

SUMMER 2017



WEST VIRGINIA
LAND TRUST

Bickle Knob

If you live in Randolph County or visit Elkins, you have probably driven Stuart Memorial Drive and climbed the Bickle Knob observation tower. This 10-mile tour through the Monongahela National Forest encapsulates so much of what is unique and representative of these public lands—spectacular views, unique limestone geology, trailheads into Otter Creek Wilderness Area, iconic red spruce forest, luxurious roadside rhododendron blooms, a quaint campground, the Bear Heaven rock house and boulders, and a rich Civilian Conservation Corps history with a monument dedicated to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

It is a school field trip wrapped up in one beautiful afternoon drive. Numerous hiking trails and some of the best low-tech mountain biking opportunities exist just minutes from Elkins and the Shavers Fork of Cheat River... this place has it all!

So, what could ever threaten such a treasure? Despite its splendor, a potential threat was looming in the heart of this paradise—nearly 125 acres of private land were for sale to the highest bidder. In the conservation world, we call this the “donut-hole” threat, where any number of potential threats from development can forever change the local landscape and historical qualities.

The West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) is excited to announce that in June we were able to acquire an option to purchase this property, eliminating these potential threats forever and keeping Stuart Memorial Drive the scenic and tranquil destination West Virginians have come to associate with this beloved place. This is the kind of conservation project where WVLT shines — identifying a need, pulling together resources, and acting quickly to protect a special place.

Now... the work continues. We'll be launching a fundraising campaign in upcoming weeks to help finance the acquisition of this now public preserve and ensure that it will be managed into the future for the benefit of all West Virginians. Please keep an eye out for our letter and consider contributing toward this valuable conservation project.

On your next visit to Randolph County, take some time to head east from Elkins on Route 33 toward Stuart Memorial Drive and Bickle Knob. Shed your fear of heights and climb the observation tower to get a 360-degree view west to Rich Mountain, south over Cheat Mountain to Snowshoe Ski Resort, east to Spruce Knob, and north to Otter Creek Wilderness and the Fernow Experimental Forest. As you look north you can also breathe a sigh of relief that your view will always be wild and wonderful, for directly below the observation tower is our newest protected special place.

For more information, contact Ashton Berdine, Lands Program Manager, by emailing ashton@wvlandtrust.org.

Snap Shots



WVLT Lands Provide Habitat For Threatened Bats



The West Virginia Land Trust is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to identify, protect, and restore habitat that is essential for the survival of threatened and endangered species.

In 2016, biologists surveying the Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve in Doddridge County netted a northern long-eared bat, a federally listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Endangered species are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. Threatened species are animals and plants that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

The northern long-eared bat is associated with mature forests, where they roost under bark during the summer. In winter, they hibernate in caves and mines.

The species is listed as threatened due to a dramatic population decline caused by white-nose syndrome, a disease that has reduced populations more than 90 percent in some parts of the country.

Bats are important to our nation's ecology and economy, eating tons of insects nightly and providing a natural benefit to farmers and foresters. Some research estimates that bats provide at least \$3 billion annually in economic value.



Special Places CELEBRATION

Celebrate the land we love and honor those who protect it

On May 4th, the West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) hosted the 12th annual Special Places Celebration in Charleston. Many thanks to everyone who helped make the event an incredible success: sponsors, silent auction donors, attendees, WVLT Board of Directors, Special Places Planning Committee, and staff!

This year's theme was a "Celebration of Home." Home in West Virginia means many things. It means scenic views, open fields, farmland, ancient forests, creeks and streams, outdoor recreation, roaring rivers, and history. Through a wide variety of projects, WVLT is working hard to protect our home for future generations.

Together, we raised nearly \$60,000 that will be used to fund trail construction, outdoor education, and the protection of land currently under consideration.

We cannot function without your support and for that we are grateful. West Virginia is blessed with abundantly beautiful landscapes. Your generosity will help ensure that they will forever remain as a special place for generations to come.

We hope you will join us next year for more fun and a great evening as we once again celebrate the land we love and honor those who protect it!



With Thanks...

We are thankful for our volunteers at:

- The Shack Neighborhood House Junior Volunteers
- Morgantown's Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioner's Junior Employees
- Adventure WV
- Mountaineer Rescue Group

These volunteers have assisted with trail work in our nature preserves, led groups on hikes, and assisted at community events.

We are also thankful for our partnerships with West Virginia University:

▶ College of Law – Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic

West Virginia University's Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic provides legal services to local governments, landowners, and non-profit organizations to develop land conservation strategies and practices. The clinic regularly collaborates with the West Virginia Land Trust to identify appropriate properties for conservation and assist with the legal services, such as title examinations, drafting conservation easements, negotiating with mineral owners and lessees, and drafting surface use agreements.

▶ Media Interns from the Reed School of Media

These students provide assistance with social media, community outreach events, marketing research, photography, and some graphic design work.

▶ GIS Interns from the Geography Department

These students provide field-based work including: trail construction, invasive plant species removal, ecological restoration, trail and related environment mapping, and baseline documentation.

▶ Davis College: Falling Run Trail

The West Virginia Land Trust is collaborating with faculty in the WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design to train crews that are building a network of trails linking WVU's downtown campus to the WVU Organic Farm.

▶ Research Continues in Elizabeth's Woods Nature Preserve

By monitoring a variety of precipitation and tree uptake variables, the team of three scientists will gain information on how oak-hickory and sugar maple-yellow poplar stands respond to drought in our changing climate.

BLUE JEAN BALL

In partnership with the Mon River Trails Conservancy, the West Virginia Land Trust hosted the 3rd annual Blue Jean Ball at Camp Muffly near Morgantown in early March. This annual event raises awareness and funds to support the protection of public recreational greenspace in the Mon Valley.

Guests dressed up their favorite blue jeans for a fun evening, as they enjoyed local BBQ with wine and local beer, danced to the Halftime String Band, played a round of beer ring toss, grabbed a prop and struck a pose in the photo booth, while bidding on fabulous silent auction items and outdoor experiences.

With more than 175 attendees, the event raised over \$11,000. Proceeds from the first two events were used to help secure the Collins Ferry connector trail from Morgantown's Suncrest neighborhood to the Mon River Rail-Trail. This year's greenspace project is under development: Stay tuned!

The National Quiet Zone – Forever Peaceful



Bill and Sue Hevener, and Bill's sister, Patsy Cummings, know the value of place created by a deep-rooted family history growing up on the Hevener Farm in Pocahontas County, located in the Deer Creek Valley. That idyllic valley is also where the Green Bank National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NARO) is located, which neighbors the Hevener Farm.

The NARO has made Green Bank, WV famous for its cutting edge research, its iconic radio telescopes, and lack of any cell phone towers and cell phone service – making it one of the only “quiet zones” in the United States.

Bill and Patsy grew up in this beautiful valley, inheriting the family farm. As time passed, they began to think about preserving the pastoral view, traditional farming use, and their own legacy of protecting the land. In 2013, Bill and Patsy protected 384 acres comprising the agricultural portion of the farm with a voluntary conservation easement held by the West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) with support from the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund. In July of this year, Bill and Patsy placed an additional 528 acres of forested land under a similar conservation easement with the WVLT, forever protecting the entire farm and forestland from development and subdivision.

These easements ensure good agricultural practices on the farm well beyond their own lifetimes and maintain the ability to manage the forestland as a “working” forest, ensuring responsible forestry practices, sustainable harvesting, and use of best management practices. As a bonus, these easements help protect Deer Creek, a critical cold water brook trout fishery. This means that livestock are now excluded from the stream and provided alternative water supplies, thus reducing erosion, sedimentation, and pollution. Upstream, the forestland will provide a canopy to shade the headwater tributaries feeding Deer Creek.

This new forestland easement also adjoins the Monongahela National Forest, adding additional protection to public hunting and fishing lands, while protecting the viewshed for the Allegheny Trail, a popular hiking trail running the length of West Virginia right on the edge of the new Hevener forestland conservation easement.

This latest easement also received support from the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund, an essential partner in conserving West Virginia's special places.

The West Virginia Legislature created the Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund to invest in land conservation projects of unique and important wildlife habitat, natural areas, forest lands, farmland, and lands for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

“Long before our Great Grandfather, Uriah Hevener, settled on this farm, Native Americans hunted here. Our Dad, Howard Hevener, enjoyed taking visitors out to a freshly plowed field or along Deer Creek to search for arrowheads. Thinking of the arrowheads reminds me of the Indians' view of Mother Earth. They had great respect for the earth and all living things. The earth was nurturing to them supplying them with food, clothing and shelter, but they only took what they needed. The Native Americans were one with nature and did not abuse its resources. I am so grateful to the West Virginia Land Trust for the opportunity to preserve our farm for the future and to help keep the water, air and earth clean.”

– Patricia H. Cummings

Potomac Source Water Protection Project Underway

The West Virginia Land Trust and the West Virginia Rivers Coalition have partnered under the Land and Water Initiative, a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network and Land Trust Alliance, which aims to build capacity for land protection in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The initial phase of the project includes a series of stakeholder meetings in the Potomac drainage of Jefferson County. The meetings will be used to identify ways that conservation and planning efforts can be linked with source water protection opportunities.

The project also involves creating maps and an action plan that will identify conservation and civic resources that will be helpful for promoting land protection as a strategy for safeguarding drinking water supplies.

For more information about the project, contact Adam Webster at (304) 413-0945 or email adam@wvlandtrust.org.

Elizabeth's Woods Expansion

Just south of Morgantown, near Little Falls, sits an 84-acre mature forest owned by the West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT), known as Elizabeth's Woods Nature Preserve. This spring, the land trust added another 174 acres to the original preserve, bringing the Morgantown area a nearly 260-acre forested park that connects to the Mon River Rail-Trail, already a major recreational asset for the region.

Wanting his property to be protected, Edward Dunlap donated the property to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 2015. Since the tract touches Elizabeth's Woods, WVLT purchased the property from TNC to become part of the preserve.

The property addition, known as the Dunlap tract, is mostly forested and sits above the Monongahela River, providing both upstream and downstream views. The property also includes a cascading waterfall along Tom's Run, a tributary of the Monongahela River.

"Although recreational opportunities might be the most exciting part of protecting and linking these properties, this area is ripe with seasonal streams and seeps that flow directly into the river," said Rick Landenberger, WVLT Science and Management Specialist.

"By protecting this land from being developed and restoring and maintaining the natural qualities of the streams on the property, we're getting an added benefit of protecting water quality just upstream of Morgantown's drinking water intakes," Landenberger said.

WVLT is currently asking anyone interested in visiting the properties to contact our office. Parking is limited and trails remain unmarked and under construction. We welcome your interest in hiking the properties, volunteering to do trail work, or donating toward efforts to construct parking and access. Give us a call: 304-413-0945.



Nature Lovers' Paradise Protected Forever By A Conservation Easement

"Ever since 1974 when Robert Head and I moved to Sawmill Hollow I have considered it my task to preserve the land, the animals and the waters, while at the same time maintaining a small homestead," explained Darlene Fife.

Together Darlene Fife and Robert Head own a 111-acre farm near Lewisburg. Shopkeepers by day, Robert owns The Bookstore, which specializes in unique and rare books; while Darlene owns Plants Etcetera – a gift shop featuring West Virginia handicrafts, pottery, baskets, woodwork, candles, toys, crystals, cards and fossils. The two are also writers and poets in their spare time. The farm offers a forested retreat where Darlene continues to spend her summers seeking inspirations of nature. The property is a writer's paradise.

Three perennial freshwater streams come together on the farm, fed by numerous seeps and springs from rocky ledges, through steep forested valleys. Conserving this property will help safeguard water quality within the Muddy Creek watershed of the Greenbrier River.

Darlene recalls when Allegheny woodrats were so common in her forest that they were visiting her cabin, "A few years ago, I left colorful scraps of cloth out for them to build their nest – the color red was their favorite." The farm's deep forested hollows are home to interior forest migratory songbirds, scarlet tanagers and wood thrushes, and the old farm habitat is home to birds such as blue-gray gnatcatchers and eastern phoebes.

"We believe the conservation easement with the West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) will ensure that the land will continue to be a wildlife refuge for both plants and animals, the waters will remain pollution free, and a small homestead can continue to be in harmony with its surroundings," said Darlene.

WVLT is preserving Darlene and Robert's refuge for wildlife by conserving the native forest and restricting the future land uses to small farm operations.





Engaging
People In
Conservation

A West Virginia Land Trust Program

Living in West Virginia is awesome and we are planning a lot of exciting activities for folks to celebrate our home with us!

In partnership with the Friends of the Cheat, we had a record-breaking float trip welcoming nearly 250 people down the Cheat River in Tucker County on June 10th.

We also hosted more than 60 guests on June 11th for a ribbon cutting celebration at our newest public nature preserve – the Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve in Doddridge County.

Come Explore Our Projects!

August 12: Camp Bartow Celebration and Tour (Bartow, WV)

Last fall, WVLT purchased a historic Civil War site in Pocahontas County, known as Camp Bartow. The property was the scene of the Battle of Greenbrier River in October 1861. The 14-acre property lies in the heart of the battlefield and was a campground of the 31st Virginia Infantry. As part of the first campaign of the Civil War, the battle proved instrumental in the creation of West Virginia in 1863.

September 24: Elizabeth's Woods Nature Preserve Hike (Morgantown, WV)

This 84-acre preserve was donated to the WVLT in 1995. The property is managed under guidelines outlined in the deed, which require keeping the property in its natural condition while accommodating hiking and nature study. We are currently developing parking, access, and trails. Come see what all the excitement is about!

October 21: Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve Spooky Flashlight Hike (Charleston, WV)

Did you know there is a 19th century cemetery located in the Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve? Bring your flashlight and spooky stories as we take a Halloween hike! The preserve is a 52-acre natural area located minutes from downtown Charleston. Trails are established on the property and are open to the public.

To learn more or to register for an activity, call Jessica Spatafore at (304) 413-0945 or email jessica@wvlandtrust.org.

Better from our Executive Director

As we settled onto a rough wooden bench in a bamboo and thatched-roof blind, perched on a steep and foggy forested slope, raucous bird calls pierced the pre-dawn stillness. "El macho grita," whispered our Ecuadorean guide ("The male is calling"). For the next hour, as the site brightened with the rising sun, we watched a frenzied courtship display as up to eight of the large scarlet and black birds pivoted, screeched, bobbed, and weaved among the branches, puffing their feathers and flapping their wings, in hopes of outdoing their rivals and attracting a female.

My family and I had piled into a truck an hour before, driven to a pulley-and-cable platform that took us over a rushing river, and then hiked up a narrow trail through cloud forest in hopes of seeing the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. The Cock-of-the-Rock, larger than a blue jay, and chunky, uses a special place called a "lek", where this mating ritual is performed... sort of a non-alcoholic "singles bar" in the animal world.

Leks are important and unique sites for reproduction of many species of birds, including the American Woodcock in our region (also some insect, fish, reptile, and mammal species around the world). This lek is on private land, owned by a rugged Andean woman who farms her tropical mountainside, sells fronds from the tagua palm for roof thatch, and now, for a fee, offers tourists a chance to see this unusual spectacle. The local eco-lodge operator who recognized the opportunity – both for her and for tourists – hopes that the income flowing from tourists will conserve the lek, and the bird, for the long term.

Special places with unique characteristics abound in West Virginia too, many on private land. Conserving them as part of our natural and cultural heritage is a goal of the West Virginia Land Trust. The "Hidden River" conservation easement we hold on a farm in Pocahontas County is one such place. Here, a mini-tsunami of rising groundwater after a heavy rain suddenly transforms the dry, rocky river bed into a swollen noisy stream, a sort of magical hydrological phenomenon. Camp Bartow, the Civil War site we purchased last year, is another, where the souls of soldiers rest among the earthworks they excavated in 1861 for a good vantage point up the Greenbrier Valley, in preparation for battle. A fisher – an uncommon, large member of the weasel family – uses our Elizabeth's Woods preserve in Monongalia County, and now will benefit from more permanently protected habitat with the addition of an adjacent parcel that will triple the size of the original preserve.

We are proud to be claiming these conservation successes, honored to be working with landowners who hold an abiding love for their lands and waters, and gratified to be joined by so many supporters (that's you!) who make these exciting projects happen. Special places that protect rare species, water quality, recreational opportunities, scenic vistas, and history have come under protection because our community of supporters shares a commitment to protecting the Mountain State's special places. We hope you'll encourage others to join with you, and with us, to ensure that these unique places are conserved.



Have a great summer.

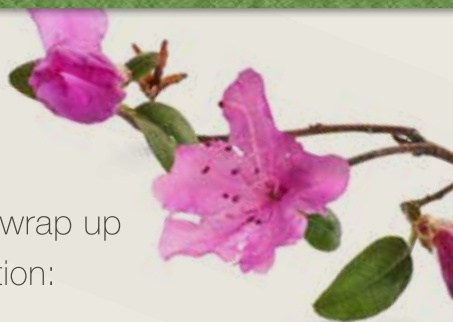
Brent Bailey Ph.D.
West Virginia Land Trust Executive Director

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