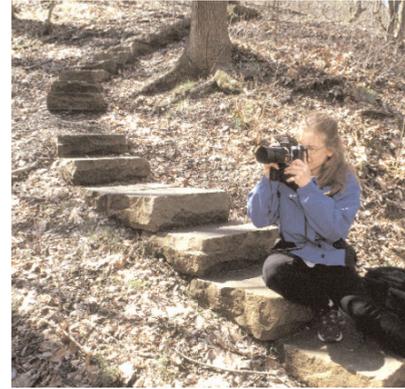
In 1999, the Buchanan and Flowers families donated their four acres in memory of family members. “We were happy to make a gift that will benefit people and wildlife today and 100 years from now,” Robert Buchanan said at the time.

The Trust manages the Hollow as a wild place and provides recreational and educational opportunities for the public.

“We built two-and-half miles of trails. And we cleared out twenty tons of old tires and trash. U.S. Steel workers and local supporters helped make it all happen,” relates Bill Lawrence, a board member of the Trust who participated in the original decision to pursue the conservation of the Hollow.

Lawrence drives the hour from his apartment to hike the trails and partake in the Hollow's tranquility. He knows where the largest tree stands and how the factory pipe discards in the streambed absorb enough water to keep the ground wet in drought years.

“All kinds of people like it here.” Bill nodded towards a sturdy wooden bench. “Because of the benches that were built by U.S. Steel workers, we have people with walkers who use the trails.”



The Witch Hazel Trail features lots of witch hazel and cut-stone steps.

A family treasure

The benches provided welcome rest for Alana Redenbaugh and her father, John Kiser. When doctors advised her aging father to get more exercise, Alana brought him to the Hollow, partly because it is a short walk from her home but mostly because she loves the place.

John has since died, but the times Alana and her three children spent with him in the cool quiet of the trails are precious memories.

“It was a nice place to walk,” Alana said, recalling her days with dad. “He used to talk about the pipe factory that was here when he was a boy. I wouldn't know anything about this place if it weren't for him.”

John ran through the Hollow as a child, using it like generations of area children. The mysterious woods were a giant playground and a respite from adult eyes.



These children are in another world, although not far from home.

Today the Hollow is his grandkids' playground and school. Alana home-schools her children and, the Hollow lends itself to many lessons.

In spring, Timothy, Katie and Nicholas study the emerging life of the season. Warmer weather begs the family to sit under a tree to chat and read good books. Winter fun is looking for animal tracks in the snow.

“It really helps the kids to visualize life without houses around,” Alana said. “We've taken books to the Hollow to read one or two chapters on pioneers.”

For a biology lesson, the children watch salamanders move about the muddy ground, record their whereabouts and measure them.

“I try to go down there as much as I can,” Timmy said. “We found salamanders that were black and red and some were green. Mostly they looked like regular lizards.”

People like the Redenbaughs, Lawrence and Pencoske clearly appreciate the Hollow. Local officials too express warm sentiments.

“Lincoln Borough is very proud of the conservation of Dead Man's Hollow,” said Ronald Rosche, past borough president and councilman for 17 years. “It's something that should be done everywhere. Saving these properties now—while there are still some left—is something that is going to be needed down the road as a place where people can go and be quiet and enjoy nature.”

* Pennsylvania established the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund in 1993 with a 48-0 vote in the Senate and a 196-3 vote in the House. The Keystone Fund has supported more than 1,600 community park and recreation projects, protected tens of thousands of acres of natural areas, built hundreds of miles of recreational trails, supported state parks and forests, and more. Keystone grant recipients must match the funds they are awarded dollar for dollar.