

FOLLOWING A PATH TO FALLINGWATER: Heritage and Kaufmann Society Member Robert Rzepka

For Robert Rzepka, an unplanned stop at Fallingwater three decades ago evolved into a deep interest in Frank Lloyd Wright's works and a personal investment in the preservation and future of Fallingwater.

Raised in Green Bay, a connection to nature was ingrained early on. "Growing up in Wisconsin, I didn't have to go far to end up in a forest or on a farm." As a high school student, drafting classes led to an initial interest in home design and architecture, and at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay (UWGB), he majored in urban studies with a focus in environmental design. Through this specialized program, Robert was able to work for actual clients solving built environment design problems.

He earned a dual Master's degree from Penn State University in 1986. His thesis and graduate degree in operations research led to a job computer modeling urban scale transportation flows. Ultimately his career choices propelled him to lead efforts in designing and implementing technical solutions, define enterprise-level strategic technical methods, and lead program management endeavors until his recent early retirement.

Stemming from his early interest in environmental design, it was natural that Robert developed an affinity for Wright's architecture. He first learned of Wright as an undergraduate. One of his professors at UWGB was a classically trained architect in the style of Mies van der Rohe, a pioneer of modern architecture. The professor took his students to Chicago to visit the Federal Center (a monument to Rohe's maxim,



A photo that Robert took of Edgar Kaufmann's desk in his study illustrates the customized features of the built-in furniture to accommodate the views.

"Less is more.") and Wright's Frederick C. Robie House, considered the pinnacle of his Prairie-style architecture. Later, while traveling with a friend during his time at Penn State, Robert saw a road sign for Fallingwater and insisted they stop. He became a Fallingwater member that day and has maintained his support for more than 20 years. He returns regularly for tours, as he feels "there is always something new to discover." He has also collected several first editions of Wright-authored books as well as a copy of Wright's portfolio "Buildings Plans and Designs by Frank Lloyd Wright."

Robert appreciates how Wright was able to make Fallingwater feel like "...it had always been part of the landscape. The integration of form into

function is so impressive and awe-inspiring. The way simple aspects of everyday life are designed particularly for a room like the desk designed to accommodate a corner window in Edgar Kaufmann's study. Or, the rock face coming out of the floor of the living room... it has been there for tens of thousands of years but appears that Wright placed it there with great purpose and that it could have been placed nowhere else."

Architectural preservation is important to him, and he feels that too many of Wright's works have already disappeared. Beyond his annual membership support, Robert enjoys the opportunity to give to special projects like the Fallingwater windows endowment and the conservation of Fallingwater's original architectural drawings. He has also decided to include Fallingwater in his estate plans because he feels strongly about making a lasting impact to ensure Fallingwater will be around for future generations to enjoy.

When asked if there is anything else he'd like to share, Robert offered this:

"I would tell people to take a 'behind-the-scenes' tour. In that way, you will find out about what really goes on, see the secret sauce, the works behind the curtain. Determine what the organization's true needs are and learn more about how the organization spends the money you are donating. Your eyes will be opened wide and you can be an informed member."

We're so glad that Robert's path led him to Fallingwater, and we are grateful for his commitment to its preservation. 🌿

Conserving our Wildest Landscapes

Restoring Water Quality and Aquatic Passage

The Pennsylvania Wilds in the northcentral part of the state is an outdoor recreation destination celebrated for its wealth of forests, streams and wildlife.

The region encompasses more than two million acres of public lands over a dozen counties with 29 state parks, 50 state game lands, eight state forests, the Allegheny National Forest and two Wild and Scenic Rivers, the Clarion and the Allegheny. Some of its notable statistics include the largest wild elk herd in the northeast, the oldest and tallest trees in the state, and even some of the darkest skies in the world at Cherry Springs State Park where “10,000 stars can be viewed with the naked eye.”

The Conservancy’s Elk County office in Ridgway serves the Upper Allegheny and West Branch Susquehanna regions to protect public land, streams and rivers with regional partners. Watershed projects focus on improving aquatic habitat and can include abandoned mine drainage (AMD) remediation, stream bank improvements and riparian (streamside) plantings. The Conservancy has also created safe public access to streams for recreation, with 28 access locations added or improved in that region to date. This work is made possible through WPC’s Canoe Access Development Fund.

Although WPC has been enhancing or restoring rivers and streams in the PA Wilds region since 2010, in recent years staff have completed more than 1,500 assessments of road-stream intersections to evaluate the ability of fish and other aquatic life



One of the bridges WPC and partners built to replace deficient culverts on the Middle Fork East Branch Clarion River on State Game Lands 25, reconnecting 12 miles of stream.

to travel along streams, and worked with stakeholders to improve stream connectivity at 15 locations. They just completed work in the Middle Fork watershed of East Branch Clarion River in Elk County in partnership with the regional conservation district. This project began in 2018 with assessments of every culvert interrupting Middle Fork on State Game Lands 25. The culverts were replaced with bridges to completely restore fish passage to the entire 12 miles of stream in the watershed.

The next WPC project in the region is the construction of an AMD treatment system on West Creek in Saint Marys in Elk County. This AMD treatment system will collect multiple discharges impacting West Creek and treat them using passive systems to neutralize acidity and remove metals. The discharge water will flow through a series of ponds that use a mixture of compost, wood chips and limestone to treat the acidic water. The Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation recently funded this work, and construction is anticipated to begin in early 2025. 🌱

Rewarding Work in the PA Wilds



Watershed staff Kylie Maland and Luke Bobnar (center) accepted the award for Conservation Stewardship at the PA Wilds Champion Awards.

Each year the PA Wilds Center, a nonprofit that promotes conservation integrated with economic development initiatives in this region, recognizes individuals, organizations or communities through “The Champion of the Pennsylvania Wilds Awards.” WPC’s watershed conservation program was honored to be the recipient of the PA Wilds Conservation Stewardship Champion Award at a ceremony in July.

Awards are based on contributions in the past year that have helped grow and sustainably develop outdoor recreation and nature tourism in the PA Wilds, helping to “create jobs, diversify local economies, inspire stewardship and improve quality of life.” Congratulations to all of WPC’s staff working in the PA Wilds for their hard work in protecting and improving water quality in this region.

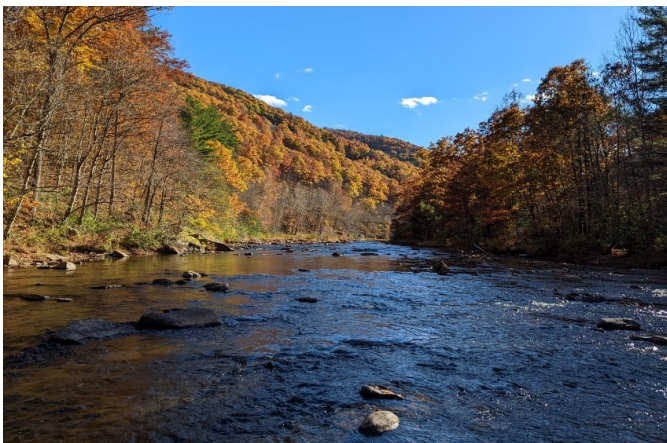
The newly protected 1,495-acre addition to Moshannon State Forest maintains connection within one of the largest tracts of unfragmented forest in the state.



Maintaining Forest Connectivity



The Elk County property consists of hilltops and steep slopes, mature forests and significant riparian areas.



A 1.25-mile stretch along the Bennett Branch Sinnemahoning Creek is now protected, especially important due to the riparian forest's unique species composition (property is to the left of the creek).

This summer, WPC conveyed 1,495 forested acres in the Bennett Branch Valley in Benezet Township, Elk County to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to become part of Moshannon State Forest. The property, in the heart of elk country in the PA Wilds, is an important connection within one of the largest tracts of unfragmented forest in the state. It has frontage along the Bennett Branch Sinnemahoning Creek, and Johnson Run, a Class A Wild Trout stream, flows through it. The property is within the viewshed of the Elk Country Visitor Center in Benezet, and is open for public recreation such as hiking, wildlife watching, fishing and hunting. The PA Wilds' recreational opportunities attract seven million people each year, worth a stunning \$1.85 billion in tourism income.

Earlier this year, WPC was involved in the Clarion Junction Conservation Easement, in which 19,800 acres along the Clarion River in Elk County and Kinzua Creek in McKean County were placed under easement, the largest in our history. This project connects state forest, game land and the Allegheny National Forest while keeping the property on the tax rolls.

The Conservancy owns and manages two preserves in Elk County that are open to the public: Bennett Branch Forest, comprising 1,465 acres and a 3.6-mile hiking trail, and a small gem of a property, the 24-acre Blakeslee Recreation Area, a mature floodplain forest with public access to Bennett Branch Sinnemahoning Creek.

For more information about our properties, visit:
WaterLandLife.org/land-conservation/explore-our-preserves

Western Pennsylvania
Conservancy



800 WATERFRONT DRIVE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15222

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
PITTSBURGH, PA
PERMIT NO. 2504



Autumn is a magical time
to visit Fallingwater!

Visit [Fallingwater.org](https://fallingwater.org) or call Visitor Services
at 724-329-8501 to book your tour today.

Imagine – and Create – Your Legacy

**Estate gifts have helped the Conservancy
withstand all kinds of challenges.**

Over several decades, legacy gifts have supported land acquisition and the ongoing care of these protected landscapes, endowed beloved community gardens and preserved Fallingwater and its collections. The great thing about planned giving is that donors of all financial means can easily include WPC, or one of its programs, in their wills or trusts — and make a big impact.

What moves you to be a donor today? You can continue supporting the work you love by including the Conservancy in your estate plans.

For more information about naming the Conservancy in your will, contact Julie Holmes, senior director of development, at 412-586-2312 or jholmes@paconserve.org.

Tiadaghton State Forest in Lycoming County

Mission Statement: The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. The Conservancy creates green spaces and gardens, contributing to the vitality of our cities and towns, and preserves Fallingwater, a symbol of people living in harmony with nature.