

Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy

Conserving and enhancing the lands and waters of Northcentral PA



Fall 2021



Frantz Road Conservation Easement

Farm Fields and Forests Along Frantz Road Conserved

When their mom passed away two siblings who grew up on the family farm in eastern Lycoming County wanted to do what they could to conserve the farm they grew up on. Dan is the oldest, but when he moved off the farm Marty took on his chores. She helped their parents with the fields and the hay and the repairs needed on the buildings.

While they haven't worked the farm for a number of years and the fields were leased to a neighbor they thought the property should continue to be used for agriculture. The rolling fields on top have been in row crops for a number of years now, and sidehill pastures have reverted to trees and shrubs.

Quite a bit of the fields are "Soils of Statewide Importance." This is a designation used by the Natural Resource Conservation Service and PA Department of Agriculture for soils that are important for producing food, forage, or fiber. While their Dad had a dairy herd for a number of years, he converted to being entirely row crops and hay about 60 years ago.

It's not just the farm fields and soils that have conservation value on the farm. There are several small runs on the property.

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Plunketts Creek Connected to Its Floodplain (and Using It)

We've talked a lot about the project at Plunketts Creek. NPC worked with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, a United States Army Reserve Unit, and numerous other partners to remove an earthen berm along Plunketts Creek at State Game Lands 134. The site is near the village of Proctor, about 1.7 miles from the confluence of Plunketts Creek with Loyalsock Creek.

The berm was over 2,200 feet long and was constructed to protect the birds (first turkeys then pheasants) being raised when the property was managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission as a propagation farm.

The project got started because NPC was given funding for a water quality improvement project in Lycoming County. The funds weren't tied to any specific water designation (impaired, high-wquality, etc.) or limited to a specific watershed.

NPC sat down with the Conservation District, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to discuss various needs in the County that couldn't be met with current funding programs.

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Farm Fields... *continued from page 1*

They are unnamed tributaries to Sugar Run which is a tributary to Muncy Creek. Sugar Run is a Cold Water Fishery. The CWF designation means its clean, cold (obviously) water that has all the right conditions for support a group of fish that includes trout. By managing the fields and woods with soil conservation in mind, the water can continue to support trout and other cold water aquatic life.

Thank you to Dan and Marty for working with us and helping to conserve some of the lands and waters in the region.



Farm land conservation project along Frantz road



Forest conservation project along Frantz road

Board Member Review

When there's time and space in the newsletter we know it's important to review things we sometimes take for granted our members will know. There's space this fall, so we want to review with you who is on the Board and who the officers currently are:

Jonathan Bastian, Vice-Chair	Chris Kenyon
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Stream Partnership Construction Season Wrapped Up

The stream partners continued to work at a steady pace through July and August. September got a little wet and soggy.

The group did more work on Beaver Run (Montour County), Limestone Run (Northumberland County), and Hemlock Creek (Columbia County). But the rain in September slowed things down and by the end of the month things were too wet for anything to move ahead.

The series of rain events in September had NPC and partners out visiting sites and checking on past projects.

Once we hit mid-September we start to discuss sites and whether we can proceed. There are restrictions on when some streams can be worked on. Trout and some other fish spawn in the fall so we don't want to interfere with that.

The other issue as the year progresses is leaving enough time for the grass seed to germinated and grass to grow where we disturb the soil. We want vegetation established within a couple weeks of a project wrapping up. If we go too late into the fall the amount of daylight and soil temperatures become issues for getting the seed to germinate.

Appreciating Property Easements

By Sara Street

"Hello," From Sara Street, Land Stewardship Specialist. "I have enjoyed visiting easements this year. What wonderful landscapes Northcentral Pennsylvania has to offer. NPC's members and donors allow landowners to ask questions and have conversations about conservation easements. This is a voluntary land conservation tool that NPC's members make possible in our region. Thanks for placing easements on your properties." This is me at the Viani Easement."



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Appreciating Property Easements *By Sara Street continued from page 2*



Van Horn Easement this spring looking into a vernal pool. It is amazing, this year I am still hearing tree frogs peeping in the woods as I walk around looking at easement sites. Thanks for conserving sites for invertebrates to thrive.



Kohler Easement. There were about four different fern species covering the ground layer at this easement this fall. This is a welcome sight if you compare it to sites that are over-run with Japanese stiltgrass and other invasive plants.



Spicebush, **Lindera benzoin**, one of my all-time favorite native plants. This plant is deer resistant, can tolerate a range of soil types, thrives in shade and moist soils, the branch structure is v-shaped, it ranges in size to about 6' x 6', and has bright yellow fall foliage. There are male and female plants. The female plants get bright red berries in the fall. But, get a photo quick before the birds swallow them up! (Viani Easement)



Smooth blue aster, **Aster laevis**, is blooming now in your Northcentral Pennsylvania woods and meadows. This is a wonderful sight alongside the fall foliage colors. (Viani Easement)



Oak Meadow Easement in Muncy looking south towards Bald Eagle Mountain. This view is the reason why we conserve easements. Thank you!



Blackwell easement this past July. What a wonderful site and access to Pine Creek. Thank you!



Plunketts Creek Connected... *continued from page 1*

One of the ideas tossed out was removing the berm at State Game Lands 134 and reconnecting Plunketts Creek to its floodplain.

Since the property is no longer used to raise birds, the Game Commission was open to the berm being removed. The berm caused high water to push into private properties across the Creek from the State Game Lands. Because of the berm, the speed of the water during high water events became faster as Plunketts Creek turned a corner and was pinched between a hillside and the berm. This added speed increased the damage downstream. Since the water was moving faster it would wash away more soil.

Removing the berm would also re-connect the stream to its floodplain. Having a stream connected to its floodplain provides a lot of value to communities and the ecosystem.

When a stream can spread out across its floodplain during high water events it reduces the flood impacts both upstream and downstream. If a stream is constricted, in this case by the berm, the water raises up higher and may back-up, adding to the damage upstream landowners experience.

Water flows to the lowest point. With the berm gone, the lowest point is now on the State Game Lands. Before this, highwaters would push into neighboring properties.

Another advantage of floodplains is they can act like a big sponge. Water that flows over a floodplain will drop out excess sediment, or dirt. Plus, with water spreading out across the floodplain and flowing slowly, there will be more time for water to absorb into the groundwater system.

The groundwater system stores water and slowly releases it over time. Plunketts Creek is designated as a High Quality-Cold Water Fishery with Naturally Reproducing Trout. The researchers from Susquehanna University who sampled fish and sediment before the project found natural spring entering the stream through out their study reach.

The springs provide cold, clean water to Plunketts Creek. This is critical to the trout during the summer months. A "shot" of cold water from a spring can make all the difference in trout, and the macroinvertebrates they eat, surviving.

Another value to Plunketts Creek having access to its floodplain on State Game Lands 134 is the habitat it provides. During high water events, the slower flowing water in the floodplain is a refuge for smaller fish. These fish move out of the main channel and stay in the floodplain where the water is moving slower and they don't get washed away.

Over time, the floodplain should also attract a variety of birds

that utilize the wet-dry cycle for some purpose (usually food). The vegetation should change too becoming more flood tolerant species that like having "wet feet" (roots that are wet or in water).

There's also the advantage of people having access to the floodplain. If people can use the floodplain, they can also use the stream. Whether that's for fishing, bird watching, or just listening to the water flow by.

The project had about a month to settle in before it was tested. The neighbor's rain gauge gathered 6-inches when the remnants of Hurricane Ida passed through (September 22 and 23).

Plunketts Creek went up, and went out into its floodplain on the State Game Lands!!!

The storm deposited sandy sediment and some areas of small gravel on the floodplain. As the water levels dropped the Creek receded back into its channel.

Here is a "photo album" of highlights...



Susquehanna University's Freshwater Research Institute electrofished, grabbed macroinvertebrates, and also took samples of the substrate at State Game Lands 134 in June 2020 and June 2021. The researchers want to track how the streambed and fish habitat change over time.



The Army Reserve Unit used removing the berm as a training exercise. Less experienced soldiers removed the bulk of the berm, but left an edge (you can see it here in front of the dozer). The more experienced operators came back through to remove the edge and get the site to its final grade.



The 1st Platoon of the 333rd Engineering Unit arrived on August 1 and pulled out on August 21. Through the Innovative Readiness Training program the unit brought their equipment and used the project as a training exercise and skill building workshops. As the local host we (NPC and the PA Game Commission) had to provide lodging, access to showers, and 1 meal a day. By partnering with American Legion Post 104 – Eugene Grafius and Loyalsock Creek Men’s Club we were able to provide keep the soldiers well fed. The Foundation for Pennsylvania’s Watersheds, Loyalsock Creek Watershed Association, and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission provided funds towards erosion and sediment control and the costs to survey the site after the berm was gone to verify the required grade was achieved. Members of some groups stopped by one night and SFC Bleiler explained how the project was being used for training purposes and to achieve training goals.



During their time on site the soldiers moved over 1,500 loads (they had 10 ton and 20 ton dump trucks) of material from the berm to either the Camp Mountain Road project or the spoil piles on site. The loader didn’t get much of a break.



Camp Mountain Road was incised, the road bed was lower than the berms along the side. Water would run on the road instead of draining off the road. The Platoon made over 500 trips with material from the berm to Camp Mountain Road. Due to wet weather that moved in, the PA Game Commission’s Food and Cover Crew had to finish the road project, but the material was on the mountain for them to work with.



The soldiers also used the hydroseeder (being set up here) to spray a mixture of water, seed, and mulch (ground up newsprint) in the areas where the grass had been removed. Spraying it takes less time than a lot of other methods, and the newspaper helps the seed “stick” in places where there are a lot of rocks.



Before



After

Here is a before and after. The shrub along the Creek and the trees in the background are your markers for seeing the change. Now that the berm is gone You’d never know it had been there.

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Plunketts Creek Connected...

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A lot of people would look at this photo and think, "oh no! That's awful." This is a photo the neighbor took during the rains from Hurricane Ida. Instead of the private property flooding Plunketts Creeks was using its floodplain on State Game Lands. When the berm was in place it would have been about 5-feet high here (see the photo of Trent holding the survey rod "on top" of the berm) and the Creek would have pushed into the neighbors yard. With the berm gone, the Creek can use its floodplain again!



This is a photo from Thursday, September 23, 2021. The PA Game Commission's Food and Cover crew stopped in to see how things were doing. It's actually the same trees as in the neighbor's photo just from the opposite direction. This is what Plunketts Creek should do.



Here's some of the fresh sediment (soil) that settled in. As the flood waters spread out, they slow down in speed. As the water slows down, the sediment has a chance to settle out.

This sediment, or dirt and sand, provides a base for grass and plants to grow. A lot of Plunketts Creek has rocky edges. Getting plant material back along the Creek will provide a filter to keep sediment out of the Creek (think about future rain storms washing dirt across the surface) and that vegetation helps to slow down flood waters a little more.

We often talk about sediment filled water as looking like chocolate milk. Think about stirring powder into a glass of milk to make chocolate milk. As the milk stops twirling around, some of the powder will settle into the bottom of the glass if it's given a chance to sit.

Thank you to NPC's members for providing the resources that allowed staff to pursue this somewhat crazy idea. This was a monumental project and was only possible because of persistence and long-term commitment. NPC's members allow projects to move forward and staff to explore funding streams and strategies. Thank you!

Lycoming College Economics Major Interning at NPC (Yes, Economics, Not Ecology)

My name is Joe Seck; I am a Junior at Lycoming College, majoring in managerial economics. I am from Sussex County, New Jersey. After graduating high school, I was looking for a smaller school with a close-knit community, and I ended up finding Lycoming College and falling in love with it. The atmosphere around campus seemed super friendly and not to mention the beauty of the area.

During the accursed 2020, I got back into hiking and picked up my love for nature, so it just means a lot more to me now that I am interning at the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy. I am very grateful for the chance that I have been given to get real-world work experience. I've found that everyone that I have met so far is super friendly and helpful. During one of my trips to a restoration project where surveying was done, it was very exciting just how much work goes into conserving just one piece of land. While the time I have spent here has been limited due to being a full-time student, I feel like I have already learned a lot, and I am very excited to learn more as I continue my internship.

NPC Intern Joe Seck





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the work of the Northcentral
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Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy

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Thank You!

We tried not once, not twice, but three times to celebrate everything accomplished in the last 30 years through NPC's members. It wasn't meant to be, but we'd like to thank the sponsors who stuck with us for the rescheduling, rescheduling, and ultimately, cancellation:



Lycoming College Clean Water Institute