

Let's Build a Forest

All forests benefit communities in some way, whether by providing recreational opportunities like hiking, biking, and fishing, or by providing ecosystem services like buffering rivers from pollution, protecting drinking water sources, and storing carbon to mitigate climate change.

The West Virginia Land Trust's Little Bluestone Community Forest, in Summers County, is a forest so valuable that the USDA Forest Service's Community Forest Program awarded our organization a grant for its long-term protection – the first grant award in West Virginia from this federal program. Local community members and landowners played a big role in making this happen.

After visiting the property in 2020 with representatives from Friends of Cooper's Mill, Summers County Historical Society, and the McCouns and Wills families, the latter having multi-generational ties to the area and a desire to create a legacy by protecting their families' land, a vision coalesced to build a community forest.

In August 2022, WVLT acquired the first 140 acres (purchased from Jack Wills and daughter Sharon Brescoach) to establish the Little Bluestone Community Forest. The community forest borders the U.S. National Park Service's Bluestone National Scenic River and the Summers County Commission's historic Cooper's Mill.

The Little Bluestone Community Forest is in a scenic, biodiverse, and steep canyon along the Little Bluestone River, about 1.5 miles upstream from its confluence with the Bluestone River and the historic town of Lilly (about halfway between Pipestem State Park and Bluestone State Parks). WVLT anticipates working with partners in the future to connect an historic wagon road on the community forest to the National Park Service's Bluestone Turnpike Trail, which would further link to the state parks and the New River watershed's growing trail systems! The community forest also protects land within a drinking water protection area for the City of Hinton, WV.

Project support and financial contributions have been provided by the USDA Forest Service's Community Forest Program, Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Community Impact Grant, West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund, and the American Water Charitable Foundation. Other major partners and supporters include the Summers County Commission, State Senator Jack Woodrum (Summers County), U.S. Rep. Carol Miller, U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, U.S. National Park Service, West Virginia Division of Forestry, Summers County Historical Society, Summers County Historic Landmark Commission, Summers County Visitors Bureau, Friends of Cooper's Mill, City of Hinton, Hinton Area Foundation, and Downstream Strategies. Individuals and neighbors have also contributed to the project.

Amy Cimarolli
Land Protection & Stewardship Specialist



SNAP SHOTS

NEWSLETTER

WEST VIRGINIA
LAND TRUST

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You can help us continue our important work and demonstrate your commitment to enhancing the livability of our communities, by making a contribution today at www.wvlandtrust.org/donate or by calling 304-346-7788 for more information.

“Mom, Hope Springs a Turtle!”

This better twist on the 1732 adage “Hope springs eternal” came from the young son of a friend. So fitting for our natural world, especially box turtles (which have been documented as living as long as a century) that are found on many Land Trust properties, it also speaks to our long view of conservation: Our lands are not only permanently protected; they embody the hopes and dreams of landowners and communities who are looking ahead, and hoping for, a bright future.

Hope has been referred to as a stubborn desire that stems from hardship, with a goal of looking toward a better future. That sounds like what carried us through two years of virus-induced isolation. In this newsletter, you’ll see multiple examples of landowners who worried that their treasured places would be devalued over time. They became determined to conserve their properties to ensure that the future for those lands would be celebrated as natural refuges and beautiful places.

In May I had a 6-turtle morning on a 70-mile drive on Route 50 between Parkersburg and Clarksburg. That was probably a personal record for me. As if some invisible starting gun had been fired to begin a march to a new destination, these intrepid creatures sallied forth – at a turtle’s pace – to cross the four-lane highway. They were not all going in the same direction, but their determination to trudge ahead was clear. Being a Sunday morning, traffic was light, and I was able to move them all forward on their journeys, keeping them (and myself) out of harm’s way. Who knows how many more preceded or followed the ones I saw during the drive? It seemed like a mysterious, coordinated emergence, and I saw their treks as a mission of determination and hope.

From our Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek and the recovery of its endangered spiny mussel, honoring a young field biologist’s life (Monroe County), to the Little Bluestone Community Forest and its protection of history, biodiversity, and recreation potential (Summers County), to expansion of conserved lands rich with recreation opportunities at Jenkinsburg (Preston County) and Piney Creek Gorge (Raleigh County), and more, I hope you’ll give yourself a hearty slap on the back for helping to protect these special places. Like the turtles’ treks, our protected lands around the state, now totaling more than 20,000 acres, reflect a mission of determination and hope.

My hope is that you’ll keep marching forward with us, determined to bring conservation status to the next 20,000 acres in West Virginia! Protected lands are an essential piece of our state’s better future.

Brent Bailey, Ph.D.
Executive Director



OMG! 20,000 Acres!

Together, we have conserved 20,000 acres!

For perspective, 20,000 acres is the equivalent to 15,152 football fields. In reality, 20,000 acres is comprised of 30 conservation easements, 22 properties designated as nature preserves or for outdoor recreation, and 7 partner projects located throughout the state. As we close out another year, we can happily exhale a big “OMG” with a sense of success.



Pictured above is one of our success stories from 2020, a place actually named OMG Acres.

“We call this land OMG Acres. OMG stands for ‘Ouellette, Mueller, Glasson’ – the last names of the three co-owners – and it also stands for ‘Oh My Gawd’ for the sanctuary it offers from society’s craziness that too often carries us away from what is truly important and meaningful.” –Mark Mueller, one of the owners of OMG Acres.

OMG Acres is a 330-acre scenic property located along the South Fork River (which flows into the South Branch of the Potomac) that includes a mosaic of open fields and woodlands. A conservation easement held by WVLT protects the forest, scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, vegetated buffers along streams, and a half mile of river frontage. The property is the most upstream of three other WVLT-conserved sites in the South Branch of the Potomac watershed. This project also protects biodiversity, including wood turtles, Virginia big-eared bat, and a sandstone “pavement” pine habitat. OMG this project has a lot of conservation values!

“Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that can help private landowners protect their special places, and a valuable tool in the conservation toolbox. Easements held by WVLT are specifically tailored to reflect the wishes of each landowner. Few conservation easements look alike because few properties are the same, and few landowners want exactly the same provisions. In agreeing to hold an easement, WVLT accepts a perpetual authority and obligation to enforce the terms of the easement. Landowners still own their property and may use, sell, or leave it to heirs, but the restrictions of the easement stay with the land forever.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER

In 2020, the West Virginia Land Trust was excited to work with donors and partners to permanently protect river access at Jenkinsburg on the Cheat River, the only public access located on a popular stretch of whitewater through the Cheat Canyon.

As that project took form on the river right (east) side of the river, long-time whitewater paddler and Friends of the Cheat board member, Charlie Walbridge, started shaping the next piece of a land protection puzzle on the river left (west) side of the river, which would conserve the scenic landscape immediately surrounding the historic Jenkinsburg Bridge, and provide for future hiking trails.

Walbridge approached a group of four outfitters, the Jenkinsburg Takeout Association, who owned 30-acres of riverfront property on the west side of the river, about selling their land to WVLT, while still guaranteeing access and camping accommodations for them. The outfitters purchased the property during the heyday of commercial rafting, but as whitewater trips on the Cheat River declined, the companies seldom used the land and ATVs were causing property damage. All parties agreed to the sale, and thus began the long process of working out a recreation use agreement and sorting out the complex parcel boundaries.

But the work is done... and public access on both sides of the Cheat River are protected into the future as the Jenkinsburg Recreation and Natural Area! The property is bordered by the Cheat Canyon Wildlife Management Area on the east side of the river and protects nearly a mile of



Special thanks to Maria af Rolén for providing beautiful photos of the Jenkinsburg area on the Cheat River in this newsletter, as well as the summer newsletter. We are sincerely grateful!

riverfront property on the west side, both up and downstream of the historic Jenkinsburg Bridge. The area also provides close access to the Allegheny Trail—West Virginia's longest trail (330 miles)—which travels through the wildlife management area. The property is a key access area for the Cheat River and Big Sandy Creek, popular whitewater runs that attract enthusiasts from around the world.

WVLT will continue working with Walbridge and other partners to restrict ATV access, repair damages, and create hiking trails near the Jenkinsburg Bridge—aka the “High Bridge”—for nearly a half mile in each direction. WVLT and its partners are excited for this project, as it increases the recreational value of the WVLT-owned parking area and river access that exists on the other side of the river.

Many thanks to the outfitters: Eric Martin of Wilderness Voyageurs, Paul Hart of Cheat River Outfitters, Roger Zbel of Precision Rafting, and Mark McCarty of Laurel Highlands River Tours for their commitment to protecting this land.

Amy Cimarolli
Land Protection & Stewardship Specialist

NEW PROPERTY

MORE-GANTOWN GREENSPACE

When a town grows as rapidly as Morgantown, people start looking for new places close to home to hike, bike, bird watch, walk the dog, or just get a breath of fresh air. Thanks to a generous donation to WVLT, Morgantown residents will have another 36 acres near the Morgantown Airport that will provide space for such opportunities.

The property backs up to a residential neighborhood, giving some neighbors direct access out their back door.

The property has a mix of forests and open areas, as well as a few existing trails. WVLT will be examining the property further to determine how recreational features will be developed and we will work with community partners to improve access. Remaining greenspaces are an increasingly rare find in more urban settings like Morgantown, but when they are uncovered, they become a close-to-home place to experience nature, hear the birds, and get some exercise.

WVLT is grateful and often humbled by the generosity exhibited by fellow West Virginians who donate land to benefit their communities. This new property was donated by the Callen family and in making this donation, the family hopes it will contribute to additional recreational land for Morgantown and further West Virginia Land Trust's mission in the region.

➤ Stay tuned for updates and volunteer opportunities at this new property.

A Dedication: Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek

In early October, friends and family gathered for the dedication of the Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek in Monroe County. The preserve is named after a young biologist, Paul William Hughes (10/17/1979-6/11/2016), who was a West Virginia native employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the time of his passing. He was a vital part of the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery and Paul's outgoing personality, his passion for the natural world, deep knowledge of aquatic ecosystems, and commitment to protecting special places and habitats through his work were widely admired.

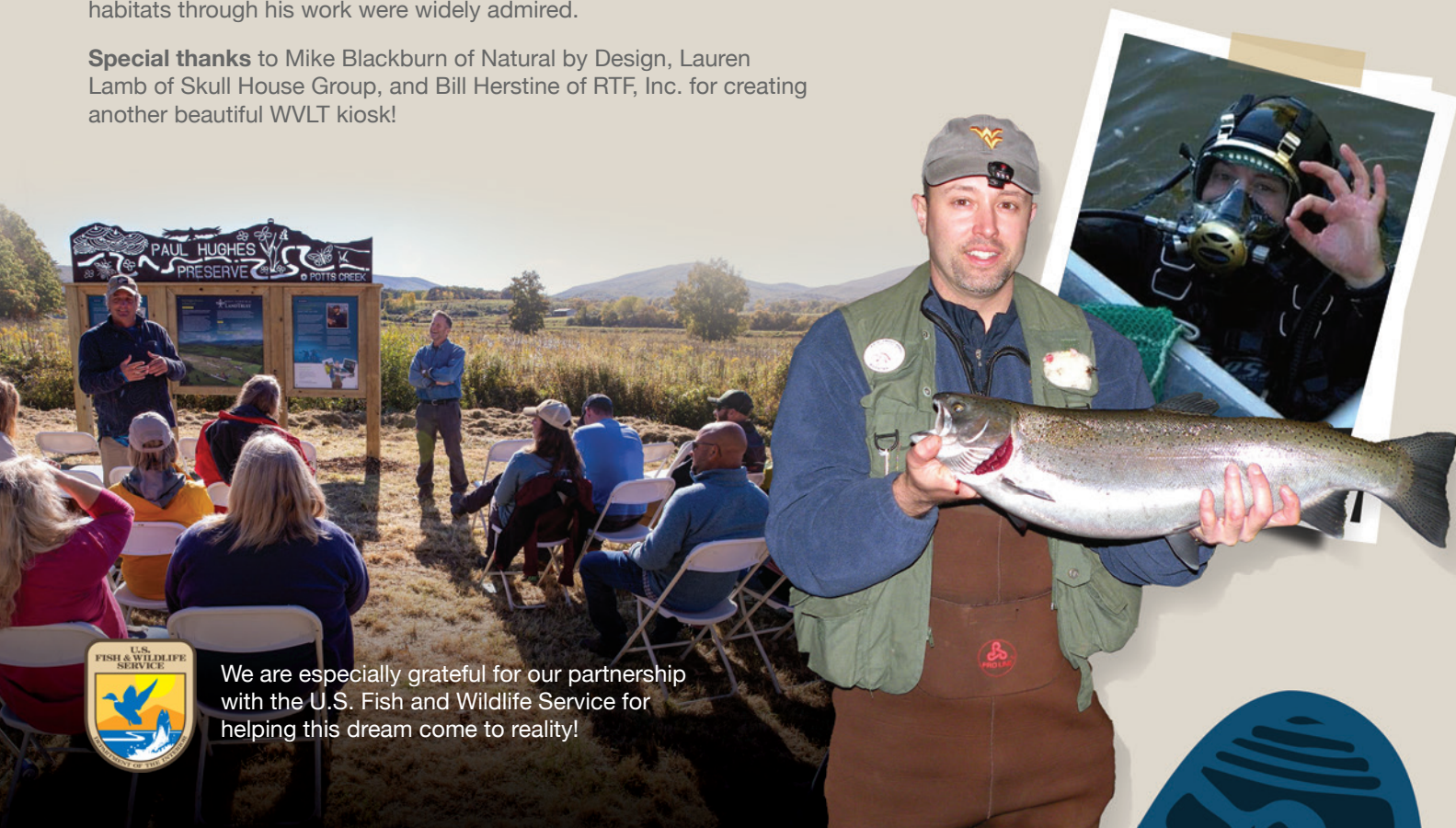
Special thanks to Mike Blackburn of Natural by Design, Lauren Lamb of Skull House Group, and Bill Herstine of RTF, Inc. for creating another beautiful WVLT kiosk!

Honoring Paul's Legacy

The West Virginia Land Trust created the Paul William Hughes Conservation Fund, which will support projects that reflect Paul's personal and professional conservation interests.

To learn more and donate, visit:

www.wvlandtrust.org/hughes.



We are especially grateful for our partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for helping this dream come to reality!

SERIES WRAP UP

Hiking Series

After two years of hunkering down during the COVID-19 pandemic, WVLT re-launched our hiking series and had a successful year gathering outdoors with our land trust community!

More than 175 participants joined us this year for hikes at WVLT properties, including Shavers Fork Preserve in Randolph County, Toms Run Preserve in Monongalia County, Little Bluestone Community Forest in Summers County, Mammoth Preserve in Kanawha County, Camp Bartow Historic Site in Pocahontas County, Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek in Monroe County, and Piney Creek Preserve in Raleigh County. Several of these hikes gave our supporters a "sneak peek" at new properties that are still in development phases and not yet fully open to the public. We hope you will join us next year as we visit a new list of special places! Stay tuned for the 2023 Hiking Series, which will be announced early next year!



Suggestions for Winter Reading

The Other Einstein

Marie Benedict • 2016

We have all learned about Albert Einstein, he was a true genius... or was he? This novel is written from the viewpoint of Einstein's first wife, Mileva, who lived in his shadow. Mileva was a brilliant scientist, but a female genius was unheard of in the earliest parts of the twentieth century. Who was the true mastermind behind Einstein's success? I highly recommend reading this book to gain a new perspective!

REVIEWED BY

Jessica Spatafore, Director of Marketing and Communications

Civil War Oddities of West Virginia: Strange Tales of Soldiers, Civilians, and the Supernatural

Hunter Lesser • 2022

Lesser is More

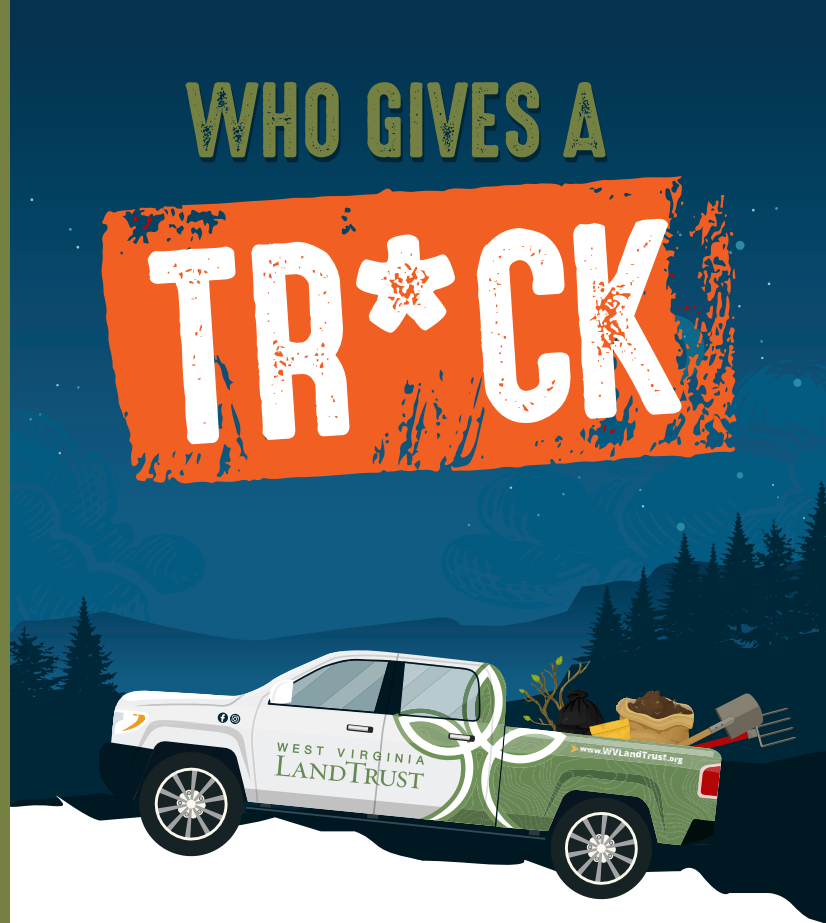
A walk with historian Hunter Lesser is sort of like a stroll with an encyclopedia audiobook, but better because it's interactive. That was the experience at the WVLT-hosted hike at our Camp Bartow preserve in Pocahontas County on a September Saturday. Lesser led the development of interpretive materials at the preserve, and he builds on those on-site materials during public walks with additional anecdotes, insights, and nuances that have rarely found their way into books or other historical records.

Until now. "Civil War Oddities," released this past summer, offers a compilation of 286 well-researched "who knew?!" snippets, each a paragraph in length, which chronicle the depth, irony, pain, and paradoxes of the Civil War in West Virginia. Drawn from sources including books, newspapers, archives in four states, and more, Lesser's book follows the war's arc from its beginning in 1861 (the first shot was fired by a woman; clergy often participated in battles) through the formation of guerilla groups (that operated independent of both sides' armies), to the bumpy beginnings of the new state (shifting capitals and leaders).

Whether a deep dive or a bit-by-bit light read before bedtime, the book fleshes out the context of a complex war. Civil war buffs, history buffs, loyal West Virginians, and newcomers to the state will all learn something new about the state's history. It also offers eerily contemporary echoes as a portrait of a time of discord, soul-searching, shifting power dynamics, race relations, and social unrest.

REVIEWED BY

Brent Bailey, Executive Director



HELP US KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

WVLT is fundraising to purchase a workhorse truck for our statewide preserve management activities. With a growing list of protected lands located throughout the state, we need a truck to support the work it takes to maintain safe public access and ensure a quality user experience. A truck is an essential tool that will support building and maintaining trails, planting trees, hauling equipment, mowing, improving drainage, installing signs, and other regular field activities.

20

Properties around the state designated to be nature preserves

8

special places already open to the public for recreation

Do you have a truck to give?

If so, give us a call at 304-346-7788! If you are all out of trucks, please consider a donation today at www.wvlandtrust.org/truck.



Chesapeake Wild award keeps Potts Creek wild

The West Virginia Land Trust will be exercising our muscles for mussels in the next two years thanks to a nearly \$500,000 award from the Chesapeake Wild program, which is a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The award will be used to conserve and restore habitat for the federally-endangered James spiny mussel at the Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek, in Monroe County, which is one of two remaining locations of spiny mussels in West Virginia. The grant also provides funding for WVLT to restore upland habitats that support pollinating insects, rare and endangered bats, and grassland birds. WVLT will construct an interpretive trail through these areas and along the creek that will provide opportunities for outdoor learning and wildlife viewing.

The Paul Hughes Preserve is a 40-acre site in Monroe County that sits at the confluence of the North and South forks of Potts Creek, which flow through a verdant valley in view of the Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory on Peters Mountain and

the Eastern Continental Divide. Potts Creek is one of only two streams in West Virginia that flow into the James River watershed, a major tributary of the Chesapeake Bay.

Project support will be provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's West Virginia Field Office, Appalachian Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, and White Sulphur Springs Fish Hatchery, as well as West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, Marshall University, Edge Engineering and Science, and the Paul William Hughes Conservation Fund.

Adam Webster
Conservation Project Manager

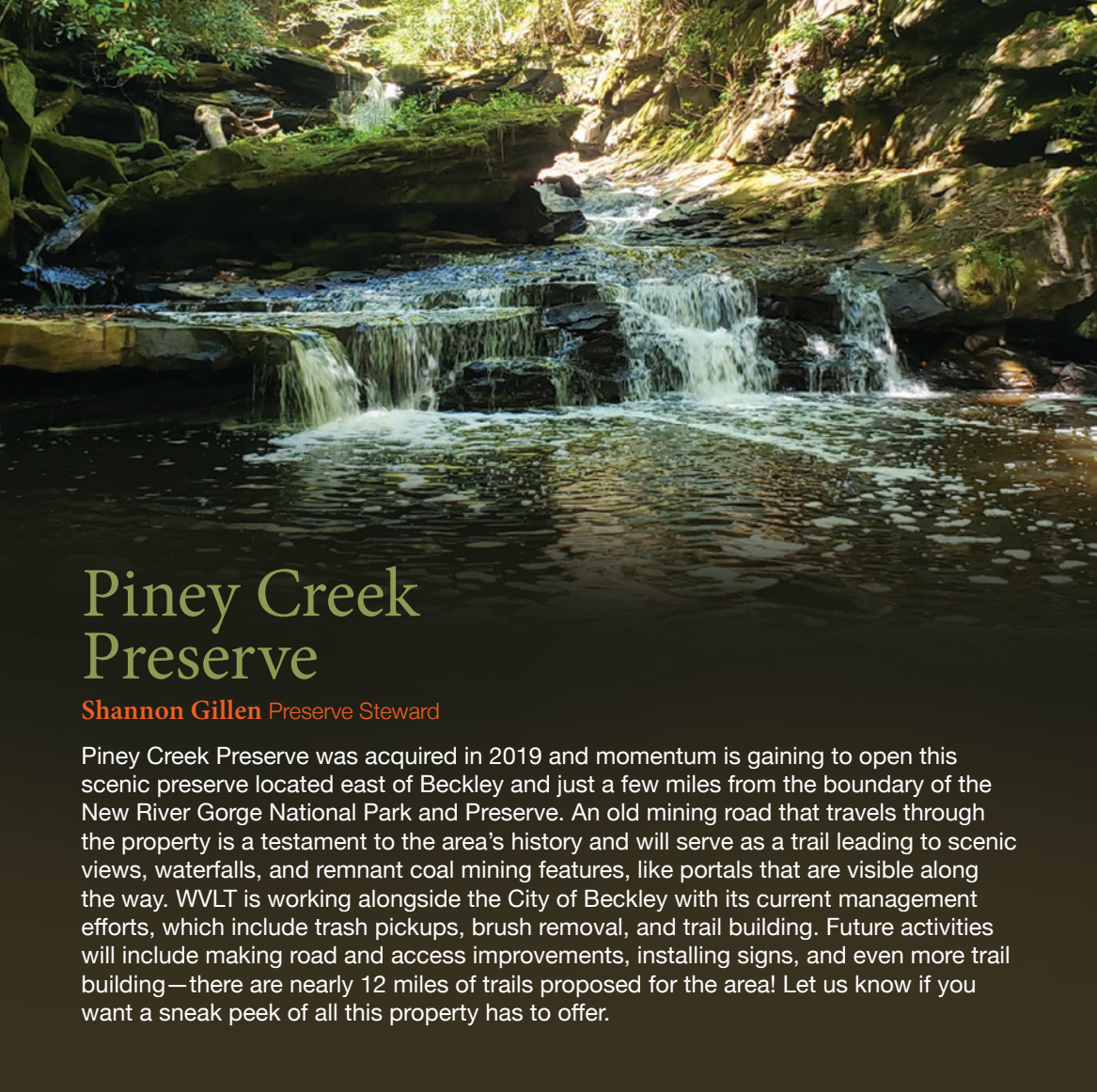
Yellow Creek Natural Area

Amy Cimarolli
Land Protection & Stewardship Specialist

Yellow Creek Natural Area's original trail system was built by locals on old mining roads, logging trails, motorcycle raceways, and wildlife paths. In some places, these original trail routes did not endure the tests of time and were eroding into Yellow Creek and having detrimental impacts to the area's sensitive wetlands. WVLT has worked with partners and volunteers to fix several sections of trail and re-route segments that were the most problematic, including working with stream restoration specialists and trail experts to include sustainable design elements into the project. Our goals are to balance recreation and natural area management—providing an excellent user experience while minimizing sediment getting into rare wetlands and Yellow Creek. Some of the work continues and we thank you for your support and patience as trails are shifted, built, revised, and finally finished. We will continue to do our best to keep the trails marked and maps updated during trail construction.



To contribute, visit www.wvlandtrust.org/donate and select "Yellow Creek Trail Fund."



Piney Creek Preserve

Shannon Gillen Preserve Steward

Piney Creek Preserve was acquired in 2019 and momentum is gaining to open this scenic preserve located east of Beckley and just a few miles from the boundary of the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. An old mining road that travels through the property is a testament to the area's history and will serve as a trail leading to scenic views, waterfalls, and remnant coal mining features, like portals that are visible along the way. WVLT is working alongside the City of Beckley with its current management efforts, which include trash pickups, brush removal, and trail building. Future activities will include making road and access improvements, installing signs, and even more trail building—there are nearly 12 miles of trails proposed for the area! Let us know if you want a sneak peek of all this property has to offer.

Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve

Shannon Gillen
Preserve Steward

Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve is located just minutes from downtown Charleston and this property is a prime example of suburban greenspace done right. WVLT has been working hard to maintain and expand existing trails to ensure visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience. WVLT worked with partners and volunteers this summer to remove downed trees, clear trailside vegetation, improve drainage, and add an anti-slip feature to the preserve's main bridge.

WVLT is working on an updated trail map for its kiosk that will highlight current hiking routes, including the addition of a loop trail and path to an historic cemetery. Two picnic tables and a bench are located along the trails, so we encourage you to pack a lunch and head over to this preserve and discover what makes it special to you!

► Plan your trip today at www.wvlandtrust.org/wallacehartman.



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Please Recycle Me!



NATURE PRESERVES AND DEER

Managing for future forests

Allowing hunting on nature preserves may seem antithetical to “letting nature do its own thing”, but West Virginia’s deer herds left unchecked can do a lot of damage to native plants populations—decimating herbaceous layers, stunting tree growth, and limiting forest regeneration. West Virginia’s deer herds benefit from the state’s significant acreages of edge habitats, disturbed forest, and agricultural areas, resulting in very high populations and an ongoing challenge to manage for adequate regeneration of the state’s incredibly productive and beautiful hardwood forests. Given an absence of any significant predators, hunting remains one way to reduce and maintain healthy deer populations and support adequate forest regeneration.

In fall 2022, WVLT is allowing controlled archery hunting at Toms Run Preserve and Alma’s Grove in Monongalia County, as well as the Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve in Doddridge County. WVLT has been conducting successful archery-only hunting at Toms

Run Preserve—our longest organized hunt—since 2018. Ten hunters are participating in the program and each of them agree to follow a rigorous set of guidelines—like an urban bow hunt— which aims at increasing safety

for all preserve users. WVLT requires hunters to stay away from trails and maps tree stand locations. Hunters also agree to Leave-No-Trace principles, harvesting a doe before a buck, and reporting any success to WVLT staff.

“I really enjoy the managed hunt at Toms Run Preserve. The property is beautiful, and Rick does a great job managing the distribution of hunters across the property. Most of my time is spent silently watching and listening, which enables me to experience the full diversity of wildlife at the preserve. September and October are especially great times to sit in a tree stand, watching for wildlife as they make their way through the preserve on their southward migration. When I do harvest a deer, it’s a great source of low carbon meat for my family. And after I harvest my doe, the preserve has a good population of mature bucks that will keep any hunter coming back.” – Chris Rota



Rick Landenberger
Science & Land Management Specialist