



## FOCUS: NANTICOKE CREEK

### The Work of Restoring a Watershed

**W**hen Earth Conservancy (EC) broke ground on the Nanticoke Creek restoration project at the end of 2024, it didn't look like much. To anyone passing by, the scene was mostly downed trees, heavy equipment, and mud – hardly a sign of progress. In reality, that early work marked the beginning of what is becoming one of EC's most impactful projects in its more than 30 year history. With support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), more than 15,000 feet of stream, long affected by historic mining and development, are being restored into a healthier, more natural waterway. It's a slow, methodical process, but even one year in, meaningful changes are starting to emerge.

By late 2024, the project design was finalized. EC competitively selected Stell Enterprises as the construction contractor. Crews mobilized quickly, beginning tree clearing in late December to avoid bat maternity season before moving into full earthwork. Construction started along Clarks Cross Road, where about 700 feet of channel were realigned, and continued upstream toward Middle Road. Crews essentially rebuilt the stream from the ground up, excavating a new channel, reshaping the banks, and installing a layered system of clay, soil, and stone. The clay base serves a critical role, preventing water from draining into underlying mine pools. The layers of stone above it, ranging from fine aggregate to cobbled river rock, create a stable streambed that mimics natural conditions. In several sections, existing utilities, including a water main and sanitary lines, had to be relocated to make room for the restored channel.

As the project crossed Middle Road, crews began digging out a buried concrete channel. Built decades ago to divert runoff from the Truesdale Colliery, the plan had been to remove much of it, assuming it had deteriorated with age. *(continues next page)*



*Looking upstream at new path of Nanticoke Creek along Clarks Cross Road*



*Cobbled river rock covering the new channel*

However, it remained in remarkably good condition. Rather than get rid of it, it was decided the channel would be sealed and incorporated into the overall restoration plan.

By the end of 2025, about 1,500 feet of stream and 250 feet of relief channel had been completed. Full seeding of the site and planting of 5,000 trees are scheduled for spring 2026. Yet even before that, to our delight, native plants such as cattails and rudbeckia were popping up on their own.

As with any highly visible construction project, the work sparked questions from neighbors. In one case, a nearby resident even took it upon themselves to post signs explaining what was happening and why. It was an unexpected but welcome gesture, helping to keep the focus on the bigger picture: the long-term restoration of the creek and its value to the community. "This isn't the kind of project that changes things overnight," said Terry Ostrowski, EC's President and CEO. "It takes patience. But what we're building here will serve the watershed, wildlife, and community for the long term." 🌱



*Anonymous posted sign*



*Volunteer rudbeckia*



*Excavation of concrete channel*



*Abandoned car in one of the Newport North stripping pits*

**NEWPORT NORTH** | In 2024, EC was awarded a \$1.35 million grant from PADEP's Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Program to evaluate approximately 3,000 acres along the northern tier of Newport Township, an area long defined by its remoteness and the complexity of legacy mining conditions, many of which were detailed in EC's 2019 *Newport Township Master Plan*.

Following a competitive public solicitation, EC engaged the local office of Verdantas to assist with the study. Work has included deed research and extensive desktop analysis, followed by on-the-ground reconnaissance to confirm parcel boundaries, identify wetlands, and conduct geotechnical investigations.

More than 50 additional legacy mining features were documented during the study. Through coordination with PADEP's Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (BAMR), they are being evaluated for inclusion in the state's AML Inventory – a critical first step in EC seeking future funding. Environmental due diligence has been equally rigorous, including detailed habitat identification, monitoring, and acoustical surveys of bat populations.

This multi-year effort is designed to build a clear understanding of site conditions and constraints, ensuring that future decisions are grounded in sound science and thoughtful planning.

May 2025 was an extraordinary month for EC, with more than \$8 million in reclamation funding awarded within just two weeks – advancing two major projects from planning into action.

EC received a \$1.6 million USEPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant for the 32-acre **Center Street** site, a former Blue Coal property impacted by mining and dumping. The project will remove unstable mining waste, eliminate two deep water-filled pits, restore a tributary to Newport Creek with a 200-tree riparian buffer, and revegetate the site in preparation for future residential reuse. Engineering design and permitting are now underway, with construction anticipated to begin following regulatory approvals.

Just weeks later, EC was awarded a \$6.7 million PADEP AMLER grant to reclaim the 30-acre **Hanover 7A** site along Route 29 and transform it into a new community park. Once strip-mined and later used for flood debris storage after Hurricane Agnes, the site will be reshaped to include walking trails, playing fields, natural areas, and an inclusive playground. Final design is nearly complete and permitting is in progress.



*EC staff & USEPA project officer look into a pit at Center Street site*



*Aerial view of Hanover 7A site*

Over the past three decades, Earth Conservancy has worked to address the lasting impacts of anthracite mining across the Wyoming Valley through abandoned mine land reclamation. That work has always extended beyond the land itself. It has relied on partnerships with municipalities, educational institutions, youth organizations, and nonprofit groups throughout the region, all working toward the shared goal of returning strong economic, environmental, and social value to the communities connected to these lands.

For us, an important part of that work has been reinvesting in those communities. In 2025, Earth Conservancy provided more than \$160,000 in funding to organizations using proceeds from the responsible sale of Conservancy lands. These investments go directly back into the communities that have long carried the impacts of the coal mining industry, funding a wide range of efforts, from neighborhood park improvements and environmental initiatives to food banks, youth programs, and longstanding traditions like local parades and Fourth of July celebrations.



That same principle is guiding our newest effort as well. In 2025, Earth Conservancy began annual scholarship contributions to Wilkes University, King’s College, and Luzerne County Community College. These scholarships assist local students seeking to further their education in fields that will strengthen the region’s future – whether through environmental stewardship, economic development, or community leadership – and to encourage them to build that future here at home.

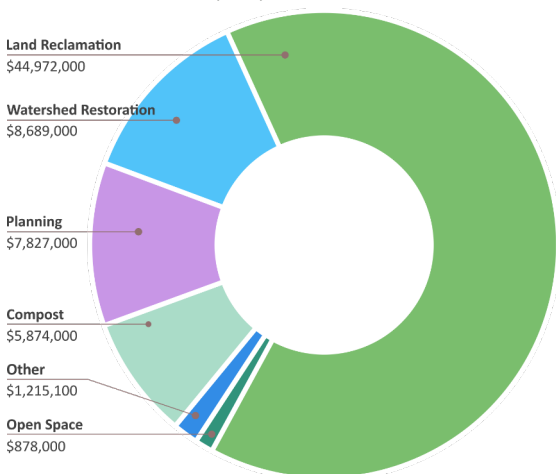
As we move into 2026, Earth Conservancy remains committed to continuing these investments in the Lower South Valley and the people who call it home. Our focus remains on long-term restoration, responsible land management, and partnerships that produce meaningful results. Progress takes time, but we are seeing it – both on the land and in the communities we serve.

EC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the legacy impacts of anthracite mining 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 mine lands 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.

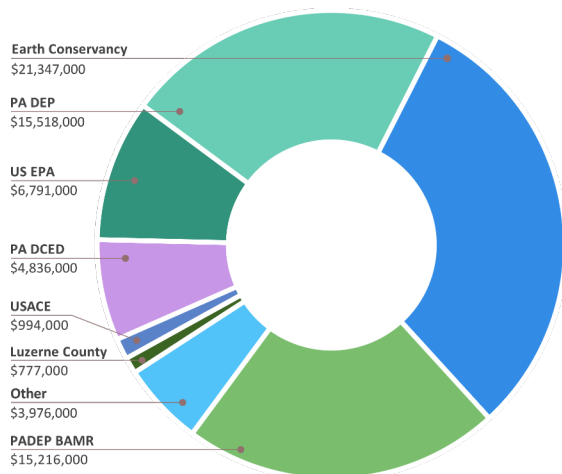
Financial statements are audited annually by an independent accounting firm. Overviews of EC’s project expenses and funding sources since inception are provided in the charts below.

### Project Expenses through 2025

Total Investment: \$69,455,000



### Sources of Project Funding through 2025





*Joe Yudichak, center left, cuts ribbon at opening of the LSVGOG's new fueling station. Photo: Hanover Township*

**LSVCOG FUELING STATION** | In October, EC joined over a dozen agency, municipal, and elected officials to mark the opening of the new Lower South Valley Council of Governments (LSVCOG) fueling station. Built on 3.5 acres donated by EC, the facility supports shared services, efficiency, and cost savings for local municipalities. The station is dedicated to former Plymouth Township official Joe Yudichak, an original EC board member who championed regional collaboration. In the first few months of operation, the fueling station had already generated more than \$100,000 in fuel cost savings.



*EC's Terry Ostrowski presents check to Plymouth Historical Society's Joe Slusser*

**PLYMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY** | In December, EC donated \$11,000 to the Plymouth Historical Society to close the funding gap for its Avondale Mine mural project, to be installed along Route 11. Designed by artist Joel Carson Jones, the mural will commemorate the 108 miners lost in the Avondale Mine fire of 1869, and honor generations of families who shaped the region through anthracite mining. "We have long ties to both the Avondale colliery and the society," said EC's President/CEO, Terry Ostrowski. "This helps preserve that history while honoring the people who helped shape this community."



*EC's scholarship awardee, LCCC's John Yudichak & EC's Terry Ostrowski at LCCC Scholarship Dinner*

**SCHOLARSHIPS** | The higher education community has long been an important part of EC's work, bringing valuable guidance and technical expertise to many of its projects. In 2025, EC decided to give back to these institutions by establishing scholarships at Wilkes University, King's College, and Luzerne County Community College. The awards support students whose studies reflect EC's mission of regional revitalization and who plan to remain in the area. Meeting with recipients offered a firsthand look at their goals and reaffirmed the importance of investing in education as part of long-term community growth.



*Elizabeth Hughes (EC) with award-winning poster in Chicago*

**BEST CONFERENCE POSTER** | EC's Espy Run restoration poster received the Best Overall Poster Award at the ICMA/USEPA National Brownfields Training Conference in Chicago - one of the largest national gatherings focused on transforming blighted properties into community assets. Presenting this work showcased how we're tackling legacy mine impacts in the Nanticoke Creek watershed, while connecting with peers who are driving innovative approaches to land and community revitalization.

## WE RECLAIM!

In 2025, through our partnership with the SHINE Program, EC expanded WeReclaim! to a new location at Maple Manor in the Hazleton Area School District. This new chapter worked with middle school students, helping them to explore the history of mining in the Eastern Middle Anthracite field, and to understand the lasting impacts of legacy coal lands. Particularly powerful was our discussion of the Lattimer Massacre, which unfolded less than three miles from the school. Students learned how 19 unarmed miners lost their lives while striking for fair wages and better working conditions, connecting them to their community's history and struggles for justice.

Another meaningful moment: Earth Conservancy received a 2025 Pennsylvania Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for WeReclaim!, honoring the program's work engaging over 100 students in learning about land use, environmental justice, and community revitalization in former coal mining areas.



### EC BY THE NUMBERS



**\$69.5**  
million  
invested



**2,093**  
acres  
reclaimed



**9,392**  
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.



reclaim | conserve | revitalize