

Outdoor Access and Programs



Land Trusts Connecting People to Nature

Land trusts have available to them a variety of tools and examples of how to improve public access and provide programming on their lands. By providing opportunities for outdoor experiences, land trusts help foster people's connections to nature and conservation.

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possible, the land trust's ability to connect the community with its work in a meaningful way is essential for the future and sustainability of its efforts.

For guidance focused on fostering these connections in children, see the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association's guide [*Nature Play: Nurturing Children and Strengthening Conservation through Connections to the Land*](#) at ConservationTools.org.

Access to Conserved Lands

A land trust, simply by opening its lands to the public for exploration and discovery, may foster appreciation of nature as well as the resources and methods that make conservation feasible.

A survey¹ of Pennsylvania land trusts that own one or more fee properties found that 92% provide public access to one or more of their properties.

Protection of sensitive habitats can be cause to restrict public access but rarely is it necessary to totally prohibit access. To safeguard critical habitats, a few land trusts require special permission and/or a guided tour of areas of specific concern.



ClearWater Conservancy uses signage to alert visitors of the preserve's natural inhabitants.

Deepening Connections to Nature

Whether simply providing public access to conserved lands or going a step further and offering outdoor programs or volunteer opportunities, land trusts may use their lands to deepen the connections of children and adults to nature.

Land trusts across the nation provide opportunities for the community to connect to nature and participate in outdoor programs. Since the community provides the support that makes land conservation

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¹ See [*Public Access Policies and Practices for Land Trusts: Survey Results in Pennsylvania*](#) at ConservationTools.org.

Conversely, many land trusts make improvements to boost public access, for example, developing and/or improving trails, establishing or expanding parking and posting signs to welcome and guide visitors.

Laws of the Land

Different lands may require different public use policies. A property in close proximity to a residential area may not be conducive to rifle hunting. A property with sensitive bird habitat may not be appropriate for dogs. These policies exist for specific reasons and usually support the land trust's efforts to protect the property and its habitat while ensuring the safety of visitors and the surrounding community.

In order for these policies to be respected, the rules *and* the rationale behind the rules need to be clear to visitors. The land trust should post these policies through signage and on the land trust's website (so people are not unpleasantly surprised by restrictions when they arrive).

Setting Public Expectations

Informing prospective visitors on location, rules, amenities, and other logistics will make their visit more likely and more enjoyable.

Some properties may be more accessible than others or lack certain amenities. Giving visitors a clear understanding of what they can expect will help them plan appropriately and make the visit more enjoyable.

Land trusts may use their website to provide details of publicly accessible preserves, including directions, parking availability, amenities, terrain and trails, etc. Land trusts may also help visitors by providing downloadable trail maps, safety tips and a list of flora and fauna that they may expect to see.

Signage

Many land trusts post signs that welcome and inform visitors that they are on conserved lands.

Through signage, land trusts have an ideal opportunity to market their organization and promote their mission.

Visitors may also be made aware of the organization(s) responsible for the preserve's protection and the funding source(s) that made it possible.

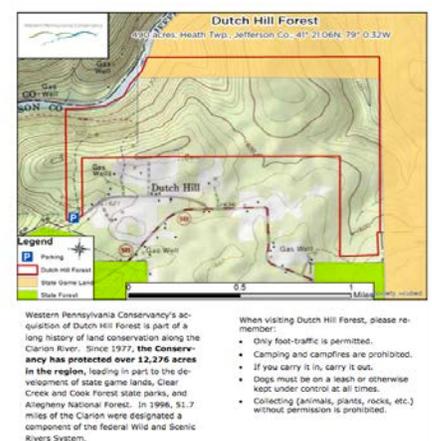


Signage at ClearWater Conservancy's preserve describes its habitat and wildlife.

Beyond this basic signage, land trusts may also add educational materials. Signs and kiosks may be used to inform visitors of the ecological value of the property, the various types of habitat and species, historical perspective, etc. See "Educational Strategies" below.

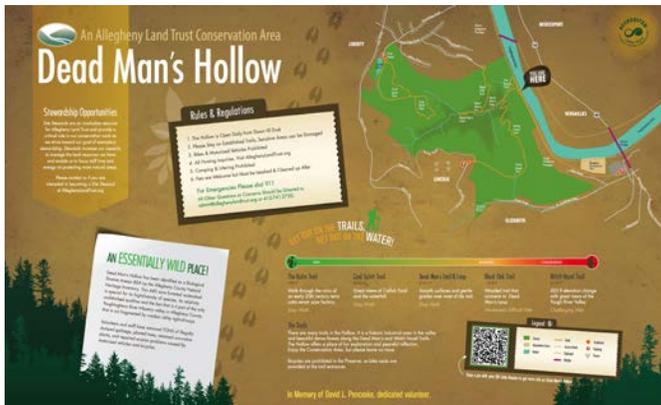


Recreational activities: There are no maintained hiking trails on this property, so please plan your trip accordingly. Numerous old logging trails, a gas well access road, and unauthorized off-road vehicle trails traverse the uplands and some of the steeper slopes. White-tailed deer, wild turkey, and black bear are common on the property. Another species that may be encountered is the porcupine. Look for them high in the tree tops, and for their "latrines" at the base of hollow trees and rock crevices. **Deer hunting** is encouraged as a tool to improve forest diversity. Only portable tree stands are permitted, which must be removed at the end of the season. Please exercise caution and wear blaze orange during hunting season.



Western PA Conservancy includes PDFs for featured preserves at waterlandlife.org providing directions and information regarding natural features and acceptable activities allowed on the property.

Land trusts may use interpretive signage and instruction along trails and on preserves to foster a connection between visitors and the protected resources. For example, interpretive learning through the National Parks Service (NPS) supports the preservation mission and actively works to help the audience care about park resources and ultimately support the park resources. Learn more about the

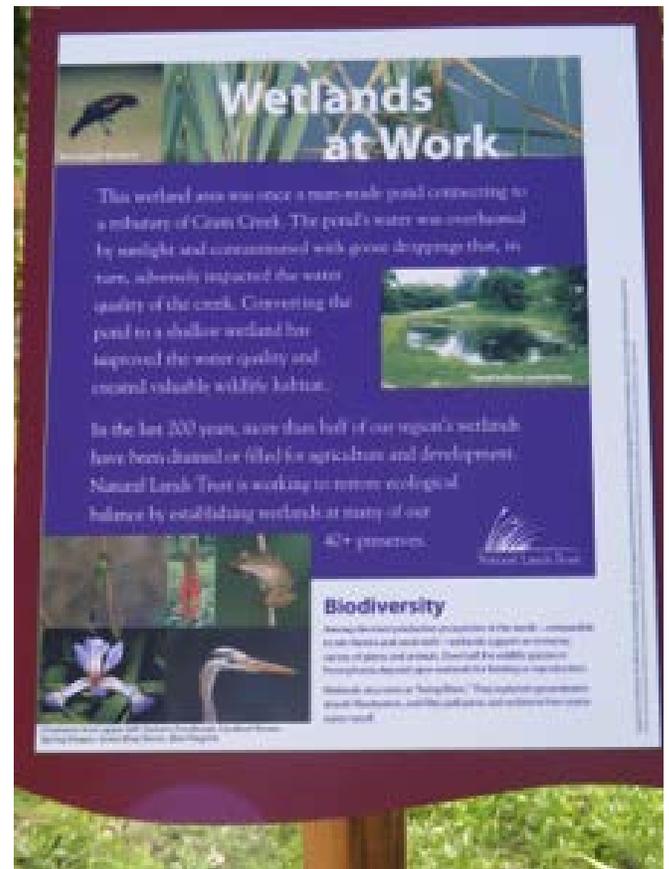


Once a visitor enters a preserve, he or she is a captive audience; land trusts should consider how they might capitalize on that engagement. Allegheny Land Trust signage at its Dead Man's Hollow preserve.

NPS's interpretive learning program at <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/download.htm>.

Acquiring Pockets of Green

Ken Finch, founder of [Green Hearts: Institute for Nature in Childhood](#), suggests that land trusts should consider acquiring small pockets of green space specifically for the purpose for young children to explore. Urban children in particular may not have sufficient access to natural areas. Land trusts may look at acquiring empty lots that can be transformed into natural playgrounds. The land trust may partner with municipalities and school districts to identify the need and potential properties for acquisition. See the Feather River Land Trust case study below in which the land trust partners with school districts to acquire properties that can serve as natural classrooms.



Natural Lands Trust uses interpretive signage to further connect visitors to the land.

Volunteer Opportunities

Many land trusts organize volunteer workdays to plant trees, restore streams and build and maintain trails.

In addition to accomplishing the tasks at hand, these volunteer workdays may serve to better connect members of the community with the land trust, educate community members on conservation and the work of the organization, and help make volunteers feel invested in the work of the land trust.

Outdoor Programming

Developing an outdoors program does not have to be complicated. It comes down to what the land trust can offer the public based on the resources it has in place and what might appeal to the community.

Land trusts offer a variety of outdoor activities or events. Some organizations may offer just one or two

events a year while others have developed robust programming with events scheduled all year round.

Outdoor activities not only facilitate connections between participants and nature, but also cultivate relationships between participants and the land trust. Through these activities, individuals have the ability to learn more about the land trust and its work. Ultimately, individuals that participate in these activities may become volunteers, financial supporters, or land or easement donors.

Although these activities may not be considered fund-raising efforts, that isn't to say the organization shouldn't charge a nominal fee or provide participants with the opportunity to donate to the organization during the course of the event.

Sample Program Advertisements or Descriptions

Below are some sample descriptions of programs offered by land trusts:

Drawing Naturally, [Berks Conservancy](#)

All levels of experience welcome!



Adventures in Climbing 101, [ClearWater Conservancy](#)

ClearWater Conservancy and the Allegheny Outdoor Institute are pleased to offer Adventures in Conservation: Climbing 101 from 2 to 6 p.m., on [Date].

The adventure will be led by Allegheny Outdoor Institute's Jason Erdman, an American Mountain Guides Association Certified Climbing Instructor. Jason and his staff will lead just 10 partici-

pants on this excursion to a private-property climbing destination in Huntingdon County.

This adventure is open to the public, but participants must be at least 8 years old. Cost is \$35 per person, online registration only.

This program will be an introductory rock climbing session for participants to learn the basics of rock climbing and get a feel for what it is like to climb outdoors. No previous experience is necessary to participate. All climbing gear will be provided; participants just need to bring their sense of adventure.

Proceeds from this event will benefit the Allegheny Outdoor Institute and its mission to provide underprivileged populations the opportunity to experience the power of nature through outdoor activities, education, and therapy.

Registrants will receive additional information regarding meeting place, what to bring and necessary forms and waivers via email.

Tree Planting, [Countryside Conservancy](#)

Want to Rebuild a Forest? The Countryside Conservancy is taking an active land management role on Quarry Ridge Preserve by removing invasive species and planting 200 evergreen seedlings in a previously logged area.

When: Saturday, October 16th 9:00 am

Where: Meet at Meadowsweet parking lot on Lily Lake Road – site of the Annual Tailgate Picnic

What to bring: shovel, or mattock/pick, gloves, water (for you or your tree).

Your tree will be waiting for you when you arrive.

Buy a tree for \$5 or consider the package deal of owning 3 trees for \$12. Each additional tree is \$3. If you cannot plant your tree you may still buy one and we will plant it for you.

Wild Wanders at Cheslen Preserve, [Natural Lands Trust](#)

Discover seasonal wonders of Cheslen on our weekly nature walk guided by nature educator and ecological consultant, William Ryan. William is a local educator and Natural Lands Trust volunteer, and gives awesome insights about wildlife during his walks. You will thoroughly enjoy yours!

Highlights vary from week to week, depending on what is blooming, hopping, crawling, and flying at the preserve. The pace is leisurely, wandering through grasslands, woodlands, and the preserve's rare serpentine barrens.

See more examples of outdoor programs at [GetOutdoorsPA.org](#).

Making the Plunge – What Do You Need?

Different activities place different demands on a land trust. A simple walk through a nature preserve may not require any specific equipment or expert instructor. A kayaking tour, on the other hand, may require guides, rented or purchased equipment (provided by the event host or participants), good stream levels, and fair weather.

Land trusts should determine what will make a nature program successful, including:

- *staff and volunteers* - the number of individuals needed to plan and staff an event;
- *expert guides/instructors* - having an expert to demonstrate the activity or, in the case of a nature walk, share knowledge regarding the site's natural characteristics;
- *safety precautions* - the organization's due diligence in evaluating potential dangers and implementing strategies to avoid foreseeable injuries;
- *access to safe outdoor locations* - the land trust may own and maintain properties that are appropriate for the activity or may partner with another organization or governmental agency that may host the event;
- *equipment and supplies* - the land trust may own or rent the equipment, borrow from another organization, or require individuals to supply their own or rented equipment; and
- *marketing strategies* - the land trust should utilize all the tools available to market to the appropriate audience.

Activity Instruction

A number of outdoor activities may require a certain level of instruction. The land trust can provide a valued service to the community by offering instruction on outdoor activities such as kayaking or fly fishing. The instruction should provide basic techniques and safety precautions to individuals; the ultimate goal is to encourage participants to follow basic procedures that will keep them safe and enjoy the activity.

Land trusts may contract with a private instructor or rely on an experienced staff or volunteer. Individuals who are comfortable participating in an activity are more likely to continue participation in the activity.

The land trust can develop activities that include stewardship or conservation messages that help participants to better understand the value of conservation, how land is conserved, and what actions they can take in their lives to promote and support conservation.

The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies published the [Stewardship Education Best Practices Planning Guide](#), which provides guidance on how to educate people about conservation using best educational practices.

Nature Play

Nature Play connects children to nature and fosters life-long conservation values. Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood defines nature play as “unstructured childhood play in ‘wild’ areas, whether it's the vacant lot next door, the local neighborhood park, or your farm.”

Land trusts should consider incorporating nature play into structured programs so that children have some unstructured time to explore their natural world.

One way some land trusts are encouraging nature play is by developing natural play areas or nature playscapes. These are small areas that incorporate



Natural Lands Trust incorporated a natural play area on its Crow's Nest Preserve. The playground includes stumps on which kids can climb and jump; a fallen log that's great for climbing on and finding critters; a dirt pile for digging; and a stick house that has been built by kids for kids.

natural elements specifically to encourage hands-on exploration.

For more information, see the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association's guide [Nature Play: Nurturing Children and Strengthening Conservation through Connections to the Land](#) and list of [Pennsylvania Natural Play Areas](#).

Risk Assessment and Liability

[Land Trust Standards and Practices](#) states that:

The land trust assesses and manages its risks and carries liability, property, and other insurance appropriate to its risk exposure and state law. The land trust exercises caution before using its land to secure debt and in these circumstances takes into account any legal or implied donor restrictions on the land, the land trust's mission and protection criteria, and public relations impact.²

When hosting programs and activities on land trust owned lands or lands owned by other entities, land trusts should be sure that they have analyzed the risks and acted to reduce or eliminate them. A first step is to address physical hazards and dangerous conditions likely to cause injuries and probably not clearly evident to potential users.

Land trusts should consider requiring releases from participants to reduce the liability associated with injury and property damage. See, for example, the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association's [Model Release of Liability Agreement](#) and the accompanying guide [Release of Liability: A Tool for Managing the Risk of a Volunteer or Participant in an Activity Suing the Activity's Organizer or Host](#).

Resources to aid in risk management, including the development of policies and plans, include:

- *A Guide to Risk Management for Land Trusts* (2014), published by the [Land Trust Alliance](#); and

- [Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access](#) and other guides published by the [Pennsylvania Land Trust Association](#). (Search for guides with the keyword *liability* at [ConservationTools.org](#)).

Strategies for Success

Outreach

A land trust has the opportunity to engage a variety of individuals through its outdoor nature programs. Different outdoor activities will attract different audiences; the trick is to know the audience, know how they receive their information and market appropriately.

The younger generations find most of their information online and through social networking applications. Older folks use these resources as well but may also rely on local newspapers, community calendars, school newsletters, word of mouth, strategically placed flyers (e.g., gyms, libraries, schools), etc.

Land trusts should expand beyond just current contacts and members by:

- sharing events with other organizations;
- utilizing social networking tools and online calendars;
- asking key community stakeholders (e.g., visitors bureau, healthcare facilities, schools, etc.) to distribute information; and
- taking advantage of local media; for example, the land trust may consider inviting a local newspaper reporter along on one of its outings.

Accommodating Needs of Young People

The Outdoor Industry Foundation surveyed participants between the ages of 13-30 to determine factors that prevent young people from exploring the outdoors. The resulting report, [Outdoor Nation Special Report: Barriers to the Outdoors](#), recommends providing

- accessible transportation;
- outdoor education and safety training (for both parents and youth);

² Land Trust Alliance. "Practice 6I: Risk Management and Insurance." *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. 2004. http://conservationtools.org/libraries/1/library_items/86.

- affordable or complimentary outdoor gear (for activities such as kayaking or cross country skiing); and
- providing free access to parks and preserves (this is more an issue with national parks and forests than state parks and land trusts preserves).³

Enrich Child Experiences

Educating the next generation of conservationists is extremely important. Scientific study shows that people are more likely to acquire an appreciation and relationship with nature through repeated positive experiences during childhood. (See the [many studies](#) collected by the [Child & Nature Network](#).)

According to the [2014 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report](#), children, especially ages 6-12, are spending less time outdoors, compared to just a decade ago. As children become further distanced from their *natural roots*, they are less likely to develop an appreciation and understanding of nature.⁴

A 2004 study by The Outdoor Industry Foundation, reports, “90 percent of adult participants in outdoor recreation were introduced to outdoor activities between ages 5 and 18.”⁵ It is therefore critical to connect today’s youth to the outdoors so that they are more likely to enjoy outdoor activities as adults.

Land trusts have an opportunity to enrich these experiences through access to their preserves and engaging children in safe, hands-on education programs and outdoor activities.

³ Outdoor Industry Foundation. “Outdoor Nation Special Report: Barriers to the Outdoors.” <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.outdoornation.barriers.html>.

⁴ Outdoor Industry Foundation. “2014 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report.” 2014. <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.participation.html>

⁵ Outdoor Industry Foundation. “Exploring the Active Lifestyle: An Outdoor Industry Foundation Consumer Outreach Report.” January 2004. <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchActiveLifestyleExecutive.pdf>.

Educator David Sobel reminds environmental educators to not put the weight of the world on a child’s shoulders. Avoid too much discussion of environmental disasters, which can overwhelm young children and cause what some label as ecophobia. The best way for children to develop empathy for nature is connecting through exploration of and immersion in nature.⁶

Storyteller Brenda Peterson notes that storytelling is a great way to capture the hearts and minds of young children. Incorporate storytelling in your programs that cater to younger audiences and highlight literature that encourages an appreciation of nature.⁷

Collaborate

Land trusts should consider potential partners in the community that might help improve outdoor activities or make it feasible to provide a certain type of outdoor programming.

Partners can be whoever or whatever brings valuable resources to the table. A land trust may work with another conservation organization, which might share the responsibility of organizing the event; a school or university, which may provide a source of volunteers; a health care facility which may help market to the broader public; a private business such as an outfitters store, which may provide the equipment or guide the tour, etc. Collaborations can be particularly beneficial for land trusts embarking on a new outdoor program or with little experience of hosting events.

Collaborations may be more work in the beginning since there is the matter of synchronizing the work among more than one entity. In the long run, collaborations often prove to be very valuable, saving the organization time and money.

Embrace Technology

Technology may be a helpful tool, not only to initiate engagement, through websites and social network

⁶ Sobel, David. *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education (Nature Literacy Series, Vol. 1)*. The Orion Society and the Myrin Institute. 1996.

⁷ Sobel, David. “Beyond Ecophobia.” Yes! (November 2, 1998). <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/education-for-life/803>.

sites, but also in keeping participants, especially youth, engaged. A few examples:

- While on a hike, have participants use their smart phones to record sounds of nature; at the end of the day or activity have them play the sounds and identify what they hear.
- Once a hike has been completed, encourage participants to update their Facebook status or tweet about completing the hike.
- Consider having participants use their phones' compasses to help them orient to a specific point.
- Plan a geocaching event where participants use GPS devices to find "hidden treasures."
- Instruct participants to post photos of the hike or outdoor event to their Facebook or Pinterest account with a description of the photo.
- Along the hike, ask questions about nature and wildlife; participants can use their smart phones to research the answer.
- Instruct participants to take at least one photo of themselves during the course of the outdoor activity; at the end of the day, ask each person to share one photo and how they felt at the time.
- Create an "I hiked the xxx" or "I kayaked the xxx" logo or image that participants can share through social media.

Become a Get Outdoors PA Partner

[Get Outdoors PA](#) is a statewide initiative that connects Pennsylvania residents with outdoor recreation activities through its website [GetOutdoorsPA.org](#).

Get Outdoors PA is another tool for organizations interested in increasing visibility and attendance of outdoor programs.

Get Outdoors PA partners also have access to an instructor database, specialized training and best practices through the [partner portal](#).

Learn more at [GetOutdoorsPA.org](#) or email info@getoutdoorspa.org with questions you may have.



Program Examples

Bike & Boat Adventures, Wildlands Conservancy

The [Bike & Boat Adventures](#) was established by [Wildlands Conservancy](#) as a way to introduce people to the Lehigh River through cycling and canoeing.

The goals were simple: 1) to provide a safe, fun and educational experience and 2) promote the conservancy's conservation goals.

Conservancy staff felt it was important to physically connect people to nature through first-hand experience. "What better way to prove something to someone, especially a young person, than for them to discover it on their own," explained Scott Cope, vice president of education.

Each Bike and Boat program includes both a biking and a canoeing component; the bike trip utilizes the D&L Trail and the canoe segment uses the Lehigh River that flows parallel to the trail. Each trip starts and ends at the same location. The 9-mile loop takes about 4-5 hours from start to finish.

At the start of the trip, participants are welcomed at Sand Island where they are equipped with a bike and bike helmet and given the necessary safety instruc-

tions for the biking portion of the trip. The group is spaced out and the bike ride on the D&L Trail begins. Once the group reaches Canal Park in Allentown, the participants are prepared for the river portion of the trip. Participants receive an introduction to gear and a thorough safety briefing that includes beginner instruction. Participants are then given the opportunity to practice skills on the flat water of the Lehigh Canal before moving to the Lehigh River and starting the paddle downstream. There is one stop along the way, on a remote river island. Here additional education programs are conducted, lunch is typically eaten, or participants simply take a break and stretch their legs. After the break, participants get back in their canoes and paddle another 2.5-miles back to Sand Island in Bethlehem where their trip began.

The environmental educational components cover a variety of topics including history, water quality, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. Wildlands developed lesson plans for each of these educational components. School groups in particular benefit from this offering as they align with Pennsylvania Department of Education academic standards and include pre- and post-trip materials that are sent to the class before they arrive.

The most common program is a study on human impact and includes both a history overview and an ecology study as the group looks for macro-invertebrates while paddling, discusses the role of these organisms in the ecosystem and how they are an indication of water quality. The history lesson includes the history of coal transportation and its impacts on the river; finally, participants discuss how the river of today supports a healthy ecosystem and numerous recreation opportunities.

Wildlands does offer teachers pre- and post-testing to determine what students have learned from the program. However, according to Cope, teachers seem to be more interested in participating in the program for the joy and experience of being outdoors. Additional evaluation tools for teachers to use once they return to the classroom are being developed.

Participants are required to sign waivers to participate, as well as register ahead of time so that

Wildlands Conservancy knows how many River Safety Guides to schedule. These guides provide safety guidance, education and professional leadership on the trips and are trained in first aid and CPR.



Wildlands Conservancy's Bike and Boat Adventures welcomes participants of all ages.

Additionally, the conservancy prepares participants by sending materials prior to their arrival, including directions and a "what to bring" letter so everyone is prepared.

The program started in the fall of 1999 and that first year the conservancy hosted approximately 200 students (ages 10 and older). Each year, the conservancy holds approximately twelve Bike and Boat programs serving over 2500 participants. This year, the conservancy is offering free trips for school teachers and

administrators and plans to host a trip for the media as well.

Public trips usually cost \$25 or \$30/per person for the Bike and Boat Program. Costs are adjusted for trips that are longer in length and/or distance from the base headquarters to cover additional logistical expenses like mileage and staff time. School districts are charged based on the number of students that participate. The conservancy seeks grant funding to supplement fees so it can offer the trip to less advantaged groups throughout the region at a discounted or free rate.

The program continues to grow. Word of mouth, promotion in local newspapers, the website, Facebook, promotional flyers, face-to-face individual meetings, stations at community events, etc., are all used to promote the program.

Schools seem to generate the most frequent return participants, though recently the conservancy began hosting themed trips, (e.g., Paddle to Musikfest, a guided kayak tour to Bethlehem's famed outdoor concert) to create more interest within the general public.

An emailed evaluation is sent to all participants as well as post-trip educational materials to school groups after the trip has taken place.

Although the conservancy has revenue goals it expects to meet annually, the program is basically covering the conservancy's costs and not producing any substantial revenue.

Attendance is the key factor in determining success of the event. If attendance drastically decreased, the conservancy would need to reconsider its investment in the program. Feedback received by participants also helps gauge whether the trip was successful.

"If participants enjoy the experience we consider it a success. If they enjoy themselves, then they become invested in the program and the resource," Cope explains. "If they become invested they are inclined to learn more about the resource, become more involved, and ultimately better stewards."

According to Cope, some Bike & Boat participants do become more involved with the conservancy at a variety of different levels. Some have become stellar

volunteers and join the organization on trips as volunteer river guides, while others become annual donors.

This program furthers Wildlands Conservancy mission by providing people a glimpse of the region's natural resources, which in turn helps them gain a new, or renewed, appreciation of what the region has to offer. Thus, they better understand the conservancy's mission to protect and preserve the natural resources for future generations to experience and appreciate.



Wildlands Conservancy's Get Out! program connects families and individuals not only to outdoor places but to the conservancy as well.

Get Out! Lehigh Valley, Wildlands Conservancy

Sometimes it just takes knowing where to go when it comes to getting people outdoors, explains Chris Kocher, president of Wildlands Conservancy; this is where the conservancy comes in.

In 2003, [Wildlands Conservancy](#) approached the [Lehigh Valley Health Network \(LVHN\)](#), a network of healthcare services serving the Lehigh valley, about the possibility of collaborating to get the region's residents active outdoors with so many studies linking outdoor recreation to healthy lifestyles, and LVHN agreed.

The partnership is simple. Wildlands' staff plans passive outdoor activities like nature walks, on various trails in the region at least twice a month. The walks are free and open to the public. Participants come away healthier and with a little more knowledge about the region and the conservancy's work.

LVHN markets the events on its website and manages the registration process. Individuals register online and LVHN provides Wildlands with attendee information. Along with information regarding upcoming events, LVHN's website promotes the health benefits of outdoor activities.

The activities are very relaxed. The conservancy assigns 1-2 staff members to lead the walk; the staff member will provide a short welcome and a little background on the organization's mission and conservation efforts in the region. Staff mingle with participants along the way, pointing out natural elements and explaining the work of the conservancy.

Kocher says, "the initiative works at the regional level because we have 650,000 people and lots of high quality trails."

The conservancy welcomes on average 40 participants to each event and approximately 10% of these are repeat participants.

Eco-Adventure Camp, Berks Conservancy

[Berks Conservancy](#) welcomes approximately 30 students each week during the summer to Eco-Adventure Camp. The camp is held at the Exploration Center in Angelica Park, Reading. Berks Conservancy hires seasonal staff, including a Camp Director and aides, to manage the program and facilitate the activities. Topics at the camp may include nature scene investigation, wildlife survival skills, buckets and books.

The camp, which began in 2010, grows in attendance each year. Many Eco-Adventure campers will return the next summer and many invite friends along.

The camp has one week for preschool age children, seven weeks for elementary age children, and one week for middle/high school students. Each week offers an overall theme that dictates what will be covered throughout the week. The theme of the day is usually accompanied by a word of the day that the camp features across most activities.

The camp staff develops the curriculum, often inspired by ideas found on the Internet. Activities are developed in advance with the flexibility to adjust to accommodate the abilities of the campers.

Sometimes the campers will be divided by age in order for the groups to have a more challenging activity; often older campers will be asked to help the younger children in a leadership type role. The goal is to keep the children as engaged as possible throughout the day.



Berks Conservancy's Eco-Camp gets kids outside and moving.

The camp welcomes all campers. Although the camp has not had any registrants with physical disabilities to date, it has accommodated campers with autism, ADD and ADHD. Camp Director Julie Moser explains:

As far as accommodating campers with special needs, we try and have them do as much of the

activity as the majority of the campers. We use the information that is provided to us by the parent to help us understand the capabilities of each child. It is always helpful for us to know any triggers the child may have as well as anything that can help us calm them down if/when it is needed. We do pace things differently at times in order to make transitions smoother because time issues can occur. Generally, most of our campers are able to complete activities without changes.

Parents must ensure their child comes prepared every day for camp—appropriate clothes and shoes for being outside, a sack lunch, a water bottle and sunscreen. Campers should be prepared to get dirty (a child rarely goes home clean according to the camp director) and be willing to participate in the activities.

Berks Conservancy has carefully considered the risks associated with the camp and has taken specific precautions. The conservancy has acquired the appropriate level of liability insurance; requires all participants' parents to sign waivers; conducts background checks on staff and volunteers; and trains counselors on first aid and CPR procedures.

The conservancy uses a variety of means to market the program, including paid advertising in local newspapers and in special issues of local and parenting magazines. The most effective advertising, according to conservancy president, Kim Murphy, is a flyer the organization developed and distributed to children through all of the local school districts.

The conservancy needed initial investments in order to make this program a reality. Tasks and resources included staff time to search for and hire the camp director and counselors; staff time to develop curriculum, camp materials, handbooks, medical forms, etc.; insurance research; marketing of the camp; organizing and staffing open houses; and materials like games, arts and crafts supplies, etc. The total cost of the staff time and materials was approximately \$5,000.

The camp is close to breaking even and Murphy hopes to “make a profit” in the near future.



The 42-acre Leonhardt Ranch, just across the street from Quincy Jr./Sr. High School, provides a living classroom for hands-on learning and stewardship experiences.

Learning Landscapes, Feather River Land Trust

In 2000, citizens, concerned by changes to the Feather River Region, founded the Feather River Land Trust (FRLT). The land trust focuses on the 2.4-million-acre Feather River Watershed, a source of water for more than 20 million Californians. FRLT currently has 4.5 professional staff members, over 100 volunteers, a membership of 650 individuals, and an operating budget of \$300,000.

About the same time the land trust was founded, area teachers were becoming concerned about the loss of quality outdoor learning places; teachers were losing their unofficial “outdoor classrooms” within walking distance of their schools. Rob Wade, an employee of one of the school districts and a FRLT founding member recognized the opportunity for the land trust to become involved.

In 2003, the FRLT board passed a resolution for the land trust to work to identify, protect and enhance places in the region that could be used for outdoor educational purposes. The next step was to get school boards onboard. FRLT reached out to the teachers that had expressed interest in the program and asked that they help to mobilize support within their schools. The land trust needed the school boards and administrators to support efforts to establish outdoor classrooms.

Once school boards passed resolutions in support of the initiative, FRLT began work with individual teachers to identify sites for outdoor classrooms and determine strategies for making these areas accessible. The goal was to find places within a 10-15 minute walking distance from the schools.

The program has been successful in creating quality outdoor learning spaces and encouraging hands-on, student-led projects to steward the landscapes.

As of 2013, Learning Landscapes has:

- secured 11 Memoranda of Understandings with local landowners, allowing students and teachers to access their lands for educational use;
- purchased the first conservation easement in Indian Valley, protecting the 318-acre [Pearce Family Ranch](#), which includes an outdoor classroom;
- Purchased the 42-acre [Leonhardt Ranch](#), providing a Learning Landscape for Quincy Jr./Sr. High School; and
- Enhanced 9 outdoor classrooms with improved access and entry, signage, trails, paths, and seating.

Resources at ConservationTools.org

To find experts on the topics covered by this guide, see the right hand column of the on-line edition at <http://conservationtools.org/guides/show/124>. The on-line edition also contains the most up-to-date listing of related library items and guides.

Library Categories

[Education & Outreach](#)

[Nature Play](#)

[Stewardship of the Land & Public Access](#)

Featured Library Items

[Nature Play: Nurturing Children and Strengthening Conservation through Connections to the Land](#)

[Outdoor Program Administration: Principles & Practices](#)

[Stewardship Education Best Practices Planning Guide](#)

Related Guides

[Nature Play: Nurturing and Strengthening Conservation through Connections to the Land](#)

[Indemnity Agreements and Liability Insurance](#)

[Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act: Statutory Protection for Property Owners Who Open Their Land to the Public](#)

[Public Access Policies and Practices for Land Trusts: Survey Results in Pennsylvania](#)

[Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access](#)

[Release of Liability: A Tool for Managing the Risk of a Volunteer or Participant in an Activity Suing the Activity's Organizer or Host](#)

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Submit Comments

Share your thoughts regarding this guide with the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association: Do any subjects need clarification or expansion? Do you have other concerns or suggestions? Please call 717-230-8560 or email aloza@conserveland.org. Thank you.

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