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Leaving a Pennsylvania Legacy

Bill Kunze reflects on conservation accomplishments during his tenure as executive director

I became The Nature Conservancy's Pennsylvania executive director 14 years ago. Across those years, I am proud to reflect, our efforts in the Keystone State launched innovative strategies around energy development, forest carbon and urban conservation that contributed to meeting the world's greatest conservation challenges. We also helped lead TNC into deeper engagement with climate change, the defining environmental issue of our time.

At the same time, we accelerated the pace and scale of our direct land and water conservation activity.

It has been a tremendous privilege to work alongside TNC's outstanding staff and trustees in Pennsylvania. They are the true authors of our successes. As I take on a new challenge at TNC, as



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Director of Land and Water Conservation Strategy for North America, I know they will continue to make you proud to call yourselves TNC members.

In my new role, I will be helping colleagues across North America—both at TNC and across the broader conservation community—do what we have done in Pennsylvania: accelerate the pace at which we protect nature, focus our attention on a network of lands and waters we identify as most likely to be resilient in a changing climate, and develop new sources of funding to supplement and leverage the generous support of our donors.

Thank you for everything you have done to make what TNC has achieved in Pennsylvania possible. As I make the transition from executive director to fellow member in Pennsylvania, I look forward to seeing what the next chapter of TNC's work in this great state will yield!



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Species Spotlight: American Eel

Conserving the Delaware River benefits a unique and globally endangered species

In 1900, American eels were prolific throughout the Susquehanna and Delaware rivers. Now they are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Their decline is likely due to a variety of threats spanning diverse geographies, habitats and the fresh, saltwater and brackish waters that fuel their epic life journey that begins and ends in the North Atlantic’s Sargasso Sea.

“Ten years ago, no one knew much about where the eels were. Now we have important data—for both the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers—that are key to understanding and effecting conservation of this unique species.”

Mari-Beth DeLucia, TNC’s Land Conservation Manager in Pennsylvania

Eels are mysterious—in how they look and what they do. We do know that large dams prevent eels from migrating upstream where they spend most of their life. However, eels thrive along the 330-mile-long Delaware, the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi.

Water in the Delaware is also very clean, partly because of an abundance of mussels, including Eastern elliptio mussels—an estimated 280 million of them—that filter the river six times before its waters reach the Delaware Bay. In return for clean, free-flowing waters, American eels assist the mussels with populating the river. The mussels wave appendages, which resemble a worm or small fish, to attract an eel before dispersing a cloud of larvae that attaches to and travels with the eel farther up (or down) stream.

The Nature Conservancy has assessed and documented eel populations and their distribution in the headwaters of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. This data recently informed efforts by TNC and partners to advocate for policies that protect the Delaware River and other marine, estuarine and freshwater habitats that play a key role in the life cycle and survival of American eels.

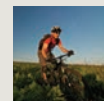
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In-House Eel Expert: Mari-Beth DeLucia

In addition to working as TNC’s Pennsylvania Land Conservation Manager, Mari-Beth DeLucia serves as an American eel conservation expert on the IUCN Eel Specialist Group, the world’s leading group of scientists who study eels. Recently, this role led her to London to join other eel experts in considering the conservation status of anguillid eels, identifying major threats and determining where action is most currently needed. There is growing concern that all 16 species of anguillid eels are in decline as a result of illegal trade, disease, habitat loss and mortality from dams, pumps and hydropower turbines. The IUCN Red List assessment will be published in 2020.



This image, used in the Winter 2018 issue of *Pennsylvania Nature News*, should be credited to John (Jay) Rogan, a volunteer who helped create bike trails at TNC’s Dick and Nancy Eales Preserve at Moosic Mountain.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Learn about upcoming events taking place this spring and summer at nature.org/paevents.

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