

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

WINTER 2021

GRAND OPENING OF NEW PRESERVE HONORING NANCY CONGER



On October 17, an intimate group gathered for the grand opening of a new land preserve named in honor of our longtime friend and champion Nancy Conger, who passed away in 2019.

The crisp, sunny day was perfect for 25 friends, family, and supporters to tour the property, where we recently completed an ambitious stream restoration project. Afterwards the preserve was officially opened with the unveiling of a new sign and a few heartfelt words remembering Nancy. In-person attendance was limited for health and safety reasons, but the community was invited to be with us virtually via livestream.

The 198-acre Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve was established in 2017 to preserve the headwaters of the West Brook. It's a major source of clean water for the Wanaque Reservoir, which 2 million New Jersey residents rely on for drinking. In August we finished a major restoration project redirecting the brook back into its original stream bed and reflooding the wetlands. Ultimately more water will flow into the reservoir during dry periods, erosion will be reduced, native plant species will flourish, and the brook will once again become a healthy habitat for the imperiled eastern brook trout.

Nancy Conger poured her energy and resources into The Land Conservancy for 25 years, starting with donations and volunteering and eventually becoming chair of the board of trustees. She helped with the acquisition of this property in West Milford, and she also helped raise the money to restore it.

Many spoke compellingly of Nancy's fierce spirit and devotion, including Congressman Josh Gottheimer, who was in attendance. He was followed by current board chair Andy Dietz and then our president, David Epstein, who said, "Nancy Conger's leadership and unflinching support for The Land Conservancy over the past 25 years made her our hero. We are proud to name this remarkable preserve in her memory."

After unveiling the new preserve sign alongside Epstein and Gottheimer, Nancy's husband, Bill Conger, said a few words. "This is the fourth time I've been able to hike around West Brook Preserve, and the difference from my first visit—when it looked like a development project—to the natural watershed you see today is a stunning transformation. It's a true recognition of Nancy's passion for land conservation and the relationships she forged that brought this to light. This is tangible proof that she really made a difference."



THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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GROWING THE NANCY CONGER WEST BROOK PRESERVE

The beautiful Kugler property pictured here is across the street from our Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford, which contains the headwaters of the West Brook. The new 43-acre parcel is home to a vital feeder stream leading into the brook, and also includes a pond with a dam that we will remove in order to restore the stream and wetlands.

In November 2020 we launched a campaign to raise funds for the parcel's purchase and restoration. And thanks to you—our community of passionate people committed to New Jersey's natural spaces—we were able to raise \$97,000. Your efforts will help ensure the permanent protection of this sensitive area, buffering an important water source and habitat for native plants and animals. The land purchase is slated to be finalized this spring.

The West Brook is a major source of clean water for the Wanaque Reservoir, which 2 million New Jersey residents rely on for drinking. When a project like this is realized, everybody wins.

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



David and a volunteer remove decades-old trash from Stag Hill in Mahwah during the cleanup day organized by MEVO.

As I reflect back upon this extraordinary year, in which we saw more of each other through a video screen than in person, I am reminded of the many supporters and partners who stepped across the virtual barrier to help The Conservancy, shining a bright beacon in an otherwise dark year.

Individual members generously provided matching funds to help us kick off our first end of fiscal year giving and Kugler campaigns, shoring up the resources necessary to complete four critical projects. The Nature Conservancy and Open Space Institute provided funding to help us add 78 acres to our Yards Creek Preserve, while 59 volunteers spent four days at Yards Creek planting 575 trees.

Long-time partner Bergen SWAN helped us add a critical property to our Ramapo Mountain Preserve, while new partner MEVO brought 30 volunteers to complete a massive cleanup for another property that will be added soon. The Wind-beam Fishing Club provided invaluable guidance and resources to help us complete the remarkable transformation of the West Brook. And we could not have developed the beautiful entrance to the new Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve without the kind assistance of the Conger Family and their many friends.

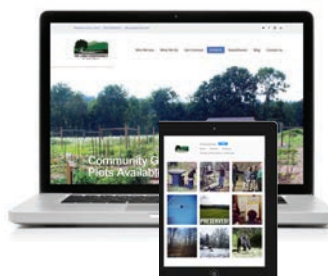
Todd Pride helped us launch our diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts while the Rock-kind-Wagner Foundation made a three-year pledge that will double the scholarships we are able to offer and increase the number we provide to students of color. City Green grew 44,000 pounds of fresh produce at our South Branch Preserve for urban residents who don't have enough to eat.

We are deeply grateful to all who contributed time, money, and ideas to help transform a difficult year into a successful one. I would be remiss if I didn't mention how fortunate I feel to work with a remarkable group of partners, colleagues and trustees whose talent, dedication, and resourcefulness inspire me every day. On behalf of all of us here at The Land Conservancy, thank you for helping us successfully navigate a difficult year none of us will ever forget.

A handwritten signature in green ink, which appears to read "Carol Epstein".

GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

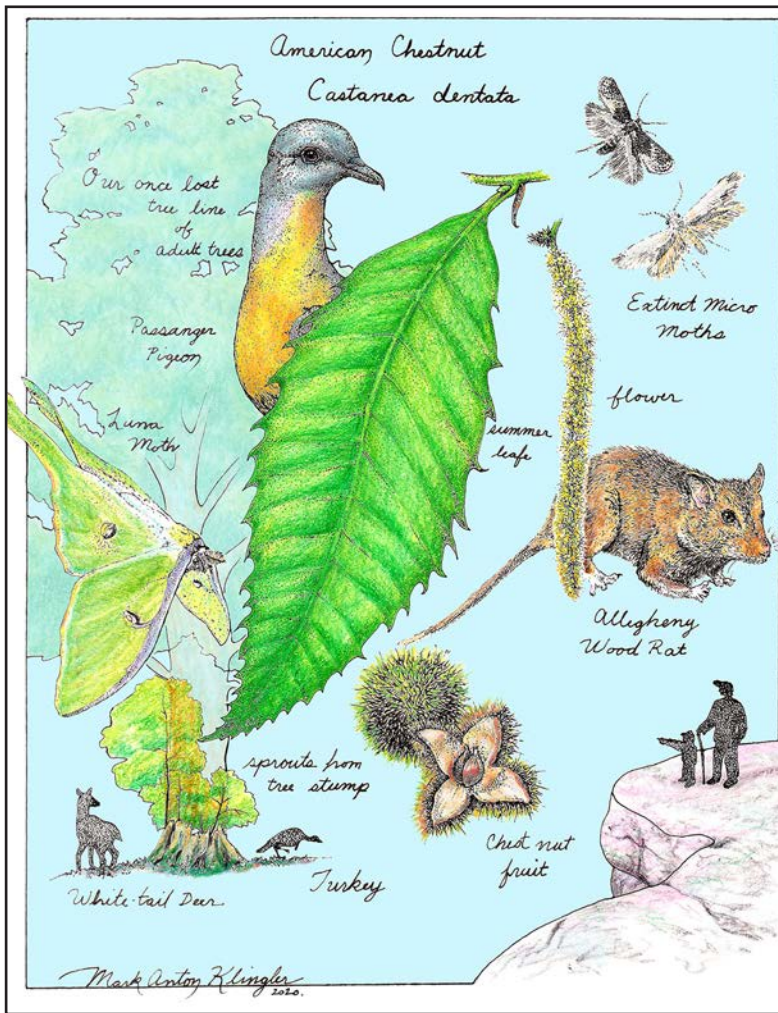
If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can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



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100 years ago, nearly 4 billion American chestnut trees were growing in the eastern U.S. They were among the largest, tallest, and fastest-growing trees. The wood was rot resistant, straight grained, and suitable for furniture, fencing, and building. The nuts fed billions of wildlife, people and their livestock. It was almost a perfect tree, that is, until a blight fungus killed it more than a century ago. The chestnut blight has been called the greatest ecological disaster to strike the world's forests in all of history.

Many people and organizations are working to develop solutions to bring back the American chestnut. For example, Antinanco Earth Arts School has planted hundreds of chestnut trees in New Jersey and Pennsylvania over the past few years, many on TLCNJ preserves. They have also published a conservation field course to teach how to recognize forest disturbances (natural and introduced), recognize forest age, learn to identify dominant and understory species, learn the principles of basic tree identification, and measure biological diversity, tree growth and tree health.



American Chestnut Revival



Rutgers University is doing innovative research into fighting chestnut blight using plant virology, and it just so happens that one of our interns, Becca Bright, is part of this study. Dr. Bradley Hillman is searching for a fungus that can be used to coinfect chestnut trees, killing the blight while keeping the tree healthy. Our big tree in Mahwah is one of the test subjects. They still have a long way to go isolating the blight and performing extensive DNA and RNA tests in the lab, but so far the results are very promising. We are excited to see what comes next, and encouraged that so many people are investing in healthy forests for our future.

In addition to blight, chestnut tree forests are also disturbed by human activity, animal grazing, and changing weather patterns. Invasive plants move in, making it harder for natives to grow. Fortunately, TLCNJ has found several mature American chestnut trees on our preserves. We are monitoring these trees for signs of blight and trying to encourage them to reproduce. An especially old tree in Mahwah with only minor blight offers some insight into how the American chestnut might be saved and revived.



PROTECTING THE KITTATINNY RIDGE

In December we added 78 acres to Yards Creek Preserve in Blairstown by acquiring two new parcels of land, bringing the size to 228 acres.

Yards Creek Preserve was established in 2019 as an ambitious conservation project that will help protect drinking water for millions of the region's inhabitants and curb encroaching development. We have identified over 1,000 acres of particularly vulnerable and richly diverse land to preserve in the Delaware River Basin, 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.

Yards Creek Preserve is near the Appalachian Trail and adjacent to more than 76,000 acres of public land in the Worthington State Forest and Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. The newly acquired Ascolese property consists of 57 acres near Four Corners Road and Gaisler Road in Blairstown, featuring a marsh backed by a stunning view of the Kittatinny Ridge. While there are a few invasive plants that need to be remediated, this land is full of native plants and shrubs. To the south is the Clark property, 21 forested acres that were likely headed for development. The majority of the land is high and

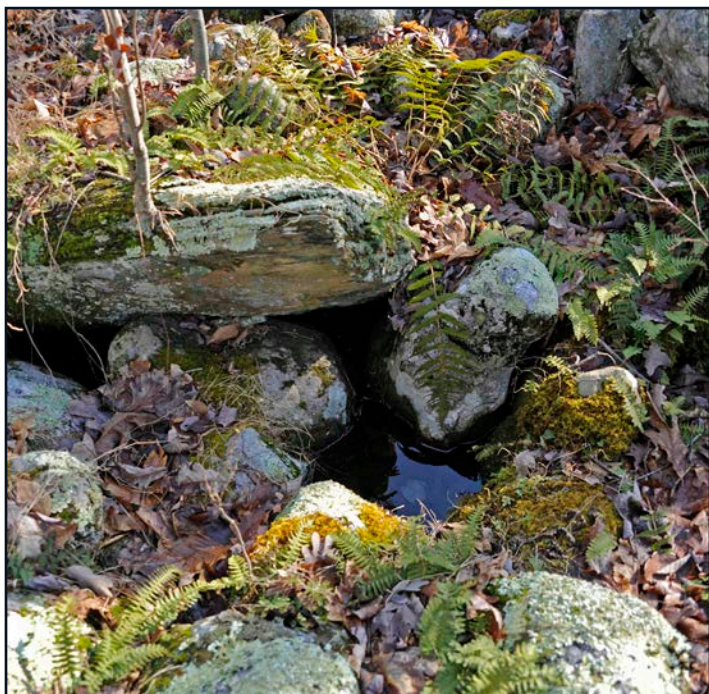


This resident of Navesink Roots Farm is happy to know that his home is now preserved farmland.

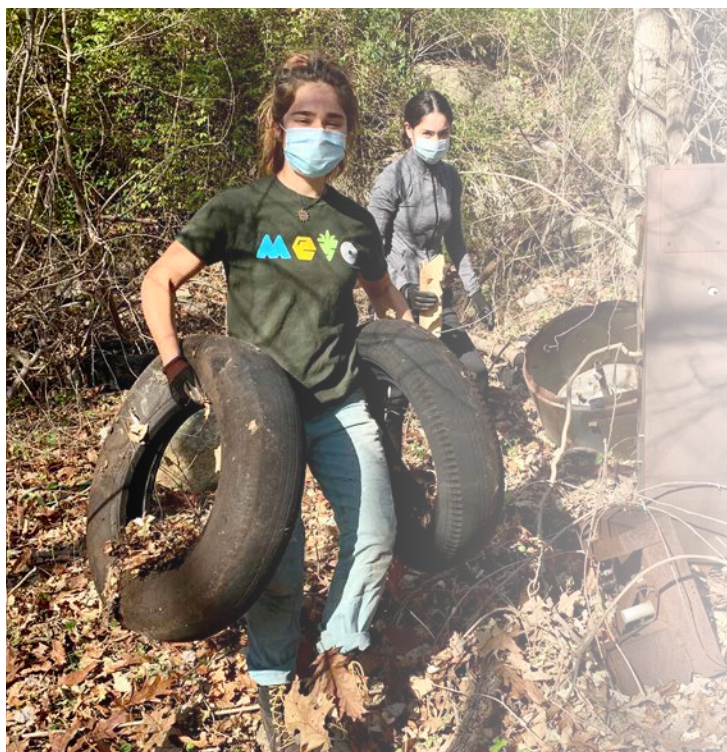
dry, but the lower landscape features a swath of stones with water run-off from the mountain, running beneath them across the property. This feature makes the area an important part of the watershed project and helped TLCNJ secure funding to preserve this spot.

We were also able to preserve nearby Navesink Roots Farm in December through a grant from the SADC. While not part of Yards Creek Preserve, this is another 25 acres in a sensitive area of the Kittatinny Ridge in Warren County that will now be permanently protected. The Black family will continue using the farm to raise livestock like the happy little goat pictured above.

Although the rivers and streams that feed the Delaware traverse one of the most densely populated parts of the mid-Atlantic region, this area also contains 700,000 acres of wetlands and pockets of wilderness such as the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, 400 miles of the Delaware National Wild and Scenic River, and a significant section of the Appalachian Trail. Yards Creek Preserve has taken its place in this larger effort by permanently safeguarding drinking water quality, preventing additional development on the slopes of the Kittatinny Ridge, and maintaining scenic views.



Water running beneath a swath of stones spanning the Ascolese property speaks to its critical role in the Delaware watershed.



Stag Hill Cleanup for the Ramapough Lenape

Stag Hill is a beautiful spot in Mahwah with sweeping views of the Ramapo River Valley below, all the way to Manhattan. This valley is also the ancestral land of the Ramapough Lenape Nation, whose members were forced to flee into the mountains by European colonists when they arrived in this part of North America.

Unfortunately, even the mountains weren't safe for the Ramapough. A prejudice towards the Lenapes that has endured for more than a century and still adversely impacts their lives today. For decades these sacred grounds were used as an illegal dump—in spite of the fact that the tribe considers it sacred land and their hunting grounds. Thousands of pounds of trash spills down the hillside, from old cars, refrigerators, and toilets to countless cans and broken bottles. But on November 21, 30 volunteers scoured the place clean thanks to an event organized by MEVO (Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization) in partnership with TLCNJ, which is in the process of acquiring another property here. Enough metal was collected to fill a 20-yard dumpster 1.5 times over, and 30 tires and 35 bags of trash and recyclables were hauled out of the woods.

This is part of a larger effort to build our Ramapo Mountain Preserve. The Land Conservancy has been working with the Ramapough Lenape Nation for a decade now, slowly purchasing properties in the Ramapo Mountains and cleaning them up to protect in perpetuity. In fact, we are helping the Ramapough reclaim their ancestral lands in a number of ways—for

example, by giving the tribe safe, long-term access to Split Rock Mountain in Hillburn, a site of archaeological and cultural importance.

TLCNJ is engaged in this work year-round, but it feels meaningful that this cleanup—the only one MEVO was able to organize in 2020 because of the pandemic—occurred during Native American Heritage Month.

MEVO has already cleaned up half a million pounds of trash in this area. Just before the cleanup began, MEVO's director Violet Reed offered sobering but inspiring words to the assembled group of volunteers. "Stag Hill has been ancestral land for the Ramapough Lenape Nation since revolutionary times, for both hunting and spiritual purposes. There are still 5,000 members in this area today. This mountain has been dumped on for the last 50 to 60 years; it's a critical social issue for our area. With this cleanup, we are standing in unity with the tribe."

There remains a lot of work to be done, but one way we can move forward together is by making this land available to the descendants of its first inhabitants—as we do for so many others.





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SCHOLARSHIPS FOR JUSTICE

Over 36 years, TLCNJ has awarded \$300,000 in scholarships to college students pursuing careers to protect the natural resources of their home state. Thanks to a gift from the Rochkind-Wagner Foundation, we can now offer two additional scholarships for at least the next 3 years specifically to students of color studying environmental sciences.

Mark Rochkind explained the reasoning behind his family's gift: "We've exploited our environment and continue to do so; we need to take a better measure of the unintended consequences. We want to encourage young, motivated people to consider a career of studying how the environment affects our quality of life, how we affect the environment, and how we can manage it sustainably. We especially want to support career opportunities in these fields for people of color."

