FALL 2016

Berks Nature

NEWS in NATURE

342-acre property protected with conservation easement

The Nature Place construction begins!

Letter from the President...

Dear Members & Friends,

Berks Nature had a great summer and we hope you did as well! Our Berks Nature Eco-Camp had another successful season. Plan to make your 2017 camp reservations in January when registration opens up, as summer 2017 will prove to be one of the best program years yet!

I must admit though, fall is my favorite time of year- and this fall is extra special. We have finally begun construction on The Nature Place! This dream has been a long time coming, with careful preparations on behalf of our staff and board. We began the design phase nearly 3-years-ago with our design team at Barry Isset and Assoc. and GWWO Architects Inc., prepped by fundraising under the leadership of campaign chair Eric Jenkins. Now, we've entered our final phase- construction with the capable leadership of Associated Construction. Thank you to all who have helped us, in any way, get to this point.

Our staff is working hard to be as prepared as possible for the opening of The Nature Place, which we believe will be shortly after September 2017. There are many things to consider regarding policies, use of building, outreach, programs, staffing, maintenance, etc. Our team is focusing on many different issues to be ready for a grand opening in just roughly 11 months.

As part of our construction, trees have been removed at Angelica Park for a variety of reasons. Many that were removed needed to come down due to safety issues, as they were dead and unsafe. We anticipate an increase in usage of the park, particularly our nature play area, and want to be sure the space is as safe as possible. Some trees need to come out due to the placement of the building, and others because we knew that with the construction activity they would not survive. Rest assured, all of these trees will be replaced on site and all of the materials we harvest will be used on site- either in the nature play area, in the garden as mulch, or elsewhere as needed.

Keep an eye on our website for construction updates. We will have a live video camera streaming to our website by the beginning of October, where you can watch the site grow and The Nature Place become a reality!

I am also very excited for our fall State of the Environment (SOTE) program. On Thursday, November 10, at our annual breakfast, we will debut our SOTE program, focusing on local sustainability efforts being championed by Berks County businesses. Scot Case, an international leader in corporate sustainability consulting, will be our speaker and will share with us the bench marks used by businesses internationally and nationally, as well as how we fair locally in our practices. This breakfast is always a great community gathering and we hope you will join us to learn more!

Our land protection efforts at Berks Nature continue. This summer, we protected our second largest easement to date, which you will read about on page 10. Our fall lineup for events is listed on page 3, so come check us out, even during construction! Our focused watershed restoration work on the Maiden Creek Watershed has been funded again for a fourth year by the William Penn Foundation. These restoration activities help bring much needed best conservation management practices to area farmers at little to no cost and have a direct effect on our waterways.

Best wishes for a great fall!

Sincerely,

Kimberly J. Murphy, President

Berks Nature

We believe that nature is essential to our quality of life.

Where to Find Us

The staff of Berks Nature is busy all over Berks County! But you can find us at our current location, 25 North 11th Street in Reading, between 8:30 am-4 pm Monday through Friday.

When not at our North 11th Street headquarters, we're likely to be found at The Nature Place at Angelica Park- the host of many of our events, programs and classes throughout the year.

For up to date information on Berks Nature, including events and other calendar happenings, visit us online at www.BerksNature.org.

Questions? Call us at 610-372-4992 x100, or shoot us an email at info@berksnature.org.

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Fall at a Glance

Sunday, October 23rd
Little Ones Nature Walk
1-2:30pm

Tuesday, October 25th
Neversink Mountain History Lecture
With Berks County native historian and author Paul Druzba
7-8pm

Sunday, October 30th
Neversink Mountain Hike with Paul Druzba
1-4pm, Location TBD at October 25th lecture.

Save the Date!

STATE OF THE
ENVIRONMENT
• BERKS COUNTY, PA •

Thursday, November 10th
Berks Nature's 8th Annual State of the Environment Breakfast
7:30-9am at the Crowne Plaza Reading in Wyomissing

Saturday, November 12th
"Finding Dory" Family Geo-Caching Day
10am-noon

Tuesday, November 15th
Little Ones Nature Walk
10-11:30am

Saturday, December 10th
Movie + Holiday Crafts
Parents Afternoon Out!
11am-2pm

Events are held at The Nature Place at Angelica Park, unless otherwise specified. More details, including cost and registration, can be found at www.berksnature.org

Berks Nature celebrates the start of construction on The Nature Place

What's happening?

The Berks Nature team is excited to announce that construction began in early September on The Nature Place, our new environmentally responsible, aesthetically respectful education center in Reading's Angelica Park!

This new education center will be an addition to the already existing one-classroom, 800 square foot structure (formerly the boathouse) in the park. Through this project, Berks Nature will create a working example of conservation principles and sustainable development in the region.

What about Berks Nature's fall programs?

If you've been to Angelica Park recently, you've seen the construction underway. Our friends at Associated Construction are working hard each day to bring our vision of The Nature Place to reality. We know it's going to be messy for the next several months, but bear with us- we promise, the end result will be well worth it.

In the meantime, Berks Nature will run business as usual, to the best of our ability. Programs will continue to be held inside the existing Nature Place throughout construction. Water has been shut off in the building for the time being, but a portable restroom and attached hand-washing station has been set up onsite for our use.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

What can we expect in the end?

We can't wait for the opportunities that await us - and you! – in The Nature Place.

Upon opening of the building in summer 2017, Berks Nature will move its administrative headquarters from its current downtown Reading location into The Nature Place at Angelica Park.

Among its many features, The Nature Place will feature a Dirty Classroom- a unique space for active learning about sustainable living, water supply, land use, food supply, air quality and energy conservation. An outdoor play zone will serve as a destination for children to learn and connect with nature in a place like no other found in Berks County. Additional features will include an interactive organic community garden; two conference rooms sized to host large partnership meetings, as well as small, private meetings; and an outdoor classroom capable of use for demonstration activities, such as tree planting and other activities designed to engage adults and children in science, nature, technology, sustainable agriculture and creative energy activities.

The Nature Place will be a regional destination for children and adults to explore the environmental sciences; a go-to destination for school children to do their Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) learning; a center where teachers can come for environmental education training; and a quiet retreat to enjoy and connect with nature. This facility is a necessary part of our future, and a very important resource for local children to explore the world of science and nature. We're looking forward to hosting nature-centered school fieldtrips, and birthday parties, in addition to having expanded space for our Berks Nature Eco-Camp.

Most of all, we can't wait to see you out at The Nature Place and surrounding Angelica Park- exploring, learning, having fun and ultimately, coming back often to visit and do it all over again!

Our successful Spread the Seeds of Conservation Capital Campaign has made the construction of The Nature Place possible. Your help is still needed, however, to meet our fundraising goal. Naming opportunities are still available.

Currently, all gifts will be doubled through a challenge gift. Our goal is to raise the final $300,000 needed by December 31st. Donate to our capital campaign today at www.berksnature.org and be part of creating The Nature Place!

BioHaven Island installed at Angelica Creek

A set of floating islands planted and installed in September will aid in filtering stormwater runoff and removing excess nutrients from the water in Angelica Park, and eventually the water that flows into the Schuylkill River Watershed.

Staff and volunteers from Berks Nature and Angelica Creek Watershed Association, a program of Berks Nature, planted 100 native plants into the BioHaven island bases, before using kayaks to anchor and install the islands in the middle of the pond at Angelica Park.

"This is the first (floating island) that Berks Nature has been involved with in Berks County," said Tami J. Shimp, Berks Nature's vice president of development and community relations. "In addition to the wetlands filtering the stormwater runoff at Angelica Park, this will assist in helping to clean the water before it gets into Angelica Creek and eventually into the Schuylkill River Watershed."

Known as floating treatment wetlands or FTWs, Floating Island Internatonal's BioHaven islands are a new and powerful tool in water stewardship, biomimicking natural floating islands to create a "concentrated" wetland effect. Independent laboratory tests have shown them to remove 20 times more nitrate, 10 times more phosphate and 11 times more ammonia- far exceeding previously published rates. Constructed of durable, non-toxic plastics and vegetated with native plants, BioHaven islands float on top of the water, providing a habitat for birds and animals, while a dynamic process takes place beneath the surface.

The BioHaven project was funded through Berks Nature by a grant from the Schuylkill Action Student grant program of the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary.

Doing our part to protect water sources

By Mikaileigh Baker, Alvernia '17
Berks Nature Summer Public Relations Intern

Back home in Tioga County, just south of Pennsylvania's northern border with New York, my family owns and operates a dairy farm. Our farm is part of the Susquehanna River Basin, otherwise known as the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Crossing through the central part of our farm is the small but lively Corey Creek. Corey Creek then connects with the Tioga River which flows into the Chemung River and eventually into the bigger Susquehanna River. Even the smallest of streams can travel quite the distance and eventually flow into the larger and most well-known of rivers.

In recent years, the U.S. government has come up with various conservation practices. Among them, the 2008 Farm Bill, from which the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative was funded. This is where my family farm was able to make improvements to help protect the water quality. As to not affect the water directly, the creek was fenced out and crossings for the cows were put in. A riparian buffer was built along the creek, as well, mainly of trees. There was a tank put in for the rain run-off from the roof and milk house waste as well as barn gutters and downspouts.

Stormwater is a primary source of this runoff, collecting pollutants of various natures on its way to the water source. Living in a valley surrounded by hills, the runoff is even worse on the farm. The riparian buffer is a way to help with both run-off and the erosion at the same time. In Berks County, there are several more ways of having pollutants get into the water source. Hence why there is a National Pollutant Discharge Eliminations System, NPDES, permit to discharge stormwater from the municipalities separate storm sewer system, MS4.

Agriculture, in Berks County, covers most land in the major watersheds. Many miles of streams traverse agriculture areas across the county. These are when the Best Management Practices, or BMPs, come into play and solutions can be implemented, such as what my farm does. Farm owners can apply for grants through the government to help pay for them.

For the Delaware River Watershed, the principles and ideas are the same. Smaller creeks and streams eventually end up flowing into the bigger rivers. You are part of the Schuylkill River Watershed, a smaller part of the Delaware River Watershed, comprising 90% of Berks County. Your watershed has a similar initiative as the Chesapeake Bay does. Many local nonprofits, including Berks Nature, have joined forces to conserve eight Delaware River sub-watershed clusters. A few simple ways you can help are by planting trees, not dumping into storm drain inlets, picking up pet waste, using environmentally friendly lawn and garden products, and protecting existing riparian buffers.

For more on what you can do to help protect your water visit www.berksnature.org/insideourwatersheds.

(Mikaileigh Baker is a senior Communication Public Relations major at Alvernia University. Raised on a dairy farm near Mansfield, Tioga County, she hopes to work in the agriculture realm in some form following graduation.)

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is the land that water flows across, or under, on its way to a stream, river or lake. Within this, the water flows to the lowest point: a stream, river or lake. Water travels over several types of surfaces, including farm fields, forests, suburban lawns and city streets. It can also seep into the soil and travel as ground water through aquifers. The question now may be asked, 'What does this have to do with me?' Because the water moves over various surfaces and ends up in a stream, river or lake, you are directly impacting the water you are using. You can do many things to have a positive impact. These positive effects are known as Best Management Practices, or BMP's.

Wilson students study water through outdoor classroom

From testing water levels and comparing stormwater data, to studying and observing their watershed, drinking water supplies and even native insects- the possibilities are wide open for Wilson West Middle School teachers, who for the first time this Fall, are incorporating into their science classes a new, hands-on outdoor "classroom."

The result of a partnership with Berks Nature and funded by a $10,000 Environmental Grant from Pennsylvania American Water, the outdoor area at the Lower Heidelberg Township school features a pond, which upon completion, will offer an observation deck and five access stations for students to get to the water.

"Every time we come down here, we think of another opportunity that the children can experience," said Wilson West teacher Javius Galan, a spearhead of the project.

The end goal, Berks Nature's Michael Griffith added, is to provide students with an opportunity to explore "hands-on science. And for those who are really into science, to do something that they might actually do when they get a job."

Each time that students test the water, he noted, the results are going to be different.

"Did it rain last night? Did it thunderstorm last night? Did it flood last night? They're going to have hands-on activities that have real world applications," said Griffith, Berks Nature's education and watershed specialist. "Pennsylvania American Water has a well over here, and a probe that does 24-hour monitoring. The kids can test this or the creek, and they can compare it to the probe and Pennsylvania American Water can use the data, NASA's GLOBE program can use the data, the school can use the data, and Berks Nature can use the data. Ultimately, it's a worldwide database that you can use anywhere."

Photos courtesy of Javius Galan,
Wilson West Middle School teacher

Such a project had been on the backburner for years, Galan said.

"For the longest time, a team of teachers wanted to put this educational classroom back here," he said. "And more recently, at the completion of the last school year, I was doing Trout in the Classroom and through contacting multiple resources and finally getting ahold of Michael (Griffith), we were able to start the discussion back up again about doing some kind of educational setting or classroom back here."

Work on the project began at the end of June and included the removal of invasive plants from the site, as well as the construction of a path down to the water's edge and a retaining wall to halt erosion.

Wilson West science teacher Steve Rhoades was among the teachers who initially tried to get the ball rolling on a pond project.

"Our goal is, we want to have our kids come down here and use this as an environmental study area," Rhoades said. "They'll do water testing, upload their data to NASA, observing animal and plant life down here and making those cloud observations. We'll use this to supplement what we're already doing with the environmental studies program."

Among the other benefits: students in Galan's fly fishing club will have the opportunity to practice on the pond, home to small mouth bass and other fish.

"It's really been a team effort, and I truly and sincerely mean that," Galan said of the project. "We've got a wonderful community. Local businesses helped out, Lower Heidelberg Township helped out, Sinking Spring helped out. And obviously, this would not have happened without Pennsylvania American Water. So when I say community, I mean our school community, but also our working community. Everyone has chipped in to make this happen."

PENNSYLVANIA AMERICAN WATER

342-acre conservation easement marks the second largest ever for Berks Nature

At the base of the Kittatinny Ridge, where the rolling hills give way to Schuylkill County's Schwartz Valley, an apple-tree lined driveway paves the way to a home up against the woodland.

On an overcast morning in early September, Dennis and Pauline Fehr sat at their dining room table, looking out over their vast land.

"None of us own anything- we just control it while we live in it," Dennis Fehr said. "We could have heaven on Earth, for crying out loud, if we all behave and pitch in."

Since purchasing their first 126-acre farm in 1967, the Fehrs have gone on to acquire an additional 200+ acres as neighboring farms have come up for sale over the decades.

"We were never in farming to make a living," Fehr said. "Farming is a hobby- something I really like to do, just to see nature. I'm dumbfounded by the beauty of nature."

Together with Berks Nature, the Fehrs are looking to the future, and making decisions so that future generations can experience that natural beauty for years to come.

At 342 acres, the conservation easement acquired on the Fehrs' Wayne Township property this summer makes it the second largest in Berks Nature's 42-year history. While Berks Nature is the holder of the Fehr conservation easement, the protection of this property makes a significant contribution to regional agricultural sustainability and the thriving Schuylkill County Agricultural Land Program.

"Dennis and Polly have the respect for their community and the environment to do their part to keep it functioning for all of our benefit, really," said Larry Lloyd, Berks Nature's senior

ecologist, who worked with the couple on the conservation easement. "All Berks Nature conservation easements are individually worked out with the landowner. This particular landowner chose to have no further housing development on their property- no subdivision and no further housing, forever. And we monitor the conservation easement to uphold the terms that are in the easement."

Now under conservation easement, Lloyd concluded, the Fehr property "will remain undeveloped for the remainder of the future. They're allowed to continue agriculture. That doesn't mean they have to, but they have the ability to."

At present, the Fehrs farm corn, beans, hay and alfalfa on their land, along with tending to some cattle. And while they're not a certified organic farm, they do follow many of the practices.

"It's just common sense farming," Dennis Fehr said.

A native of Pine Grove and Friedensburg, Dennis Fehr worked on farms from the age of 10.

"I did everything. They always said I could pick the potatoes best because I was short," he recalled with a laugh. "The farm was almost 5-miles away- I used to run there in the morning and run back home at night."

Work "is a sport," Fehr said.

"Other people have golf and other things. But every job is a sport," he added. "You do it to the best of your ability. And, try to do it right and learn as much about it as you can. People who just don't like to work, I don't understand it."

As a businessman, Fehr has invested in solar energy and more recently, EnviroKure, a Philadelphia-based organic liquid fertilizer start-up.

"If you're a businessperson with an eye to the future, the place to invest is Mother Nature," Lloyd said. "Dennis and Polly are investing in organic food production, solar energy and he's investing in carbon sequestration with the planting of hundreds of trees on his property. The trees speak to carbon sequestration and the production of air. This man is ahead of the curve."

The Fehrs, he added, "are putting their money where the future is- the only place the future can go."

"We live on an affixed planet," Lloyd said. "They're invested in keeping their land undeveloped. All these things are for the future, not just them. We're going to need these spaces for food, water and air."

To date, Berks Nature has protected more than 8,000 acres of land.

"Dennis Fehr may joke about his short stature back when he used to pick potatoes" Lloyd said, "But he's a giant when it comes to conservation."

Dennis and Pauline Fehr, with Berks Nature Senior Ecologist Larry Lloyd, on the Fehrs farm in Wayne Township, Schuylkill County.

Berks Nature enjoys relationships with hundreds of landowners in Berks, and welcomes the addition of new landowners to our "Berks Nature Family." If you have land that you'd like to protect, simply give us a call at 610-372-4992. We'll explain your options to you and will get you pointed in the right direction. Conservation easements are the tool most often used to achieve permanent land protection.

Berks Nature
25 N. 11th Street
Reading, PA 19601

We had a blast at Eco-Camp 2016, and are already thinking about next summer!

Keep your eyes peeled over the next few months for information on 2017 Berks Nature Eco-Camp registration, which opens January 15th!

Save the Date!

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

• BERKS COUNTY, PA •

Berks Nature invites you to join us
for our 8th Annual
State of the Environment Breakfast
Thursday Nov. 10th
Crowne Plaza Reading, Wyomissing

Berks Nature invites you to join us for our 8th Annual State of the Environment Breakfast on Thursday, Nov. 10th at the Crowne Plaza Reading, Wyomissing. This year, keynote speaker and sustainability consultant Scot Case will highlight businesses- local, national and international- that are benefitting from green and sustainable management practices.

For more information, or to purchase tickets, click on the events tab at www.berksnature.org, or call 610-372-4992.