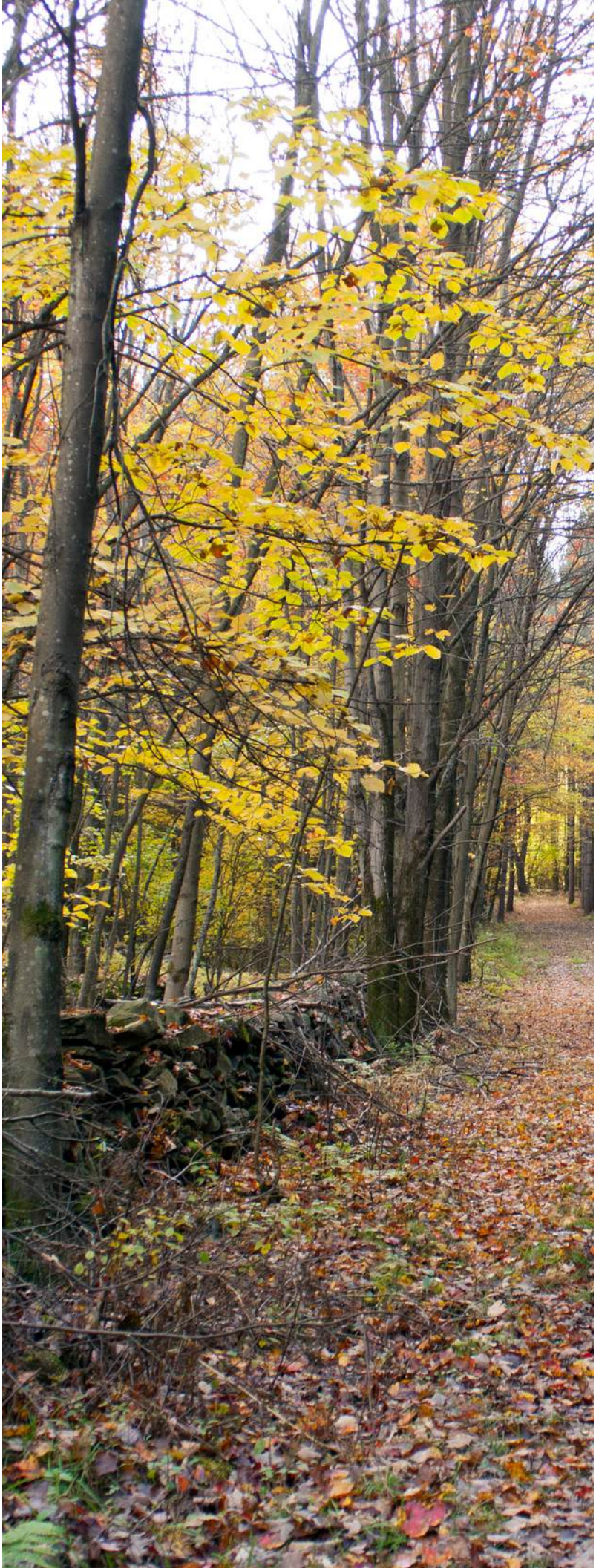
THE HORIZON

NORTH BRANCH LAND TRUST NEWS | FALL / WINTER 2026



North Branch
Land Trust



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STAFF DIRECTORY

DAVID BASS
Executive Director
bass@nblt.org

JOE BUTKIEWICZ
Director of Community Engagement
butkiewicz@nblt.org

ELLEN FERRETTI
Executive Director Emeritus
ferretti@nblt.org

BRITTANY LYNN
Marketing & Communications Manager
lynn@nblt.org

LEAH MALARKEY
Environmental Education Coordinator
malarkey@nblt.org

EMMA THOMPSON
Senior Director of Conservation & Operations
thompson@nblt.org

NATALIE WASILCHAK
Conservation Specialist
wasilchak@nblt.org



A message from the Board Chair
STEPHEN MAAKESTAD

Dear Friends and Members,
With the change in seasons, so will the Land Trust's leadership.
Thank you to Ellen Ferretti for her five years at the helm and congratulations on your retirement! We are so thankful that Ellen has left things in such a good place for continued success in our mission. And thank you to Joe Butkiewicz for serving as Interim Executive Director and continued support on Community Outreach.

We welcome David Bass as our new Executive Director. David has been a great supporter of the Land Trust and brings valuable nonprofit experience and deep community connection to our organization. We look forward to his leadership and vision in guiding the team at North Branch Land Trust.

Our environmental education program continues to grow, and we have several exciting events planned, including:

- **The Health of Our Forest: Hunting**: Game Commission Forestry and Biology staff discuss deer management
  Nov. 4th from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM - PA Game Commission Northeast Region Office

- **Conservation Collage & Coffee**: Craft a nature-themed collage from reused household items
  Nov. 7th from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM – Osterhout Free Library

- **Nature Trivia Night**: Gather a team of up to six for our second annual trivia night!
  Nov. 10th from 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM - American Legion Post 781

- **Invasive Insect Pinning –** Learn about the spotted lanternfly and other invasives, then pin your own insects
  Nov. 19th from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM - NBLT Office (105 Lt. Michael Cleary Drive, Dallas)

- **Annual Native Wreath Forage –** Forage along the Anthracite Scenic Trail Assoc. Rimple Loop and decorate a wreath
  December 5th from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm - NBLT Office (105 Lt. Michael Cleary Drive, Dallas)

There is more to come, and you can sign up for these events at https://nblt.org/events/. Turn to page 6 for further details.

Our members make everything we do possible. The trails you walk, the classes and programs we offer, the conservation easements that secure open space for good, and the workdays where volunteers pitch in all rest on your generosity. Each membership gift helps protect land and bring people closer to nature across Northeastern Pennsylvania. If you haven't already, please renew or join today at https://nblt.org/membership/, and invite a friend or neighbor to do the same. Thank you for being part of this community.

North Branch Land Trust

"Conserving precious land...forever."

OUR MISSION: North Branch Land Trust partners with landowners, communities, and stakeholders to conserve and care for Northeastern Pennsylvania's lands and waters.

OUR VISION: A future where abundant conserved lands help maintain clean air and water, diverse forests and wildlife habitats, vibrant working farms, and inspiring natural beauty.

105 Lt. Michael Cleary Dr. Dallas, PA 18612

info@nblt.org **www.nblt.org** **570-310-1781** **@northbranchlandtrust**

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Executive Director's Letter
DAVID BASS

It is an absolute honor to write to you as the incoming Executive Director of North Branch Land Trust. Over the past weeks, as I've stepped into this role, I've been continually inspired by the vibrant community that makes our work possible - our passionate donors, dedicated Board of Directors, inspiring staff, tireless volunteers, and the visionary landowners who entrust us with the future of their natural spaces.

Northeastern Pennsylvania is home to an extraordinary landscape: Dense, vibrant forests, abundant waterways that nourish our watersheds, rolling agricultural lands, and state parks and game lands that define the place we call home. With over 23,000 acres conserved across our region, NBLT's impact is visible in every quiet sanctuary, protected trail, and delicate habitat we share.

Stepping into leadership at NBLT isn't just a career milestone for me, it is a personal commitment to protecting the lands and waters of our area. As a longtime resident of Northeastern Pennsylvania, I have always felt a deep connection to the landscapes, communities, and natural resources that make this region such a special place to call home. From my years attending Wyoming Seminary to the many opportunities I've had to serve local organizations, I have been fortunate enough to witness firsthand the power of community.

Throughout my career, service has remained at the center of my work. More than a decade ago, I founded the non-profit organization, NEPA Racing, dedicated to supporting other local nonprofits through athletic events. Together, with countless volunteers, sponsors, and supporters, our events have raised more than $300,000 to strengthen our community. I have also spent the past 11 years serving on the board of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association (ASTA) and remain actively involved across the region. In 2026 alone, I had the privilege of assisting in organizing 25 local races - most notably The Back Mountain Trail 5K on New Year's Eve and Back Mountain Triathlon - which brought people together in support of important local causes including North Branch Land Trust, ASTA, and Back Mountain first responders.

My primary goal in these coming months is to listen, learn, and build upon the strong foundation created by those before me. I am deeply grateful to Ellen Ferretti for her years of dedicated service and unwavering commitment to this mission, which will undoubtedly continue the growth and success of NBLT.

To our Landowners, thank you for your foresight and deep love for the land. I look forward to walking your properties with you and exploring new opportunities to protect working farms and natural habitats for generations to come.
To our Donors and Members, your investment fuels every acre protected, every sanctuary maintained, and every outdoor experience fostered. You are the lifeblood of this trust, and I pledge to continue NBLT's strong legacy of fiscal responsibility, excellence, and integrity, while we work to help educate the next generation to the importance of these resources.
To our Community & Board, together, we will deepen our regional partnerships and advocate for balanced, responsible nature-based recreation that connects more families and neighbors to the land we safeguard.

As you flip through this issue of The Horizon, you'll read stories celebrating the land, community, and conservation work happening in our backyard. Looking ahead, our future is bright, but the need for land conservation and clean water protection remains urgent.
I look forward to meeting many of you at our upcoming sanctuary events, trail walks, and community gatherings. Please don't hesitate to reach out, say hello, or share what you love most about North Branch Land Trust.

Thank you for your warm welcome and enduring support of our wild and working lands.

SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: DISCOVERNEPA

At DiscoverNEPA, our mission is to encourage Northeastern Pennsylvania's best and brightest to stay in the region. We promote quality of life, highlight local communities and assist nonprofits by cultivating awareness and volunteerism. Together, we're branding NEPA as one of the nation's best places to live.We work to showcase the unique lifestyle that makes living in NEPA rewarding. By highlighting community pride, supporting local businesses and celebrating regional traditions, DiscoverNEPA builds connections that encourage people to call Northeastern PA home for generations to come.

What is something that the community should know about DiscoverNEPA?

We cover it all – the small stories, the larger-than-life moments, the incredible nonprofits, the local businesses making an impact… From the Endless Mountains to the Pocono Mountains to the Valley Communities in between, we aim to showcase everything that makes Northeastern Pennsylvania an amazing place to live, to visit, to explore, to plant roots, to start a new adventure and, most importantly, to become part of a community that cares.

Why sponsor North Branch Land Trust?

One common thread you'll find weaving throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania is that, as a community, we cherish our natural green spaces and our waters. The mountains and meadows, rivers and streams, parks and preserved lands – they are an undeniable marker in our collective identity. So, for us at DiscoverNEPA, partnering with North Branch Land Trust was a matter of connecting with an organization whose legacy in land and water conservation was built on an impressive 30+ years of proven results in the field.

What is the importance of giving back to the community in a way like sponsoring nonprofit organizations?

From our perspective, it's all about transforming education and awareness into inspiration and action. Since DiscoverNEPA launched in 2018, we've utilized one of the largest and loudest megaphones in the region to promote nonprofit organizations and charitable events. We utilized our website and growing social media platforms to highlight and share inspiring stories of volunteerism and to offer a wider reach for organizations through guest blogs and our Support a Cause directory. And while our sponsorship model does materialize support in several ways through volunteerism and monetary donations, we are most proud of our ability to use our collective media assets and networks to create awareness, take part in volunteer mobilization and promote opportunities for the community to get involved.

What is the relationship between the work of DiscoverNEPA and the environmental impact and sustainability efforts throughout NEPA?

Our work at DiscoverNEPA aligns so poignantly with the efforts of our local environmentally-conscious and sustainability-driven nonprofit organizations. A large part of our platform is dedicated to the regular promotion of trails, state parks and forests, conserved lands, rivers, streams and lakes. In that regard, we simultaneously promote responsible stewardship and care of our shared natural spaces. We also offer space within our content schedule for many organizations involved in such efforts to raise awareness and promote events in their own voice via regular guest blogs, and we have created several, regularly-occurring content streams directly focusing on sustainability efforts in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

MEET OUR STAFF

Emma Thompson, Senior Director of Conservation & Operations

Emma has been with NBLT for 3 years, beginning her path as the Conservation and Stewardship Coordinator.
Her current role encompasses land management and conservation efforts as well as organization operational management.
Emma came to NBLT with 5 years of experience in the natural resources field. Previously, she served as an Environmental Consultant and a Forester for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry.
Emma studied Public and Urban Affairs for her Bachelor of Arts from Virginia Tech as well as Forestry for her Masters.

"I am honored to be working with landowners and communities in our region to help them conserve their land for future generations." - Emma Thompson



UPCOMING EVENTS

for more information or to register, visit nblt.org/events, call (570) 310-1781 or email info@NBLT.org.

NBLT is committed to conservation education throughout our service area including opening nearly 600 acres of natural recreation space to the public and sharing in the importance of biodiversity, precious ecosystems, and conservation through environmental education programs.

Our environmental education initiatives directly support our mission by partnering with the community, strengthened by collaboration with local educators and environmental organizations.

Within the last year, NBLT hosted over 30 environmental education events, providing the public with education on priority topics including impacts of climate change, responsible land use, importance of water and air quality, and environmental stewardship.



Understanding Deer Management
The Health of Our Forest

Wednesday, November 4, 2026 @ 6:30 PM

PA Game Commission NE Region Office | Dallas, PA

Spend an evening with NBLT and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Take part in an educational program presented by forestry and biology staff from the Northeast Region of the Pennsylvania Game Commission focused on white-tailed deer management. Learn more about how hunting and forest stewardship play key roles in maintaining a healthy deer population.



Get Sustainable Through Crafting
Conservation Collage & Coffee

Saturday, November 7, 2026 @ 10:00 AM

Osterhout Free Library | Wilkes-Barre, PA

Join North Branch Land Trust to create your own nature-themed collage while enjoying locally made coffee. Learn about how collaging is a sustainable and creative way to reuse items already within your home. We invite all attendees to bring old magazines or books they may have.



Nature Trivia Night

Tuesday, November 10, 2026 @ 6:30 PM

American Legion Post 781 | Mountain Top, PA

Do you know Pennsylvania's state tree? What flowers are native? Bring a team of up to 8 friends and join North Branch Land Trust for an evening to challenge your nature knowledge and a chance to win prizes!



Invasive Insect Pinning

Thursday, November 19, 2026 @ 6:00 PM

North Branch Land Trust Office | Dallas, PA

Learn about the spotted lanternfly - one of our state's most notorious invasive species - along with the broader impacts of invasives on local ecosystems. Then, dive into the art of insect pinning as we guide you step by step through the process. Each participant will take home their own pinning kit, along with the knowledge and skills to continue pinning insects on their own!



Celebrate the Holiday Season
Annual Native Wreath Forage

Saturday, December 5, 2026 @ 10:00 AM

North Branch Land Trust Office | Dallas, PA

Rejoice in nature's own embellishments. Participants will walk the Anthracite Scenic Trails Assocation (ASTA) Rimple Loop to discuss and forage natural items to decorate an evergreen wreath, just in time for the holidays.Warm beverages and baked goods will welcome you back inside!



SAVE THE DATE!
North Branch Land Trust Annual Dinner

Wednesday, April 7, 2027 @ 5:30 PM

The Westmoreland Club | Wilkes Barre, PA

We invite landowners, stakeholders, community members and friends to save the date for North Branch Land Trust's 2027 Annual Dinner and Auction, an evening focused on celebrating conservation successes and the generosity of those who make our efforts possible.

Did you know? NBLT Membership Perks

Members enjoy access to complimentary and discounted programs, special events, and exclusive gatherings throughout the year.

Scan the QR code to learn more.

"FROM FIELDS TO FUTURE"
CELEBRATING CONSERVATION



Landowners, conservation advocates, philanthropists, supporters, and friends of North Branch Land Trust gathered on Monday, September 21st, for an evening of togetherness in celebration of the agricultural heritage in Northeastern Pennsylvania and NBLT's conservation successes of local farmlands and continuing commitment throughout the region.

In the picture-perfect setting of Friedman Farms venue, complemented by Farm-to-Table fare provided by Cork and Brace's Orchard apple cider donuts, the Fifth Annual Barn Banquet encompassed all things agricultural.







"Land conservation takes years of commitment and vision, and events like the Barn Banquet remind me why it's worth it." said Stephen Maakestad, Chair of North Branch Land Trust. "There's nothing quite like the scenery at Friedman Farms in the Back Mountain - natural or agricultural, every acre we save matters."

"Core to our mission is the belief that working lands, lands that produce and provide are of the utmost importance and why we specifically celebrate them tonight. Since the last barn banquet, your land trust has been busy. We have conserved two new farms one in Susquehanna County covering 80 acres and one in Schuylkill County on 52 acres. Both properties are active farms producing crops annually. We are also working with our partners Earth Conservancy to conserve 328 acres that will become a part of the Pinchot State Forest's working land providing timber to Pennsylvania's market which is #1 in the country in hardwood production," said Emma Thompson, Senior Director of Conservation and Operations at North Branch Land Trust.

Thank you to our 5th Annual Barn Banquet Sponsors: Geisinger Health, Earth Conservancy, and DiscoverNEPA, as well as Friedman Farms and Friedman Hospitality Group for their support of North Branch Land Trust in making this event about highlighting local and Pennsylvania Agriculture a wonderful reminder of how important and beautiful our agricultural lands are in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Geisinger · Earth Conservancy · DISCOVER NEPA · FRIEDMAN HOSPITALITY GROUP

Stewarding the Next Generation

North Branch Land Trust's Environmental Education

Environmental education sits at the core of our mission, shaping not only how we care for the land today but how future generations will care for it tomorrow. Through a blend of In-school lessons, after-school programming, and weekend nature experiences, we connect young learners and the public of all ages to the landscapes, wildlife, and conservation values that define our work.

By partnering with local educators, environmental organizations, and community groups, our environmental education programs extend the reach of our mission far beyond our preserves. Together, we're cultivating a generation that understands the land, values conservation, and feels empowered to protect the natural world.

In-school learning: Our educators bring hands-on, place-based lessons directly into classrooms across the region. These sessions introduce students to local ecosystems, native species, and the importance of environmental stewardship, grounding science education in the natural world just outside their school doors.

In our after-school programs: learning continues beyond the final bell. Students explore nature through guided activities, outdoor challenges, and creative projects that deepen their understanding of conservation through NBLT in partnership with local libraries and environmental clubs.

On weekends: our trails, preserves, and outdoor classrooms come alive with community energy!
From guided hikes to seasonal workshops, these events invite families and members of the community to learn together, explore together, and build shared stewardship values.





NORTH BRANCH LAND TRUST

CONSERVES PRECIOUS LANDS... *FOREVER.*

DO YOU KNOW AN INTERESTED LAND OWNER?

Through our mission, we work with private landowners, communities, and stakeholders to conserve and care for Northeastern Pennsylvania's precious lands and waters.

Conservation easements conserve land in the public interest, but the land stays in the possession and control of the private landowner.

Conservation easements protect the land, water, wildlife, and vistas you hold dear. They preserve scenic views, enhance water quality, and reduce flooding.



LANDOWNER FAQS

Conserving Your Land

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is established by mutual agreement between a landowner and a land trust. The easement permanently limits certain uses of the land in order to achieve the landowner's particular conservation objectives.

A conservation easement does not create a right for public access to a conserved property.

Why Would I Conserve?

Your land has a special meaning to you and your family.
A conservation easement protects your land... forever.

Conserving land helps protect the land, water, wildlife and vistas you hold dear.
Conserved land protects water quality and reduces flooding...
It protects wildlife and habitats...
It protects working farms, forests, and scenic views... *forever.*

Do I have to grant a conservation easement on all of my land?

In general, a conservation easement does not have to encompass an entire parcel of land and can include provisions, allowing for minimal development.

How Do I Get Started?

Contact
North Branch Land Trust
at info@nblt.org or give us
a call at 570-310-1781.

Our conservation staff will talk you through the process to ensure that your conservation objectives are met.

"Without love of the land, conservation lacks meaning or purpose, for only in a deep and inherent feeling for the land can there be dedication to preserving it." - Sigurd F. Olson

INTERVIEW WITH A LANDOWNER
ZYGMUNT FARM, SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY



Landowners are a crucial part of the success of North Branch Land Trust. Essentially, a conservation easement conserves land in the public interest, but the land stays in the possession and control of private landowners. Land trusts work to ensure that land acquired or placed under easement is properly stewarded, bringing permanent conservation benefits to our communities.

Through conservation easements, conserved land transfers, and fee-owned preserves and sanctuaries, NBLT's mission benefits both natural habitats and people living in Bradford, Susquehanna, Sullivan, Wayne, Wyoming, Lackawanna, Luzerne, and Columbia Counties.

Ed and Amber Zygmunt were the first landowners to have land conserved in Susquehanna County through North Branch Land Trust. They have worked with NBLT through the decades to understand the importance of stormwater management and conservation easements.

For Ed, the opportunity to purchase and conserve land in Susquehanna County sparked great discussion and ultimately led him to buy acreage with such a rich historical past.

Why did you decide to conserve land?

"Back in 1987, I had a friend who was a dairy farmer and he would always approach me - "why don't you buy [some parcels of land up here in Susquehanna County]!" And at the time I lived in Luzerne County, I always asked him what I was going to do with [the land] ... the land was dirt cheap back then, so I said why not and decided to buy the parcels."

"I used to work for the conservation district in Wyoming County. After running the Chesapeake Bay farmland preservation program and other land management programs, [my wife, Amber] and I thought to ourselves that maybe we should really think about preserving our own land – so that's when we reached out to North Branch Land Trust (which at the time was the Back Mountain Regional Land Trust). Having been on the board there for such a long time, I wanted to set an example for people to preserve land in Susquehanna County, and so we were the first people to donate an easement to the Land Trust.

What made you choose to ultimately make that decision, and what have you enjoyed since partnering with NBLT?

"North Branch Land Trust has been a great partner for many of our conservation endeavors, but most of all they also provide us with peace of mind. Knowing that the care we have for this land will be passed on to generations to come to not only our kids, but other landowners as well is something we greatly cherish. When I talk to people about preserving land, I tell them this – conservation easements are the glue that holds [the land] together.

I think one of our main goals on this property was to implement storm water retention practices, and for that we are so thankful to work with so many great organizations, including North Branch Land Trust. From their conservation work, along with the work of DEP and the conservation district, we have tremendously reduced the stormwater runoff on our property over the years. This just goes to show how even a few small parcels under an easement can contribute to the prevention of something so monstrous as when the [Susquehanna] river floods."

What are some current and future plans for your conserved lands?

"We've had so much done to our land through the years – between implementing managed wetlands on some of our acreage and the gravel road program [to reduce stormwater], they had the biggest impact on wetland vegetation. I would say we are pretty much done with what needs to be done and what we wanted to do [with our land]."

Besides adding a few more trees every year, whether it's another oak up along the road, an American chestnut next to my garage, or a tulip poplar, I always find somewhere else to plant something. Obviously when you talk about conserving such a large acreage of land, it's kind of nice to know that wetland vegetation moves through a cycle. Acknowledging this and knowing that more wildlife will reappear in the springtime every year fills us with gratitude."





photography by Mo Devlin

Beautiful Butler: An Ecological Treasure

BUTLER PRESERVE

HazleTownship • 118 Acres • Open to Public

This 118-acre preserve located in Hazle Twp, Luzerne Co., is an ecological treasure.
The "pie-slice" shaped property hosts globally rare scrub oak barrens (and its equally unique flora and fauna) in addition to wetlands and a riparian forest along the Dreck Creek Reservoir.
North Branch Land Trust came to own Butler Preserve in 2012. Beginning in 2010, North Branch worked collaboratively with the former property owner, Butler Enterprises, Inc., the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership to make the project a reality.
The established Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails intersects the property for nearly 1/2 mile and is embraced and used by over 30,000 outdoor enthusiasts on a yearly basis.

To learn more about Butler Preserve and all of NBLT's public spaces, visit nblt.org/preserves-sanctuaries



GIVING BACK
NBLT IN THE COMMUNITY



Pennsylvania American Water Charitable Foundation

North Branch Land Trust recently received funding provided by Pennsylvania American Water Charitable Foundation's "Keep Communities Flowing" grant program, which aligned with three pillars: water, people, and communities. NBLT will use the funding for restoration work of the Hanover Crossings Marsh Sanctuary, including the treatment of phragmites and reestablishment of native vegetation.



Hands for the Land

On July 11th, friends and volunteers of NBLT gathered at Forest Echo Bird Sanctuary for "Hands for the Land." The day was spent clearing sticks and debris from the trails, removing select invasive plants along the trail edges, picking up litter throughout the preserve, and refreshing existing trail markers. Thank you to all of our incredible volunteers who help keep our public spaces clean and safe!



Outdoor Youth Field & Education Day

On August 1st, NBLT staff enjoyed educating 70 school children about water quality indicators and the importance of stream health. The event was a local student's senior project and featured outdoor education from other organizations including the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Trout Unlimited, Patriot's Cove, and more.







Healing Our Planet

NBLT was chosen as a recipient of the 2026 Healing the Planet Grant Program, presented by Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, for a Community Native Pollinator Garden project at Forest Echo Bird Sanctuary. Funding from the awarded grant, provided by The Giant Company and Martin's, was utilized to purchase native pollinator species, gardening supplies, and informational materials. Thank you to all of our volunteers who helped prepare and plant!







Aquatic Inventory at Picton Wildlife Sanctuary

Recently, NBLT team members along with our incredible Master Watershed Steward volunteer, John Carroll, and summer intern, Peyton Taylor, spent a morning at our George and Lillian Picton Wildlife Sanctuary collecting and recording macroinvertebrates, inventorying vegetation, and testing the waters of Picton Pond for levels of salinity, alkalinity, oxygen, and turbidity.
The information collected will be used to create new environmental education materials for our visitors.



Pennsylvania American Water Camp

NBLT's Environmental Education Coordinator, Leah Malarkey, participated in Pennsylvania American Water's World of Water Camp on August 5th. Campers learned about four different bodies of water: streams, wetlands, vernal pools, and ponds. During the day they participated in stations that included education on the life cycles of mosquitoes, trout, and frogs, the migration of species from woodlands to vernal pools, the importance of healthy streams, and the construction of their very own pond.



Tabling A Triathlon

On Sunday, August 30th, North Branch Land Trust staff enjoyed a morning of rooting on participants of the Fourth Annual Back Mountain Triathlon held at Harvey's Lake, Pennsylvania.
The event, presented by NEPA Racing, is a qualifier for USA Triathlon National Championships, and supports local nonprofits and community organizations including North Branch Land Trust.
Thank you, David Bass and NEPA Racing!

Looking to get involved?

Visit nblt.org to learn more about volunteer opportunities!

NORTH BRANCH LAND TRUST
105 Lt. Michael Cleary Dr. Suite 102
Dallas, PA 18612



Legacy Giving

Leave a Lasting Impact for Generations



Across Northeastern Pennsylvania, land, water, wildlife, and rural character shape the communities we love. At North Branch Land Trust (NBLT), we believe those treasures deserve a voice beyond today and you can become part of that voice through our Evergreen Society, an exclusive community dedicated to conservation.

Legacy giving is a heartfelt way to support North Branch Land Trust. Your compassion will live on forever, ensuring our mission continues to serve Northeastern Pennsylvania for generations to come. This can be through your will, living trust, life insurance, retirement accounts, or other types of planned giving.

