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# VISTAS

An Allegheny Land Trust Publication

Fall 2020



Proximity to green space is shown to improve quality of life. Pictured here, a Girty's Woods conservation project access point. Photo by Lindsay Dill.



# COMMUNITY CONSERVATION FOCUSING ON ACCESS FOR ALL

by Alyson Fearon | Senior Director of Community Conservation & Resiliency

You have heard us say it before, green spaces do more than just serve biodiversity, they bring peace just by viewing them, hold and filter stormwater, capture air pollution, sequester carbon, and mitigate the urban heat island effect, to name a few.

Analysis by many different types of organizations have also shown there is a significant disparity in the locations of these green spaces in low to moderate income neighborhoods and communities versus high income areas. This combination of factors has created environmental justice areas, which are defined as census tracts where at least 20 percent of the population lives in poverty, and/or 30 percent or more of the population is minority. These factors serve as simple indicators for the potential of a community to suffer disproportionate health impacts and economic disadvantages.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Allegheny Land Trust's Community Conservation initiatives of Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative (TRALI) and Accelerating Land Transformation Reuse, Recycling, and Restoration (ALTR3) programs are actively working alongside locals to improve green space access in our region's environmental justice communities. As we move forward, we are conscious of the potential for 'green gentrification',

where new green spaces are sited in higher income communities or create higher income communities through traditional gentrification processes. Creating a network of smaller, decentralized green spaces can effectively increase green space access while mitigating the potential of pricing out residents, which has been reported around large urban park projects.

TRALI projects such as Eastfield (East Liberty), Ballfield Farm (Perry South), Tustin Garden (Uptown), and Garden Dreams (Wilksburg) all improve food access and provide green spaces in their communities, which are state-designated Environmental Justice Areas.

The ALTR3 program is working to reform the former St. John's hospital site in Brighton Heights transforming a large vacant field into a natural area with stormwater management. Our Unity Corner project is at the intersection of three Northside neighborhoods, Perry South, Fineview, and Central North, and expands a blight recovery project for a busy public transit location. We are working with the Garfield community to create a green space for children from a local space-constrained school and the surrounding residents.

ALT is also working on programming to provide municipal leaders with research-supported justification to include green spaces as critical infrastructure in their communities. This outreach includes information on funding mechanisms that do not rely on the local tax base, which aims to provide relief to already-strained municipal budgets.

We appreciate your support of our work in Community Conservation, and look forward to sharing positive future outcomes achieved through working together with residents.



# science at home

## 5 Organizations Reducing Barriers to the Outdoors in Our Region

by Julie Travaglini | Education Program Director

### 1. GROW PITTSBURGH

GP increases access to healthy foods through community gardening and school programs.

### 2. CREEK CONNECTIONS

A partnership between Allegheny College and K-12 schools that turns local waterways into environmental laboratories.

### 3. VENTURE OUTDOORS

VO creates opportunities for youth and adults to access the outdoors.

### 4. PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS

PAEE provides educators with the tools and resources to successfully support all learners.

### 5. ALLEGHENY LAND TRUST

ALT conserves local land to provide equal access to community green space and educational programming.



(left) Julie took a roadtrip to several national parks. It inspired her to reflect on outdoors access for others. Photo courtesy of Julie Travaglini. (below) A scenic vista captured during Julie's trip out West. Photo by Julie Travaglini.



## The Outdoors for Whom

by Julie Travaglini | Senior Director of Education & Curriculum

Last October, I went on an adventure. I was already out West speaking at the National Science Teachers Association Conference, and the timing coincided with my birthday. I didn't do anything special for my 30th birthday, and I decided to make my 33rd birthday a do-over for my 30th. So, while I was out West, I solo-hiked three National Parks. I headed to Arches and Canyonlands in Utah, and then I road-tripped eight hours to spend a few days in the Wyoming portion of Yellowstone.

As I sat on an overlook in Canyonlands, I recall having the distinct thought that everyone should get the opportunity to see this in their lifetime. The recent events of this past year have me revisiting that thought.

I understand now why I was able to take that trip and have that thought while atop of a Canyonlands lookout. It was my privilege, in part, that granted me that opportunity. I am fortunate enough to have a job that grants me vacation time and that encourages my love of travel. I could pay for an inn for my stay, and put away extra money every month for

fun extras while out West. I have a collection of name-brand hiking and outdoor gear to be prepared for most seasons and terrains. Most certainly this fortune is not the reality for many other people.

This thought led me to ask, "How can I, in my career as an environmental educator, ensure that everyone has the opportunity to see something truly remarkable in nature?" The answer I arrived at was to intentionally and purposefully seek and create opportunities to lower the barriers for everyone to access the outdoors.

Whether it's locating and securing funding for environmental education programs in high need schools, supporting land acquisition projects that bring a green space to a new community that lacks a park or outdoor space, or providing high quality virtual content for families or providing educators with tools and resources to empower their science teaching - each step and every project makes a difference.

I realize that I have many chances to actively seek and create more opportunities to outdoor education access. Not only can I, but I plan to.



Emerald View Park was among ALT's first ventures beyond the rural and suburban into urban land conservation work. Photo by Wild Excellence Films.

# Ten Years of Urban Land Conservation Efforts

by Christopher Beichner | President & CEO

In 1993, the Allegheny County Commissioners created the Allegheny Land Trust in response to a resident survey expressing alarm at the rate of green space loss in Allegheny County. Three years later, ALT protected its first parcel of land, which spurred the creation of what is today's 450-acre Dead Man's Hollow Conservation Area located just south of McKeesport.

The next 14 years saw us successfully conserve land with many communities throughout our region; our focus in rural and suburban communities was consistent with how other conservation land trusts operated across the nation. But, in 2010, ALT led a foray in urban conservation by acquiring 25-acres in Mount Washington, placing a conservation easement on the land and donating it to the City of Pittsburgh to be included as part of the City's 260-acre Emerald View Park. This year marks our 10th anniversary of conserving urban land.

Conservation is at the center of many resiliency issues facing our communities. The City of Pittsburgh is facing rapid tree canopy loss, regular flooding, budget-busting landslides, food insecurity, and air and water quality issues. Many of these issues are more severe in environmental justice areas. Targeted land conservation can play a vital role in ensuring a community's resiliency and can positively address many of these issues facing the region.

In 2013, we launched several urban conservation initiatives including land banking advocacy and protecting community

gardens. We understood our strengths of conserving land for wildlife and biodiverse habitat could also be deployed to conserve land in food insecure areas, at-risk neighborhoods, and environmental justice areas.

Complacency is not acceptable - a concept at the forefront of our cultural reckoning today. ALT has grown from a traditionally rural and suburban nonprofit to one that fulfills its mission by also working on innovative projects in urban communities.

We have embraced working with new communities and focusing on land protection in environmental justice areas, like our current efforts to protect the former Churchill Valley Country Club. We realized our land trust work was transferable to other types of land trust work, which is why we lent our expertise in helping to inform and launch new affordable housing land trusts in the Pittsburgh region.

However, ALT will not stand idly by feeling gratified while we continue to lose green space, while we continue to fight food insecurity, and while at-risk communities experience regional challenges related to the loss of green space at disproportionate levels. We are fortunate to conserve land in all corners of Allegheny County, and we will continue to be true to our vision by working with communities to protect green space that is accessible and essential to everyone's quality of life.

# Become an ALT Partner in Stewardship

by Tom Dougherty | VP of Development & External Affairs

Since our founding in 1993, ALT has worked with local communities to protect more than 2,700 acres of green space in 31 different municipalities, preserving our region's natural beauty, providing enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities, protecting and improving water and air quality, mitigating flooding, sustaining biodiversity, and remediating past environmental abuses to contribute to the overall health, wellness, and quality of life in our region.

We continue to pursue our mission with great urgency and anticipate that the successful completion of the land conservation projects currently in progress will increase the total amount of land under our protection to more than 3,200 acres by this time next year.

Responsibly caring for the land once we have protected it is a critical part of our mission, and as the number of acres under

our care continues to expand we remain steadfastly committed to upholding the very highest level of stewardship standards.

Maintaining this vital commitment requires resources in the form of financial donations and volunteer time, and we have been fortunate over the years to have had business supporters who have provided these forms of support as part of their sponsorship of an ALT conservation area.

We now need more help in these efforts.

Through the recently launched Campaign for Stewardship we are looking for five additional businesses who are interested in becoming "official sponsors" of one of our higher-profile conservation areas by making a financial contribution and scheduling a company volunteer event at "their" conservation area in 2021.

ALT will proudly and gratefully recognize the "Campaign for Stewardship" partners in the following ways:

- Feature article on the campaign in quarterly news magazine *Vistas* (reaches 6,000 supporters)
- Article and company logos in e-blast (reaches 8,000 supporters)
- Announcement on all ALT social media channels
- Provide an opportunity for ALT-led volunteer, team building, or environmental education session at ALT conservation area for employees and/or their families
- Recognition as a sponsor on ALT website with logo and link to company website
- Company name/logo displayed prominently at sponsored conservation area

If your business is interested in making a meaningful contribution to the quality of life in your community, providing a team-building opportunity for your employees, and helping ALT fulfill our conservation mission please contact Tom Dougherty at 412-741-2750 (x211) or at [tdougherty@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:tdougherty@alleghenylandtrust.org).



A BNY Mellon Employee gives back during a workplace volunteer outing at Dead Man's Hollow conservation area. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

# Addressing Our Region's Challenges: INEQUITY IN OUR ECOSYSTEM

by Lindsay Dill | Marketing Communications Director

As you may know, ALT was formed when a county-level survey revealed a public outcry for land protection in our region. Since our 1993 founding, we've protected more than 2,700 acres of land in 31 municipalities. We see the rate of green space loss as a serious regional issue, and one that must be addressed equitably.



A natural arch over a community-forged trail at the Girty's Woods conservation project, which sits in a DEP-designated Environmental Justice Area. Its protection would provide green space access for tens of thousands within a short walk, bike, or drive from the land. Photos by Lindsay Dill.



Protecting the Churchill Valley Greenway conservation project in Churchill & Penn Hills would also affect environmental justice areas and create accessible trail access for more than 100,000 within a 3-mile radius.

Green space has the power to absorb and filter our rainwater improving water quality and avoiding exacerbated flooding and landslide issues, to improve our air quality by removing toxins, to create opportunities for outdoor education and recreation, to protect dwindling wildlife habitat, to improve our communities by balancing development rates, improving desirability, and raising property values.

With so many benefits stemming from permanently protected green space, we see the equitable protection of our region's green space as imperative to our region's resiliency.

While the greater Pittsburgh area has a storied, industrial history, it also has a rich, natural heritage; and the loss of green space continues as our industrial production has dwindled - in fact, we're still losing 2,000 acres of green space each year to development that is fast outpacing our region's population growth rate.

A near half-century ago, Pennsylvanians voted on a promise to our environment.

"The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet

to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."

This is what Article I, Section 27 - the Environmental Rights Amendment - of Pennsylvania's state constitution reads. As recently as 2017, it was cited and upheld in a PA Supreme Court case, where Justice Christine Donohue wrote, "the Commonwealth (including the Governor and General Assembly) may not approach our public natural resources as a proprietor, and instead must at all times fulfill its role as a trustee."

There's much to be done to protect our land equitably. At ALT, we'll continue helping local people save local land; we'll continue seeking funding for projects in municipalities with fewer resources; we'll continue our community conservation efforts on unique, non-traditional projects (see page 2); we'll continue to provide nature-based education to all ages to foster the next generation of stewards; and we'll continue working hand-in-hand to maintain and improve the land we've protected together.



Support the protection of more close-to-home green space for all by becoming a member today:  
[alleghenylandtrust.org/become-a-member](http://alleghenylandtrust.org/become-a-member)

ALT provides nature-based education programming for all ages to foster the next generation of stewards. Here, students from J E Harrison Middle School learn about water health in 2016 at Wingfield Pines conservation area.





## OUR SPONSORS

help us expand and improve our work and bring its benefits to more community members.

Many thanks to our new and renewing sponsors listed below. To view a full list of our current sponsors, visit: [allegHENYlandtrust.org/our-sponsors](http://allegHENYlandtrust.org/our-sponsors)

Please recognize and patronize our sponsors.

### NEW

- Maitri Genetics - *Platinum*
- Ceeva - *Bronze*
- GRB Law - *Bronze*
- The Hill Group - *Bronze*
- Ernst Seeds - *Supporting*

### RENEWING

- Allegheny Financial Group - *Gold*
- Civil and Environmental Consultants - *Silver*
- Wall to Wall Communications - *Silver*
- Marshall Design - *Silver*
- Mitsubishi Electric Power Products - *Bronze*
- SOTA Construction - *Bronze*
- KU Resources - *Supporting*
- Clearview Federal Credit Union - *Other*
- Dollar Bank - *Other*
- Environmental Planning and Design - *Other*
- Knepper Press - *Other*

If you're interested in becoming an ALT sponsor, please contact Tom Dougherty at [tdougherty@allegHENYlandtrust.org](mailto:tdougherty@allegHENYlandtrust.org)



An ALT easement donor worked with ALT to create a conservation legacy by placing an easement on her land. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

# LEAVE BEHIND A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

by Tom Dougherty | VP of Development & External Affairs

As a supporter of Allegheny Land Trust, you know that protecting Allegheny County's remaining open spaces is one of the most effective things we can do to address many of the pressing issues our region is facing today, and you understand that how we treat our undeveloped land now and in the future will determine the quality of life of generations to come. Protecting green space leaves a legacy.

If you want the clean air, clean water, scenic beauty, close-to-home recreation, wildlife habitat, and local food growth that comes with land conservation to be a part of your legacy, please consider including ALT in your estate plans. We would be honored to have your support in this most solemn of ways to contribute to our capacity to help local people save and care for local land forever. Bequests in a will or trust are one of the most common ways of making a legacy gift and they are simple to establish.

If you would like more information or if you have already included Allegheny Land Trust in your estate plans, then please get in touch with us to discuss the possibilities with you. Thank you!



Please contact Tom Dougherty, ALT's Vice President of Development, at [tdougherty@allegHENYlandtrust.org](mailto:tdougherty@allegHENYlandtrust.org) to discuss possible gifts of these types.

# Featured Supporter:



(left) Remnants of Bethel Green conservation area's history make up what is now a narrow coal-tailing-formed trail. (right) George stands along one of the trail networks he helped develop at Bethel Green conservation area. Photos by Lindsay Dill.



by Lindsay Dill | Marketing Communications Director

Most days, George Suchar leaves his home with hiking boots, hat, and one of a variety of tools in-hand to hit a trail network that he's helped build over the last 16 years.

When he began coming here, there was only one way in. That was the exact right number of ways in for "Mike & Pap", the duo that is George and his grandson.

"We started coming up here as something to do together," George said. "Immediately, he really liked it up here, and so did I. So, this became our escape."

George and Mike would roam the woods enjoying sightings of deer, hawk, fox, and birds as they explored and began forging trails along their own well-worn paths. Mike disobeyed rules and tested his limits with Pappy along the way, and at the end of each day they could feel like they enjoyed a secret adventure of building and discovery.

While he isn't joined by his now-grown grandson as often, George has continued to maintain trails that he and his grandson built, to check in on trees he's raised, and to ensure the green space is free of trash.

When ALT launched its campaign with the help of many neighbors and the Municipality

of Bethel Park to protect this green space, George felt a sense of relief, knowing this place would remain forever green.

"This is one of the only green spaces around – and unless you preserve spaces like this, they'll be gone. We have to protect what we have," George said.

The land is still within its first year of ownership under Allegheny Land Trust, but the years of building and maintaining done by George got it off to a great start. Many now enjoy the space for hiking, birding, and taking in the sights that Bethel Green has to offer; and for many, a visit may mean meeting George: Bethel Green's original steward.

"Everyday I go in the woods, I have a mission – pick up any litter, clear the woods in winter, clear the trails in summer – then I see a tree down over the trail, and so I have my next day's mission," George said. "Now, it's good to know there are the extra hands at ALT caring for the land. And anyway, you can only change so much at a time as the woods is always changing on its own. I try to guide it, but nature will take its course."



George's grandson Mike as a young man circa 2008. The duo often explored and forged trails at what is now known as Bethel Green conservation area. Photo by George Suchar.



Three foxes found by George and his grandson at Bethel Green conservation area. Photo by George Suchar.

## Become a "Friend Of Bethel Green" Or Another Green Space

Inspired by George's story? You can help care for Bethel Green or other ALT conservation areas by connecting with Friends Of groups. To join Friends of Bethel Green or learn more about other green space friends, contact ALT's Director of Stewardship and Volunteers Caitlin Seiler at [cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org](mailto:cseiler@alleghenylandtrust.org).

# notes

## FROM THE LAND:

### Land Protection Efforts Grow Despite Uncertainty

by Roy Kraynyk | VP of Land Protection & Capital Projects

**S**o far in 2020, ALT has protected nearly 200 acres - 155 acres in Elizabeth Township that we call Buena Vista Heights, 40.5 acres in Bethel Park, now known as Bethel Green, and the historic Walker-Ewing log house and its surrounding envelope of land. In addition, we have another 345 under contract - the 148-acre former Churchill Country Club golf course in Churchill and Penn Hills, a 155-acre green space in Reserve Township, and a 42-acre woodland valley in Ohio Township.

Furthermore, an offer on 8.3 acres in Franklin Park is about to be inked, and negotiations are advancing on 2 more parcels totaling 16.9 acres adjacent to that. The Franklin Park parcels will be added to 16 acres that ALT protected several years ago creating a 30+ acre greenway along the eastern side of I-79, and enhanced connections to Blueberry Hill Park.

Not resting, this is the time of year that we try to secure tracts of land under contract so we hit the ground running in January 2021 to raise the capital required to purchase, place a conservation easement, or cover the costs of land donations.

We are vetting a few more conservation opportunities for the ones that provide the greatest public benefits, are fundable based on their natural attributes and community capacity, have local financial and volunteer support, are in the direct path of development and other criteria we use to qualify land for our portfolio so we know that the land that we are protecting is some of the “best of the rest”.

The grants used to acquire the above acres were written and awarded a year or more ago. A new variable that we will face in 2021 is how the economic crisis will impact the level of giving from public and private funding partners.

We heavily rely on two state agencies for a majority of the funding we receive for land protection. These are tax dollars and fees that Pennsylvanians pay, that we are bringing back to our communities through the grants that we receive. Our private foundation partners that help to support land protection as well as our day-to-day operations may be impacted with their support of COVID19-related initiatives. Good news is that individual giving is holding steady and we deeply appreciate that!



A fall sunset at the Churchill Valley Greenway conservation project. Photo by Mike Birge.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**E** Education Events

**V** Volunteer Events



## Starlight Stroll: #OptOutside Dead Man's Hollow

November 27 | 5:30 - 6:30 pm

Not into Black Friday lines and sales? #optoutside with us at our Starlight Stroll! Enjoy the opportunity to explore one of our green spaces after dark. Topics vary depending on the evening's leader and can include nocturnal and crepuscular creatures, astronomy, lore, and much more!

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

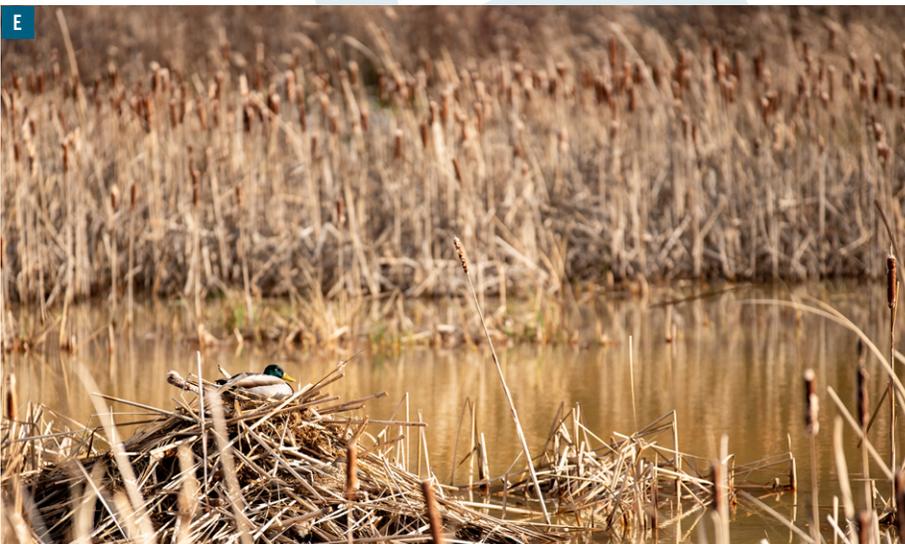


Photo by Lindsay Dill.

Photo by Lindsay Dill.

## Getting Little Feet WET Workshop: Winter! Virtual Program

December 1 | 5 - 6:30 pm

Enjoy a FREE workshop aimed at helping educators adapt science activities for early learners in the winter time. Developed specifically for teachers working with young children (ages 3-6) in coordination with early childhood experts and educators, Getting Little Feet Wet is Project WET's early childhood curriculum. Getting Little Feet Wet contains 11 interactive, hands-on activities for young learners to explore different aspects of water—from water properties to water sounds. Participants will explore how to adapt activities for winter time and learn additional activities to get young children exploring science in the colder weather. more. This workshop is offered at a reduced cost thanks to cosponsored grant funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

**All Ages | Cost: Free!**

## Winter Warriors: How Wildlife Survives Winter Virtual Program

December 2 | 5 - 6 pm

Join ALT for a webinar on some of the amazing adaptations local wildlife possess in order to survive the harsh winters. Who caches food? Who turns into a froggy popsicle? Who leaves town? Learn all of this and much more.

**All Ages | Cost: Free!**

Photo by Lindsay Dill.



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Education & Curriculum

Photo by Wild Excellence Films.



### Twitter in the Trees: Christmas Bird Count

#### Wingfield Pines

December 19 | 8 am - 10 am

Listen to the sounds of the forests, meadows, and streams as we venture into our green spaces to count the wide variety of birds that call Wingfield Pines home. Stay after for the annual Christmas Bird Count with several partners!

All Ages | Cost: \$5

Photo by Lindsay Dill.



### Girl Scout Fairy Garden Day

#### Dead Man's Hollow

May 1, 2021 | 10 am - 12:30 pm

Join us for a flower-filled day where Junior Girl Scouts can earn both their Flowers and Gardener badges! Scouts will even make their very own mini fairy garden to take home with them. Other levels of Girl Scouts and children not enrolled in scouts are welcomed to attend as well!

All Ages | Cost: \$20

*Generous support from PPG has enabled us to provide these one-of-a-kind environmental education programming in 2020.*

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

**EVENTS & THE PANDEMIC** | The health, wellness, and safety of all ALT visitors, volunteers, and staff are our top priority. As we continue to follow this fluid situation with COVID-19, we will adhere to recommendations from the PA Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control, and local authorities.

At the time this newsletter was created, the above events are scheduled to occur. We'll update event attendees as the situation develops to protect the health and safety of the public. We will make efforts to reschedule events, and cancel when necessary. We look forward to gathering at our green spaces as soon as it's safe to do so. To stay up-to-date, visit: [alleghenylandtrust.org/coronavirus/](https://alleghenylandtrust.org/coronavirus/)





# ALLEGHENY LAND TRUST

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# ABOUT ALT

**Allegheny Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land conservation nonprofit that has been helping local people save local land in the Pittsburgh region since 1993.**

ALT has protected more than 2,700 acres of green space in dozens of municipalities to preserve our region's unique natural beauty, provide expanded outdoor recreational opportunities, protect and improve water and air quality, sustain biodiversity, and enhance the quality of life for all in our region. ALT's areas of strategic priority include Land Conservation, Land Stewardship, Community Conservation, and Nature-Based Education.

With conservation areas in 31 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:



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Vistas is underwritten by an anonymous donor. Thank you!

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**FRONT COVER:** A fall view of an ALT green space. Photo by Lindsay Dill.

**BACK COVER:** Goldenrod in bloom at the Churchill Valley Greenway conservation project. Photo by Jeff Pepper.



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