



ECOTONES

2022 ANNUAL REPORT





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// Above: Abundant foamflower along trail at Bob's Woods at the Earl Poole Sanctuary //

// Cover: A new day of Nature Preschool begins with circle time outside in the Nature Play Zone //

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

DEAR BERKS NATURE FRIENDS AND FAMILY:

While it seems like we've been enjoying spring all winter, the signs of a new natural awakening are before us. Winter is the time when our team makes arrangements for all our spring and summer activities, and we have quite a few new things planned this year. One of these new efforts embraces our "live every day like it's earth day" motto.

We have developed a passport system for you to explore all of Berks Nature's public nature preserves. Visitors are encouraged to create a post rubbing at each preserve and then bring their completed passport to The Nature Place for a prize on Earth Day. We hope you find some time to get out and explore Berks Nature's special preserves this spring.

When you visit The Nature Place, you'll see a new display in our lobby on Neversink Mountain. We have local artists' renderings of "Reading's other Mountain" in addition to some of our other nature preserves. We are grateful to local historian, Paul Druzba for sharing his collection of historic Neversink memorabilia, which is on display for visitors to see.

In this issue you'll learn about some of our recent work with NASA's GLOBE program. (Global Learning for the Observation and Benefit of the Environment). Berks Nature has been a proud GLOBE partner for nearly 10 years and we'll share why we're celebrating our own educator, Michael Griffith. In addition, you'll read about our preschool staff working toward their nature-based educator certification.

Our land team closed the year with exceptional progress in protecting our county's special places. In 2022, we protected a total of 706.71 acres through conservation easements. In addition, we acquired 169.73 fee simple owned acreage. This brings our total protected and owned land to 12,621 acres.

We've added a few new staff in the past six months including a Facilities Manager, a new Community Engagement and Outreach Assistant, and, for the first time, a Vice President for Land and Conservation. We have been understaffed for many years and these additions allow us to meet our mission related needs to preserve Berks County because nature is essential to our quality of life.

And so, 2023 continues to be an exciting year of stabilization, growth, and change.

We are looking for ways to accelerate our conservation efforts as new pressures on our land become evident. We will move forward with our work in climate change, land protection, watershed protection, agricultural restoration, education, urban greening and preserve and trail management. We hope you have a safe and happy spring and summer and that you come visit us at The Nature Place or enjoy one of our off-site programs or preserves.

Sincerely,



Kimberly J Murphy
PRESIDENT

// MEET THE TEAM //

BERKS NATURE STAFF



Kimberly J. Murphy
President

Andrew Fetterman
Vice President for Land and Conservation

Lawrence E. Lloyd
Senior Ecologist

Jeremy Haymaker
Trails & Preserve Specialist

Sarah Chudnovsky
Land Protection Specialist

Allison Mackley
Vice President for Education

Michael J. Griffith
Education & Watershed Specialist

Melissa Acosta
Community Educator

Anne Muvdi
Nature Preschool Director and Eco-Camp Director

Joan Marten
Nature Preschool Teacher

Alyssa Matlack
Nature Preschool Teacher

Lynn Walker
Nature Preschool Teacher

Jenn Bartley
Nature Preschool Teacher

Amber Schenck
Nature Preschool Assistant Teacher

Elizabeth Danovich
Nature Preschool Assistant Teacher

Tami J. Shimp
Vice President for Development & Community Relations

Regan Moll-Dohm
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Events & Visitor Experience Manager

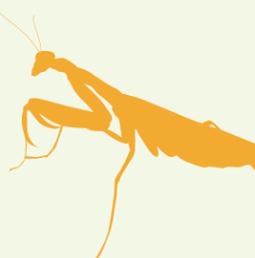
Beckey Seel
Volunteer Engagement Coordinator & Educator

English Dawson
Community Engagement and Outreach Assistant

Dawn McDonough
Office & Membership Administrator

Brian Birchak
Facilities Manager

Melina Hart
Accountant



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Lena Hunter
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// MEET THE TEAM //

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// Bucolic view from a protected property in Maxatawny Township //

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



ENGLISH DAWSON //

Community Engagement and Outreach Assistant

English joined the Berks Nature team in November 2022 as the Community Engagement and Outreach Assistant for The Nature Place. English has received degrees in Environmental Resource Management as well as Community, Environment, and Development from Penn State University. Her professional background to this point has focused on agricultural sciences and sustainable foodways.

English was born and raised local to Berks County and is thrilled to bring her passion for environmental and social sustainability back to her home and community. When she's not working, you can find English spending her time with her large family, reading a good book, or participating in activities outdoors. 🌿

BRIAN BIRCHAK //

Facilities Manager

From biology and environmental science, to trail and building maintenance, to nature education, Brian has explored a myriad of pursuits within the environmental movement. In October 2022, Brian brought these diverse talents to Berks Nature, becoming our first Facilities Manager. Before Berks Nature, Brian worked at a nature center uniquely situated within a superfund site. Here, he honed his experience in ecological restoration practicing invasive plant species control, native plant horticulture, freshwater monitoring and ecology, and watershed conservation.

Brian is a tinkerer, explorer, nerd, naturalist, banjo player, and dad (to three boys). He is just as happy getting lost in a forest as he is playing around with computers...or his banjo. 🌿



// LEARNING IN NATURE //

GLOBAL SCIENCE, LOCAL ACTION

WHAT BETTER WAY TO LEARN SCIENCE THAN BY DOING SCIENCE?

The GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) program is designed to do just that.



By equipping teachers, students, and community members with scientifically verified, data collection protocols as well as training and networking assistance, the GLOBE program provides educators and budding scientists with meaningful, hands-on experiences with the scientific method.

Since GLOBE was intentionally built for teachers, the activities are hands-on, low-cost, and teach real world science. *Really.* GLOBE's data is research quality and is used by an international community of scientists, including NASA!

When GLOBE first launched in 2005, 33 countries joined the program. Today, representatives from 127 countries participate in GLOBE including 22,609 schools, 26,571 teachers, and 563,999 students in North America alone.

Berks Nature became a GLOBE partner in 2014 with the goals of recruiting and training local, Berks County teachers to adopt the GLOBE program in their schools and of using The Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park as a unique engagement experience in scientific inquiry for students and the community scientists participating in our four volunteer-based watershed associations.

Nine years later Berks Nature continues to raise up its partnership with GLOBE in the Berks County community.

// Participants in the GLOBE NARM learn about water quality monitoring in the classroom and while collecting data for Angelica Creek //



THE 2022 GLOBE NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL MEETING

Berks Nature hosted the GLOBE North American Regional Meeting (NARM) for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Region at The Nature Place this past November; one of just four GLOBE partners selected for this opportunity.

Among a prestigious list of 2022 NARM hosts, including the NASA Langley Research Center, University of Toledo, and University of California-Berkeley, Berks Nature stands out as the only land trust and nature center selected for this honor; a tribute to The Nature Place's immersive educational experiences and Berks Nature's investment to bring GLOBE to Berks County's schools.

The two-day event invited a varied group of participants – members of the Berks County community, public school teachers and administrators, and employees from NASA and GLOBE – to immerse themselves in GLOBE's curriculum and protocols; the demonstrations of sustainability in full display across The Nature Place campus; and authentic and stimulating environmental discussions.

One of the most meaningful sessions was a "social simulation", featuring a staged lawsuit brought forward by the world's less developed nations seeking justice against the developed nations for their misuse of the environment and role in the global climate crisis.

Moments of intense intellectual engagement flowed effortlessly into the humor and bonding of roasting s'mores over a shared campfire – a conference epitomizing the blend of community, relationships, and stewardship at play each and every day at The Nature Place.



// LEARNING IN NATURE //

IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AND JOY

Berks Nature’s educators are some of the most passionate and dedicated teachers and naturalists in Berks County. Too often, the time, energy, and love that these educators invest into teaching and nurturing Berks County’s youth and life-long learners goes unseen.

But it is thanks to these incredible teachers that Berks Nature’s environmental education – from its Nature Preschool to its public family programs – has become the invaluable community asset that it is today.

This section is for them: for their accomplishments, for their passion, and for their commitment to nature-based education.

FROM TRAINER TO MENTOR

Shortly after Michael Griffith joined the Berks Nature team, he ventured to Tennessee to become a GLOBE Trainer, granting him the agency to teach others, like teachers or volunteers, for example, to use the GLOBE protocols and curriculum.

In 2022, after six and a half years, Griffith has officially matriculated into the role of GLOBE Mentor Trainer.

With this new title, Michael can now teach others to become GLOBE Trainers themselves. These Trainers can then champion GLOBE in their own communities and school districts, training others to follow the protocols and curriculum.

It is a very proud moment for Michael, imparting new energy and momentum into a personally meaningful program; after leading several GLOBE training sessions over the last six and a half years, Michael has witnessed, firsthand, the power of this program to not only teach the scientific method but to inspire new value for scientific inquiry.

“Every student in the entire county – from Kindergarten through 9th grade – should be using GLOBE,” explains Michael, “It’s not just a science report, GLOBE teaches kids how to do real world science, collect real data, and help the planet. This is why we want to be Trainers: to give every child access to this program.”



// Michael Griffith //



// The (nearly) full cast of Nature Preschool teachers //

BRINGING NATURE-BASED EDUCATION TO BERKS COUNTY

At the cornerstone of Berks Nature’s mission is the belief that nature is essential to our quality of life, this includes the role of nature-based education as a crucial part of active, engaging, and comprehensive learning for our community’s children.

While nature-based education isn’t a new concept nationally or globally, Berks Nature’s Nature Preschool was one of the first of its kind in Berks County. This motivated Berks Nature’s Preschool Director, Anne Muvdi to seek out opportunities for her and her team of educators to collaborate with and learn from other professionals with experience teaching outdoors.

What she found was the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools’ (ERAFANS) Nature-Based Teacher Certification Course, a five-day professional development program that provides best practices in nature-based early childhood education to prepare teachers for meaningful outdoor learning experiences.

From working in and with local landscapes to risk management to outdoor inquiry and literacy, ERAFANS’ introductory certification course covers a broad range of skills and approaches considered crucial for implementing a nature-based early childhood pedagogy in both formal and informal childcare settings.

In 2018, Anne completed this training and began introducing these techniques into the Nature Preschool’s curriculum: the Nature Play Zone is set up with stimuli that are meant to provoke learning without forcing it; activities involve less materials and request more imagination; and mindfulness practice in the form of sit spots and even yoga are all regular occurrences for Berks Nature’s preschoolers.

Following Anne’s lead, three other educators at Berks Nature received their Nature-based Teacher Certification in 2022: Allison Mackley, the VP of Education and Lead Preschool Teachers Joan Marten and Alyssa Matlack.

// LEARNING IN NATURE //

We asked our talented cast of teachers at the Berks Nature Preschool to share either their favorite part of their job or why they entered this teaching career. Here's what they had to say!



JOAN MARTEN

"Learning and loving nature has a direct impact on children. Nature Based Teacher Certification training was an opportunity for personal and program growth. Immersing myself in outdoor play and learning, I found myself inspired and motivated to share and implement it in our nature preschool program."



ALYSSA MATLACK

"Coming home from training gave me a fresh mindset on how to approach learning outside, a pocket full of new activities to implement into my classroom, and ideas on how to bring the outside into my classroom even more."



ANNE MUVDI

"While everyone who attended the training was an outdoor educator, it was very valuable to get diverse perspectives of how each teacher and each school incorporates the value of nature into their instruction".



ALLISON MACKLEY

"The hands-on, immersive Nature-Based Teacher Certification training course not only validated the best practices in nature-based education that we offer at Berks Nature but also provided an opportunity to experience learning from both the student and educator perspectives."



JENN BARTLEY

"My favorite part of the day is sharing the wonders of the natural world with the children. Those moments are never the same from day to day and being part of the children's joy at these discoveries reminds me why I chose to become a nature-based educator."



LIZ DANOVICH

"What gets me excited about working at Berks Nature Preschool is getting to see the kids have fun and grow through exploring and caring for creation!"



AMBER SCHENCK

"My favorite part of being a Berks Nature Preschool Teacher is being able to spend so much time in nature and incorporate nature and Science into learning and creative activities."



LYNN WALKER

"My favorite part of the day is watching the kids jump in puddles, play in the mud, and have fun!"

THE ABCS OF NATURE PRESCHOOL

When you spend upwards of 75% of your day outside, the great outdoors becomes your classroom, which is just the way the Berks Nature Preschoolers and teachers like it!

Just like any other preschool class, a core element of the Berks Nature Preschool curriculum is literacy. But unlike other preschools, the Berks Nature Preschoolers practice their early literacy in nature. The Nature Preschoolers search for letter sounds while exploring the trails of Angelica Creek Park; trace, write, and draw letters using items found in nature; and even create stories and poems while hiking!

In this way, practicing literacy feels like less of a chore and more of a game!

"The natural world provides a canvas for kids' imaginations to run wild," explains Anne Muvdi, Director of the Nature

Preschool, "which sparks so much joy and allows for meaningful instruction to take place."

To that point, everyone benefits from this approach to learning early literature skills out in nature.

The outdoors provides a more inclusive environment that allows children to move their bodies, breathe fresh air, and even make mistakes (drawing in the sand is more forgiving than the permanence of an error scribbled in crayon on paper).

The Nature Preschool teachers prefer this approach as well; creative exploration outside is more exciting and fulfilling than constantly managing an antsy child to sit properly in a chair until they complete a worksheet.

Thanks to time outside, learning the ABCs has never been this fun!



// Nature Preschoolers practice early literature skills by tracing letters in a loose gravel path //

// FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND //

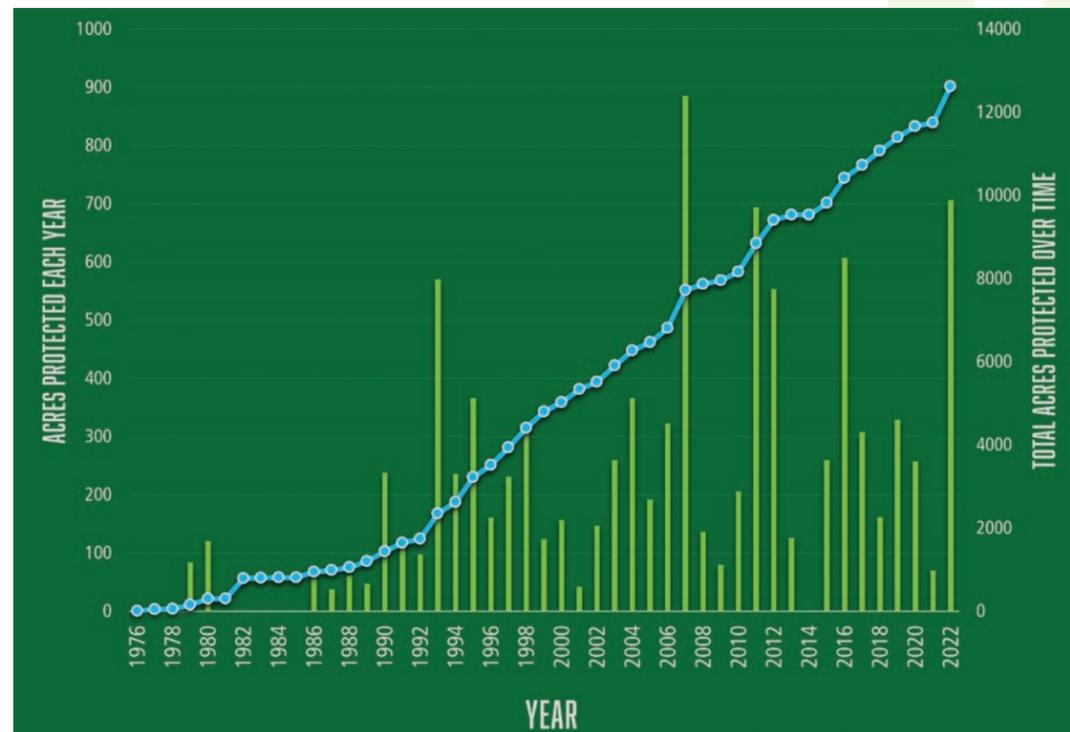
GROWING OUR LAND PROTECTION LEGACY

Over the last 48 years, Berks Nature has helped preserve over 12,600 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, from establishing conservation easements, to acquiring land to steward, to facilitating land transfers for conservation.

In 2022 we celebrated the following milestones in our protection pursuits:

- 9,753.26 acres** protected under conservation easements
- 620.15 acres** owned by Berks Nature to manage and steward
- 2,248 acres** transferred to partners for long-term management
- 876.44 acres** 2022 was Berks Nature's biggest year for land protection since 2007. Approximately 706.71 acres found new security under conservation easements and Berks Nature acquired 169.73 acres to protect and steward for a total of 876.44 acres protected. 🌿

// The growth of Berks Nature's protected land portfolio since 1976. Green bars represent annual acreage additions while the blue line demonstrates cumulative protective acreage over time. //



CONSERVATION ON COMMON GROUND



// Andrew Fetterman //

In January of 2023, Andrew Fetterman joined the Berks Nature team as the organization's first Vice President for Land and Conservation.

This role will focus primarily on overseeing the land, water, urban greening, and conservation programs Berks Nature implements across the county. To do so will require savvy both in relationship building, with individuals as well as organizational partners, and in matters of conservation and the environment. It is a challenge that Andrew is well-equipped to take on.

Andrew prides himself is his ability to both listen and connect with people of various backgrounds and origins. Navigating public and private partnerships was an integral part of his previous role as an environmental consultant, a position he held for 24 years. In his free time, Andrew also volunteers for various organizations including teaching

hunter trapper education with the Pennsylvania Game Commission and painting songbird decoys for the bird conservation program at Willistown Conservation Trust.

In other words, Andrew has spent his career building relationships on common ground.

But Andrew is still an earth scientist and naturalist at heart. He

boasts a Master of Arts in Earth Science Degree from the State University of New York, College of Oneonta and has been a Professional Geologist in Pennsylvania since

2002. Prior to his career in environmental consulting, Andrew studied freshwater mussel ecology in the St. Lawrence, upper-Delaware, and upper-Susquehanna River basins. It is from this unshakable foundation in environmental sciences that Andrew will lead Berks Nature's conservation efforts.

Like so many members of the Berks Nature team, this work holds personal significance for Andrew. Born in Reading and raised in the Earl Hills of Berks County, Andrew now lives with his wife, Alison, and two children, Gus and Etta, in the Oley Hills.

Already, the Fetterman family models the conservation ethic that Berks Nature has been sowing in Berks County over the past 47 years. The Fettermans placed a conservation easement on their property in 2017, which not only protects their land but also obstructs development pressure seeking access to their neighbors.

It was this interest in and commitment to land protection that initially attracted Andrew to the VP for Land and Conservation position; he was impressed by Berks Nature's proven track record of success protecting land from urban sprawl and over-development. But what Andrew is most excited for now, is working with the dynamic group of naturalists, educators, and defenders of the environment that make up the Berks Nature team.

"I want to work with people who share my interests in nature," explains Andrew, "It is both energizing and humbling to be part of this team as I share a similar passion for the protection of land and freshwater ecosystems." 🌿

"I want to work with people who share my interests in nature," explains Andrew, "It is both energizing and humbling to be part of this team as I share a similar passion for the protection of land and freshwater ecosystems."

// FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND //

CREATING GREENER CONNECTIONS

Across the nation, people are eager to get outside. Since the COVID pandemic began in early 2020, participants in outdoor recreation has increased by 6.9% (though it is worth noting that consistent or “core” participants, who engage in outdoor recreation more than 51 times a year, have declined by about 13% since 2007).

Here too in Berks County enthusiasm for outdoor recreation is on the rise and has been for the last 15 years.

One popular solution for addressing increased public interest in outdoor recreation while safeguarding the sensitive habitats and ecological functionality in these spaces is the development of “greenways”. A greenway, in its simplest terms, is a corridor of open space.

Greenways can vary greatly in their scale and setting ranging from narrow ribbons of green to wide mosaic bands of open spaces, incorporating natural, cultural, and scenic features. They can thread delicately through urban and suburban communities or stretch comfortably across rural and rugged landscapes.

Some greenways primarily support recreation and are centered around trail systems for walking, biking, or other passive forms of outdoor exploration. Other greenways prioritize environmental values, protecting ecosystem services and providing thruways for wildlife to move between patches of habitat; these greenways often exclude human passage.

However, all greenways are united by two common functions: protect and connect.

Think of a greenway network like a wheel, with several spokes radiating out from a central hub. In the greenway network

model, the wheel’s hub are sites with natural, cultural, or historic value – a state park for example – and the spokes are the greenways themselves. Unlike a single wheel, greenway networks consist of several hubs, and those spokes – the greenways – connect hubs to one another.

More and more often, major cities and municipalities are looking to greenway networks as a way build up a community’s green infrastructure enhancing environmental protection, access to outdoor recreation, and quality of life for greenway communities.

Pennsylvania, and Berks County, are no different.

According to a survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Greenways Partnership Commission in 2001, about 80% of Pennsylvanians surveyed reported that they had used a greenway and 93% supported additional greenways for their community.



"A greenway, in its simplest terms, is a corridor of open space."

// Views of Weiser State Forest along the Kittatinny Bridge //

A county-wide greenway system connecting Berks’ major park, recreation, and open spaces is called for in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update. This updated plan highlights the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan, an addendum adopted to the comprehensive plan in 2007 that provides recommendations for identifying, protecting, and preserving the County’s historic sites and districts.

Capitalizing on this momentum, Berks Nature produced its own greenway feasibility study for the Angelica Creek watershed in 2010.

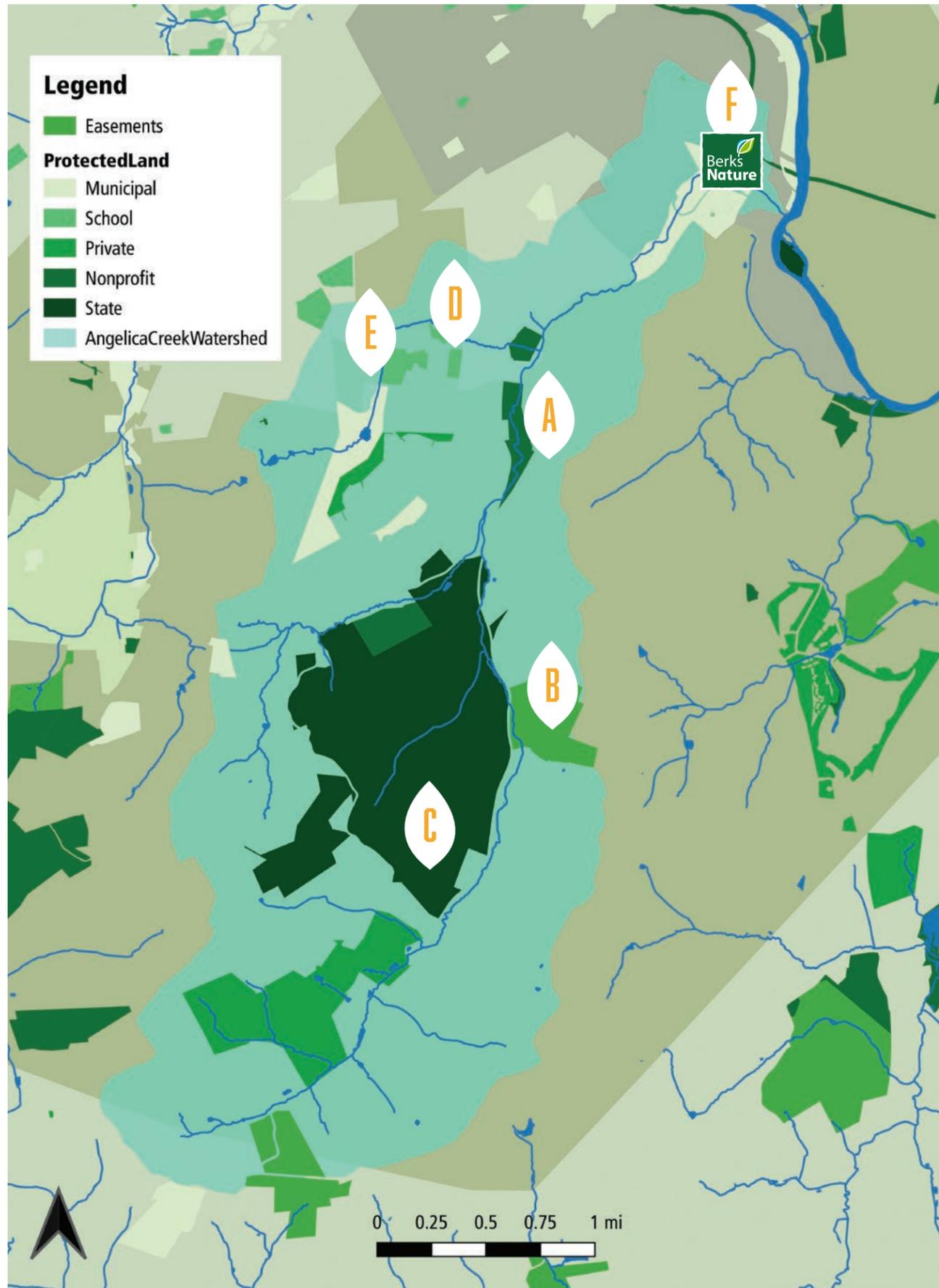
In this study, Berks Nature identified several historic, cultural, and recreational resources in the Angelica Creek watershed and described potential greenway opportunities to connect these community hubs together locally and with a greater, regional greenway network through the Schuylkill Heritage Corridor and Schuylkill River Trail.

Greenway plans like this represent conservation at a larger (and in this case watershed-level) scale, which provides more opportunities for creative problem solving, planning, and networking. Conservation at this scale considers not just the ecological needs of a landscape, but imagines a future of healthy coexistence between people and nature.

Thirteen years later, great progress has been made in creating these greenway connections. Between state agencies and conservation non-profit holdings, a total of 1,418 acres of the Angelica Creek watershed are now protected from development, that’s 30% of the entire watershed. 🌿

// Bikers enjoying the Angelica Creek Trail and its connection to the Schuylkill River Trail during the Schuylkill River Greenways' annual Ride for the River Race //





// FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND //

A ANGELICA GREENWAY PRESERVE

In 2022, the stars of opportunity and preparation aligned. First, Berks Nature assumed ownership of 12 acres of land, previously owned by the City of Reading and the former site of the historic Angelica Ice Dam. Additionally, after two years of coordination, Berks Nature acquired an additional 15 acres of land. These two properties are adjacent to one another, creating a contiguous, 27-acre swath of riparian woodlands.

Collectively this land is known now as the Angelica Greenway Preserve, a private preserve with no trails, parking, or public access whose woodlands shelter the Angelica Creek. The new Angelica Greenway Preserve includes both historic and conservation features prioritized by the Angelica Greenway Feasibility Study, representing a key step forward in building this greenway network and healing past environmental wounds driven by industrialization.

B CONSERVATION EASEMENT // CUMRU TOWNSHIP // 76.35 ACRES

Berks Nature holds a conservation easement on this approximately 76-acre property. Over 90% of this land is forested, protecting a tributary of Angelica Creek and extending the reach of Nolde Forest State Park's lush, old-growth woodlands. By placing a conservation easement on this private property, land use, and in particular development rights, are limited or prohibited in perpetuity prioritizing the land's conservation value over its utilitarian value.

C NOLDE FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

In November 2022, Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center was inducted into the national Old-Growth Forest Network. It is a great honor and a tribute to the conservation ethic that took root here to join a network that preserves and celebrates ancient forests, as just five generations ago, nearly every tree in what we know now as Nolde Forest had been felled.

It was Jacob Nolde, a German immigrant, who took up the charge to reforest the land in 1904, setting the stage for the Nolde Forest

Environmental Education center – Pennsylvania's first environmental education center – and the 700+ acres of lush, deciduous and coniferous woodlands thriving today.

In 2019, Berks Nature assisted in the acquisition and addition of about 59 acres to Nolde Forest; the first addition of land to Nolde Forest since its inception in 1966.

D ANGELICA CREEK TRAIL EXTENSION

Berks Nature is currently in the process of extending the Angelica Creek Trail from its current end-point at Ken Grill Pool to Shillington Park, as suggested by the Angelica Greenway Feasibility Study. The trail extension is unique in that it will ultimately connect two popular public parks and nature centers – Nolde Forest and Angelica Creek Park, home to The Nature Place – but also serves a community need for safer pedestrian walkways. This accessible, 5-mile trail connection will provide the Governor Mifflin School District community with a safe route to their schools.

E GOVERNOR MIFFLIN CAMPUS GREENING

In the spring of 2018, Berks Nature helped the Governor Mifflin School District plant a streamside forest of 155 native shrubs and trees alongside Rabbit Run, which runs along the border of the school district's campus. The entire Governor Mifflin community embraced the project: senior high school students assisted with drafting the management plan, middle schoolers dug holes for the trees, while elementary students physically planted the trees and shrubs alongside Berks Nature in April.

Before the planting, this area had no environmental or educational benefit. But as the young assemblage of native trees and shrubs grows, their roots and canopies will protect Rabbit Run and improve the hydrological and biological processes occurring there. The young streamside forest also provides new, immersive education experiences as an outdoor classroom for water quality testing and other student-led projects.

F ANGELICA CREEK PARK AND THE NATURE PLACE

// EXPLORE AND ENJOY LOCALLY //

CLIMATE ACTION TAKES ROOT IN READING



// The inaugural Reading Climate Corps at Café Esperanza's community garden in Reading. Photo Credit: Reading Climate Corps //

Each year, dozens of volunteers share their time with Berks Nature to plant trees, restore native wildlife habitats, and keep tabs on the state of Berks County's natural resources. But in 2022, Berks Nature welcomed a unique group of community members to Angelica Creek Park to help with these local restoration efforts.

These young adults - aged anywhere between 18 and 24 years old - all hailed from the City of Reading, as the inaugural members of Reading's Climate Corps.

In 2022, the Corps Network, thanks to generous funding from the William Penn Foundation, launched the Delaware River Climate Corps, an initiative to advance climate resiliency and strengthen green career pathways across the Delaware River watershed.

The City of Reading was one of just ten localities selected across Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania to host one of the Delaware River Climate Corps.

A Climate Corps is a locally-based organization designed to engage young adults and veterans in service projects that address conservation, disaster response, and other community needs. Through these service projects, Corps Members gain work experience and develop in-demand

skills, jumpstarting participants' careers in public service and the environment.

From May into November, the first members of the Reading Climate Corps advanced several public-space maintenance projects focused on local, environmental concerns (particularly those related to climate change) from installing and maintaining green stormwater infrastructure, to developing community gardens, to environmental stewardship in the way of planting and caring for an urban forest.

It was in this last effort that the Reading Climate Corps partnered with Berks Nature and brought its inaugural class of Corps Members to Angelica Creek Park to experience the trials and satisfaction of environmental stewardship first-hand.

In the spring, organizing members for the Reading Climate Corps and their partners PowerCorpsPHL of Philadelphia helped Jeremy Haymaker, Berks Nature's Trails

and Preserve Specialist, remove invasive honeysuckle vines from the woodlands of Angelica Creek Park.

While the shrubs, indigenous to southern Russia, were initially introduced for their fragrant flowers and resistance to local browsers, like deer, they are now a troubling source of disruption in Pennsylvania's forests. By leafing out in early spring, invasive honeysuckle blocks out the sun and eats through the soil's buffet of nutrients, starving the native understory wildflowers that local pollinators rely on.

Then in the fall, the full Reading Climate Corps team returned to plant 20 native white oak trees in the vacancies left by the felled honeysuckle thickets.

With six public nature preserves to manage, Jeremy is always happy to have an extra set of helping hands (or eight in this case!), but the value of this assistance runs deeper.

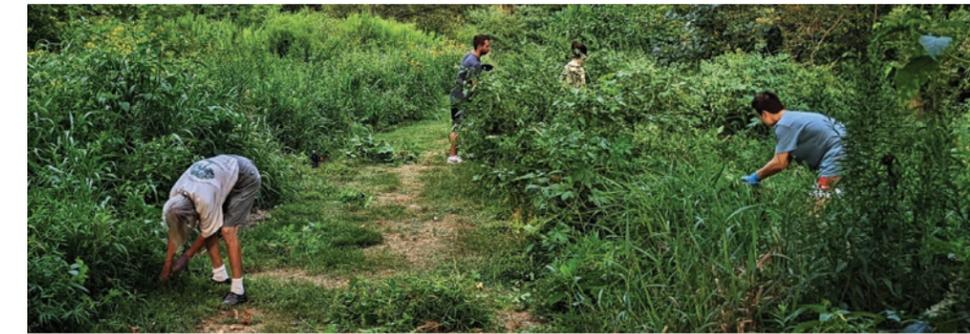
The Corps Members gain knowledge and learn skills that will not only benefit their future career, but will also be carried back to and shared with their neighbors and fellow community members. As knowledge spreads, important environmental and climate issues can gather momentum in local discourse and generate interest for future participation in the Climate Corps program.

"We at Berks Nature understand that there is a lot of work that needs to be done to address the issues of climate change, and although that task can seem daunting, there are steps that we can take to reduce heat stress, improve air quality, and regulate increasing temperatures throughout the city," explains Jeremy, who is encouraged by the efforts of Reading's Climate Corps to provide residents of the city with

opportunities to not only connect with but also steward resiliency within nature,

"Planting trees and cleaning up trash may seem fruitless to some people, but when you couple these actions with environmental education, as the Reading Climate Corps has, you plant the figurative seeds that lead to change in the years ahead." 🌱

// Volunteers remove disruptive, invasive plants from the restored habitats of Angelica Creek Park //



LEND A HAND TO OUR BERKS NATURE TRAILS

Berks Nature stewards nearly 1,000 acres of land in Berks County, including six public preserves that are managed both for wildlife habitat and for public exploration. That's a lot of ground to cover by just one person, and Jeremy Haymaker, Berks Nature's Trails and Preserve Specialist, could use a hand!

In 2023, Berks Nature will be launching monthly Trail Maintenance Volunteer Days for our Berks County neighbors to get out with Jeremy and help maintain these preserves and trails as both vibrant ecosystems and venues for outdoor recreation.

This is a perfect opportunity for any trail walker or outdoor enthusiast to give back to the very spaces in which they recreate and to discover a new sense of place in their local natural areas.

Jeremy is looking for volunteers who are ready to jump in and get their hands dirty! Trail work can vary from installing erosion control measures to brush and branch trimming to keep trail corridors clear. The work site and tasks will vary between months, but the bulk of this maintenance in 2023 will focus on the Neversink Mountain trail system.

Join Berks Nature every 2nd Thursday of the month to be part of the action and lend a hand! For more information, email Jeremy Haymaker (Jeremy.haymaker@berksnature.org). 🌱

// EXPLORE AND ENJOY LOCALLY //

A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE EPHRAIM MALICKSON WILDLIFE SANCTUARY UNDER BERKS NATURE'S OWNERSHIP

Ephraim Malickson once owned this land; nearly 200 acres in the Schuylkill Highlands region of Berks County. This is an area rich in both cultural and natural heritage valued by local residents and environmental organizations alike, and the Ephraim Malickson Wildlife Sanctuary is no exception. But perhaps no one valued this property more than Mr. Malickson himself.

To Mr. Malickson, the land was called "Tekene 2", the indigenous Lenape word meaning woods or uninhabited place, embodying Mr. Malickson's vision for the land as a sanctuary: "a place for the birds and deer to go and be safe."

Mr. Malickson worked closely with Berks Nature and estate planning professionals to ensure this special place would never cede to development, even when he was no longer around to steward the land himself. In 2011, following Mr. Malickson's passing, a conservation easement was placed on the property, permanently restricting the

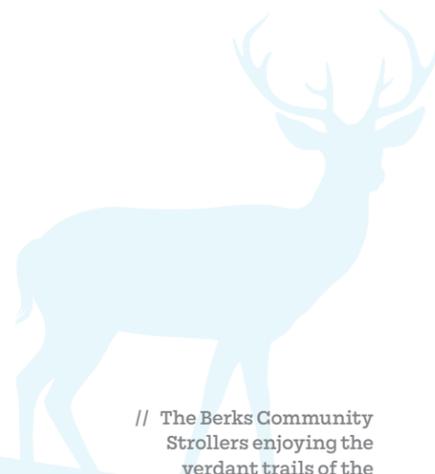
future use of the land, thereby protecting the natural resources thriving there.

At this time, Berks Nature became the stewards of "The Ephraim Malickson Wildlife Sanctuary (Tekene 2)". Eleven years later, in 2022, Berks Nature took full ownership of the Ephraim Malickson Wildlife Sanctuary and celebrated the grand re-opening of this public preserve in March 2023.

While public access is encouraged and several trails loop through the wooded preserve, the Ephraim Malickson Wildlife Sanctuary is also managed for wildlife habitat. The Sanctuary is heavily forested with intermittent streams and wetlands, including the headwaters for the Indian Corn Creek, a Migratory and Cold Water Fishery, providing diverse habitats for many native plants and wildlife, including migratory songbirds.

As such, visitors to this special place should always practice Leave No Trace principles to preserve the wild and ecological integrity of the Sanctuary. 🌿

"a place for the birds and deer to go and be safe"



// The Berks Community Strollers enjoying the verdant trails of the Ephraim Malickson Wildlife Sanctuary //



// HELPING HANDS //

GREEN THUMBS AND GOOD DEEDS

From the trails and active restoration projects to the gardens and educational exhibits, maintaining The Nature Place as a campus for learning and recreation takes a lot of work! Fortunately for Berks Nature, we have some behind-the-scenes help.

The numerous native garden beds that decorate The Nature Place campus are cared for primarily by two community volunteers: Holly Kendall and Suzanne Tucker.

Even before Holly retired, she knew she wanted to volunteer at Berks Nature. With all the challenges facing our global community, Holly has found cultivating local happiness here in Berks County to be the best strategy for doing a little good in the world.

When Holly finally retired, she also moved into a new home without any green space to garden. Gardening is a family tradition passed

down between the Kendall women: Holly's grandmother gardened, Holly's mother too, and her sister tends to a beautiful mosaic of native flower beds on her own property.

In 2017, the time was ripe to assist Berks Nature with the new gardens of The Nature Place and Holly began volunteering.

Likewise, Suzanne Trucker was born with two green thumbs. In 2018, Suzanne was ready to end a lifelong career in horticulture, but she was by no means ready to stop gardening! "Working with plants is food for my soul," says Suzanne, "When you make a career out of [gardening], it ends up in your blood."

In the spring of 2019, Suzanne joined Holly as a volunteer for The Nature Place's native garden beds. While Holly and Suzanne began as strangers, they have found

comfort and companionship managing The Nature Place's gardens together.

With so much experience and passion between them, Holly and Suzanne are often trusted to tend the gardens as best they see fit – from weeding, to dead heading, to planting...always planting!

There is one thing though that can distract these gardeners from their beds: the Nature Preschoolers. In fact, watching the Nature Preschoolers learn and play has become a highlight of both women's time volunteering around The Nature Place.

As the children come racing out of the building, overflowing with energy and enthusiasm, (and sometimes dressed as native pollinators ready to visit the very garden beds so lovingly cared for by Holly

and Suzanne) both Holly and Suzanne are happy pause from their work to watch.

"It's so important for young kids!" explains Suzanne, "Get them in nature and start them off loving nature from the get-go!"

Holly shares the sentiment: "It gives me peace." Peace to be outside in nature, and peace to see the children growing up to become nature lovers themselves, "I feel better knowing that those kids feel the same way [that I do] and are going to make the planet a better place."

Thanks to the tender care and countless hours that Holly and Suzanne have poured into the gardens of The Nature Place, these children and visitors alike can find that same inspiration to do little bit of good for the world and Berks County.

"I feel better knowing that those kids feel the same way and are going to make the planet a better place."

// Holly Kendall (left) and Suzanne Tucker (right) planting new native flowers in the garden beds around The Nature Place //

// Volunteers and the 2022 Ambassadors plant native trees at Angelica Creek Park //



NOW WELCOMING THE 2023 CLASS OF BERKS NATURE AMBASSADORS

Each spring, Berks Nature excitedly welcomes a new class of Berks Nature Ambassadors.

We are constantly impressed by the Ambassador applicant pool and the variety of experiences, skills, and perspectives each new class brings to the program. But all are united by the same sense of purpose and passion to protect and better understand our natural world.

The 2023 enrollment season has already wrapped up with the introductory Ambassador Welcome Night event; held in late March each spring as a chance for veteran and prospective Ambassadors alike to mingle and meet one another.

Welcome to the team 2023 Ambassador Class – we can't wait to see your passions become action!

// A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD //

GATHERING AT THE ROOKERY

Berks Nature has long envisioned expanding the built space of The Nature Place to better accommodate our environmental educational programming and field trips. In researching and planning for this new space, we quickly realized that in addition to better serving the families and school districts of Berks County, an indoor-outdoor hybrid space of this size was unique for our region and could serve a larger community need as an event venue.

We called this new space, The Rookery. 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.

Already, several local non-profits have hosted events or reserved space at The Rookery at The Nature Place and we are humbled to see our vision for this space as a community gathering point for our local allies come into focus.

THE SCHUYLKILL ACTION NETWORK ANNUAL MEETING

The Schuylkill Action Network is a collaborative network of over 100 partners working together to improve water resources in the Schuylkill River watershed.

Every year, the Schuylkill Action Network convenes a meeting to provide its partners the opportunity to meet and mingle while showcasing conservation victories in the watershed. In November 2022, the Schuylkill Action Network’s Annual Meeting was hosted at The Rookery and the restoration of the Angelica Creek floodplain was highlighted as a “watershed win”.

WECONSERVEPA’S PENNSYLVANIA LAND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

The Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference is Pennsylvania’s premier networking, training, and inspirational event for staff and volunteers of conservation groups.

The first day of this three-day conference concludes with a reception at The Rookery and will serve as an invaluable opportunity for conference attendees to reconnect with collaborators from other conservation groups and make new connections.

READING MUSICAL FOUNDATION

The Reading Musical Foundation hosted their annual “Berks Shines” Concert series in The Rookery at The Nature Place. It was the first time setting up the Rookery with a stage and concert-style seating – including a piano!

FROM KERI SHULTZ, PRESIDENT OF THE READING MUSICAL FOUNDATION:

“It was the first time [the Reading Musical Foundation has] had a live program since 2019, and we couldn’t have asked for a better venue or evening. Kaitlyn made the planning process easy, our guests were fawning over the view, and a big thank you to Tami for sharing her afternoon and evening with us!”

// Below Left Three Photos: Snapshots from the Schuylkill Action Network’s Annual Meeting //

// Below Right: Reading Musical Foundation’s unique and beautiful “Berks Shines” concert //



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// 2022 FINANCIAL REPORT //

PRELIMINARY PRE-AUDITED FIGURES TAKEN FROM BERKS NATURE DECEMBER 31, 2022 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.



TOTAL REVENUES // \$5,917,051.03



TOTAL EXPENDITURES // \$2,640,931.75



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Your contribution will stay in Berks County to help us protect nature! At Berks Nature, we believe that nature is essential to our quality of life.

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Thank you for becoming a Champion of Nature. Together we will make a difference.

We invite you to become involved with Berks Nature in many ways from attending our public events and programs to volunteering!

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