



STEWARDSHIP

PERSPECTIVES

A Publication of the Brandywine Conservancy's Environmental Management Center

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First Easements: A Legacy of Conservation

Forty years ago, in February 1969, the Brandywine Conservancy accepted its first conservation easement. This marked the beginning of a conservation program that became a model for land trusts across the country and today encompasses 415 easements and has protected more than 43,000 acres in the Conservancy's region.

A bit of perspective: the Environmental Protection Agency did not exist in 1969, there was no Clean Air Act or Clean Water Act, and the first Earth Day had yet to occur. Yet four families with a deep love for their lands each took a bold first step for conservation.

Fittingly, it was our founder and Chairman of the Board, George A. "Frolic" Weymouth, who donated the first conservation easement on his property, The Big Bend, protecting one and one-quarter miles of the east bank of the Brandywine River. The next three



easements were granted later that year by the Thissell Company, chaired by the Honorable Harry G. Haskell, Jr.; Mr. and Mrs. Ford B. Draper; and Mr. and Mrs. James B. Wyeth. They all conserved river frontage. Together, these four easements on contiguous properties protected 338 acres and over five and one-half miles along both banks of the Brandywine, from just north of the Delaware border and upstream almost to

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Plant Invaders: Mile-a-Minute Weed

A major threat to our region's biodiversity is mile-a-minute weed (*Persicaria perfoliata*), an invasive herbaceous species introduced to the United States from Japan in the 1930s. This annual vine can grow 18 feet in a single season, easily overpowering native species for sunlight, water and nutrients.

Mile-a-minute (MAM) favors disturbed areas, open fields, woodland edges, forest openings, stream banks, rights-of-ways and roadsides. Seeds remain viable in the soil for up to six years. Successful control requires ongoing management to inhibit new sprouts. Herbicides, hand pulling and mowing are effective management strategies, but success can be difficult when dealing with large infestations.



Photo credit: Timothy A. Block

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First Easements (cont.)

the village of Chadds Ford. The land is mostly wooded floodplain, but at the time zoning did not prohibit development in floodplains.

The use of conservation easements as a land protection tool was nearly unheard of 40 years ago. There were no state laws governing conservation easements (and wouldn't be until 2001). Instead, the Conservancy relied on common law principles to acquire the first easements. At the federal level, the donors relied on an obscure IRS Revenue Ruling as the basis for claiming a tax deduction for their easement gifts. Later in the year, President Nixon signed the Tax Reform Act of 1969, establishing a federal regulation that allows qualified conservation easements to be treated as charitable gifts.

Even today those first easements would be considered notable. We are deeply indebted to the Haskell, Draper, Wyeth, and Weymouth families for their foresight. They led the way, establishing a lasting legacy of conservation for the Brandywine Valley and a course of action to permanently protect the Brandywine Watershed and lands across the country.

Fighting Invasive Species

Have you ever wondered what that plant on your property is—the one that's first to bloom in early spring and lasts late into fall? Chances are it is not from around here. Our region has many invasive plant species that threaten our native vegetation.

Through a generous grant from the William Penn Foundation, the Brandywine Conservancy has developed informative sheets regarding invasive, exotic plant species. Each sheet includes photo illustrations and discusses identifying characteristics, preferred habitat (sun, shade, etc.), origin, how the plant affects native plants, and methods of control.

We currently have sheets for mile-a-minute weed, Japanese stilt grass, multiflora rose, Oriental bittersweet, Russian olive and tree-of-heaven (also known as *Ailanthus*) available on the Conservancy website at www.brandywineconservancy.org, in the web library under "invasive plants." If there is a species for which you would like to see a sheet developed, please let us know by calling 610-388-8340 or sending an email to ekall@brandywine.org.

Conservancy Calendar

Brandywine River Cleanup

April 18

The Young Friends of the Brandywine Conservancy invite volunteers to help remove debris from the banks of the river. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, please call 610-388-8315 or visit www.youngfriends.org.

Wildflower, Native Plant & Seed Sale

May 9 and 10

Celebrate spring with the Conservancy volunteers and shop for a variety of native plants suitable for all gardens. All proceeds benefit the beautiful Wildflower and Native Plant Gardens surrounding the Brandywine River Museum. Held in the Museum courtyard. 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Free.

Spring Wildflower Walk

May 16

Led by local botanist Janet Ebert. Meet in the Laurels Preserve parking lot at 9 a.m. Please call 610-388-8340 to register. Free.

Radnor Hunt Races

May 16

The annual "Race for Open Space" benefits the Conservancy's environmental programs. Six steeplechase races are held at the Radnor Hunt Club in Malvern, PA. For more information and tickets, please call 610-388-8383 or visit www.radnorhuntraces.org.



Spring Bird Walk

May 20

Led by Conservancy staff member Kevin Fryberger. Meet in the Laurels Preserve parking lot at 8 a.m. Please call 610-388-8340 to register. Free.

Spring Laurels Walk

May 28

This is your chance to ask questions about land management on the Preserve and learn about the history of the area. Meet in the Laurels Preserve parking lot at 8:30 a.m. Please call 610-388-8340 to register. Free.

Plant Invaders (cont.)

In 1996, the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team, the University of Delaware and the Chinese Academy of Agriculture Sciences began the search for natural enemies of MAM to identify a biological control for the plant. In 2001, a species of weevil (*Rhinocomimus latipes*) was recognized as a host-specific parasite of MAM. To avoid further straining of our native natural resources, an expert committee of regulatory agencies, federal land management and environmental protection agencies reviewed and approved research about the weevil before it was released.

This species of weevil breeds at least three generations in a year. Adult weevils eat the leaves of MAM while the larvae bore into the stem of the plant, compromising the weed's vitality.

The Brandywine Conservancy's Laurels Preserve, along with three other locations in Chester County, was selected by the University of Delaware as a weevil release site for a research project to study its effectiveness in controlling and ultimately removing MAM from the landscape, allowing native plants to thrive. In September 2005, three months after their release at the Laurels, the weevils had dispersed up to 82 feet and had a population increase of two percent, a rate comparable to those of other biological control agents. By 2008, the farthest a weevil had been observed was 18 miles. There was also a reduction in MAM seedling counts, the number of seed clusters and the percent of overall leaf cover at the test sites in the Laurels.

While complete control of MAM may not be possible, there are many techniques for managing it, and often a combination of two or more management methods can be effective. In order to determine the most efficient and effective approach to MAM management, a goal should be developed that takes into account the specific elements of a site. Periodic monitoring and continued application of control methods will help suppress this exceptionally invasive species.

We will keep readers informed with new information about the study and MAM control. In the meantime, visit our website, www.brandywineconservancy.org, for information about MAM and other invasive species.



Local Ponds Needed for West Chester University Study

It may surprise you to learn that Chester County has more than 4,600 ponds—including more than 1,700 ponds in the Brandywine watershed—and that very few of these ponds existed a mere century ago. Many of these are natural ponds formed along major creeks. A few are mill ponds that remain from earlier centuries. The majority have been built recently to improve water supplies, provide recreation and improve property values. The number of these ponds has approximately doubled in the past 30 years.

Ponds provide wildlife habitat and often modify the streams with which they are associated. Some ponds interrupt natural stream flow, interfere with fish migration and elevate stream temperatures during the summer. Many ponds help to reduce excessive quantities of nitrogen and retain sediments that would otherwise damage stream habitats. For owners, ponds can be a blessing or a burden. Knowing something about pond maintenance can be beneficial to owners' enjoyment of them.

Students from West Chester University, under the direction of faculty members Dr. Win Fairchild and Dr. Gary Coutu, as well as consultant Christopher Robinson, have spent much of the past three years cataloguing ponds in the region, including ponds' history over the past 75 years and their ecological effects. This summer, the students will measure sediment accumulation rates at ponds in Chester County. If you have a pond and would like it to be included in the study—and get suggestions on pond maintenance as well—please contact Dr. Fairchild at 610-436-2318 or send an email to wfairchild@wcupa.edu.



Easement Monitoring Season

The Conservancy conducts most of its annual easement visits between March and December. We will contact you by mail with our proposed visit date about two weeks prior. Should you wish to arrange a specific meeting time, or reschedule our visit, please contact our office at 610-388-8340.

Conservancy staff members who may visit your property include Easement Manager Estelle Dolan, Assistant Easement Managers Kersten Appler and Kristen Frentzel, and Western Area Manager John Goodall. During our visit, please feel free to ask questions regarding your easement.

We are always available to answer questions about the conservation easements held by the Conservancy and to help landowners with land management and landscape restoration information. We are privileged to be your partners in land conservation and hope for our relationship with you, the landowner, to extend beyond our annual visit.

Submit Plans Early to Avoid Construction Delays

Due to the growing number of conservation easements that we hold, requests for Conservancy approval of building plans is at an all-time high. Check your easement document for those activities that require our review and the time-frame allotted for Conservancy approval.

We encourage you to submit your plans well in advance of the anticipated construction date. Once we receive the complete plans, we can conduct our review in a timely manner. If you have any questions regarding this process, please call 610-388-8340.



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