



Family's Decision to Conserve 82-Acre Farm Expands Moulton Park

Thanks to the generosity of the Moulton family, 82 acres of land have been added to Moulton Park along the Shenandoah River in Jefferson County. The family sold the property at less than fair market value, to achieve a conservation and recreation outcome for the community. Partners, including Chesapeake Conservancy, West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT), and Jefferson County Parks & Recreation Commission (JCPRC) worked together to secure public and private funds to support the acquisition of the property, including a significant grant from the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund.



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On The Cover:

Participants at the Moulton Park Ribbon Cutting enjoying a walking tour of the future recreation site.



The Moulton family donated the original three acres of Moulton Park to JCPRC in 1976 to provide a public recreation area. Almost 50 years later, the family has expanded their legacy by working with partners to significantly grow the park with their family's namesake. As part of the agreement, WVLT will hold a conservation easement on the property that assures its permanent protection.

"On top of providing expanded public recreation, this generation of the Moulton family added conservation goals to their vision, stipulating that the land be managed for watershed protection, education, native species protection, and soil and forest regeneration," said Ashton Berdine, WVLT's Lands Program Manager.

JCPRC is planning to include hiking trails, camping facilities, and additional parking at the expanded park, which will complement the existing outdoor pavilion designed and built by the Moultons in 2015.

"Four generations of our family have had the privilege of calling this beautiful piece of land home," said Brucie Moulton. "We have all loved the place immensely and none of us could bear the idea of development, however profitable it might have been. We are grateful for the many partners who worked with us to craft a future for this property that emphasizes environmental protection and education—two core Moulton family values—and we are thrilled to know that the expanded Moulton Park will be enjoyed by the community for generations to come." Moulton Park is located along the Shenandoah River, which is one of 150 major rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay.

Executive Director's Report

Along with autumn's leaves, ribbons have fluttered to the ground, cut in West Virginia Land Trust celebrations of special places opening to the public. From the Piney Creek Preserve in Beckley to the Collins Ferry Connector with Morgantown's rail trail, to Moulton Park in Jefferson County, access to trails and open spaces continues to expand across the state, with great community support.

Those ribbon fragments represent enormous efforts! You can't secure permanent access to trails, or climbing sites, or open spaces, without first protecting the land. Conservation assessment, landowner discussions, fundraising, public records reviews, appraisals, and partnership exploration are part of each parcel's due diligence, following standards that underlie WVLT's national accreditation. Essential funding from our supporters ensures that our conserved lands are permanently protected through these practices.

Partnerships strengthen our work in so many ways. Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission purchased Moulton Park, the Land Trust accepted an easement ensuring the Park will always be dedicated to public use, and the Chesapeake Conservancy coordinated all efforts. "Beckley Outdoors", an ambitious vision for community well-being, will invest in development of our Piney Creek Preserve's trails. The Mon River Trails Conservancy used proceeds from the annual Blue Jean Ball in Morgantown to support costs associated with securing and building a spur trail off the Mon River Rail-Trail to a nearby neighborhood. Note how many other allies populate our newsletter: The Conservation Fund, the Institute for Earth Education, Heart of the Highlands Trail System ... and more!

Trails don't magically appear: The alchemy of the art, science, physical force, and funding that create pathways into our natural spaces brings diverse players into the mix. Whether it's local volunteers, nonprofit partners, a federal work crew, or a nonprofit connecting the deaf community to outdoor activities, the trail experiences now available on WVLT lands have been shaped by many hands and hearts.

And beyond recreation: Bats. Freshwater mussels. History. Education. Forest restoration. Water quality. These pages are just a snapshot of what's underway with WVLT. It is a time of enormous opportunity for conservation in the Mountain State. Join with us: We should be cutting more ribbons together!

Brent Bailey, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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DISAPPEARING ISLANDS

Donation to Refuge System is More than Meets the Eye

During the summer of 2023, WVLT donated two islands in the Ohio River to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to become part of the nearly 3,500-acre Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is a collection of islands, riverside properties, and underwater habitats that span the Ohio River in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. An estimated 85 percent of the refuge is located within West Virginia, providing popular areas for anglers, hunters, boaters, birders, and other recreationists.

The Ohio River transformed drastically during the beginning to mid-20th Century when nearly 20 dams were built for flood control and to support energy, industry, and commerce. A river that historically ran free with seasonally fluctuating water levels and braided channels, was channelized, pooled, and changed forever. The deeper water needed for boats and barges to carry coal, agricultural goods, and industrial and petroleum products inundated numerous islands, while the constant waves from barges and boats eroded shorelines of islands that remained above water.

Despite the changes brought about by dams—the Ohio River still moves 35 percent of the Nation's waterborne commerce—nature's resilience played out over time. Like many islands in the Ohio River, Gallipolis Island, in Mason County, was used for agriculture—a rumored watermelon farm—and even hosted a fairground at one point in its history. The island was historically more than 80 acres but when the land trust acquired the property in 2014, it was barely 3 acres and losing ground. Upper Twin Island, in Ohio County, was once 125 acres and today is completely submerged.

So, why did we protect these islands?

Despite the seemingly dire or underdog statuses for Gallipolis and Upper Twin Islands, biologists championed them for their “big river” habitats, especially the benefits for the Ohio River's dozens of freshwater mussel species. Mussels generally require clean-swept sand, gravel, cobble and boulder habitat, and well oxygenated and nutrient rich waters. These habitats are typically abundant around islands and benefit fish, waterbirds, and other aquatic animals.

Gallipolis Island was considered a priority acquisition for the Refuge System and WVLT was able to hold that property and Upper Twin Island until the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could take them into its ownership in 2023. Gallipolis had regrown trees and during our ownership a Great blue heron rookery was on the island—a rookery is a place where dozens of herons may go to nest and reproduce. Scientists have documented herons using the same rookeries for decades.

WVLT would like to thank its partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Realty Division and the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge for making this project happen in 2023. We are also grateful to the City of Gallipolis (OH) and Michael and Barbara Hoeft for donating these islands to the land trust. Hoeft, who owned most of Gallipolis and all Upper Twin, donated the land to WVLT in 2014 with a vision for their protection and eventual inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System.

It took a village... and a little bit of time... but these important habitats are now protected under the National Wildlife Refuge System, and we look forward to the agency's efforts to steward and restore these habitats over time.



Nationally Significant Cave in West Virginia Permanently Protected

The Conservation Fund, a leading land protection organization in the United States, transferred 298 acres in Monroe County to WVLT as part of an effort to protect Greenville Saltpeter Cave, designated as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service for its exceptional historic and ecological values. The property, which will be called the “Greenville Saltpeter Cave Preserve,” has five above-ground entrances and an 81-acre network including 4 miles of underground rooms and passages, rimstone pools, saltpeter deposits, and a stream that flows into and through parts of the caverns. The cave played an important role in early American history and is critical habitat for imperiled bat species.

A LONG HISTORY

As early as 1777, entrepreneurs mined the cave for saltpeter that was used to make gunpowder. Nearly a century later, during the Civil War (1861-1865), the Confederate Army also mined the cave for saltpeter, which was then a critical wartime resource. William Davies, a notable American geologist who authored “Caverns of West Virginia,” noted in 1958 that the cave contained many “cart ruts, burro tracks, mattock marks, and other relics of operations.” Today, many of these remnants are no longer present due to vandalism and the passing of time, but history remains.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, people regularly gathered at one of the openings to Greenville-Saltpeter Cave that had favorable acoustics— known as the “Singing Cave”—to perform gospel music. Native Americans, which were active in the area, likely used the cave prior to European settlement.

AN ECOLOGICAL WONDER

In recent years, Greenville Saltpeter Cave and its surrounding landscape have been recognized as critical habitats for imperiled bat species. Numerous bat species feed, forage, roost, and hibernate in the cave and surrounding fields and forests, including

federally endangered Indiana and Northern long-eared bats, as well as other species such as Tri-colored and Little Brown bats, which have been considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for threatened or endangered species status.

In a 2021 study published in *Conservation Biology*, scientists estimated that White-nose syndrome, a fungal disease largely affecting hibernating bats, killed more than 90 percent of North America’s Tri-colored, Northern long-eared, and Little brown bat populations in fewer than 10 years. Researchers noted declines in Indiana and Big brown bat populations. It is believed that human disturbances to cave ecosystems have contributed to these declines.

Interestingly, Greenville Saltpeter Cave caught the attention of biologists because its population of Tri-colored bats are one of the largest known surviving groups of this species. Some researchers suggest that a “bat gate” installed by a previous landowner—under recommendations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR)—may have been beneficial by preventing humans from entering the cave and inadvertently spreading the White-nose syndrome fungus from their gear, as well as reducing stress to hibernating bats. Controlling access continues to be a major strategy for recovery of imperiled bats.

In recent years, large infrastructure projects, such as pipeline construction, have fragmented and reduced foraging, mating and roosting habitat used by bats, increasing the importance of permanent conservation for sites such as this one.

“The biological and historical value of this land made it clear to everyone involved that permanent conservation was more than just prudent – it was paramount,” said The Conservation Fund Vice President and West Virginia Director, Joe Hankins.

EXPERIMENTING FOR BATS

Although gating cave entrances helped sustain bat populations in Greenville Saltpeter Cave, the spread of White-nose syndrome remains a threat. In upcoming years, WVDNR will be implementing an experimental treatment in the cave, which will use ultraviolet light to kill the harmful fungus (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*) that is responsible for causing White-nose syndrome. WVDNR will be using ultraviolet light in the “C” spectrum (“UV-C light”), which can kill the fungus while minimizing disturbances to other cave dwelling organisms. During treatments, biologists will “bathe” the ceiling and walls of the cave in areas where bats have historically aggregated. Treatment of these areas just prior to the hibernation season is expected to significantly reduce the prevalence of harmful fungus resulting in increased survival for hibernating bats. WVDNR’s efforts will be shared with other state and federal natural resource agencies to help guide broader bat conservation efforts.

“UV-C light treatment is a cutting-edge process, and this is the first time we are performing this method in West Virginia. I am enthusiastic the results will be positive, and the UV-C light method will become standard practice in reducing White-nose Syndrome,” said Alex Silvis, WVDNR project lead and endangered species coordinator.

INTO THE FUTURE

After WVDNR’s research project, WVLT will work with agencies and local partners to open the property to the public. Although the cave will remain closed into the foreseeable future, the surrounding landscape of the preserve will be made available for hiking, bird watching, nature study, and photography.

WVLT will manage the preserve and its habitats in cooperation with WVDNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The land trust will also partner with the Institute for Earth Education, the former landowner who launched the effort to see the Greenville Saltpeter Cave and surrounding landscape conserved into the future. WVLT will work with the Institute for Earth Education to develop educational, interpretive and stewardship programs at the preserve.

“Our partners at West Virginia Land Trust will serve as unparalleled caretakers for this land. We’re thrilled to have helped secure this outcome, which will benefit West Virginians for decades to come,” said Joe Hankins, The Conservation Fund Vice President and West Virginia Director.

At the request of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, The Conservation Fund negotiated the acquisition of 149.6 acres from Amanda Sandell and Matthias Grawe in 2021 and 148.5 acres from the Institute for Earth Education in 2023. Both properties were transferred to the WVLT to be managed as the future Greenville Saltpeter Cave Preserve.



The Gateway to Sandstonia Protected Forever

During 2023, the West Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) secured permanent access to a popular rock climbing area—known as “Bubba City” or “Sandstonia”— which borders the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, near Fayetteville, WV. The 40-acre preserve, now called “Gateway to Sandstonia,” is within a few miles of the National Park Service Visitor Center and provides recreational access to a nearly two-mile rock wall that offers dozens of climbing routes, as well as hiking opportunities and scenic views.

“New River has over 1,400 named rock climbs and has become one of the most popular rock-climbing destinations in the country,” said Charles Sellars, Superintendent of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. “Providing safe and environmentally conscious access points is vital to our visitors and our resource.”

Climbers have known about the rock formations to the north of the New River Bridge for many years but gaining access across private land was an ongoing challenge. WVLT’s “Gateway to Sandstonia” will now serve as the permanent access that locals and visitors have been wanting for years.

Future plans for the property include parking, signage, and hiking opportunities. The preserve will be developed with support from donations and local volunteers. For those who want to get involved, please email jessica@wvlandtrust.org.

“WVLT has put the “public” in public lands! This strategic acquisition that connects a public road to the national park secures recreational access to miles of awesome Nuttall sandstone cliff. The climbing community is psyched to help create a trailhead and maintain this gift.” said Gene Kistler, founder of New River Alliance of Climbers and former owner of Water Stone Outdoors.



SPECIAL PLACES

A Celebration of COMMUNITIES

On September 7, WVLT welcomed nearly 200 guests at J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works, near Charleston, for our Annual Special Places event. Chef Paul Smith, from 1010 Bridge Restaurant & Catering, prepared a gourmet dinner, The Bullock Distillery curated a specialty cocktail, and Minor Swing provided music and entertainment! With your generosity, the event brought in more than \$70,000 that will be used to protect special places throughout the state, emphasizing projects with community impact and public benefit.

2023 HONOREE Terrell Ellis



Terrell Ellis has been with the West Virginia Land Trust since 1998. Her 25-year commitment to the organization is something she is very proud of! We are too! Serving as the organization's Board President, Interim Executive Director, and Organizational Consultant, she guided the organization through tremendous growth. Under her leadership WVLT gained national accreditation status with the Land Trust Alliance. She maintains her involvement through the Mammoth Preserve project, connecting it to larger regional community and economic development initiatives.



Community Recap



APRIL 22

Touch the Earth Festival

A group of supporters gathered on Earth Day, for the 3rd Annual “Touch the Earth Festival” in Morgantown, which featured educational activities, a tree planting, dog parade, and a guided hike on new trails connecting Marilla Park to local neighborhoods. Mon Valley Green Space Coalition, Friends of Deckers Creek, Mountaineer Audubon, Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Mon Group of the WV Sierra Club, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Monongahela Master Naturalists, Morgantown Municipal Green Team, and West Virginians for Public Lands were among the partners and supporters at the event.



APRIL 29

Blue Jean Ball

The 9th Annual Blue Jean Ball, co-hosted by WVLT and Mon River Trails Conservancy, was held on April 29 at Camp Muffly in Morgantown, WV. Our friends and supporters enjoyed BBQ, craft beer, live music, an auction, and yard games. We saw lots of old friends and made many new ones!

We hope everyone who attended had a great time and got a good sense of the exciting opportunities that exist in our area to create public spaces for recreation, water protection, community-building, and education. More people attended and more money was raised this year! All proceeds will benefit outdoor recreation and greenspace projects in the Mon Valley.



MAY 26

STEM Day

Organized by Dr. Eddie Brzostek, WVU biology students led a STEM Education Day for nearly 100 Eastwood Elementary students in May at WVLT's Toms Run Preserve in Morgantown!

Have a group interested in outdoor education? Our preserves are open for these activities. Contact us to make arrangements!



JULY 8

Outdoor Rec Kick-off & Whiskey Tasting

WVLT hosted “Piney Creek Preserve: Outdoor Rec Kick-off & Whiskey Tasting” in Beckley. With more than 200 community members in attendance, we raised over \$5,000 to develop the Piney Creek Preserve into a premiere outdoor recreation resource!

Our supporters enjoyed great food, drinks, live music, a raffle auction, hung out with new and old friends, and tasted the limited-edition Piney Creek Bourbon created by Bullock Distillery. Thanks to the City of Beckley, The Bullock Distillery, Beckley Outdoors, New River Alliance of Climbers, and Piney Creek Watershed Association for helping make this event a great success!





The Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN) connects people with nature by creating a national network of protected, mature, publicly accessible, native forests. OGFN aims to preserve at least one forest in every county in the United States that can sustain a forest. OGFN works to identify forests for the Network, ensure their protection from logging, and inform people of the forest locations.

Founded in 2012 by Dr. Joan Maloof, the network currently has over 213 forests in the Network across 34 states. Marie Hall Jones Ancient Preserve joins twelve other West Virginia forests already in the Network. OGFN also recognizes exceptional forest advocates, educates about the extraordinary ecological benefits of old-growth forests, and speaks out regarding immediate threats to specific ancient forests.

Learn more about the OGFN at www.oldgrowthforest.net.

NOW OPEN

Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve

After many years of planning, the Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve opened to the public on August 5th!

Allen Jones donated the 172-acre forest near West Union, Doddridge County, to WVLT in 2016 with a desire to see his family's property become a natural area for locals and visitors to enjoy. WVLT is grateful for the Jones family's generosity, including financial contributions that helped fund the preserve's development and allowed us to see their family's vision come full circle. Grant support for infrastructure and access on site was also provided by the Schoenbaum Family Foundation. Folks can now safely park, cross the creek by a footbridge, enjoy a picnic in the outdoor education pavilion, and hike 4 miles of trails.

Special thanks to Mountain Valley Resources – Dave, Gabe, Kemp, and Barbie Holtzer for their partnership and construction expertise! Additionally, we thank our staff who put in many long days building trails and erecting the pavilion.

► **Plan your trip today at**
www.wvlandtrust.org/ancientforest





NOW OPEN

Piney Creek Preserve

WVLT is thrilled to announce the Wildwood Trailhead located in the Piney Creek Preserve, in Raleigh County, is now open to the public. This trailhead hosts the Waterfall Hollow Trail which leads to two waterfalls – Cranberry Creek Cascades and Little Whitestick Falls – which have also been added to the WV Tourism Waterfall Trail!



The 613-acre preserve continues to gain momentum since it's located minutes from Beckley and just a few miles from the boundary of the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. Future plans include nearly 20 miles of recreation trails for hiking and biking that will take visitors along historic coal seams and mine benches, with multiple waterfalls along the way.

West Virginia Land Trust and City of Beckley are currently engaged in recreation planning for the 613-acre preserve. Exciting recreation assets are being evaluated for potential development in the coming months and years.

Recreation plans begin with two trailheads, each with 20-car parking lots, creating access at both the Northern and Southern ends of the preserve to unique natural features, trail experiences, and coal heritage interpretation.

► **Plan your trip today at**
www.wvlandtrust.org/pineycreek.



SCAN TO GIVE!



SMALL GIFTS BIG IMPACT!

We plan to continue developing Piney Creek with support from donors and volunteers like you! Consider donating to the Piney Creek Preserve Management Fund to expand the preserve. *Checks made payable to West Virginia Land Trust may be mailed to WVLT Preserve Management, PO Box 11823, Charleston, WV 25339*





AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps)

We are grateful for our partnership with AmeriCorps NCCC and this year were fortunate to be awarded two crews – one in May and another in September.

Together, West Virginia Land Trust, Friends of Blackwater, and Heart of the Highlands Trail System were awarded a crew with each organization hosting them in Tucker County for one week in May. During their week with WVLT, the nine-person crew worked in Yellow Creek Natural Area to plant 125 Caneau fir trees, hung boundary marker signs to better inform the public, improved water drainage and hardened wet sections, and armored rerouted sections of the Moon Rocks Trail. It was a full, productive week!

Preserve maintenance takes a village and we are thankful for our partners at The Nature Conservancy, CASRI, and Blackwater Bicycle Association (especially Sue Haywood, Jess Tucker, and Andrew Walker) who helped create meaningful projects at Yellow Creek, both for preserve management and for a quality crew experience.

Later in the year, we were awarded a second crew to work in North Central West Virginia. The eight-person crew worked in two WVLT preserves over the course of a month. First the crew spent time at Toms Run Preserve in Morgantown developing both a new parking lot and new trail. There is



now space for 3 cars at the Cascade Trailhead and a 0.5-mile trail that connects the Cascade Trail to the main trails at Toms Run Preserve.

Then the crew headed west to spend some time in Doddridge County at the Marie Hall Jones Ancient Forest Preserve. The crew put the finishing touches on the recently opened preserve by adding steps to the pedestrian bridge, building a split rail fencing, and removing roots and rocks from the newly constructed trail.

Want to know more about how to become an AmeriCorps member with NCCC or how to get a crew for a project of your own? Check out their website: www.americorps.gov.



AmeriCorps

Corps THAT

In mid-June, the West Virginia Land Trust was fortunate to partner with CorpsTHAT, a nonprofit environmental organization with a mission of making the outdoors accessible to the Deaf community for both recreation and livelihood. CorpTHAT's Summer Conservation Crew began construction on a new trail at Toms Run Preserve in Morgantown. Trail crew members are paid through their parent organization and volunteered their time with WVLT. Working closely with WVLT's Science and Land Management Specialist, Rick Landenberger, and intern Jasper Clark, the crew completed \$12,000 worth of trail work in a week! During their week in West Virginia, the crew also participated in CorpsTHAT's leadership training, and camped at Chestnut Ridge Park in Monongalia County.



► For more information on supporting the Deaf community in the outdoors, visit www.corps-that.org.



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www.wvlandtrust.org

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Need to get right with your accountant?

There are a variety of ways to support West Virginia Land Trust while making your year-end giving plans.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| + IRA distributions | + Major gifts |
| + Gifts of appreciated securities | + Recurring monthly gifts |
| + Planned gifts | + and more! |

You may also send a check to PO Box 11823, Charleston, WV 25339, or make a secure online donation at www.wvlandtrust.org/donate.

Questions, or don't know where to start? Call Robinne Gray, WVLT Director of Resource Development at 304-413-0945.