



# CURRENTS

FALL/WINTER 2022 | VOLUME 65, NO. 2



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

## CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH NATURE

BY **SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI**, Environmental Educator

“Are there tigers in these woods? Will deer hurt me? Can I get poison ivy by looking at it?” These are real questions asked by real children trying to understand what to expect as they exit their school bus and embark on their first adventure in one of our local preserves.



PHOTO: SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI

**Summer students at Wyncote Academy search through leaf mold for nature's decomposers - insects!**

Many of us agree that the well-being of children and the natural places we love are intimately linked. Research tells us that regular time outdoors is essential for children's healthy development but many children today are less connected to nature than ever before.

Since 2008 when Richard Louv published *Last Child in the Woods- Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, children have become even more removed from nature. As an

Educator at Wissahickon Trails, I see many children of various backgrounds. Some have families that encourage outdoor play and exploration of natural areas, but many others do not.

A 2021 University of Michigan poll found that half of children aged 10-12 and a third of children aged 7-9 use their devices to engage with others, and the world, through social media apps like PopJam, Instagram and YouTube. But ask yourself, will your kids remember their best day on Instagram? Not likely because there is no app for experiencing nature firsthand. Seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling and hearing nature for ourselves

- not through a screen - is an amazing experience.

There is a vast amount of data supporting the importance of children experiencing nature directly. Positive outcomes include:

- **Improving creativity** and problem-solving
- **Increasing physical activity**
- **Enhancing ability to focus** and reducing the symptoms of Attention Deficient Disorder
- **Promoting social** and emotional skill development
- **Reducing stress** and encouraging calmness

At Wissahickon Trails, our education program offers some children their first peek at nature. Many kids are tentative...unsure of what to expect. Once they walk the trails, hop across the stepping stones, and scramble in the creek, many of them are hooked! In fact, parents, teachers, and other adults are equally as engaged. Nature does that, a digital screen does not.

If you'd like to help groups of children experience nature, for perhaps the first time, please consider joining our volunteer education team by contacting Alex McWhorter at [alex@wissahickontrails.org](mailto:alex@wissahickontrails.org).



PHOTO: SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI

**Middle school students take a break from water quality testing to enjoy the stepping stones.**

### Summer Education Programs

Secondary students at Wyncote Academy spent time in July learning about local wildlife and their habitats. The kids participated in classroom lessons and a field trip to Wissahickon Trails' Briar Hill Preserve to explore the preserve while "orienteering". Orienteering is the sport of navigation using a topographical map and a compass. The kids used their maps to move through the preserve and locate specific places.

Middle school students attending Temple University Ambler's Summer Program learned about careers in environmental science and became "scientists for a day" as they performed water quality testing along the Wissahickon Creek. The kids tested for temperature, pH, nitrate, phosphate, and dissolved oxygen. This kind of "hands-on", real world science gives kids a chance to see what a career in an environmental field would look like.

2022 marked the fifth year of our partnership with the Ambler Area YMCA's Knight Park camp and the third year with Wissahickon Valley Boys and Girls Club. Campers have the opportunity to explore nature through a variety of games and other activities, such as monarch migration, predator prey relationships, owl pellet investigations and everyone's favorite, getting their feet wet exploring the creek!

# SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY IN YOUR BACKYARD

PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

BY: **KRISTY MORLEY**, Senior Naturalist

Biodiversity is essential to healthy ecosystems and supporting life on earth. Unfortunately, biodiversity, or the variety of all living things on our planet, has dramatically declined in recent years. This decline can largely be attributed to human activities, such as land use/habitat loss, pollution, and a changing climate. The good news is, this means that human activities can also help increase biodiversity.

**Here are a few actions you can take at home to support the animals, plants, and organisms of the Wissahickon Valley:**

**Plant a variety of native species:** Native plants support a complex web of insect life that then provides resources for birds and other animals. Many of our local bees, moths and butterflies require specific species of plants to support a part of their lifecycle. Without those plants, those species will not survive.

**Ligated Furrow Bee:** A common native bee that pollinates a wide variety of flowers while collecting pollen.

**Reduce your lawn:** Ecologist and author, Douglas Tallamy, suggests that if we could all replace half our lawns with productive native plant communities, we could create more than 20 million acres of habitat out of what is now “ecological wasteland”. This is more area than most of our major national parks combined! Even replacing a small portion of this would go a long way toward encouraging a more diverse community in our yards.

**Reduce chemical use:** A healthy ecosystem creates its own pest control system. Ladybugs eat aphids, ground beetles eat soil dwelling pests like slugs, and lacewings eat a variety of soft bodied pests.

**Create habitat:** Leaving the fallen leaves in your garden areas provides important protection for a variety of insects over the winter months. Cutting hollow plant stems in early spring provides nesting sites for cavity nesting native bees.

**Work together:**

Work with your neighbors to plant different species. This increase in variety can have an even greater impact on biodiversity. Get involved in your town environmental committee or your homeowners association to advocate for reduction of grass and chemical use.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

**Prairie warbler:** One of numerous bird species that rely on a constant supply of caterpillars and other soft bodied insects to feed their babies.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Magnolia Warbler at Dodsworth Run Preserve

As summer draws to a close there should be just one thing on everybody's mind: fall bird migration. Brave migrants are departing their breeding grounds and traveling overhead as they fly south, sometimes thousands of miles and usually at night, to somewhere they deem more suitable for winter. Millions of birds have already begun

## HELP OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS DURING THEIR FALL MIGRATION

BY: **TOM VOTER**, Stewardship Assistant

this formidable journey and we wish them safe travels. But tragically, our well wishes aren't enough. With such an epic adventure there is grave danger. Highly reflective glass that mirrors the surrounding landscape and the light emitted from skyscrapers and houses confuses the birds and causes them to crash into our windows, often fatally.

**Here's what you can do to help:**

**Turn off your lights** at work when you leave and keep your lights at home off at night as much as possible. Draw the blinds or close the curtains at night and reduce the brightness for when you do need to use the lights.

**Use physical barriers** on your windows like screens, netting, or cords. The

physical barrier must not have gaps any larger than 2 x 2 inches. The birds will see the barrier and change course before collision.

**Apply vinyl films to make the glass opaque.** You may also use stickers, paint, or markers designed for glass to decorate your window, making the physical barrier obvious, and having fun in the process.

**Be an advocate for the birds.** Getting word out can be tough, so please spread the word to family, friends and neighbors.

For more information and resources on what you can do, visit the Take Action at Home page on our website.

# A BETTER BRIAR HILL

BY: **TOM VOTER**, Stewardship Assistant

Nestled between the dreamy meadow of the Cheston Family Preserve and Whitpain Township's Prophecy Creek Park, lies a hidden gem: Briar Hill Preserve. Towering trees over dense thickets, a softly singing stream and thriving wildlife make Briar Hill the choice destination for anyone who seeks an escape from the hustle and bustle of the suburbs into a forested paradise.

The conservation team has been hard at work to improve Briar Hill Preserve. **We are proud to provide the following updates on our projects underway:**

**The installation of a new stepping stone creek crossing** is now complete, allowing adventurers to keep their feet dry and mud-free as they cross into the



PHOTO: TOM VOTER

neighboring Prophecy Creek Park. This attractive new crossing answers the question, "should I stop here and turn back?" No, keep hiking, there's so much more to discover.

**The repair of the bridge is now complete**, inviting visitors to once



PHOTO: TOM VOTER

again comfortably cross a small stream and access the loop trail. This bridge was constructed in 2020 thanks to a collaboration with our friends at Horseways and generous support from trail users. In 2021, a severe storm flooded the creek and hurled a barrage of uprooted ash trees, damaging the bridge. We can now say that we have come out on top with a freshly repaired and reinforced bridge, ready to weather the next storm.

**Our team has mapped out and completed the initial cutting of an upcoming trail connection.** The trail will have you weaving up and down a

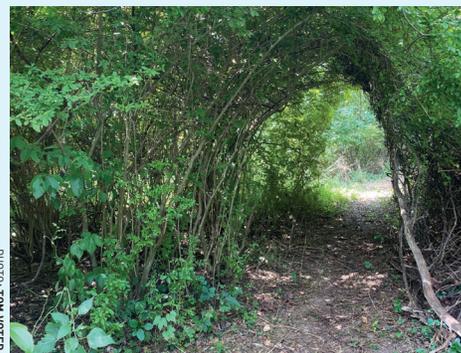


PHOTO: TOM VOTER

slope through the forestscape. Quaint tunnels cut through the dense hedges lead you through miniature meadows, between piles of boulders, and past an abandoned, rusty pickup truck. Once complete, the trail will connect Briar Hill to our recently-acquired Hughes Family Preserve and its vast, rolling meadow that we've been working to restore for the last two years. We expect to have the new trail complete by the end of Autumn 2022. We can't wait for you to try it out.

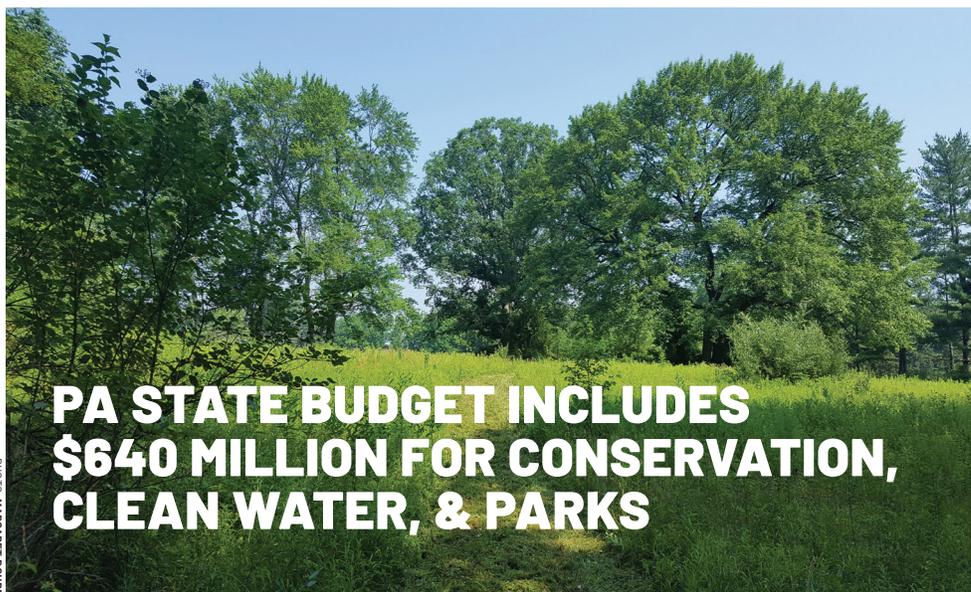


PHOTO: MARGARET ROUNDE

## PA STATE BUDGET INCLUDES \$640 MILLION FOR CONSERVATION, CLEAN WATER, & PARKS

BY **MADALYN NEFF**, Communications Specialist

The Pennsylvania state budget has been finalized for the upcoming fiscal year, and Growing Greener III (called "Outdoor Recreation Program" in the budget) and the Clean Streams Fund are included! In total, this is \$640 million in new investments to support conservation efforts, clean water, parks, and recreation.

Thank you to everyone who contacted your elected officials and showed your support for this investment in Pennsylvania's land and water. You've made a difference that will be felt for generations to come.

Growing Greener has been a critical funding source for local and regional environmental projects. Over the years, Wissahickon Trails has received \$1.2 million from Growing Greener to support the acquisition of Briar Hill Preserve, Stream Smart House Calls program, and the Wissahickon Headwaters Riparian Restoration project. We're thrilled that Growing Greener has been funded and will continue to support projects that benefit the environment and PA residents.

Thank you to Rep. Daley, Rep. Brooks, Rep. Hanbidge, Rep. Stephens, Rep. Malagari,

Rep. Pennycuik, Rep. M. Mackenzie, Rep. Webster, Rep. Ciersi, Rep. DeLissio, Rep. N. Nelson, Senator Haywood, Senator Saval, Senator Hughes, Senator Cappelletti, Senator Kearney, Senator Mensch, Senator A. Williams, and Senator Kane for supporting Growing Greener III.

# MONARCH BUTTERFLIES ENDANGERED?

BY KRISTY MORLEY, Senior Naturalist

You may have seen the headlines declaring “Monarch butterflies now listed as endangered” in July 2022.

The headline referred to the decision by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an advocacy group based in Switzerland, to add the monarch to their proprietary Red List of Threatened Species, as Endangered. While significant, this is quite different from a determination by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to protect a species under the Endangered Species Act in the United States, and has no real-world implications for monarchs in the U.S or even worldwide.

If monarchs were to be listed by the U. S. government, legal consequences would govern how humans interact with the species, including limitations on handling of the species, outlawing home raising, and eliminating the use of pesticides and herbicides such as neonicotinoids and glyphosate. Several monarch experts believe it will be difficult to list the monarch as endangered in the U.S., despite its declining numbers, due to the potential negative impacts on commercial agriculture.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Monarch butterfly

## So what can you do to help the monarch?

**Plant milkweed!** We have three species of native milkweed in our area, all of which monarchs will use to lay their eggs on.

**Check your municipality’s lawn & weed ordinances** and advocate for using native plants. Some municipalities have outdated weed ordinances that list important native species, such as milkweed, and goldenrod, as “weeds” that must be removed from residential lawns.

**Plant a variety of flowering plants** that bloom throughout the summer and fall. Adult monarchs need nectar to survive and do best when there are a variety of sources from which to choose.

**Plant at least 3 of each variety** and more if you can. Adult butterflies prefer to visit masses of flowers, and caterpillars can quickly eat 1 plant to the ground.

**Purchase your plants from local native nurseries.** Avoid plants pre-treated with neonicotinoids.

**Keep your yard herbicide and pesticide free.**

## A Healthier Habitat Starts Behind the Scenes: WHY I SUPPORT THE DAILY WORK

A few years ago, I chose to “adopt” Crossways Preserve with a significant yearly donation after I read in a newsletter that it cost \$250/acre per year to maintain and improve habitats. That number struck me because it was verifiable, concrete, and I knew I could make a difference with a gift. I’ve seen improvements over the years and know that my investment is having an impact on the land.



PHOTO: ANNA MARCINI

As I find myself in the fortunate position of having resources to share, I thought about the things that matter to me the most and how everything Wissahickon Trails does embraces my values. While climate change is having an impact across the globe, Wissahickon Trails continues to do its part to restore,

protect, and preserve our little corner of this world. By stewarding the Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries, and the surrounding open space, a positive effect is being created for the Delaware Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, and thus the entire world. This work is important to me.

To sustain this progress requires ongoing maintenance and stewardship, potential further land acquisitions, and easements. Wissahickon Trails has a large base of volunteers that are a wonderful asset that help in all sorts of ways. But to be a stable organization, you need a trained and educated staff to work regular hours of maintenance as well as supervising and teaching volunteers. This all comes with a cost, whether it’s salaries, utilities, transportation, equipment repair and a variety of other expenses. It’s what makes all those tree plantings, trail repairs, water monitoring, and conservation management plans possible.

As someone who normally stays in the background, it may not be a surprise that I find myself drawn to the “behind the scenes” work that makes Wissahickon Trails a high functioning, financially stable, and forward-thinking organization. In this spirit, I am donating \$250,000 to launch a Land Stewardship Fund for ongoing maintenance needs of Wissahickon Trails. I will continue to make sizeable gifts each year that will allow us to dedicate a stable source of income to the less obvious, but equally as important, core work of the organization. I want everyone to remember, that I did not start my donations at this point. Every little bit counts and I hope you will join me at whatever level you are comfortable.

Sincerely,

*Catherine Ruhling*

# YOUR COMMUNITY AT WORK



PHOTO: MARGARET RHODE

## KeyBank Improves Habitat

Thirteen staff members from Key Bank came out to Crossways Preserve to help with the important task of maintaining previous tree planting sites. They also installed stakes and netting around young saplings so that they would be protected from hungry deer.



PHOTO: FIELDING LEWIS

## Haines Run Crossing

Conservation Crew members Dan Dilanzo, Fielding Lewis, Keith Bance, and Mark Smith fixed up a crossing over the Haines Run. They raised and secured three concrete steps that allow trail users to keep their feet dry when crossing from the Green Ribbon Trail to Gwynedd Preserve.



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

## Deer Exclosure Maintenance

Thanks to Cappgemini for fixing up the deer exclosure at Camp Woods! You can visit the deer exclosure (located just off of the Mayapple trail) to see native plants growing abundantly, safely fenced-off from grazing deer.



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

## Live Stake Planting

Creek Watchers joined Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed for a live stake training and planting. Live staking is an easy, low-cost method for planting trees and shrubs along a stream with branches harvested from mature trees and shrubs.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

## Caterpillars Count!

Ten volunteers conducted 253 surveys at Crossways Preserve to measure the abundance of caterpillars, beetles, and spiders found on trees and shrubs. Peak caterpillar abundance was on 6/21 when 33% of surveys contained at least one caterpillar.



PHOTO: DANNY ARMSTRONG

## Fairwold Academy Tree Planting

Fairwold Academy planted 50 native trees and shrubs to create more habitat for wildlife at Pizek Preserve. They also honored the memory of a dear friend and mentor, Emery Lawrence, who took part in these annual plantings for many years.



PHOTO: SAMANTHA DOUGLAS

## Mailing Volunteers

A big thank you to the volunteers that support our development team by helping with mailing materials - Gwen Bryant, Judy Gresko, Nancy Smith, and Barb Weand.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

## Nest Box Monitors

Fourteen volunteers helped check nest boxes weekly throughout the summer. This year we "raised" 9 eastern bluebirds, 59 house wrens, 13 tree swallows and 5 Carolina chickadees.



PHOTO: FRANCES MCKENZIE

## Tex Mex 5K Volunteers

Volunteers make the Tex Mex 5k run! Eighty-two enthusiastic volunteers helped managed the start/finish line, packet pick up, distribute food and drinks, and so much more.

# STORMWATER WORK

## in the Sandy Run/Overlook Elementary School

BY: **ERIN LANDIS**, Water Programs Manager

The headwaters of the Sandy Run begin in a residential neighborhood in Abington, with water spilling into the stream channel from the street when it rains. The Sandy Run is the single largest tributary to the Wissahickon Creek, but it runs through developed areas and is polluted and degraded. Wissahickon Trails has focused stormwater management efforts on the Sandy Run headwaters to improve the stream health in the Sandy Run and Wissahickon Creek, but we also hope to reduce flooding for nearby residents and involve the community in restoring the local stream.

In August, a major stormwater management project was installed at Overlook Elementary School, which is located in the Sandy Run headwaters.

The project includes several green stormwater infrastructure features including a large rain garden, a bioswale, and a bioretention strip; these features collectively capture stormwater from one of the school's parking lots and from an athletic field. The rain garden, bioswale, and bioretention strip are all features that are planted with deep-rooted plants that filter and absorb water, replenish groundwater, and reduce the speed and power of water flowing from the parking lot towards the Sandy Run. Reducing the amount of water and speed of water reaching the stream will reduce flooding in heavy storms and reduce erosion of stream banks. Additionally, fewer pollutants will reach the Sandy Run because the



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Stormwater from an uphill parking lot will flow through this bioswale to a rain garden

green stormwater projects are filtering stormwater and reducing the volume of stormwater transporting pollution to the creek. The green stormwater features will also provide habitat for wildlife like birds and butterflies and will serve as an educational tool for the community and students to learn about green stormwater management and the benefits.

## TRAIL RESILIENCY in a Changing Climate

BY **MADALYN NEFF**, Communications Specialist

For the mid-Atlantic, a warming climate means more frequent and higher intensity storms like we've seen with Hurricane Ida (2021) and Tropical Storm Isaias (2020). At Wissahickon Trails, we are focused on improving the resiliency of our preserves and trails to manage the damage these storms bring.

### Responding to Extreme Weather

When we know a storm is coming, we prepare by securing our equipment, creating a post-storm plan, communicating warnings on social media, and monitoring the height of the Wissahickon Creek during the storm.

Once the storm has passed and it's safe to walk the trails, staff and volunteers check for hazards. After the initial assessment, we determine what sections need to be closed and alert the public through digital communications and signage. To open as many trails as quickly as we can, we prioritize by working in less damaged sections first, often simply clearing fallen trees and leaving them alongside the trail to become wildlife habitat. Harder hit areas take more time and planning – and sometimes outside contractors – to make them safe for use.

### Recovering from Recent Storms

We're pleased to report significant progress has been made on the trails that were damaged in 2020 and 2021 by severe storms.

#### GREEN RIBBON TRAIL (MILE 1.25-2) - TRAIL REROUTE & BOARDWALK



PHOTO: MARGARET RHOIDE

A section of trail was rerouted to higher, drier ground with the help of Saly

Glassman, Ira Berman, Peg Collins, and Horseways. A new temporary boardwalk was installed in a wet section of the Green Ribbon Trail and several wooden bridges were strengthened.

#### ROTARY BRIDGE - FOUR MILLS NATURE RESERVE



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

wedged under the Rotary Bridge in the Wissahickon Creek, causing bank erosion

and threatening the integrity of the bridge. With support from Ambler Rotary

Club, we hired a consultant – first to assess the bridge for safety, second to create a plan for maintenance into the future. Thanks to Caddick Utilities for donating their services to remove the tree and thanks to Bob King and Ambler Rotary for coordinating the removal.



PHOTO: TOM VOTER

#### BRIAR HILL PRESERVE BRIDGE

The bridge at Briar Hill

Preserve was damaged during a storm and has since been repaired and is ready for visitors once again.

### A Community Coming Together

As we navigate a changing climate with more intense and frequent storms, we're thankful for the support and engagement of our community. Your partnership is what makes this work possible. Whether it's donating funds to help offset repair costs, volunteering to clean up debris, or respecting trail closures while we assess them for safety, we are grateful for all that our community does to care for our trails.

# FOUR MILLS BARN Renovation Update

BY **MICHAELLE FLEISHER**, Finance & Human Resources Director

We are in the pre-construction home stretch! On the right is our final 'before' picture of the attic that will become a show stopping conference room. The end wall will all be bird-safe glass, leading to a balcony overlooking the creek. Our building is almost empty, we are awaiting final work permits from our Township and then construction will begin!

The first floor will be flood resilient, with removable wainscoting that can be washed if there is another flood. It will also house our community programming area, high clearance storage and the much-anticipated staff locker room and shower.



PHOTO: ALEX MCWHORTER

## Future conference room

The second floor will have our workspaces, conference room, kitchen and the highly desired additional restrooms.

We hope by the next newsletter we will be announcing a grand reopening date, but at the very least, we'll show a construction progress photo. We'll also post photos and updates on our website.

If you would like to contribute to this project and make a difference for generations to come, visit: [wissahickonstrails.org/news/invest-in-the-future-of-four-mills-barn](http://wissahickonstrails.org/news/invest-in-the-future-of-four-mills-barn)

# GREEN RIBBON TRAIL & HEADWATERS RESTORATION RECEIVE STATEWIDE RECOGNITION

BY **MADALYN NEFF**, Communications Specialist

The **Green Ribbon Trail and Preserve** was designated by the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association as one of the 2022 Great Places in Pennsylvania in the category of Great Greenways and



PHOTO: DAVID FREED

Trails. Great Places have a sustainable vision for the future and serve as a model for other

## Green Ribbon Trail

communities. The 12.6 mile Green Ribbon Trail follows the Wissahickon Creek and travels through 578 acres of preserved land in six townships and two boroughs. This scenic and much-used trail has evolved over a period of 50 years with guidance

from a Master Plan and the collaboration of Wissahickon Trails, municipalities, and private landowners.

The **Wissahickon Creek Headwaters and Riparian Restoration Project** has been awarded the Achievement Award by Water Resources Association of the Delaware River Basin (WRA). The WRA Annual Awards recognize people, projects, and organizations that make a substantial contribution to sound water resources management and promote water resources sustainability and resilience in the Delaware River Basin. "These Award Recipients are an inspiration, for their leadership, vision and scientifically credible work to enhance the long-term sustainability of the Delaware River Basin," said Skelly Holmbeck, WRA Executive Director.

# WELCOME NEW STAFF: TOM VOTER



Join us in welcoming Tom Voter, Wissahickon Trails' new Stewardship Assistant. Tom joined the Conservation team this June and has already been a huge help in maintaining our trails, assisting with habitat restoration and volunteer projects, and completing the first steps toward creating a new trail at our Hughes Family Preserve. Tom grew up in

Upper Dublin where he cemented his love for the natural world while exploring the Wissahickon Creek. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from Temple University and is excited to pursue a career where he can get others excited about nature. Tom lives with his cat in Philadelphia, and enjoys birding, biking, mountain biking, volunteering and anything else outdoors. His favorite bird is a turkey vulture!



# OUR MISSION

We inspire and engage diverse communities of people to protect, steward, and enjoy the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

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**MANY THANKS TO THESE SPONSORS  
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