

# THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY **OUTDOOR**ISSUES

FALL 2023

## 500 LAND PRESERVATION PROJECTS!



This October The Land Conservancy of New Jersey added 21 acres to our Yards Creek Preserve in Blairstown, which means we have now protected and restored a total of 322 acres in the Delaware River watershed along the eastern slopes of the Kittatinny Ridge. This is one of the highest quality and most biodiverse forests in New Jersey.

We were also excited to recognize this as the 500th land acquisition we've made in the past 42 years. Five hundred—wow!

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day tasks that make up our work—especially when you do as much paperwork and jump through as many hoops as we do. But hitting a milestone like this encourages us to take a breath, step back, and look at the big picture.

Sandy Urgo, who heads up the land team that makes these acquisitions a reality, cites our staff's hard work

as critical to our ongoing success. She says, "The whole team has helped to build these preserves, working at grant writing, due diligence, restoration, stewardship, and reimbursement. These places are amazing, biodiverse, and resilient, and it is an absolute joy to pursue the re-wilding of this land."

Yards Creek Preserve is a great example of what TLCNJ's legacy allows us to accomplish. Since purchasing the first property for this project in 2019, we've been able to accumulate 300 acres toward our larger goal of amassing 1,000 uninterrupted acres to protect the Delaware River Basin (one of the most important watersheds on the East Coast) and build the Bobcat Alley wildlife corridor. Our reputation and relationships in the conservation community are serving us well, helping us work with landowners, government entities, funders, and fellow nonprofits. The network we've built over the past 42 years, along with the

**(Continued on page 2)**



## THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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## 500 Projects, cont'd

expertise and skills of our staff, are key to our successes. The preservation work is one pillar of our work; restoration is another. At Yards Creek Preserve we have removed six stream culverts, corrected an area where the stream was previously forded, and reforested food plots that were cut in the forest. A stream restoration this past summer is already improving the resilience of the area, as evidenced during this season's heavy storms. Hundreds of trees have been planted by staff and volunteers, most recently in October, and invasive species control continues to move forward. As a result, biodiversity is thriving.

Sandy says, "Yards Creek Preserve is really flourishing, and under the management of The Land Conservancy, it continues to grow. We are completing thoughtful restorations as we go along, improving habitat and reducing stressors. Trees have been planted, natural stream crossings have replaced culverts and driveways, wetlands have been enhanced, human impacts have been reduced, invasive species are being battled and native species are thriving."

The Delaware River Basin is one of the most important watersheds on the East Coast. Fifteen million people rely on the basin for clean drinking water—including the cities of Trenton, Philadelphia, Wilmington, and New York City. Funding for this most recent acquisition came from a Green Acres Nonprofit Planning Incentive Grant, The Nature Conservancy, and the Open Space Institute Delaware River Watershed Protection Fund (a project of the William Penn Foundation).



Yards Creek Preserve is home for this wood turtle and many other creatures.



# FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



Our staff works hard all year long, each team plugging away at a different facet of our conservation work, and each member contributing their unique skills and experience: navigating the intricacies of Green Acres regulations; plugging huge data sets into GIS to make maps both beautiful and useful; finding and using green spaces in municipalities all over the state. As for me, I brought my deep love of the land to TLCNJ's development and communications team four years ago. We tell stories and forge relationships to build community, bring in funding, and keep the organization humming.

I'm proud of what our small but mighty organization has accomplished, but it's easy to get caught up in the everyday tasks and challenges. Fortunately, each year we attend the national Land Trust Alliance Rally, which throws me into the mix with colleagues from

all over the country. In that high-energy environment, I get a big-picture perspective of how our work is making a meaningful difference in climate change and in the lives of individuals. I'm comparing notes with colleagues whose projects dovetail with our own, and learning from the achievements of others.

The outdoor adventures and time spent with co-workers are another reason I love Rally. Last year we kayaked through Maurepas Swamp in Louisiana, and this September David led us through the forests and waterfalls along Eagle Creek in Oregon's Columbia River Gorge. Learning about the landscape we're visiting—which we all share a love for—reminds us why we're working so hard.

Back at the conference center in Portland this year, I was inspired by groups involved in the landback movement with Indigenous communities like we are. I chatted with fellow communicators over lunch about how to engage diverse audiences and develop strategic marketing plans. Another workshop gave me food for thought about plugging in TLCNJ's goals to the NJDEP's 80x50 report to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I saw old friends and made new ones, all of us excited to trade ideas and resources. And then we all returned home, excitement renewed, energized and full of new ideas for the year to come.

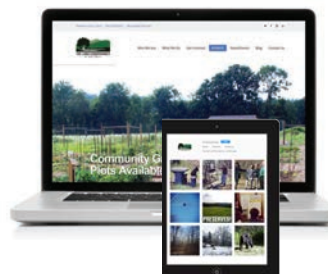
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'Kate Munning'.

Kate Munning  
Communications Manager

## GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can also visit [tlc-nj.org](http://tlc-nj.org) to read our blog.



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# Watch Our Scholarships Grow!

We are extremely proud to showcase the five New Jersey students who were awarded TLCNJ's 2023 scholarships, each of whom was given \$7,500 to support their pursuit of a degree in environmental science or a related field.

Several of our winners attended the dinner after this year's Gray Cup golf tournament, and we got to hear about their fascinating research and plans for the future. It's energizing to learn what these future environmental leaders have in store, and makes us more optimistic for the future. Time to meet the winners!



*Adam Gelfand*

First up is Adam Gelfand, who was born in Livingston and now resides in Scotch Plains. Adam says, "I am an ecologist who sees the natural world through the eyes of trees. As an undergraduate, I studied environmental education at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC. Since then I have worked as a habitat restoration technician, teacher, and habitat monitor in NJ and NYC. I am currently working towards a master's degree in ecology, evolution, and conservation biology from Columbia University. My research interests include tree rings, habitat restoration, Indigenous land stewardship and sovereignty, and climate change. I'd like to work in non-profit land management, conservation science, and conducting research that supports land back movements."



*Sophia Ludtke*

Next up is Sophia Ludtke, who grew up in Gladstone and is a rising junior at Harvard, where she studies earth science and environmental policy.

Sophia says, "My research is related to hybrid solar-wind renewable energy on agricultural land, the human health impact of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and the effects of climate change on human migration and civil conflict in Israel and Palestine. In addition, I have experience working at a regenerative farm in rural Illinois and leading backpacking and hiking trips throughout the Blue Ridge and White Mountains. I'm very excited to be spending this summer conducting glaciology field work on the Juneau Icefield in Alaska!"

Jose Antunes, our third award winner, is a Newark native and a PhD student at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in the department of chemistry and environmental science.



*Jose Antunes*

He currently studies enzymes that biodegrade 1,4-dioxane, a groundwater contaminant and probable human carcinogen. These enzymes have the potential to remediate polluted environments and improve water quality. Jose looks forward to seeing the results of his work applied in the field. He is also a community leader as the co-founder of GIDE, NJIT's first DEIJ organization for graduate students.

Kylie Bill from Florham Park is a rising junior at American University double majoring in studio art and environmental science. Kylie has always used art to express her love for nature, and her scientific research focuses on plant biodiversity in an evolutionary context. Kylie applied these methods in her Girl Scout Gold Award project to restore land in her hometown into a native meadow for birds and pollinators, as well as in her current research



*Kylie Bill*



# The Pollinator Program's Busy Bees

on how floral scent affects the foraging patterns of the Eastern Bumblebee.

Our fifth and final scholarship winner this year is Eliza Rothenburger, a rising junior at Virginia Tech studying wildlife conservation. Eliza is currently examining the impact of climate change on shorebirds on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and has done similar work with deer, bears, weasels, and scavengers.



*Eliza Rothenburger*

Eliza says, “I hope to be able to determine what species I enjoy working with the most, and what kind of research I have a true passion for. Right now, my goal is to do field research, focusing on studying animal behavior in natural habitats with a focus on threatened and endangered species.”

It's exciting and inspiring to learn about the work of these young environmentalists, and to see how they'll shape a better world in their careers.

It's hard to believe that the next cycle of scholarships will be starting up soon. Beginning in January, applications for 2024 will be available on our website at [tlc-nj.org](http://tlc-nj.org). We're thrilled to be increasing our awards once again, now offering SIX scholarships worth \$10,000 each to college students who are New Jersey residents pursuing a degree in environmental science, natural resource management, conservation, park administration, and related fields. This scholarship program started in 1983 with the Russell W. Myers Scholarship, followed by the Rogers Family Scholarship in 2005. For 40 years TLCNJ has been proudly supporting future environmental leaders who are training for careers protecting our natural resources.



Once again, our Pollinator Program field day was a big hit! The curiosity and excitement of these students is contagious. They were full of serious questions and real insight, and they gobbled up all the fruits and veggies grown by City Green Farm. Who says kids don't like vegetables?

Huge thanks to our superstar outdoor education intern Van Trat, who has been teaching this group about plants and pollinators all year, and to the Boys and Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic for continuing to be a great partner. Being out in the field with these students and seeing their enthusiasm for nature up close gives us feel-good vibes that will keep us going until we do it all again next year!



We're also thrilled to announce that a generous donor has fully funded the Pollinator Program for the next three years! This gives us the opportunity to extend the program's reach and plan for the long term.

# Looking Ahead, Together



There are so many facets of our work here at The Land Conservancy, and we've been at it for 42 years now. It's difficult to grasp the scope of what we do just from social media and our newsletter. So we decided to try something new. On October 18, we invited some of our members to participate in a webinar to examine the finer points of land preservation, habitat restoration, and environmental education and mentorship. David presented some historical context and then dug deep into the issues: funding open space in New Jersey, building climate resilience for at-risk communities, and training the next generation of environmental scientists. Attendees got a behind-the-scenes look at where the organization is headed, and they were invited to contribute their own questions and concerns about the future.

Looking ahead means acknowledging that we won't be here forever, and that the work we do is for the good

of future generations. The Legacy Giving Circle is an honorary society celebrating those who have named The Land Conservancy of New Jersey in their estate plans, knowing that their generosity and forethought will help protect natural resources in the Garden State for years to come.

Thanks to a challenge match issued by a dedicated donor, every person that confirms The Land Conservancy has been named in their will or estate plan by December 31, 2023 unlocks a \$1,000 grant for the organization. So we invite you to join the dedicated individuals and families who have already taken steps to ensure open space and clean drinking water will continue for future generations. Become a Legacy Giving Circle member today at [tlc-nj.org](http://tlc-nj.org).

Thank you to our current Legacy Giving Circle members: Anonymous, Sherri Albrecht, Estelle Anderson, Paul Augustyniak, JoAnn Bowman, Andrew E. Bradley, Jean Cater, Margie DeAngelo, Faith Eckler, Alan Epstein, David Epstein, Jessica Epstein, Naomi Epstein, Patty Epstein, Sally Epstein, Teresa Finlay, Matthew Finlay, Sheldon Freidenreich, Eric Gargiulo, Martin Gilbert, Steven Grossman, Jean Grossman, Mildred Lillis, David Luber, Sylvia M. Luber, Harry A. Marshall, Robert D. McLean, Zelda Meisels, Nancy Monroe, John Naughtright, Kaki Pierson, Robert Ross, Eleanor Rowe, Rick Simon, John Simonelli, and Barbara Wattenbach.



*“A future without our farms and woods, streams, and clean air, places to hike and catch a beautiful view, is a future I can't imagine. I'm happy to do my part to keep the Garden State as clean and wild as possible. Land preservation lasts forever, whereas zoning rules and environmental policies, though essential, aren't a guarantee for protecting our natural places. This generous matching gift will make your gift today go further. There is no time to lose. What we give today will protect land for the future.”* —Kaki Pierson, Legacy Giving Circle member





# Lurker Park, East Hanover's Community Haven

**L**urker Park in East Hanover is a busy recreation complex with ball fields, roller rink, tennis courts, and a town pool. Bee Meadow Park serves the same purpose for nearby Hanover. These parks are also precious green spaces and nature retreats in the midst of bustling New Jersey suburbs surrounded by commerce and highways. Lurker Park and Bee Meadow Park, both of which TLCNJ helped grow, significantly contribute to the quality of life in these communities. Hanover was recently written up in the *New York Times* as a desirable place for families to put down roots, and the town's parks and open spaces were touted as an important factor for residents looking to settle there.

Our staff used their planning experience and land acquisition skills to develop and update both towns' open space plans and facilitate land preservation there. After many years of work, the last six small privately held inholdings have been secured to make Lurker Park one contiguous area on the map. Similarly, a new property was added to the entrance of Bee Meadow Park, enclosing its borders.

The small lots in Lurker Park were created following World War II as part of a Passaic River camping community. Most of the owners abandoned these lots as the town cobbled together the park, which now serves as a place for neighbors to reconnect, offering walking trails and drive-in movie nights. Especially during the pandemic, both Lurker Park and Bee Meadow Park supported the need for neighbors and families to spend time together.

Raj Butani's family owned one of the recently acquired lots in East Hanover. "It is a little bittersweet for my parents, as it was their last attachment to East Hanover Township, where they moved in 1973. But we are happy that the land will be protected. We had a few commercial real estate companies make an offer on the property, but my Dad was determined to honor his commitment and place the land in the township's hands."

The land we helped preserve, all within the floodplain of the Passaic River in East Hanover, is seasonally wet and will remain undeveloped. With the help of The Land Conservancy, Hanover has received grant funding to design and install new trails at Bee Meadow Park. Similarly, East Hanover is working with Morris County to fund a new trail that will allow their property to be accessible and enjoyed by the public for years to come.



*Bee Meadow Park*



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## Featherfoil Returns!

Earlier this year, our land guru Sandy Uργο spotted something very exciting at our Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve: a colony of 200 *Hottonia inflata*, also known as featherfoil. This beautiful, feathery flowering plant has densely whorled leaves that floats on the water. This species is critically imperiled, and one that we had never seen in the years that we've been working at and observing this site. New Jersey is one of the 11 states where *Hottonia inflata* is critically imperiled, meaning that there are five or fewer occurrences here. So this is a significant find indeed. The most exciting aspect of this discovery is that this colony owes its existence to the restoration The Land Conservancy has done on the wetlands at Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve.



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