

VISTAS

A publication of Allegheny Land Trust

Spring 2008



From the Executive Director

Land Protection from Islands to Mountain Tops

The year 2007 ended at one of the lowest points for Allegheny Land Trust and 2008 began at one of the highest. I'm not talking about morale...I'm talking about elevation.

Within a three-week span from December 27 to January 17, ALT acquired two properties that couldn't be further apart—vertically—Sycamore Island at river elevation of 716 feet above sea level and a parcel on Mt. Washington at 1,123 feet above sea level, a difference of 407 vertical feet.

This illustrates the diversity of land in Allegheny County and the variety of reasons ALT protects land. These two parcels not only represent extremes in our geography and ecology, they also have very different histories and qualities.

Sycamore Island

ALT acquired Sycamore Island to protect its unique ecology—its hardwood floodplain forest is among the most rare global plant communities and undeveloped river islands are scarce. Its contribution to the river ecosystem provides habitat for native mussels imperiled in our increasingly engineered streams; migrating birds that follow the Allegheny Valley can find refuge there as well as osprey and kingfisher that spend time fishing and nesting along the Allegheny Riparian corridor.

See "From the Executive Director", page 2

Increasing Capacity to Meet Public Demand

John W. Ubinger, Jr., ALT Chairman and President

The research ALT commissioned as part of our strategic planning process in 2006 clearly indicates that there is a significant and growing public demand for the conservation of land in our region.

Each of the issues of *Vistas* we have published following the adoption of our Strategic Plan in the fall of 2006 has kept you up to date on the milestones that we have achieved in the execution of our Plan. Our Greenprint, the centerpiece of ALT's land acquisition strategy, is in place. Our professional staff has been significantly enhanced with the hiring of Rhonda Hagins, our Development Director, and Doug France, our Stewardship Coordinator. Our operations have been made more efficient with the move to our new office space in Sewickley.

To say it another way, as we approach the mid-point of the three-year capacity-building program specified in our 2006 Strategic Plan, I am pleased to report we are on schedule. Even more gratifying, the predictions of the public interest in our land conservation work are being borne out. Since the beginning of 2007 we have acquired two properties (see article at left) adding 25 unique acres to our portfolio of conserved lands. At this moment we are actively

See "Increasing Capacity", page 3

Protecting Pittsburgh's Unique Landscape

Ridgelines, steep slopes and clean water, pages 4 and 5.



Special Donor Issue!

2...Helping to Keep Pittsburgh Green...One Acre at a Time
3...The Importance of the Individual Conservationist
4 and 5...Land Conservation Just for Pittsburgh
6 and 7...Thank You, Donors!

"From the Executive Director", continued from page 1

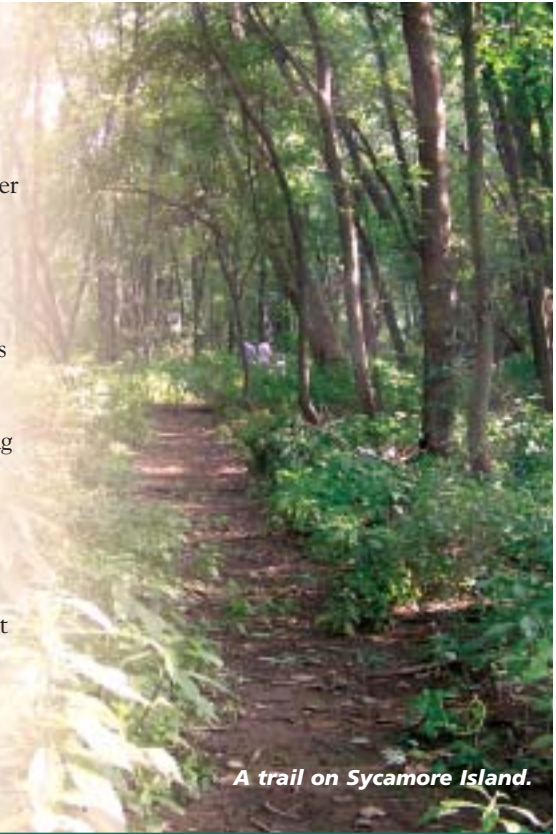
While Sycamore frequently floods, natural ridges in the soil remain above some of the highest waters. In its first deed of sale in 1806, the island was only six acres, but today it is more than 14 acres due to the build-up of silt at the downstream end of the island and, likely, deposits from river dredging. The most important factor for the island's growth could be its location on the inside of a river bend, naturally the zone of deposition in a stream or river. Construction of the river lock system also doubtless assisted Sycamore's growth as the slower moving river deposited more silt.

Mt. Washington

In contrast, the Mt. Washington parcel located on the south side of the mount is high and dry with commanding distant views beyond the West End and Green Tree Hill. This urban parcel provides valuable greenspace and the unique opportunity to experience nature in an urban setting. A parking area and existing trails will provide an entrance into a trail network proposed for the Grand View Scenic Byway Park—a 260-acre park surrounding Mt. Washington.

The public benefits of this forested hillside include a reduction in runoff by the woodland's natural interception of rainfall and the air purification by trees absorbing carbon and filtering particulates, important ecological functions in a region struggling to meet air quality standards. The property also provides habitat for a population of peregrine falcons who nest among the skyscrapers.

The property will be transferred to the city in the future and maintained by the Mt. Washington Community Development Corporation. ALT will hold a conservation easement to ensure that the property remains undeveloped, and continues to provide the community with beauty and an important natural asset in their own back yard.



A trail on Sycamore Island.



Businesses, cars, bicyclists, tall buildings—and healthy shade-bearing street trees—happily co-exist on Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh.

Helping to Keep Pittsburgh and the Region Green... One Acre at a Time

Roy Kraynyk, ALT Executive Director

In its 250th year, Pittsburgh has transformed from a centuries-long industrial center to one of the greenest cities in the U.S.:

- Pittsburgh is second only to Portland, Oregon in the number of LEED certified green buildings.
- Roofs of skyscrapers are being greened with vegetation to reduce the urban heat island effect and reduce runoff.
- Street trees are being better cared for and replaced when needed.
- Gas fueled vehicles are being added to the city's fleet.
- The rivers support recreational boating and fishing like never before.
- City and county parks are getting a facelift.
- "Green" legislation is a commitment by city and regional legislators.

These are great accomplishments and commitments by the public, private and nonprofit sectors to make our city and region a healthy and attractive place to live.

As Pittsburgh strengthens its reputation as a "green city", Allegheny Land Trust is making a significant contribution by protecting green space. Our contribution to the greening movement is quite literal—ALT is conserving the very green space that makes our communities, literally, green. How "green" could a city, a region or community truly be without abundant green space? Help your community stay green by joining or continuing your support of Allegheny Land Trust.

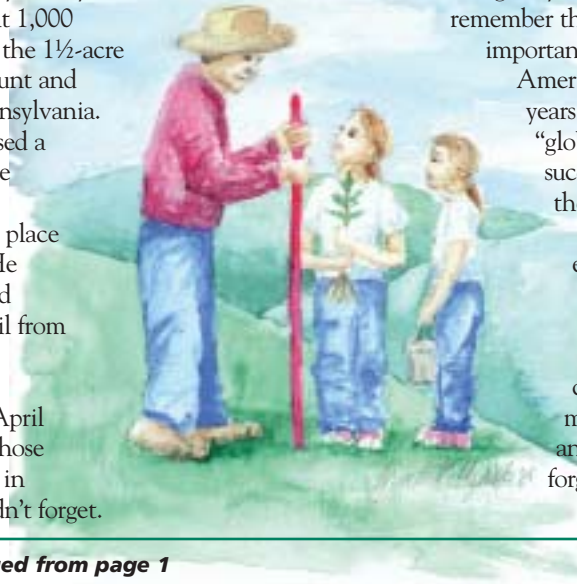
The Importance of the Individual Conservationist

Rhonda M. Hagins, Director of Development

I was eleven years old when I planted my first tree. During a sunny weekend in April, 1977, my nine-year old sister and I helped our uncle plant 1,000 American Red Pine seedlings on the 1½-acre slope that rose from behind my aunt and uncle's farm in northwestern Pennsylvania.

I remember that my uncle used a bright red planting bar to slice the ground to make a hole for each seedling, making sure to carefully place the roots deep into the ground. He explained that when the trees had grown, they would protect the soil from eroding down the slope and help conserve water.

When I think back to that April weekend, I realize that planting those pine seedlings was my first lesson in conservation. It was a lesson I didn't forget.



Now that I'm responsible for raising support and awareness for Allegheny Land Trust's conservation efforts, I still remember the lesson my uncle taught me about the importance of the individual conservationist. The American Red Pines that we planted thirty-one years ago still remind me that regardless of how "global" environmental efforts become, successful conservation will always depend on the initiative of individuals.

It's hard to believe that my niece is eleven years old now. When I make the trip home this April, I'll walk with her through that mature pine grove and explain why it's important that we all become conservationists just like my uncle did with me. My lesson will remain the same as his, and I hope it will be a lesson she, too, doesn't forget.

"Increasing Capacity", continued from page 1

reviewing five properties, totaling more than 250 additional acres. Finally, we are nearing the completion of the design and regulatory approval processes for the construction of the innovative passive treatment system on our Wingfield Pines property to mitigate the abandoned mine discharge which has degraded Chartiers Creek for decades.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Allegheny Land Trust. I had the privilege to be one of the founding board members of this organization. ALT's

accomplishments over the past 15 years, through the efforts of our extraordinarily dedicated directors and staff, have been remarkable.

We also are grateful to our growing group of contributors who share our commitment to conservation and who make our work possible. However, there is much more to be done to help local people save local land for the benefit of our magnificent natural environs and the community we enjoy living in. We look forward to your continued interest in and support of our work.

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VISTAS is underwritten by an anonymous donor. Thank you.

Land Conservation... Just for Pittsburgh.

Roy Kraynyk, ALT Executive Director

JUST AS PITTSBURGH REGION LANDOWNERS, businesses and city and county government are planning buildings and transportation options that are making our area increasingly “green”, Allegheny Land Trust is making land conservation decisions to keep our land green.

Development of land for homes and businesses is a constant in our future. But while it provides jobs for tradespeople and opportunities for residents, it adds pressures to fragile land and an already overburdened infrastructure. Strategic conservation of fragile lands and development plans that protect these lands while preserving natural topography avoids issues such as landslides, sewage overflow into our rivers and streams and reduced air quality before they even become problems.

PROTECTING OUR STEEP SLOPES



Disturbing slide prone Pittsburgh Red Beds and altering the hydrology of this site are two possible causes of the Kilbuck landslide.

Development projects require moving soil—in some cases millions of tons of soil—and sometimes all the vegetation from a site in order to grade the terrain and build the development as planned. The steep slopes of our region exist because they have found their own balance of a combination of highly erosive poor soils and underlying rocks. Because of their composition they are naturally unstable, often held in place only by the vegetation growing on the surface. In addition, the Pittsburgh Red Beds, a clay layer that is found in many municipalities, are notoriously slide prone and naturally given to mass slumping. When either of these unstable types are disturbed by grading or clear cutting of the vegetation that helps to stabilize them, the fragile equilibrium that they have reached over millennia is altered and the result can be catastrophic.

Removing dense woodlands can also destabilize slopes and change the hydrology, or flow of surface and groundwater, of a site. Mature trees and understory layers of vegetation act like skin protecting the soil from washing away when it rains. The tree trunks, branches, leaves and ground cover can intercept up to 76% of the annual precipitation, and the root structure helps to hold the slope in place.

When the vegetative layer is removed, suddenly 100% of the rainfall now reaches the unprotected ground. Most of this rain rapidly runs off the site carrying with it topsoil and other sediments that clog municipal storm pipes and reduce the carrying capacity of streams, which can increase flood frequency. Some rain water finds its way into the ground, which in most cases is good—unless the underlying geology is slide prone. In this case the water acts like a lubricant that can trigger the layers of a slide prone slope to move or fail.

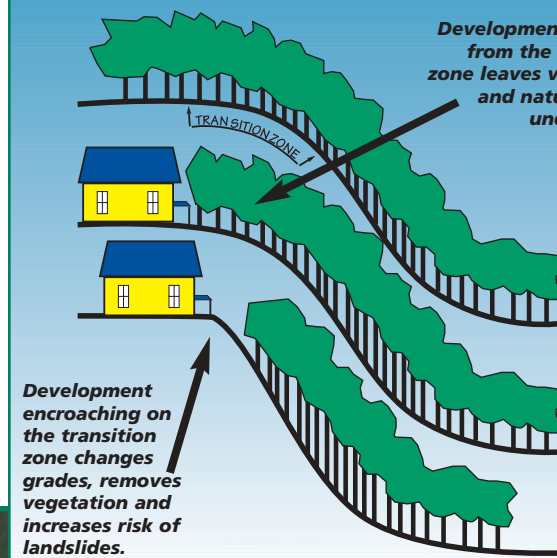
Woodlands also serve to absorb carbon and trap particulates which helps maintain air quality. In a region struggling to meet air quality standards, a comprehensive effort to protect woodlands should be a high priority.

Where possible, developers should work closely with the natural lay of the land and preserve as much woodland as feasible, and compensate for any disturbance or impervious surfaces in a way that doesn't change the hydrology of the land.



Tree removal and grading too close to the ridgeline caused a serious landslide exposing building foundations. Walls are being built in an attempt to stabilize the site, and black plastic being used to prevent water from further saturating the soils. This landslide scar will take decades to heal.

STEEP SLOPE TRANSITION ZONE



PROTECTING OUR RIDGELINES

Perhaps the most vulnerable landscape feature in our area today is the ridgeline. Ridges are very desirable development sites because they can offer commanding views of meandering river and stream valleys and sometimes distant and dramatic views of Pittsburgh.



Good example of development set back from ridge and for the most part maintaining the tree line.

However, as desirable as they may be, developing the ridgeline has its risks. The ridge is the transition zone between the flatter stable ground and the less stable steep slope. When this sensitive transition zone is disturbed by grading and clear cutting of vegetation the risk of that slope sliding increases, just like the steep slope outlined above.

When a slide occurs the community may acquire expensive repairs—the City of Pittsburgh has budgeted between \$200,000 and \$550,000 annually over the past four years for landslide restoration. Blocked railroad lines and highways and other forms of property damage or losses can also occur.

Municipal codes should strictly manage ridgeline development with setbacks from the edge of steep slopes and protection of woodlands that define the ridgeline and stabilize the transition zone.

The aesthetic impact of ridgeline breeching can be judged by the beholder. To someone viewing the ridgeline, a filtered view of a ridge top development through the trees is more attractive than buildings and retaining walls precariously perched atop a barren treeless hillside.

PROTECTING OUR WATERWAYS

Unlike landslides and erosion, water pollution isn't easily seen by the general public, and most people associate water pollution with industrial dumping of chemical substances, not even realizing that the last but biggest problem is our own ancient sewer system used every day.

Allegheny County is being challenged with one of the nation's largest public sewer improvement efforts. This is due to the 414 combined sewer overflow (CSO) structures and an estimated 150 sanitary sewer overflow structures in the county which are spilling billions of gallons of raw sewage into our waterways. As little as one-tenth inch of rain can cause raw sewage to overflow. Therefore, local, state and federal regulatory agencies have taken action and are mandating communities repair their systems, which will cost more than 3 billion dollars. Tap-in restrictions have occurred in some areas of the county. Yet, new development is increasing the volume of stormwater and sewage exacerbating the problem in areas where the system is already overloaded.



Ridge top development provides dramatic and distant views of our region's wooded hills, ridgelines, and meandering river valleys. Is this development trend killing the goose that laid the golden egg?

This especially needs to be addressed by communities where development is a growing trend, because pollutants dumped into a waterway in one community flow into the next without stopping, affecting people who have no control over the source.

STRATEGIC LAND CONSERVATION

Development without consideration of the land's natural assets and structures can increase the risk of landslides, the frequency and height of flood events and the amount of raw sewage in our waterways. One solution to all the issues above is strategic land conservation. Allegheny Land Trust is working hard to conserve the land that helps address these problems and we are also working hard to position land conservation as a solution in the minds of local and county decision makers.

Strategic Conservation Practices to Protect Our Ridgelines, Our Hillside and Our Waterways

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in memory of George Myer

Every attempt has been made to accurately list contributors to Allegheny Land Trust for the period January 1–December 31, 2007. If there are any errors or omissions, please accept our apologies and please call 412-741-2750 or email us at admin@alleghenylandtrust.org so that we may correct our records. Thank you.

Storytime at Chartiers Creek Day 2007 at Wingfield Pines, Upper St. Clair.





Helping local people save local land.

Suite 206A
409 Broad Street
Sewickley, PA 15143

www.alleghenylandtrust.org

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Allegheny Land Trust has a new view!

We're now located in downtown Sewickley—our new address is above.
Check www.alleghenylandtrust.org for more information.

VISTAS

UPCOMING EVENTS

2008 Venture Outdoors Festival

Washington's Landing
May 17; 11am – 6pm
Remember to stop by ALT's booth and pick up a Sycamore tree to celebrate our recent acquisition of Sycamore Island.

Rally 2008, Annual National Land Conservation Conference

September 18-21
Join ALT and other area conservation organizations in welcoming over 2000 conservation professionals to Pittsburgh; ALT will be hosting a field trip to Sycamore Island.

For more information on volunteering, please contact Rhonda Hagins at rhagins@alleghenylandtrust.org or to sign up for the conference visit www.lta.org

What will be your legacy?

This land was here before us and will exist long after we're gone, but we can choose the mark we leave on it.

You can make sure that generations after us will be able to enjoy the same views and activities we do today by helping to conserve the land we cherish.

Allegheny Land Trust is charged with making the right choices in land conservation, choices that range from biodiversity to stormwater management to simply preserving the unique landscape of our region.

Consider including a donation to the Allegheny Land Trust in your will or trust, and help us protect the land we cherish for those who will follow us. Call 412-741-2750 or visit www.alleghenylandtrust.org



Canoeing on the Ohio River.

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Allegheny Regional Asset District

