

EARTH CONSERVANCY NEWS

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EC contributes to area's economic improvement

In 1994 when EC purchased 16,300 acres of land from the bankruptcy estate of the former Blue Coal Corporation, the goal was to reclaim mine scarred lands and plan responsible reutilization with economic benefits and positive community development. Of EC's lands, more than 11,000 have been dedicated to green space.

As part of its primary goal of reclamation, EC and its partners have to date reclaimed 850 acres at a cost of \$12.6 million. An additional 1,000 acres are currently in the process of being reclaimed. In accomplishing these objectives, EC has been able to attract \$7.8 million in grants from Federal, State and local agencies to invest in the reclamation efforts.

Reutilizing EC lands for the benefit of the community through land sales has netted positive results by placing properties back on the tax rolls. EC has sold 339 parcels of land totaling 1,275 acres for a total of \$7.5 million. These sales have

continued on page 6, see IMPROVEMENT.

South Valley Parkway project shifts into high gear

Anyone traveling the roads in the Lower Wyoming Valley has at one time or another has been forced to contend with congestion on Middle Road. Whether around Luzerne County Community College, passing through Nanticoke City or accessing the Sans Souci Parkway, drivers are faced with increasing traffic and increased headaches. Pain reliever is on its way in the form of the proposed South Valley Parkway.

The planned road would link PA Route 29 in the north to Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township. The new parkway would also alleviate congestion in the area of Luzerne County Community College, improve access to the Sans Souci Parkway and improve safety on Middle Road.

EC is working with Luzerne County, PENNDOT, and a variety of other environmental, civic and governmental organizations to coordinate the project. A panel of 20 representatives from those groups make up the Project Advisory

continued on page 7, see PARKWAY.



Breaker Signing ~ Seated from left to right are Susan Shoal, Rhea Simms, Dr. Anthony Mussari and Michael Dziak; standing left to right are John Jablowski Jr., Merle Mackin, Jack McNulty, Ray Clarke and Leo Kucewicz.

Huber Society gets land donation

The Huber Breaker Preservation Society achieved its first milestone in January 2004 when the Earth Conservancy donated three acres of land to the group for the future home of the Huber Breaker Park. The land overlooks the old breaker running along Main Street in Ashley.

The Society worked with the Earth Conservancy and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to develop plans for a park that would welcome visitors to the historic Huber Breaker. Future plans include informational signage and potentially a museum highlighting the impressive history associated with the 65-year-old breaker, which is eligible for inclusion in National Register of Historic Places. Considered at the time of its construction in 1938 and '39 to be one of the most technologically advanced breakers in the country, Huber employed 6,000 men and boys at its peak and processed more than 7,000 tons of coal each day.

More information on the Huber Breaker Preservation Society and the Huber Breaker can be obtained by contacting anthracite@adelphia.net or www.huberbreaker.org.

Exit 168 / Rt. 115 Connector Road Master Plan completed

Plans for development of the Exit 168/Rt. 115 corridor have progressed quickly with the completion of the project Master Plan. The plan makes the best use of the Earth Conservancy's 310-acre land holdings in that area with the project focusing on restoring and enhancing the environment and creating high quality jobs for north-eastern Pennsylvania.

Developed in partnership with EC and Luzerne County and PENNDOT, the plan includes proposals for a road connecting State Route 115 to Interstate 81. The new road will improve access from Route 115 to I-81 and will create quicker, easier and safer access for the drivers exiting Geisinger Health Systems and East Mountain Corporate Center. The original access road was closed more than 10 years ago after a number of vehicle accidents occurred on the ramp.

The plan goes beyond simply providing easier access to and from Route 115 and 81. It includes economic enhancements to the area that incorporate business, commercial, residential and recreational amenities, all of which are designed to be developed in phases, keeping pace with market demand.

An important component of the plan is its placement in proximity to the Seven Tubs Nature Area and the gateway this property presents to that recreational area. The Tubs area is an important component of existing and proposed recreational trails and will link to the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Trail System.

Funding for the I-81 Exit 168/Route 115 Connector Road Master Plan was provided by Luzerne County, the U.S. Dept. of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Earth Conservancy.

Ashley Planes Heritage Park rolling toward construction phase

One of the area's most beautiful and historically significant areas, Ashley Planes captures in one place the quintessential beauty and working history of the Wyoming Valley. With plans well underway to turn the Planes into Ashley Planes Heritage Park, the 500-acre site will be preserved for future generations of area residents and visitors seeking to learn about the region's coal mining history.

Working in partnership with PENNDOT, the DCNR, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and Luzerne County, the Earth Conservancy has developed site plans, which include the creation of a trail following the former line of the old rail pul-



Ashley Planes Pool/Pond ~ This natural pool located near the bottom of the Ashley Planes will greet hikers as they travel up the planes.

ley system. The Planes are a series of three inclined planes that utilized a rail-pulley system developed to haul anthracite over the Wilkes-Barre Mountain and on to larger cities and markets. Built in 1848 and remaining in operation for more than 100 years, the Ashley Planes are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Future plans include explo-

ration of connecting the Ashley Planes Heritage Park Trail to the D&L Backtrack Trail running along the mountain ridge. Plans for the park also include parking and a comfort station.

Funding for the Ashley Planes Project was provided by PENNDOT and DCNR.

Hanover recreational park forms lasting partnership

One of EC's notable successes during the past five years is the ongoing reclamation of the Sugar Notch Bank and development of the Greater Hanover Recreational Park. From the outset, this 60-acre project held the promise of not simply reclamation but of becoming useful to residents in the Greater Hanover Area. Phase I of the project was completed in 2003 with the official opening of the lower playing fields for soccer and football. Last year saw residents, youth athletic groups, civic leaders and a school district working together to form the Greater Hanover Area Recreational Park Commission (GHARPC).

Working with Julie McMonagle, the Department of Environmental Conservation's Northeast Pennsylvania office and the Earth Conservancy, Sugar Notch, Warrior Run, Hanover Township, the Greater Hanover Area School District formed the Greater Hanover Area Recreation Park Commission (GHARPC), a non-profit group to assume ownership of the park. The Hanover Area Youth Soccer Association, along with members of the commission will act as caretakers of the park, overseeing field maintenance and athletics scheduling coordination.

Once the GHARPC becomes operational, the completed Phase I park lands, 15 acres, will be deeded to the commission by the Earth Conservancy. The commission expects to be

operational early this year. As work is completed on Phases II and III some time during the next two years, the GHARPC will assume ownership of the additional 45 acres of fields and will take over ongoing maintenance and operation.

The GHARPC held its first election in November 2003. Elected officers are as follows: Matthew Lukachinsky, president; John Sipper, vice-president; Tom Hooper, treasurer; Denise Malachefski, secretary. They were elected to three-year terms. The commission recently received a \$10,000 grant through Rep. John Yudichak for maintenance costs associated with the park.

Work on Phase II progressed steadily throughout 2003 with the grading of the earth, importing and spreading compost and topsoil. The site is ready to be seeded in the spring for the planned baseball field. Phase III work will continue in the spring with grading the earth to accommodate the planned softball, little league and football fields.

Adjacent to the recreational park, approximately 50 acres of the Sugar Notch Bank will begin the reclamation process thanks to a \$500,000 DEP Growing Greener Grant. This land could become a residential development. Planning work will begin in the spring.



Recreational Park ~ With the initial portion of the park completed, work on the Greater Hanover Area Recreation Park continues with Phases II and III.



Hanover Culm bank ~ Huber culm bank greets drivers as they enter and exit the Hanover Industrial Park. Plans to eliminate it are underway.

Reclamation will enhance Hanover Industrial Park

A series of reclamation projects at EC's Huber Banks I and II, near the entrance to the Hanover Industrial Park, will not just erase eyesores that have greeted those traveling to and from the park but will transform the land into economically viable property that could enhance the local economy.

Both banks have been designated as Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) areas so will offer incen-

tive to companies looking to locate in an up-and-coming part of the Wyoming Valley. EC is funding the reclamation of Huber Bank I, while Huber Bank II is being reclaimed in partnership with Northampton Fuel Company, Inc. Both projects are expected to be completed later this year, at which time they will be ready for development to accommodate new businesses.



Scarlet Reclamation ~ When the Huber reclamation work is completed, the area will look much like this project, the former Scarlet Bank, on which reclamation work was completed last year.



Landfill ~ Reclamation of the former Luzerne County Flood Debris Landfill is well underway, with much of the remnants of the Agnes Flood disappearing from sight.

Remnants of Agnes flood disappearing from Hanover Township view

The site that became the home for much of the debris from the '72 Agnes flood is well on its way to becoming a productive component of the Hanover Crossings Industrial Park. Located adjacent to the park, the former Luzerne County Flood Debris Landfill is currently undergoing reclamation. EC received a DEP Growing Greener grant to reclaim the landfill and has worked with the Pennsylvania Department of

Environmental Protection, Luzerne County and the Luzerne County Conservation District to develop the project.

The entire 50-acre site will be excavated and graded to accommodate detention basins and building pads. The ground will then be layered with ash, topsoil, and seeded. The reclamation phase of the work is expected to be finished in about two years.

EC partners for watershed reclamation

EC is working in partnership with several agencies on watershed projects to address the negative effects of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) in the Lower Wyoming Valley. The correlation between mine-scarred lands and AMD is so closely tied that the restoration of the water systems goes hand-in-hand with the reclamation of mine scarred land.

Nanticoke Creek – EC, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (BAMR) are collaborating to develop plans to reduce the amount of AMD seeping in to the Nanticoke Creek as a result of the exten-

sive mining in the area. Plans are in the engineering stage, after which a cost estimate and work schedule will be completed. This project is expected to take many years and millions of dollars to correct due to the level of AMD pollutants in the water system.

Wetlands – EC continues work on the AMD cleanup in Hanover Township where two wetlands were created as filtration systems to rid the water flowing through them of AMD pollutants. Funded by the EPA and EC, we partnered with Wilkes University to develop the program, which has shown significant success and is used as an ongoing educational tool.

EC honors retiring directors

EC honored two board members whose contributions were instrumental in moving forward the organization's mission. Harold "Rolly" Snowdon Jr. and Edward Schechter, now both retired from the EC Board of Directors, were honored by friends and fellow board members at separate luncheons last year.

Rolly's leadership and guidance fostering the creation of the Earth Conservancy and encouraging its development have been invaluable. His commitment and dedication to promoting the organization's ideals and his support of its mission were pivotal in making EC a champion for land

reclamation in Luzerne County.

Ed Schechter joined EC as Chairperson of the Land Use Plan. His leadership solidified EC's goals for land use, reclamation and development. Ed pursued the goals for reclamation and conservation through active involvement in all steps of planning and implementation of many projects. His enthusiastic commitment and strong work ethic guided EC toward achieving its goals.

Both men were honored for their work at separate luncheons, where many of the current board members and retired members presented them with plaques. Their dedicated service will be missed.

ATV study moving forward

The ATV Feasibility Study is moving forward with its research into the potential of locating an off-road vehicle park in the Wyoming Valley. The popularity of the sport, 15 million Americans are riders according to the ATV Safety Institute, demands that issues related to ATVs be addressed. Earth Conservancy has taken on the task of exploring the potential for park space because of its large land holdings.

The Steering Committee, made up of ATV enthusiasts, government agencies, and civic leaders, has begun to tackle the most important issues relating to ATV riding, including: potential sites, liabilities, owners, and maintenance

issues. Pennoni Associates was hired as the consultant for the project.

It is important to note that this study is the first in this area to bring together representatives from those entities and decision-makers that have a stake in the process, including the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), PPL Utilities, Luzerne County Planning Commission, UGI, PA Game Commission, Newport and Plymouth Townships, and a number of area ATV riding clubs. Funding for the study was provided by the DCNR and Luzerne County.

Improvements continued from page 1.

generated economic improvements resulting in \$331,000 per year in new property taxes. Those numbers can be broken down as follows: local communities \$29,500; county \$80,600; school districts \$221,000. In addition, \$150,000 in transfer taxes has been paid.

Of the land sales, 300 acres were sold to the Greater Wilkes-Barre chamber of Business and Industry for the new Hanover Crossings Business Park. The park's first company, Advance PCS, expects 750 new jobs to be created including pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, management and other professional employees. Many additional jobs have been created by the reclamation efforts and new homes are being built throughout

area communities.

Many communities have received land donations from EC. Through 2003, 29 donations were made totaling 180 acres valued at \$1.3 million. These donations were made to groups like municipalities, volunteer fire companies and recreational organizations and will help to stimulate community development projects and improve quality of life for residents.

EC thanks all of its partners and board members for recognizing the importance of positive community development and their support in achieving these goals for Luzerne County and all its communities

In Brief

Earth Conservancy is working on these projects:

Warrior Gap – EC is working with the DEP BAMR to reclaim 50 acres of the Warrior Gap area. The DEP BAMR is funding the work, which is expected to be completed in 2005.

Nuangola – EC's planned 13-parcel residential development is underway in Nuangola. The road is currently under construction that will travel through the development. The development's tree-covered lots are available for purchase.

Archiving Records – Grant funds received through the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor enabled EC to engage an archivist to begin cataloguing the records of the former Glen Alden/Blue Coal Companies left in the building after declaring bankruptcy in 1974. Doug Reynolds, working as a consultant with the D&L, discovered an abundant history of not only the mining industry but of the people who worked for the mining company. Further archiving work is



Nuangola Residential Development ~ Workers move earth as they excavate the road for the new Woodland Acres development in Nuangola.

planned, including: further inventorying, appropriate storage for the historically significant documents, and identifying and exploring a permanent location for the collection.

EC receives grants to continue reclamation initiatives

During 2003, the Earth Conservancy received grant funding to continue existing reclamation projects and to begin others. Our work also benefited from grants awarded to local municipalities:

Grant funds recently awarded by the Brownfields component of the EPA, will allow EC to develop plans for remediating the silt pond adjacent to Concrete City. Once plans are developed, EC will seek additional grant funding to begin the reclamation process. EC competed successfully on a national level with other conservation groups to secure the \$200,000 cleanup grant.

EC received a \$500,000 Environmental Stewardship and Watershed Protection Grant as

part of the Growing Greener program from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to continue reclamation of parts of the Sugar Notch Bank adjacent to the Greater Hanover Area Recreational Park.

Sugar Notch Borough received a \$100,000 grant for the purchase of an auto-feed remote controlled grinder for use at the Earth Conservancy Compost Facility. The cost of the grinder is \$250,000. Therefore, additional funding is being sought to complete the purchase.

Rep. John Yudichak provided grant funding to the Earth Conservancy for improvements to the recreation park.

Parkway continued from page 1.

Committee.

First suggested in EC's Master Plan, partners in the development of the project are considering six preliminary alternative routes the new road might take. Public meetings were held in December and January, with additional meetings planned.

Major components of the project under consideration include: safety, improving safety for those

now traveling Middle Road; congestion, reducing the volume of traffic on Middle Road; regional access, creating easier access to Routes 29 and 81 and to the college; and, economic development, opening up the region to improved economic development.

The plan is expected to go into design later this spring.

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and Members**

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Earth Conservancy, a non-profit organization committed to the revitalization of 16,300 acres of former coal company-owned land, will plan for its most productive use and manage that land for the next 20 years.

More than 10,000 acres of Earth Conservancy land has been committed for open spaces and recreational purposes.

Working cooperatively with local, state and federal agencies, governments, educational institutions, and local residents, Earth Conservancy will return these abandoned lands into productive assets for the communities in which they lie.

Reclamation, conservation, responsible development and recycling will be employed for this purpose.

Innovative environmental technologies will be used to improve the quality of the land and water. Knowledge will be shared with students, learning institutions, and interested community groups.

Earth Conservancy's actions will improve local tax bases, help create new and better jobs, and develop and apply new environmental technologies.

Earth Conservancy Staff

Michael Dziak, President/CEO; **John Renfer**, Executive Administrator; **Jacqueline Dickman**, Director of Public Affairs and Development; **Rick Ruggiero**, Property Documentation Specialist and Survey Coordinator; **Shirley Santine**, Real Estate Sales Coordinator; **Anna May Hirko**, Administrative Assistant; **Reda Griffiths**, Secretary; **Steve Draus Jr.**, Field Manager; **Keith Scortichini**, Compost Foreman; **Nicholas Kratz**, Assistant Compost Site Foreman; **Vince Mitchell**, Field Personnel; **Michael Thomas**, Field Personnel

Earth Conservancy is a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) corporation. Board meetings are open to the public and usually are held the first Thursday of each month at 8 a.m. at the Earth Conservancy office, 101 S. Main St., Ashley, PA 18706. Check the Citizens Voice and Times Leader Newspapers for meeting notices and changes, or check www.earthconservancy.org.

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