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# VISTAS

An Allegheny Land Trust Publication

Spring 2019



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### In Memory of Fitzhugh Brown

Fitzhugh Brown supported ALT's work for years. We are saddened by his passing, and will remember the impact his support has had on our region's conservation. Donations in his name are still coming in into 2019. We appreciate his and his family's support over the years.

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Michael Vollmer  
Beth Weber  
Eric and Kathleen White  
Vicki & Roy Wiegand  
Rick & Christi Wilcox  
Donald and Mary Williams





A small stream flows through a prospective ALT green space. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

# Building Upon 25 Years of Land Conservation

by Chris Beichner | President & CEO

We have been so fortunate to serve a changing Pittsburgh region for the past 25 years. Since 1993, we have worked in numerous communities to protect over 2,500 acres of green space.

As we conclude our 25-year celebration and move into opportunities this year, we would like to take a moment to recognize our 2018 successes and thank YOU for helping us to achieve new heights in land conservation as shown in the infographic to the right.

Thank you for your financial contributions, which led to our most productive year ever in conserving land. Thank you for offering your time by volunteering at our many conservation areas to ensure we care for and enhance the land we intend to protect in perpetuity. Thank you for making us aware when green space is endangered and when the community feels strongly about conserving it. Thank you for participating in our education programs, which help connect future generations with the value of nature and the protection of it. And, thank you for trusting us to do this important work in your community.

We know that your contributions and participation are vital to

conserving and caring for current and future protected lands. You should know that we are building our capacity and planning for the future. As an example, we hired Alyson Fearon in May 2018 to focus full-time on our urban community conservation efforts to help address the region's resiliency including issues with landslides, flooding, and food deserts.

You should also know we are finishing up the final details of our next multi-year strategic plan with a renewed resolve in conserving high-quality land that is threatened by development, caring for the land we protect in a sustainable way, and helping current and future generations understand the value and importance of green space and its protection. More details about our new strategic plan will be shared in a future VISTAS.

So, again, thank you for helping to bring these efforts and the successes of our past and future to fruition. Without you, we lack the resources to fulfill our mission, and we look forward to continuing our community partnerships for the next 25 years and beyond.





# notes

## FROM THE LAND:

### What Does Protecting an Acre Look Like?

by Roy Kraynyk | VP of Land Protection & Capital Projects

**W**hat's in a number? We frequently report on the acres that we have protected and write about the benefits that green space provides our neighborhoods, such as scenic beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, and wildlife habitat as some of the reasons we work every day to protect remaining green space in Allegheny County. And, we are very happy to announce that last year ALT completed a record number of projects, protecting 411.3 acres!

As a counter to our typical perspective, let's see what this number represents through the lens of prevention. For this exercise, let's assume the 411 acres were zoned residential (average ½-acre lots), the land was entirely wooded and 75% developable. The balance of land is difficult to develop because it is too steep or wet with wetlands, streams, and floodplain.

Given these parameters, the following represents the amount of impacts that protecting this land prevented:

Building lots = 616

Impervious surface = 60 acres (driveways, roads, and buildings based on 10% lot coverage per home + and 10% of the developed land for access roads)

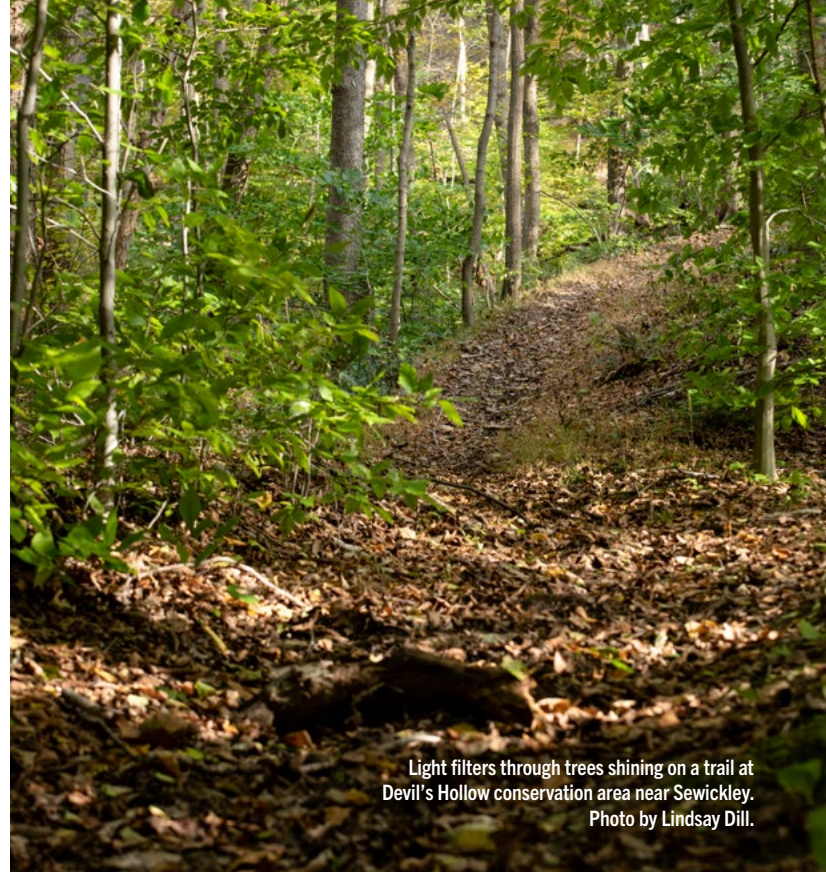
Woodland loss = 226 acres (based on 80% of each lot cleared for house, driveway, and lawn)

Increase in stormwater runoff = 186 million gallons per year (based on 40" of annual precipitation)

Loss of carbon sink = 900,000 pounds of carbon not captured by 226 acres of trees that were removed

Vehicle trips per day = 6,160 (based on 10 vehicle trips per day per household)

Schools = 160 more students (based on the US Census average family size of 2.26 in Allegheny County and 0.26 children per household)



Light filters through trees shining on a trail at Devil's Hollow conservation area near Sewickley.  
Photo by Lindsay Dill.

The intensity of the impact of these factors on quality of life, water quality, flooding, traffic congestion, and others will vary widely depending on the specific location of the development and surrounding land uses. The traffic impacts to a rural community may be less than a densely-populated suburb, but the scenic impacts to the rural community are more significant. The stormwater and flooding impacts would be more dangerous if the development were in an existing flood-prone watershed.

As ALT looks forward to 2019, we consider these factors as we vet opportunities for land protection. We target land protection where it will have the greatest public benefit to the surrounding, downstream, and downwind communities. Right now, we have 7 projects in 7 municipalities throughout Allegheny County totaling 335 acres in our sights. Some are under contract and others are in negotiations. The land expands county parks and farms, protects scenic rail/trail corridors and stream banks, and adds protected green space and outdoor recreation opportunities for more communities.

Once again, we couldn't have this success were it not for the support we receive from our members like you who demonstrate that the community supports local land conservation.

Every major private and public funder that we seek large grants from wants to know about the public support that we receive. Thanks to you and others, we are able to demonstrate a sustained and growing membership. In addition to bringing strong competitive projects to our funding partners, we can demonstrate strong community support, which helps to get our grant requests awarded.

Together, let's make 2019 another successful year!

# Addressing Our Region's Challenges: LANDSLIDES AND LAND TRUSTS

by Lindsay Dill | Marketing Communications Director

Pittsburgh experienced the wettest year in its history in 2018, which brought on headaches, heartaches, and wallet-aches to communities affected by the dozens of landslides caused in part by increased rainfall. Climate scientists predict that more and heavier rainfall will become the norm for our region, and 2019 is already off to a wet start.



An explorer stands on the steep hillside of Mossie Slopes conservation area, which was protected in-part to ensure its steep slopes remain undeveloped. Photo by Lindsay Dill.



A photo of a landslide in Kilbuck Township that occurred during development preparations on a slide-prone slope. Photo courtesy of DEP.



ALT staff member Emilie Rzotkiewicz and Board member Beth Dutton gaze at the steep hillside of Barking Slopes conservation area. This stunning, riverside green space was protected in-part to ensure its slopes remain untouched. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

As a result, municipal officials are grappling with how to deal with associated complications like flooding and landslides. The City of Pittsburgh, for example, responded to last year's landslide frequency by raising its annual remediation budget from \$3 million to more than \$6 million.

Landslides are defined as any downslope movement of soil, rock, debris, or earth caused by gravity, often influenced by environmental and human factors. The geological make-up of our region's soil, the large percentage of acreage consisting of hillsides, and careless past development patterns contribute to a significant number of landslides in our region. Couple our steep, clay-laden slopes with heavy rain and frequent freeze-thaw cycles, and we have a significant regional landslide issue.

In the city limits alone, steep slopes account for approximately 11% of the city's landscape. Research in 2004 by Carnegie Mellon University's Studio for Creative Inquiry's 3 Rivers 2nd Nature found that 46% of the hillsides defining Allegheny, Monongahela, Ohio, and Youghiogheny River valleys in Allegheny County were developed and 54% remain wooded. It is likely that this ratio has changed with more hillside development in recent years.

Land conservation, frequently led by conservation land trusts like ALT, can serve as a significant tool in addressing this serious regional challenge. One acre of green space protects about 327 trees, whose root systems help to stabilize loose earth and absorb about 860,000 gallons of rainwater annually.

We can proactively avoid more landslides by protecting land on and surrounding our slopes, ensuring undisturbed and rainwater-absorbing surfaces. Additionally, when landslides do inevitably occur on our steepest of slopes, despite preserved flora and land, the heartache is contained only to

temporarily-closed trails rather than to forcibly-vacated residents.

In our region, ALT has acted as a community partner in addressing landslides by permanently protecting landslide-prone slopes, providing environmental education, and working with neighborhoods and municipalities to take action to protect our slopes.

In the face of losing 2,000 acres of green space each year to development, ALT conserves land above, on, and near slopes as a strategic component in a comprehensive solution to the challenge of preventing landslides. We need to work more urgently to protect our slopes, watersheds, and trees to avoid future harm done by increasing heavy rain events and warming weather. While development on or too near ridgelines and slopes may be tempting for the scenic views and the tax revenue generated, it is essential that communities take proactive steps to avoid disturbing these unstable lands to avoid significant damage and costs caused by catastrophic slides.

In addition to land protection, ALT works with communities to help them identify their slide-prone areas with data found on our online Greenprint Planning Tool <[tools.wprdc.org/urban-greenprint/](https://tools.wprdc.org/urban-greenprint/)> and by consulting with representatives on the best ways to write and enforce zoning ordinances to protect slopes.

Finally, ALT is working with current and future generations of our region's stewards by providing environmental education to all ages on environmental topics including watersheds, which are heavily linked with landslide challenges. We hope that by teaching more about the causes of landslides, we can better equip current and future leaders to proactively address the issue with the right tools to make a difference.





A volunteer forges new trail at Linbrook Woodlands Conservation area. Photos by Lindsay Dill.

## Stewardship Season Kicks Up

by Caitlin Seiler | Director of Volunteer and Land Resources

As the urgency for conservation increases and our ability to protect land expands, our Stewardship Department takes to the task of managing more land. Determining how to care for and implementing the plan for these lands in perpetuity is a heavy lift. The protection of unique assets like streams and rare plants, and monitoring for situations like encroachment and trespassing are some of the issues we regularly face. For these reasons, our staff works to identify and prioritize management activities at our Conservation Areas, and identify partners and volunteers to implement these goals. This year, we plan to continue the momentum at our feature green spaces, working with partners to support our efforts, and creating more opportunities for individual volunteers to gain skills for helping to steward our lands. Read about a few of our upcoming action items for 2019:



### Wingfield Pines Fixes

Complete necessary repairs to the abandoned mine drainage system at Wingfield Pines. We expect the system to be fully functional again by the end of spring 2019.



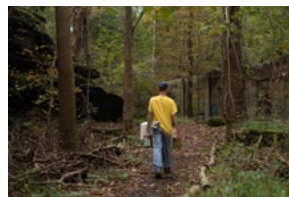
### Management Plans

Complete management plans for two Conservation Areas: Wingfield Pines and Audubon Greenway. These plans will guide management activities balancing user experience, educational resources, protection of sensitive ecological spaces, and sustainable trails, and will direct our activities over the next 5-10 years.



### Volunteer Trainings

Facilitate workshops at Wingfield Pines Conservation Area to give our volunteers the skills to manage trails, fight invasive species, confidently identify plants and wildlife, and use stewardship technology.



### Dead Man's Hollow Trail Plan

Implement the Dead Man's Hollow Master Trail Plan, focusing this year's efforts on trail construction and signage installation.



### Group Workdays

Create more partnerships with organizations and their employees that promote giving back to their communities. We'll continue our existing partnerships and seek new ones with groups like Scouts, youth groups, sports teams, and other groups interested in service projects. Get in touch and we'll be happy to tailor a volunteer workday for your group's needs.



### "Friends Of" Green Spaces

Continue our popular monthly trail work series at Dead Man's Hollow. If you want to get a monthly workday series set up for your favorite conservation area, call us; we can help you get started with forming or connecting to a "Friends Of" group.

We hope you'll stay involved and continue to make a difference with us. Check our Event Calendar at [bit.ly/altoutside](https://bit.ly/altoutside) for upcoming ALT & volunteer activities. Eager to get involved with any of the above initiatives? Contact Caitlin Seiler at [cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org).





## Featured Supporter:



**RICK DUNCAN**

Volunteer site steward Rick Duncan canoes to Sycamore Island twice each week during the busy season. Photos by Lindsay Dill.

by Lindsay Dill | Marketing Communications Director

A third place is not your home, it's not your work, but it's the third space where you find a sense of belonging, where people know your name, where you feel a sense of agency to make change or care for the space.

For Rick Duncan, that space is a piece of land covered in flora, home to fauna, looped with a one-mile trail, and in the middle of the Allegheny River accessible only by watercraft. It's called Sycamore Island, and Rick has been its lead site steward for ten years.

"It's become my place where I can get away," Rick said. "My special hideaway spot to get peace and quiet in a beautiful setting close to home."

Rick became involved with Sycamore Island when the Sylvan Canoe Club put out a request for its members' help in shuttling representatives from Allegheny Land Trust and several potential project supporters when the island was for sale. As a canoe club member, he volunteered and happened to be in the same canoe as ALT VP of Land Resources Emilie Rzotkiewicz for the ten-minute paddle over to the island.

"By the time I'm getting out of the canoe, I was signed up as a site steward. Emilie gets right to the point!" Rick said.

Nearly ten years later, Rick is still the site steward visiting the island seven months out of the year maintaining the one-mile trail loop that he helped flag and create, clearing trash from the trails and shores, and managing invasive and nuisance species like poison ivy, which dominated the island prior to his volunteer work. In the summer, Rick is at his home-away-from-home about two times each week.

"Beyond maintaining and slightly improving things, I try to leave

it pretty wild," Rick said. "I want it not to be a phony, manicured park or somewhere that is too orchestrated and controlled. It should be somewhere you feel like you've found on your own, discovered in the middle of the river."

Having grown up in a military family, Rick moved around frequently, but found that his favorite places were those with trees, trails, and nature. When Rick moved to Pittsburgh for school, he yearned to get away to somewhere more forested, nearer to nature. When Rick discovered Sycamore Island years prior to ALT's involvement, it provided that escape, so he visited often with his wife, Barbara, and daughter, Jamie.

"We would pull up on the shore, skip rocks, eat a snack, and go," Rick said. "It was covered in poison ivy, and we didn't want to hike through it. Once I became the site steward, cutting back that poison ivy was my first priority."

The majority of the trail is now successfully cleared of poison ivy, making it a much more enjoyable space for the thousands of visitors who paddle there each year.

Rick's work has made a big difference at the island, and he serves as the epitome of an ALT site steward. In addition to his own work on the island, Rick manages, communicates, and organizes a Friends of Sycamore Island group via Basecamp, which allows fellow fans of the island to organize outings and cleanups there throughout the year.

There are two reactions from island visitors that Rick says make him smile and feel fulfilled in his work.

The first: "Wow! I didn't know this existed right here, so close to the city." And the second: "How can I help?"

## Join Rick and Become a Friend of Sycamore Island

Rick's story is one of many that we share from our supporters. Over our 25-year history, many individuals have made a big difference in helping protect, maintain, and improve our region's green space. If you'd like to get involved and leave a lasting legacy at Sycamore Island or a green space near you, contact our Director of Volunteer & Land Resources Caitlin Seiler to join a "Friends Of" group or organize a volunteer workday with your workplace. Caitlin Seiler: 412-741-2750 x207 or [cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org).



## Understand the Land

by Jessica Kester | VP of Education

What a year the Environmental Education Team had in 2018! We educated over 21,500 individuals on everything from healthy water to the science of spider webs. Looking forward to this year's busy season, the education team is focusing on teaching for a better today and a more sustainable future through a variety of partnerships. Here's what you'll see us up to:

**Engaging with STREAM:** In partnership with Trout Unlimited's Penns Woods West Chapter and the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, ALT is happy to announce the first STREAM Girls badge program for Girl Scouts in Western PA! The program will be held in the Big Sewickley Creek watershed in May where middle school girls will use science, technology, recreation, engineering, art, and math skills to explore the Big Sewickley Creek, learn to tie flies, and to fly fish during a two-day workshop.

**Exploring Land Histories:** We'll be learning how to "read the land" to explore how human's have impacted the landscape during our History & Hooch hike at Barking Slopes (Plum) with historian Charles Succop in March.

**Making Choices:** Middle school students will be learning how small, everyday choices impact the watershed in positive and negative ways using the art of geocaching through our lesson Riverton: A Watershed Redevelopment Project supported by RiverWorks Discovery and the EQT Foundation. Free programs are still available through May for southern Allegheny, southern and eastern Washington, and Greene Counties in Pennsylvania, and Belmont County, OH.

**Educating Educators:** Our Environmental Education Team leaders will present a Project WET Early Childhood Facilitator workshop in March for Getting Little Feet WET in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators conference in Philadelphia.

**Pointing Out Plants:** We're excited to be partnering with Blue Heron Nature Skills to provide our Plant Pursuit hikes this year with herbalist Jen Dalke. We'll be hiking each month April – September at several of our green spaces and covering multiple topics such as phenology, medicinal uses, natural remedies, and - of course - plant identification.

**Scouting on the Land:** We're reaching out to the scouts this year with a focus on fairy gardens for young Girl Scouts in May at Dead Man's Hollow, an eye for citizen science for all scouts in April at Dead Man's Hollow (McKeesport), the Soil & Water Conservation Merit Badge in May at Wingfield Pines (Upper St. Clair). Our education team is also available to bring programs to scout meetings and summer camps, or to run a badge program for your pack or troop.

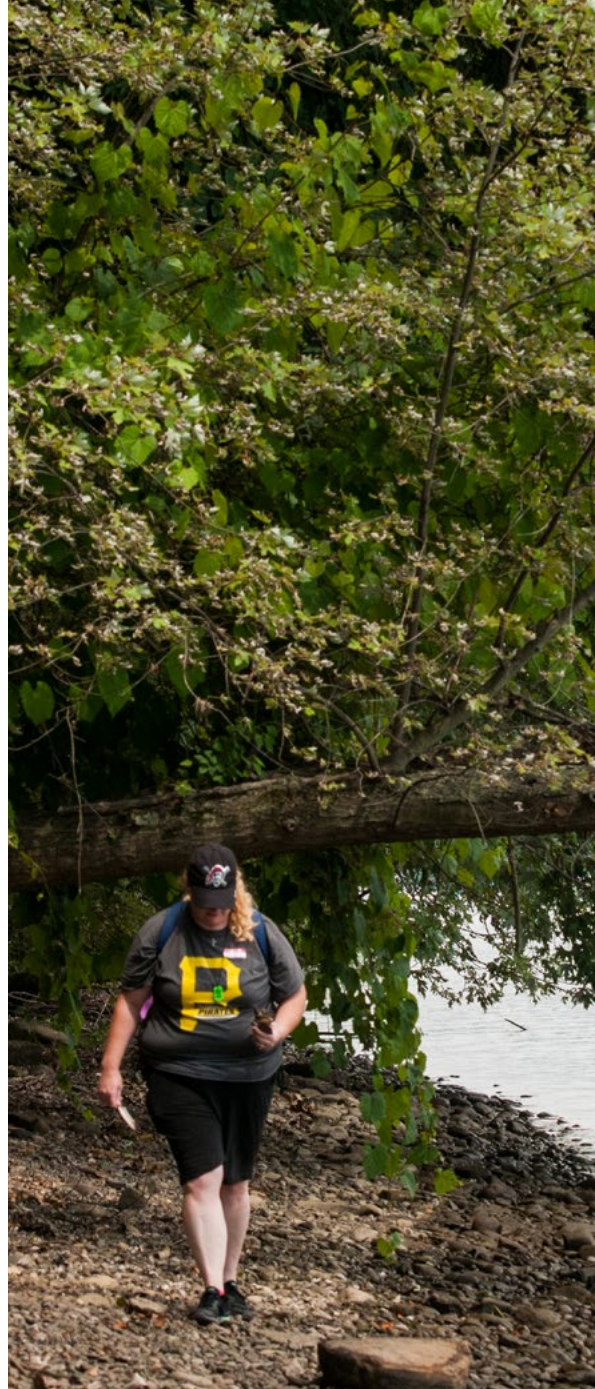
**Speaking Out:** Educators will learn how to help young students have a voice and be heard as we partner with Young Voices for the Planet for multiple spring and summer workshops that include local children expressing their real-life challenges in the face of environmental issues.

**Hunting with Experts:** Once again, we welcome the identifiers from the Western PA Mushroom Club as they guide us through four mushroom hunts this year; two to Sycamore Island (Verona) via pontoon boat, one at Dead Man's Hollow (McKeesport), and one at Audubon Greenway (Sewickley). Learn about habitats, substrates, identification, and even toxicity on these amazing hikes!

No matter who you are, what your age, or what you would like to learn about the environment, our environmental education team will have some way for you to get outdoors this year!



Experience the expertise of our education team first-hand at an upcoming event: [bit.ly/altoutside](http://bit.ly/altoutside)



An attendee to our Environmental Education Team's educator workshop collects specimens to analyze at Sycamore Island. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

“It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility.”

Rachel Carson



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## E Education Events

## V Volunteer Events



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

### History & Hooch Barking Slopes

March 31 | 3 - 5 pm

Step back in time as we explore and uncover the past of Barking Slopes conservation area. Attendees will learn how to read the land to rediscover hidden features left behind by communities that once called Barking Slopes "home". Finally, attendees will sample locally-made McLaughlin Distillery hooch at the end of the hike.

**Ages: 21+ | Cost: \$20**



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

### Fungus Among Us: Mushroom Walk Sycamore Island

April 13 | 9 am - 12 pm

Join Allegheny Land Trust and the Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club as we journey to Sycamore Island in search of seasonal fungi aboard the Allegheny Cleanways Tireless Project pontoon, "The Rachel Carson". We will shuttle from the Verona Public Docks to explore the island and collect mushroom samples, then return to shore for identification to discover what treasures we uncover.

**All Ages | Cost: \$20**



Photo by Caitlin Seiler.

### Trail Tuesday Dead Man's Hollow

April 16 & May 21 | 5 - 7 pm

June - September | 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Lace up your boots, get outside, and lend a hand in helping improve local land! Join us every third Tuesday (April-September) as we work to improve and expand the Hollow's trail system.

**All Ages | Cost: Free to Attend**

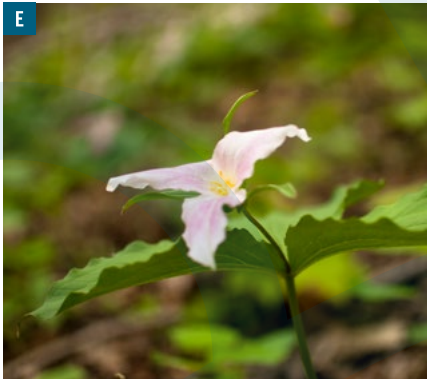


Photo by Lindsay Dill.

### Plant Pursuit 5:30 - 6:30 pm

April 17 | Dead Man's Hollow

May 15 | Dead Man's Hollow

June 6 | Audubon Greenway

Hone your plant identification skills at our first few Plant Pursuits! In April, we'll observe the first life of spring, in May we'll seek out wildflowers, and in June we'll explore Botany for Beginners. We feel fortunate to have this hike hosted by our partner Jen Dalke of Blue Heron Nature Skills.

**All Ages | Cost: \$5**



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

### Scouting Out iNaturalist Dead Man's Hollow

April 28 | 1 - 3 pm

Do you want to see and understand more while taking a walk in nature? Learn how to utilize the iNaturalist app to identify plants, animals, and even fungi. Attendees will be guided on the educational hike by an ALT environmental facilitator. This event is open to all ages and is great for scouts looking to enhance their nature skills.

**All Ages | Cost: \$15**



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

### Soil & Water Conservation Merit Badge Wingfield Pines

May 4 | 12 - 5 pm

Scouts can earn their merit badge while enjoying the trails of Wingfield Pines conservation area, which always hold something new and exciting in nature. Our trained environmental educators can sign blue cards. "Conservation is the duty of every person to learn more about the natural resources on which our lives depend," - Scouts BSA.

**Ages: 12-18, Scouts | Cost: \$26/scout**



To register and find more information, visit this case-sensitive link:  
[bit.ly/altoutside](https://bit.ly/altoutside)





Photo by Lindsay Dill.

## Fairy Gardens: Flower & Gardener Badges Dead Man's Hollow

May 5 | 12 - 3 pm

Girl Scouts can earn their Flower and Gardener badges in a "fairy garden" while enjoying the trails of Dead Man's Hollow conservation area. Our trained environmental educators will lead this program.

**Ages: 8-12, Scouts | Cost: \$20/scout**



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

## Steward Training Series Wingfield Pines

May 18, June 20, September 15 | 9 am - 12 pm

Either become a skilled ALT steward or hone your steward skills if you already volunteer with us. These workshops equip attendees with the knowledge and resources to work as an independent volunteer steward at any of our conservation areas around the county. Each workshop in the series will focus on a different theme.

The spring workshop includes identifying native and invasive flowers, using iNaturalist to record found species, and observing basic bird habitat and ID. The summer workshop covers potential dangers of working outdoors - creatures, climate, and common sense. It will also include an introduction to sustainable trail building and maintenance. The fall training covers restoration area management, including tree planting, identification, and protection of newly-planted trees.

**All Ages | Cost: Free**



Photo by Lindsay Dill.

## Twitter in the Trees: Spring Bird Count Wingfield Pines

May 11 | Hike: 8 - 10 am, Count: 10 am - 4 pm  
Become a citizen scientist (no experience required!) as we learn how to use field guides and iNaturalist to identify and catalogue birds. Stick around after the hike from 10 am - 4 pm with the Pittsburgh South Hills Bird Circle & USC Citizens for Land Stewardship as they host a Spring Migratory Bird Count in support of the Audubon Society.

**All ages | Cost: \$5**



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# Elevate Your Commitment to Land Conservation

by Chris Beichner | President & CEO

We are so fortunate to have 16 fantastic Board of directors, an amazing staff who are dedicated and passionate every day in fulfilling our mission, and over 400 outstanding volunteers willing to spend their free time caring for and enhancing our conservation areas. This team is made up of individuals with various backgrounds, skillsets, education, interests, and values that make up a dynamic organization making positive change towards building a resilient region.

This spring 2019, we are seeking to recruit individuals into our leadership ranks as new Board candidates. We are seeking diverse candidates who have a passion for land conservation, stewardship, and have a skill to bring to the organization. Some responsibilities of a Board member include participating in bi-monthly Board meetings, joining at least one committee, understanding best practices for nonprofit governance, and contributing financially to the organization.

If you are interested in becoming an ALT Board member and would like to see a copy of the Board job description or would like to discuss this opportunity, please contact Chris Beichner at [cbeichner@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:cbeichner@alleghenylandtrust.org).



## ALLEGHENY LAND TRUST

416 Thorn Street, Sewickley,  
Pennsylvania 15143  
phone 412.741.2750  
email [info@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:info@alleghenylandtrust.org)  
[alleghenylandtrust.org](http://alleghenylandtrust.org)



# ABOUT ALT

**Allegheny Land Trust (ALT) is a nationally-accredited, independent, non-profit organization that has been helping local people save local land in the Pittsburgh region for a quarter century.**

Founded in 1993, ALT has protected more than 2,500 acres of green space preserving our region's unique natural beauty, providing enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities, improving water quality, fostering biodiversity, and enhancing the overall quality of life for our communities. ALT's areas of strategic priority include Land Conservation, Stewardship, Education, and Urban Greening.

ALT's mission has expanded in recent years to include innovative methods of land conservation in support of community needs for urban green space as well the addition of a professional environmental education team teaching of all ages to foster future generations of stewards.

With conservation areas in 30 municipalities, there is now an ALT conservation project within 12 miles of every Allegheny County resident. The benefits of ALT's efforts can be experienced across the region from McKeesport to Franklin Park, Upper St. Clair to Blawnox, Mt. Washington to Plum, and many places in between.



KEEP IN TOUCH

### FOLLOW US:



Please recycle or reuse this newsletter when you're finished — cut up pieces of it to use in a homemade Mother's Day Card. Email us with your creative reuse of Vistas!

Vistas is underwritten by an anonymous donor. Thank you!

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**FRONT COVER:** A robin bathes in a rain puddle in early spring at Barking Slopes conservation area in New Kensington.

**BACK COVER:** Trillium bloom at Mossy Slopes conservation area in Monroeville.

Photos by Lindsay Dill.



EFP's Combined  
Federal Code  
is 62348