

NATURE

PENNSYLVANIA

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Bill Kunze © Perri Strawn

Your Support Matters

In previous issues, you've seen us protect thousands of acres of priority lands. Now, a peek behind the conservation curtain: As we embark on a holiday season sure to bring many of us new gizmos and gadgets, read how The Nature Conservancy uses the latest technology for the benefit of nature—and stretches our donors' dollars ever further in the process.

Help us continue to put cutting-edge tools in our staff's hands. If you haven't already done so, please include The Nature Conservancy's Pennsylvania Chapter in your year-end charitable contributions. Donate today in just one click by going to nature.org/pagiving.

Bill Kunze, Executive Director



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Mobile Monitoring © Devan King/The Nature Conservancy

Technology in the Woods

Most people head into the forest to unplug. But if you are a Nature Conservancy land steward whose job is to monitor properties and easements, it's all about high tech. Pennsylvania Chapter staff are pioneering a new technology that makes assembling on-site data about nature much easier.

Accessible from a tablet or phone, the app stores photos, maps and data that can be easily synched and shared among staff via a cloud platform.

“This mobile monitoring system goes where you go, allowing you to collect real-time information as you check in on a property,” says Rachel Ralls, the Conservancy's Pennsylvania Conservation Lands Program Manager. “It keeps track of where you've been and highlights places that need a visit.”

Pat McElhenny, the Chapter's Stewardship and Fire Program Manager, uses the technology all the time.

“I check preserve boundaries, track invasives, and record evidence of illegal activities,” says McElhenny. “I also have a version that provides access to aerial and topographical imagery that informs prescribed fire activities pursued with partners on public, private and Conservancy lands.”

According to Ralls and McElhenny, mobile monitoring saves time spent typing up handwritten field notes and provides a streamlined reporting system that fulfills annual monitoring requirements. Saving time also means saving money.

“Rolling this out at all of the Conservancy's 2,600 easements and 1,400 fee lands could save significant dollars in staff time,” says Joe Fargione, the Conservancy's North America Region Science Director. “Early success stories like in Pennsylvania are accelerating the widespread adoption of this new technology.”



Volunteer Program Manager Molly Anderson examines a discovery with LEAF Intern Gabrielle DiPasqualle. © Gates Rhodes

Monitoring Minsi Lake

Nature Conservancy scientists know that the dense, overgrown woods surrounding Minsi Lake in Northampton County harbor ecologically valuable vernal pools. Last summer, high school interns from the Conservancy’s month long summer LEAF (Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future) program hiked into the brambles to learn more. Armed with iPads, long pants and lots of bug spray, they embarked on a digital scavenger hunt to find these seasonal wetlands that provide critical habitat to birds, salamanders and other forest-dwelling species. Clues came from the Chapter’s mapping guru, Preston Welker, who created an interactive digital map that would assist with locating vernal pools in an area boasting one of the largest concentrations in the state. In the end, they achieved their mission: Find 30 vernal pools, remove invasive vegetation, take photos and document observations before marking the task “complete.” On the other end of the data, in his suburban Philadelphia office, Preston Welker synched the new information to share with staff and partners around the state. All in real time.

Opportunity of a Lifetime

“LEAF gave me many opportunities and experiences that I never imagined I could do. These experiences changed my views and shaped me into a different person.”

—Sabrina Tan, who traveled to Pennsylvania from Balboa High School in San Francisco to gain skills and learn about careers in conservation.



Sabrina Tan © Gates Rhodes

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Preston Welker © Ruby Mitchell

FACES OF CONSERVATION

Preston Welker,
Geographic Information Systems
Technician in Conshohocken, PA

Roots Run Deep In my native Colorado, I enjoy the hike to Diamond Lake, which is nestled into the mountains like a bowl of clear, cool water. The journey also rewards you with a beautiful view.

Finding Focus For two years in college, I took a wide range of classes, unsure of what I wanted to do. Then Geography, the study of the world, captured my interest. I like to travel, so it was a good fit for me.

A Place I Love In Pennsylvania, I enjoy hiking along the Appalachian Trail. I like that I can get on the trail here and walk all the way to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where I used to live and work as an AmeriCorps member.

Job Satisfaction I am excited about trails we constructed at our new Cove Mountain Preserve. I am also designing a trail map so people don’t get lost while visiting there!