

A photograph of a forest path. A large, textured tree trunk is in the foreground on the right. A dirt path covered in fallen leaves leads into a dense forest of green trees.

# **Westmoreland Land Trust**

## **Annual Report 2014**





## **Seventh Year Accomplishments – 2014**

Five meetings of the Westmoreland Land Trust were held in 2014.

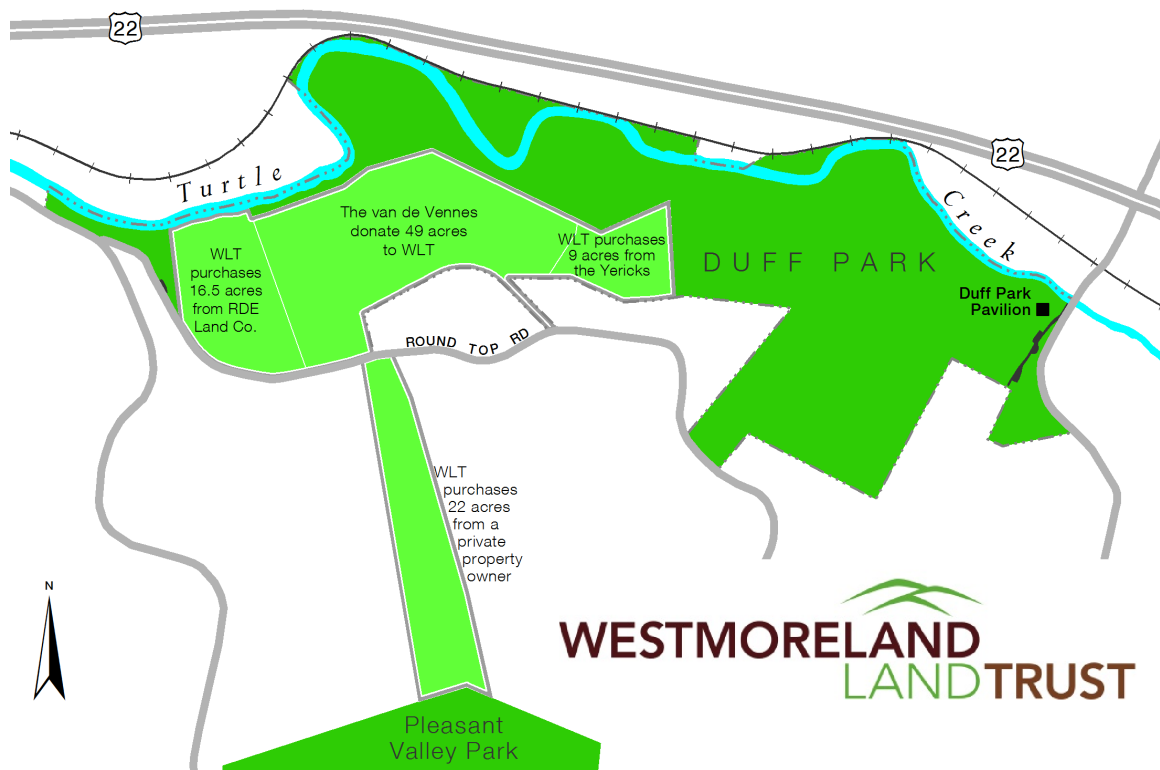
Our objectives for 2014, agreed upon at the January annual meeting, were as follows.

- Once suitable properties are identified as outlined in the next three bullet items, submit grant applications to government agencies and/or foundations for acquisition funding.
- Use our selection criteria and community need to actively identify key properties that, because of their location, features, or community value, would be especially desirable to procure and particularly appealing to foundations/government agencies to fund.
- Continue to assess and, as appropriate, pursue the donation/purchase of properties that are brought to the attention of the land trust.
- Assist Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation and the other project partners in acquiring the Turtle Creek railroad corridor and other properties near this proposed trail.
- Close out the existing DCNR grant for open space purchases by year-end, with the objective to purchase the third property as set forth in the grant.
- Procure access to and use a planning tool (such as “CommunityViz”) for assisting with property selection.
- Hold regular communications with the Westmoreland County Commissioners regarding ongoing funding of the Westmoreland Land Trust.
- Expand and enhance the “Friends of Westmoreland Land Trust.”
- Complete the purchase and placement of property boundary signs at all lands that the land trust owns or manages.

- Orient and integrate the five new board members into the organization.
- Fill all positions on standing committees and require respective chairpersons to hold regular meetings of the committee.

## PROPERTY

The Westmoreland Land Trust continued during the year to work on **acquiring multiple specific properties in Murrysville**, as proposed in the grant we were awarded several years ago by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.



In 2014, we used the remaining portion of this \$166,000 DCNR grant to purchase a nine-acre property and a 22-acre property, both adjacent to Duff Park in Murrysville. The sloped, forested nine-acre tract is adjacent to Duff Park's southern boundary and is located off of Round Top Road. The 22-acre parcel is not only adjacent to Duff Park but also to Pleasant Valley Park and so acts as a green corridor, linking these two extensive natural areas and giving nature enthusiasts continuous access to almost 500 acres.

These two purchases complete a multiple-year effort to expand Duff Park that, in 2013, included the purchase of a 16.5-acre adjacent parcel and the acceptance of a donation of a 49-acre adjacent parcel from long-time Murrysville residents Theo and Pia

van de Venne. Together, the four acquired properties add some 97 acres of preserved open space to our region.

All four properties will be conveyed to the Municipality of Murrysville in 2015 for addition to the Murrysville park system.

We also continued to **review a variety of other properties for possible acquisition** – including several that were brought to us by members of the public interested in donating or selling properties to our organization.

Our Projects Committee began using **CommunityViz planning software** to undertake a suitability analysis of county lands, based upon select attributes. Thoughtful input of criteria into the software produces an interactive map that identifies land suitable for conservation, helping us to focus our land conservation efforts.

Although we currently hold no easements, Board member Lewis Lobdell represented our organization in a review and adaptation of the **Pennsylvania Land Trust Alliance easement form**, conducted by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. We will have use of the revised easement form when the work, which is still ongoing, is completed.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

Our two fee-owned properties, presently held by Westmoreland County -- the Ackermann Reserve in North Huntingdon Township and the Cabin Hill property north of Greensburg -- were **monitored in 2014 by members of the Stewardship Committee** to evaluate the condition of property boundaries, the overall health of the natural environment, and the safety of visitors.

This regular monitoring helps to





prevent misuse of the land and its resources and to minimize risk to the organization.

No property boundary encroachments or serious misuse of the Ackermann or Cabin Hill properties were noted during the monitoring visits, and these conditions were documented using our monitoring reports.

We **purchased markers** to clearly demarcate property boundaries for the Ackermann Reserve, the Cabin Hill property, and any future fee-owned properties. The small, brightly colored signs say “Westmoreland Land Trust Conservation Area” and include our website address. Signage not only makes the public aware of conserved land, but also enables us to properly steward the land.



In April, Stewardship Committee members and Westmoreland County Engineer Henry Fitz located and flagged about 20 obscure property marker pins in the forested 59-acre Ackermann Reserve, and then **placed the new property boundary markers** around the perimeter of the reserve.



At the Ackermann Reserve, we also honored the donors’ wishes by erecting a “No Horseback Riding” sign on that property.

The Stewardship Committee also began to develop a plan to control invasive plants on the Reserve with workdays and professional knotweed removal.

Information about these recent efforts at Ackermann, as well as a list of all our stewardship efforts on the property since we acquired it in 2009, was shared with the donor family.

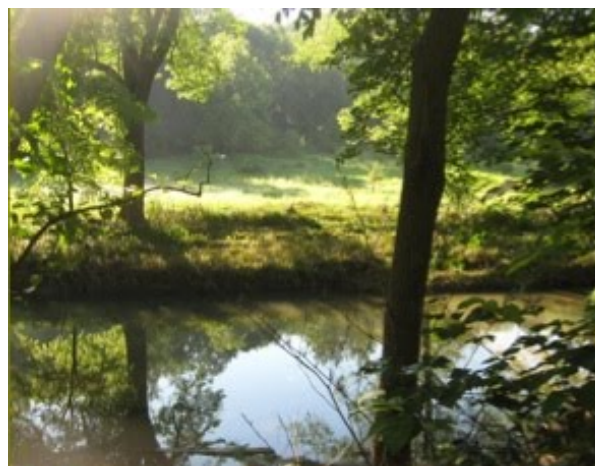
Stewardship Committee members advocated the establishment of a **segregated fund for stewardship**, which would demonstrate our commitment to long-term stewardship. The Westmoreland Land Trust board voted unanimously in March to establish the fund.



## FUNDRAISING

The Westmoreland County Commissioners allocated \$10,000 for the Westmoreland Land Trust in 2014. This currently is the only dedicated funding our organization receives. Late in the year, the Commissioners announced an allocation of \$9,500 for 2015.

Because the Westmoreland Land Trust is partnering with Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation in the development of the Turtle Creek Trail, a new 9-mile-long trail that will extend from Export to Trafford, we formed two teams and participated in the County Parks' annual fundraiser, **March For Parks**, on March 29.



Turtle Creek Gorge

Twelve board members gathered their friends and families and participated as walkers, proudly donning Westmoreland Land Trust T-shirts donated by County Commissioner and Board Member Ted Kopas.



The Westmoreland Land Trust Team at Twin Lakes.  
The Trust also had a team at the Murrysville march location.

We also set up an informational booth with our banner and brochures at the Murrysville march site to educate the public about our work.

The Westmoreland Land Trust was among the top ten fundraising teams in the 2014 March For Parks event, raising nearly \$1,894 for our county parks.

Our Development Committee continued to promote “**Friends of Westmoreland Land Trust**” to increase the organization’s public profile and encourage donations. We



continued to work on a database to build and refine our list of contacts and potential donors.

We updated our profile and once again participated in the Pittsburgh Foundation's/Community Foundation of Westmoreland County's **Day of Giving** on May 6. In 2014, 24 donors contributed to the Westmoreland Land Trust and their donations were matched at 14 cents on the dollar by the foundations, netting a grand total of \$2,744 for the land trust on that day.

WESTMORELAND  
GIVES.ORG

The Westmoreland Land Trust also received **seven additional donations** during the year totaling \$6,105. Of that, \$5,285 was specifically designated for land purchases in the Turtle Creek Greenway. These funds are held in a board-restricted fund for Turtle Creek Greenway conservation efforts.

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## 2014 Donors

### **Benefactor**

*\$10,000 and above*

Westmoreland County Commissioners

### **Patron**

*\$5,000 to \$9,999*

Anonymous, on behalf of the Murrysville Trail Alliance

Lynn and Patrick Gurrentz

### **Partner**

*\$500 to \$999*

Chuck and Judy Duritsa

Lewis and Kate Lobdell

Arvind Paranjpe and Betsy Aiken

### **Associate**

*\$250 to \$499*

Larry and Elizabeth Larese

Roberta Messalle in memory of Floyd & Juliana Messalle, residents of the Turtle Creek Gorge from 1945 to 2001

The Pittsburgh Foundation/The Community Foundation of Westmoreland County

Joseph Tarara



## Donor

up to \$249

Carl Baumeister

Mark Bowers

Richard and Eileen Byers

William and Donna Doney

Joanne Foerster

Susan Huba

Karen Jurkovic

Joseph and Arlene Kalinowski

Michael Kuzemchak

Brian Lawrence

David Lester

John Lohr

Janet McNeel

Murrysville Giant Eagle

Gregory Phillips

Anthony Quadro

Vincent Quatrini, Jr.

Lisa Smith

Deborah Snider

Loree Speedy

Virginia Stump

Delia White

John Zink

An apology and special thank you to Malcolm and Patti Sias for their donation and matching fund donation from the First Evangelical Lutheran Church to the land trust in 2013, which was not acknowledged in that year's report.

## OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Westmoreland Land Trust **hosted a celebration on October 3 marking the**



(l-r) Westmoreland Land Trust Chair Chuck Duritsa, Murrysville Council President Joan Kearns, Murrysville Mayor Bob Brooks, and Pia and Theo van de Venne.

**nonprofit organization's fifth anniversary of acquiring open space for the citizens of Westmoreland County and celebrating its most recent acquisitions**, the properties adjacent to Duff Park in Murrysville (see *Property Section*).

"The Pieces Are Coming Together" celebration was held in the pavilion at Duff Park. Officials from the Westmoreland Land

Trust, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Municipality of Murrysville; and

land donors Theo and Pia van de Venne spoke about the project that has added approximately 97 acres of conserved land to Duff Park.



Duff Park is an extraordinary natural area that has been designated as a Pennsylvania Wild Plant Sanctuary.

It also is home of one of Pennsylvania's few remaining deciduous old-growth forests areas (with trees of estimated age of 215 to 240 years).

The event was open to the public.



photo courtesy of Doug Bauman

The Westmoreland Land Trust issued **four news releases** during the year, with good pickup by local print media. We also increased our use of Facebook and regularly added new content to our website.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

We elected to **support an update of the Westmoreland County Natural Heritage Inventory** that would be completed by Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program ecologists. By applying for a grant from the Commonwealth Financing Agency, we may be eligible for \$25,000 to \$50,000 to that would enable us to partially fund the Natural Heritage Inventory update.

We also are **partnering with Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation Department and others on the Turtle Creek Trail** and Greenway project (see page 5).

We continued our membership with the **Land Trust Alliance and the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.**

## **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Chuck Duritsa completed the Land Trust Alliance's organization assessment survey to **determine whether the Westmoreland Land Trust is eligible for specialized training** through a program funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

The program is designed to train and assist small land trusts in effective land operations and management. The board is considering participation in the training subject to a number of factors, including our eligibility as non-owners of fee property; a requirement to commit to pursue formal accreditation after the training; the cost, if any, of the training; and the time commitment required by our volunteer board members.

Since our founding in December 2007, our organization has relied on the support of our all-volunteer board. As our organizational needs keep growing, we recognize that we may need additional support and began during the year to **investigate ways those needs might be met.**

Income and expenses for the next three years were estimated to assess the organization's cash flow, and whether or not it could support an option of hiring a staff person. This work was continuing at the end of the year

## **FISCAL ADMINISTRATION AND LEGAL CONCERNS**

Our revenue in 2013 was such that we were **exempt from filing federal tax** in 2014. Our treasurer filed the exemption (the organization's 990-N) online in a timely fashion.

At the end of 2014, an internal annual financial review revealed that **about 50% of our spending was on program costs.**

The Finance Committee developed a **draft operating budget for 2015.** This budget was presented via email to all board members for further discussion at the January 2015 meeting.

The Westmoreland Land Trust submitted a **Charitable Organization Registration Statement** with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations that allows us to solicit charitable contributions from Pennsylvania residents.

We maintained not-for-profit **Directors and Officers Liability insurance** for our directors and officers during the year.

## **BOARD ELECTIONS AND ENRICHMENT**

**Four new board members and one returning board member** joined the Westmoreland Land Trust in January 2014.





They are, l-r, back: Greg Phillips, Mike Kuzemchak, and Jay Tarara; front, Martha Frech, and Brian Lawrence.

Gregory Phillips is District manager/CEO of the Westmoreland Conservation District; Mike Kuzemchak is the Laurel Highlands Program director for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy; Jay Tarara is a retired program manager with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; Martha Frech is president and owner of Streamline Engineering; and Brian Lawrence is the assistant deputy director in the Westmoreland County Department of Planning and Development.

Gregory Phillips, Jay Tarara, Martha Frech, and Brian Lawrence all are new to the Board of Directors. Mike Kuzemchak had previously served on the board from its founding in January 2008 through September 2012 when he left due to a change in his professional employment.

All five board members were elected to a three-year term expiring December 2016, except for Greg Phillips, who was selected by drawing of lots to fill the remainder of a term vacated by Bruce Corna, Jr. that expires in December 2015.

Board members voted at the January 2014 meeting to elect the following **slate of officers**: Chuck Duritsa, chair; Tony Quadro, vice chair; Susan Huba, treasurer; and Loree Speedy, secretary.

At the March 21 meeting, **Vince Quatrini** announced that he wished to resign from the Board of Directors but would continue to serve on the Stewardship Committee. Alan Fossi indicated that he would not be seeking a second term on the board due to conflicts with work.

Existing board members who were up for **reappointment at the end of the year** -- Mark Bowers, Chuck Duritsa, Ted Harhai, Malcolm Sias, Virginia Stump, and John Ward -- all indicated a desire to continue their service, and were unanimously appointed to a new three-year term, effective January 1, 2015.

**Andy Loza, executive director of the Pennsylvania Land Trust Alliance, spoke to our board in January** about that organization's work to support land trusts through lobbying, monitoring legislation, education, developing legal document models, technical guides, and school curriculums.

**Caleb Crousey of the Community Foundation of Westmoreland County discussed** the management, restriction and investment principles of **endowment funds** at our May meeting. An endowment's principal remains untouched in perpetuity, but the investment income would provide a source of funds for the trust's activities.

Mark Bowers attended the **Western Pennsylvania Natural Gas gathering** in January in Pittsburgh organized by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association to discuss natural gas issues impacting land trusts and conservation in western Pennsylvania.

Tony Quadro attended the **2014 Pennsylvania Land Trust Alliance Conservation Conference** and shared with our board members some of the information he gained there, including the availability of PALTA's conservation planning guidance and in-depth analysis, and the finding that face-to-face contact proves to be most effective in engaging potential donors. His conference attendance was funded by the Westmoreland Conservation District.

Chuck Duritsa and Loree Speedy attended a **Western Pennsylvania Land Trusts Roundtable and Training** organized by the Land Trust Alliance and E-Concepts, LLC and sponsored by the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

National training expert David Allen led an engaging seminar on board effectiveness. Board members and staff from western Pennsylvania land trusts shared experiences and problem-solving approaches related to board recruitment, volunteer recruitment, and communications.



In October, Mike Kuzemchak and Betsy Aiken attended a **Pennsylvania Land Trust Alliance conference** hosted by the Western PA Conservancy: “Acquiring Land, Acquiring Easements: Tools to Make Conservation Projects Happen.”

Betsy Aiken attended a **Growing Greener Coalition conference** in November on funding opportunities for conservation, recreation, and preservation projects.



## **2015 OBJECTIVES**

- Close out the existing Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant and transfer the four acquired properties to the Municipality of Murrysville for annexation to Duff Park.
- Complete the acquisition of the one-acre Mount Pleasant Township property and hold ownership of the property.
- Initiate a strategic planning process to better define our direction and priorities.
- Complete the Suitability Analysis mapping project to identify county properties suitable for conservation to better focus and prioritize.
- Submit grant application(s) for a part-time non-profit management staff member.
- Continue to work toward an expanded/enhanced “Friends of Westmoreland Land Trust.”
- Pursue acquisition of properties in Turtle Creek Gorge near the to-be-established rail trail.
- Pursue/participate in the Land Trust Technical Assistance Training program as our eligibility allows.
- Hold regular communications with the Westmoreland County Commissioners regarding ongoing funding of the Westmoreland Land Trust.
- Encourage established committees to meet routinely to advance their goals, with subsequent reports to the full Board.
- Continue stewardship of Ackermann and Cabin Hill properties, with a focus on invasive species management and trail development at Ackermann Reserve.





## **Mission**

To conserve and steward lands and waters of Westmoreland County that harbor ecological, scenic or recreational qualities to offer a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

## **Vision**

All Westmoreland County residents and visitors enjoy the scenic and natural value, accessibility and quality of open space conserved.

Throughout Westmoreland County recreational land abounds, water resources are protected, wildlife flourish, and the quality of life is high because of the continuing work of the Westmoreland Land Trust complementing the work of like-minded entities.

## **Values**

The Westmoreland Land Trust values the following.

Conservation of diverse real property that is in, or in close proximity to, Westmoreland County and culturally, historically, ecologically, recreationally, or scenically valuable

Restoration, protection, and maintenance of conserved property as appropriate for its best long-term stewardship

Partnership with public or private entities where beneficial to encourage collective effort

Research and planning in support of conservation efforts

Promotion and education of conservation opportunities and benefits

Conformance with the Land Trust Standards and Practices published by the Land Trust Alliance in 2004, or as amended

## **2014 Board of Directors**

Betsy Aiken

Mark Bowers

Chuck Duritsa  
*Chair*

Alan Fossi\*

Martha Frech

Alex Graziani

Rep. R. Ted Harhai

Susan L. Huba  
*Treasurer*

Karen Jurkovic

County Commissioner Ted  
Kopas

Mike Kuzemchak

Larry Larese

Brian Lawrence

H. Lewis Lobdell

John Lohr

John Pallone

Greg Phillips

Tony Quadro

*Vice Chair*

Vincent Quatrini, Jr.\*

Malcolm Sias

Lisa Smith

Loree Speedy  
*Secretary*

Virginia Stump

Jay Tarara

John Ward

*\* Resigned in 2014; position  
not filled*

## Background

The Westmoreland Land Trust was formed in December 2007 in response to citizens' desire to conserve land of special value in Westmoreland County, such as land that contributes to the local quality of life because of its scenic, recreational, environmental, historical, or cultural qualities. The trust was awarded nonprofit status by the Internal Revenue Service in January 2009, making donations to the land preservation group tax-deductible.

From its founding in December 2007 through the end of 2014, the Westmoreland Land Trust has acquired some 206 acres in five distinct communities:

- the 59-acre Otto and Magdalene Ackermann Nature Preserve in Ardara, North Huntingdon Township,
- 22 acres in Murrysville adjacent to the Lillian Kellman Nature Reserve,
- 21 acres in Rostraver Township along the Youghiogheny River,
- 3.5 acres in the City of Greensburg near Cabin Hill Drive,
- 9 acres in Murrysville adjacent to Duff Park,
- 4 acres in Ligonier Township along Route 30 (conserved in partnership with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and the Loyalhanna Watershed Association),
- 16.5 acres in Murrysville adjacent to Duff Park (a property formerly part of the Norbitrol Plan of Lots),
- 49 acres in Murrysville adjacent to Duff Park and accessible from Round Top Road, and
- 22 acres in Murrysville that link Duff Park and Pleasant Valley Park (providing continuous access to 500 natural acres).