



## HERITAGE CIRCLE

# Love of a Native Landscape: Charles and Sandra Romesburg



Shoreline along the Casselman River, part of the property that the Romesburgs helped protect

Thirty-five acres of a quiet forest stretches along a crescent-shaped mile of the Casselman River in Somerset County, across the water from the Great Allegheny Passage. From his home in Utah more than 1,800 miles away, Charles Romesburg likes to imagine what is going on there. Maybe the area is covered in snow, the animals that live there are hunting for food or bedding down in their burrows. One thing that he knows for certain on any day is that he has ensured that this bit of forest will always be wild and will always provide essential habitat for wildlife. Charles and his wife, Sandra, are sure of this because they helped the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy protect this land in perpetuity.

"I could think of it as my property—that's the way I like to think of it, because if I hadn't done that, it wouldn't be protected," he explains.

Charles and Sandra have lived out West for six decades, but the love of a native place stays with some people no matter the span of time or how geographically distant the landscape.

Charles is a distinguished professor now retired from the Department of Environment and Society at Utah State University. His expertise centered on statistical aspects of environmental science. He has been researching, writing and teaching about nature and science his whole career, so preserving a forest is very gratifying to him.

"What I wanted was a group that would let me put my money in and get a physical piece of land," he explains. He is pleased that his current support and legacy plans ensure that "critters are living life on their own terms," especially in the region where he grew up.

Charles's life path has taken him a long way from Uniontown, Pa. where his mother raised him after his father passed away when he was just five years old. His mother operated a hair salon from her home to be available when he got home from school. His paternal grandfather, who owned the Nash car dealership Romesburg Motors in Uniontown, played a major role in his life. The pair took regular Sunday drives to his great-uncle's farm in nearby Somerset to "break in" new vehicles delivered to the dealership. Since breaking in new cars required driving 600 miles, he and his grandfather toured the countryside extensively. He spent a lot of time in the Laurel Highlands, including Bear Run Nature Reserve.



Charles Romesburg

Charles went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Lafayette College in Easton, Pa. and a master's degree in Nuclear Engineering from the University of Arizona. He met Sandra, who is from the Harrisburg area, when they worked together at Westinghouse's astronuclear

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facility in Large, Pa. The couple moved to Utah when Charles took a teaching post at Utah State University upon his graduation from the University of Pittsburgh where he earned a PhD in Operations Research.

The Romesburgs became members of the Conservancy in 1970. In 2017, they began designating gifts to purchase and permanently protect land and subsequently have included the Conservancy in their estate plans. They also support animal protection organizations – they have great compassion for living creatures. Charles isn't materialistic; he feels a sense of responsibility to use his money to help accomplish what needs to be done.

He truly values the permanence of land protection: "When my heart stops beating, that's the end of me, but in protecting land, I've done something that can't be extinguished; a part of me will live on."

The Romesburgs also appreciate that they are able to be precise about how their gifts will be used: specifically for forested property; wetland areas that are along bird migratory paths; additions to Bear Run Nature Reserve; land near Ohiopyle State Park and in the Susquehanna River basin; or for properties in other regions with high biodiversity. They have designated that fishing, but not hunting, is allowed on these properties.

It's very possible that Charles's grandfather, who showed him so much of the beauty of Western Pennsylvania, took him fishing on the Casselman River or one of its tributaries. Now a piece of this world will remain intact, changed only by the cycles of nature, for future generations of people and wild creatures to experience — thanks to Charles and Sandra Romesburg.

## Welcome to the Heritage Circle

We are pleased to welcome William Stevens and Karen F. Delmonico who recently joined the Heritage Circle.

## Ultimate Legacies

We are deeply grateful to Alice C. Young, whose legacy is supporting the Conservancy's mission. We received her bequest this year.



View of the Youghiogheny Gorge

## What exceptional place do you want future generations to experience, just as you have?

The Heritage Circle is a group of forward-thinking people who have chosen to dedicate their legacy to protecting Western Pennsylvania's exceptional places.

Gifts to the Conservancy designated through estate plans have protected threatened habitats and the plants and wildlife that depend on them. Estate gifts help care for Fallingwater, support community garden plantings each spring and ensure the preservation of Western Pennsylvania's watersheds and scenic landscapes. Imagine what your legacy could be!

For information about joining the Heritage Circle, please call **Julie Holmes, director of development** at **412-586-2312** or **jholmes@paconserve.org**



# Hellbenders, bats and mudpuppies...oh my!

The onset of spring awakens WPC scientists from their deep, data-crunching concentration and allows them to move purposely out into the field, forest, cave and river. Here's a brief look at a few species they're studying this year.

## Hellbenders in the Yough



WPC, in collaboration with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and local river guides, will be exploring the middle and lower reaches of the Youghiogheny River this summer to locate hidden populations of hellbenders, a large aquatic salamander. This will be the first time that this river has been systematically searched for this elusive species.

DCNR will supply drift boats, safety gear and local boat captains and WPC will provide the scientific expertise for the surveys. The Ohio State Park staff's knowledge of that stretch of the Yough is extremely important to a logistically difficult project like this. Local boat captains will navigate the river, stopping at promising areas for WPC staff to conduct the surveys. To find hellbenders, WPC scientists will manually lift large flat rocks from the river bottom (often the size of car hoods), while surveys of deeper waters require the use of SCUBA gear. This project will highlight the importance of this species within the park and to a larger extent, the state.

## Bat Cave Update

Bat conservation is especially important as the fungal white-nose syndrome has drastically impacted populations of bats throughout the region. Bats require at least two ounces of fat to sustain them while hibernating. During this time, they wake up about every 15 days. When a bat has white-nose



syndrome, it wakes continuously and burns up its caloric reserves, leading to starvation. Larger colonies of bats have survived deeper in caves where the air is cooler, allowing them to preserve their fat reserves longer.

In late 2017 the Conservancy protected 13 acres along the popular trout stream Spruce Creek in Franklin Township (Huntington County) that also includes a limestone cave. The privately-owned cave had been open to the public for commercial tours from the 1960s until it closed operations in 2014. At one time the cave had provided shelter for bats, including the federally endangered Indiana bat. Over the last year, the State Game Commission worked to improve habitat for hibernating bats. This includes cooling the cave from its previous 53 degrees to between 35 and 42 degrees – the optimal temperature for hibernation. Contractors replaced the solid entrance door to the cave with steel bars and bored a hole into an upper cave wall to allow cool air to flow into the cave and warmer air to exit.

Last year only two bats of two species were discovered in the cave, but this February researchers from the Game Commission found 10 individual bats of four species. This is an early, but promising, sign that the habitat is improving. The Conservancy plans to transfer the property to the Fish and Boat Commission in the near future.

## Mudpuppies and Mussels



Mudpuppies are aquatic salamanders that are sometimes mistaken for hellbenders, but they have smooth skin and external gills, and they only grow to about 12 inches (about half the size of hellbenders). WPC staff is conducting a survey of mudpuppy distribution in the Pittsburgh region in the lower Allegheny and upper Ohio rivers. Mudpuppies are the only hosts for salamander mussel larvae, which attach to their gills as parasites until the mussels grow into juveniles. The researchers are collecting data to determine if salamander mussels are low due to gaps in mudpuppy distribution. Using SCUBA gear in areas of the Ohio River less than 30 feet deep, scientists will also study the distribution of freshwater mussels, including salamander mussel.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



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## Please bear with us!

The Conservancy is currently shifting to new database software to improve our donor service capabilities. We're working to make this transition as seamless as possible, but if your name, address or any other information is incorrect at any time, please let us know by sending an email to [development@paconserve.org](mailto:development@paconserve.org) or calling 1-866-564-6972.

**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.

## Join us for Members' Day on Saturday, May 4, to celebrate our members — because we can't do it without you!

Get to know WPC staff and the work that we do throughout the region. Enjoy guided hikes, information sessions and free tours of Fallingwater. Shop the native plant sale. Bring a picnic or purchase lunch (*reservations are required - \$18 for ages 11+*).

Visit <https://waterlandlife.org/membersday2019/> to register, or call 1-866-564-6972.

Stay tuned for future member events, including hikes at Toms Run in Allegheny County and the Bennett Branch Forest in Elk County.

Not a member, or need to renew? Call **Kathy Patrignani** at 412-586-2340 or join or renew online at [www.waterlandlife.com](http://www.waterlandlife.com).

