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Penns Woods

Ten-year partnership achieves healthy forests with fire

Some landscapes need fire to thrive. The mixed oak forests dominating half of Pennsylvania depend on this natural disturbance even though forest managers have historically used fire sparingly on state lands. However, over the last decade The Nature Conservancy, working with the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), has built capacity for safely and effectively delivering prescribed burning to improve the health and productivity of fire dependent landscapes throughout the state.

“A decade ago, we did very little burning,” says Peter Sussenbach, bureau director of wildlife habitat management at PGC, which owns and manages 1.5 million acres throughout Pennsylvania. “We sought TNC’s leadership in developing plans, training crews and conducting burns in targeted locations that, over 10 years, have added

up to more than 44,000 acres statewide.”

Pennsylvania’s forests play a critical role in filtering air and water, storing carbon, harboring native wildlife and



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yielding premium hardwood for a variety of products. But the health and condition of many state forests is declining. And, Sussenbach says, just preserving forests is not enough. “If we don’t set up this ecosystem to be as healthy and resilient

as possible, then we are selling future generations short.”

TNC staff members Jenny Case and Pat McElhenny recently received career achievement awards at the Fire in Eastern Oaks Conference for leading this effort in Pennsylvania. This spring, Case heads to Belize with other international fire experts for a two-week wildfire management training.

“TNC pursues prescribed burning with partners who appreciate the value and positive outcomes that result from combining staff, training and equipment to implement this important conservation practice in places where it is needed the most,” says McElhenny. “Working with PGC has made it possible to pursue this work at a previously unimaginable scale and pace that neither organization could have achieved alone.”



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Learning Exchange

Cities team compares notes with Puerto Rican peers

Members of The Nature Conservancy’s urban conservation program in Pennsylvania recently traveled to San Juan, Puerto Rico as part of a learning exchange. Thanks to a grant from TNC’s Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion program, the team met with representatives from Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña (ENLACE) to share knowledge about stormwater management practices, participatory decision-making, environmental justice and how to make cities more resilient in the face of a changing climate.



TNC Team © The Nature Conservancy

“Our partners at ENLACE helped establish and continue to work closely with the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust—known as the world’s first community land trust of an informal settlement,” says Julie Ulrich, TNC’s urban conservation program director in Pennsylvania. “A board that includes residents manages the land trust and has a mandate to preserve and develop affordable housing in the face of gentrification and land scarcity—all issues we face in Philadelphia.”

In return for gaining knowledge about community land trusts, the TNC team shared strategies in planning, managing and implementing green stormwater infrastructure projects with a community-centered approach. ENLACE intends to use the information to address ongoing flooding and pollution issues while bringing additional benefits to residents of the Caño Martín Peña.

Carlos Muñoz Perez, ENLACE’s urbanism and infrastructure program manager, says, “The exchange is an opportunity to learn from Philadelphia’s nature-based solutions framework to comply with federal water quality standards and better position San Juan and the G-8 communities to be responsive to infrastructure challenges exacerbated by extreme rainfall events.”

NATURE PENNSYLVANIA

Harrisburg mural highlights Kittatinny Ridge

An artist’s rendition of Pennsylvania’s Kittatinny Ridge has landed on the wall of a Harrisburg deli just across the street from the state capitol. The two-story, 80-foot-wide mural depicts a vibrant green and gold forest scene featuring two female kestrels surrounded by warblers amid Pennsylvania native plants like Service Berry, Table Mountain Pine and Maple Leaf Viburnum.



© Sprocket Mural Works

The Harrisburg non-profit, Sprocket Mural Works, commissioned Houston-based artist Emily Ding to paint the mural—one of 14 created in 10 days—for The Nature Conservancy and Tröegs Independent Brewing during the 2019 Mural Fest. The partners wanted to highlight the Kittatinny Ridge as part of a “healthy forests=clean water=good beer” campaign that promotes the importance of this 185-mile unbroken forested chain to securing clean and abundant water. The Kittatinny also serves as a “wildlife superhighway” for migrating birds and mammals. The Conservancy has permanently protected 20,000 acres along the ridge and is working to protect an additional 8,000 acres in the next three years. The mural is located at 512 N. 3rd Street in Harrisburg.

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