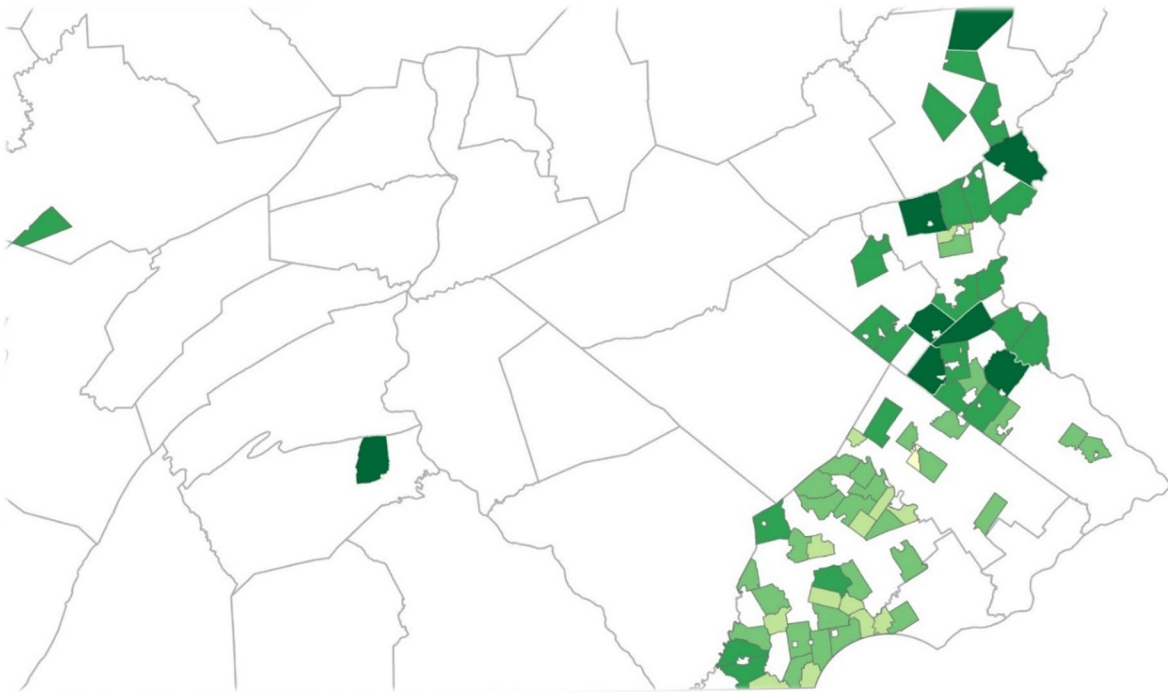


Lands Available for Conservation in Pennsylvania Townships That Have Open Space Taxes



February 2022

Summary

Pennsylvania Act 153 of 1996 (“Open Space Lands, Acquisition and Preservation”) authorizes local governments (excluding counties) to establish earned income and real estate taxes specifically dedicated to the acquisition of land and easements for the purpose of providing open space benefits. The local governments must receive referendum approval from voters before enacting such taxes.¹

In this report, [WeConservePA](#) identifies the quantity of remaining unprotected open space in townships that have passed open space tax referendums. WeConservePA’s research addresses a concern that a township might reach buildout—a condition where all available land is either conserved or developed—and thus be unable to use open space taxes for acquisition of real property interests.

WeConservePA found that all 72 municipalities that have passed open space tax referendums have a substantial amount of undeveloped, unprotected land appropriate to conserve. Only one township has fewer than 1,000 acres of large parcels of unprotected open space remaining. Considerably more unprotected open space could be conserved if townships were to look at smaller parcels that could be stitched together into larger conservation tracts.

Data Sources and Methodology

The Trust for Public Land’s [LandVote](#) tabular database, which covers the years 1988 through the present, tracks open space referendum results across the country. WeConservePA joined its spatial data with LandVote data to create a spatial database of the 72 Pennsylvania municipalities that have passed open space tax referendums.

WeConservePA continually updates its [Conserved Land Spatial Database](#), which identifies publicly and privately conserved land in Pennsylvania. WeConservePA overlaid this conserved land data with tax parcel and land use data for the 72 municipalities to identify large parcels that are neither developed nor conserved. The land use data came from Chesapeake Conservancy’s 2013 mapped 1-meter resolution land use classes.

Individual parcels of land containing less than five acres of undeveloped,² unprotected open space were excluded when reporting the total acreage of unprotected open space remaining. This approach understates the amount of land available for conservation in that one can stitch together contiguous parcels of less than 5 acres each in order to conserve a larger area.

¹ In addition to acquiring real property interests, the statute allows up to 25% of open space taxes to be used to: (1) develop, improve, design, engineer, and maintain open space acquired with dedicated open space taxes and (2) prepare the resource, recreation, or land use plan needed to acquire open space.

² Undeveloped land use categories included tree canopy, low vegetation, shrubland, wetlands, and water.

Additionally, in more highly built communities, parcels of less than five acres may have significant value for water quality, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation.

The 19 townships that have only passed bond-based referendums were excluded from the remaining unprotected open space analysis because there is no concern that open space money will accumulate in these townships; bonds provide one-time funding rather than an ongoing revenue source.

Findings

All 72 townships that have passed open space tax referendums have a substantial amount of undeveloped, unprotected land appropriate to conserve. In total, nearly 400,000 acres—617 square miles—of open space remain unprotected. The amount of open space that is not conserved in each municipality varies greatly and is presented in the table that concludes this report.

The mean average unprotected open space in townships with open space taxes is 5,460 acres, with a median of 4,000 acres. Barrett Township in Monroe County has the highest amount of unprotected open space with 23,700 acres or 80% of existing open space.

No township lacks unprotected open space to conserve. Only one township has fewer than 1,000 acres of unprotected open space remaining—Perkiomen Township in Montgomery County. Perkiomen has 711 unprotected acres, constituting 55% of the township's total open space and 23% of its total area. Thirteen townships have from 1,000 to 2,500 acres of open space that remain unprotected.

Figure 1. Number of open space tax townships fitting within each stated range of unprotected open space acres (and the median acreage for that range)

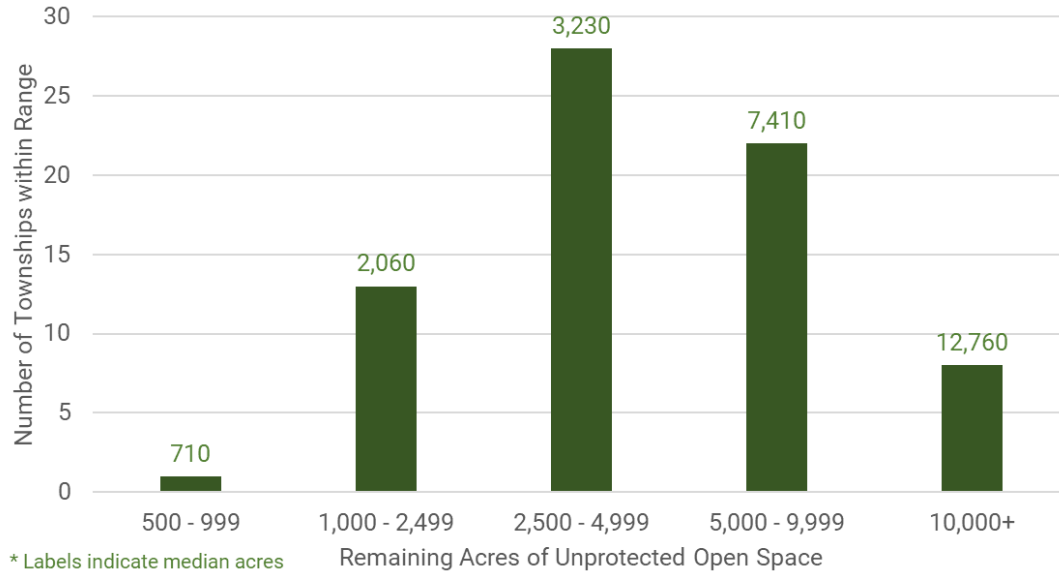
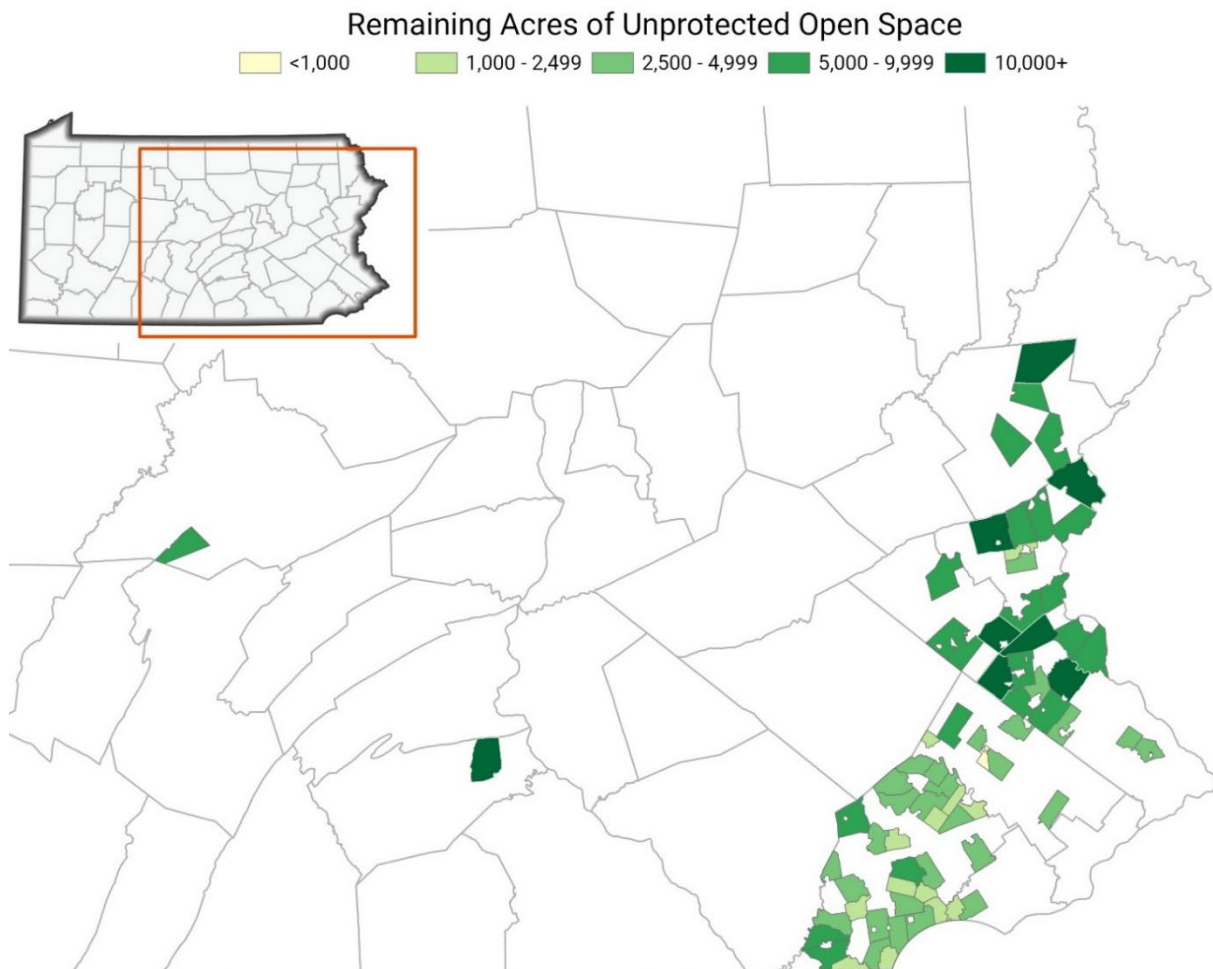


Figure 2. Spatial representation of remaining acres of unprotected open space by township (for those that have open space taxes)



Potential Future Conservation Acreages³

County	Township	Total Acres	Conserved Acres ⁴	Acreage of Non-Conserved Tax Parcels With 5 Acres or More of Undeveloped Land
Bucks	Bedminster Township	18,736	6,056	12,680
Bucks	East Rockhill Township	7,743	1,723	3,984
Bucks	Hilltown Township	15,354	2,187	8,112
Bucks	Milford Township	16,474	2,565	10,346
Bucks	New Britain Township	8,187	2,234	3,930
Bucks	Newtown Township	5,454	1,230	2,706
Bucks	Nockamixon Township	13,790	4,304	7,171
Bucks	Richland Township	11,338	2,018	7,210
Bucks	Springfield Township	19,208	4,945	10,474
Bucks	Tinicum Township	18,858	6,920	9,194
Bucks	West Rockhill Township	9,504	1,564	5,740
Bucks	Wrightstown Township	5,942	1,050	2,797
Centre	Halfmoon Township	14,990	5,777	7,417
Chester	Charlestown Township	7,387	2,222	2,737
Chester	East Bradford Township	9,304	3,008	2,862
Chester	East Brandywine Township	6,722	967	2,417
Chester	East Coventry Township	6,462	886	2,736
Chester	East Marlborough Township	9,279	3,507	3,089
Chester	East Nantmeal Township	10,375	4,877	3,826
Chester	East Nottingham Township	12,187	3,240	5,547
Chester	East Pikeland Township	4,976	904	1,937
Chester	East Vincent Township	7,951	1,519	3,889
Chester	Elk Township	6,531	3,406	2,064
Chester	Franklin Township	8,203	2,492	3,111
Chester	Highland Township	10,870	6,730	3,288
Chester	Honey Brook Township	15,131	5,113	7,494
Chester	Kennett Township	9,259	1,348	4,150
Chester	London Britain Township	6,180	2,378	1,700
Chester	London Grove Township	10,275	2,640	4,876
Chester	Londonderry Township	7,149	4,032	2,046
Chester	Lower Oxford Township	11,002	4,257	5,177
Chester	New Garden Township	8,679	1,088	4,566
Chester	Newlin Township	7,668	4,595	2,315
Chester	North Coventry Township	7,969	2,049	2,938

³ For townships that have passed open space tax referendums (earned income tax or property tax)

⁴ Conserved acres from WeConservePA's Conserved Land Geospatial Database as of December 2021.

County	Township	Total Acres	Conserved Acres*	Acreage of Non-Conserved Tax Parcels With 5 Acres or More of Undeveloped Land
Chester	Pennsbury Township	6,281	2,081	2,178
Chester	Pocopson Township	5,105	1,255	2,134
Chester	Schuylkill Township	4,542	502	2,018
Chester	Upper Oxford Township	10,528	4,366	4,638
Chester	Warwick Township	12,012	7,148	3,258
Chester	West Bradford Township	11,037	1,780	5,136
Chester	West Brandywine Township	7,986	1,106	3,860
Chester	West Pikeland Township	6,198	1,844	2,275
Chester	West Sadsbury Township	6,324	1,544	3,483
Chester	West Vincent Township	10,840	3,710	4,716
Chester	Willistown Township	10,960	3,932	3,194
Cumberland	Silver Spring Township	17,035	1,561	12,476
Delaware	Chadds Ford Township	5,160	1,687	1,547
Delaware	Concord Township	7,068	860	2,580
Lehigh	Lower Macungie Township	10,059	2,330	7,728
Lehigh	North Whitehall Township	30,231	1,747	9,543
Lehigh	Upper Milford Township	10,740	1,359	5,400
Lehigh	Upper Saucon Township	13,847	997	12,849
Monroe	Barrett Township	33,142	6,565	23,677
Monroe	Jackson Township	18,445	7,164	6,896
Monroe	Paradise Township	13,163	2,700	8,060
Monroe	Stroud Township	17,595	3,113	9,210
Montgomery	Franconia Township	6,899	1,375	2,980
Montgomery	Lower Frederick Township	4,808	570	2,548
Montgomery	New Hanover Township	12,849	1,771	7,411
Montgomery	Perkiomen Township	2,261	572	711
Montgomery	Skippack Township	7,323	2,408	2,923
Montgomery	Upper Pottsgrove Township	2,747	334	1,111
Montgomery	Whitemarsh Township	7,231	1,659	2,970
Northampton	Bushkill Township	15,229	4,144	7,308
Northampton	Lower Mt Bethel Township	14,755	4,329	8,477
Northampton	Lower Nazareth Township	6,656	893	4,370
Northampton	Lower Saucon Township	14,319	1,488	7,724
Northampton	Moore Township	23,212	4,896	13,217
Northampton	Plainfield Township	14,848	4,344	7,447
Northampton	Upper Mt Bethel Township	27,048	6,373	16,029
Northampton	Upper Nazareth Township	3,601	643	2,181
Northampton	Williams Township	10,966	1,659	6,006
TOTALS	72 Townships	817,497	200,640	394,794