

FULL CIRCLE

How a well-matched intention preserved a beloved landscape

Land conservation requires patience, with opportunities sometimes falling into place like a jigsaw puzzle over a course of years, and even decades. Gifts from estates also have their own timing, beginning with a personal intention to leave the world a better place, even after an individual's own lifetime. When events synchronize, it is often the generosity of Heritage Circle members that gives us the ability to act quickly when a conservation opportunity arises.

In January, the Conservancy purchased a 105-acre forested property on the western slope of Buffalo Mountain in Londonderry Township, Bedford County. The acquisition protects about a mile of ridgeline that is visible for miles along State Route 96 between Manns Choice and Hyndman. The property, purchased from a local family, was conveyed to the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) to become part of the 11,000-acre State Game Land 48.

A large portion of the funding was made possible through an estate gift from Evergreen and Heritage Circle members James and Eleanor Thomas, who passed away within a month of each other in 2016 and whose generous bequest was received in late 2019.

The Thomases had designated funds for land protection in Bedford County through their will, and coincidentally this forested property is less than five miles from their beloved former home in Hyndman. From conversations they had with Conservancy staff years before, we can just imagine that they would have loved the contribution that they made to the protection of this familiar landscape.

The Thomases were first introduced to the Conservancy through their annual bike trips in Ohiopyle and visits to Fallingwater. James worked for B&O Railroad for more than 40 years, retiring as a passenger engineer who had



Eleanor and James Thomas

regularly traveled from Cumberland, Md. to Washington, D.C. Eleanor was a secretary and bookkeeper in the insurance and real estate industry. They both loved the outdoors and gardening, tending to their landscape filled with native plants like ferns and rhododendrons.

Continued

The scenic view from the Buffalo Mountain property



How a well-matched intention preserved a beloved landscape *(continued)*

When discussing their plans to include WPC in their will, Eleanor emphasized they were not wealthy, but just really loved their land and wanted to give money to an organization that feels the same way about land protection. They told the story of how they had been concerned for the woods that bordered their backyard, that some of the trees were more than 150 years old. When a portion of that property went up for sale, they purchased what they could to preserve the woods, even paying a higher market price based on the value of the timber, which of course, they never intended to harvest. They viewed this as their first small-scale land protection contribution.

As for the Buffalo Mountain property that their estate helped to protect, the property and surrounding landscape host several species of conservation concern such as the Allegheny woodrat, timber rattlesnake, golden-winged warbler and several bat species, including the globally-imperiled tricolored bat. Because of this, the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program recognizes the area as a globally significant natural heritage area, and therefore the PGC will manage the property with the protection of these species in mind.

It is truly a fitting tribute to James and Eleanor Thomas, whose story illustrates how a good intention and the right plan can make a positive impact for the future. 🌿

The rocky slopes are important habitat for several species of concern, like Allegheny woodrat and timber rattlesnake.



Photo credit: Mark R. Johnson

The golden-winged warbler is one of the species of conservation concern that can be found on this property.



We're grateful to all of the Heritage Circle Members who have included the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in their estate plans.

We are pleased to welcome the following people who have recently told us of their intentions:

Diana Austin and Sandy Altman
Steven L. Cox
David Glick
George M. Golvash
John and Dorothy Rust

We are deeply grateful to the following donors whose planned gifts have been received by the Conservancy since November 2021:

H. Charles Romesburg
Malcolm Strachan
Ruth Wilder



Make an Impact Today with your IRA's Required Minimum Distribution


Are you deciding what to do with your 2022 Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your retirement account?

If you are 70½ or older, you may be able to give up to \$100,000 of your RMD directly from your IRA to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (and may designate Fallingwater or any other program) — without having to pay income tax on the money. This type of gift — called a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) — could satisfy all or part of your 2022 RMD if made before December 31.

Important points to keep in mind:

- The IRA account holder must be 70½ or older at the time the distribution is made.
- Distributions are limited to \$100,000 per individual per year and must be transferred directly from the IRA custodian to the Conservancy.
- Distributions can only be directed from a traditional or Roth IRA (not from a retirement plan such as a 401(k), 403(b), etc.).
- Gifts must be received by December 31 to count towards your 2022 RMD.

We encourage you to consult your financial advisor to determine if this opportunity is right for you.

If you have any questions about IRA rollovers or other charitable gift opportunities, please contact Julie Holmes at **412-586-2312** or jholmes@paconserve.org. 

Look for your postcard with registration information for these April events.

Virtual Annual Members' Meeting and Update

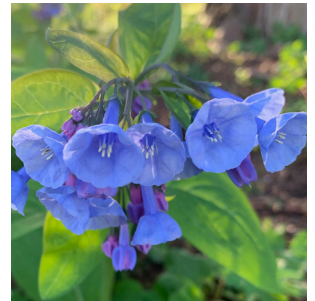
Thursday, May 5 | 12:00 p.m. EDT

Join Tom Saunders, President and CEO, for a virtual Annual Meeting and Update on Zoom. Staff will present program highlights of 2021 and the annual financial summary. Find out how your support makes an impact across our region by greening communities, protecting land, water and wildlife and caring for Fallingwater.

Spring Members' Hike Jennings Environmental Education Center

Butler County | Saturday, April 30

Hike with WPC naturalists to find spring wildflowers. Learn about this 300-acre state park originally protected by WPC that includes a unique 20-acre prairie ecosystem.



Multiple hike times available beginning at 8:30 a.m.

Visit WaterLandLife.org/webinars and Fallingwater.org/events in April to register for the following events:

WPC Webinar: Mussels and Watershed Conservation

Earth Day | Friday, April 22 | 12:00 p.m. EDT

Join the Conservancy's science staff for a fascinating talk about our work involving freshwater mussels in our region's rivers and streams. And, learn how you can help.

Fallingwater Webinar: Beauty, Neuroscience and Architecture

Tuesday, April 26 | 12:00 p.m. EDT

Join Donald Ruggles, AIA, practicing architect and CEO of Ruggles Mabe Studio, as he explores how beauty can and does make a vital difference in our lives, including improving many aspects of our health. Ruggles suggests that a new, urgent effort is needed to refocus the direction of architecture and art to include the quality of beauty as a fundamental, overarching theme in two of humanity's most important fields of endeavor—the built and artistic environments.

Are you interested in receiving monthly e-newsletters and digital invitations to WPC events?

Please provide your email address to stay up to date by emailing members@paconservancy.org.



Western Pennsylvania
Conservancy



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Fallingwater is stunning in every season and there are so many ways to experience it.

Choose from a variety of tours
at fallingwater.org/visit

Tree planting season has begun!

Last year TreeVitalize and the Pittsburgh Redbud Project planted 1,096 street trees in communities and along rivers and trails, bringing the total to more than 38,100 trees since 2008. Each tree the Conservancy plants is hand-picked in local nurseries by our staff. This spring we'll plant trees in nearly 20 communities.

We are seeking volunteers for spring plantings in areas including McKeesport, Point Breeze North and Wilkinsburg. Interested in volunteering? Visit WaterLandLife.org/volunteer for more information.



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.