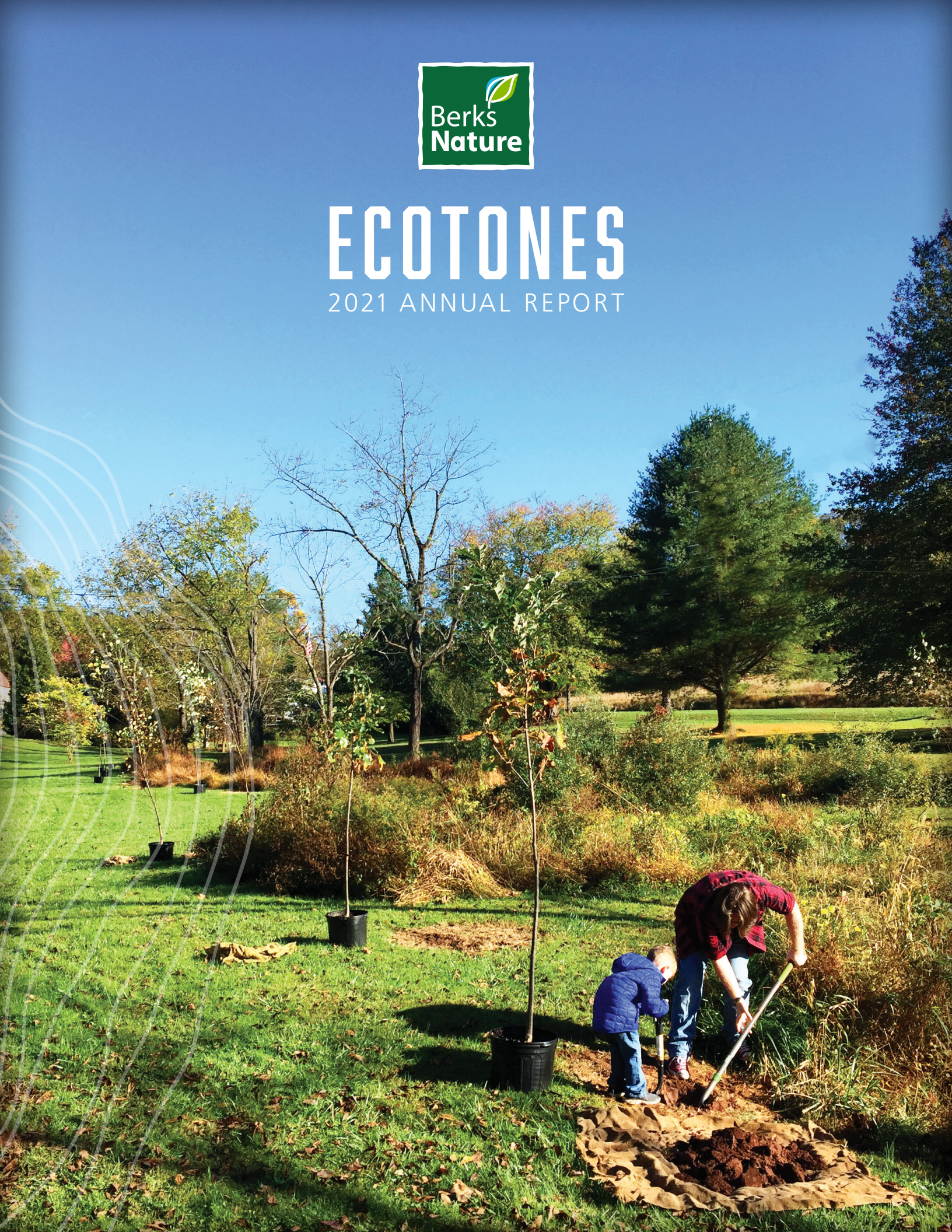




ECOTONES

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





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 @BerksNature



// Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*) //

// Cover: The Geiger family pitches in to plant trees along the creek on their farm in Robeson Township. //

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An **ECOTONE** is a transitional area between two adjacent, biological communities. It is a place of meeting, sharing, and integration.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends:

As I write this, I am watching our construction crew put the finishing touches on our rooftop deck and event space/classroom building, which we have decided to call, "The Rookery at The Nature Place".

A "rookery" is a colony of nests, generally built by birds. Great blue herons gather in large rookery colonies each spring, building their nests together in the safety of the treetops. This building, The Rookery, takes its name from this practice; we envision The Rookery as a gathering space for our entire community of conservation allies.

We will officially cut the ribbon on March 21 and are planning a big public celebration on April 9, and we hope you will join us. Be on the lookout for our resident great blue heron as you enjoy the stunning views and unique vantage point atop The Rookery!

As you will see in this issue, we have added some new employees to our team. I'm pleased to share that each of these positions allows us to expand our education offerings, engage more volunteers, provide greater stewardship for our trails and preserves, and offer a consistent welcoming face in our lobby. We are particularly proud that one of our new staff members is fluent in Spanish which will help us better serve our diverse population.

It is worth noting another special staff milestone. Tami Shimp celebrated 25 years with Berks Nature (formerly Berks County Conservancy) in February! Tami

came to us as an intern in 1996 and was hired as a Land Protection Specialist shortly thereafter. Tami grew into a key member of the team and now shares her talent as our Vice President for Community Relations and Development. She says that she is the lucky one, but we think we're pretty lucky as well. Congratulations Tami!

To re-engage our school community, we are offering free field trips this spring and fall. It has been a rough few years and we truly want our youth to experience time in nature. With special funding we are able to offer these experiences to school children this year free of charge. But we are almost booked, so teachers reach out and schedule your class today!

Registration is also open for our Eco-Camp program. This year we will have greater capacity, but spots fill up quickly so make your reservation today. We're trying something new this year as well. We will have one week of camp located at the Rentschler Arboretum in Bernville. We are grateful to our partners at the Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club for sharing this beautiful space with us.

Best wishes for an enjoyable spring. Thank you all for your ongoing support and come visit us at The Nature Place.

Kimberly J. Murphy
PRESIDENT OF BERKS NATURE

// MEET THE TEAM //

BERKS NATURE STAFF

Kimberly J. Murphy
President

Lawrence E. Lloyd
Senior Ecologist

Jeremy Haymaker
Trails & Preserve Specialist

Sarah Chudnovsky
Land Protection Specialist

Michael J. Griffith
Education & Watershed Specialist

Anne Muvdi
Nature Preschool Director

Melissa Acosta
Community Educator and Fellow

Rachel Dombroski
Educator and Community Garden Coordinator

Joan Marten
Nature Preschool Teacher

Alyssa Matlack
Nature Preschool Teacher

Lynn Walker
Nature Preschool Teacher

Jenn Bartley
Nature Preschool Teacher

Tami J. Shimp
VP Development & Community Relations

Regan Moll-Dohm
Director of Communications

Kaitlyn Tothoro
Events & Visitor Experience Manager

Beckey Seel
Volunteer Engagement Coordinator & Educator

Dawn McDonough
Office & Membership Administrator

Stephany Goico
Welcome Receptionist & Store Manager

Melina Hart
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// MEET THE TEAM //

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// The pedestrian bridge over Hay Creek at Rustic Park, Birdsboro, opened in 2021 //

// MEET THE TEAM! //

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



STEPHANY GOICO //

Welcome Receptionist & Store Manager

Stephany loves the arts and enjoys painting and creating beautiful things in her free time. Her favorite thing in the whole world, aside from thrifting, is taking care of her 8-month-old son, her pride and joy, Liam Willow. 🌿



BECKEY SEEL // *Volunteer Engagement Coordinator & Educator*

From wetland delineations as an Environmental Consultant to teaching public programs as an educator for Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center, Beckey has enjoyed a varied career path, ultimately leading her to Berks Nature in 2020 where she served as the supervisor for our Camp for School Program. Beckey is passionate about environmental education and the power of this practice to forge deep relationships between people of all ages and the natural world. She lives in Robeson Township with her husband, Dave, and two children, Ben and David who all enjoy time spent together on their forested property in the Hay Creek watershed. 🌿



ALYSSA MATLACK // *Nature Preschool Teacher*

Alyssa joined the Berks Nature staff as a part time employee in October 2017. In August of 2021, she joined the full-time staff as the head teacher of one of the preschool classes. Alyssa graduated from Alvernia in May 2021 with an elementary education certification, background in special education, and a minor in psychology. She has worked with kids since she was 11 when she started volunteering for a story time at a local library. Loving nature herself, Alyssa loves the idea of tying the outdoors into the classroom, as well as bringing the classroom outside. 🌿



// EVER FORWARD //

PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

// Views of the Kittatinny
Ridge from Hawk Mountain
in Berks County //



Nature is built from millions of specialized interactions.

Like an intricately braided cord, the fates of plants, animals, and entire ecosystems are inextricably intertwined. Should one thread break the braid will unravel and the system will fall apart; one cannot exist without the other.

Human threads too are interlaced through these braids. From nature we are fed and provided with fuel, fibers, and goods; from nature we breathe clean air and drink filtered water; from nature the climate is regulated; from nature we find comfort, awe, and healing.

But the actions of people are disrupting Earth's ecosystems, fraying the delicate braids, and threatening the ecological services upon which all life relies. Only 5% of the lower 48 states in our nation resembles a "pristine" ecological state. Consequently, North America has lost 3 billion birds in the past 50 years. Worldwide over one million species face extinction.

Underscoring these tragedies is the looming threat of global climate change: the long-term shifting of temperature and weather patterns as a direct result of humanity's fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. The consequences of which, "[have] profound implications for international peace and stability," according to the United Nations.

It is our very actions that present the greatest threat to our own survival. Fitting then, that it falls to us to make amends and pay reparations for the sake of nature's ecological integrity and functionality. How then can we change course on this tragic trajectory?

PROTECTION

Where ecosystems remain robust and functionally intact, we must implement protections to ensure the viability of these systems and services in perpetuity.

Climate change presents the greatest threat to humanity that modern humans have ever faced.

Fortunately, there are several natural climate solutions we can employ to slow and restrain the climate crisis. Among these, protecting natural, intact ecosystems ranks

// EVER FORWARD //

highest, offering the greatest and speediest climate benefits at a relatively low cost.

A 2021 study comparing natural climate solutions and their various benefits proposes this new hierarchy: protect ecosystems first, then improve their management, and lastly restore them.

According to lead author of this study, Susan Cook-Patton, "If you want large, near-term climate mitigation, you really should think about protecting those intact ecosystems, and improving the management of agricultural lands."

Forest preservation in particular can provide more bang for your buck in addressing the global climate crisis.

Forests play an integral role both in regulating ecosystems and in the carbon cycle. In this way, forests directly impact the processes behind climate change. Trees inhale atmospheric carbon dioxide, society's most abundant greenhouse gas emission, and exhale oxygen. They also can store carbon in their wood and foliage, known as carbon sequestration.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, halting the loss and degradation of natural systems, like forests, while also promoting their restoration could contribute over one-third of the total climate change mitigation scientists say is required by 2030.

In Berks County, this pairing of forest preservation with restoration is well underway; an effort in which Berks Nature actively participates and promotes.

Nearly 47% of Berks County's land area is

shaded by tree cover. These forests, from the Kittatinny Ridge to the Oley Hills, store an estimated 10.6 million tons of carbon, a benefit worth \$1.8 trillion dollars.

Mirroring the statewide trend in ownership, much of Berks County's woodlands are privately owned. Berks Nature works directly with these landowners to protect privately held forests under conservation easements: voluntary, legal agreements that limit development and prioritize the woodland's conservation value.

To date, Berks Nature has conserved in perpetuity 8,144 acres of predominantly forested properties under conservation easement agreements.

Even in the County's metropolitan center of Reading, forests persist. Rising above Reading to the east, nearly 5,000 acres of forests flourish across the rugged landscapes of the Neversink Mountain Preserve and Community Forest and the Mount Penn Preserve.

Nature prospers across the two sister mountains of Reading thanks to the efforts of Clinton F. Earl. During Earl's lifetime and as a result of his participation on the Reading Planning Commission, hundreds of acres between Mount Penn and Neversink Mountain were purchased or zoned for forest protection by the City of Reading. During the 20th century, more than 500 additional acres of land across the two mountains were purchased and protected by the Clinton Earl Trust.

Today, the greater Reading community is reinvesting in Mount Penn Preserve both as a recreation destination and as a climate

PENNSYLVANIA'S CLIMATE IS CHANGING.

Since the early 20th century, temperatures have increased by 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit and annual precipitation is on the rise, up 10% with no signs of slowing. This may not seem like much, but small changes can have enormous impacts.

By 2050, the number of 90+ degree days is expected to balloon from 10 to 40 each year and more rain means more storms and more flooding. Both put pressure on Reading's aging infrastructure.

The City of Reading is one of the few cities in Pennsylvania to have drafted a Climate Resiliency Plan. Already, Reading has produced a greenhouse gas inventory to better understand the footprint of our emissions and has switched the City's facilities over to carbon-free electricity, saving \$400,000 annually 🌿



// Canopy of Bob's Woods at the Earl Poole Sanctuary //

// EVER FORWARD //

Gardening with native plants restores those ancient food webs that humanity's rampant urbanization actively jeopardizes, as these are the plants local wildlife, including insects, have evolved to utilize.

According to Dr. Tallamy's research, the non-native ornamental plants that dominate modern landscape design support 29 times less animal diversity than do native ornamentals, like the flowering dogwood tree (*Cornus florida*), which supports 117 species of moths and butterflies alone.

On November 4, 2021, 350 community members, including 110 students, gathered for Berks Nature's largest ever State of the Environment Breakfast featuring Dr. Tallamy.

The exceedingly engaging and motivating program delivered by Dr. Tallamy served as a reminder that although the environmental problems facing us are great, they are not insurmountable, and we all have a responsibility to protect and sustain nature, being essential to our quality of life and the integrity of our world.

"Every human being on earth depends entirely on the quality of Earth's ecosystems, so why wouldn't every one of us bear the responsibility of good earth stewardship?" asks Dr. Tallamy.

Berks Nature is carrying this message forward into 2022 and beyond: grow native plants; rebuild local ecosystems; heal nature. 🌿

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// Streamside exploration in Angelica Creek. //

// FRESH AIR: JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED //

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALING AWAIT IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Nature is essential to our health and quality of life.

Yet, national trends suggest that Americans are spending less and less time outdoors. Young Americans in particular are opting to stay inside. In fact, the average child living in the United States spends 1% of their time engaged in unstructured outdoor play.

In Berks County too, our children are disconnected from nature. A Berks Nature survey in 2019 found that 25% of children between 5 and 17 years of age from the City of Reading spent less than 1 hour

outside on a daily basis. Even worse, 13% reported spending zero time outside.

Spending time in nature isn't a cure for everything that ails us, but mounting evidence suggests that time spent in nature has clear preventative and therapeutic benefits.

A 2009 study by the EMGO Institute for Health and Care Research found lower incidence of 15 diseases—including depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and migraines—in people who lived within a half mile of green space.

According to Mardie Townsend, an Honorary Professor at the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University, time in nature has also been associated with lowering stress, which in turn can reduce levels of depression and anxiety.

Children especially have a lot to gain by heading outside. The free and unstructured play that comes naturally in outdoor environments is essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones.

As a pediatric speech and language pathologist working with families and their children in early intervention programs, Sharon Hussar, President of the Reading-based Pediatric Speech and Language Therapy Services, Inc., understands the value of outdoor nature play.

In Hussar's experience, children learn best during 3-dimensional, sensory play. Yet unstructured, outdoor play is on the decline in Berks County as more and more children spend their days in front of screens with limited sensory experiences.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE IN STEWARDING THE EARTH'S ECOSYSTEMS AND EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS!

- 1 Check out the Homegrown National Park project and get your native plantings on the map!
- 2 Read up and find a local native nursery near you with Berks Nature's Native Plant Resource Page at berksnature.org
- 3 Make your voice heard across your community by commenting on your local comprehensive plans and municipal zoning policies. You are not alone, and together our voices harmonize to create a chorus of change!

BUT YOU DON'T NEED 10 ACRES TO RESTORE NATURE ON YOUR LAND OR IN YOUR COMMUNITY!

SUE'S GARDEN

Sue turned her 0.1-acre backyard into an oasis of native plants. Her garden is certified by the Penn State Extension's Master Gardeners as a Pollinator Friendly Garden and each year she helps raise the monarch butterfly caterpillars born on her milkweed.

UNION TOWNSHIP MEADOW

When Union Meadow Park's baseball field was consistently too water-logged to use, Union Township made the decision to give the space back to nature. The 3-acre meadow was burned in September 2019 and then a wildflower seed mix was spread by hand in March 2020. The young meadow already flourishes with color and pollinators.

ANDREW MAIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S LEARNING BY NATURE GARDEN

Andrew Maier Elementary School's "Learning by Nature" initiative aims to install green infrastructure and create new, outdoor classroom spaces for immersive learning in nature. This includes a 0.05-acre pollinator garden, purposefully designed to provision nectar to adult insects and to host young caterpillars.

READY TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE?

Enroll in Berks Nature Rx today! Visit berksnaturerx.com for more information and to sign up. Berks Nature is proud to partner with Penn State Health, the REACH program, and Berks County Medical Society to offer this program for our community.



// Black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia*) //

// FRESH AIR: JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED //

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children ages 2 to 5 should get just one hour or less of screen time per day, while children 18 to 24 months shouldn't engage in any extended screen time, except for video chatting. Parents do not appear to be heeding this warning.

"Our children are doing a lot of watching and not doing...observing more than they are actively participating," says Hussar, "Exploring, moving, and playing outside offers a sensory rich experience where all our senses can be activated and true learning can take place."

Townsend too shares this perspective, "If we are to prevent an upsurge in mental health issues, especially among children, we need to re-engage humans with nature as a matter of urgency." She calls on mental health professionals to prescribe time in nature as often as possible while also advocating on the policy level to help ensure access to green spaces for everyone.

It is with great fortune and the tireless dedication of the County's conservation partners that Berks County is home to an abundance of trails, parks, and open spaces that are free and accessible to the public. The tree canopy blanketing nearly 47% of Berks County alone is credited with helping the County save nearly \$7 million in public health costs each year.

To further increase access and engagement with the outdoors, Berks Nature has partnered with Penn State Health to champion the Berks Nature Rx program.

The goal of the Nature Rx program is simple: introduce (or reintroduce) Berks County's residents to the powerful health benefits of a life lived outside. Sounds lofty, but it's really quite reasonable. According to a 2019 study published in Scientific

Reports, it only takes 120 minutes of outdoor activity each week to reap nature's innate health benefits.

The Nature Rx program approach is two-fold.

First, equip doctors with the resources to prescribe nature as a medical treatment in their practice. This process began in 2019 when the Berks Nature Rx strategy was officially endorsed by the Berks County Medical Society. Together with Penn State Health, information about Nature Rx was distributed to every pediatrician, family practice, and cardiologist in Berks County.

Second, commit Berks County residents to integrate 120 minutes of outdoor activity into their routine weekly lives. Today, nearly 300 people have enrolled in the Berks Nature Rx program.

Through the Berks Nature Rx website, program participants are connected to a plethora of resources to help generate new, creative ideas for outdoor exploration and to grow participants' networks of local, outdoor recreation groups.

Berks Nature also personally hosts opportunities for Nature Rx participants to clock their 120 minutes, the most popular of which are the on-going GooseChase scavenger hunt challenges. After downloading a free app, individuals or whole families compete against other players by completing a series of outdoor missions scattered throughout Berks County.

It's never too late to change your routine. This year, make time for the outdoors and be nourished mentally, physically, and spiritually by nature.



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// Joe pye weed blooming at The Nature Place //



// A hiker at Bob's Woods at the Earl Poole Sanctuary //

// FRESH AIR: JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED //

EDUCATION HIGHLIGHT: GOOSECHASE



// GooseChase user learnshaw's favorite trail //

“ My sister and I love to complete these challenges together with our kids! We explore new areas and enjoy the tasks that encourage us to be creative with our time outdoors. No matter the time of year, we look forward to the Berks Nature Goose Chase missions that get us up and moving. ”

-learnshaw

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF GOOSECHASE!

GooseChase is a fun and easy way to spend time outside. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to complete a scavenger hunt by taking photos, recording videos, or entering text into the GooseChase app.

While the game encourages players to explore Berks County, most missions can be completed on a nearby trail, in a local park, or even just outside in the back yard! A major incentive to completing these missions, of course, is finding new and fun ways to spend time outside. But the best players of each challenge also receive prizes from rain barrels to gift cards!

“ We always look forward to the Berks Nature Rx challenge. Every fair weathered day my kids ask, ok mom what are our missions today? It makes exploring outside even more enjoyable and encourages us to spend even more time outside as a family. ”

-babygotssnacks (GooseChase user)

John Muir once said, 'Going to the woods is going home.' We are at home when we are outdoors, especially is there is great tree cover, a burbling stream and a path laced with root lines. Making the conscience choice to separate ourselves from technology and life's stressors, brings peace.

-holgatetrio

“ Participating in the Nature Rx challenge helps me to get outside more! The challenges are simple yet motivating. It also gets my daughter out more and helps her to appreciate nature. It's an activity we can both do together. ”

-bethix (GooseChase user)

GET IN ON THE FUN - a new GooseChase challenge begins on April 1st!

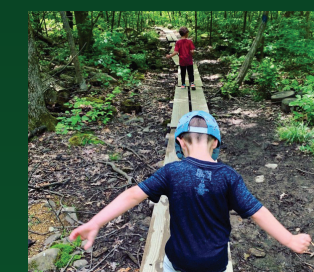
Visit berksnaturerx.com/goosechase/ to get started!



// The Rowe Family picking apples //



// GooseChase user mhenry enjoys the outdoors //



// GooseChase user babygotssnacks on their favorite Berks County trail //



// GooseChase user theHudak4 swinging in the snow //

// FOR THE LOVE OF LAND //



// Uslar easement in Albany Township //

OVER THE LAST 47 YEARS, BERKS NATURE HAS HELPED PRESERVE OVER 11,000 ACRES OF LAND IN BERKS COUNTY. WE ARE PROUD TO REMAIN BERKS COUNTY'S LAND TRUST, HELPING TO PROTECT THE COUNTY'S RICH LANDSCAPE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.

// FOR THE LOVE OF LAND //



PROTECTING LAND UNDER CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits the uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Berks Nature currently holds conservation easements on 9,070 acres of private land across Berks County.



ACQUIRING LAND TO STEWARD

Berks Nature owns 433 acres of land in Berks County, serving as the leading stewards of 3 public nature preserves and 5 private preserves. Each public preserve is managed to not only support wildlife habitat and ecological resiliency but also to create safe, restorative spaces for people of all ages to enjoy the great outdoors.



FACILITATING LAND TRANSFERS FOR CONSERVATION

Within our dynamic network of non-profit and government partnerships, Berks Nature has often acted as a facilitator for conservation by purchasing land and then transferring it to a different organization better suited to manage the property.



// Willit Run Farm in Union Township //

COYLE PROPERTY / WILLIT RUN FARM

94.52 ACRES // UNION TOWNSHIP

When Richard and Martha Coyle first sought protection for their property, Willit Run Farm, in 2007 circumstances prevented them from easing all 94.5 acres of the farm. Instead, Berks Nature established a smaller, 29.5-acre easement along the property's southeastern border.

Finally, in 2021, the easement was amended and restated to include the entire 94.5-acre farm, marking a major milestone for this conservation mission nearly 15 years in the making.

Instead of actively farming this sensitive land, the Coyles have enrolled their farm

in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). In lieu of crops or livestock, the Coyles have cultivated a native grassland and planted a streamside forest to buffer the property's small creek, which supports native wildlife, reduces erosion, and improves the resiliency of the entire Schuylkill watershed.

Beyond the boundaries of Willit Run Farm, the Coyles' land is part of the Hopewell Big Woods and Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape, one of the most important natural landscapes in the region.

GECHTER PROPERTY

17.05 ACRES // EXETER TOWNSHIP

In December 2021, Berks Nature closed on the Gechter Property, a parcel located within the Neversink Mountain Preserve and Community Forest.

Berks Nature has worked in cooperation with Jack Gechter since the early 90s, this being the second property owned by the Gechter Family to move to Berks Nature's ownership. Both parcels were included on Berks Nature's Priority Acquisition List for Neversink Mountain and represent a great

outcome for the long-term sustainability and health of the Neversink Mountain Community Forest.

Across Neversink Mountain, Berks Nature stewards nearly 540 acres of land and holds conservation easements on an additional 38 acres. The Gechter property acquisition represents a possible new access opportunity for visitors looking to explore Neversink Mountain.



// The Gechter Property in Exeter Township //

// FOR THE LOVE OF LAND //

2021 EASEMENT HIGHLIGHT

APPROXIMATELY 66 YEARS LATER and Martha Coyle remembers that morning clearly. Ed Scheffey - "Pappy" to Martha - was on his way to visit Dr. John Pratt, known to the family as "Doc Pratt". The trip in itself was not terribly surprising, but on this morning Ed motioned to Martha excitedly, "Hey, take a look in that bag!" Peering inside young Martha saw wads of cash - the bag was filled with money.

After 15 years of diligent saving and resourceful business savvy, Ed proudly revealed, "I'm paying off the farm today."



// Native grassland flourishing at Willit Run Farm //



DO GOOD

Ed Scheffey had always wanted a dairy farm. He began saving his money fastidiously while working full time as a master carpenter and part-time at a dairy in Pottstown with the hopes of ultimately buying his own land and herd to tend someday.

But as a newlywed living with his in-laws and with no property to his name, Ed couldn't find a bank willing to give him a loan. As luck would have it, the large animal veterinarian who serviced the Pottstown dairy herd, Dr. John Pratt, caught wind of Ed's dairy dreams and approached him with a proposition.

Doc Pratt had known Ed for years. Their paths first crossed when Ed was just 9 years old, assisting with the daily milk deliveries. As a boy, Ed had held the reins of the milk wagon's work horses, keeping the team in line while the men dropped off the milk.

At the Pottstown dairy the two reconnected, Ed now a man 35-years grown. It was here that Dr. Pratt came to know the hard-working man that eager boy had become. Where banks saw a liability, Dr. Pratt saw a good man with a bright future: a worthy investment if there ever was one!

In May 1940, with financial support from Dr. Pratt, Ed and his wife Esther purchased their farm, a property hand-picked by Ed himself: 94.5 acres in Union Township just south of the Schuylkill River. The farm had raised pigs since the 1800s (even as late as 1937, a small city of pig stalls, arranged in a grid, still occupied the farm's northwestern field.)

It held promise, it held potential, and most of all, it held water.

Ed knew the success of his dairy would rely in no small part on the vitality of the property's narrow creek, a tributary to the mighty Schuylkill River and the primary source of water for the pasture and Ed's herd. Ed's biggest question then, when surveying his land, was posed at this stream: "Will it run?" he asked.

Thus, Ed's dairy earned its name: Willit Run Farm.

Martha and her brother John grew up on Willit Run Farm, nurtured and profoundly shaped by the farming partnership modeled by Ed and Esther. Life on the farm operated on one simple rule: do good.

"You do things the right way or not at all!" Martha recited, "You work together."

To do good you worked together; together meant community, and community included the land.

Ed was guided by a deeply rooted stewardship ethic. He treated his herd like family and tended the land with care, employing contour farming and crop rotation to prevent erosion and maintain the soil's integrity.

Water remained forefront in Ed's mind. To protect the pasture's creek and with assistance from the Berks County Conservation District, Ed installed an innovative diversion ditch following the natural contour of his land, which, following heavy rains, intercepted surface runoff and guided it safely towards the creek.

When Martha and John inherited Willit Run Farm, they committed themselves wholly to upholding their Pappy's legacy of "doing good".

In 2002, Martha, her husband Richard, and brother John enrolled the farm in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) – an incentive program that rewards farmers for implementing intuitive conservation practices in lieu of agricultural production.

Then in 2007, Martha reached out to Larry Lloyd at Berks Nature (the Berks County Conservancy, at the time). She had noticed a trend that disturbed her: all around, farms were folding to development pressures. This was a future Martha could not accept for Willit Run Farm.

At the time, circumstances prevented Martha from establishing a conservation easement

on all 94.5 acres of the farm, so she settled on an easement to protect 29.5 acres along the property's southeastern border.

Finally, in September 2021 after 15 patient years, the conditions were ripe for change. Working with Berks Nature and with funding provided by WeConservePA, the Coyles successfully amended and restated their conservation easement, this time on the entirety of their 94.5-acre farm.

By blocking development in perpetuity on Willit Run Farm, the conservation easement ensures safe passage of Martha's heritage forward into the next generation. The land will remain in Martha's family as a living precedent of responsible stewardship.

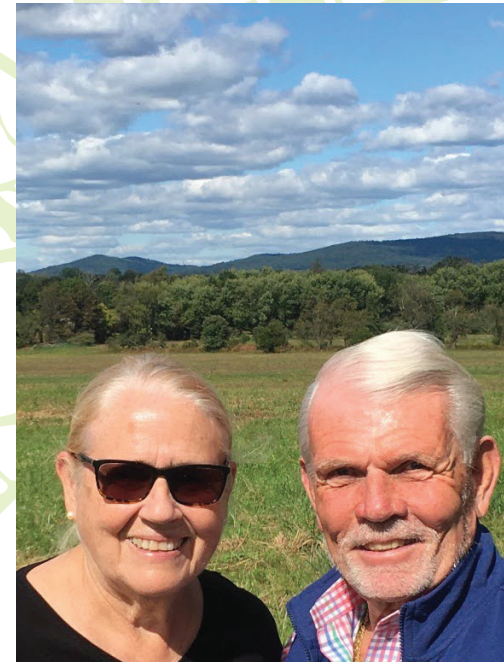
Willit Run Farm looks decidedly different today than it did when Ed first purchased the farm in 1940. But the heart of Ed's conservation ethic still beats.

Growing across the 80 acres of farmland are not crops but native grassland plants, providing habitat for local wildlife; the stream that once watered Ed's herd is now kept cool and clean by the surrounding woodland, benefitting their neighbors downstream on the Schuylkill River who rely on this water to drink; and the conservation easement, now encompassing all 94.5 acres of the farm, ensures that this ecosystem will continue to flourish for generations to come.

For Martha, the stewardship and now protection of Willit Run Farm is an act of appreciation and responsibility; appreciation of her Pappy and Esther, who worked against all odds to earn full ownership of the property, and responsibility to live their legacy to "do good".

// Martha and Richard Coyle, owners of Willit Run Farm //

// Below: Indian grass (Sorghastrum nutans) //



// EXPLORE AND ENJOY LOCALLY //

EXPLORE AND ENJOY LOCALLY

ANGELICA CREEK PARK // 87 ACRES

When the Angelica Dam breached in 2001 the impounded lake drained, revealing the Angelica Creek after a century of submersion. Instead of rebuilding the dam, the City of Reading resolved to restore the creek's nexus of wetlands, setting the stage for Angelica Creek Park.

Restoration of the Angelica Creek floodplain began in 2005 and continues today, creating a unique wetland and stormwater demonstration project. Take a stroll through the dog-friendly wetland trails. Get your hands dirty in our teaching and demonstration gardens. Let the kiddos run free with their imagination in our Nature Play Zone!

Angelica Creek Park is also home to The Nature Place, a LEED Gold Certified environmental education center which serves as Berks Nature's headquarters and is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 to 3:00.



// The Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park //

BOB'S WOODS AT THE EARL POOLE SANCTUARY // 30 ACRES

What was once an active farm and apple orchard became a public nature preserve following a generous land donation to Berks Nature in the late 1970s. Originally named for famed ornithologist and artist Dr. Earl L. Poole, today this special place is named in honor of Robert C. "Bob" Fleming, an Oley Hills resident and lover of nature who unexpectedly passed away in 2018.

Today, Berks Nature owns and manages the property both for people and wildlife. The leisurely 1-mile trail loop is perfect for picnicking while the mosaic of woodlands, meadows, and successional fields creates a diverse array of landscapes perfect for birds (and birdwatching!). Bob's Woods also shelters a headwater creek for the Antietam Creek watershed, providing cool, naturally filtered sourcewater for the Antietam Lake, previously a reservoir for drinking water, just downstream in Lower Alsace Township.



// Fall foliage at Bob's Woods at the Earl Poole Sanctuary //

NEVERSINK MOUNTAIN PRESERVE // 1,067 ACRES

Nestled between the Schuylkill River to the south and the City of Reading to the north lies the natural oasis of Neversink Mountain. Derived from the indigenous Lenni Lenape word, "navasink," referring to land that comes to a point as a promontory, this vantage point provides breathtaking vistas for hikers, the most popular of which are the City Overlook and McIlvain Pavilion.

The Neversink Mountain Preserve and Community Forest encompasses 1,065 acres of interior forest, shrublands, and seeping headwater creeks, 538 acres of which Berks Nature manages and stewards. As a result the lush and rugged Neversink Mountain is home to an abundance of flora and fauna, including a diversity of butterflies, moths, and birds. 🌿



// Overlook of the Schuylkill River from Neversink Mountain //

// EXPLORE AND ENJOY LOCALLY //

LIFE IS BEST LIVED OUTSIDE



// Jeremy Haymaker, Berks Nature's new Trails and Preserve Specialist, enjoying life lived outside with his family //

In 2021, for the first time in the organization's history, Berks Nature has added a Trails and Preserve Specialist to their team. This position is wholly dedicated to maintaining and improving Berks Nature's three nature preserves and the network of public trails interlacing them.

Fulfilling this role is Jeremy Haymaker: an avid outdoorsman with a simple motto, "Life is best lived outdoors".

For Jeremy, the new position feels as much like a fresh start as it does a homecoming.

Nearly 12 years ago, Jeremy worked as a counselor at Berks Nature's first summer of Eco-Camp. As a seasonal position, Jeremy's term as counselor came to a close at summer's end. While Jeremy dreamt of returning to Berks Nature, the practical pressures of reality instead led him to a job outside the environmental field.

The compensation was generous, but the work itself uninspiring. As time trudged onward, Jeremy slumped into a pattern of complacency, accepting the mundane of his work at the cost of his passions. That is, until Jeremy's son was born.

With the birth of his son, a switch flipped inside Jeremy. What kind of role model was he, slogging through life without passion and purpose?

Life is too short and is best lived outdoors after all. It was then that Jeremy began his journey to recenter his life on the deeply held values and interests of his youth. Little did he know that this path would ultimately lead him back to Berks Nature.

It has been a fun and challenging first year as Trails and Preserve Specialist for Jeremy. There are a lot of acres to cover (around 1,000 acres

to be exact!) and the work is never done. But in 2021, Jeremy got started with Bob's Woods at the Earl Poole Sanctuary.

When Jeremy was first introduced to the field at Bob's Woods, it was overrun with veritable mob of high-profile invasive species including multiflora rose, autumn olive, and honeysuckle. If Pennsylvania's native plants had any hope of returning, these disruptive intruders had to be removed.

To get the job done, Jeremy and Senior Ecologist, Larry Lloyd, called in the big guns. Twice they enlisted a brush mower, a heavy duty, walk-behind lawn mower to fell the prickly mats of invasive shrubs and vines. Between the two rounds of mowing, Jeremy and Larry sprayed persistent new growth with an orange-based herbicide.

Yes orange, as in the citrus. While not as strong as your commercial herbicides like Roundup, this gentler approach avoids harsher chemical applications.

With the invasive species at bay, the stage was set to usher in the new, native denizens of the Bob's Woods meadow. Aided by a handful of volunteers, native plants growing throughout Angelica Park were harvested for their seeds.

Just as buying local goods better supports community health and sustainability, growing locally sourced plants better supports a robust and resilient landscape.

The same volunteers who harvested the perennial seeds at Angelica Creek Park then joined Jeremy and Larry in the fall to spread them across their new home at Bob's Woods. Thus, seeds were planted, both in the Bob's Woods meadow and in the hearts of those community members.

Just as the native seeds will set their roots in Bob's Woods, so too have these volunteers rooted themselves to this place through this intimate act of seed shepherding.

As for Jeremy, his roots were laid 12 years ago. Sometimes, as it is in nature, it takes the turning of time for conditions to ripen. But the seed bank patiently persists until the time is right to grow back into the light.

Welcome back Jeremy.

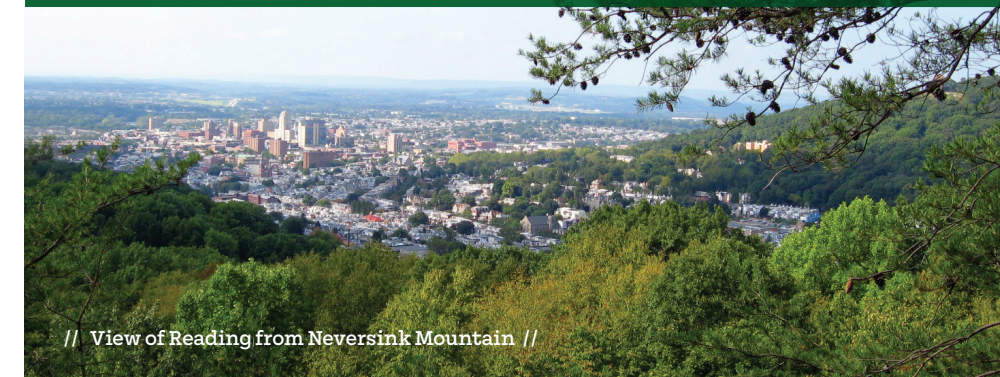


NEVERSINK MOUNTAIN TRAIL ASSESSMENT

To better maximize the community impact and use of the Neversink Mountain Preserve and Community Forest, Berks Nature is partnering with the International Mountain Bike Association's Trail Solutions team to assess the mountain's existing trail network.

The assessment began in earnest in December 2021. First, the Trails Solution team thoroughly inventoried Neversink Mountain's landscape and trails network. Then, Berks Nature and Trail Solutions hosted three, well-attended community engagement sessions at The Nature Place to collect feedback and bring into focus the community vision for Neversink Mountain Preserve.

The Trails Assessment team is now consolidating this information into a draft Trails Assessment Plan, to be presented both to Berks Nature and to our greater community in early 2022.



// View of Reading from Neversink Mountain //

NATIVE PERENNIALS PLANTED AT BOB'S WOODS



PURPLE CONEFLOWER
(*Echinacea purpurea*)



MOUNTAIN MINT
(*Pycnanthemum*)



HYSSOP
(*Agastache*)



SNEEZEWEED
(*Helenium*)



NEW ENGLAND ASTER
(*Aster novae-angliae*)

REFERENCES

Lawn, F. (n.d.) Why Local Seed Sources Provide Better native Plants. Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education. <https://www.schuylkillcenter.org/pdfs/quill2008/WHY-LOCAL-SEED-BETTER-NATIVE-PLANTS.pdf>

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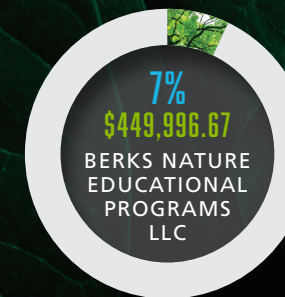
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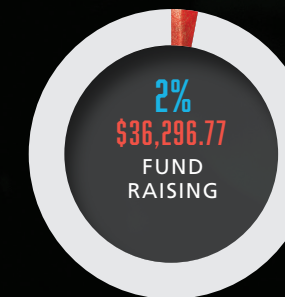
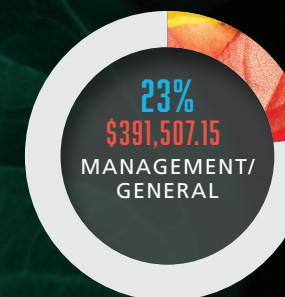
PRELIMINARY PRE-AUDITED FIGURES TAKEN FROM BERKS NATURE DECEMBER 31, 2021 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.



*INCLUDES ONE-TIME \$3.5M GIFT FOR CAPITAL EXPANSION AT THE NATURE PLACE

*BERKS NATURE WAS THE RECIPIENT OF A PPP LOAN IN 2021

TOTAL REVENUES // \$6,650,265.27



TOTAL EXPENDITURES // \$1,702,644.86

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