



CURRENTS

SPRING/SUMMER 2023 | VOLUME 66, NO. 1

CONNECTING THE WISSAHICKON

10 Acres Forever Protected & A Growing Trail Network

PHOTO: TOM VOTER

BY GAIL FARMER

Just before the New Year, Wissahickon Trails and our public and private partners were successful in acquiring and preserving a key piece of land that connects 2 trail networks and their associated open space (Fig. 1). This 10-acre property on Lewis Lane in Whitpain Township expands our Camp Woods preserve to 48 acres and is part of the historical landscape of Dawesfield, a house of local historic significance that sits on a neighboring property. The house was George Washington's Whitpain headquarters during the Revolutionary War. While General Washington stayed with the Morris Family at the house, his troops camped out across the surrounding landscape, including Camp Woods. Over the decades, numerous revolutionary war-era artifacts have been found at Camp Woods, including musket balls, shoe buckles, utensils, and more.

Wissahickon Trails has been working with community members as well as Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, and the State over the past 20+ years to preserve more than 200 acres of open space adjacent to the Prophecy Creek, a tributary to the Wissahickon Creek. Preserving the lands along Lewis Lane and the Prophecy Creek are a preservation priority to a variety of stakeholders owing to the trifecta of expanding existing open space, preserving land with historical relevance, and protecting the riparian buffer of a key tributary to the Wissahickon. Several neighbors on Lewis Lane have been instrumental to

this longterm preservation effort, not only in helping to secure open space in this priority area (59 acres have been added in just the last 5 years), but also by donating conservation easements and trail easements on their properties (in light blue on Fig 1), which gives Wissahickon Trails the perpetual right to limit development, protect existing natural resources, and to build and maintain a trail in a designated area on those properties.

Our future plans include habitat improvement work and trail creation. The trail easements donated by the neighbors enable public access to the new acreage and, together with our recent acquisition, provide the desired connectivity between our Armentrout and Camp Woods preserves on the north side of Lewis Lane with Briar Hill Preserve and Whitpain's Prophecy Creek Park on the south side of Lewis Lane creating a network of approximately 7 miles of trails. We aim to complete this trail connection in 2023. In terms of our

habitat work, the 10-acre property is largely turf grass with a forested edge, not terribly beneficial from a habitat perspective. Our conservation team is planning a restoration effort which will convert most of the turf to native habitats, particularly focusing on extending the forest edge of Camp Woods and thereby better protecting the interior forest. This work will be gradual and occur over multiple years.

Please stay tuned for a celebration of this open space preservation effort this spring. We are excited to share the property with you and to recognize and celebrate the many people who helped make this preservation effort a success!

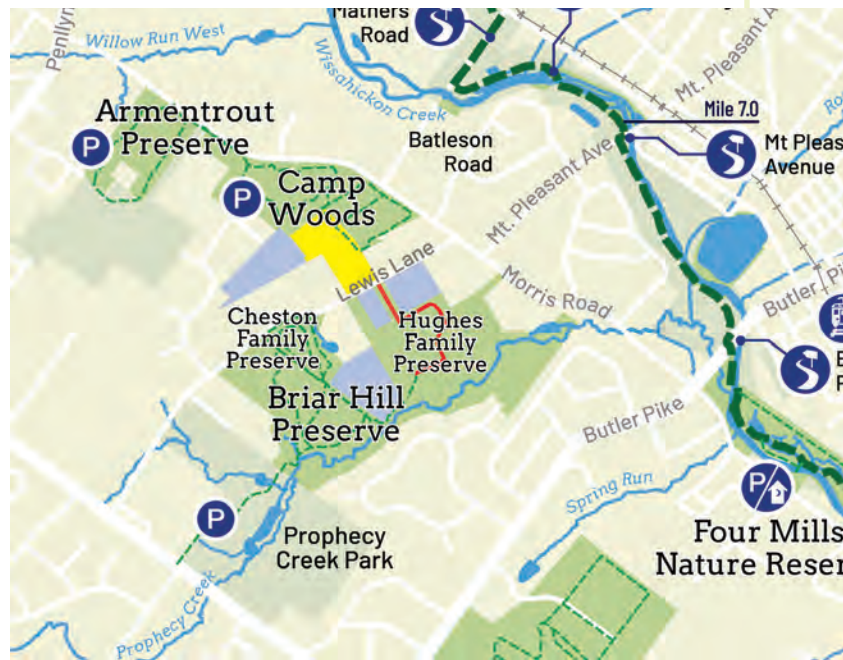


Fig.1 Newly preserved 10-acres shown in yellow, proposed trail connection in red.

2022 BY THE NUMBERS

1,134 community members financially supported our mission through annual fund donations, monthly giving, and designated gifts.

109 Green Ribbon Circle donors provided nearly \$27,000 through monthly donations to support our core work.

10 acres of open space adjacent to Camp Woods forever protected, expanding the preserve to a total of 49 acres.

1,092 feet of new trail created to connect Briar Hill Preserve with the Hughes Family Preserve at Briar Hill.

275 tons of sediment and 476 pounds of nutrients are estimated to be removed from the Wissahickon Creek each year thanks to our recently completed floodplain and stream restoration project near the Green Ribbon Trailhead in Upper Gwynedd.

139 birds across 17 species studied at our MAPS Bird Banding Station at Crossways Preserve. Among the birds studied were a 7-year old gray catbird (originally banded in 2016) and 2 ovenbirds, a species never captured before.

10.5 acres of meadow habitat seeded with native grass and wildflower species at the Hughes Family Preserve at Briar Hill to benefit pollinator species.

125 native trees and shrubs were planted at Willow Lake Farm, Piszek Preserve, and the Wissahickon Creek headwaters restoration site to improve understory and riparian habitat.

110 corporations, foundations, local businesses, and local organizations supported our work.

840 volunteers devoted 4,239 hours of their time across the breadth of the organization's efforts. This equates to the workload of two full-time employees over the course of one year.

3,864 community members deepened their connection to the natural world by engaging with us through our events, nature programs, lectures, and hikes.

14 corporate volunteer groups devoted their time and energy to bettering their local environment.

7,711 wildlife observations recorded in iNaturalist by 789 different users.

86 nestlings lived in nesting boxes on our preserves until they were ready to strike out on their own.

120 native tree saplings were protected with fencing from deer overbrowsing at Camp Woods and Crossways Preserve, ensuring they will survive to regenerate the forest.

260 bags of trash and 38 tires removed from the Wissahickon Creek and surrounding trails at the 52nd annual Creek Clean Up.

1 large stormwater project was installed at Overlook Elementary School and is estimated to keep approximately 3,422,500 gallons of stormwater runoff from entering the Sandy Run.

2 residential green stormwater projects were installed through our Stream Smart program and are estimated to keep approximately 26,710 gallons of stormwater runoff from entering the Sandy Run.

1 new stepping stone crossing installed across the Prophecy Creek to connect Prophecy Creek Park to Briar Hill Preserve.

73 community science volunteers submitted 428 data reports on the plants, wildlife, and waterways of the Wissahickon watershed.

Making Plans for Spring & Summer



PHOTO: SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI

PLANTING A POLLINATOR FRIENDLY GARDEN

BY SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI

A successful pollinator garden includes many different types of plants.

Choose a variety of native plants

- They don't need fertilizers or pesticides
- They have a long association with local pollinators
- Choose plants with large, compound flowers such as Joe-Pye weed,

goldenrod and milkweed

Avoid modern hybrids

- Large showy blooms may not produce nectar
- Pollinators may not be able to find the nectar or pollen through the fancy petals

Have several plants in bloom continuously from spring through fall

- Overlap bloom times so there is always something in bloom

Plant in drifts

- Group 3 or more plants of the same species together
- Grouping helps pollinators find the plants

Plant close together- closer than the tag may recommend

- Planting close together will prevent weeds so no mulch is needed

Don't mulch or use landscape fabric

- Native bees use the bare ground between plants

Don't cleanup the garden until spring

- Pollinators overwinter as eggs, larvae, pupae and adults
- These winter residents need leaf litter and hollow stems to survive
- Keep beds of leaves through the winter

Caterpillars eat leaves! So don't panic if the plant's leaves have holes or get eaten.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY


Question mark caterpillar enjoying a leaf

Lower Gwynedd Township has a beautiful native plant pollinator garden in front of the Community Center at Penllyn Woods Park. Stop by and see it sometime!

EXPLORING NATURE IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER

BY KRISTY MORLEY

Here are a few fun activities to try while on the trails or preserves:

 **Take a rainbow walk:** Find all the colors of the rainbow while on a walk. Take a photo of what you found and make a collage of your rainbow. Do it on multiple walks and see how the colors change throughout the season. For an alternate option, pick one color and find as many things of that color on a walk.

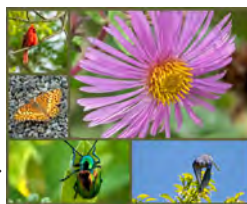




PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

Find all the colors of the rainbow in nature!

 **Go on a sound safari:** Listen quietly for 30 seconds. How many sounds do you hear? Try to describe the sounds, even if you aren't sure what's making it. Compare the sounds in your neighborhood to the sounds on a trail. What sounds are different or the same? Listen at sunset to hear things like katydids and owls.

 **Some identification aids:** iNaturalist is a great resource to help identify insects and plants, while the Merlin app can help you identify birds and bird songs.

ALES FOR TRAILS PASSPORT

BY LISA HANSELL

Hike Local! Drink Local!

Wissahickon Trails and some of your favorite local craft beverage makers are partnering again for Ales for Trails. Purchase a \$50 Ales for Trails Passport and receive one free item from the following businesses: McAllister Brewing Company, Round Guys Brewing Company, Stone & Key Cellars, Tannery Run Brew Works, Ten7 Brewing Co., and Well Crafted Beer Company.

"Well Crafted is pleased to join Wissahickon Trails in raising awareness and funds for green space in our community. Your purchase of an Ales for Trails passport goes towards a great cause and is the perfect way to explore local craft beers in Montgomery County," says Nica Bellenger, Well Crafted Marketing Manager.

Visit wissahickontrails.org for complete details and to purchase your Ales for Trails Passport.



Ales for Trails Passports sponsored by Minuteman Press Ambler.



PROJECTS IN PROGRESS In The Wissahickon Watershed

PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART



Four Mills Barn Renovation – Reopening this Spring!

BY MICHAELLE FLEISHER

Great progress is being made with our Barn Renovation project! The core electrical and plumbing is all roughed in and framing is almost complete. The Staff Decorating Committee has selected most of the finishes (counters, paint, flooring, etc.). Our general contractor, Elevate Construction, is feeling confident about a mid-Spring completion. We'll keep you updated via social media and emails.

PHOTO: TOM VOTER



Maintaining the Mill

BY TOM VOTER

After wrapping up a great year of programs at the mill, we prepared the mill for winter and have been hard at work prepping for another great year. Members of the Conservation Crew got together to clean out the basement storage area, which will allow the space to be used to display old mill tools during open houses. Additionally, the conservation team is planning a solution for the wet trail section of the Mill Trail; one rotten boardwalk has been replaced so far.

Green Ribbon Trail at Route 202

BY TOM VOTER

As the Route 202 widening project continues, we have been working on Green Ribbon Trail improvement projects. A local contractor is inspecting the muddy section through Timoney Preserve, with a fix coming later this year. A gap has formed in the Runner's Crossing and we are looking into relocating the crossing as part of a larger plan to cut a new trail—redirected underneath the Route 202 bridge. These projects will improve the Green Ribbon Trail for when we reopen the scenic King's Woods trail section.

PHOTO: TOM VOTER



A Fresh Look Along the Roads

BY MADDY NEFF

Last fall, staff installed 17 new preserve road signs! These new preserve signs are part of our ongoing efforts to update our trail signage. Now that we have wrapped up our road signs, we are going to focus on updating and creating new on-trail signage. We are excited for the opportunity to improve preserve visitor's experiences through educational and wayfinding signs.



PHOTO: JESSE FORRESTER

Waterfowl Preserve Viewing Platform

BY MARGARET ROHDE

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters on Giving Tuesday, we were able to raise a good portion of the funds needed to build an accessible wildlife viewing platform at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve. The platform will be an earthen mound surrounded by native plantings and will have a wheelchair accessible ramp leading to a flat viewing area, complete with railings and a bench, so that everyone can enjoy great views of the reservoir and the wildlife that call it home.

Hughes Family Preserve – Coming Soon

BY TOM VOTER

The Hughes Family Preserve has now completed another year of meadow establishment. In 2023, the conservation team will enter the next phase of management, and start mowing the meadow 1/3 at a time, to allow the meadow to mature. We have mapped out the first drafts of the trail for this preserve and expect to have it open to the public by Spring 2023.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM: REGINA BABCOCK



PHOTO: ANNA MARCHINI

We're thrilled to welcome Regina to the Wissahickon Trails' team as Development/Executive Assistant! With a background in fundraising, Regina has worked for faith-based and non-profit arts organizations. She has a lifelong interest in natural history and wants to foster relationships between Wissahickon Trails and its community.

With a husband, two teenaged sons, two middle-aged cats, and way too many books, Regina lives in Delaware County. She loves film, knitting, painting watercolors, and collecting an ever increasing number of succulents. Currently, Regina is writing a genre-blending sci-fi/mystery western.

ON THE HOMEFRONT: Tips for Taking Care of the Environment at Home

Sometimes it can feel a little overwhelming to try to be more sustainable or eco-friendly. But ultimately, the goal is to make changes in your life—big or small—that reduce harm to our environment. That’s what matters!

Whether you take one action a day, or ten, you are making a difference. Several members of our Board of Directors offer real life tips to help the environment at home.

Spilling the Compost Tea

“You’ve heard the saying ‘ashes to ashes and dust to dust?’ Perhaps you have not heard this one: ‘scraps to compost and compost to garden hero.’ Coffee grounds, egg shells, veggie scraps,

crushed leaves, unsuspecting weeds, horse manure from my boy Burt—they all go into the compost bin. And then they go back to the garden, transformed into terrific fertilizer and worm-rich soil enhancers. And don’t get me started on compost tea...The circle of life in our garden!”

—Suzanne Bush

Up the Recycling Game

“I am trying to cut back on my use of plastics especially in the kitchen and am trying to take advantage of every opportunity for recycling in various ways.”

—Nancy Kreider

Outsourcing Compost

“We have composted our food waste for years. We switched from composting at home, to using Back to Earth Compost Crew to pick up our scraps. They work in suburban Philadelphia and keep food waste out of landfills and incorporate it back

into the soil in our communities. And, it’s a great composting option for folks who are unable to set up at-home composting.”

—Sara Hertz

Lawn Makeover



PHOTO: KRISTIAN SMITH

Letting leaves lay where they fall creates shelter for wildlife and encourages the growth of other plants, like this fungi.

“As someone who lives along a tributary of the Watershed, I am continually learning better yard care strategies and gradually converting my landscaping to native plants. Not

only is better for the birds and insects who live along the creek, it’s fun and great outdoor exercise!”

—Kristian Smith

Easy Riders



PHOTO: TODD OUTTEN

“I have added a basket to my bike so that I can ride to the store versus driving to the store.”

—Todd Outten

The Green Classroom

“Aside from being an owner of an old farmhouse - which is a form of environmental practice - we actively teach our children



PHOTO: SANDIE CLARKE

the value of activities such as recycling, water conservation, plastic reduction and environmental awareness. I also enjoy gardening, especially learning about native plants and shrubs that benefit the local biosphere while beautifying our home.”

—Patrick Hitchens

Get to know Wissahickon Trails’ Board of Directors by visiting the Staff & Board page of our website.

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

BY LISA HANSELL

Do you want to create a deeper connection with our community and show a shared commitment to protecting and enjoying the preserves, trails, and waterways in the Wissahickon Valley? Then join over 100 committed corporations and local businesses that partner with Wissahickon Trails each year through numerous impactful programs and events.

Event and program sponsorships provide an opportunity to connect with the thousands of community members who attend these events throughout the year. Become a sponsor for one of our signature events (see list below) or support a series of nature programs such as the hike series, speaker series, or virtual programs.

With 1,300 acres to protect and maintain, conservation projects are always ready and available for funding and volunteers. Companies can provide support to a range of projects including trail maintenance, tree planting, and habitat restoration.

To learn more about the ways your organization can be a part of connecting people with nature with Wissahickon Trails, contact Lisa Hansell, lisa@wissahickontrails.org.



PHOTO: LISA HANSELL

Signature Events

Maple Sugaring Festival
Sunday, March 5

Creek Clean Up
Saturday, April 29

Tex Mex 5k Race for Open Space
Wednesday, June 21

Walk the Wissahickon
Saturday, September 30

Craft Beer by the Creek
Summer 2023

Green Ribbon Gala
Wednesday, October 18

Green Ribbon Trail Race
Saturday, November 4

YOUR COMMUNITY AT WORK



PHOTO: RILEY PERRY

Salamander Monitoring

As autumn turned into winter, Community Science volunteers devoted nearly 90 hours to monitoring salamander populations at Camp Woods and Crossways Preserve. Their reports provided data on the health of the salamander community and the surrounding ecosystem.

J & J Clean-up

Twenty staff members from Johnson & Johnson were dispatched along the Sandy Run near their facilities on Camp Hill Road. They collected trash along the banks of the tributary where it passes underneath a busy highway.



PHOTO: AMBER DUDICK

Headwaters Tree Planting



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Conservation Crew volunteers planted 20 trees and shrubs at the Wissahickon Creek headwaters restoration site.

These plantings are part of ongoing work to improve vegetation along the creek to slow down erosion, filter out pollutants from stormwater, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Green Ribbon Trail Race Volunteers



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

Volunteers like course marshal Brenda Doll ensured a safe and successful

Green Ribbon Trail Race. Twenty-two volunteers managed runner check-in, marshaled the course, handed out water, and distributed post-race food to over 100 runners!

Cappemini Improves Habitat



PHOTO: JENNIFER BORSTEIN

Coworkers from Cappemini came to Piszek Preserve

to collect trash along the Creek and nearby roadway. They also worked to remove aggressively-spreading vines from a recent tree planting site while repairing protective stakes and netting that had become damaged.

Tree Planting at Willow Lake Farm

Students from Fairwold Academy



PHOTO: STEVE BASS

and Rotary's Interact Club helped staff plant 50 trees and shrubs at Willow Lake Farm. The planting restored an

area where mature trees have fallen as a result of recent storms and damage by the emerald ash borer.

Creek Watch



PHOTO: ERIN GRUMP

5 new Creek Watchers were trained in the last few months of 2022.

Creek Watch volunteers, like Carolina Bromberg, are tasked with monthly visits to assigned sections of the Wissahickon to track real-world changes along the Creek.

Overlook Elementary School Site Maintenance



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Volunteers revived tree protection surrounding young trees

and shrubs at Overlook Elementary. Positioned on the banks of the Sandy Run, these trees and nearby stormwater infrastructure will help absorb stormwater and reduce downstream flooding.

Creek Watch Tour of Sewer Authority

23 Creek Watchers took a tour of the



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

Upper Moreland-Hatboro Sewer Authority to learn the nitty gritty details of

how our wastewater is treated and then discharged into our streams!

Darchei Noam Clean-up



Members of the local congregation picked up trash along the Green Ribbon Trail adjacent to

their synagogue. Their efforts helped beautify a heavily-trafficked portion of the trail for the entire community.

Damaged Boardwalk Removal



PHOTO: ALEX MCHORTER

Volunteers joined staff to deconstruct a flood-damaged boardwalk

along the Green Ribbon Trail south of Route 202. Removing the displaced boardwalk will open the trail for easier passage as well as create space for new boardwalk construction to take place.

Interested in operating a 330 year old Mill, helping with maintenance projects, or volunteering at upcoming events? We provide a variety of opportunities to get involved, no matter your schedule. Choose a project based on your skills, interests, and availability. Explore volunteer positions at wissahickontrails.org/take-action/volunteer

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

BY ANNA MARCHINI



PHOTO: KASIA KALYTA

"The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share,"

—Lady Bird Johnson

This beloved quote reminds Zbigniew "Zibi" Bieniaszewski that nature crosses all boundaries.

Since moving to the area in 2002 from Poland, Zibi has dedicated himself to numerous community and environmental projects. He is a passionate beekeeper and member of the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association, as well as the Whippain EAC, a long-time volunteer with Weavers Way, and one of the founders of Ambler StoryTellers. As a donor and volunteer with Wissahickon

Trails, Zibi has grown from "just being interested to actually doing something." Inspired after attending one of our native plant workshops, he converted at least 50% of his yard to a pollinator garden. The garden didn't do so well at first, but Zibi persisted, creating a beneficial habitat that also attracts the curiosity of bumblebees and passers-by, alike. Recently, Zibi hosted one of our educational public workshops so that others could be inspired to make changes to their own property. Zibi supports Wissahickon Trails because he knows how important it is for people to connect to nature. "Wissahickon Trails really connects 'land, water, and people' by giving people access to trails and open space." Fun fact: Zibi and his family have visited 38 national parks!

Board Of Directors News

BY MADDY NEFF

Wissahickon Trails' Board of Directors is comprised of a group of dedicated volunteers, each bringing a different perspective and expertise that helps the organization grow and position itself for the future. This year, we welcome two new members and recognize the service of one member who has completed their service on the Board.

Welcome New Members



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB BROCKWAY

Bob Brockway

Bob was the President/COO of the Honickman Group and was responsible for all functional departments of the company for 28 years until retiring in 2019. Now, Bob is active in the Blue Bell Rotary Club,

Montco Family Promise, The First Tee, and the Philadelphia Golf Association. Retirement offers him the opportunity for travel, golf, skiing, hiking, and spending time with his family. As a Wissahickon Trails Board member, he looks forward to participating in the maintenance and growth of the wonderful trails and green space in the community, which are for current and future generations.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARM SCHERPIER

Harm Scherpier

Harm is a physician with a career in health information technology. He was born and raised in the Netherlands, and Harm and his wife Titia now live in Fort Washington. Harm loves the Wissahickon

Creek and nearby trails and you can find him hiking, running, or doing trail work with the Conservation Crew. He is an active member in local community organizations, including Fort Washington Swim and Tennis Club and Pennypack Farm. Harm has led many hikes for Wissahickon Trails, and he sees guiding hikes as a great way to connect people to their local trails and natural areas.



PHOTO: DANIEL BURKE

Recognizing Years of Service: Mary Claghorn

Mary has been involved with Wissahickon Trails for more than 20 years and is a member of the Green Ribbon Circle. After completing her term on the Board of Directors, we're happy to share that she isn't going far—she will now join the Emeritus Board. During her tenure, she has brought her leadership and positive outlook to many of the organization's committees, including

Development, Conservation, Engagement, Governance, Finance, Education, as well as the ad hoc Four Mills Barn and Gala Committees. A dedicated event volunteer, you can find Mary hard at work at the Green Ribbon Trail Race, Walk the Wissahickon, Tex Mex 5K Race, Creek Clean Up, and Maple Sugaring Festival. We thank Mary for her support and the joy she brings to every interaction and look forward to continuing to work together.

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 FOR CONTINUING TO SUPPORT OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT.

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