



Summer 2025

THE STEWARD

Newsletter of the Lower Merion Conservancy

We Are All Connected : A New Vision for our Logo

Have you noticed something different about our newsletter? That's right—we have a new logo! If you read our fall issue, you may remember our graphic design intern, Holly Fasching, who joined us last year. Holly was introduced to the Conservancy through our Climate Artist in Residence, Deirdre Murphy, who was Holly's mentor at Lehigh University. Deirdre knew Holly's passion for the environment and her eye for design would make her a perfect fit for an internship with the Conservancy—and she was right. This spring, we're thrilled to officially share the beautiful, thoughtful work Holly crafted during her time with us.

One might imagine a design intern would begin work on a new project by sketching out patterns on a computer or drawing in sketchbooks. Holly, however, began her design internship not on the computer, but instead connecting directly with our staff. Her design process was informed by getting to know us personally, and digging into the values that drive our work: our ties to the watershed, our efforts in native plant restoration and land preservation, our belief in the power of individual action and our belief that historic preservation work isn't just about protecting old buildings—it's about honoring the stories and landscapes that give our community its sense of place. From protecting biodiversity and waterways, to preserving open space and strengthening climate resilience, Holly has translated it all into one cohesive visual identity.

At the center of the new logo is an oak leaf—a keystone symbol of strength and biodiversity. Native oaks support hundreds of caterpillar species, which in turn feed birds and boost local ecosystems. They provide food, shelter, canopy, and water filtration—oaks are true conservation powerhouses. Encircling the leaf is the outline of a house, representing both our dedication to historic places and the power of everyday action in our own backyards—from uncovering neighborhood histories to supporting the growing network of neighbors transforming turf into native habitat.

Running through the oak is a branching network of tributaries flowing into a central river, echoing our commitment to watershed health and reminding us that small actions, like drops of water, can combine to create powerful change. Holly purposefully drew the river flowing beyond the boundaries of the house to symbolize how local impact can ripple outward.

Every part of this design speaks to one of our core beliefs: small actions, taken together, lead to big, lasting change. We're all connected, after all. We love the new logo, and we hope you do too. Thank you, Holly!

Interested in supporting the Conservancy and celebrating our new logo reveal? Check out our new merch campaign by scanning the QR code, or by visiting lower-merion-conservancy.printify.me/



**LOWER MERION
CONSERVANCY**

New LMC logo (above) versus old logo (below).



Holly, pictured here with Deirdre Murphy at Deirdre's LMC residency exhibition, is currently completing her design degree at Lehigh University, where she's already made an impact as an artist and student leader. One of her photographs was selected for The 2024 Audubon Photo Awards: The Top 100. In 2025, she was the winner of a campus-wide art installation competition and also received a Student Life Leadership Award for her outstanding contributions to student life and the creative community at Lehigh. To check out some of her work, visit <https://www.hollyfaschingphotography.com/>.

Local Impact of Federal Funding

It has become a constant refrain during the first part of 2025: non-profits everywhere have been reeling from abrupt pull backs on grants, rescinded funding, and shifting government priorities. Funding secured in 2024, projects underway since 2022, and partnerships built and growing around the Conservancy have been impacted in ways with immediate effects, as well as in ways that might not be seen for months or years.

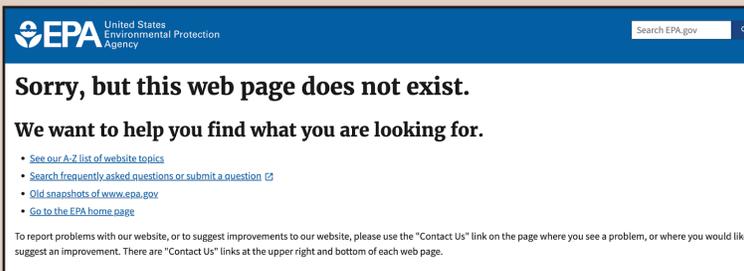


LMC, Upper Darby Tree Tenders, Pennsylvania Resources Council, and Stonehurst Hills Community Association plant a native pollinator garden in Upper Darby.

In May, the federal government rescinded a previously awarded EPA Thriving Communities Grant worth \$345,000. This funding was to expand the Green Streets and Growing Greener Communities programs, paying for 250 native trees, 40 downspout planters, over 4,000 native perennial plants, community food gardens, workshops and outreach. Our proposal focused on increasing upstream-downstream connections and creating a cohesive framework for maximizing environmental improvements to create relief for environmental justice communities. There is a possibility that the funding could be restored but the focus of our project means the funding will remain at risk.

When questioned by the media and numerous affected organizations about the discontinuation of certain grant programs, the EPA stated that it was conducting a comprehensive review of its programs and funding decisions to ensure alignment with current policy priorities. The EPA implied that the previous administration's emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as well as its funding of environmental justice initiatives had strayed from the EPA's core mission of protecting human health and the environment. The new federal directive opposes DEI. Many environmental justice resources have been permanently removed from federal websites, related protections have been rolled back, program funding has been cut, and previously awarded grants have been rescinded.

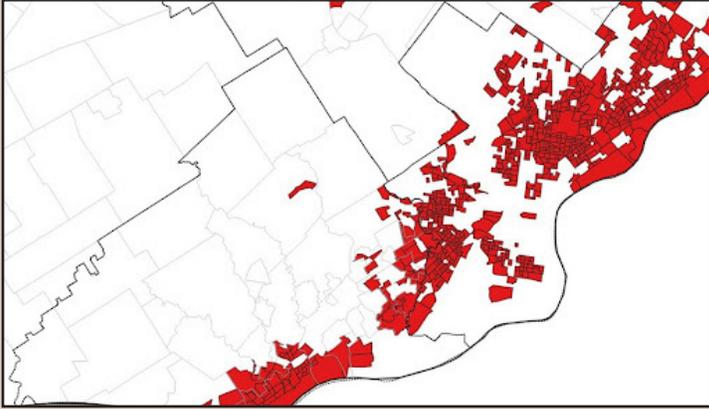
Environmental justice is not a new idea nor a recent initiative started within the last presidency. It has been a recognized environmental issue for 50 years and a longstanding EPA policy for over 30 years. Environmental justice issues first gained national attention in the 1970s and became part of EPA offices in the early 1990s. It was defined by the EPA originally as: "The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. EPA has this goal for all communities and persons across this Nation. It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."



Environmental justice maps and resources quietly disappeared from federal websites, showing the above error message instead.

on how to identify and address the disproportionately adverse human health and environmental effects of programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. Efforts have expanded over the past three decades to mitigate unequal environmental conditions. Lower Merion Township and surrounding communities all have census blocks that have been or currently fall within the environmental justice

Environmental justice was brought to the forefront of the environmental movement in the 1970s as communities that had experienced more exposure to pollution and degraded environments began demanding answers and solutions. In July of 1990, the EPA formed the Environmental Equity Workgroup, which resulted in the creation of the Office of Environmental Equity in 1992, later renamed the Office of Environmental Justice in 1994. That same year, then-President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, which directed federal agencies to develop strategies

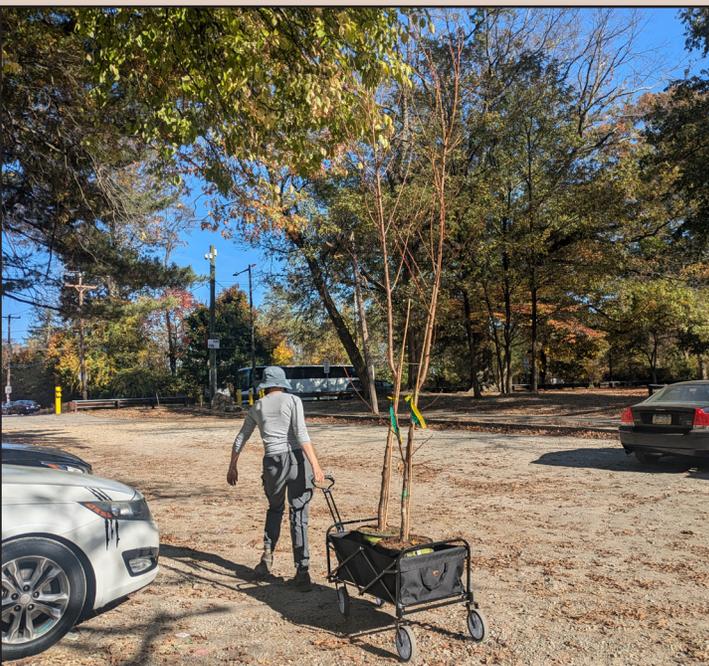


All maps highlighting federally designated environmental justice areas have been removed from federal websites. Map above shows EJ areas in and around Philadelphia.

classification. Rolling back efforts to implement solutions for longstanding environmental issues threatens these communities.

Pennsylvania nonprofits could lose \$6,277,651 through the cancellation of the EPA Thriving Communities grant program—funding that would have supported restoration efforts in areas that have long suffered increased environmental burdens and are hit hardest by climate change.

As daunting as the threats to environmental justice funding are, the Conservancy and our project partners remain committed to improving water quality, increasing biodiversity, and building climate resilience.



Trees being installed in Southwest Philadelphia with our downstream partners, the Cobbs Creek Ambassadors.

Miyawaki Method: Mini Forests with Big Impacts

With tree canopies shrinking, invasive plants thriving, and biodiversity on a steady decline, we are always on the lookout for new approaches to habitat restoration. Many invasive plants thrive in the sun so our focus is on creating more shade to make invasives easier to manage. Our partners from the Upper Darby Tree Tenders told us about a faster reforestation technique they had been researching called the Miyawaki method—and we dug in.

Created by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the 1970s, the approach mimics the soil conditions of old-growth forests to create fast growing miniature native forests. These forests are a mix of canopy trees, understory trees, and shrubs, planted 12 to 18 inches apart. The close spacing provides support and creates competition, which—combined with improved soil conditions—speeds up growth.

The approach has gained popularity in Europe and India but has not yet taken off in the U.S. In March, we visited the Horn Farm Center for Agricultural Education—an early East Coast adopter—in York, PA, to tour their two Miyawaki forests and learn from their experience. The Horn Farm team used broad forks (a tool used in no-till agriculture) to loosen the soil and planted young, bare-root trees by hand. To amend the soil, they spread leaf mulch 4 to 6 inches deep across the entire area.

We were impressed by the rapid growth of their forests and inspired by the possibilities, so we started our own Miyawaki native forest in Rolling Hill Park this spring. A SHARE grant from Sandy Hollow Arts & Recreation for the Environment, Inc. helped cover the cost of the broad forks, and we sourced as many trees and shrubs as we could to get started.

Cont'd on page 4

Miyawaki Method: Mini Forests with Big Impacts Cont'd

Our Miyawaki broke ground on April 23, when 176 Friends Central Middle School students came out to Rolling Hill Park for a work day. The students helped with a range of tasks around the cottage and about 25 students and teachers worked on the Miyawaki forest. They loosened the soil with broad forks, pulled out porcelain berry vines, dug up multiflora rose bushes, hauled away rocks, and began planting. After the initial site preparation and planting, we followed up with smaller work days to finish the installation.

Our first section is now complete, and we will continue planting patches nearby using the Miyawaki method to reforest a field near the cottage that has been overrun by invasive plants. We see this method as a powerful tool in a variety of scenarios—forest reconnection, lawn replacement, streamside planting expansion—especially in areas where pressure from invasives makes conventional plantings more difficult to maintain. We will continue to look for opportunities to plant using the Miyawaki method.



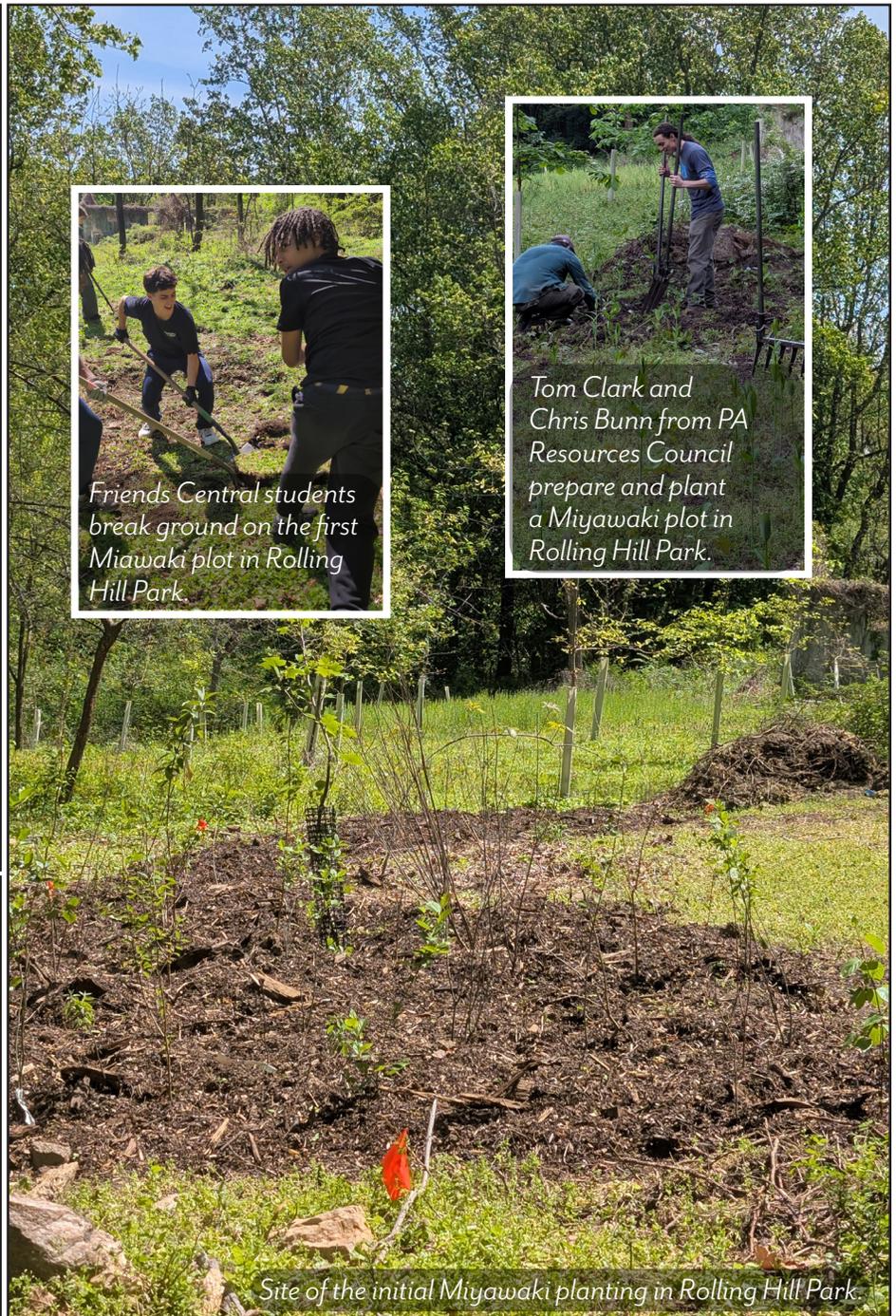
LMC staff and partners observe the first Miyawaki install on the east coast, at Horn Farm in York, Pa.



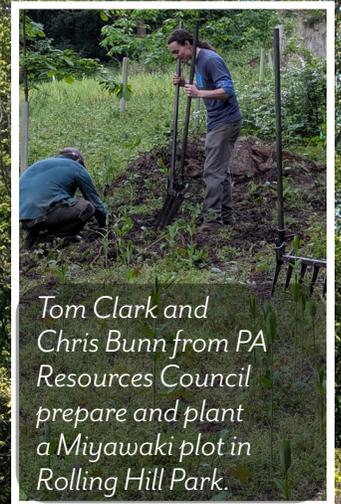
Andrew Leahy of Horn Farm shows off a broad fork.



Alex Hood prepares a planting site in Rolling Hill Park with a broad fork.



Friends Central students break ground on the first Miyawaki plot in Rolling Hill Park.



Tom Clark and Chris Bunn from PA Resources Council prepare and plant a Miyawaki plot in Rolling Hill Park.

Site of the initial Miyawaki planting in Rolling Hill Park.

Growing Greener Communities



Protecting our watersheds can start right outside your door!

Launched in late 2024, the Conservancy, with project partners Darby Creek Valley Association, Eastern Delaware County Stormwater Collaborative, and Pennsylvania Resources Council, began the Growing Greener Communities initiative to create a cohesive clearinghouse of information, education, and outreach, coupled with on-the-ground support to create greener, more sustainable, and resilient communities. The website, growinggreenercommunities.org, is the first step in an initiative that will combine efforts such as Green Streets and StreamSmart Stormwater House Calls to engage a broader audience and expand our reach. The program filmed a how-to video on constructing rain gardens that recently won the 2025 Bronze Telly Award for general tutorial. The latest how-to video is a step-by-step guide on how to live stake.



The website features a forum to help build community, answer questions, and share ideas. Also found on the website are guides and resources on installing green additions like rain barrels and creating wildlife habitat with native plants. In early 2026 we will hold a multi-part educational program where participants will design their own rain gardens. The partnership helps us maximize resources, obtain more grant funding, and offer more robust programming to accelerate the greening of our region.



Native insects like caterpillars are unable to eat most non-native plants, which threatens their ability to survive. Without native insects, other wildlife such as birds lose access to important sources of food as well.

[Read More](#)

Just one rain garden with one inch of rainfall can capture as much as 1,500 gallons of water. Get your friends, family and community involved and see what a difference we could all make towards cleaner water, less erosion, and a healthier ecosystem.

Above: Screenshots from GGC website. Below: A native garden installed by Growing Greener Communities partners.



Scan the QR code to check out the new website!



6 Sustainability

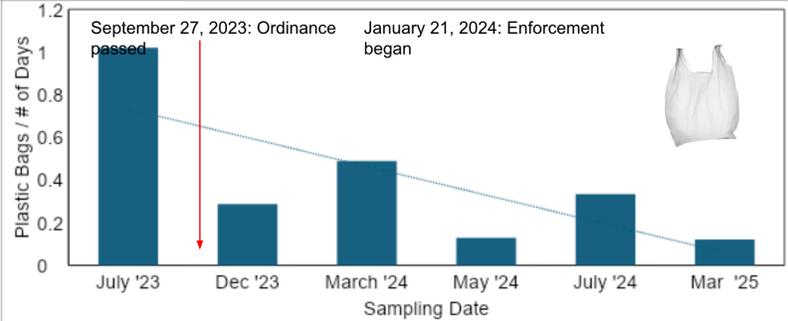
Student Study on Bag Ban Impact

In January 2024, Lower Merion Township implemented an ordinance prohibiting retail establishments from providing customers with single-use plastic carry-out bags and paper bags that do not meet specific requirements for carryout or delivery. Prior to the ordinance, the Conservancy, in partnership with Dr. Steven Goldsmith of Villanova University, had spent more than four years compiling data, conducting outreach, and garnering support from local businesses, residents, and municipal leaders. Now, more than a year since the ordinance took effect, Dr. Goldsmith's students have conducted fieldwork to assess its environmental impact.

Student researchers Hayley Wilson, Sophie Sproul, Helen Hulka, and Flynn Milledge surveyed plastic pollution in 20 headwater streams across Montgomery, Delaware, Chester, and Philadelphia Counties as part of Dr. Goldsmith's Watershed Biogeochemistry class. The students hypothesized that they would identify a decrease in watershed plastic bag pollution over time. To test their hypothesis, they surveyed plastic pollution at the 20 headwater streams using a standardized 50-meter transect method for collecting and classifying litter, based on NOAA's Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project. Samples were collected from June 2023 through July 2024, and during the spring semester, the students presented their findings to the Conservancy—a full-circle moment.

From the start of collection in June 2023 to the most recent data set in March 2025, students observed a significant decline in the prevalence of plastic bags in local waterways, reinforcing the ordinance's effectiveness. The Conservancy thanks Dr. Goldsmith and his students for helping us better understand the real-world impact of local legislation. Their work offers valuable insight into how smart policy can lead to measurable environmental improvements.

Plastic Bags Over Time in Lower Merion Township Sites



A graphic of compiled data shows a clear decline in plastics found in waterways since the bag ban began.



Photo taken before the bag ban, showing plastics along a creek.



Students present their work to peers and Conservancy staff.



Student researchers in the field collecting plastics.

Hidden Impacts

At the Conservancy, we emphasize the power of collective actions—like planting native plants and capturing stormwater—because small positive changes add up. However, the opposite is also true. Actions like home pesticide use accumulate and contribute to systemic issues. Pesticides can persist in soil, drift through the air, and wash into nearby waterways, moving through food webs and impacting many forms of life beyond their intended targets. Not all impacts show up right away, exposure can decrease disease resistance or impact a creature's ability to reproduce. Impacts on people can be difficult to measure because there are so many factors that influence health, but some of the most used pesticides have been linked to health risks.

Glyphosate is the most common herbicide in the U.S., used to kill anything from Japanese knotweed patches to crabgrass popping up in sidewalk cracks. Some studies have linked glyphosate exposure to cancer and the impact of glyphosate on wildlife is clear. Even as it breaks down, glyphosate remains toxic in soil, harming soil microbes and nearby plants. In an effort to create long-term improvements, we stick to cutting or pulling invasive plants to weaken them and help give native plants a competitive edge.

Atrazine and 2, 4-D are broad leaf herbicides used to create traditional lawns, killing “weeds” and leaving only the grass. In residential areas they are often used for aesthetic purposes. It is worth considering potential risks when using these chemicals in places where children and pets play.



Atrazine is a hormone disruptor that impacts human reproduction and is tied to birth defects. 60 countries have banned or are phasing out Atrazine. 2, 4-D is classified as a possible carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and is particularly toxic to aquatic organisms. Due to its tendency to persist, one storm can wash the chemical off of a lawn, onto the street, down the storm sewer system, and into the nearest stream.

Property-wide mosquito treatments - which use pyrethrins or pyrethroids - have fewer links to human health risks but they are also toxic to aquatic life. In spaces where they are sprayed, they harm or kill butterflies, fireflies, bees, and beetles and other beneficial insects. Fewer insects means less food for birds, fish, and other animals higher up the food chain. Mosquito treatments turn native plant gardens into ecological traps, attracting pollinators only to expose them to toxins. Rain can wash the chemicals into waterways, which ironically supports mosquito populations by harming their predators, like dragonflies and damselflies. Instead of spraying, remove or regularly dump water out of anything that can collect water (empty pots, buckets, chairs and tables, frisbees, etc.) and talk to your neighbors about doing the same.

When managing your yard, consider avoiding pesticides altogether—especially when safer, hands-on options exist. If you want to read more about pesticides, the National Pesticide Information Center and Environmental Working Group are solid starting points. Google Scholar is a great tool to dig deeper into the research.



Pollinators become unintentional bystanders of pesticide use.

Salt Studies

This school year, with funding from a PA DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) Environmental Education Grant, we provided hands-on lessons to students in grades K–12 about chloride pollution. The lessons tied small scale decisions about salt use to big picture water quality issues, connecting to our salt studies with Dr. Steven Goldsmith of Villanova University. Students learned about the infrastructure that carries our water, the everyday pollution we as humans contribute, the solutions and responsibilities we have to reduce our impact, and the vital role native plants play in protecting our ecosystems.

Lessons featured an EnviroScape model to show how pollutants move through our watershed and impair water quality. Preserved macroinvertebrates helped students connect to the web of life in our creeks, and trips to local streams gave them the chance to observe aquatic creatures in person. These “macros” are bioindicators of stream health, showing students firsthand how life in the water reflects the health of the ecosystem. When we couldn’t bring students to the creek, we brought the creek to them - collecting water samples from local waterways to bring into classrooms for testing and exploration.

All students learned about the impacts of road salt and the reality of our overuse. They tested water samples for chloride and discovered that even when salt seems to disappear from our roads and sidewalks, it’s only dissolved - and still very much present. That salt flows through the storm sewer system and into our waterways, making local streams sometimes saltier than the ocean during the winter months.

Students also learned about the EnviroDIY loggers installed in nearby streams and how they help us monitor chloride pollution over time. These devices track conductivity, which reveals spikes in salt levels during and after winter weather events. The data collected will help us - and future students - spot long-term trends in stream health and inform how we can all become better stewards of our natural world.

Each student was asked the essential question: “How do we help?” Small actions, like limiting salt use and sweeping up excess, make a difference. So do larger steps, like restoring native plant habitat. And perhaps most important of all, sharing what they’ve learned and educating friends and family.



Students from Bucks County Learning Cooperative collect creek water to test for chloride.



Students test water samples for chloride. (L) Our youngest students at Phoebe Anna Thorne Kindergarten (R) Black Rock Middle School.



Black Rock Middle School students observe the EnviroScape Model (L) and analyze chloride tests from Mill Creek water samples (R).



Lower Merion High School AP Environmental Science students take their first field trip since Covid to Mill Creek to examine water quality.

Trout Release with Black Rock Middle School

This spring, we participated in a trout release with students from Black Rock Middle School through the Pennsylvania Trout in the Classroom (PA TIC) program - an exciting teaching initiative supported by the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

With the help of their teacher, Rebecca Epting, students raised trout in their classroom tanks caring for them from eggs to fry until the fish were large enough to be released. LMC visited the classroom in the winter, when the trout were still growing, and shared lessons on local trout habitat changes, the impacts of stormwater runoff, the importance of riparian buffers, and the interconnected web of life in our watersheds.

Trout require clean, cold, oxygen-rich water to thrive. Many local streams cannot sustain trout because stormwater runoff carries pollutants into streams, erodes streambanks and streambeds, and causes flashy flows that widen the channels and warm the water. These impacts are worse in areas without trees and shrubs lining the stream banks. Students learned how native plants play a critical role in cooling and protecting our waterways, helping to reduce the effects of runoff and improve stream health.

When the time came for the fish release, the trout were transferred into buckets equipped with aerators and cooling systems, loaded into the back of a Jeep, and brought to Merry Place Park in Delaware County, along Darby Creek, a designated trout release site. Once there, students hiked with teachers and LMC staff down the trail with the fish in tow, then at the release site formed a human chain to carefully pass all 85 trout, one by one in containers, from the trail down a steep embankment and into their new home in Darby Creek.

It was a joyful and memorable experience for everyone involved!



Students pose in front of a trout stocking sign at Merry Place Park.



Students prepare to take their fish on hike to release site.



Eighty-five trout are passed down from the bank to the creek.



Trout just before being released into Darby Creek.

100th Anniversary of Wynnewood's English Village

One hundred years ago, two brothers, S. Arthur Love (an architect) and Donald M. Love (a builder), broke ground on the English Village, a small residential development in Wynnewood off Cherry Lane. The brothers are believed to have modeled the neighborhood after Elizabethan-era villages they saw in England. Even in its infancy, the neighborhood – an enclave of 29 Tudor-style homes – was a curiosity and a tourist attraction. In a 1926 article about the village that appeared in *Building Magazine*, a writer observed that “everything has been done to take away the newness and to give the feeling of home, of tradition, of ancestry.” Little has changed since then. In 2025, 100 years later, the village still very much resembles the spot that this writer described - “a bit of old English... lifted bodily from its native land and transplanted in America.”

The neighborhood's residents deserve credit for this. Even as properties have been bought and sold, one thing has remained constant: throughout the years, residents have been loving and respectful stewards of their houses. The Love brothers went to extreme lengths to set the neighborhood apart from other post-war developments in America (for example, they employed ships' carpenters to install the two-inch thick oak floors and imported metal casements and old glass from Britain to give the houses an “aged appearance”). They would have been particularly grateful to one longtime resident, Susan Dinneen, for her efforts to preserve the spirit and integrity of their village. Susan was the leader of the popular campaign in 2009 to designate the village as a local historic district. Twenty years later, she led efforts to create historic plaques for houses in the neighborhood. Countless times, she and her husband Mark welcomed residents to their warm and inviting house (straight out of a real English Village) to discuss strategies for preserving the neighborhood. After the English Village was designated as a historic district, Susan volunteered her time to serve on the Township's Historic Architectural Review Board.

Sadly, Susan passed away in early May. Her death has been felt deeply by residents of the tight-knit neighborhood and by the Conservancy. It is not possible for our organization to think of the English Village without thinking of Susan. We are comforted with the knowledge that Susan's legacy lives on in this special corner of Wynnewood. Visit the QR codes on the right to see video of Susan and Mark, featured on our English Village Story Map, or to learn more about Susan's life in her obituary.



“Old World Village,” 1926. City Parks Association Photographs, Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center.



Historic photo of Susan and Mark Dinneen's home in the English Village.



Plaques that were created, designating the Historic English Village.



(L) Watch a video of Susan and Mark Dinneen discussing the English Village.

(R) Susan Dinneen's obituary information.



Toland Farms Story Map

For the past few years, the Conservancy has used ArcGIS StoryMaps to create immersive and in-depth “stories” that focus on our historic preservation work. Storymaps allow us to combine images, photographs, GIS mapping, text, and videos to create programming that is interactive, informational, and enjoyable! Readers can access all of our StoryMaps on our website.

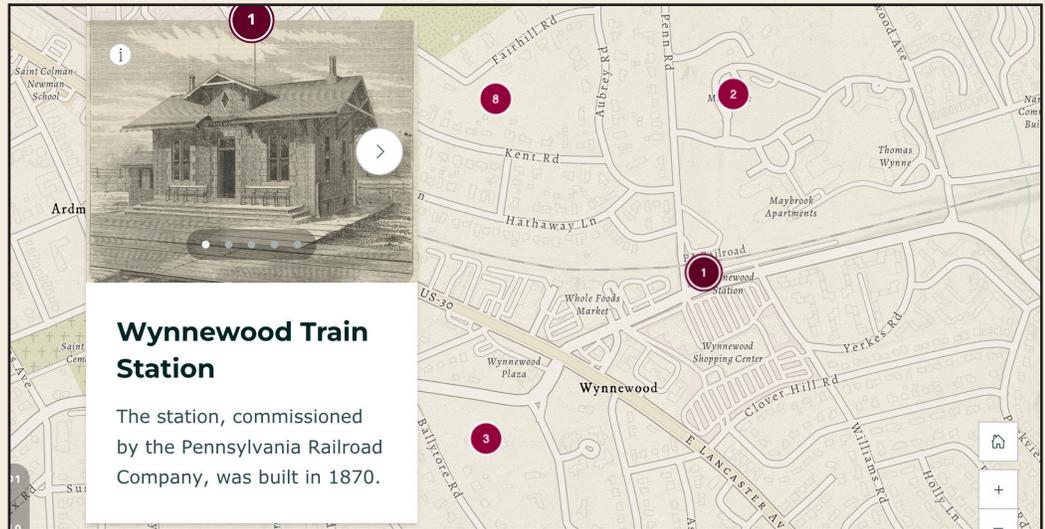
This past winter, the Conservancy launched a new StoryMap that features the historic Toland Farm neighborhood in Wynnewood and Ardmore. This StoryMap chronicles the development of this traditional neighborhood. It includes information about each house in the neighborhood, including architect, builder, and date of construction, as well as historic photos of most homes in the neighborhood.

The Toland Farm StoryMap is the first in a series of “Historic Neighborhood StoryMaps” the Conservancy plans to create about traditional neighborhoods in Lower Merion and Narberth. Would you like to see a StoryMap of your neighborhood? Let us know! This summer, we are excited that two local high school students (one from Lower Merion and one from Friends Central) will be creating StoryMaps focused on the histories of their own traditional neighborhoods!

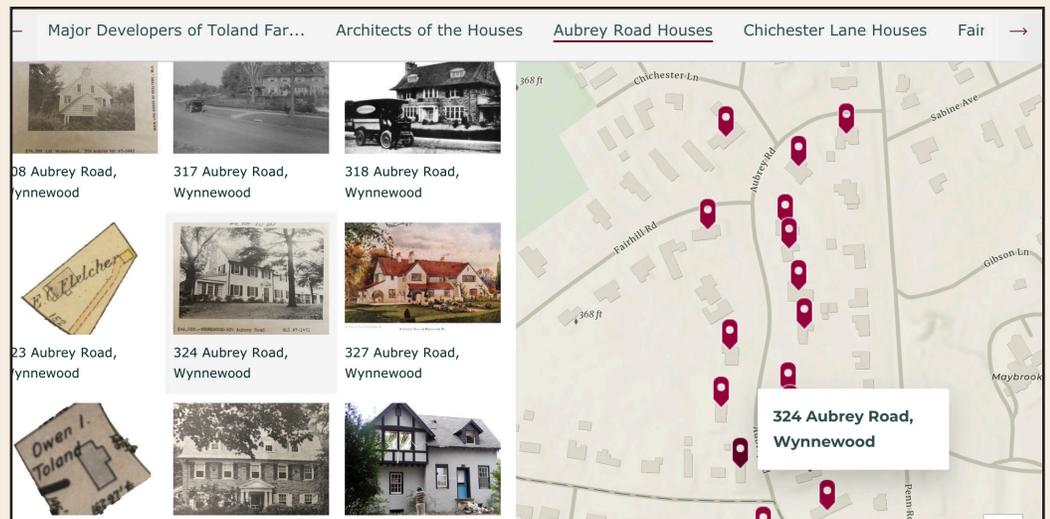
Find our Toland Farm StoryMap and other online tours in the Historic Preservation section on our website: <https://lmconservancy.org/historic-preservation/>.



A historic ad showcasing a “Country Home” in Wynnewood, Pa, by Architect: Lawrence Visscher Boyd, at 327 Aubrey Lane.



A screenshot of a Toland Farms StoryMap depicting the Wynnewood Train Station, built in 1870. Each map point has historic photos and information users can explore.



A screenshot of the Toland Farms StoryMap depicts an interactive map. Users can scroll over the map to highlight the homes and click on images to expand to more information.

Happenings at the Conservancy Cottage

The Conservancy Cottage at Rolling Hill Park has been busy. Here's a look at some recent projects and events, made possible by members, volunteers, and community partners.

Eagle Scout built Message Board + Invasive Plant Removal (R)

Ben Folk of Narberth Boy Scout Troop 176 built a stunning new community message board for the Conservancy in Rolling Hill Park. Ben also cut and pulled invasive plants, including Japanese hops, mugwort, and multiflora rose.

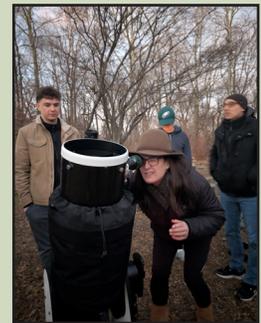


Native Container Garden Workshop (L)

Participants left with native container gardens to expand their home habitat. Chris Bunn of Pennsylvania Resources Council also shared his tips for winter seed-starting.

Astronomy Night at the Cottage (R)

A crew of stargazers gathered at Rolling Hill Park to observe a planetary alignment, the Orion nebula and learn about the night sky. Huge thanks to Les Carriere and friends from Ryan Observatory and Rittenhouse Astronomical Society for the stellar event!



Seedlings from Interfaith Power & Light (L)

We received 120 tree and shrub seedlings this spring through Interfaith Power & Light and the PA Plant 10 Million Trees initiative. This is our second round in 12 months. The seedlings are stored and cared for at the Conservancy Cottage while we work to get them planted in community projects, including our Miyawaki Forest.



Annual Spring Bird Census (L)

Volunteers fanned out across four locations and spotted fifty bird species. Special thanks to Gregg Gorton for sharing his expertise.



Downspout Planter Build (L)

Planters were constructed with our Growing Greener Communities partners. These planters will catch and slow rainwater, while boosting habitat.

Friends Central Middle School Service Day

176 students spent the day cutting and pulling invasive plants, re-mulching paths, and planting native plants. Notably, they helped break ground on our first Miyawaki Forest plot and prepared the future site of our live stake nursery. Following their volunteer time, LMC staff led students on a hike to Mill Creek.



Spring Gala

This spring, we gathered at the historic Lutheran Deaconess House in Gladwyne for our Annual Gala. The evening brought together community members, elected officials and partners who are committed to protecting our natural and historic resources. Mark Taylor, who recently stepped down from the board after 14 years of dedicated service, was our Gala honoree. (Turn to page 15 to read more about Mark's parting speech at the Gala.)

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those who helped us raise funds for future conservation work through our Gala celebration, including our host Michael Karp, our attendees, and our generous sponsors:

Bruce D. Reed, Shreiner Tree Care, John B. Ward Arborists, Manko Gold Katcher & Fox, Aqua, E.B. Mahoney Builders, Faegre Drinker, F.L. Bissinger, Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, Friends of the Harriton Preserve, Hanson Fine Building, Lower Merion Historical Society, Pennoni, Peter Zimmerman Architects, Clark Hill, Cynwyd Club, First Trust Bank, Mack Landscape Management, McCaffrey's Food Market, Navigation Benefits, Ranieri & Kerns Associates, and Ringpfeil Advanced Dermatology.



Mark Taylor with the Conservancy staff.

Your support makes our work possible. From all of us at the Conservancy—thank you.

Leave the Leaves Campaign

This past fall, we launched a campaign asking ten community members to commit to leaving fallen leaves on their properties instead of removing them. The goal was two-fold: to expand the ecological benefits of leaf litter across more properties and to shift public perceptions of beauty - away from viewing leaves as an eyesore or nuisance, and toward recognizing them as an ecological asset worth celebrating. Leaving leaves does more than free up time from raking—it supports an entire web of life. Leaf litter provides habitat for lightning bugs, luna moths, and bumble bees that overwinter in fallen leaves; amphibians like salamanders and toads hibernate under them; and birds rely on the life in the litter for food. As leaves decompose, they enrich the soil with microbes and help retain moisture. When removed, these natural cycles are disrupted and landscapes are left deprived of essential habitat and organic soil amendments. The aesthetic of a native garden in winter - uncut stalks, intact seed heads, and leaves left intact on the ground- may not fit standard views of garden aesthetic, but the more one learns about the benefits, the more beauty can be seen in them. *At a time of rapid biodiversity loss, leaving the leaves is a simple, powerful act of ecological stewardship.*

We asked some participants to share their experience. Some are seasoned “leave-the-leaves” pros; others joined the movement for the first time this year. Here’s what they had to say—and how their yards are changing as a result.

Craig, Ardmore



“This is my first year [leaving the leaves]. I just left them where they fell and let nature do its thing. Looking forward to seeing more pollinators this spring!”

Laura, Merion Station



“I’ve been leaving the leaves for the past 3 years, raking as many leaves into garden beds

and under trees as possible. I’m using layered leaves to kill some of my grass as well, so I can start new garden beds. I was inspired to start doing this because I know how important it is for pollinators and other insects in our ecosystems to complete their life cycles. I want to help restore their populations.”

Rebecca, Ardmore



“I keep some leaves in the beds and this year I raked the rest into a big pile in the corner of the yard. I saw Doug Tallamy speak locally and he opened my eyes to the fact that insects

are the base of the entire ecosystem, and that leaving the leaves is one tangible thing I can do to support their successful reproduction. I put up an educational sign and also regularly talk to my next door neighbors about my mission. I’ve seen great results including bird and butterfly species I’d never seen in a suburban yard before!” Check out Rebecca’s Instagram, @nativegardenjourney, to watch as her yard transforms!

Deirdre, Ardmore

“This is my third year of leaving a blanket of leaves on my garden over the winter. Winter residents birds like dark eyed juncos had plenty to eat. The plants wake up refreshed from their long winter nap. Pollinators & insects love it. I have loads of fireflies in the summer...The wild winter look has caught on up and down the block.”



Peter, Roxborough

“Two years of leaving the leaves. The goal of my garden is to support wildlife, pollinators, and biodiversity and mimic the forest setting on a small scale. Rich, organic soil is what would lead to long term success.”

Michelle & Lars,
Penn Valley

“We were inspired to join [the campaign] to share our experience with the value of leaves in our space especially since they are often treated as waste...We leave approximately 2-3” of leaves in sunny perennial beds and rake the remaining off of hardscaping like the driveway and porch to put in compost bins or to pile on non-native ground covers to discourage them. We see regeneration of keystone native trees like oaks and hickories where we leave the leaves and also protect from deer browse. In spring, I like to look for native bee species that emerge from their leaf-covered overwintering burrows in the woods... I also enjoy looking for many species of fireflies in the summer knowing that they wouldn't have survived without the leaf cover that we leave to preserve moist conditions for their larval stages in the fall, winter, and spring.”



Want to help us shift the perspective of beauty in our landscapes? Join our growing photo campaign! We will be sharing photographs of local yards that embrace the power of native plants. Life-supporting, resilient landscapes are the new beautiful. Want to be featured? Reach out to Candice@LMConservancy.org for more information.

Supporter Spotlight

At this year's Gala, we had the chance to honor and celebrate longtime Conservancy supporter Mark Taylor before he stepped down as Board Chair, marking the end of 14 years of dedicated service—including eight years leading the board. His speech, delivered at the historic Lutheran Deaconess House, reminded us that environmental work is “an act of quiet resistance against apathy.” Reflecting on the challenges of our time - uncertain funding, rollbacks in climate policy, and a rapidly changing climate - Mark left us with a powerful call to action: *“Intelligent people who care about their community, putting their good intentions into action matter now more than ever.”* Thank you, Mark.



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NEW LOGO, SAME MISSION

The Lower Merion Conservancy protects and enhances our community's character and quality of life, recognizing that the sustainable management of our environmental and historic resources is inextricably intertwined with both conservation and change.



**LOWER MERION
CONSERVANCY**

**TO READ ABOUT OUR RECENT
REBRAND - TURN TO PAGE 1!**