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An Allegheny Land Trust Publication

FALL 2025





Landscape-Scale Conservation: Protecting More Than Just Land

by Sarah Costlow | Vice President of Land Conservation

Have you ever wondered why a great blue heron touched down in a local stream, caught a glimpse of a fisher on your trail camera, or saw a black bear roaming through your yard? It is likely because the habitat is ideal for supporting this wildlife. You may have heard Allegheny Land Trust use the term “landscape-scale conservation.” This approach strategizes the protection of large, interconnected natural areas and focuses protection on prioritized clusters of land rather than isolated parcels. This effort helps keep ecosystems intact and minimizes habitat fragmentation, which provides long-term benefits to both people and wildlife. Intact ecosystems and habitat help keep the fireflies lighting up our communities!

WHY CONNECTIVITY MATTERS TO PEOPLE

Protecting green space at a landscape scale, in proximity to where you live, contributes to cleaner water and air. Contiguous green spaces absorb more rainwater and runoff from roads than paved or impervious surface, helping to reduce flood risks and recharge groundwater supplies. Forests, meadows, and wetlands help hold and filter pollutants from water, protecting water quality in rivers, streams, and aquifers – the sources of our drinking water.

The root systems of trees and vegetation help stabilize hillsides, particularly in areas where steep slopes and red bed soils are prone to erosion and landslides. Tree canopies lower the temperature of the surrounding area by providing shade and evapotranspiration, which is the sum of all processes by which water moves from the land surface to the atmosphere via evaporation and transpiration. They also improve air quality by sequestering carbon and other pollutants, a critical service as we confront the impacts of climate change.

These green spaces also offer important recreation opportunities, including picnicking, birdwatching, walking, running, and biking. Protected natural areas improve public health and community well-being by encouraging outdoor activity, reducing stress, and enhancing local economies.

We’re living in a time where we are becoming more conscious of having clean air and water, witnessing more communities prone to flooding and landslides, and trying to temper the heat of summer. While protecting green space won’t solve 100 percent of these problems, protecting the best of what remains will help the situation from getting drastically worse. If we focus on strategically connecting and restoring fragmented ecosystems with these issues in mind, it can even help reduce the future impact of these events.



ALT staff explore a green space set to continue the Panhandle Greenway Conservation Project.

SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY AND WILDLIFE

Landscape-scale conservation is increasingly recognized as a key climate adaptation strategy and a way to protect our region's biodiversity. As temperatures rise and precipitation patterns shift, species need room to move to find new habitat, migrate seasonally, or escape local climate extremes. Connected natural corridors allow for this movement and are essential for maintaining biodiversity and genetic diversity across generations. Fragmented habitats lead to isolated populations, reduced genetic diversity, and increased extinction risk. In contrast, connected landscapes support more robust ecosystems. In E.O. Wilson's 2016 book, *Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*, he argued that to prevent mass extinction, we must set aside at least half of the planet for nature. He emphasized that only large, contiguous protected areas can preserve enough genetic diversity to allow ecosystems to adapt and persist.

Studies by the Nature Conservancy show that large, connected habitats support greater species richness and more stable wildlife populations. These areas act as a climate refuge where conditions remain relatively stable and can support species survival over time.

Ensuring the ecological resilience of our region for both people and wildlife is why ALT focuses our efforts on priority conservation areas and seeks to protect land adjacent to existing parks, preserves, and protected areas.

ALT'S LANDSCAPE-SCALE EFFORTS

One example of our landscape-scale conservation efforts is our Deer Creek Conservation Project. In early 2025, ALT acquired 266 acres of woodlands in Indiana Township within the Deer Creek Watershed, adjacent to Emmerling Community Park, and host to a one-mile stretch of the Rachel Carson Trail. The land has since been transferred to the Pennsylvania Game Commission for permanent protection. This project preserves the area's rural character, expands public recreation access, and enhances habitat connectivity for native wildlife.



ALT staff enjoy a hike at the Audubon Greenway.

Another major initiative is ALT's Panhandle Greenway Conservation Project in the Robinson Run Watershed, just a 20-minute drive from downtown Pittsburgh. With its vulnerability to flooding and increasing development pressure, this area is a high-priority target for conservation. Since 2023, we've conserved 250+ acres as part of this effort to create a regional greenway with high recreational and ecological value. This year, we're working on two separate projects: 30 acres in Collier that would expand Settlers Cabin Park and 42 acres in South Fayette that would buffer the beloved Panhandle Trail. We'll need all the help we can get preserving these two new tracts of land this year to maintain momentum on this landscape-scale conservation effort.

FUTURE CONNECTIONS

Protecting land at a landscape scale isn't just a conservation strategy, it's a scientifically supported need to ensure a livable, resilient, and biodiverse future. Decades of ecological research have shown that larger, connected ecosystems are essential for water and air quality, ecosystem function, habitat stability, and species survival. We are all connected to the land and thrive when the land is connected. We hope you'll continue to support our work so we can maintain our momentum in researching, pursuing, and conserving landscape-scale conservation efforts.



Flora and fauna now flourish at ALT's Audubon Greenway – a landscape-scale conservation effort years in the making.

Where We are Now and Our 2025 Projects

A look at Allegheny Land Trust's existing and newly protected lands, and current conservation projects in progress.



An explorer hikes through the Panhandle Greenway Conservation Project.



A walker enjoys Pittsburgh's beloved regional trails.

1

EXPAND SETTLERS CABIN PARK

30 Acres | Collier Township

Serving as another phase of our Panhandle Greenway landscape-scale conservation effort, this project would add 30 acres of conserved woodlands to a growing network of green space. Historically serving as farmland and a family homestead, this land's conservation would grow Settlers Cabin Park, protect drinking water quality, avoid exacerbating flood issues in the Robinson Run Watershed, and provide wildlife habitat.

2

PROTECT THE PANHANDLE TRAIL

42 Acres | South Fayette Township

Together with our other Panhandle Greenway feature, this land is part of our Panhandle Greenway conservation effort. These 42 acres of green space are in South Fayette Township, within the Robinson Run Watershed, and directly along the beloved Panhandle Trail. In addition to protecting the green, shade-giving trailside of the Panhandle Trail, this land's conservation will help create an ecological, recreational, and place-making greenway unlike any in the region.



An aerial view of the Dead Man's Hollow Expansion Project. Photo by Gerardo Valasquez.

3

GROW DEAD MAN'S HOLLOW

10 Acres | Elizabeth Township

Dead Man's Hollow was ALT's very first conservation project, and it remains among its most popular to visitors today. Now, we have an opportunity to expand the footprint of this incredible conservation area by conserving 10 acres between the Hollow and the Youghiogheny River along the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP). By protecting this green space, we can conserve the shaded trailside of the GAP, preserve community-forged trails through the land, and create permanent walk-up access to the Youghiogheny River for Dead Man's Hollow.



A young explorer runs through a former driveway of the St. John's Green.

4

IMPROVING ST. JOHN'S GREEN

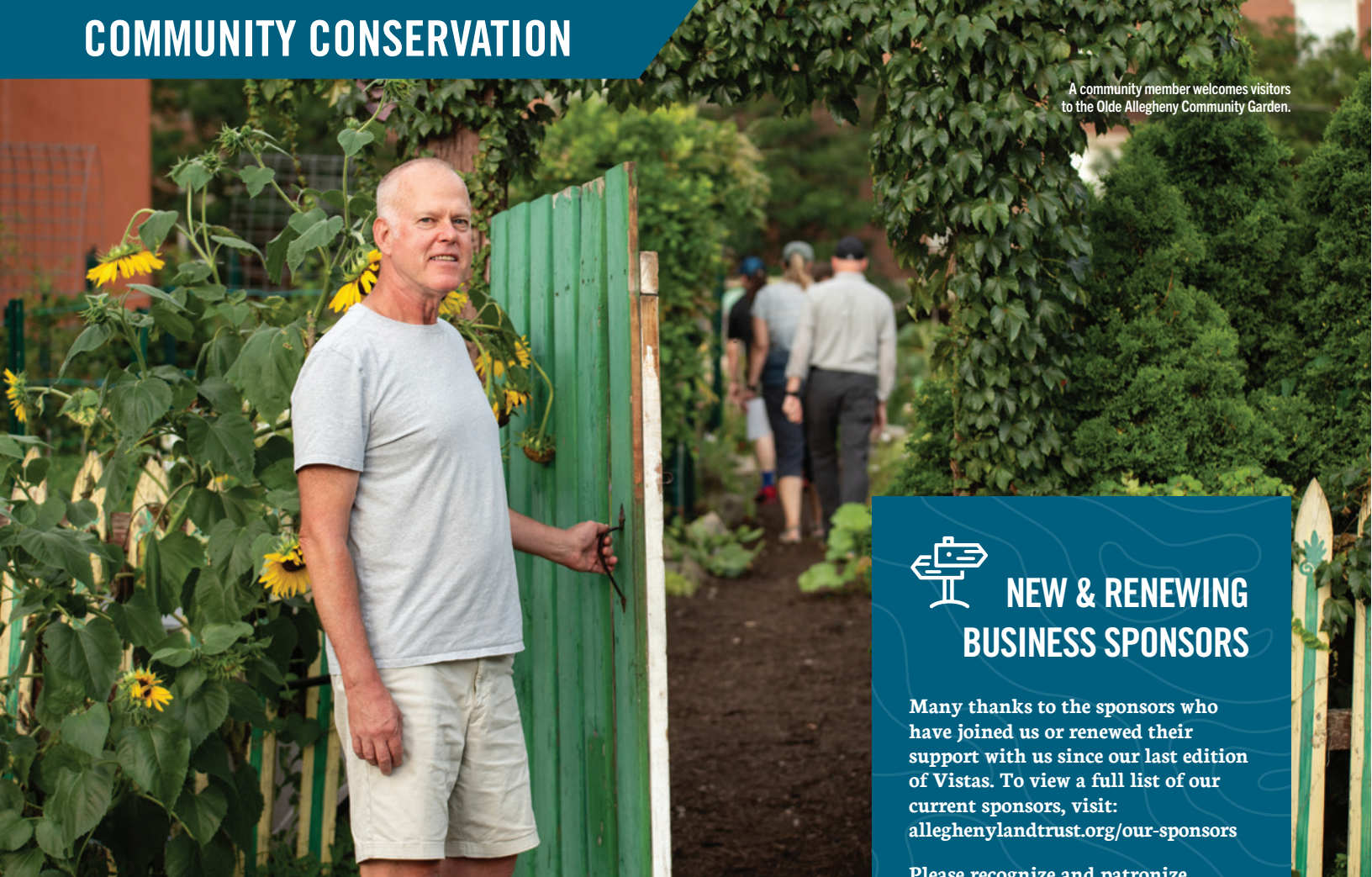
30 Acres | Brighton Heights

Located in the Brighton Heights neighborhood of Pittsburgh, this is a recovering green space that was once home to a hospital. When ALT acquired the property, it was barren land with community-forged pathways, gathering spots, and several areas of dumping issues. We're now in the midst of implementing a site plan to improve community use and access to the green space while transforming it into a haven for native plants and natural stormwater infrastructure.



For more information or to support ALT's current conservation projects, please visit alleghenylandtrust.org/currentprojects





Together, We Saved More Community Gardens

by Tom Mulholland | Community Conservation Director &
Lindsay Dill | Marketing & Community Engagement Senior Director

In early July, gardeners in two City of Pittsburgh neighborhoods were able to celebrate the permanent protection of their beloved gardens. Through Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative (TRALI), ALT's joint venture with Grow Pittsburgh, we were able to successfully conserve several parcels of the Olde Allegheny Community Garden in the Central Northside as well as another set of parcels of the Kincaid Street Community Garden in Garfield.

OLDE ALLEGHENY COMMUNITY GARDEN | CENTRAL NORTHSIDE

Located at 1309 Arch Street, Olde Allegheny Community Garden was previously an abandoned lot that neighbors and various leaders began to improve in the early 1980s. Since its founding, the garden has served as a vibrant community gathering and growing place.

TRALI was able to permanently protect several garden parcels, helping to secure its status as a permanent community fixture.

"Our community garden is more than just a place to grow food—it's a space where neighbors come together, share knowledge, and cultivate connection," said gardener Peggi Habets. "It offers a peaceful retreat in the heart of our neighborhood."



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Many thanks to the sponsors who have joined us or renewed their support with us since our last edition of Vistas. To view a full list of our current sponsors, visit: alleghenylandtrust.org/our-sponsors

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If you're interested in becoming an ALT sponsor, please contact Tyler Chilcott at tyler@alleghenylandtrust.org.



A volunteer installs a pathway at a TRALI garden.



A bike rests against a community-painted fence at Olde Allegheny Community Garden.

KINCAID STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN | GARFIELD

Located along Kincaid Street, Kincaid Street Community Garden is now one step closer to being permanently protected. This is the second phase of protecting this garden, and there are still phases ahead to conserve the land in its entirety.

Established in 2011, this garden started with a few backyard plots and expanded across four vacant lots over the next decade. Gardener members participate by caring for the collectively shared garden plots where they are growing a perennial food forest or by adopting their own plot to care for independently.

“We love working together on the challenges and joys of building community and a garden, we love sharing food around our picnic table together, and we love playing in the dirt!” said the gardeners of Kincaid Street.

By utilizing ALT and Grow Pittsburgh’s independent strengths, TRALI creates the stability necessary to foster a vibrant, sustainable urban agriculture movement in the Pittsburgh region by removing the threat of future sales of agricultural lands for

other development purposes and creating opportunity to expand urban agriculture.

“Grow Pittsburgh is proud to support growers who have dedicated time and resources to strengthen their community’s food security, among the many other benefits gardens bring to our neighborhoods,” said Grow Pittsburgh’s director of community projects, Dora Walmsley.

There are more than 120 community gardens and urban farms in Allegheny County, many of which use land without a formal land use agreement or have only temporary permission. Providing permanent protection for gardens like these provides environmental benefits by mitigating storm water, protecting pollinator habitat, creating neighborhood food security and serving as vital places for social connections and community-building.

“We’re honored to be a part of these beloved gardens’ history by ensuring its permanent conservation with Grow Pittsburgh,” ALT President and CEO Carrie Gilbert said. “Part of our vision is to make green space easily accessible and available to everyone, and we believe the TRALI initiative – and these gardens – is helping to fulfill that vision.”

Now that the future of these gardens is secure, gardeners can confidently continue to invest their time, energy, and resources into maintaining and improving these community gathering and growing spaces.



Flowers grow at a TRALI garden.



NATURE ON WHEELS

by Julie Travaglini | Senior Director of Education & Curriculum

Over the past two years, ALT's Education Team has been working on something major that we teased over several months. Now, at long last, we can finally shout it from the rooftops: Nature on Wheels is coming!

Nature on Wheels is a new initiative designed to expand access to environmental education across the region. This innovative hybrid truck-and-trailer system allows us to bring our programs directly to more diverse audiences, especially those traditionally excluded from environmental education.

Reaching underserved communities is essential for promoting environmental justice and empowering residents to advocate for healthier, more sustainable land. These communities often experience higher exposure to pollution, fewer green spaces, and limited access to environmental resources.

The initiative aims to provide individuals with the knowledge and tools to engage in local decision making, address environmental challenges, and build resilience to climate-related challenges. Ultimately, this kind of outreach fosters a stronger connection to nature and inspires collective action for lasting, positive change.

The trailer was designed with the guidance of CannonDesign's Open Hands program and funded by American Eagle Outfitters Foundation, Arconic Foundation, Benedum Foundation, CannonDesign, Grable Foundation, HDR Inc., Rivers of Steel, and the Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club. Our education and development teams worked together to raise more than \$225,000 to fund the creation and build out of Nature on Wheels.

Now, we are seeking funders to help build a \$100,000 implementation fund for Nature on Wheels programming over the next year. These dollars will help us staff Nature on Wheels, bring it to our local communities, and provide opportunities for free programming. This mobile learning lab will also be available as a fee-for-service program, with pricing and scheduling information to come soon.

We look forward to connecting and learning with you—whether it's out on our properties, online, in the community, or through Nature on Wheels!



Five Ways to Support Nature on Wheels

- 1. Add a Donation to Your Ticket**
Every donation made at your ticket checkout helps bring Nature on Wheels to more people around our region.
- 2. Book Nature on Wheels for Your School**
Connect with us to bring Nature On Wheels directly to students.
- 3. Book Nature on Wheels for Your Event**
Include environmental education in your next community day, festival, or other event!
- 4. Visit Us**
Bring your friends and family out to enjoy Nature on Wheels when we're in your area.
- 5. Spread the Word**
Share our posts and announcements about Nature on Wheels with your networks.



Campers learned how to look for birds and how to build nests like a bird.



ALT Summer Camp Recap

by Sara Klingensmith | Education Associate

Our very first ALT Summer Camp at Blackridge Civic Association (BCA) was a whirlwind of wonder, adventure, and fun!

Every morning, we hiked with campers through the re-wilding landscape of Churchill Valley Greenway in search of birds, bugs, and more. Campers excitedly constructed “Moss Island,” found a secret hideaway under an area of spruce trees, and searched for hidden geocaches. During creative time, we emulated birds by building nests, assembled mobiles out of found natural items, and designed our very own exploratory backpacks. To beat the heat, we played water games and enjoyed the shade given by some of Churchill’s forested nooks. We discovered what’s in a watershed, learned what owls had for lunch by dissecting owl pellets, and had a blast measuring and observing earthworms.



Campers took it upon themselves to build “Moss Island.”

Most importantly, campers made many new friends and lasting memories.

We’d like to extend thanks to a few folks for making this first ALT Summer Camp possible. Dr. Maria Wheeler-Dubis from Backyard Nature and AJ Markiewicz, ALT’s Mark A. MacKay Conservation Intern, helped us in running the programming with our campers. The Grable Foundation and dozens of individual donors helped allow us to offer summer camp at no cost to campers’ families. We could not have done this without our gracious hosts, the Blackridge Civic Association. Finally, we couldn’t have had such a fun time learning

without the participation of our enthusiastic campers!

To learn more about future ALT Summer Camps, stay tuned to this newsletter and our website events calendar to find our 2026 information.



Volunteers help plant trees
at Churchill Valley Greenway.



See an issue on the land?

Use our Field Report survey on your phone — no app required — just bookmark it! This allows visitors to easily and accurately document issues that we can then address. The Field Report survey has photo and location data capabilities, which helps us take the guesswork out of where exactly that tree fell, or the bluebird box was built, or those weeds were pulled.

Scan the code above, or visit
bit.ly/altfieldreport

Maintaining Our Green Gems

by Caitlin McCalla | Vice President of Stewardship

It has been another busy year for ALT's stewardship team, working on projects that improve the sites both for human and wildlife use. Through strong efforts from volunteers, community partners, and our small-but-mighty stewardship team, we are restoring native habitat and planning for future management across several ALT green spaces.



Volunteers help dig in brand new,
sustainable trail tread at Girty's Woods.

GIRTY'S WOODS

Following a strong community effort to protect these woods connecting the communities of Millvale, Reserve, and Shaler, ALT formed a management plan that focuses on habitat restoration and trail improvements to build connections and establish sustainable trails for more people to explore the site.

We have built 1.5 miles of new sustainable trail, establishing a new trailhead at Frederick Street in Millvale and connecting to Irwin Lane in Reserve township. We are also partnering with crews from Landforce and Student Conservation Association to build connections towards Stanton Avenue in Millvale. Finally, volunteers have been helping us restore a native canopy in the disturbed woods by planting hundreds of trees.



A volunteer prunes an overgrown tree at Churchill Valley Greenway.

CHURCHILL VALLEY GREENWAY

Knowing that long-term stewardship would be a significant effort when we permanently protected Churchill Valley Greenway in 2021, we targeted our planning to effectively balance community needs and ecological benefits. We completed a prescribed forest restoration plan and a vision planning process where we invited key stakeholders to develop a big picture overview of major goals for the site involving forest and wetland restoration and public access. Our next step was to dive into a detailed management planning process that would provide a roadmap with specific recommendations for trail improvements, signage and access, and would fill any gaps in habitat restoration not already covered by the forest or wetland restoration.

This plan was supported with funds from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Regional Asset District. We kicked off the planning effort in Fall 2022, which involved four public meetings and an online survey where participants shared input on management goals and ideas. The plan was finalized in March 2025, and we have already begun implementing recommendations for trail improvements and invasive species management. You can find out more about the plan and upcoming volunteer workdays on our website.



A bird perches on a cattail at Wingfield Pines.

WINGFIELD PINES

In partnership with Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh and Powdermill, ALT received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to improve Wingfield Pines' habitat to support neotropical migratory birds. These birds fly to places in North America in the spring and summer to breed, then migrate to Central and South America for winter. These species fly thousands of miles twice annually and face several risks, including collisions, habitat loss, the pesticide-induced insect population reduction, and disrupted timing and food availability due to climate change.

The habitat work at Wingfield Pines provides a haven for these species to rest and prepare for their long flights. Some changes you will notice at Wingfield include new culverts and swales along the main trail from the access road to the water treatment system, as well as many new tree, shrub, and herbaceous plants. Observe the wildlife in the newly-established wetland from our new overlook between two walnut trees!



Explorers hike along the switchback trails of Dead Man's Hollow.

DEAD MAN'S HOLLOW

Our first and still beloved conservation area received a lot of attention to its trails this summer. At Catfish Pond, a local scout troop raised funds for materials and constructed a new bridge crossing over the "waterfall". Through a partnership with the Student Conservation Association and local high schools, a particularly wet, poor-draining section of Cool Spirit Trail was rerouted for better access and sustainability. With funding from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Ruin's trailhead will receive attention to improve habitat and visitor experience. We are also in the process of repairing and replacing damaged signs, removing hazard trees, and planning to plant new native trees.

We look forward to continue maintaining and improving our beloved green spaces with the help of funders, members, and individual volunteers like you. We hope you'll check our website events calendar for upcoming opportunities to lend a hand on our open volunteer workdays!

A cyclist enjoys the trails at Girty's Woods.





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UPCOMING EVENTS

E Education Events

V Volunteer Events

Beautiful fall foliage
at Churchill Valley Greenway.



WEBINAR SERIES

October 22 | Nature's Vampires & Zombies

November 5 | Turkey Talk

December 3 | Fauna of Our Festive Songs

Gain nature knowledge from anywhere you have an internet connection with our free webinars on a variety of topics.

All Ages | Time: 5 - 5:45 PM | Cost: Free



AARP 50+ WALK

October 24 | Dead Man's Hollow

Geared for those ages 50 and up, we will walk over moderate terrain and short distances, taking plenty of breaks to stop and learn about our local flora and fauna. Sponsored by AARP Pennsylvania.

Ages 50+ | Time: 5 - 6 PM | Cost: Free



SCIENCE STROLL SERIES

October 24 | Dead Man's Hollow's Haunted History

December 6 | Finding Warmth in Winter

Join our education team to learn more about science in nature! In October, we'll explore flora, fauna, and haunted history. In December, we'll explore how insects, mammals, reptiles, and birds stay warm and fed throughout the winter.

All Ages | Time & Location: Varies | Cost: \$5



Registration is required for all events. For registration and more info, visit: alleghenylandtrust.org/events



TREE PLANTING CELEBRATION

October 25 | St. John's Green

Join us for a tree, shrub, and wildflower planting at St. John's Green community conservation space in Brighton Heights! Formerly the site of St. John's Hospital, this space is now being re-wilded to serve as a community green space and to provide storm water management. We need your help to bring the vision to life!

All Ages | Time: 9 AM - 12 PM | Cost: Free



VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER MEETUP SERIES

October 29 | Online

November 19 | Online

We are so grateful for our volunteers' work! Join our monthly "office hour" to share upcoming events, thoughts, and ideas.

All Ages | Time: 6 - 7 PM | Cost: Free



FALL COLORS WALK

October 26 | Panhandle Trail near Sturgeon, PA

Enjoy a ~2-mile nature hike along the Panhandle Trail during peak fall colors to a green space ALT is trying to conserve. We'll also explore flora and fauna on the way. Proceeds support the conservation of nearby land, so join us to help preserve shade, recreation opportunities, and storm water buffers along the Panhandle Trail!

All Ages | Time: 10 AM - 12 PM | Cost: \$5



VOLUNTEER TRASH CLEANUP

November 8 | Hickory Hill

Join us on the banks of Big Sewickley Creek for a riparian zone cleanup with Civil & Environmental Consultants and Big Sewickley Creek Watershed Association. We'll clear trash, debris, and invasive plants to prepare for upcoming restoration work.

All Ages | Time: 10 AM - 1 PM | Cost: Free



Photo by Oregon State University
via Flickr Creative Commons.

COMPOSTING FOR BEGINNERS

November 11 | Giant Eagle Market District @ Settlers Ridge

Learn the benefits of composting, decide on the best method for you (whether your space is big or small), and learn how to get started! Participants will receive a copy of "Composting for Beginners" and be entered to win a \$100 Giant Eagle gift card. Event sponsored by Giant Eagle.

All Ages | Time: 6 - 7:30 PM | Cost: Free



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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 4,000 acres of green space in 41 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 Environmental Education.

With conservation areas in 41 municipalities, there is now an ALT conservation project within 8 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.



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FRONT COVER: Fall colors against a blue sky at Churchill Valley Greenway.

BACK COVER: Native flora and fungi growing at Audubon Greenway.

All photos by Lindsay Dill unless otherwise noted.



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