

A family legacy to honor a father's love of place

Many West Virginians grow up going to grandma's farm or listening to grandpa's stories about the cherished family land—hunting morels, spring wildflowers, digging sassafras, catching crawdads and lightning bugs, sunrise deer hunts, roasting marshmallows on a bonfire, and listening to katydids and screech owls at night. If these are some of your memories, then you probably understand how a love for “place” gets in your blood. That place becomes part of your heritage and an opportunity to protect it becomes your legacy.

That's how the fourth generation of the O'Brien family felt when they approached WVLT about conserving 1,200 acres in Ritchie, Wood, and Wirt counties. Their great grandfather purchased the first parcel, near Volcano, WV, in the 1880s and each generation passed along cherished and detailed memories of the family's land—spending summer's in a rustic dwelling with kerosene lamps, riding a white horse to home from school on the old road, making first-ever Christmas cookies with black walnuts collected from the forest, boiling a giant Copper kettle of spiced peach preserves on an outdoor fire, and tales about “massive trees” once scattered on the property and a desire to let part of the land return to an old growth forest.

To honor their family's legacy, the O'Briens great-grandchildren donated their “special place” to WVLT to protect it from development and preserve the landscape for the enjoyment of future generations. Located within a mile of popular hiking and biking trails at Mountwood Park, this “legacy” conservation project gains significance by creating a more expansive network of protected lands in the area.



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You can help us continue this important work and demonstrate your commitment to enhancing the livability of our communities, by donating today at wvlandtrust.org/donate.

If you are interested about options for protecting your family's property, please visit our web site at www.wvlandtrust.org click the “Protect Your Land” button to learn more, or contact our staff at (304) 346-7788.





Letter from the Executive Director

The roots of family trees run deep, especially if they were nurtured by grandparents. The O'Brien family heirs and the West Virginia Land Trust first connected in 2018, when their 96-year-old patriarch, Jim, was put in touch with us by one of his daughters.

Jim's recall and perspective were remarkable. Despite some physical limitations, his intellect sparkled. He talked about his grandparents' post-Civil War-era history with their forest near Volcano on the Ritchie/Wood County line, their early leap into the nascent oil industry there, and his growing interest in how forest conservation could be part of a climate change solution by allowing forests to stand and grow, storing carbon following decades of fossil fuel extraction from the ground beneath them.

Musing that his stewardship of the land was one link in a four-generation chain of his family's ownership of the property, he connected his past with what was yet to come. "My grandmother didn't care much for cutting the trees, and I have to thank her for that," he said. "My children want to preserve the forest... I like to think of some of it as a future old growth forest." There's something almost poetic about a nonagenarian talking about old growth.

Jim passed away in 2020. But his vision for the protection of the land is ensured, with his children choosing to donate it to the Land Trust.

That strong sense of place and impulse to honor a family's legacy is a throughline with several of our recent acquisitions, as you'll see in this edition of our newsletter. At the West Virginia Land Trust, conservation is both heart and science. We're grateful to the families who trust us to steward the natural places that have been integral to many lives and many stories, and we're proud to honor them through protection.

We're also pleased to share these lands with the public once safe access can be developed. See our 2023 schedule of hikes on WVLT preserves. There's no charge, though advance registration is required. Or attend one of our upcoming events in Morgantown or Charleston. Thanks to our many friends and supporters, West Virginia's conservation successes continue to multiply, leading to expanded recreational access, improved water quality, increased wildlife habitat, and more livable communities.

HAPPY SPRING!
Brent Bailey, Ph.D.

LAND PROTECTION

Forest on the Guyandotte River

West Virginians are blessed with so much forest. Its beauty, a retreat for the spirit, bountiful wildlife habitat, and recreational potential are just a few of the benefits we may take for granted just because forests are so common. It's not until we need a place to hunt and fish, camp, walk the dog, or take a family picnic that we really value those forests that are free and open to the public for such pleasures. Add a riverbank view of the Guyandotte River and you have a little slice of heaven!

WVLT was gifted 173 acres of land in Lincoln County along the Guyandotte River with all the beauty and benefits of an Appalachian forest. The Morris Family Guyandotte Preserve is a bit remote but offers a place for adventurers to spend a day in the woods. The tract is mostly located on a high overlook of the Guyandotte River and except for two gas wells drilled in the early 1900s, the property has been maintained in its natural state. A section beside the Guyandotte River also presents an opportunity to develop a new access point for the Guyandotte River Water Trail, and possibly even a future camping site for water trail users.

But the real story is about the generosity and concern a family had for this property. Living out of state and having inherited the property, the owners knew their ancestors loved

the land and wanted to leave a legacy. They sought out the WVLT for advice and ended up donating the property to our organization to manage this special place for future generations to enjoy.

WVLT's property records indicate that the Morris family assumed ownership of a nearly 175-acre tract bordering the Guyandotte River in June 1930. At that time, A.F. (Ferd) Morris, who lived in Hamlin and Huntington, West Virginia, acquired the land from members of the Burks family, also of Hamlin. Ferd Morris, and his eldest son and business partner Russell Morris, shared an office in Hamlin and acted as stewards for the property over their lifetimes. Ultimately, the tract of land was left to Ferd's grandchildren, who donated it to the West Virginia Land Trust in December 2022.

"The Morris family are thankful for the Trust's interest in the property and hope that it will be enjoyed by the public for generations to come. By naming the land the Morris Family Guyandotte Preserve the Trust pays fitting tribute to Ferd and Russell Morris, who recognized the land's value so many years ago and took steps to preserve its natural beauty." — Kent Collins



Pencils, lasers, and permits

Getting started at Potts Creek

A team of scientists and stakeholders met in early 2023 to launch an ambitious habitat restoration project at the Paul Hughes Preserve at Potts Creek in Monroe County. WVLT Landscape Architect Mike Blackburn turned previous pencil sketches into a colorful conceptual map that illustrates what the preserve may look like once the project is completed, and engineers made plans to use laser-equipped drones to create a detailed 3D model of the restoration design. Federal and state laws require the land trust to obtain special permits to make the project happen and these additional mapping and modeling efforts play into that process. Other partners will be conducting insect and bat surveys, as well as planning for trails and parking areas. The project is funded by the **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chesapeake WILD** program and aims at restoring habitat for the endangered James spiny mussel, as well as building hiking trails and improving conditions for pollinators, bats, and birds. There will be lots of moving parts at Potts Creek during the next two years—stay tuned for future updates!

Needleseye Park Update

Things are happening in Fayette County, especially in outdoor recreation. One of several cases in point is the 282-acre Needleseye Park located at the edge of Oak Hill. The property was originally acquired by WVLT in 2019 and later donated to the City of Oak Hill to manage as a municipal park. The area is characterized by a mixed oak forest with interesting and abundant rock formations, including the Needleseye, an iconic gap formed between giant boulders during the Pleistocene Period. Well-suited to hiking, trail running, mountain biking, climbing, birding, botanizing, and geologizing (if that's not a word, it should be), the park is a recreational asset for the area. But, the benefits don't end there: Protected forests conserve biological diversity and provide ecosystem services, including being critical habitat for declining neotropical migratory songbirds and endangered bats, as well as storing carbon and reducing impacts from climate change.

The City of Oak Hill was recently awarded nearly \$1 million for trailhead development and construction of 12 miles of hiking, running, and mountain biking trails that will connect to outstanding climbing and bouldering opportunities. They are also working on several other items, including an Emergency Response Plan, a Climbing Management Plan, and an 18-hole competition level disc golf course that will traverse through the forest. Since its beginning, the project's partnerships have grown to include WVLT, City of Oak Hill, New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, Fayette Trails Coalition, WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, National Park Service, and many volunteers.

Talk about teamwork!



What's Happening in our Public Preserves...

Preserve management and field work are year-round activities. Things don't end when the weather gets cold, and the snow begins. Even though we may enjoy a warm woodstove or glowing heater at the end of the day, WVLT and its partners love being in the woods in winter and we've discovered that a lot of work can get done between Thanksgiving and Easter. Although the larger volunteer projects slow down during winter, we work with smaller groups of dedicated people who help us remove downed trees, clear drainage structures, remove invasive species, and map new trail routes to be built in the warmer months ahead. In the Morgantown Area, we partner year-round at local parks and preserves with the Mon Valley Greenspace Coalition, Friends of Deckers Creek, Morgantown Board of Parks and Recreation Commission, WVU Plant and Soil Science Club, WVU Landscape Architecture program, and others. Some of the "off-season" tasks that we tackle in winter at Toms Run Preserve, Marilla Park, and Airport Park are likely easier than trying to accomplish them during the summer's heat and humidity.

Near Charleston, at Wallace Hartman Nature Preserve, WVLT rerouted a section of trail and blazed the entire trail system to match new trailhead kiosks. We have made efforts to provide more trail variety at Wallace Hartman and hope that the completion of the Boy Scout Trail reflects that effort—we are seeing increasing numbers of hikers, runners, and dog walkers on this new trail. Wouldn't it be great to be able to add even more trails to the preserve?

In southern West Virginia, we're working with the City of Beckley on a plan that includes trails and environmental restoration at the 1,000-acre Piney Creek Preserve. This preserve includes part of the scenic Piney Creek Gorge, as well as several tributaries with outstanding waterfalls that traverse through the rugged terrain in view of proposed trails. Once restoration is completed and plans are finalized, WVLT and its partners will begin on-the-ground work to build trails that will lead to Piney Creek, known for its brown trout fishing and whitewater. Although surrounded by Beckley, the preserve is rugged, remote, and habitat for black bear and other wildlife.



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Whether you are a water enthusiast, adventure hiker, nature lover, or history buff, our 2023 Hiking Series offers an activity for everyone this year! We hope to see you in the woods!

RSVP: Registration will open approximately one month prior to each activity and is strongly encouraged. Guests will receive an email with more details about the activity (meeting location, driving directions, packing list, etc.). If you have any questions in the meantime, please email Jessica Spatafore jessica@wvlandtrust.org. We look forward to seeing you in the woods!

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

MAY 20

Shavers Fork Float Trip

Elkins, WV • Activity level: Beginner/Intermediate

Join us for a river float on the beautiful Shavers Fork which will end at WVLT's Shavers Fork Preserve! Meet at WVLT's Shavers Fork Preserve at 10:00 A.M. to conserve parking spaces and get a shuttle to the river put-in. (Launch by 11am to join the flotilla.) Then join the paddling after-party at the Shavers Fork Preserve's river take-out around 4:00 P.M. to enjoy music, refreshments, and plenty of friends to share your big fish stories with around the campfire.

Blackwater Outdoor Adventures will be partnering with us, renting boats, and running a shuttle! Fee: \$30 (single kayak rental) / \$60 (tandem kayak OR canoe rental) / \$10 if you have your own. All guests must register at www.wvlandtrust.org/hikingseries by May 12.

JULY 15

Airport Park

Morgantown, WV • Activity level: Beginner

Plans for Airport Park include hiking, biking, and dog walking. Once parking, signage, and trails are developed, this park will be open to the public. In the meantime, join us for a sneak peek of Morgantown's newest preserve!

AUGUST 5

Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve

West Union, WV • Activity level: Beginner/Intermediate

Friends are invited to celebrate the GRAND OPENING of this Ancient Forest located in Doddridge County. In 1972, Marie Hall Jones outbid timber companies to buy this property on the courthouse steps. Later her son, Allen, donated the property to WVLT in hopes to open a community forest. We are excited to announce that this property will be officially open for public use in August!



What classifies as an "ancient forest"? For example, the Jones Ancient Forest is a 190-acre forest surrounding 30 acres of "old growth". Trees labeled as old growth are typically undisturbed for hundreds of years. Some trees in the Jones Ancient Forest are 300 years old!

SEPTEMBER 23

Yellow Creek Natural Area

Davis, WV • Activity level: Intermediate

Calling all leaf peepers! Take in the colors of fall and join us for a hike to the iconic Moon Rocks, located in the Yellow Creek Natural Area.

OCTOBER 21

Arbuckle's Fort Archaeological Site

Lewisburg, WV • Activity level: Beginner

In partnership with The Archaeological Conservancy, we are pleased to announce the GRAND OPENING of Arbuckle's Fort in Greenbrier County! Join us for the unveiling of our interpretive nature walk and learn pre-revolutionary history of this archaeological site.



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www.wvlandtrust.org

Please Recycle Me!



Blue Jean Ball

April 29, 2023 • 12:00 - 2:00 PM, Camp Muffly, Morgantown, WV

Join us for the 9th annual Blue Jean Ball - a picnic for outdoor recreation greenspace. All proceeds benefit greenspace projects in the Mon Valley!

TICKETS

\$50 Per Person

\$75 Per Couple

+\$5 per Kids Meal

Please register by April 14
at www.wvbluejeanball.org.



Mon River Trails
Conservancy



EXCELLENT SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITY!

Connect with hundreds of outdoor enthusiasts

Blue Jean Ball sponsors get double exposure as all digital marketing is cross promoted by WVLT and MRTC.

9K

Facebook Followers

36K

Website Views

2014

Nine Year Event

Special Places Celebration

SAVE THE DATE

September 7, 2023 • 6:00 PM

J.Q. Dickinson Salt Works

Charleston, WV

More details to follow!

Enjoy a tour of the Salt Works, WVLT project updates, specialty cocktails from Bullock Distillery, and a gourmet dinner by Chef Paul Smith from 1010 Bridge! Come celebrate the land that we love, and the heroes who protect it!

