

We've Been Busy Bees!

Touch the Earth!

In celebration of Earth Day, WVLT partnered with WV Sierra Club, WV Rivers Coalition, West Virginians for Public Lands, Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Mon Valley Greenspace Coalition, Mon River Trails Conservancy, Friends of Deckers Creek, Mountaineer Audubon, and Morgantown Green Team for the Touch the Earth Festival in Morgantown.



The event featured educational activities, including a trail-building workshop, a guided tour of the park's trails and wetland, tree planting, a crash course in invasive-species, and a scavenger hunt in which participants identified local flora. Trees on the trail offered signage about their ecological and financial benefits.

Blue Jean Basket

The 8th annual Blue Jean Basket – the Ball reimagined – a picnic for greenspace, co-hosted by the West Virginia Land Trust and Mon River Trails Conservancy, took place on May 21. Guests enjoyed made-to-order sandwiches from Cheese Louise food truck, local craft beer from High Ground Brewing, live music by The Stonefly Four (featuring Chris Haddox, who recently played on *Mountain Stage with Kathy Mattea!*), and outdoor games at Camp Muffly in Morgantown.



Special Places Celebration

The West Virginia Land Trust is pleased to announce that this year we will cross the 20,000-acre threshold of land protected! Thanks to support from many businesses and individuals who donate, sponsor, volunteer, and love the outdoors, we have created outdoor recreation access, ensured clean drinking water supplies, preserved working family farms, and protected open spaces, scenic views, historic sites, and more. This is something to celebrate! In 2022, we will be celebrating our special places all year long. We hope you will join us for a hike in one of the special places you helped to create during our yearlong Saturday Hiking Series!



SNAP SHOTS
NEWSLETTER

WEST VIRGINIA
LAND TRUST

In This Issue

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- ▶ Community Engagement

You can help us continue this important work and demonstrate your commitment to enhancing the livability of our communities, by becoming an organizational sponsor. For more information, you may visit www.WVSpecialPlaces.org, email jessica@wvlandtrust.org, or call (304) 346-7788.

Stacking the Odds, Betting on Forests

When life offers pancakes, go for a tall stack. It's the same with conserving a parcel of forest: The more layers of benefits, the better.

In a state like West Virginia, with almost 80% of its land under forest cover (third highest in the U.S., after Maine and New Hampshire), the impact of multiple layers of benefits can be tremendous. On any given forested parcel, the stack of benefits can get pretty tall.

Our base layer pancakes are about water: Forested slopes and banks of rivers slow rainwater runoff, reducing water speed and quantity that become flood waters. Leaves on trees and the forest floor disperse rainwater, reducing sedimentation and erosion that cloud running water, accumulate silt on stream beds, and imperil aquatic creatures. Of course, lands that are protected for natural vegetation upstream of drinking water intakes won't be developed for industrial uses like chemical storage tanks (can you say "Elk River"?), or parking lots with motor oil leaks. Conserving "natural infrastructure" is the simplest and most cost-effective way to protect water.

Add another pancake to the stack: recreational opportunities. Visitors to West Virginia regularly seek trails for hiking, running, and biking, or water trails for floating, kayaking, or canoeing (another benefit of the clean water mentioned above). As our state emphasizes its outdoor economy, preserves that showcase our natural beauty and assets become linchpins for community vitality.

Add a pancake: Forest preserves aren't just for visitors from far away, but they provide health benefits – both mental and physical – for residents who use them regularly. The benefits of regularly walking in the woods have been documented by researchers to reduce blood

pressure, improve diabetes, lessen depression and anxiety, enhance creativity, ease addiction, and control obesity. This is a pancake you need: Ask your doctor for a "nature prescription" on your next visit.

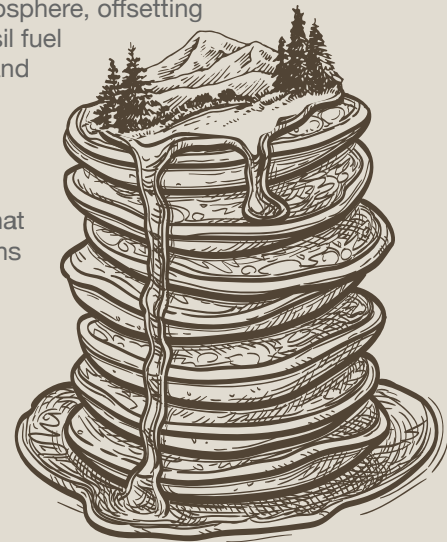
Stack it up for biodiversity: See the article in this newsletter about birds and the importance of West Virginia's forests in sustaining species that are suffering in other parts of their ranges. Add in the salamander species that forests protect, which are Appalachia's global claim to fame for biodiversity, and globally rare mussels and crayfish, and other aquatic species whose habitats forests protect, and you've got a platter of pluses.

Add on a layer of economic impact: Forests that are sustainably harvested will regenerate, sequestering carbon as they re-grow, while providing employment to stewards who manage those lands.

Top it off with a dollop of global climate impact: Removing carbon from the atmosphere. The harvested timber mentioned above, when used in construction, holds carbon that will be locked up in joists and trusses, for decades to come. Forests that remain as forests – which happens when they're conserved in perpetuity by a land trust – are among the most significant removers of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, offsetting emissions from vehicles, fossil fuel burning, and conversion of land from forest to housing, urban environments, and cropland. Extensive forests like West Virginia's have large-scale impacts, but municipalities that plant urban forests score gains in carbon reductions, too.

It's a forest feast, and West Virginia offers a banquet of benefits.

Brent Bailey, Ph.D.
Executive Director



STEWARDSHIP

Land management requires boots on the ground and that's exactly what the WVLT staff has been doing on our growing number nature preserves across the state. Staff have been working at the Shavers Fork Preserve, Yellow Creek Natural Area, Poppy Bean Preserve, Toms Run Preserve, Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve, and others. Opening our preserves to the public requires marking boundary lines, developing parking lots and trail systems, and providing information via trail signs, maps, and brochures - that's the basics, in any case.

We're excited to announce that we're hiring a preserve steward to handle the properties in the southern half of the state. This is exciting because this will effectively double our current stewardship capacity as the second full-time steward, and the only one who will focus exclusively on land management. Stay tuned for an announcement in the next newsletter, introducing our new steward.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers make it all happen

Call it cabin fever or our need to experience the sublime rebirth of spring, but either way WVLT staff have been busy since late March working with our growing list of volunteer groups that support our critically important field efforts. So far this year, volunteers have contributed a total of 270 hours of work, extending two new trails, maintaining four existing trails, planting native tree seedlings, and clearing thousands of invasive shrubs - mostly Autumn olive, Multiflora rose, and European privet - making room for the many beautiful native herbs, shrubs and trees that are otherwise outcompeted.

THE OLD

FAMILY FARM

Many West Virginians grew up on the old family farm – the place they worked, hunted, and played in the creek... the place they love.

The love for this place never leaves our blood... but sometimes life takes us far away from the old homeplace. One such place is Ed and Bettye DeBerry's 110-acre farm in Marion County. A lot of good living and family memories happened here but now it is mostly just a quiet home for the wildlife. The DeBerrys wanted to leave a legacy, a place for the wildlife and for the public to enjoy. We are pleased to announce they put their faith in WVLT and donated the old family farm.

This is a quiet and secluded place, although it is only 30 minutes from Fairmont. The farm is mostly wooded but there is still evidence of fields that once pastured cows and supported a garden. As a typical WV farm, it also has an abundance of forest and hills. Here, the trees seem to act as guardians over the farm, overlooking the daily activities

from the hills above. Old trails and roads traverse the forest and hold great potential to be restored back into hiking and biking trails. Another interesting value of this preserve is that it adjoins the 600-acre Curtisville Lake Recreation Area, adding to a larger protected landscape— something that wildlife, hunters, and recreationists can appreciate.

It is our hope to preserve the biological values of such a quiet place, but to also provide new public benefits. This is an old farm and could be brought back to "farm life". WVLT seeks to learn more about the community's need for placing new farmers and veteran farmers, for parkland, for hiking and bike trail development, outdoor education, and hunting access. All these activities will be assessed, and our future management will seek to benefit as many of these needs as possible. In the meantime, the old family farm is in good hands and the birds and deer, and possums and coons stand guard.

Ashton Berdine
Lands Program Manager

To date we have offered nine volunteer workdays with local volunteers (thanks Amy H, Martha M, Jan Q, Joe C, Bev C, Mike A, Brian H, Mercedes M, Brad S, Cindy O, Tim W, Paula H, Don R, JoNell S, and Mark B!), the West Virginia University Honor Society Club, Boy Scouts from Wheeling, the Mon Valley Greenspace Coalition, and our newest partner the Mountaineer Challenge Academy (MCA). The MCA's mission is to train and mentor at-risk youth from around the state. Of the eight principles that guide Cadets through the 22-week process to getting their high school diploma or GED, the WVLT helps the students fulfill the 'Community Service' requirement. Our staff really enjoys working with these polite, hard-working, and disciplined young men, and will continue the partnership when the next class starts this fall.

Rick Landenberger, Ph.D.
Science and Land Management Specialist



Birds, Birding, and Bird Apps

Apps, smart electronics, and sensors rule the day. On a late spring morning, my phone alarm woke me, social media alerts introduced a dozen things I'd want to know about, world news appeared at my fingertips, an exercise app scolded me about missing yesterday's routine, my early bird friends (of the humankind) texted me about their day's birding plans, and I knew the weather before looking out the window. This all happened within 30 seconds around 6 AM—ding, buzz, ring, zzzt-zzzt-zzzt!

While a lot of the electronic overload in our lives seems as if it is figuratively “for the birds,” some of it is literally for the birds. By 8 AM, I was standing in the parking lot at WVLT's Toms Run Preserve in Monongalia County with a dozen other people who were participating in the organization's 2022 hiking series. It was a just-right spring morning—trees and plants flowering, birds singing, cool breeze blowing, and nothing to do but enjoy the day.

So, we stared at our phones.

Kidding, not kidding.

Thanks to organizations like the National Audubon Society, Cornell Ornithology Lab, and other innovators, there are apps that allow anyone to identify birds by song and sight and to contribute birding observations to global conservation databases. The number of online birding resources are seemingly endless. On this day, we used “Merlin” to identify birds by song (you can also identify by photo) and “eBird” to keep a list of bird observations. We ended up counting nearly 40 species during our hike and approximately 100 species have been identified at Toms Run Preserve in the last few years.

How do we know this? Apps.

The eBird app lets visitors at our preserves tally their observations, which are then filtered into a global database of bird observations. “Citizen science” projects

like eBird, which allow the public's observations to be used by researchers, have become a considerable force in bird conservation in recent years. According to Cornell and Partners in Flight, eBird data has helped conservation professionals identify and protect critical bird habitats; has contributed toward identifying and managing rare, threatened, and endangered species; helped create guidelines for siting windmills and communication towers; and informed laws that limit drone flights over habitats for sensitive species.

On the evening before our birding hike, BirdCast, a website that uses weather surveillance radar to count migrating birds, estimated that 14 million birds had passed over West Virginia and 400 million were moving through the United States. Despite these seemingly large numbers, scientists estimate that bird populations have drastically declined since the 1970s. Researchers at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology and Canada's National Wildlife Research Centre found in a 2019 analysis that bird populations in the United States and Canada declined nearly 30 percent—a total net loss of three billion birds. Apps will help researchers keep tabs on bird populations into the future.

While apps and online resources can certainly help anyone sharpen their birding skills, it is worth noting that most field identification apps are imperfect. Although it isn't entirely impossible to see an Emperor penguin atop Spruce Knob, it is extremely unlikely unless the zoo transport truck took multiple wrong turns. When it comes to birds, your ground game will still need to be strong and discerning—colors and patterns, song, behavior, time of year, and habitat are all part of confidently identifying birds. But, apps can elevate your learning and supplement identifying birds in the field.

Bird on!

Adam Webster
Conservation Program Manager

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to LeJay Graffious, from Mountaineer Audubon and Old Hemlock Foundation, for leading our hike.



Got Habitat?

The West Virginia Land Trust conserves land for both people and wildlife. While we aim at providing recreational opportunities on many of our properties, we also target protecting critical habitats for declining plant and animal populations, especially those identified by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources in the State Wildlife Action Plan as a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” (SGCN). (WVLT contributed to the development of the current 10-year plan in 2015.) These species are typically experiencing population declines and require more immediate action to ensure their survival. West Virginia’s SGCN list for birds includes 75 species, with 39 prioritized for immediate conservation efforts.

SGCN-listed birds largely thrive or fail based on the availability and quality of suitable habitat. According to the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, the state’s more than 12 million forested acres are vitally important to millions of birds, which migrate from as far away as Bolivia, Argentina, and the Canadian tundra. West Virginia’s landscapes provide essential breeding habitat and are a critical stopover for neotropical migrants, rivers and lakes are flyways and seasonal habitat for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, and valleys and farmlands are critical for declining grassland bird populations.

The WV Land Trust’s conservation efforts play into ensuring suitable habitats for a wide variety of bird species are available into the future. For example, we protected a Great Blue heron rookery (breeding grounds) along the Ohio River and have recorded other SGCN birds such as Wilson’s snipes, Common mergansers, Bald eagles, American kestrels, Rusty blackbirds, Barn owls, and Black ducks at the Poppy Bean Preserve in Hardy County. Grassland and old field birds are experiencing steep population declines and places like Arbuckle’s Fort Archaeological Site, Camp Bartow Historic Site, Poppy Bean Preserve, Potts Creek Preserve, and the Mammoth Preserve provide habitat and restoration opportunities for species like Grasshopper, Vesper, and Clay-colored sparrows; Eastern Meadowlark; Short-eared owls; bobolinks; and Loggerhead shrikes. The Yellow Creek Natural Area in Tucker County provides potential refuge for high elevation forest and wetland birds, and other preserves with large intact mature forests such as Toms Run Preserve, Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve, Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve, Piney Creek Preserve, Shavers Fork Preserve, and Cove Mountain Preserve are essential habitat for migrating neotropical birds, such as Wood and Swainson’s thrushes, Broad-winged hawks, Louisiana waterthrush, and various Neotropical migrant warbler and flycatcher species.

Partners in Flight estimates that nearly 36 percent of the global population of Cerulean warblers is found in West Virginia, highlighting the significance of the state’s forest resources – and the decline or degradation of forest cover in other states. Ceruleans, which depend upon mature forests with tall trees, can be seen and heard during breeding season in several WV Land Trust preserves, an opportunity that is increasingly rare in other parts of the species’ range.

As WVLT expands its preserves across a range of habitats, a more secure future for avian species is made possible.

Find It Here

Easily overlooked and at times considered pests, birds play a vital role in controlling insect and pest populations, pollinating plants, dispersing seeds, contributing toward local economies through hunting and birdwatching, and stimulating people to engage more in conservation. Using apps helps WVLT understand the bird populations on our properties, which is both fun and can help steer management activities toward conserving species of greatest need.

Useful birding resources:

eBird (Checklist app and website):
www.ebird.com

Merlin
(Bird song and photo identification app)

Picture Bird
(Bird photo identification app)

BirdNet (Bird song identification app)

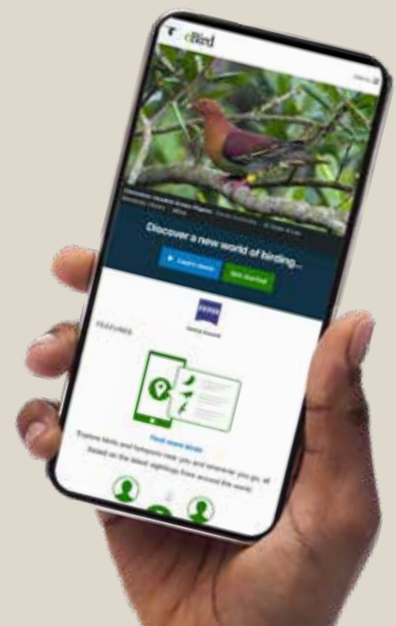
Sibley Birds (Bird identification app—digital version of “Sibley Guide to Birds”)

iBirdPro (Bird identification app)

All About Birds (Comprehensive digital library of all things birds)— www.all-aboutbirds.org

Audubon Birds (Comprehensive digital library of all things birds)— www.audubon.org/birds

Although online apps and resources are convenient, sometimes Wifi isn’t available, or it is just nice to sit down and thumb through a guidebook—there are many available. “The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Virginia” was also recently released and although it is not a classic field guidebook that you’d stick in your backpack (although it has been done), it is a textbook-sized collection of natural history information and artful images of birds specific to the mountains and landscapes of West Virginia. Buy it locally or find it online.



UPCOMING

Hiking Series

WVLT has protected 20+ properties designated to be nature preserves and we are working hard to open them to the public. Access, parking, signage, and trail work are underway. We are inviting you to visit these special places to get a firsthand view of our important work and how you can help!

More details can be found on our website at www.wvlandtrust.org/hikingseries.

2022
HIKING
SERIES

JULY 16

Little Bluestone Community Forest

(Summers County)

AUGUST 20

Mammoth Preserve

(Kanawha County) with Appalachian Headwaters

SEPTEMBER 10

Camp Bartow

(Pocahontas County) with Pocahontas Parks

OCTOBER 8

Potts Creek

(Monroe County) with Friends of Hanging Rock

NOVEMBER 12

Piney Creek

(Raleigh County) with City of Beckley and Active Southern WV

GONE FISHIN'

On the afternoon of April 24, nearly 40 participants joined at the Shavers Fork Preserve in Randolph County for a Hiking Series activity. WVLT Board Member John Schmidt and friends from Trout Unlimited led fly fishing and hand fly tying demonstrations, WVLT staff led the group in a hike on the property, and the activity ended with West Virginia ramp quesadillas prepared over an open fire. It was a very enjoyable day!

I never dreamed there were so many details when it comes to fishing! The length, thickness and weight of the pole, the thickness of the line, and the details of the handtied fly to look like the real bugs, there are so many specifics to consider when fly fishing.

We learned that when you arrive to your fishing spot you need to check your surroundings... like what fish and bugs are currently in/ on the water. The first step at the riverfront for a successful fishing day is turning over rocks to see "who" you see. Fly fishermen/ women often carry a variety of flies so they can match the current bugs of the season. I have come to the new observation that fly fishing is a true art!

Being in nature along the water is such a relaxing way to spend the day and we are fortunate to live in a headwaters state with plenty of good fishing waters.

If you are interested in learning more about fly fishing, we recommend Elk River Touring Center (www.elkriverwv.com) and ask for John Schmidt, fishing guide and WVLT Board Member. You are bound to have an enjoyable day and he might even cook you a riverside quesadilla!

Jessica Spatafore

Director of Marketing and Communications



WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

Jenkinsburg Recreation and Natural Area—keeping it going after all these years!

After high water pushed the Cheat River Downriver Race to the end of May, the race happened successfully on Memorial Day weekend. Starting at Friends of the Cheat's (FOC's) festival grounds in Albright and ending 10 miles downstream at the WVLT's Jenkinsburg Recreation and Natural Area (aka "Jenkinsburg"), the race (and FOC's coinciding Cheat River Festival) are harbingers for spring and summer Cheat River fun.

Jenkinsburg has served as the only major access point into the heart of the Cheat Canyon for many years. The property sits at the confluence of Big Sandy Creek and the Cheat River and is known for being a "wild" and "out there" place—people come to swim and gather along the shores of both waterways, as well as the iconic "High Bridge" that spans the river.

For many years, FOC worked with a private landowner to maintain the property. In 2020, WVLT worked with private donors (Friends of the Whitewater Community) to purchase the area. With major support from the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund, we were able to secure permanent public river access and will now manage the area for recreation and its natural beauty.

Even though there is nothing easy about getting to Jenkinsburg (4x4s and high clearance vehicles are recommended), it is a popular recreation destination and is one of the most scenic destinations in North Central West Virginia. As such, the WVLT needs your ongoing financial support to help us manage this property. We pay for parking area gravel, signs, trash clean up, and other necessary tasks that keep this place available for the public. WVLT currently contracts FOC to keep a set of eyes on the property and ensure that it remains a place for everyone to enjoy.

Having the Jenkinsburg Recreation and Natural Area—which is surrounded by the Cheat Canyon Wildlife Management Area—protected for public use is just one part of the puzzle. Properties like these have ongoing expenses and we count on your support to maintain and grow the accessibility of this area now and into the future.

The Oakland Foundation, Walmart Community Grant Program, Dunn Family Foundation, West Virginia University Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic, and many private individuals also contributed to the acquisition of the Jenkinsburg Recreation and Natural Area.

Donate today at www.wvlandtrust.org/donate and select "Jenkinsburg" to ensure your contribution keeps things going.

Photo credit: Maria af Rolén

Our Staff

Brent Bailey, Ph.D.
Executive Director
brent@wvlandtrust.org

Ashton Berdine
Lands Program Manager
ashton@wvlandtrust.org

Debby Berry
Administrative Assistant
info@wvlandtrust.org

Jesse Cecil
Operations Manager
jcecil@wvlandtrust.org

Amy Cimarolli
Land Protection Specialist
amy@wvlandtrust.org

Terrell Ellis
Organizational Consultant
tellis@te-associates.com

Rick Landenberger, Ph.D.
Science & Land Management Specialist
rick@wvlandtrust.org

Jessica Spatafore
Director of Marketing & Communications
jessica@wvlandtrust.org

Adam Webster
Conservation Program Manager
adam@wvlandtrust.org

Our Board

Jonathan R Marshall
President

Andy Altman
Vice President

Gabe Rushden
Treasurer

Dave Clark
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Calvert Armbrecht

Ted Armbrecht

Chap Donovan

Jackie Hallinan

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Lewis Payne

Nina Peyton

Bren Pomponio

John Schmidt

Craig Slaughter



PO Box 11823
Charleston, West Virginia 25339-1823

www.wvlandtrust.org

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BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

WVLT Staff participates in Wilderness First Aid course

As a safety measure for our Hiking Series and other outdoor activities, our staff organized a "Wilderness First Aid" course in Morgantown for several staff, along with other partners.

Spending time in the out-of-doors is not without a level of inherent risk, but unfortunately that risk isn't often considered until it's too late. With a considerable amount of WVLT staff time spent in the fields and forests of our beautiful state, we take responsibility for managing that risk seriously -- for our volunteers and event participants, as well as ourselves.

With instruction provided by Adventure WV of WVU, the staffs of WVLT and Monongalia County Parks and Recreation completed a Solo Wilderness First Aid (WFA) certification course at the County's Camp Muffly in early spring, just as our 2022 Hiking Series got underway. Focusing on situations where one is an hour or more from rescue, the 16-hour course combines classroom work, skills practice, scenarios, and testing to cover



Emergency Response and Assessment, Musculoskeletal Injuries, Environmental Emergencies, Survival Skills, Soft Tissue Injuries, and Medical Emergencies. What that means for you is that we are better prepared to have more fun outdoors, more safely than ever. Be careful out there!

Jesse Cecil
Operations Manager

