

## New life: Park planned for a former strip mine and flood dumping site in Luzerne County

June 12, 2025 | Kat Bolus

The property across the road from the Pennsylvania State Police Troop P barracks and training facility is grassy, lush and peppered with trees and cone flowers.

Soon, Earth Conservancy will begin a \$6.7 million project to turn the 33-acre former coal mining strip pit into a recreational area with three multi-purpose athletic fields, a walking trail, a sensory playground and pickleball courts.

Like most of the property owned by the organization, there's history below the surface.

"After Hurricane Agnes in 1972, this pit was actually used in large part for disposal of some of the flood debris, a lot of construction material," said Terence Ostrowski, president & CEO of Earth Conservancy. "We had geotech analysis look at this, and it's a lot of like, wood, bricks, metal type of material, so, all underneath."

Pennsylvania designated non-operating strip mine sites for the disposal of storm debris after the flood, according to the Earth Conservancy.

The nonprofit is based in Luzerne County. Its mission is to put 16,000 acres of land once mined by the Glen Alden Coal Company back into productive use for today's community.

In May, Earth Conservancy received a \$6.7 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation to fund the project. That grant came from money allocated in the bipartisan federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

"Hanover Township is grateful to the Earth Conservancy for securing these funds for a large recreation park. This park will benefit the community and region, fostering health, unity and vibrant connections that enrich lives. The township looks forward to supporting this very important project," Hanover Township Manager Sam Guesto said. He is also a member of the Master Site Development Plan Steering Committee.

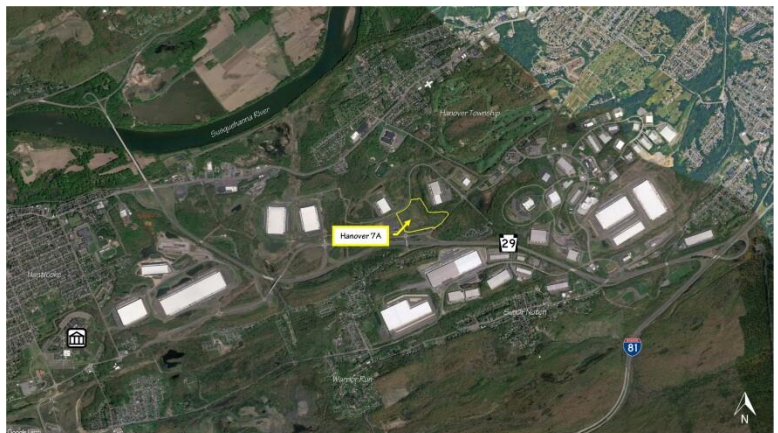
Ostrowski is hopeful that construction will begin later this year or in early 2026 on the recreational area.

### Strip pit to an economic driver

Earth Conservancy capped the large open strip pit in 2006. Then, in early 2020, they



*Terence Ostrowski, president & CEO of Earth Conservancy, stands near the site of a future recreational area in Hanover Twp. for the lower south valley in Luzerne County.*



*Map of where Earth Conservancy will develop a new recreational area in Hanover Twp. with an over \$6 million grant from the state.*

had a meeting with stakeholders to discuss what to do with the site in Hanover Twp., directly off State Route 29. They refer to the area as Hanover 7A.

"It wasn't really suitable for any type of building construction. So one of the ideas that was floated then was actually having a regional recreational facility," said Ostrowski.

A DCNR grant helped Earth Conservancy fund a master plan study in 2023 that included public input.

"A lot of the feedback that we were getting ... was, you know, like walking trails, outdoor fields, you know, for youth football, youth soccer, playgrounds. So we try to incorporate that all in," he said.

Ostrowski stressed the importance of public input. He said they also worked with the local school districts, municipalities and colleges.

Earth Conservancy also sees the project as an economic driver for the area, he said. The Back Mountain and the west side of the valley have large regional recreational complexes, while the south valley lacks one.

Ostrowski pointed out that families often go out of town for large youth sports tournaments. He hopes the new fields will keep them local.

"If we have really good, reliable fields that could accommodate those types of tournaments, that we'll start seeing that come in as well, and that ... would bring in people staying at local hotels, utilizing local restaurants and other local facilities," he said.

Ostrowski said they're working with Hanover Twp. to plan for the long-term maintenance of the recreational area.

## **Hitting goals**

Part of Earth Conservancy's mission is to turn 10,000 acres of the former coal land into areas for recreation, conservation and open spaces.

The park gets the organization very close to hitting that goal, Ostrowski said. They have about 3,500 acres left to convert.

"We've kept very close to that plan, something I'm very proud of ... we're about to hit some major milestones in the next few years," he said.

Ostrowski remembers when old strip pits and culm banks were the everyday, normal backdrop of the area.

"One of the things I really like to say is that if you go around this area now, you really don't see those, and I hope that it's in large part to what Earth Conservancy is doing in this area," he said.