

FOCUS: NEWPORT TOWNSHIP

EC looks towards its next priority area.

Having completed its *Master Plan for Bliss, Truesdale, Warrior Run, and Sugar Notch Lands* in 2018, EC shifted its focus to over 2,500 acres of land in Newport Township, generally bounded by the Pinchot State Forest, Kirmar Parkway, and the Susquehanna River. Local engineering firm Borton-Lawson was engaged for the study, whose team evaluated the topography, hydrology, and infrastructure of the property, and assessed the opportunities and costs of its reclamation and potential redevelopment. The resulting report, completed in 2019, described a rugged, highly variable, and steeply sloped terrain. Mining impacts were extensive, especially to the Newport Creek watershed. Transportation access and utility connections were significantly limited. For these reasons, traditional redevelopment on most of the land was deemed unfeasible.

Yet it was those same qualities, buttressed by a reemerging forest, that recommended the area for recreation and greenspace. The leading idea: an off-highway vehicle (OHV) park. In truth, the same area had been tagged for an OHV area in both EC's *Open Space Master Plan* (1999) and its *ATV Feasibility Study* (2005). With interest renewed, EC applied for and was awarded a Community Conservation Partnership Program grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) to reevaluate plans and stakeholder support for a park. The study will get underway in 2020. This will complement conservation work EC is doing in partnership with North Branch Land Trust to transfer approximately 1,400 acres of Penobscot Mountain into the Pinchot State Forest, 700 acres of which is complete. Together, these projects will move EC even closer to fulfilling its commitment to conserve 10,000 acres of land. The *Newport Township Master Plan* may be viewed on www.earthconservancy.org.

2 STAFF NEWS

In 2019, the retirements of two key EC employees were announced. Both Mike Dziak and Rick Ruggiero had been with the organization since its beginning.

Mike – an Exeter native, Navy veteran, graduate of Wilkes University, and executive IBM retiree – assumed the post of EC's President and CEO in June, 1994. According to the job description, he was to “manage and direct all activities of the conservancy.” This was a charge he fully upheld. From the start he involved himself in every significant decision, strategizing priorities and investments, teaming with area communities, and navigating a variety of challenges, including economic downturns. Mike's vision, tenacity, and overall knowhow allowed EC to make significant progress towards its mission, as well as position it for future success. We thank him for his decades of leadership and dedication, and for the exceptional results during his years of service. At right, Mike receives a citation from the Pennsylvania Senate for his “extraordinary commitment” to EC, sponsored by Senator John Yudichak (pictured) and Senator Lisa Baker. As it notes, Mike “has rightly earned the respect and admiration of his many friends and colleagues” through his work.

Also retiring was Rick Ruggiero, EC's Property Documentation Specialist & Survey Coordinator. We joke that Rick came with the building, as prior to EC he had been employed by the Blue Coal Corporation. He is also a veteran of the Navy Seabees. Rick's knowledge of the land, mining, and the Blue Coal archives played an enormous role in EC's planning and reclamation work. He also regularly put his engineering and mechanical skills to the test at our compost facility and AMD treatment systems. Above all, Rick was a storyteller. A master of historical (and random) knowledge, EC is unquestionably a more mundane place without him around.

Both men have continued to work with EC as consultants to assist with the transition.



Meuser Tours EC's Bliss Bank Project | In August 2019, EC hosted an information session and tour of its Bliss Bank project with Congressman Dan Meuser (R-PA9) to discuss the Surface Mining Control & Reclamation Act – aka SMCRA – which is up for reauthorization in 2021. SMCRA helps fund reclamation of abandoned minelands across the U.S., and has



been integral to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's ability to reclaim priority sites through its Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (PADEP BAMR). The meeting was organized by Trout Unlimited (TU) – SMCRA funds are used to mitigate acid mine drainage impacts on streams and watersheds as well. Representatives from U.S. Senator Pat Toomey, State Senator John Yudichak, the PADEP BAMR, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Newport Township, and EPCAMR also attended. Meuser later agreed to co-sponsor the bipartisan SMCRA legislation, introduced by Representatives Matt Cartwright (D-PA8) and Glenn Thompson (R-PA15). At left, EC's Mike Dziak (center) discusses the environmental and economic benefits of reclamation to Dave Kinney from TU (left) and Congressman Meuser (right).

When I received the offer in 2019 from Mike Dziak and the Board of Directors to become Earth Conservancy's President/CEO, I was surprised, honored, and excited. It was a unique and challenging opportunity and I appreciate the trust, confidence, and ongoing support Mike has shown me. I know for him EC was much more than a job. It truly was his passion, and EC's staff, like family.

As a brief introduction, I was born and raised in the Wilkes-Barre area, and attended Penn State University, earning a B.S. in Engineering, and an M.S. in Civil and Environmental Engineering. After graduating, I worked as an engineer for RKR Hess Associates in the Poconos.

I moved back to Wilkes-Barre in 1998 with my wife, Ann, and started a family – now with three grown sons, Keith, Kyle, and Jacob. At that time, I also joined the firm of Borton-Lawson, starting as a project engineer, becoming a project manager, and then supervisor to a small team. I worked on a variety of projects, including the Wyoming Valley levee raising, several hydrologic analyses of area watersheds, and an acid mine drainage study on Solomon Creek. Additionally, I acted as the municipal engineer for six local communities. Through this work, I assisted in obtaining grant funding, oversaw numerous construction contracts, and gained extensive regulatory knowledge.

By chance, I also worked on several projects for EC, including reclamation of the Concrete City silt pond and an 80-acre section of Huber Bank, as well as the remarkable transformation of what is now the Greater Hanover Area Recreation Park. All of these gave me a deep appreciation for EC's mission and the ongoing work it did.

Now, as President/CEO, I am committed to continuing EC's mission of reclaiming former legacy coal lands to benefit our environment and community. These lands present many opportunities – not only for local economic revitalization, but also for the expansion of recreational facilities and sustainability initiatives, like green energy. I look forward to collaborating with municipalities, officials, local groups, and residents alike to make these visions a reality.

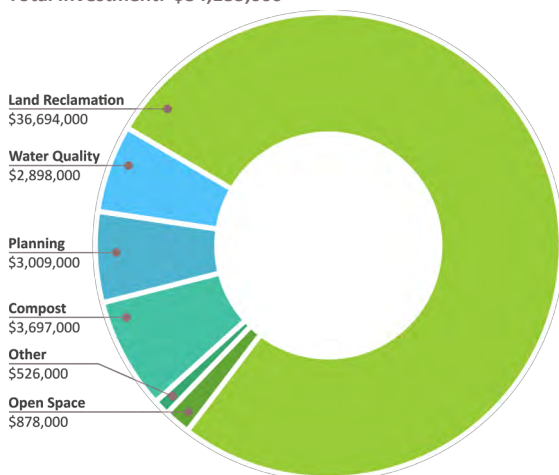


EC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the impacts of historical coal mining practices in northeastern Pennsylvania. EC seeks to lead our communities in the reclamation of mine-scarred lands and streams, returning strong economic, environmental, and social value to the region by creating a well-planned, vibrant valley, protected by green ridgetops. To this end, EC develops sustainable land-use plans; leads reclamation efforts of damaged minelands and watersheds, and guides their reuse; commits to provide 10,000 acres for recreation and open space; partners with local communities to achieve our mission; and educates the community on our work.

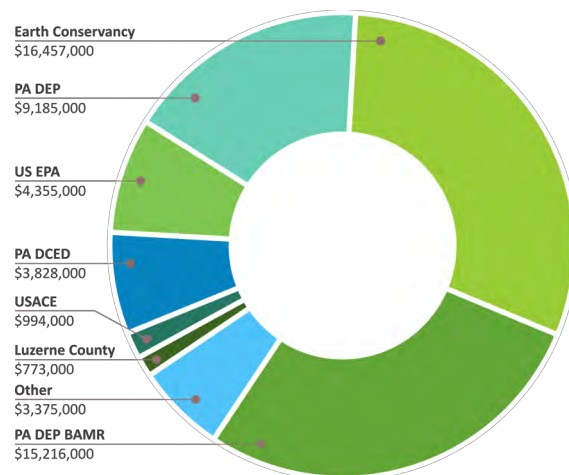
Financial statements are audited annually by an independent accounting firm. Overviews of EC's project expenses and funding sources since inception are provided in the charts below.

Project Expenses through 2019

Total Investment: \$54,183,000



Sources of Funding through 2019





View of Bliss Bank, looking west. Phase V is in the foreground, followed by Phases III, II, and I.

Bliss Bank & Espy Run Stream Restoration | Work progresses on reclaiming the 220-acre Bliss Bank site, located along the southern side of Middle Road, and across from the main campus of Luzerne County Community College. Current construction activities are focusing on filling a large pit on the Phase III site, as well as excavation of 3,000LF of the Espy Run channel. Work on utility and transportation connections is also underway. The picture above includes, from bottom to top: Phase V (unreclaimed); Espy Run, Segment D (in progress); Phase III (in progress); Phase II (completed in 2019); and Phase I (completed in 2015). Phase IV is located to the right. To date, over \$6.4 million has been invested in the projects.

SVP Access Roads | EC's original *Land Use Plan* (1996) proposed the South Valley Parkway (SVP) as a way to connect reclaimed parcels to the region's transportation network. With the SVP complete, EC has initiated construction of several access roads, critical to realizing this plan. Of the four roads funded through PA DCED's Multimodal Transportation Fund, one is finished (Hanover 9), one is nearly finished (Hanover 7A), and two will be done as part of earthwork required for site redevelopment (Bliss and Loomis).

Hanover 7A | The reclaimed parcel, located on the SVP just off of Exit 2, S.R. 29, was subdivided and sold in 2019 to an area developer, who is constructing a 55,000 square-foot barracks and training facility for the Pennsylvania State Police. Discussions are underway for the use of the remaining 30 acres, with ideas including a new regional recreation area.

Environmental Workforce Training (EWT) Program | EC's second cohort of the EWT Program was completed in April, 2019, with 19 area residents finishing the technical curriculum of surveying and environmental cleanup skills, delivered by Penn State Wilkes-Barre. The accomplishment was celebrated with a closing ceremony and career fair, with 11 area engineering firms and other employment agencies in attendance. Over 80% of graduates reporting either had found employment or chose to continue their studies.



Leaf & Yard Waste Compost Facility

EC opened its Leaf and Yard Waste Compost Facility in 1995 on a five-acre site in Newport Township, offering composting services free to all Luzerne County residents and municipalities. Over the years, we have worked with 18 communities, processed more than 180,000 tons of material, and saved users millions of dollars collectively in tipping fees. After decades of service, EC retired two front-end loaders in 2019, which were replaced by two new Case loaders – a 721GXT and an 821G – with improved operator controls, increased power, and greater maintenance efficiencies.



Hank Zielinski, PE, of Northampton fuel Supply discusses reclamation of the Harry E. bank in Swoyersville with participants in the EWT Program.

EC values the assistance we receive from funders at the federal, state, and local level, as well as that from individual and corporate grants and donations. Thank you to all those who support EC in its efforts towards revitalizing the environment, economy, and communities of the lower Wyoming Valley.

PADCNR | Newport Township OHV Park Feasibility Study

PADCNR awarded EC \$62,000 to support a feasibility study for an off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation park. The project, which builds upon EC's original *ATV Feasibility Study* (2006), will evaluate approximately 10,000 acres primarily in Newport Township, including property owned by EC, PADCNR, and others. There will also be numerous opportunities for community input.

ARC | Environmental Workforce Training Program

EC was honored to receive nearly \$98,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to support the 2020 Environmental Workforce Training Program. The 233-hour training, which focuses on surveying and environmental cleanup skills for unemployed and underemployed residents of northeastern Pennsylvania, is done in partnership with Penn State Wilkes-Barre. Based on feedback from our advisory network, the curriculum now includes classes in technical writing and environmental sampling.

PFWL | Riparian Forest Buffer for Espy Run, Segment D

Each year, the Pocono Forest & Waters Conservation Landscape (PFWL) awards mini-grants to protect and sustain natural resources within a six-county region. Addressing impacts from nonpoint source pollution, like acid mine drainage, is a priority. EC received nearly \$10,000 to enhance riparian forest buffer along 1,000LF of the under-construction Espy Run channel in Hanover Township.

PADEP AML Pilot Program | Bliss Bank Reclamation, Phase IV

PADEP's Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Pilot Program, funded through a federal appropriation to the U.S. Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement, supports reclamation projects that not only address priority AML hazards, but also contribute to economic and community development. The \$2.8 million award will underwrite reclamation of Bliss Bank IV, a 31-acre section of the larger 220-acre site. The project will also include infrastructure and utility work to ready the site for development.

USEPA | Bliss Bank Reclamation, Phase V

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) continued support for EC's reclamation of Bliss Bank with a \$500,000 Brownfields Cleanup award for Phase V of the project. This 50-acre section, located in Hanover Township, moves work across the lower portion of Wilkes-Barre Mountain to the east. The upper forested portions of the area are earmarked for conservation. The grant will be used for engineering design and ensuing reclamation. It will also be a significant tool to leverage additional funding for the work.

6 OTHER NEWS

Earth Conservancy headed 'up the line' to participate in the Everhart Museum's annual Community Day, themed "Art in Bloom." There, we met with dozens of area residents, many of whom recounted family links to Blue Coal and anthracite mining. EC discussed our ongoing reclamation and conservation work, as well as one particular wildflower that loves minelands' acidic soils: milkweed. If you weren't already aware, milkweed is the only plant on which monarch butterflies lay their eggs, and which monarch caterpillars eat. Unfortunately, milkweed colonies are in decline, something which correlates with significant drops in the monarch population. Reclaiming minelands may be one way to help reestablish milkweed, butterfly, and other pollinator habitat. At right is one of our table's visitors, who joined in our torn-paper monarch-making craft. A special thanks to Mike Korb, PE, who inspired this activity with his presentation "Mine Reclamation and Monarch Butterfly Habitat" (2015).



Dianthus armeria at Askam; Photo by E. Hunt



\$54.2
million
invested



2,000
acres
reclaimed



8,677
green acres
preserved

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Earth Conservancy is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) corporation and is dedicated to conducting its affairs in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and fiduciary responsibilities. Board meetings are open to the public and are held on a quarterly basis at 8AM at Earth Conservancy's offices, 101 South Main Street, Ashley, PA 18706. Call the office at 570.823.3445 for meeting dates and times.

