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 rivers, streams and groundwater. They may protect communities from stormwater or toxic spills. They may conserve productive farmland or working forests. Some focus on protecting biodiversity while others preserve traditional farmlands.

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 yet born.

The Manada Conservancy is a land trust; a local, nonprofit 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

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 lands it records.

Some restrictions contained in the easement are tailored to the particular property and to the goals of the landowner and conservation organization. An easement might limit, 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 nearly always perpetual—applying to all present and future owners of the land—and is recorded at the County Recorder of Deeds office.

Pennsylvania’s Land Trusts

Pennsylvania’s land trusts share a commitment to conserving natural resources for the people of today and for the generations not yet born. The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association promotes voluntary land conservation by supporting land trusts and building a positive climate for conservation in Pennsylvania.

Conserving our Commonwealth

The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association provides voluntary land conservation by supporting land trusts and building a positive climate for conservation in Pennsylvania.

Conservation easements may 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.

A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a land trust or governmental body. The easement is nearly always perpetual—applying to all present and future owners of the land. Federal tax benefits are available to conservation easement donors whose donations meet IRS requirements.
Leaving a Legacy
Seek No Further Farm

For more information on this story and land conservation in general, visit www.conserveland.org

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 runoff, helping to decrease pollution and flooding.

“This was important 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 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 otherwise would not have land to work.

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

“People 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.

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 shone. It was sided a few years ago, he said, keeping the brick home cozy in winter. The entire property is nearly fenced, containing Lexus, Cap’s playful, yet graying, dog.

Cap’s 102 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 realized 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 want to make it better and I believe I did.”

~John Conner, President of the Manada Conservancy

For more information on this story and land conservation in general, visit www.conserveland.org

John Conner, President of the Manada Conservancy

The farm provides scenic beauty and preserves some of the township’s original character, benefiting travelers of State Route 22 and local residents.

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