

Growing a Generation of Environmental Stewards

PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER



BY **ERIN MCCOOL**

Picture a sixth grader crouching beside a cold, clear creek, water rushing over her fingers, notebook in hand. She's not on a field trip. This is her science class. She's collecting water chemistry data, analyzing it, questioning her process, and beginning to understand how the health of this stream is connected to her own.

This is what's taking shape across the Wissahickon Watershed.

We are building a connected K-12 pathway of environmental learning grounded in Pennsylvania's STEELS standards (Science, Technology, Engineering, Environmental Literacy and Sustainability) and woven into everyday school life. Students encounter the Wissahickon watershed repeatedly throughout their academic careers, with each experience building on the last, deepening knowledge, sharpening skills, and connecting to the living world around them.

Questions like these are visible, Rather than starting with abstract concepts, students begin with local phenomena.

"Why does this section of the creek run cloudy after a rainstorm?"

"Why do some neighborhoods flood while others don't?"

These are visible, urgent puzzles happening right outside the classroom door. By investigating authentic environmental challenges, students connect complex scientific concepts to everyday life. As they investigate, debate, and propose solutions they build reading, writing, and communication skills. They also begin to recognize that access to nature and a healthy watershed are integral to what makes this region such a remarkable place to live.

Picture fourth graders gathered at the forest's edge, examining soil teeming with life. Nearby, eighth graders review stream data, comparing their measurements with past records and engaging in scientific debate about what the numbers mean. A high school student who first visited the creek years ago now presents her environmental research to community stakeholders; confident and prepared.



PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER

These scenes aren't exceptional, this is how we are working with education leaders to re-shape what environmental learning looks like in schools.

School systems represent one of the largest concentrations of people living and working in our watershed. By engaging students and their families, we reach significant portion of our community and prepare the next generation to steward this precious resource long into the future. Every student who graduates environmentally literate, equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate a complex and changing world, is a win for the watershed and for all who call it home.



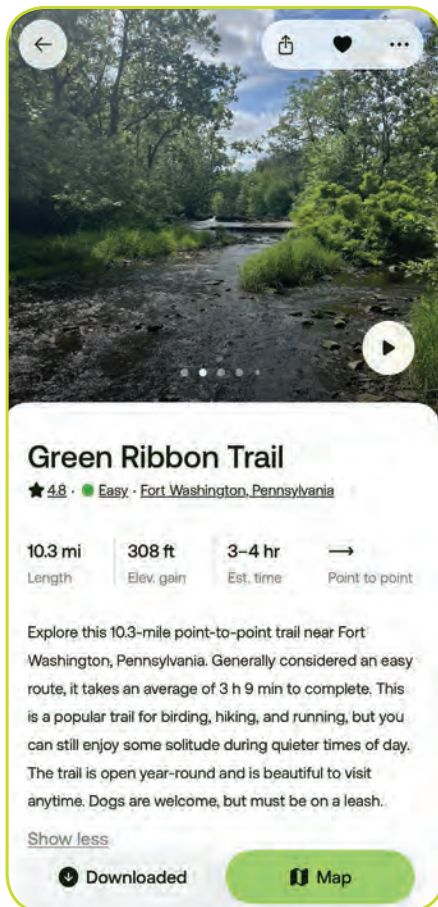
PHOTOS: DAVID FREED

Hike with Confidence Using AllTrails

BY **TOM VOTER**

People discover our trails in many ways, through friends, neighbors, and now through AllTrails, a widely used app with a simple mission: "To help the world find its way outside."

As a part of our efforts to encourage our community to hike locally, Wissahickon Trails is now a Public Land Partner with AllTrails. Through this partnership, we are able to create curated hiking routes discoverable directly within the app. Users can search for trails near them or explore the map showing where to begin. The app provides detailed

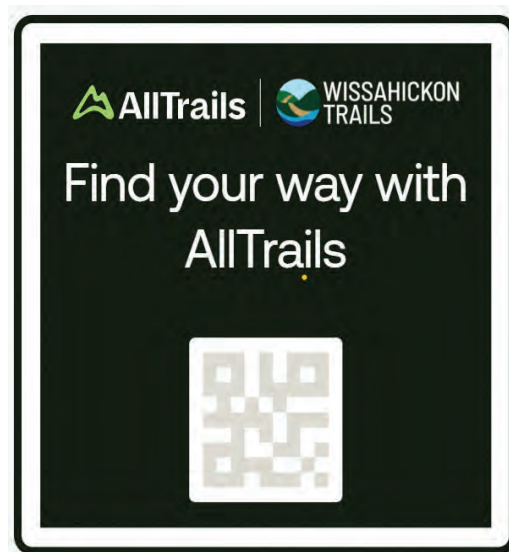


Example of a Wissahickon Trails route page on AllTrails, showing trail details, route maps, and recent hiker reviews.

information about mileage, elevation, trail surfaces, estimated hiking time, and more. Hikers can also post reviews and photos after their hike, giving others an idea of what to expect and provide up-to-date information about recent conditions.

This partnership also supports our accessibility efforts. Knowing what to expect before setting out, and being able to follow a map on your phone empowers hikers to explore with confidence.

"I've lived in this area my whole life, I can't believe I've never been here!" It's a phrase we hear often, and one we're excited to hear even more as new people discover our trails. Wissahickon Trails is proud to collaborate with AllTrails, and we are excited to use the platform to help more people discover our trail network.



COMING SOON: Scan QR codes at trailheads to discover recommended routes in the AllTrails app.

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

1,037 community members supported our mission with a donation, monthly giving, and designated gifts.

2,803 community members deepened their connection to the natural world by engaging with us through our events, nature programs, lectures, and hikes.

97 Green Ribbon Circle donors provided nearly \$28,000 through monthly donations to support our core work.

22 local organizations, clubs, and businesses devoted their time and energy to bettering their local environment through hands-on volunteering.

91 birds were studied at our MAPS bird banding station at Crossways Preserve.

770 observations were made by 57 observers of 451 species and were recorded in iNaturalist on Wissahickon Trails properties.

25 trail improvement projects completed by staff and volunteers.

79 community science volunteers collected data across 486 hours

103 corporations, foundations, local businesses, and local organizations supported our work through financial donations.

2,231 students engaged in our education programs.

739 total volunteers devoted 5,131 hours of their time across the breadth of the organization's efforts.

Your Community AT WORK



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

New Creek Watchers

A group of 9 new Creek Watchers have begun their onboarding process. This group of volunteers is responsible for monitoring dedicated sites along the Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries, tracking month-to-month changes in erosion, temperature, algae, and more.

Education Volunteer Training



PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER

Dedicated volunteers continued their learning by participating in a session about strategies for encouraging questions during outdoor exploration. This is part of our ongoing professional learning for education volunteers.



PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER

Serve the Preserve

At Penllyn Natural Area, community members have begun to support our monthly Serve the Preserve program—a series of projects designed to enrich the health of the plant and animal life of the preserve while also improving the experience of trail users that visit. From April to October of this year, monthly stewardship days will invite volunteers to be part of the restoration efforts. Helping reclaim areas of the preserve from unwanted vegetation, planting native species, and improving flooding resilience are just a few areas of focus. To learn more, reach out to alex@wissahickontrails.org.



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

Maple Sugaring Volunteers

41 volunteers devoted over 200 hours (including training) to helping present another successful Maple Sugaring Festival. Performing a variety of roles, these dedicated volunteers were central to facilitating such a beloved community event.



PHOTO: ANDREW CONBOY

Community Canopy Project

Wissahickon Trails partnered with Community Canopy Project at Piszek Preserve to remove Callery Pear and Bradford Pear. After, the stumps were treated with an herbicide to prevent them from resprouting.

Volunteer Spotlight Karen Ciprero

BY ALEX MCWHORTER

Karen Ciprero joined the very first Salamander Monitoring cohort in 2019 and has been a consistent presence in the program ever since. As part of our Community Science efforts at Camp Woods Preserve, Karen has been monitoring the same site for seven years in search of Eastern Red-backed Salamanders. These salamanders, which are sensitive to a variety of pollutants as well as fluctuations in temperature and moisture, help us understand the vitality of local ecosystems and the health of our preserves.



An Eastern Red-Backed Salamander

Over seven years, Karen's dedication to the project has made her an invaluable partner in this work. Consistent, long-term volunteers not only generate reliable data, but also gives our staff the ability to devote time to improving projects, introducing new opportunities, and training new volunteers.

In addition to monitoring our local amphibians, Karen and her family have participated in Creek Clean Ups and several of our programs and events over the years. We (and the salamanders) thank Karen for all of her support!



A Green Restaurant Hosting a Green Race for a Green Cause
5k Race for Open Space
Wed, June 24, 2026.





Rooted Wonders: The Everyday Magic of Trees

BY **ERIN LANDIS**

Trees in neighborhoods and parks can be easy to overlook, but their impact is anything but ordinary. Trees quietly perform magic every day: filtering water, absorbing pollution, cooling cities, and providing habitat for wildlife. The closer we look, the clearer it becomes: these giants are among the most valuable resources we have to support clean water, sustainable landscapes, and healthy communities.

Clean Water



During heavy rainfall, stormwater can erode streambanks, cause flooding, and carry pollutants into waterways. In forests, trees absorb or evaporate

60% of annual rainfall, drastically reducing the negative impacts of stormwater runoff. Streamside trees also provide shade, keeping waterways cool and suitable for aquatic life.

Sustainable Landscapes



The extensive root networks of trees stabilize soil alongside streams and across the landscape. Without this structural support, stormwater can erode stream banks into waterways and shrink property size over time. Trees also provide cover, food, and nesting space for wildlife. Even after a tree has died, it provides decades of value as food and habitat, while ultimately recycling nutrients back into the soil. They also help filter pollutants from water and soil, including excess nutrients from fertilizer, metals, and even oils.

Healthy Communities



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Shade from trees can reduce peak summer temperatures in urban environments and reduce cooling costs. A single tree can remove over

four pounds of air pollutants annually. Studies also link trees to lower stress levels and a greater sense of wellbeing, as well as increase property values.

To Plant a Tree This Spring:

The wonder of trees isn't just something to admire, it's something we can grow! As the saying goes: The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.

 **Choose the right tree for the right place.** Consider how much sunlight and water the tree will receive and how much space is available for it to grow, then pick a species that will be a good match for those conditions. Look for native species that are indigenous to our region, have adapted to the local climate and better support local wildlife.

 **Contact your municipal Shade Tree Commission** or Environmental Advisory Council. They may offer tree sales and guidance for planting a tree, or several of them!

Information in this article is sourced from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Tree Tenders Program.

Connection to Conservation: YOUR SUPPORT AT WORK

BY ANNA MARCHINI & SAMANTHA DOUGLAS

For some, the connection begins with a favorite trail. For others, it's a place to bring their kids to explore nature, or simply a reminder that we are all connected by the land. Whatever the reason, that connection often inspires people to give back in meaningful ways.

At Wissahickon Trails, donations translate directly into year-round stewardship: caring for preserved land, maintaining trails, protecting waterways, and creating opportunities for people to experience nature. This support makes possible the essential work of our conservation team, ensuring trails are ready for visitors day after day.

“ We recently opened a DAF (Donor-Advised Fund) and can better plan our gifts to Wissahickon Trails this way. When we walk the trails, it feels good to know that we helped take care of this place.**”**

— M.C., donor since 2018

Together with donors like you, we are advancing trail projects to improve access for more people, connecting students to the creek through hands-on education, and continuing on-the-ground work that improves the health of our waterways.

Whatever connects you to this place, we hope you will choose to support it in a way that works for you.

Ways to Give



DONATION:

Make a one-time gift, or join our monthly donors in the Green Ribbon Circle.



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION:

Donors ages 70 ½ or older can make a tax-free gift from their IRA.



DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS:

Suggest a grant through your DAF any time of the year.



ALWAYS CONSULT

your financial advisor or tax professional to determine the best plan for you.



STOCK GIFTS:

Donate your appreciated stocks for potential tax advantages.



CONTACT Anna Marchini, Deputy Director, with any questions at anna@wissahickontrails.org.

Welcoming New Members to Our Board

BY **GABRIELLE FATULA**

Caring for the Wissahickon takes people who believe in the power of protected open space. We're excited to welcome three new members to our Board of Directors who are helping guide this work forward.



Nancy Bednarik

Nancy joins the board following a long career at Merck, where she held a variety of leadership roles including work with the Neighbor of Choice program and utilities and facilities management. Later in her career, she earned a Master's degree in Sustainability Engineering and served as an adjunct professor at Villanova, teaching sustainable infrastructure. Nancy has lived along the Green Ribbon Trail in North Wales for many years and is excited to bring her professional experience and long-standing connection to the Wissahickon to support the organization's mission.



Michaelle Fleisher

Michaelle brings decades of financial and organizational leadership experience to the board. Her career spans public accounting as well as roles in both small and large businesses, and she previously served as Wissahickon Trails' Finance and HR Director for nine years. Michaelle and her family have been involved with the organization for more than 15 years through volunteering and community engagement, and she has also served on the boards of the Ambler YMCA and the Wissahickon Valley Public Library.



Joseph L. Maglaty

Joseph joins the board after a nearly 30-year career at Merck. During that time, he managed IT projects supporting research laboratories and later led the company's STEM education outreach efforts with local communities and schools. After retiring, he continued supporting science education initiatives through volunteer work with organizations including the Franklin Institute. Joseph's passion for the outdoors began during graduate school in Colorado and continues today through conservation volunteering and community engagement.

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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