



# Conservation and Stewardship Forum REPORT

Wednesday March 10, 2010 7:00 - 8:30 P.M.  
South Coventry Township Building

## Participants

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Jim Barker	Township Supervisor	Owen Prusack	Park Superintendent - Warwick Park
Millie Donnell	South Coventry Township	Amy Walker Gorham	South Coventry Township Vice Chair, OREO Board
John Burgos	Dame Julianna League Fly Fishers	John Hoekstra	Green Valleys Association
Cathie Whitlock	South Coventry Open Space, Recreation and Environment Oversight Board – Chair OREO	Harriet Stone	W. Vincent EAC Open Space Com. – Green Valleys Assoc.
Sara Shick	WV Twp. Planning Commission – VW Land Trust	Grant DeCosta	Chester County Dept. – Open Space Preservation
Charles Jacob	Warwick Township	Christine McNeil	French & Pickering Creek Conservation Trust
Edie Shean-Hammond	NPS	Bob Williams	Chester Co. Parks & Recreation
Meade Rudasill	West Pikeland Land Trust		
Planning Team			
Michelle Brummer	Gannett Fleming, Inc.	Ann Toole	TRP

## Agenda

1. Welcome, Introductions, and About the Plan –Michelle Brummer presented information about the project planning team and the Northern Chester County Federation consultant selection process.
2. Forum Discussion – Participants engaged in a discussion about the challenges and opportunities regarding the conservation and stewardship of natural resources in Northern Chester County.

## Discussion Results

**“Bumper Stickers” – Participants produced words for a bumper sticker that would best describe their organization’s purpose, goals or mission.**

- Land Matters
- Preservation (Sense of Natural Resources, Culture, Place, Heritage)
- Funding Preservation, Making Parks Permanent
- Keep West Vincent Green

- Quality Environment = Quality of Life (Note: Suggested Three Times)
- Water Quality = Quality of Life
- Promote Fly Fishing Fun
- Explore Nature, Heritage and Community
- Continue Expanding Trails
- Preserve, Promote, and Protect Land Conservation and Use
- Preserve and Protect Our Natural and Cultural Heritage for enjoyment of current and future generations “we’re making it in America”
- Connect to Nature, Heritage and Community
- Protect Our watershed
- Preserve Hopewell Big Woods

### **Conservation and Stewardship Programs in Place**

- Hopewell Big Woods is 72,000 acres – almost the whole area here in Hopewell Big Woods. Problem is that people don’t know what Hopewell Big Woods is. Groups agreed that it would take time and successes long the way to advance the identity.
- French and Pickering Creek Trust does annual inspections of easements. They talk with the landowners about steps they can take to protect and conserve their land with the easement. The Trust conducts trips and tours for landowners such as to Longwood Gardens. They do special events and education in a fun and casual way. Parties hosted by landowners that have eased their properties inviting others to attend who might consider easing their own land. It is a casual informal educational strategy that works. They show maps of persevered properties and relationships. Examples exist of property owners that are actually buying property to preserve (West Vincent). The outreach method is high touch and very community based with a “show and Do” philosophy.
- Chester County Heritage Program – Manage land and are involved with other organizations. Provide educational programs, examples of best management practices and consultation. Program it, practice it, and demonstrate it. Parks Department does education and outreach.
- We need to come up with numbers to prove what we do works and has value.
- Have some demonstration areas or projects.
- Have great signage.
- Warwick coordinates with Chester County, other municipalities and organizations in its conservation efforts. Coventry Woods project will results in 600 acres preserved.
- The Hill School and the Bentley tract are important land conservation projects.
- Need to educate new residents and elected officials about the value and assets of Northern Chester County.
- Crow’s Nest helps to get young participants involved in nature based experiences and fun activities.
- Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site has a host of programs for a range of ages. NPS staff has made a concerted effort to engage youth and diverse ethnicities in park activities and use. Engagement of the Latino community has resulted in participation among participants with ties to 13 Latin American countries. Programs include after school activities, summer camp, and art projects with high visibility to park visitors. (Note: Need to ask Edie for the “million dollar photo” perhaps from the art project. As a result, there is now a Latino historical aspect of Hopewell in place. Programs range all the way to a nationally important stonewall conservation education program in conjunction with a school in western Kentucky. Getting rid of fees really helped to increase park visitation and program

participation. Important to consider the demographics of the area. Eagle Scouts have helped on park projects including a health and fitness trail.

- Chester County provides grants and technical support through the Chester County open Space Program. This supports acquisition and development. The agricultural preservation program has helped to protect farmland. The County also is active in supporting trail planning and especially construction. Different partners take leads on various initiatives. The County is looking into the ability to change passive parks into active recreation areas. Chester County is undertaking a strategic planning process.
- West Pikeland did a survey that found overall support for open space preservation. The township has been a model of outreach. Supports and advocates discussions with all interests' not only like-minded conservationists. Communication with all interests is vital. The soccer field recently built helped to relieve pressure in the Township. Their Open Space referendum provided the "War Chest" the community needed to preserve land. Recommendations for success include the following steps: talk with the community, pursue and secure funding from a variety of sources, and network with groups such as the Natural Lands Trust (especially). Focus on connectivity. Use trails to show that they are community based connectors. There is a concerted effort in West Pikeland to get people to serve on multiple boards – works for communication and coordination of effort.
- Defining our constituency: Landowners, Residents (major groups), Supervisors, and various Township committees. Have very focused outreach. Focus on use and users such as kids being a major group: let's try to think bigger and beyond just things like soccer: how can you use soccer as their entre to other interests?
- West Vincent has a tree vitalize grants. Goal is to use signage to inform the public. Youth helped to clear trails, which was a highly visible project and result. The Township has a trails committee. Passed two referenda on the EIT and the property tax to support open space.
- People do recognize a split between new residents and long-term residents in terms of understanding about the nature of the area, land use, level of services and expectations. Politics and political action indicate different philosophies are in place.
- **Need to inform people about what is going on and where to do the activities. One stop shopping about what is available regionally. Coordination is needed for this.** Engage the OJR School District, the Cable Station. Engage people in educational and awareness building efforts about the value, history and resources of the region. The heritage landscape is vital. Need to make the case of the economic value of the region. Need to show people visually what they have and what the alternative would be. Need to promote opportunities and to get more visitations to important areas.
- Keying in on kids was a common theme throughout this discussion.
- Dame Juliana League Fly Fishers are champions by example. The organization makes improvements, mobilizes forces for initiatives such as stream bank stabilization. 120 members including 40 who are active. They provide labor to spread fish about the streams. Their home stream is the French Creek and are branching out to the Pickering Creek. All programs led to stewardship. Concern about losing many young anglers! The YMCA in Phoenixville teaches fly-fishing and also stream ecology.
- Community sports are a lot of work and require multiple partners and volunteers.
- Need to work out the parking issues at parks especially where there are sports fields.
- Green Valleys Association has taken on big issues successfully such as the Perrier case in which over 700 people turned out for a public meeting. Envirofest is a unique event in northern Chester County that brings together businesses and non-profits from the areas of sustainable watershed practices, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, land conservation, green building, energy efficiency, and environmental education. Educational and entertaining for adults and children. This year will feature live music, local microbrew tasting, fishing, workshops, demonstrations, and much more. In 2009 over

1,100 people attended. Stream Day Celebration generated over 40,000 pounds of trash. Will do the Schuylkill Scrub from the headwaters of the Delaware to Bartram's Garden from Mid April to Mid-May as a media event.

- Programs at Welkinweir: summer camp with 500 campers, school district outreach, pre-school programs, and library programs.
- Look into how to educate municipal officials and landowners on how to treat their land.
- Recognize that there is power through participation: getting people involved will connect them with efforts.
- South Coventry is focusing on Woody's Woods and the master plan underway. Will be working on the trail link to Hopewell Park and the Schuylkill River Trail. The Township would like to see the school district do a program on recycling as part of the curriculum. Was once part of the curriculum and gave 125 kids outdoor experiences annually. The OREO Board has an annual clean up day, Community Day and Recycling Day. A native plant exchange is part of the Community Day celebration.
- French & Pickering Creek Trust does the annual Iron Tour through Open Space preserved properties. Earth Day in Warwick Park. Hopewell Big Woods Teaching Trunk.

### **One Important Thing the Plan Could Do**

- It's all about the execution.
- Go to special interest groups such as Dame Juliana Fly-fishing League.
- Identify special interest groups and leaders. Decide what to undertake.
- Northern Chester County has more heart than anywhere – just witness all that has been protected, studied and enjoyed.
- What the Plan needs to do: rooted in community cooperation, connect citizens to the land, provide continuous connections, and be persistent. (Never give up: look at how Dick Whitlock turned 12 acres in to 300 acres of preserved land as Woody's Woods.) Work smart not harder. Be seamless in goals and engagement. Use variety of means of networking from the Internet to meetings, from socials to educational events. Make things fun to participate in. Develop and foster a regional brand: need a good name for Northern Chester County. Maintain Momentum. Capture the children as a way to reach adults. Do adult education and outreach too. Have concrete steps to work on. Use Best Management Practices. Have inter-municipal committees. Get message out to all groups: not just like-minded people. OUTREACH: PTOs, new comers, community building events, education, key groups, build your families roots here. Establish your legacy.