



CURRENTS

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Peace of Mind, Every Quarter Mile

BY GABRIELLE FATULA

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: TOM VOTER



Trails invite us to slow down, breathe deeply, and connect with the natural world. But being in nature also comes with an unspoken truth: sometimes it can feel vulnerable to be out on your own. What if something goes wrong, and no one knows exactly where you are?

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Wissahickon Trails' conservation team, the Green Ribbon Trail is now safer and easier to navigate. Over recent months, staff worked to install mile markers and emergency locator signs every quarter mile along the 10.5-mile trail. This initiative positively enhances the experience for visitors, from seasoned runners to families enjoying leisurely weekend walks.

Upon first glance, the signs may appear straightforward, yet they serve a remarkable purpose. Each one is directly tied to Montgomery County's emergency response system, ensuring 911 dispatchers and first responders can quickly locate individuals in the event of an emergency. The markers also clearly indicate the Township you're in, helping visitors stay oriented as they move along the trail.

The numbering system now begins at the southern terminus of the trail, with mile 0.0 at Skippack Pike, and mile 10.5 is now at the trail's northern terminus in Upper Gwynedd. This change isn't just practical for today's visitors; it also helps lay the groundwork for the future, when the Cross County



Trail is completed through Fort Washington State Park and intersects with the Green Ribbon at Skippack Pike. It also leaves open the possibility of a future extension north beyond Upper Gwynedd.

These updates represent a win for trail users and for the region. They reflect Wissahickon Trails' ongoing commitment to ensuring the Green Ribbon Trail is not only beautiful but also safe and easy to navigate. None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our conservation team, whose expertise and behind-the-scenes work keep our trails welcoming and secure. With these enhancements in place, visitors can focus on enjoying their time outdoors without worrying about the what-ifs.



So, the next time you're on the Green Ribbon Trail, keep an eye out for the new signage. They may be small, but they carry a big promise: peace of mind, every quarter mile. Happy exploring!

Let the Wild Be WILD

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: MARGARET ROHDE



BY **MARGARET ROHDE**

Gray catbird nestling at Crossways Preserve

The environments we spend our time in are shaped by what we want to see. In backyards, parks, and even many nature preserves, there is usually some level of cultivation, taming, and intervention. Our goals for these spaces and how much we manage their wildness depend on our perspective of what is beautiful and desirable to look at.

It is human nature to tend the land and many of us have felt the satisfaction that comes from cultivating an orderly, leaf-free yard. There is beauty in the intentionally planted garden and there can be wildlife benefits within our more landscaped areas, and it is a lovely thing to take pride in their management; at the same time, there is a different and equally important beauty and value in wildness, and in the complexity that nature creates on its own.

Other living beings need that complexity. A patch of land left to its own devices that forms a mix of flowers, grasses, and brambles (both



Eastern Cottontail at Crossways Preserve

living and dead) might look “messy” to us but provides essential food and shelter for our non-human kin. For a songbird trying to find shelter from the cold, the presence of a brushy pile of fallen branches, where small pockets of warmer air are held, can make or break survival. In the summer, that same spot can be a nesting space for both birds and mammals, where they can safely raise young. Without autumn leaves covering the ground in layers, fireflies and countless moth



White-tail Deer at Crossways Preserve

species would have no place for their life cycles to begin and unfold, and if the landscape does not include the standing, dead stalks of summer’s weeds, insects like ladybugs and bees would have nowhere to overwinter. The seasonal changes of the natural world create and perpetuate habitat for so many living things and these are just a few examples of the way life can be more abundant and supported when nature is left to design and organize itself.

It isn’t easy to change our perceptions around what is aesthetically pleasing, but if we can embrace a little more wildness here and there (in our own yards, parks, and preserves), then we create the possibility of places for there to be more wild *life*. And if we want future generations to experience the wonder of witnessing hundreds of fireflies light up a summer sky, we need more of those places than ever before.

Building Conservation Together: Our Community-Centered Approach

BY ERIN MCCOOL

This past winter, we launched an exciting pilot program that brought together community members to reimagine how we approach conservation. Through personal outreach, individual interviews, and collaborative meetings, we formed a cohort focused on the communities neighboring Penllyn Natural Area and the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve. The relationships we have built and findings from our initial pilot will continue to shape our work for years to come.

Community-centered conservation is an approach to environmental stewardship that emphasizes local participation, meaningful collaboration, and building environmentally literate and resilient communities. It means bringing diverse ideas, knowledge, and perspectives into our conservation work, broadening our view and



Sunset at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve

helping people connect with nature and our preserves in more meaningful ways. The benefits are far-reaching. Ecologically, local stewardship leads to better watershed outcomes, and conservation practices endure when communities have a stake in their success. Socially, we tap into valuable local knowledge about land use history, flooding patterns, and seasonal changes while strengthening networks between neighbors, schools, and municipal leaders. These community-backed initiatives build adaptability and support by demonstrating grassroots demand and shared responsibility.

Our six-month pilot included a network mapping activity, preserve visits, and a series of 4 council meetings focused on community, climate, and connection to nature. Participants provided invaluable feedback on our 10-year conservation management plans and shared insights about safety and accessibility. As we look ahead, we're measuring success and identifying resources to scale this work, knowing that the Wissahickon watershed makes life better for everyone who lives and works here, especially when we protect it together.



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: MARGARET RONDIE

5 Preserves, 1 Trail Connection Is Open

BY ERIN MCCOOL

After decades of planning and collaboration, Wissahickon Trails is proud to announce the completion of our 5 Preserves, 1 Trail initiative. This project creates a continuous 9-mile trail segment of the Green Ribbon Trail that connects five nature preserves across Whitpain and Whitemarsh Townships. This milestone represents years of partnership with public and private supporters, including Whitpain Township, PECO, Montgomery County, PA DCNR, and countless generous donors who contributed \$4.2 million to make this vision a reality. Since 2018, we've preserved 51 additional acres of open space, acquired two critical trail easements, and invested in thoughtful enhancements like an equestrian bridge and stepping-stone crossings at Prophecy Creek. The final connection, made possible through a trail easement at Willow Lake Farm and completed with support from PECO and a donation honoring Phil and Barbara Albright, now links 436 acres of protected land for everyone to enjoy.

This achievement reflects our deep commitment to ensuring that everyone who lives and works in the Wissahickon watershed can access nature close to home. We're grateful to residential property owners, especially the Lea family at Willow Lake Farm, whose decades of generosity; from conservation easements in 1993 to the recent trail easement; exemplifies the power of sharing private land for public benefit. Their willingness to open their property allows trail visitors to walk seamlessly between Armentrout Preserve, Camp Woods, Briar Hill Preserve, Willow Lake Preserve, and Prophecy Creek Park, creating an interconnected network of natural spaces that serve as havens for both wildlife and people.

This spring, we're thrilled to announce a series of hikes to celebrate and explore this new connection, co-led by local and community leaders who are committed to preserving access to nature for all who live and work in the Wissahickon Watershed. These guided walks will offer an opportunity to experience the full 9-mile trail system and learn about the natural and cultural history of the preserves. Stay tuned for specific dates, which will be announced in early 2026. Looking ahead, we're also excited to build on this momentum by connecting the 5 Preserves trail system to the Green Ribbon Trail along the Wissahickon Creek and the Cross County Trail, a major regional route spanning the Philadelphia suburbs. These connections will further expand access to the natural landscape that makes our communities such special places to live, work, and play. As we continue this work, we remain committed to bringing together public and private partners to protect the habitats and ecosystems that benefit us all, ensuring that open space remains accessible for generations to come.

Clear Roads, Salty Waters: the Hidden Costs of Winter Safety

BY ERIN LANDIS

Salinity of freshwater streams has been increasing over the past 20+ years due to increasing road salt use, an insidious and often invisible threat to clean water.¹ Yet, salt literally saves lives! Road salts can be used to support public safety while minimizing environmental damage by reducing overapplication and addressing improper salt storage and spills. Curtailing these incidents that allow salt to migrate to streams and groundwater will not affect public safety.

Excess salt is persistent in the environment and poses a serious risk to waterway health. Freshwater wildlife cannot thrive in salty conditions, and some urban streams in Philadelphia have seen salinity levels exceed those of ocean water!² Salt also impacts groundwater and drinking water, a concern for individuals with cardiovascular conditions. We are also footing a big bill: according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, corrosion to vehicles and infrastructure nationally costs about \$5 billion in repairs annually.³

Across Pennsylvania, advocates are working to protect water quality while still prioritizing safety. The Stroud Water Research Center, the Izaak Walton League of America, and the Pennsylvania Road Salt Action Working Group mobilize volunteers to monitor salt use and promote smarter winter practices.

House Bill 664, under consideration by the PA Senate, would direct PennDOT and the Department of Environmental Protection to create best-practice guidelines that minimize environmental harm while maintaining road safety. A statewide guide that sets minimum standards for best practices is a good place to start in providing solutions.

What Can You Do?

- Follow House Bill 664 and contact your legislators.
- Talk to your municipality about local salt application.
- Consider joining the Pennsylvania Road Salt Action Working Group.
- Spread the word and reduce your own salt application when possible..

Passionate residents making their voices heard are the best force for change!

Sources:

- 1 - <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/chloride-salinity-and-dissolved-solids>
- 2 - <https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia-salt-roads-environment-delaware-river-brandywine-tookany-tacony-20220111.html>
- 3 - <https://www.epa.gov/snep/winter-coming-and-it-tons-salt-our-roads>

YOUR COMMUNITY AT WORK



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

Dodsworth Run Preserve Eagle Scout Project

Jules Lehrer, a local Scout, completed their Eagle project at Dodsworth Run Preserve in October. Jules designed and installed a pollinator garden, planted with native species that will provide resources for butterflies.

Pollution Incident in Rose Valley Creek



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

An astute trail user reported a pollution incident in the Rose Valley Creek, which flows to the Wissahickon.

Wissahickon Trails staff alerted local authorities, who initiated professional remediation. Thanks to the people keeping a sharp eye on the creek, and know that you can always report a suspected spill or pollution event to local authorities!

Jarrettown Elementary Gets a Rain Barrel



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Jarrettown Elementary School received a new rain barrel to use in their student garden and support early understanding of stormwater capture and reuse!

Germantown Academy Summer Camp Partnership



PHOTO: JEFF LINTON

Students ages 6 through 12 participated in a Summer Camp collaboration with Germantown Academy and explored the Wissahickon Creek and the watershed to learn about threats to stream health, macroinvertebrates (stream insects), and more!

Evans-Mumbower Mill Open House Volunteers



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Our monthly open houses at the Evans-Mumbower Mill continue to be supported by a wonderfully dedicated group of volunteers. Both kind and knowledgeable, the Mill's open house volunteers are integral in providing a unique experience for everyone who visits the Mill.

56th Annual Wissahickon Creek Clean-Up



PHOTO: KRISTIAN SMITH

373 volunteers joined us for the annual Creek Clean Up along the Wissahickon and together, we removed 191 bags of trash and 12 tires from the Creek and its tributaries.

Pollinator Garden Installation/Volunteers

Working closely with students in the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit's Discovery Class, a new pollinator garden has been installed just outside the courtyard at the



PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER

Four Mills Barn. Students helped clear invasive plants and planted a variety of pollinator-friendly, indigenous species in their place. Ongoing maintenance will be supported by volunteers as tasks change with the seasons.

Tex Mex & Walk the Wissahickon Volunteers

Two of our largest events, the Tex Mex 5k and Walk the Wissahickon, were supported by a significant amount of volunteer help. Over 90 volunteers



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

devoted a total of 280 hours to help execute these community events. Without this volunteer support, we simply would not be able to provide these meaningful experiences for the people who live and work within the watershed.

The Conservation Crew



PHOTO: TOM VOTER

Conservation Crew members assisted staff in replacing two small bridges just South of the W. Prospect Ave. Entrance to the Green Ribbon Trail. The new bridges are wider, lower to the ground, and heavily secured in place to better endure the inevitable flood waters.



A Smarter Way to Give Back

BY ANNA MARCHINI

If our local environment is important to you, giving non-cash assets may be one of the most effective ways to help protect it. By donating appreciated investments such as stocks or the required minimum distribution from your IRA, you may reduce or even avoid capital gains taxes while still receiving a charitable deduction. This approach allows you to make a greater impact on the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley without increasing your out-of-pocket contributions. With recent tax law changes, many donors are rethinking the best ways to support the causes they love. Non-cash giving offers an opportunity to align your financial planning with your values, ensuring your resources work harder for both you and our environment. You can discuss your plans with your financial advisor to see what is best for your situation.

When asked why he's chosen to use these strategies to support Wissahickon Trails, donor Brent G. says *"My mother set an example about the importance of giving. I am following in her footsteps because Wissahickon Trails understands that not only do we need to protect open space now, but we must educate our children about environmental issues, so they are prepared when making decisions for themselves and the community."*

The Benefits of Giving the Smarter Way

Save On Taxes: Reduce or avoid capital gains tax while still receiving a charitable deduction for appreciated assets such as a required minimum distribution from your IRA.

Give More, Spend Less: Stretch the impact of your gift without increasing out-of-pocket costs.

Plan With Purpose: Align your financial goals with your values.

The Power of One Small Gift

How symbolic adoptions fuel real conservation BY SAMANTHA DOUGLAS



Over the summer, **48 supporters** chose to symbolically adopt a Monarch butterfly or a bird, not just as a meaningful and unique gift, but as a personal way to

invest in something bigger: the health of our environment and the future of local wildlife.

From August to September staff and volunteers were able to capture, raise, tag and release **47 Monarch butterflies** ahead of their awe-inspiring fall migration. These tags contribute to an international

research effort that tracks their epic journey to the forests of central Mexico; a migration increasingly threatened by habitat loss and climate shifts.

Meanwhile, this summer at our MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station our staff banded **70 new birds** and documented **40**



recaptures. These efforts help us monitor population health and protect vital nesting habitat across our preserves.

Each adoption received helps us fund the supplies,



training, and staff time needed to do this work, but more importantly, it gives us a deeper understanding of our work restoring habitats, species tracking, and ensuring the

survival of birds, butterflies, and so many others who call the Wissahickon Valley home.

What may feel like a small act, a \$25 gift, a certificate in the mail, is in fact a step toward something greater.

Thank you for helping keep the Wissahickon Valley a place where people and nature can thrive.

Education Volunteer Spotlight



BY **ALEX MCWHORTER**

In 2025, Wissahickon Trails will host over 1,700 students for outdoor education experiences. Through partnerships with local schools, homeschool groups, and the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, our organization has the unique opportunity to bring students into nature for unforgettable, hands-on learning opportunities.

Focusing primarily on creek exploration within the Four Mills Nature Reserve and the power of water and gravity at the Evans-Mumbower Mill, these learning experiences take complex ideas and present them as graspable concepts for the ever-surprising minds of elementary, middle, and high school students.

To deliver these concepts to students in a variety of outdoor settings – and keeping the day running smoothly – takes special people. We, as an organization, are so fortunate to have many of those special people in our education volunteers. Joining us from a variety of backgrounds, these dedicated volunteers ensure that students have meaningful experiences. They keep them safe, keep them asking questions, and (do their darndest to) keep them engaged. Many of these volunteers have also been integral in shaping the programs themselves. Their experience over the years has provided unique insight into the planning process as we determine what works best.

To help create the best experience for students and volunteers alike, many of our volunteers have participated in organization-led training focused on leading outdoor discussions, emphasizing student-led observation, and feeling comfortable outside of their comfort zones. We thank all of our education volunteers for their dedication and willingness to learn alongside the students they teach.

Thank you to all of our 2025 education volunteers:

Judy Blubaugh
Bob Brockway
Linda Brockway
Joan Carpenter
Erin Crump
Duane Deaner
Michael Ecker
Barb Frankl
Jyl Harrington

Dee Hillas
Mitchell Hirsch
Eunhee Hwang
Todd Jackson
Nancy Kreider
Joe Maglaty
Suzanne Marinell
Bob Meyer
Malcolm Montgomery

Robert Pace
Don Rand
Shawn Robbins
Kristen Roosa-Beck
Nancy Smith
Victoria Tapia
Mary Ann Vettese
Ann Western
Laura Zanini



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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TEX MEX 5K

CREEK CLEANUP

CRAFT BEER BY THE CREEK

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