

## 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 Manada Conservancy is a land trust—a local, non-profit membership organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of the natural, historic, agricultural and scenic resources of the Manada and Swatara Creek basins in Pennsylvania's Dauphin and Lebanon Counties. Visit [www.manada.org](http://www.manada.org)



## 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 the 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.

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](http://www.conserveland.org)

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*In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create but by what we refuse to destroy*

—John Sawhill



Produced by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association working in partnership with Pennsylvania's land trusts and the Land Trust Alliance

with financial support from the William Penn Foundation, an anonymous donor and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Growing Greener Program

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*Our warmest appreciation to Casper Kohler and the many other thoughtful and generous people who make land trust work possible.*

Photography credits: Manada Conservancy; Back Panel, Gerry Keltz, freelance photographer



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Pennsylvania's Land Trusts  
Conserving our Commonwealth

Manada  
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# Leaving a Legacy

## Seek No Further Farm

Casper Kohler's reasons for keeping his 100-acre farm intact run deeper than money. So deep that he struggles to explain why he feels his land must never be developed.

"I don't know why I want to save it," Cap said. "Money, you spend it and it's gone," he said, looking perplexed at his own loss of words. "I guess you call it leaving a legacy."

Cap's farm was worth enough money to developers to afford him a most luxurious retirement. But when real estate agents call him, he tells them his land can't be developed. When he hangs up, he smiles.

His farm, Kohler's Seek No Further Farm, will always be open space.

Cap found comfort with the Manada Conservancy, a volunteer-run land trust operating in Dauphin County. He donated a conservation easement to the Conservancy after researching his options.



Cap Kohler (left) and Vic Rohrer, Manada conservancy volunteer, pose at the farmhouse shortly after completing the conservation easement.

A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government conservation agency to limit development on the land. Just as a utility easement gives a power company power lines forever, a conservation easement gives

“When we finished the easement, Cap wrote me a note saying, ‘Thanks for helping me reach one of the goals in my life.’”

~John Conner,  
President of the Manada Conservancy

the conserving organization the right to enforce the restrictions of the easement forever. Cap’s conservation easement prohibits development but allows farming and other open space uses to continue.

Residents of West Hanover Township, and those downstream from Swatara Creek, benefit from Cap’s easement. His open land provides natural filtration of run off, helping to decrease pollution and flooding.

“I’m very interested in seeing our streamside buffers expanded,” said Carol Buskirk, vice



chairperson of the township Environmental Advisory Council and planning board member. “We are part of the Swatara Creek Watershed and Mr. Kohler’s property is a buffer in a commercial area.”

The farm also provides scenic beauty and preserves some of the township’s original character, benefiting travelers of State Route 22 and local residents. Because of these public benefits, Cap’s donation is considered charitable. That, coupled with the reduction in land value from giving up development potential, qualifies Cap to receive a federal income tax deduction.

Cap’s home also serves as an example of the typical Pennsylvania farmhouse.

“You can travel all around West Hanover Township and you won’t see another, even though that was the dominant housing style here,” said John Conner, president of the Manada Conservancy.

At one time the farm didn’t stand out. When Cap was busy milking 35 cows and raising children, property lines seemed non-existent with fields bordered by yet more fields and forest.

Now he counts the former farms by what they have become: a school on the east, a warehouse on the south and housing developments that dot his western fields.

Cap watched as State Route 22 was constructed in the 1940’s. He knew the next steps would be more houses, more industry and fewer farms. Eventually, the township would ban keeping livestock in most of the municipality.

Cap’s farm is exempt from the livestock rule. It pleases Cap to know future owners can have horses, cows or goats. “I loved to farm, that’s all,” Cap said. “So many animals were born on this farm.”

The farm is no longer a dairy, but the land still produces wheat and hay. Cap leases his fields to a local farmer, who wouldn’t have land to work otherwise.

Farming is what led Cap to conserve his land. He first heard about conservation easements



through the Dauphin County Agricultural Preservation Program. After attending meetings, conferences and reading numerous books, he found the county program, which pays farmers for easements, did not meet his needs.

“Under state law, a [future] owner [of Kohler’s farm] might make the case that for whatever reason there is no practical way to farm it,” said Bob Kristoff, resource planner for the Dauphin County Conservation District, which runs the county program. The farm could then be released from the easement restrictions contrary to Cap’s wishes and in spite of his efforts.

“The difference in the county program and private programs is what steered Cap to Manada,” Kristoff said, adding “his farm ranked low on our priority list and we wouldn’t have had funding for at least many years—if ever to preserve his farm.”

For 62 years, Cap worked to improve his land. Now in his 80s, he is still making improvements.

Cap spends his days planting young trees that his children and grandchildren will see mature. Saplings peek from tree shelters on formerly timbered hills. Their trunks, measured in inches, stand rigid against a backdrop of green meadow and blue sky while they struggle to produce young leaves in spite of years of drought.

On one of the farm’s many gentle hills, Cap’s circa 18th century farmhouse shines. It was sided a few years ago, he said, keeping the brick home cozy in winter. The entire property is neatly fenced, containing Lexus, Cap’s playful, yet graying dog.

Cap’s 100 acres will always be a green oasis in a sea of suburban humdrum. A few days after meeting with this writer, Cap called.

“I was walking around the farm yesterday and I realize that I want to leave a speck on this earth better than I found it,” he said. “In my mind’s eye, I see what this farm looked like 62 years ago. I tried to make it better and I believe I did.”

