

Linn Log

The Newsletter of the
Merrill W. Linn
Land & Waterways
Conservancy

Board of Directors

John C. Snook, *President*
Wayne McDiffett, *Vice President*
Sue Travis, *Treasurer*
Roger Curran, *Secretary*
Lettie Davis
John Fernsler
Roy Fontaine
Geoffrey Goodenow
June Hoyle
Clyde Peeling
Jan Peterson

Staff

Jeannette Lasansky, coordinator
Carla Watson, administrative assistant
Judith Becker, editor of *Linn Log*

PO Box 501, Lewisburg, PA 17837
570-524-8666 or 522-0487 FAX 570-524-8743

conserve@ptd.net
www.LinnConservancy.org

Winter 2004

Educational Events:

Halfway Run SnowFest: Sunday, February 1

R. B. Winter State Park's seventh annual **SnowFest** will be here soon! Join us at the Park for some winter fun on Sunday afternoon, February 1, noon to 4 pm. Try out broomball, take part in the snow volleyball tournament, and learn about ice fishing and ice rescue. You can go cross-country skiing and ice skating, see an ice carving demonstration, and watch some ice cutting on the lake. Take a snowmobile ride and learn some snowmobile safety tips. There'll be a snowshoe demonstration and a guided snowshoe hike as well as children's nature programs, including a Winter Story time by the fireplace in the Learning Center. There'll be a silent auction and presentations on winter birds, wild game cooking, geo-caching, and animal tracks and tracking. Learn how to care for your pet in the winter and learn some winter survival skills for yourself. All this and more at **SnowFest**, rain, snow, or shine!

A complete schedule of events and activities is available at the Halfway Run Environmental Learning Center and on their website <www.dcnr.state.pa.us>. You may also obtain a schedule by calling the park at 570-966-1455, weekdays between 8 am and 4 pm. The Center is west of the lake and the park office, on the north side of Route 192. A large R. B. Winter sign indicates the road to the Environmental Learning Center.

Halfway Run Environmental Center Events

The Center has planned a number of public programs for this winter, including two home schooling environmental education opportunities. A complete schedule of events is available at the Halfway Run Environmental Learning Center or can be obtained by calling the park at 570-966-1455, weekdays between 8 am and 4 pm.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 10 am to noon

HOMESCHOOL DAY: ANIMAL ANTIFREEZE

How do frogs, ants and other creatures keep from freezing in our cold Pennsylvania winters? Students ages 9 to 14 can find out about these amazing adaptations during some experiments and a talk. Pre-registration is required.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 10 am to 2 pm

HOMESCHOOL DAY: GEOLOGY ROCKS!

Students in 3rd to 8th grades are encouraged to participate in this program about rocks, minerals, geologic history, the rock cycle, and fossils in Pennsylvania. We will hear a story or view a video, identify some rocks and minerals, create a geologic time line, examine fossils, and discuss the rock cycle. If time and weather permit, an outdoor geology walk may be conducted. Most of this session will be indoors. Please pack a bag lunch. For more information about this program, please contact the park. Pre-registration is required.

**Conservancy Cross-Country Ski/Snow Shoe or Hike
Saturday, February 21, at 10 a.m.**

Member Tom Gibson is offering a winter outing on the Skyline Drive, Bald Eagle Mountain, heading west off Route 15 just south of South Williamsport. The hike will start on an old parkway (now closed) that winds up the mountain. At the top, in addition to views, are trails through the woods and along a power line right-of-way. Different length trails can be put together to create a hike of 5 to 12 miles, depending on your sport, preferences, and snow conditions. Moderate to strenuous in difficulty. Call Tom at 568-8272 to let him know if you plan to participate or if you have questions about the outing. Meet at the Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau parking lot next to Country Cupboard on Route 15, Lewisburg, at 10 am. Bring lunch if you want and dress appropriately; it can be cold on top of the mountain, with snow even when there is none in the valley.

Watershed Alliance Programs: January 20, February 24, March 16, and April 3

Vice-chair Sue Auman of the Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance of the Linn Conservancy has organized a series of programs centering on environmental issues pertinent to the watershed. Open to the public, the programs will be held at 7 pm in the Mifflinburg High School's large group instruction room. "Trout Fishing and Habitat on Buffalo Creek" will be presented on January 20 by members of the local chapter of Trout Unlimited. Still to come are: February 24, "Wetlands Restoration and Duck Habitat," to be presented by members of the local chapter of Ducks Unlimited. The March 16 program will be "History of Buffalo Creek" and, on April 3, there will be a Buffalo Creek canoe/kayak excursion, time and place TBA. Also on February 24 is the BCWA Annual Meeting.

Conservancy's "Caring for Communities" Family Events Set

Acting on an idea proposed by former board member Brian Gockley, the Linn Conservancy brought together several area citizens who worked throughout the fall to lay the groundwork for family-oriented events that focus on our local environment.

In early October a group of seventeen persons from Union and Northumberland Counties joined Conservancy member Gockley and other members of the steering committee: Jeannette Lasansky, also from the Conservancy, Bill Deitrick and Ted Retallack from the Union County Conservation District, Shawn McLaughlin from the Union County Planning Department, and Neal Fogle from the Penn State Extension Service, to brainstorm over a barbecue provided by the UCCD and some committee members. Conservancy members Neal Woodruff, Geoff Goodenow and Harriet Bresenhan were in attendance. Through discussion facilitated by Neal Fogle of Penn State Extension the group adopted a name for its activities and developed a range of subjects and concerns for the upper Northumberland and Union County area—open space, land use, habitat, transportation, recreation, among others. At subsequent meetings, members of the Conservancy's steering committee, joined by members of the Conservancy's Education Committee and guests from SEDA-CoG and the BCWA, moved the concept along.

The "Caring for Communities" kick-off date is Sunday afternoon, April 25, at the Dale/Engle/Walker property on Strawbridge Road in Buffalo Township. Events planned for that occasion will include music and

picnicking, nature walks, workshops and demonstrations, and a variety of presentations about raptors and other animals. Other, smaller, events will be held during the following week at sites in upper Northumberland and Union Counties in the late afternoons and evenings. The week will culminate in several bike hikes along the Rural Routes bike trail routes. Note those dates—April 25 through May 1—on your calendar; the late March issue of the *Linn Log* will present the full schedule.

Plans for Montandon Community Days Move Forward

The Linn Conservancy is pleased to be part of a group of Montandon citizens planning their first annual Community Days for Memorial Day weekend. Each month since the summer, citizens have been meeting to organize this two-day event which will include craft and non-profit education stands, entertainment, food stands and sit down meals, a community service project, and a large parade. The events will be held on both Saturday and Sunday of the holiday weekend and will begin with educational walks in the Montandon Marsh led by Conservancy members. Our video, *The Montandon Wetlands: A Special Place in Our Backyard* will be shown throughout the day in the West Chillisquaque Township Building near the Montandon post office. Also, we will have a booth with information about the Montandon wetlands complex and about the Conservancy. There will be calls for volunteers to help as the date draws nearer. Community Days is another item for your new 2004 calendar!

Lettie Davis, Conservancy board member and Montandon resident, and Jeannette Lasansky, Conservancy coordinator, have been attending the planning sessions and helping where they can in this new community initiative.

Our Environment Matters:

Buffalo Creek Watershed Membership Drive

The Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance of the Linn Conservancy conducted some volunteer activities in the fall and has some interesting programs planned for the winter/early spring (see event schedule and insert). Planned events are posted on the <www.linnconservancy.org> and <www.buffalocreek.org> websites at all times.

The BCWA is seeking to enlarge its support base through membership. Membership is \$5 a person and can be sent to the group at our PO Box 501, Lewisburg, or it can be added to a Conservancy renewal for 2004. If you do the latter, just make a note on the check memo line or on the business reply envelope. The BCWA also accepts donations and, because it is under the umbrella of the Linn Conservancy, any monetary gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Although much of the BCWA work is done by volunteers or is part of projects supported by grants, the Alliance's expenses are real and can only be met through separate contributions. The Area Agency for the Aging has made such a contribution which is designated to support outreach and volunteer activities in the watershed. You can make a difference by supporting this part of the Conservancy as a volunteer and/or by giving financial support. A membership enclosure for the BCWA is enclosed.

Roaring Creek Watershed and Forest Land Protected in Northumberland County

Pennsylvania will acquire 9,300 acres of woodlands in Northumberland and Columbia counties for addition to the Wyoming State Forest. The Pennsylvania American Water Company plans to sell 7,000 acres to the state for \$4.4 million, with half the funding coming from the Richard King Mellon Foundation and half from the Community Conservation Partnership Program. The water company intends to donate the remaining 2,300 acres to the state. The company will retain rights to the lakes and water infrastructure on the land which will be open to the public for recreation.

The Conservation Fund, located in Arlington, Virginia, negotiated the deal for the land which includes large, uninterrupted areas of mature forests from ridge top to ridge top, and the entire Roaring Creek Watershed as well as habitat for bobcat, black bear, turkey, and deer. This tract is dear to many who have striven to protect it, especially over the last couple of years. More land in this area is in need of permanent protection from development because of its special nature.

This land was designated as among the most special areas in The Nature Conservancy's recently completed *Natural Areas Inventory for Northumberland County*. The study, which was presented to the Northumberland County Commissioners and Planning Staff last March, was funded through funds provided by the Northumberland County Planning Commission, the Cherokee Plant of Merck & Co., Inc. in Riverside, the Merrill W. Linn Land & Waterways Conservancy, the Huplits Foundation, the Cora Brooks Foundation, and the Audubon Society. The Linn Conservancy was responsible for the successful application for a Huplits Grant through the Otzinachson Group of the Sierra Club as well as the Cora Brooks Foundation grant.

Lower West Branch River Conservation Plan Presented

Working closely with representatives from several municipalities, service clubs, and special interest groups since 1999, the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, Williamsport, has been spearheading a major planning process on the lower west branch of the Susquehanna. A draft of the plan can be seen at The Public Library for Union County and at the office of the Union County Planning Department, Industrial Boulevard, Lewisburg, as well as accessed at its website <www.npcweb.org>. Hundreds of potential projects are identified as desirable in this planning document. Local groups, including ours, that implement part or parts of this "shared" vision will be eligible for state grants that might fund as much as 50% of the project costs—for land purchase, trails, flood mitigation, or educational programs, for example. Linn Conservancy member Betsy Quant had served for a time on this group.

John G. Clark White Oak Seedlings will be Available for Purchase Late March/early April

Special white oak seedlings raised by member Mark Holman are again available for purchase with a recommended late March/early April pickup date. Thanks to Rachel Hochman & Mark D. Knott and the Lasanskys for donating white oak seedlings in memory of botanist John G. Clark; these were planted on the Koons easement along Buffalo Creek in Mifflinburg and are doing well. Other members and friends purchased seedlings for their own use. Please call 524-8666 or write if you are interested in one or more of the remaining seedlings.

People, Businesses, and Organizations Effect Change:

Buffalo Valley Trail Feasibility Study

The County Planning Department is asking for your input as Linn Conservancy members. The possibility of a Buffalo Valley Trail from Mifflinburg Borough to Lewisburg Borough along the currently active West Shore Railroad corridor is now under study. The study will determine the feasibility of creating an off-road trail facility for non-motorized users and will anticipate how such a trail might draw users from area communities. Between the Boroughs of Mifflinburg and Lewisburg, the rail alignment passes through West Buffalo, Buffalo, and East Buffalo Townships. It is anticipated that a trail within this approximately 8-mile corridor would provide for additional recreational opportunities, promote intergovernmental cooperation, strengthen public/private partnerships, and foster economic development, including tourism.

The landscape architectural firm Simone Jaffe Collins of Berwyn, Pennsylvania has been selected by Union County to assist in the preparation of the trail feasibility study and subsequent master plan. The firm is noted for its extensive trail planning work across the state. This study will allow the community to determine trail feasibility, address potential alignment alternatives, estimate costs, and establish priorities for trail implementation. A Trail Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from municipalities, the railroad, and other interested parties has been formed to assist the consultant throughout the study process.

The first two public meetings of this feasibility study project were held in mid-November and early January; the consultant and committee presented their findings on the trail's feasibility at the latter. If trail development within this railroad corridor is determined to be feasible, additional public meetings will be held in early 2004 as part of the Master Plan, or second phase of this project. Please let the Conservancy know of your interest in attending future meetings by e-mailing us at <conserve@ptd.net>

ASAP. By having your e-mail address on hand, we can alert you to events of interest that fall between *Linn Log* editions.

Questions regarding this press release or the trail feasibility study should be directed to Brian Styche, Project Manager for Simone Jaffe Collins at 610-889-0348 and/or Shawn McLaughlin of the Union County Planning Department at 522-1370.

County Watershed Specialist and \$25,000 Grant Helps Galvanize Volunteer Efforts

As the face of our landscape and our needs as people change, the value of clean and reliable water cannot be overlooked. It's with that understanding that the watershed movement began almost five years ago. Within the past five years, numerous watershed associations have formed, creating a valuable local resource. These organizations can be very effective in carrying out solutions to local watershed problems and, better yet, possibly prevent future problems. However, these groups are made up entirely of volunteers with full time jobs, families, and hobbies. These constraints, among others, have sometimes made it difficult for them to function as effectively as they would wish. With this in mind, the Union County Commissioners authorized the County Conservation District to procure funding for a watershed specialist to work on local watershed issues and problems.

At the recommendation of Ted Retallack, the County Conservation District Manager, Shanon Burkland, a Union County native, has been named the Union County Conservation District Watershed Specialist. Shanon comes to us with a degree in Applied Sciences and Ecology and Environmental Technology from Paul Smith's College in upstate NY. Upon graduation, she was chosen as an intern for the Adirondack Aquatic Institute where she was a member of a team responsible for lake watershed assessment and monitoring, volunteer training, and stewardship promotion. She has since spent the last four years teaching outdoor and environmental education to a wide array of participants. Prior to employment with the county, Shanon served on the Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance Board of Directors where she developed the first edition of their newsletter and was active in many other group projects.

As a watershed specialist her role is to serve as a community liaison for watershed resource issues. This can be accomplished through public education as well as through coordination and implementation of our water quality improvement initiatives. She will be working on many watershed initiatives in Union County.

To learn more about the Buffalo Creek Watershed Alliance see the insert in this *Linn Log* which also includes a form for supporting that effort with time and money.

Community-Supported Agriculture Offers Opportunity to Invest in Family Farm Preservation and Environmental Protection *by Hannah Holm, Conservancy member*

On the day of my visit to Shaffer Farm, in early October 2003, 25-year-old Matt Shaffer leads me past rows of bright red lettuce, deep green kale and chard. The string beans, bitten by the first freeze of fall, have wilted, but a row of snap peas looks like it could still produce another harvest. We walk uphill along a crease in the hillside that collects rainwater from the cultivated fields above us and feeds it into a small creek. The waters of this creek enter the Susquehanna River a few miles south of Sunbury, in Northumberland County, PA.

If the Shaffers farmed differently, heavy rains might wash silt and chemicals off the fields, fouling the stream. They farm organically, however, foregoing the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and they use different methods to increase the fertility of their fields. In the gully, the Shaffers encourage the growth of permanent grasses to hold the soil and stabilize the banks, and I see no bank erosion. Runoff is limited by growing crops in narrow strips, contour plowing, and using "green manure" cover crops to hold the soil, help it retain moisture, and replace nutrients between seasons of growing crops for harvest. What's good for the soil is good for the stream. What remains to be seen is if Matt Shaffer can make this system good enough for the bottom line to support his family.

A key element of Matt's strategy is the establishment of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) business, in which subscribers purchase shares in the coming harvest at the beginning of the season and then get weekly boxes of fresh produce from May through October. I visited Shaffer Farm because I'd heard about the CSA and wanted to find out how it worked.

Cresting the hill, Matt tells me the farm has been in the family for at least 80 years and four generations. His father began farming organically in 1970, but it was only in 1999 that the Shaffers got certified as organic producers. Despite the higher prices they now get for their produce, Matt, his parents and his brother all hold down off-farm jobs in addition to working on the farm. That's the norm for farm families these days. Matt is not satisfied with this situation, however; he wants to farm full-time. He

explains, "With any new job, you're excited at first. But then after a while, you get comfortable, and then you lose that sense of a new challenge." With farming, though, every day brings new problems to solve.

Matt's ambition to farm full-time flies in the face of state and national trends. Over 60% of farmers are now over age 55, up from about 35% in the 1950's, and more people are getting out of farming than into it: Pennsylvania has lost about 20% of its farmland to development in the last 20 years. Making a living from farming, organically or otherwise, is not easy.

One major challenge is finding the right markets. Matt has decided to focus on direct retail marketing, where there's no pre-set production quota and no middle-man. Beyond neighbors and friends, though, it's not obvious where to find customers. Matt tried selling vegetables at the Lewisburg Farmers Market, but working alongside vendors of bananas, discount shampoo, and produce trucked in from down the road and across the country, he found that most shoppers didn't see the advantages of locally grown, organic produce. Ard's Farm Market proved to be a better venue for him. Ard's, located on Route 45 between Lewisburg and Mifflinburg, doesn't focus exclusively on organic or local goods, but showcases both. Through Ard's, Matt established the connections that enabled him to establish his CSA in 2002.

Since CSA subscribers assume risk along with the farmer by paying for a portion of the harvest up front and accepting it as it comes, CSA's seem to offer the ideal opportunity for farmers to obtain a steady income despite production uncertainties. Subscribers in turn obtain plentiful fresh produce they can feel good about. Making it work is still a challenge, though. Most of Matt's subscribers have never invested in a CSA before and are unfamiliar with the uncertainties that come with farming. Some were alarmed last spring, when wet weather delayed the onset of the harvest. Things improved later in the season, and the subscribers often got surpluses. This created its own problems, though. "It definitely had some rough spots," said one of the new subscribers. "I was getting loads of beets for weeks, to the point where I didn't know what to do with them."

With each share going for about \$425, and just nine subscribers in 2003, the Shaffer Farm CSA is not particularly lucrative. As part of the overall farm strategy, though, it holds promise. Matt is optimistic about future growth as he learns how to improve his timing in planting and harvesting and maximize the production of what his subscribers want.

In 2004, Matt may enable his subscribers to pay for part of their shares with work on the farm. When I mentioned this to an early subscriber, she said she'd like that – she missed spending time out on a more distant CSA farm she had subscribed to previously. I respond in a similar way. I'd like to go back to the folded hills of Shaffer Farm and get my hands dirty, too.

A common thread among people that seek out organic and locally-grown food is a desire to feel closer to the land, and closer to where their food comes from. If Matt can respond to that desire by letting his subscribers in on the challenge and satisfaction he finds in farming, it may be the key to making his small core of loyal customers flourish and grow, and making Shaffer Farm as successful economically as it is biologically. If more farmers can do the same, we may all benefit from more healthy streams and the preservation of our rural landscape.

To contact Matt Shaffer about subscribing to his CSA, buying organic hay or grain, or ordering hormone & anti-biotic-free beef or pork, call him at (570) 286-1029 or send him a note at RR5, Box 285, Sunbury, PA 17801.

To locate other certified organic producers, try the *PA Certified Organic* search engine on the web at <<http://www.paorganic.org/search.php>>.

Environmental Adventure Award Announced

The Linn Conservancy's education committee has selected Daniel B. Stamm, Jr., an 11th grader in the Milton High School to receive the Conservancy's Environmental Adventure Award. This summer, Daniel will be attending the Wallops Island, Virginia Marine Science Consortium with this award which is supported by an anonymous gift annually. One of Daniel's goals will be to make some presentations about the benefits of wetlands preservation and discuss different types of wetlands, such as fens and bogs. Mark Benfer of New Berlin won the award last year.

Members Help Linn Conservancy Meet Its Goals With Gifts and Time

Welcome to new members: Diane Specht & Tony and Thomas Donato, Hannah Holm & David Collins, Linda & Terry Eberhart, David & Nicole Napoli, Cindy & Dick Skelton, David & Jane Ray, Becky Hagenbaugh, John Arbogast, Adam & Mint Hackenberg, and Nora & Warren Elze. Thank you Roger Curran, Geoff Goodenow,

June Hoyle, Jeannette Lasansky, Roy Fontaine, and Wayne McDiffett for participating in a fall membership campaign. Members joining after December 9th will be listed in the late March *Linn Log*.

Thanks to members who, from August through November, have made donations, additional financial gifts, or increased their level of giving: Wayne McDiffett, John & Kim Snook, Douglas & Mary Candland, Peter Judge, Jim & Susan Mathias, the Mifflinburg Bank & Trust, Joe Keller, John & Gail Dunlop, Carla & Jace Watson, Robert Linn, Carolyn & Eric Hathaway, Shirley & Dale Bingaman, David & Doris Martin, Ed and Mary Mastascusa, William Roll, Tom & Marge Duck, Geoff Goodenow, the Mifflinburg Telegraph, and the firm of Brann & Light for the recording fees of the Central Builders' easement; also to Betty Black for her recent contribution to the Conservancy. These gifts and new memberships when combined with steady membership support ensure a better future.

Thank you to attorney Daniel J. Clement for work on a new easement in Hartley Township. We hope to have more on this in the March *Log*.

Thank you to Peggy Lauver of Mifflinburg who again gave a gift certificate of a Conservancy membership to someone she knew.

Thanks to Dave & Vicki Heberlig and Margaret Moyer who prepared this newsletter for mailing and to Ed Culver and Joe Keller who stuffed the annual membership letters.

Thanks to Owen Anderson, Shawn McLaughlin, and Ed Culver who gave of their time as well as expenses in taking slides for the soon to be completed video on the Buffalo Creek Watershed.

Thanks to new members James Swan, Diane Specht, Mike Molesevich, Hannah Holm, and Tom Gibson who gave of their time on trail and other Conservancy needs. Diane offered to coordinate the Conservancy column in the *Daily Item* which appears with a piece written by a Conservancy member every other month.

Thank you also to those who have offered to volunteer along with sending in your membership renewal this fall. Keep those checks and volunteer forms coming—they are our life blood!

Thanks to Dr. William and Ethel Musser for their gift in memory of Dr. Preston Hoyle.

Thanks to Kathy Rowe, Joe Keller, Jo Reilly, and Matt Corbett for doing the August and October Adopt-a-Road cleanups along Penns Creek.

In Brief:

We still hope to purchase, with \$95,000 being held by DCNR, a large parcel of riparian and farm land along the Susquehanna in Gregg Township. The land would have a conservation easement placed on it before being turned over to the Union County Conservation District. The UCCD plans for a major environmental center that would focus on waterways and wetlands at the site. An archaeological assessment of the site has recently been conducted by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission under Douglas C. McLearn.

Are we in your will? If not, consider the potential that a bequest and/or planned giving can mean for future generations and for protecting the environment that you care about. For more information about planned giving, write to <www.linnconservancy.org> or to PO Box 501, Lewisburg, PA 17837. The Linn Conservancy is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization.

Please Note: Please help us meet our goals by replying as quickly and as generously as you possibly can this year. Thank you for your support in the past! Giving to the Linn Conservancy makes a difference that matters since membership support is our major financial underpinning.

