

EARTH CONSERVANCY NEWS

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\$750,000 Growing Greener Grant Funds Major Reclamation Project

A large-scale reclamation project initiated by EC will help convert large tracts of mine-scarred land near the State Route 29 Corridor in Hanover Township into productive areas that will benefit the entire Wyoming Valley.

EC will use a \$750,000 Growing Greener grant it received in May to reclaim the Preston Bank and a portion of the Huber Bank, in Hanover Township. These areas are near State Route 29, Interstate 81, and the Hanover Industrial Estates. Both the Preston and Huber Bank areas are in a Keystone Opportunity Zone.

"Reclamation of these areas will restore significant land in the Wyoming Valley, improve area watersheds, promote economic revitalization by providing land for economic expansion, and eradicate the negative perceptions created by mine-scarred sites" said EC President Mike Dziak. "This will be another great step forward for our region."

EC is partnering on this reclamation project with Northampton Fuel Supply Co. and UGI Utilities, Inc.,

which use coal waste material to generate electric power.

The total project area consists of four land parcels that can be reclaimed independently in a phased approach. Eventually, 300 acres in the Solomon and Warrior Creek Watersheds in Hanover Township will be reclaimed. On some of the parcels, reclamation work has already begun.

UGI is removing 50,000 tons of coal silt per year from a northern portion of the Huber Bank, and EC has begun reclamation of a 63-acre site at the Sugar Notch Bank Area that it plans to develop into a community recreational complex consisting of athletic fields, tennis and basketball courts, and trails.

The first phase of this recreational area is currently being constructed on eight reclaimed acres on the eastern end of the site. It will include two multi-purpose fields, a basketball court, a parking area, and walking trail.

This project is being funded by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Rural Abandoned Mine Program, Luzerne County and EC.

Community Gardens Take Root

The seed was planted last year when Deborah Shoval, a Kingston native, suggested to EC's Board of Directors that EC consider using some of its land to implement a community gardening project that local residents could participate in.

This year, that idea has grown into a project that has two dozen area residents planting gardens at a 1.5-acre site along Flats Road, in Plymouth Township. Participants are given plots of land to grow vegetables, herbs, spices, and flowers for their personal use and assume responsibility for planting and maintaining those plots during the growing season, which EC has extended to Nov. 6.

So far, the project has met with an overwhelmingly positive response, and a group of college students has also gotten involved.

A horticulture class from Luzerne County Community College is using two plots of land to grow herbs and similar plants as part of their coursework.

To help the gardeners get started, EC held an organizational meeting in May. Wilma Jones, a Penn State Co-operative Extension Master Gardener, shared information and gardening tips with the participants, and Ms. Shoval talked about the benefits of organic gardening.



About two dozen local residents have taken advantage of EC's Community Gardening Project. Participants plant and maintain their own plots, which are provided by EC free of charge.

"EC is really happy with the enthusiastic response this project has received from the participants and hopes to continue this program in the future," said Amy Gruzsky, manager of the Community Gardens Project. "It was a great idea and it has turned into a great community activity."

EC Obtains Funding to Build Trail

Construction of Mocanaqua Loop will begin this year

EC will receive a \$100,000 grant from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's Recreational Trails Program to design and construct the Mocanaqua Loop Trail.

Construction of this trail, which is located along the ridgetop of Penobscot Mountain's northern reach in Conyngham Township, will begin this year.

EC has surveyed the area and pinpointed various points of natural and historical interest to be highlighted with interpretational signage, as well as several locations for scenic overlooks.

The spectacular, panoramic views of the Wyoming Valley, the Susquehanna River, and the surrounding mountain ranges, are one of several features that make this an exceptional trail.

The entire Loop will cover about six miles, taking users to various points along the ridgetop and then using a series of secondary trails to return them to the starting point.

These secondary trails will serve a dual purpose by offering the option of shorter, less strenuous excursions along the mountainside as well as variety for frequent users.

EC is looking at two possible access points to the trail, one in Mocanaqua, off of Main Street, and another further north in Lee.

The Loop is being developed in conjunction with an outdoor center planned by Conyngham Twp., which would provide a variety of recreational options for residents and visitors.

The proposed outdoor center would be located along the Susquehanna River, near the trail. It will offer a docking area, fishing, a seasonal ice skating area and access to the Mocanaqua Loop.



The trail's path along the mountainside is just as interesting and scenic as points along the ridgetop, offering users a very diverse and unique trail experience.

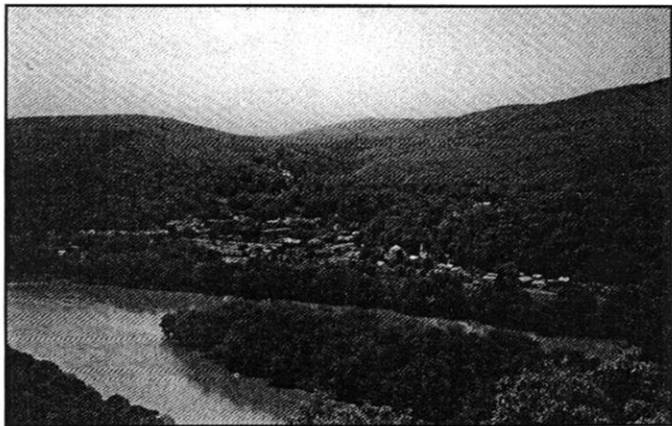
A rock climbing area is located near the trail that EC would like to include in the confines of the trail area.

The Mocanaqua Loop is the first third of the proposed 9-mile Escarpment Trail, which will extend from Mocanaqua to Nanticoke and will be for *non-motorized* uses only.

In addition to DCNR's funding, EC also received \$2,000 from the PowerBar Corporation's Direct Impact on Rivers and Trails (DIRT) program.

The Mocanaqua Loop is one of the first projects proposed in EC's Lower Wyoming Valley Open Space Master Plan to be developed. The Open Space Plan outlined recreational and conservation uses for 11,000 acres of EC land.

Two other Open Space Plan projects, the Luzerne County Recreational Area and The Ashley Planes Heritage Park (*see page 3*) are also being developed.



Spectacular views like this can be enjoyed from several points along EC's proposed Mocanaqua Loop. Here, the Susquehanna River and Bellis Island is in the forefront, while in the background is the town of Shickshinny and surrounding mountain ridges.

EC DONATES LAND TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Since its inception, EC has donated small parcels of land to local communities to help them meet various needs and to provide amenities to their residents.

At its May meeting, EC's Board of Directors approved four new land donations to local communities for various purposes:

- 1.85 acres to Preston Fire Co. No. 3, in Hanover Township, at the corner of South Main Street and Rose Lane.
- Two parcels totaling 0.477 acres to Sugar Notch Borough, off of Mott Street, in Sugar Notch, for use as sewer easements for a sewer upgrading project.
- Two dirt roadways to Edwardsville Borough, to provide access to a residential development.
- A 20-foot alleyway near Spruce Street, to Wilkes-Barre Township for community use.

The Ashley Planes Heritage Park

Combining History, Nature and Recreation

EC has received two major grants to help design and build the Ashley Planes Heritage Park that was proposed in EC's Lower Wyoming Valley Open Space Master Plan.

EC was recently awarded a \$70,000 DCNR Rails-to-Trails grant to help fund the design, engineering and architectural work on this project.

Last year, EC was awarded a \$1 million Transportation Enhancement

Act (TEA-21) grant for construction of the heritage park.

Luzerne County also contributed \$10,000 toward the development of a conceptual master plan for the project.

Presently, Urban Research and Development Corporation (URDC), Bethlehem, is creating the conceptual master plan.

URDC will devise an interpretive trail system throughout this 400+ acre area that incorporates the remaining historic ruins and other points of interest at this site. They will also determine the best location for park access, facilities such as rest rooms, a picnic area and an educational environmental/cultural center.

It is EC's goal to make The Planes an area that offers educational, natural, and recreational opportunities for visitors.

stationary steam engines that pulled loaded freight and passenger cars up the steep incline from Ashley to the top of the mountain at Solomon Gap. The cars then followed a downgrade track to White Haven.

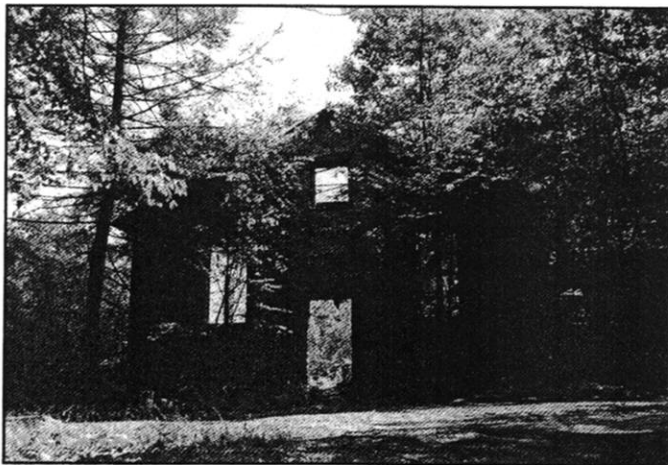
The Planes stretched from Ashley to Fairview Twp. to Solomon Gap, with lengths of 4,356 feet, 3,778 feet, and 4,797 feet respectively.

They were, and still are, considered a national transportation and engineering marvel.

Today, the Ashley Planes houses ruins and remnants from a time when "Coal was King" in Northeastern Pennsylvania and provides a part of the anthracite story that until now had been overlooked – the story of how coal was transported.

EC wants to preserve the Planes' history by creating a recreational site that takes full advantage of the area's attributes, while also helping to preserve them for future generations.

When completed, The Planes will be a key heritage site in our area that complements existing historical sites in the region.



Existing ruins at the Planes pay homage to the site's history and the role it played in the anthracite mining story. EC plans to incorporate historic structures such as this one into a hiking/biking trail system that will traverse the site, providing both education and recreation while highlighting the area's heritage.

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Earth Conservancy
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Inquiries and comments
may be addressed to
Amy Gruzsky, editor, at
the preceding address,
or by calling 570-823-3445.

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Site Has National Significance

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Ashley Planes were once the main transportation route of anthracite from the valley floor in Ashley to White Haven and larger urban markets.

Built in 1843, the Planes consisted of three, double-track inclines with



Some trails already exist at the Planes, taking visitors through picturesque wooded areas like this, as well as through the site's former industrial sections.

Local Students Help Turn a Brownfield Green

They came to Newport Township by the busload, bringing shovels, pails, and a lot of enthusiasm. When they left, the 30-acre site on which they had been working had become home to 4,000 new tree seedlings.

In April, over 600 students, teachers and chaperones took part in EC's third consecutive Volunteer Tree Planting Initiative, which helps to further reclamation on former mine-scarred EC sites through the planting of trees.

This year, 105 students from Fairview Township Elementary, 30 students from the Greater Nanticoke Area High School, 450 students from Wyoming Valley West Middle School, and about a dozen volunteers from Wyoming Valley West High School and Amnesty International participated.

EC supplies the seedlings, which this year included Black Locust, Bristly Locust, Japanese Larch, Norway Spruce and White Pine, and the schools provide transportation, tools, and most importantly, volunteers to plant the trees.

The students from Fairview Township Elementary even went a step further, donating 50 garden diggers to EC for future tree planting efforts. The students held a Bluebird Box sale at their school and then used the money they raised to purchase the shovels.



A member of Amnesty International spent a Saturday morning in April helping other Amnesty volunteers and students from Wyoming Valley West High School plant seedlings on reclaimed and in Newport Township.



Over 300 students from Wyoming Valley West Middle School get ready for a morning of tree planting. After receiving planting instructions, the students organize themselves into small groups and are given bunches of trees, which they spend the next two hours planting. The outing ends with a bag lunch eaten at the site, and then it's back to school!



This enthusiastic group of boys from Wyoming Valley West Middle School and their chaperone takes a needed break from planting and seizes the opportunity to pose for a group photo.

"The dedication and enthusiasm shown by these students and their teachers is outstanding," EC President Mike Dziak said. "It is very encouraging to see all of these young people work so hard on a project that will benefit their region and the environment. Everyone at EC is very appreciative and proud of their efforts and we look forward to working with more young people on projects like this in the future."

Although planting on reclaimed land can be difficult due to the uneven terrain and hard, rocky consistency of the soil, the students did not let that dampen their enthusiasm or hinder their efforts.

Some students even used the event to do a little exploring on their own, digging up salamanders, observing birds, and even searching for, and finding fossils and chunks of anthracite that they took back to their classrooms.

Many parents also participated in this year's event as chaperones, helping students plant their trees, and had some very positive feedback on the effort.

"I just spent the morning of April 26th planting trees with my son's seventh grade class from WWV Middle School. It was a great experience for both the adults and the children. I hope you continue to involve our youths in such wonderful projects. Congrats on a job well done!!!!" wrote David J. Prohaska, via e-mail.

EC's Volunteer Tree Planting Initiative is an annual event that takes place every April. While the majority of the participants are local schools, EC will work with any group interested in participating. We are also looking for either college students or other volunteers who would be willing to help organize and carry out future tree plantings. For more information on this program, contact Amy Gruzesky at 823-3445.



These Fairview Township Elementary students take special care planting their Norway Spruce seedlings.

EC Focuses Efforts on Acid Mine Drainage

Anyone living in or visiting the Wyoming Valley has surely noticed the bright orange and yellow water that flows through many parts of our area.

Obviously unnatural, this water is contaminated by acid mine drainage (AMD), which flows from subsurface mine pools into area waterways.

The heavy metals and other contaminants in this water not only look and smell bad, but often kill aquatic organisms and plants, rendering portions of streams, creeks and rivers biologically "dead."

This problem has affected numerous watersheds in our area, causing significant environmental damage.

As part of its reclamation efforts, EC is involved in efforts to address and help remediate this serious problem.

To date, EC has constructed and maintains two wetland systems in Hanover Township that treat AMD discharges in the Nanticoke Creek Watershed, and is working with the U.S. Geological Survey and Wilkes University on an assessment of the Newport and Nanticoke Creek watersheds for impacts from abandoned mine areas and discharges.

Funding for the Newport Creek assessment was provided by the PA Dept. of Environmental Protection's 104(b)(3) non-point source pollution grant program. EC is funding the Nanticoke Creek assessment and the U.S. Geological Survey has provided matching funds for both efforts.

Specifically, flow rates were monitored to determine the stream flow lost into subsurface mine pools due to percolation through surface mine disturbance. Water quality has also been monitored to gauge the impact from abandoned mine land runoff and deep mine discharges.

As a follow-up, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has begun developing an Ecological Restoration Plan, with the goal of ecologically restoring the Nanticoke Creek Watershed. This project is funded under Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996. Total project funding may amount to \$7.7 million, of which 35 percent has to be in the form of a local match. DEP's Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation has committed to supporting the project as a local sponsor.

Education Big Part of the AMD Equation

EC has developed an educational video and brochure about the Wyoming Valley's acid mine drainage (AMD) problem and the methods currently used to address AMD-impacted areas.

Both projects are now complete and should be ready for distribution to interested schools and groups in time for the upcoming school year. The video was produced in conjunction with local PBS affiliate, WVIA-TV, and Dr. Ken Klemow, a local biology professor. Dr. Klemow also provided technical assistance with the AMD brochure.

For the past several years, EC has given tours of its reclamation and constructed wetlands sites to interested groups, and EC personnel have made presentations at local schools and to interested community groups. This new video and brochure will further EC's efforts to foster a better understanding of the environmental damage past mining has caused and to promote more involvement in environmental restoration efforts.

"The aim of these projects is to get the region's youth more involved in issues that affect our area and our environment," said EC President Michael Dziak. "We need to provide them with an understanding of the problems we face as an area and try to get them actively involved in creating solutions to these problems."

The video and brochure were developed in such a way as to allow them to be used either independently of one another or in conjunction with one another, and/or with tours of EC's Phase II Constructed Wetland in Hanover Township.

These materials and/or tours are provided to interested schools by EC free of charge. Interested teachers, schools or groups should call Amy Gruzesky, at 823-3445.

It should also be noted that these materials can be used in a variety of ways. In addition to being ideal for use in a science curriculum, they can also be used to complement other disciplines such as history, social studies, current events, and economics because their subject matter is relevant to these areas as well.

The AMD video was made possible in part through a grant from the PA DEP's Watershed Restoration and Partnership Act and in-kind contributions from WVIA and Dr. Klemow.

The AMD brochure was funded through a Regional Watershed Support Initiative grant through the Eastern PA Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation.

Earth Conservancy Staff

Michael A. Dziak

President and CEO

John Renfer

Executive Administrator

Thomas Chesnick

Engineering Projects Manager

Amy Gruzsky

Director of Public Affairs and Development

Jeffrey Stouder

Operations Engineer - - ROW

Rick Ruggiero

*Property Documentation Specialist
and Survey Coordinator*

Tommy Thomas

Document Researcher

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Our Mission

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.

Over 10,000 acres of Earth Conservancy land will be 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.

EC is a private, non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization. Officers of the corporation are: Dr. Christopher Breiseth, Chairman; Mark Dingman, Vice Chairman; Susan W. Shoval, Secretary; Harold C. Snowdon, Jr., Treasurer; Michael Dziak, President and CEO. Other board members are: Margaret Bakker, Stephen Barrouk, Joseph Hillan, A. Peter Kanjorski, Dr. Jon Larson, James Manley, John McCarthy, Jr., Robert Mericle, Fr. Thomas O'Hara, Edward Schechter, and Rhea Simms.

Board meetings are open to the public and usually held the first Thursday of each month at 8 a.m. at Earth Conservancy's offices, 101 S. Main St., Ashley.

** Check the Times Leader and Citizens Voice newspapers for notices of upcoming meetings/scheduling changes, or EC's website at www.earthconservancy.org. Go to the EC Info link.*

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101 South Main Street
Ashley, PA 18706

Phone: (570) 823-3445

Fax: (570) 823-8270

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