



## Raising money to keep popular Canaan Valley property open to the public

Our normally unflappable Lands Program Manager, Ashton Berdine, was caught off guard when he shared the good news with a Tucker County resident. “I could just about give you a big wet kiss right now!” responded the man, a mountain biker. “Umm, no, no thanks, that’s quite all right,” Ashton stammered, taking a step back. “I thought you’d be pleased. But remember, it’s not a done deal yet.” “That’s ok!” said his friend, calming down a bit. “I just thought we were going to lose this property. And now we won’t! Let us know how we can help.”

The good news is that the WV Land Trust has secured an option to purchase almost 900 acres in Tucker County. The land’s acquisition will permanently protect a major recreation site that’s heavily used by locals for hiking, running, and mountain biking, and by mountain bikers from throughout the United States, who come to ride the famous “Moon Rocks” on site.

“We are really proud to protect this property for public use and also to help preserve another critical piece of one of the largest wetland complexes in the southern Appalachians,” Berdine commented. Currently owned by the Vandalia Heritage Foundation, the property will be called Yellow Creek Preserve, named after a tributary of the Blackwater River that flows through it.

“We see this as a legacy project,” said Brent Bailey, Executive Director for the land trust. “It’s an iconic property where we want to restore and preserve the unique natural features. But conserving it will also ensure continued recreational access, which is a major draw for visitors and the economic vitality of Davis, Thomas, and the Canaan Valley area. And there is an active local community and great local partners to work with.”

Local groups and potential partners include the Heart of the Highlands Trail System project, with volunteers who design and build trails; Friends of the 500<sup>th</sup>, volunteers allied with the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge; WV Highlands Conservancy; the National Youth Science Foundation; Friends of Blackwater; local municipalities; the County Commission; and local, state, and federal agencies who focus on conservation and economic development.

Fundraising has gotten underway with the land trust to complete the purchase, with a special website: [www.BuyTheMoonWV.org](http://www.BuyTheMoonWV.org).

“It’s not a done deal until we finalize the purchase,” cautioned Bailey. “But we’re very hopeful that everyone who uses the trails, who knows the Canaan Valley area, and who loves the highlands of our state, will contribute to our efforts to bring it to a happy close.”

Land Trust staff are available, upon request, to show the property to supporters of the campaign.



SNAP SHOTS  
NEWSLETTER



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## A Letter from Our Executive Director

**Brent Bailey, Ph.D.**

“You can’t be an astronaut and NOT be a conservationist,” declared retired US Air Force Officer and NASA astronaut Pam Melroy at a conference I attended last year. “When you look down at Earth and you see its beautiful colors, and you realize that every thought, every word, every piece of music, every bit of knowledge we have comes from that spinning sphere, it becomes precious to you, and clearly worth doing everything in your power to care for it responsibly.”

Melroy has spent more than a month of her life, cumulatively, in space. In describing the view of our planet from above, she highlighted large-scale changes that are visible from spacecraft, and went on to challenge land trust conservationists to see their work in the context of protectors of humanity’s heritage and future, and the challenges that are faced worldwide as a result of a changing climate and unsustainable land uses.

Every day, my staff and many others around the country like ours sally forth to plant a flag for land that’s loved. Family legacies are preserved with easements; community properties are secured for public recreational space; water quality is protected by streamside forests that will remain in place, preventing erosion and slowing runoff. A hundred acres here, 300 there; over time, it adds up, but it’s easy to be ensnared in the details of getting it right, and in the process forgetting that there’s a much bigger impact to this work, which is accelerating in West Virginia, and being repeated in other states and countries.

“This protection of our farm wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t for you,” one landowner said to a WVLT staff member, grateful for the assistance we provided in guiding the family through decision-making to conserve their land. Acre by acre, we inch along to make sure that permanent protection will keep the water flowing, the wildlife with suitable habitat, the discovery available in a new nature preserve. But we do it with the long term and the big picture in mind: We protect ecological processes, and we consider factors ranging from local land use trends to global climate change in determining what we protect, and how.

It’s the only planet we’ve got, and making sure it stays green and blue, and vibrant, requires a large-scale caring outlook that honors the creation of our “spinning sphere,” the history that’s brought us here, and the future we hope to offer to generations that will follow us. “You are more than conservationists; you are stewards of the Earth,” Melroy closed. “Thank you.”

And likewise: Thank you, for supporting our ongoing efforts to protect West Virginia’s Special Places, and all that they represent.

## Thankful for Supporters

### **Ziegler and Ziegler, L.C.**

The WVLT is grateful to have the advice and counsel of Anna Ziegler, attorney at Ziegler and Ziegler, L.C., located in Hinton, WV. Anna has been supporting land trust conservation efforts throughout West Virginia for a number of years and is dedicated to the future of our state and its communities.

### **Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund**

Many thanks to the Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund for their support of many WVLT projects! 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.

The OHCF’s work is guided by an 11-member Board of Trustees, drawn from land trusts; the Division of Forestry; the Division of Natural Resources; outdoor recreation and sportsmen’s groups; and the professions of biology, ecology, forestry, and public health. This mix of interests represents our state’s diverse citizens and regions. The OHCF is working to protect the best of our natural resources for all West Virginians.

### **We are incredibly thankful for our Organizational Partners!**

Organizational Partners not only provide financial support for us to continue our important work, they also demonstrate their company’s commitment to enhancing the livability of our communities!



## Leaving a Legacy

# Planned Giving Leaves a Conservation Legacy

Many paths can lead to permanent land protection and having a range of options for landowners to consider is essential to WVLT’s success. For one generous family with 50 acres bordering the Greenbrier River, the conservation mechanism of choice was a life estate... the first for the West Virginia Land Trust.

With this transaction, the family members transferred ownership of their property to the Land Trust but retained full use and enjoyment of their property during their lifetimes. Upon the passing of the donors, WVLT will then hold all interests in the property and will be able to manage it as a nature preserve and for public recreational access.

This conservation tool provides relief for donors who are conducting estate planning and desire to leave a conservation legacy, but who are not totally ready to walk away from their beloved land.

While the donors of this property wish to remain anonymous, the merits of the donation are plentiful. The property provides a valuable buffer of bottomland hardwood forest along the Greenbrier River and protects a much larger upland forest on the mountain above. It also ensures the scenic beauty and the remote experience of this river is preserved. Someday, WVLT will be able to showcase this property as a nature preserve and allow canoers and kayakers a place to rest along the river.

Estate attorneys are best positioned to advise landowners on their options. If you would like to explore conservation options that include a retained life estate, please feel free to contact Lands Program Manager, Ashton Berdine, by emailing [ashton@wvlandtrust.org](mailto:ashton@wvlandtrust.org) or call 304-413-0945 for more information.

“

*A life estate  
is a creative  
way for people  
to plan their  
legacies.”*

– **Nathan Fetty**  
*Managing Partner of the  
Land Use and Sustainable  
Development Clinic at the  
WVU College of Law*





*The proposed Yellow Creek Preserve ranks high for conservation too! It is considered a “climate resilient” area because many types of habitat—bogs and forests, streams and mountaintops— occur in close proximity and are connected across the landscape. The proposed preserve borders Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Little Canaan Wildlife Management Area, which are further connected to an even broader network of intact landscapes, such as the Monongahela National Forest.*

## Making Conservation Choices Informed by Climate Change

By: Amy Cimarolli

The huge silver maples dominating the shading forest were a pleasant distraction from the spider webs and the hot, muggy weather (as August days are in the South Branch of the Potomac valley). I was visiting a prospective tract for protection by the WVLT. When I saw the species of maple I knew I had reached the South Fork’s floodplain, and the scattered collections of colorful plastic trash mixed with piled driftwood in the low spots indicated this forest regularly flooded during heavy rain events. I immediately knew this place was special and worthy of WVLT action to protect it.

West Virginia is seeing more frequent heavy rainstorms, and in recent decades has seen flood-related disaster declarations almost every year (EPA 2016). EPA climate science predicts for West Virginia a likelihood of rising temperatures, increasing average annual precipitation, and shifting rainfall patterns likely to intensify both floods and droughts. A new way the WVLT is working for the future of West Virginia is by considering where land conservation will help protect human communities and nature in the face of a changing climate.

Bottomland hardwood forests are rarely conserved for nature in West Virginia because the soils are deep and rich, and the land is flat—good for agriculture or development. The flooding forest at the mouth of the South Fork is worthy of preservation for this reason alone! But the land is also providing an “ecosystem service” of lessening floodwater impacts to residents and businesses

downstream of Moorefield by slowing, and temporarily storing, South Fork and South Branch floodwaters.

The WVLT broadened its land evaluation criteria this year to include a consideration of how a place, like this new addition to the Poppy Bean Preserve, contributes to protected lands (private, state, and federal) that together may help keep West Virginia’s nature diverse and working for us under a changing climate. Through a Land Trust Alliance-funded project with the Open Space Institute, WVLT explored new maps developed by The Nature Conservancy’s Eastern Region scientists on the climate resilience of different lands in West Virginia (check out <http://maps.tnc.org/resilientland/coreConcepts.html> to explore the science on your own). The ultimate purpose of this work is to “identify the places most essential for conserving and sustaining [nature’s] diversity under a changing climate” (Anderson et al. 2016).

The first phase of the project yielded for the WVLT a series of maps displaying lands of high values for protection given a changing West Virginia climate. The maps reveal good places for conservation to happen for diverse reasons: highlighted as the most special are those places where multiple wildlife habitats show up in one area, where habitats are well connected with each other, and where not enough of a type of habitat is preserved.

References: Anderson, M.G., Barnett, A., Clark, M., Prince, J., Olivero Sheldon, A. and Vickery B. 2016. Resilient and Connected Landscapes for Terrestrial Conservation. The Nature Conservancy, Eastern Conservation Science, Eastern Regional Office. Boston, MA. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2016. What Climate Change Means for West Virginia. EPA 430-F-16-050. 2 p.

## Protecting the Family Legacy

“*The land takes care of us, it is our home, so we want to give back to the land in striving to protect and defend it. In protecting our land, we are protecting ourselves, our legacies, and our futures. We are all connected. Greed destroyed large portions of West Virginia in the past, but with forethought and planning that will not ever happen to this land. My prayer is that future generations may enjoy this natural splendor. I believe this conservation easement will help my prayer come to pass by protecting and guarding this land.*”

**Annana Vanderver**

Typically, when the West Virginia Land Trust receives a call from a landowner regarding developing a conservation easement for their property, the person on the other end of line is sixty years plus. It was a surprise to receive an inquiry from a twenty-something with such passion about protecting her family farm.

“It’s so refreshing to meet such a forwarding thinking young person. It’s very responsible for her to make the decision to protect her family’s legacy through a conservation easement. Her heart was in the project all the way,” said Amy Cimarolli, WVLT Land Protection Specialist.

The small 112-acre farm in Fayette County – with a heart of gardens, an orchard, several natural springs and small streams – is located on Laurel Creek, a tributary of the Meadow River in the Gauley River watershed. The farming area of the property has rich soils classified as being of statewide importance for agriculture, which are valuable to conserve from losses to development as this easement does. Thick rhododendron in the maturing forest’s understory, locally referred to as “Great Laurel,” is Laurel Creek’s namesake; the leaves and undisturbed soils of the farm’s forest serve downstream water users by absorbing pollution of rain storm runoff from roads and old strip-mines in the area. While leaving the streamside forest undisturbed, Annana plans to steward the forest and utilize wood products she harvests for woodworking and other farm uses.

The purpose of the conservation easement is to create a family nature preserve and refuge for wildlife, to increase protections for water quality within the Laurel Creek watershed of the Meadow River, and to support the small farm attributes of the property.



*Left to right: Amy Cimarolli, WVLT Land Protection Specialist; Annana Vanderver; and Annana’s mother, Margaret Traecy.*

## Partner Project



## Cheat Fest

*Let the Tradition Continue!*

When our friends at Friends of the Cheat (FOC) realized the neighbor’s field that’s been used for parking for their annual Cheat Fest – the organization’s major fundraiser – was up for sale, they saw the threat to the way they connect with their many supporters, and to their coffers. Faced by an urgency to make the purchase happen, FOC casted around for options and contacted the West Virginia Land Trust to see if we could help.

FOC is a source of pride for Preston, Monongalia, and Tucker counties, and for the whitewater community that floats the rivers and braves the rapids of north central West Virginia. Through years of steady growth, FOC has accomplished great things to restore the health and water quality of the Cheat River watershed.

◀ *The property is located in the field in front left foreground with a small red shed.*

Knowing their solid reputation, the West Virginia Land Trust suggested that we could help FOC acquire the property through a loan. Although the project didn’t fit the framework of a typical conservation project, it wasn’t the first time we’d been approached about a parking area. In 2014, we provided a loan to the Greenbrier River Trail Association to purchase a property to be used for parking and improved trail access near Lewisburg. Similar to that project, we knew this property is one that will serve FOC for the long term. So, a deal – and a partnership – was struck.

While the acquisition helps ensure the success of Cheat Fest, the watershed group also intends to allow public river access from the property and hopes to utilize the area for its educational programming, community projects, and as a safer route for a section of the Allegheny Trail, which is West Virginia’s longest hiking trail.

Learn more about Friends of the Cheat at [www.cheat.org](http://www.cheat.org)





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# Trail Work & Youth Engagement

WVLT had a breakout summer for trail work at its Toms Run Preserve thanks to many dedicated volunteers, who helped build a new mile-long trail and maintained existing trail networks.

• **The Shack Neighborhood House:** For the fifth summer, we hosted weekly trail building sessions for about fifteen middle school-aged kids from “The Shack.”

The Shack Neighborhood House provides an inclusive, safe, and fun environment for learning and recreation. Programs strengthen families by nurturing children, youth and community members of all ages in Monongalia County and the surrounding areas. Through the initiatives of its Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers, The Shack

fosters personal growth and self-confidence and promotes social responsibility.

• **West Virginia University:** We hosted 10 days of field work by West Virginia University’s AdventureWV Quest Service program, with nearly 200 student participants in total. Also, during WVU’s “Welcome Week,” we hosted a group of 35 freshman volunteers.

Our partners at the **New River Gorge Trail Alliance** (NRGTA) organized many volunteers and groups to help build trails in the Needleseye Boulder Park.

• **Boy Scouts of America:** Roughly 325 scouts – who were attending events at the Summit Bechtel Reserve – spent their days of service in Needleseye learning to build hiking trails.

• **NRGTA** worked several days with WVU Tech Students (50 students), the New River Alliance of Climbers (35 volunteers), ACE Adventure Resort (12

volunteers and staff) and hosted numerous volunteer days with people from the community (50 volunteers).

Youth engagement was plentiful over the summer including five field trips to WVLT preserves.

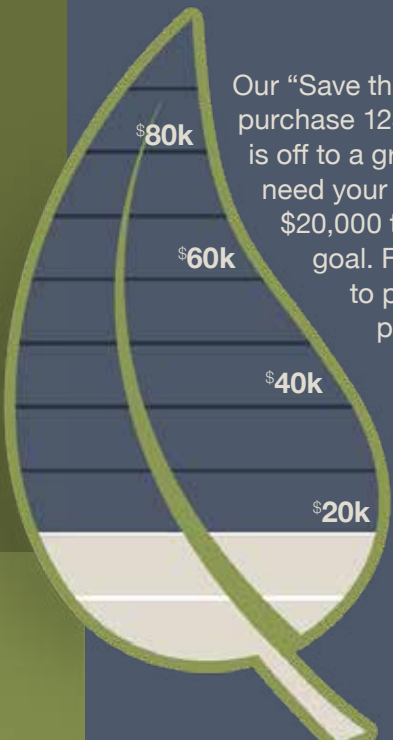
• As part of National Science Foundation research being conducted by WVU in Elizabeth’s Woods, more than 60 students from **Eastwood Elementary** participated in science field days that focused on climate change and forest ecology.

• WVLT hosted an interpretive field trip at Elizabeth’s Woods with 45 children from **Morgantown Early Learning Facility**.

• **Cub Scouts:** WVLT staff led nearly 40 families from **Cub Scout Pack 39** through Elizabeth’s Woods (Monongalia County), Marie Hall-Jones Ancient Forest Preserve (Doddridge County), and Gauley River Canyon Preserve (Nicholas County).

Support the Cause

**THANK YOU to all who have contributed to our Bickle Knob campaign**



Our “Save the View” campaign to purchase 123 acres at Bickle Knob is off to a great start, but we still need your help! So far, we’ve raised \$20,000 toward a hefty \$100,000 goal. Funds raised will be used to protect and manage the property, located in the iconic viewshed of the Bickle Knob fire tower.

Please donate today at [www.BuyBickle.org](http://www.BuyBickle.org)

**Ready to pull on some gloves and get to work?**  
We’re always looking for volunteers!  
Contact Jessica Spatafore ([jessica@wvlandtrust.org](mailto:jessica@wvlandtrust.org)) to get involved.





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## Buffering Streams

Spring Valley Farm is taking steps to improve water quality and wildlife habitat along The Second Creek, a tributary of the Greenbrier River. By planting trees in areas that were once pasture, the owners hope to establish stream buffers that will reduce livestock impacts to the creek and also shade the cold waters of The Second Creek for trout and other aquatic organisms. Trees and native plants provide food and shelter for wildlife, as well as filter pollutants from storm runoff and farming operations. The WV Land Trust and the WV Conservation Agency organized the tree planting for the Spring Valley Farm which is permanently protected by conservation easements.



Tree planting volunteers included a group from the Church of the Covenant who visit Ronceverte, WV annually for a mission trip. (Left to right: Linda Reese, Shelly Armstrong, Deb Evans, and Ben Evans.)

Giving Back