

REIMAGINING A LOCAL LANDMARK

BY: **MICHAELLE FLEISHER**



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

Last Fall, we reported on the flooding of our historic Four Mills Barn from Tropical Storm Isaias. This September, the barn flooded again from the remnants of Hurricane Ida. Many donors stepped up to help in our efforts to repair damage and restore the barn and nearby trails. We are incredibly grateful for their support. Knowing that storms of this magnitude are expected to be more frequent because of climate change, we embarked on a renovation of the Barn to ensure its place in our future.

The proposed renovation addresses two critical needs: flood resiliency and an updated accessible facility for programming.

Flood Resiliency



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

Flooding during Tropical Storm Isaias in 2020.

Creating a first floor that can withstand flooding is a priority. Measures implemented years ago, concrete floors and raised outlets, will

be enhanced with removable, water-resistant, cleanable wainscoting. There will be no permanent furnishings on the first floor and storage spaces will utilize shelving no closer than 3 feet from the floor.

Program Space & Accessibility

By relocating all offices from the first floor to the second floor, we will create a versatile and highly visible education and community programs space. This space will be seen by anyone entering the barn from the courtyard and will be used by thousands of people each year through programming, events, school groups, and other community organizations.

The Barn will have additional gender inclusive bathrooms, which is a necessity for the number of visitors that attend the variety of events and education programs held at the Barn. The second floor will also have a conference/community room overlooking the Wissahickon Creek. The creek side wall of the conference/community room will be made entirely of bird-safe windows, offering a unique view of the Wissahickon Creek and Four Mills Nature Reserve.

Renovating Four Mills Barn



View of deck leading off conference room to courtyard.

Project Status

We engaged Elevate Construction and their partner Daedalus Design Build for this project because of their experience with historic structures like ours. The concept designs are being fine-tuned right now and we anticipate a completion date in early 2022.

Fundraising

We have made wonderful progress in our fundraising for this project, raising nearly 65% of our anticipated costs. We have received key grants and donations from several donors, starting with the lead donation from Phil & Barbara Albright followed closely by grants from BLBB Charitable and The McLean Contributionship. As we continue to fundraise, BLBB Charitable is partnering with us to provide a 1:1 match of all donations up to \$25,000. You can make an impact; please visit our website to make a gift and to see detailed plans of the barn renovation: wissahickontrails.org/news/invest-in-the-future-of-four-mills-barn

PROTECTING WATER QUALITY IN THE WISSAHICKON CREEK

BY: ERIN LANDIS

PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

Wissahickon Clean Water Partnership

Thirteen municipalities and four wastewater treatment plants in the Wissahickon watershed are collaborating to work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to create a plan to improve water quality in Wissahickon Creek. This collaborative process has been in the works for six years and currently a draft Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) is being reviewed and revised through a series of conversations between the WCWP and the DEP and EPA. We are excited that the years of watershed-wide cooperation among local communities will be bringing a plan to fruition soon to help us protect and restore the Wissahickon Creek for all to enjoy!

Winter Salt Watch Takeaways

Last winter, Community Scientists participated in the Izaak Walton League of America's (IWL) Salt Watch program by using free test strips to monitor chloride levels in local streams. The

effects of winter salt application on waterways are not well studied and this past winter, over 20% of the chloride samples collected and reported were above the level considered toxic to aquatic life over prolonged periods of time. The number of samples containing high chloride levels also increased from the previous winter. However, our biggest takeaway is that we need more volunteers to sample local streams this winter! This program has been growing the last few winters, but we still need more volunteers to generate an accurate and rigorous dataset.

How to be Salt Smart



PHOTO: COLLEEN WALTERS

You can help improve stream quality too! This winter, remember:

- Reduce use of deicing products by shoveling first and then applying deicers only where still needed.
- More salt doesn't necessarily equal more melting! One 12-oz coffee mug full of salt is enough to treat 10 sidewalk squares.
- Sweep up excess salt.
- Be informed: there is no enforced policy or regulation as to what can be marketed as 'environmentally -friendly' salt alternatives.

- Talk to your town: road salt has a big impact on streams and encouraging our municipalities to use best practices can have a big impact!

StreamSmart Projects



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

We've been hard at work setting up home stormwater audits and installing a few rain barrels in Abington this summer to improve the Sandy Run tributary of the Wissahickon. This fall we are also beginning construction of major stormwater projects at nearby Overlook Elementary School. Approaching the problem of stormwater runoff in the neighborhood by working with both residents and large property owners like the school will comprehensively address the issue of stormwater in this headwaters area.

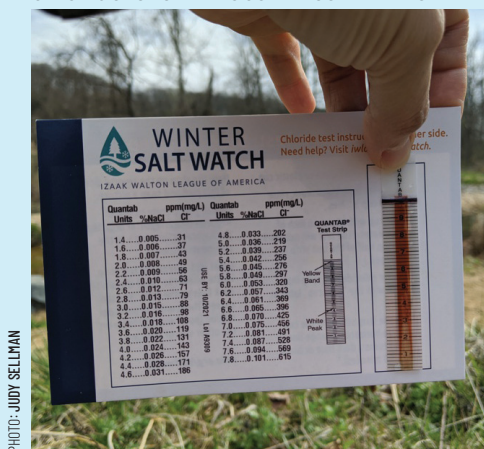


PHOTO: JUDY SELLMAN

YOUR COMMUNITY AT WORK



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Tree Planting

Kanna Fitness in Ambler planted 146 trees at Piszek Preserve in Oreland, PA. This area was previously inhabited by lots of invasive plants, which were removed and replaced by these native trees and shrubs and will provide much better habitat for local wildlife and help with stormwater control.



Carolina chickadee eggs

PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Nest Boxes

Three Community Science volunteers helped monitor the 22 nest boxes that we have located at Armentrout Preserve and Crossways Preserve. This year the boxes served as home to several Carolina chickadee families, as well as eastern bluebirds, tree swallows and house wrens, and a total of 101 birds made their way out into the world from these boxes!



PHOTO: JEFF CLARK

Creek Watch

Over 30 Creek Watch volunteers visit their assigned sites monthly to collectively monitor the Wissahickon Creek and many of its tributaries for water clarity, strange surface coatings or odors, algae, and other indicators of water quality. Our Creek Watchers are critical in consistently keeping an eye on stream health and being the first line of defense to alert us when there are signs of poor water quality. Email our Water Programs Manager, erin@wissahickonrails.org, if you're interested in joining the Creek Watch team!



Eastern red-backed salamanders

PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Salamander Coverboard Monitoring

Twelve Community Science volunteers continued monitoring salamander coverboards to help us understand the health of the forest floor at Crossways Preserve and Camp Woods. During the spring monitoring period of March to May, 184 salamanders were found, weighed and measured, all but one were Eastern red-backed salamanders. The lone outlier is a red salamander that continues to visit one coverboard at Crossways Preserve.

Donor Spotlight: BLBB Charitable

BY: ANNA MARCHINI

Like most nonprofits, Wissahickon Trails depends on the community to help fund our mission related work and programs. This support comes in all shapes and sizes and has allowed us to preserve nearly 1300 acres of land throughout the watershed. BLBB Charitable's approach to creating long-time partnerships with local nonprofits aligns with Wissahickon Trails goal of building relationships that extend beyond a one-time gift.



BLBB Charitable came to us as a true partner, looking to invest in our mission while keeping the impact on the community a priority. Familiar with Wissahickon Trails' trusted reputation in the community and expertise in the field, BLBB Charitable thought carefully about where their support would have the most long-term impact. They have generously supported our education and community science programs, and stepped up as a major donor for the Four Mills Barn renovation. In addition, BLBB Charitable has been a sounding board for new ideas and is generous with their time and talent.

"It's important for BLBB Charitable to partner with local organizations that have an impact on the future of our region. Wissahickon Trails' education and community science programs share the wonders of the natural world with the next generation, not only preserving open spaces, but also creating future environmental stewards and leaders," said Clifford Haugen, President, BLBB Charitable.

Help Us Welcome Our Newest Staff Member

BY: ANNA MARCHINI



Chris Carlin

Chris Carlin joined Wissahickon Trails in May as our Development Database Assistant. Responsible for all the work that goes into keeping our fundraising efforts running smoothly, he can often be found helping staff run reports, figuring out metrics, or thinking through a complicated issue to make it better.

Born in Philadelphia and raised in Abington, and with a year living in Japan, Chris now calls Ambler home. He lives with his wife and their dog, Maggie, near the Green Ribbon Trail. He can usually be found on the trail or dining out in Ambler. He finds living and working in the same region rewarding, especially when he meets someone and they share their enthusiasm for Wissahickon Trails.

Summer Camp 2021

BY: KRISTY MORLEY



PHOTO: BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

Wissahickon Trails participated in two local summer camps, providing environmental

education to campers from the Ambler Area YMCA's Knight Park camp and the Wissahickon Valley Boys and Girls Club. Campers explored metamorphosis and designed their own butterflies. They tried their hand at catching "prey" using echolocation, which was harder than it looked. We ended up with a lot of hungry bats! They traversed the difficult migration of the monarch butterfly, dodging threats and finding safe habitats on the imaginary journey from Ambler to Mexico. Campers also learned a bit about predator and prey relationships with a spirited game of Quick Frozen Critters.

Campers got their feet wet in the Wissahickon Creek, searching for macroinvertebrates, and other creatures in the water. Their very thorough investigations found a variety of "macros" including dragonfly larva, caddisfly larva, scuds, and planaria. They also managed to catch a catfish, a sunfish, and six crayfish!

Green Ribbon Gala returns to Cedarbrook Country Club

Thursday, October 14, 2021

BY: ANNA MARCHINI

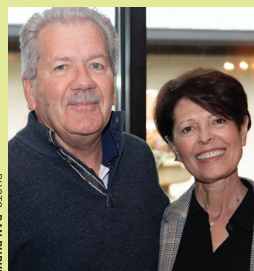


PHOTO: DAN BURKE

Tim and Aurora Hughes at a past Green Ribbon Gala.

This year's Green Ribbon Gala will honor Tim and Aurora Hughes, who have been champions of open space preservation for over 25 years and have contributed to the preservation and restoration of 45 acres in the Prophecy Creek corridor. Partners like Tim and Aurora make our work possible—to connect communities to the land and waterways in the region.

We look forward to gathering together on Thursday evening, October 14, at Cedarbrook Country Club for this year's Green Ribbon Gala to celebrate what we've accomplished with the continued support of our partners, friends, and greater community. As with all events these days, we are following state and county guidelines to keep everyone safe.

Show your commitment to improving the places where people and nature can thrive by attending the Green Ribbon Gala. Tickets can be purchased online at [wissahickontrails.org/events/green-ribbon-gala](https://www.wissahickontrails.org/events/green-ribbon-gala).

CONSERVATION CORNER

Tree Cookie Steps

PHOTO: MARGARET RHOIDE



Muddy season just got a little more bearable through one section of the Green Ribbon Trail near Swedesford Road. Early this spring, staff placed freshly-cut tree cookie slices on the trail to be used like steps - they'll help keep your feet dry, reduce damage caused by foot traffic through the wet section, and prevent detouring around the mud, which can cause significant damage to trailside vegetation. These tree slices are repurposed from old ash trees that were killed by emerald ash borers (an invasive insect). While sad to cut them down, they have a second life protecting trailside ecosystems.

Macroinvertebrate Sampling in the Wissahickon Creek

PHOTO: SAMANTHA DOUGLAS



We collect macroinvertebrate samples from the Wissahickon Creek every year. Macroinvertebrates are small aquatic insects in the larval stage of their life cycle; they live under rocks in the stream and will later emerge as dragonflies, damselflies, and more! The type and variety of macroinvertebrates found in a stream tells us a lot about the cleanliness of a stream, which is why we sample these little bugs annually.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Tagging Monarch Butterflies

Monarch butterfly populations have been declining over the last several years. Wissahickon Trails works to create habitat for these important creatures and manages a tagging program to track populations. Monarchs can be tagged, without hurting the butterfly, to help scientists learn more about the dynamics of their annual migration. Tagging efforts can help researchers estimate monarch populations as well as gain critical information on stopover sites that can guide conservation efforts. Each tag is a small, adhesive disk with a unique number that is placed on the underside of the wing. Wissahickon Trails has been tagging monarchs for four years and partners with The Hill at Whitemarsh to raise and tag these important pollinators.



PHOTO: MARGARET RHOIDE

Hughes Meadow: Work in Progress

After acquiring the Hughes Family Preserve last autumn, our first order of business was to come up with how best to enhance the land for birds, mammals, and insects, while also helping to reduce stormwater flowing toward the nearby Prophecy Creek. With that goal in mind, we began conversion of 10.5 acres of mowed field at the Preserve into a native

meadow. Once established, it will offer more food, cover, and nesting areas for wildlife, while slowing, retaining, and filtering stormwater. Field-to-meadow conversion takes time and usually a few growing seasons, but we made good headway in the spring and are ready for planting this fall, when we'll seed the area with tall, native grasses and wildflowers. By next summer, we're hoping for a meadow filled with a diversity of new plants and buzzing with pollinators.

Snow Seeding



PHOTO: MARGARET RHOIDE

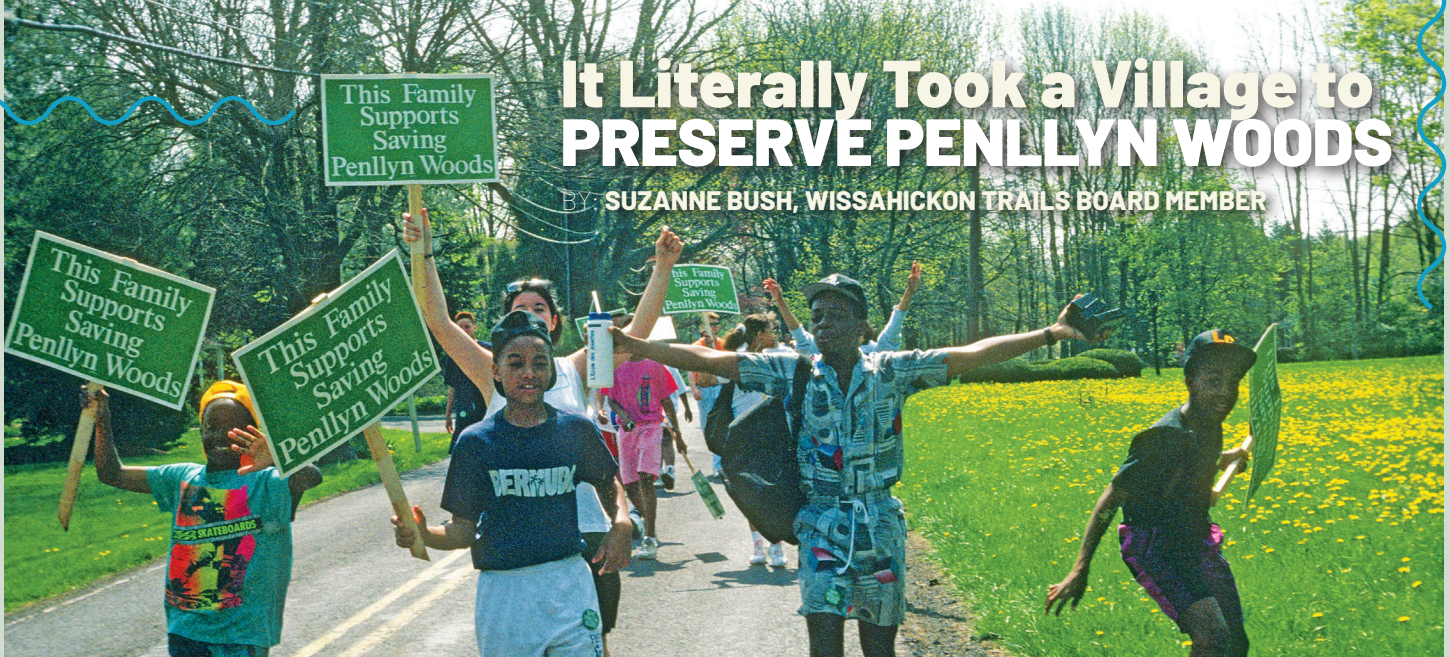
Snow seeding in action.



PHOTO: MARGARET RHOIDE

Looking forward to a meadow filled with plants that pollinators love.

Late last winter, we tried a new method of seeding wildflowers called "snow seeding," which involves scattering seed on top of a layer of snow, rather than seeding directly into the ground. Because the seeds are dark in color and absorb the sun's warmth, they heat up and find their way to the ground before the snow melts - over the course of the winter, the freeze-thaw action of the ground gradually works the seeds into the soil, while also fulfilling their need for cold-moist stratification. When temperatures rise in the spring and any frozen moisture in the ground melts, they are watered in. This method not only more closely mimics how native seeds function naturally, but also reduces our use of fossil fuels and limits soil compaction and disturbance, since no tractor or seed drilling equipment is needed.



It Literally Took a Village to PRESERVE PENLLYN WOODS

BY: SUZANNE BUSH, WISSAHICKON TRAILS BOARD MEMBER

In the 1840's and 1850's Quaker activists in Penllyn kept runaway slaves safe in a cave near the original Gwynedd Quaker Meeting House, known as the "Orthodox Cottage," in Penllyn Village, before they were moved to the Foulke Mansion nearby. The Mansion is gone, but the Orthodox Cottage remains—expanded and now a private home. One of the Village's residents, E. Gloria Stewart Jones, chronicled the historic connections between the Underground Railroad, Bethlehem Baptist Church and the people who settled in Penllyn Village. Her book *Penllyn Village, Lest We Forget*, combines history with personal memories from residents of the Village. One of the chapters details the residents' fight to save Penllyn Woods from development—a historic David versus Goliath battle that ultimately preserved 55 acres of woods and trails.



Carol Jones

Her niece, Carol Jones has a million stories about Penllyn Woods, and each of those stories begins with a recollection of family and community. "We grew up in the woods," she says.

"My dad was a hunter, unlike most people who got to shop in the grocery stores, we ate what my dad brought home from the woods. When you're poor, that's what you do."

She remembers how Penllyn Woods brought the larger community—beyond Penllyn Village—together. Equestrians. Scouts. Hunters. Her memories are awash with anecdotes featuring the

people who wove the fabric that made Penllyn Woods irreplaceable. "Karl Sacks had the hounds," she says, referring to the legendary leader of the Highland Hunt, "and there was a rifle range, too. On Sundays the local people who hunted would go up and shoot clay pigeons." She and her friends camped in Penllyn Woods with the scouts, and even the family's Christmas trees came from the woods.

Carol has lived in Penllyn Village all her life, and in her 60+ years, she has watched—and made—history. "In the early 70's my dad sat us down and told us things were going to change. Mr. Ingersoll said the family was going to put the woods up for sale." Development seemed inevitable, but the residents of Penllyn Village decided to fight.

"My father went to the Township," she says, but didn't get much support. The developer purchased the property for \$250,000, she recalls. "That included both sides of the railroad track. He immediately built the Polo Club, so we knew Penllyn Woods would be next." She explains that the only entrance to the Woods was the Penllyn Village playground. They foresaw profound and unacceptable impacts on their village and on the larger community.

Former State Representative Kate Harper credits the Penllyn Village residents for raising the alarm. In a 2019 blog post celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Penllyn Woods' preservation, she points out that the effort to preserve Penllyn Woods was a seven-year battle. "Candidly, the group knew they had to 'keep the pressure on' with the local township supervisors when setbacks and lawsuits threatened to

Community members show their support for saving Penllyn Woods in the 1990s.

derail the preservation effort, but they also publicly supported the Township officials, too, in spending the money to buy the land, in Letters to the Editor and in answering the critics."

Carol says that Dave Froehlich brought the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) into the picture. Dave is the former Executive Director of WVWA. The organization is now called Wissahickon Trails. "The Watershed printed materials for us. We had soul food dinners, meetings at the church, just to keep people updated. And the Watershed purchased the 'Save Penllyn Woods' signs. That's when the Township started to listen." She says that Wissahickon Trails provided information to the Township about how sensitive this particular parcel of land is. "The land didn't need to be developed. You would have destroyed a neighborhood, the ecology."

The Penllyn Woods and Wissahickon Trails team recruited like-minded citizens to work with them, including Saly Glassman, Debbie Simon, Phoebe Driscoll and Kate. "It was a time there were no partisan politics involved," Carol explains. "Lower Gwynedd was much smaller then. It was the first time in my lifetime that we saw Lower Gwynedd working together for the common good for all. Lower Gwynedd (Township Supervisors) put their butts on the line for this." She stops for a moment to think about the magnitude of what a group of motivated citizens achieved in preserving Penllyn Woods. "It's not just the ball fields, it's the land, too. It's a gem that has been sitting there for years and years."

FALL & WINTER ON OUR PRESERVES

PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY: **KRISTY MORLEY**

The changing of the seasons brings changes to our trails and preserves. Fall and winter are a great time to get outside and look for a variety of plants and animals. Here are some of the things you might see when you visit our preserves:



A ladybeetle aggregation – Large groups of ladybeetles form in the fall in preparation for winter hibernation. Having spent the summer eating aphids, these insects are looking for a

protected spot under loose bark or in leaf litter to survive the winter.



Baby snapping turtle – Eggs that were laid over the summer hatch in early fall. These tiny turtles make their way to the nearest body of water and can sometimes be seen crossing roads or trails.

Pokeweed – Just one example of a variety of native plants that produce fall berries, including viburnum, crabapples, and poison ivy. These berries fuel the migration of numerous bird species.



Bird nests – Winter can be a great time to view bird nests, like this Baltimore Oriole nest.



Mouse nest – Mice use milkweed or cattail fluff to make a secure winter home. Look for these billowy nests in the dense branches of evergreens or even on top of old bird nests.



Yellow-bellied sapsucker – This winter visitor is most easily identified by the rows of small holes it drills in trees. These holes cause the tree to leak sap, which the bird eats using its specialized brush-tipped tongue.

OUR MISSION

We inspire and engage diverse communities of people to protect, steward, and enjoy the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

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