



WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

www.westmorelandconservancy.org

October 2005 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 newsletter@westmorelandconservancy.org

Community Day 2005

Murrysville Community Day was held Saturday, September 10 at the Public Works Complex. Co-chairs were Jan Fitzpatrick and Joanne Kendall, who arranged a lovely display of photographs and educational materials. Various members manned the booth throughout the event and we would like to thank those people for contributing their time. We believe it is very important to maintain a presence to help the public understand what we do as *"An all volunteer, non-profit, 501c-3 Corporation dedicated to acquiring and preserving rural and rustic lands for the public good."*



A Changing of the Guard Our New Treasurer: Bjørg Granger

Cindy McCormick-Werns officially resigned her positions as Treasurer and Governor of the Westmoreland Conservancy at the September 28 meeting in order to devote more time to family. Bjørg Granger was then unanimously elected to the office of Treasurer and appointed to serve the remainder of Cindy's term as Governor. The Westmoreland Conservancy would like to thank Cindy and her husband, Joe, for the many of tireless service on our behalf and wish them well in their endeavors. We would also like to welcome Bjørg, a long-time supporting member, into her new position.

Summer Picnic 2005

The 2005 Summer Picnic was held Saturday, August 13. It was a family event for the members of Westmoreland Conservancy, FORM, Pleasant Valley (PV) Park Volunteers and S.L.A.M. Everyone brought a side dish and the cost was \$7/per adult, which included burgers, hot dogs, keilbassi, chips and refreshments with children under 18 attending free.

There were a variety of games played at the event: bocce, croquet, geezer golf, and some very competitive innings of softball. We now know that Lisa Hyland swings a mean bat!!

The weather was beautiful and allowed everyone to enjoy good company,



conversation and games from 3 pm

until about 6:30 pm, at which time the skies opened up. Most took refuge in the pavilion, continuing conversations and enjoying the varied food selections. The only casualty was the bonfire and s'mores.

Joanne Kendall won the 50/50 raffle and promptly donated the winnings to the Conservancy treasury. In all, it was an entertaining day with very good attendance. We look forward to seeing everyone next year!



The Pros and Cons of Gas Well Drilling on Conservancy Lands

By Dick Byers and Mount Fitzpatrick

Back in grade school in the 1940's they told us we had enough natural gas from the current resources to last us for a thousand years. By the mid - 1970's gas companies in our area were being told not to take on any new customers because they didn't have the reserves to supply them. They only missed their prediction by 970 years. Since then we have had continuous exploration for more natural gas. Methane is associated with all coal beds. In 1980 Congress passed a law providing tax credits for coal bed methane fuel, thus providing a profit incentive to capture methane anywhere there is coal. According to a publication by the Western Organization of Resource Councils, a \$40,000 to \$50,000 investment to drill a coal bed methane gas well (CBM), could yield a return of \$500,000 over the life of the well. This lucrative return along with the rising demand for clean natural gas is the reason we are seeing so many gas wells popping up across the country. Gas fueled power plants are also much cheaper and faster to build than coal-fired power plants.

What does gas exploration mean to the conservancy? At a meeting sponsored by the Westmoreland Conservation District (WCD) at the Donahoe Center on March 24th, we discovered that farmer's experiences with gas well drilling were predominantly negative. There are a lot of problems involved with gas well drilling. These include environmental disturbance, constant noise from motors and compressors, diminished water quality and quantity, erosion, destruction of land and wildlife, contamination of aquifers, methane seepage and air pollution.

The biggest problem, however, is Pennsylvania's screw-balled law concerning gas wells. Our honorable judges have determined that methane is not a gas. Instead, it is defined as a product of coal. Therefore, to keep a gas well driller off your property, you must own not only the gas rights, but also the coal rights! Only about 25% of landowners own the coal rights and have no recourse if a gas company wants to put a well on their property. Pennsylvania, we were told at the meeting, is the only state with huge gas deposits that have this odd definition for coal bed methane gas.

Not having the coal rights puts property owners at the mercy of the gas companies. They can drill on your property without your permission and they do not have to pay you royalties for the removal of gas. This is more than a simple invasion of privacy. Each well requires up to 2 acres for the access road, truck parking area and drill pad. Once the well is drilled, water, often in huge amounts, has to be pumped out to release the gas. This water removal may continue for several years and its disposal can be quite a problem. It could cause flooding and erosion problems. Drillers are required to take care of the problems, but often they do not comply until forced. If the water is tested and found clean it can be injected into aquifers or discharged on the surface or into streams. However, if it is salty or contaminated with metals or bacteria, as it often is, it will have to be hauled away for treatment, something the gas company doesn't want to do. Even if the water problem is addressed on the surface, the water table is still being lowered to retrieve the gas. This may mean water wells going dry or becoming salty, and springs and streams drying up, a bigger problem for farmers who might be using the water for livestock or irrigation. They are advised to have their water tested every year so they can prove drilling changed their water quality, if necessary. A test covering all the possible contaminating elements costs \$209.

Wells are visited by operators nearly everyday. This means a constant barrage of huge trucks on the access road which may erode and require repair. Farmers report this is something they have to keep on the backs of the companies to do. Methane seepage can also saturate the soil and kill tree roots and surface vegetation. Seepage into drinking water can cause a health hazard.

Wells must be 1000 feet apart in Pennsylvania. Each well, however, can be connected with an underground pipeline

with compressor stations and roads leaving long lasting scars on the landscape that disrupt wildlife corridors and fragment the habitat.

These are all concerns the conservancy should evaluate should we own the coal rights on a property and be approached by a gas company to drill wells. The temptation of monthly royalties from a gas well should be carefully considered with all the above problems in mind. Even if all appears in our favor, the adjoining property owners should be considered. For example, would a gas well on our property affect the well water of a neighbor? There are other considerations. Jim Pillsbury, a hydraulic engineer for the WCD, gave us a list of 33 questions and considerations that should be negotiated with the CBM operator too lengthy to list here.

Even if a gas company simply wants the right-of-way to bring a gas line across conservancy lands, permission should only be granted with restrictions. Once the right-of-way is obtained, the gas company can later install a larger pipe and disrupt the habitat a second or third time after the land has recovered from the initial pipe line. The agreement should be for a one-time disturbance with a limit on the size of the pipe, if permission is given at all.

If we do not own the gas rights on a property, we are in the same position as the farmers who must put up with all the inconveniences and disturbances and monitor the drilling to see that the operators are complying with the law. Accepting or buying land without the coal rights may bring headaches we don't want.

Dues Increase a Necessity!!

The Westmoreland Conservancy is an all-volunteer, non-profit, tax-exempt, 501-c-3 organization dedicated to acquiring and preserving rural and rustic lands for the common good. To date, we have been responsible for acquiring properties totaling 272 acres. We maintain parking areas and walking trails on Conservancy properties for the enjoyment of the public.

Individual and family membership dues have not increased since our founding in 1991. Expenses have been kept to a minimum by operating the Conservancy without an office or paid staff, and we plan to continue to do so.

We do not hire a marketing firm to obtain funding. Our necessary operating funds are generated solely through donations and membership dues. However, routine costs for insurance, printing costs for the quarterly newsletter, mailing expenses, post office box rental, etc., all continue to rise. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the annual dues for individuals from \$10 to \$15 and family memberships from \$15 to \$20.

We sincerely hope that you will continue to support the Conservancy in its efforts to acquire new properties and to maintain its current Nature Reserves for the public benefit.

Thank you,

Mount Fitzpatrick,

President

ELIOT PORTER: Nature's Color Photographer

1901-1990

By Jan Fitzpatrick

The last issue of Eco-Fun contained a quotation from the American naturalist, Henry David Thoreau: "In wildness is the preservation of the world". This quote was used as the title of a photographic essay combining selections from Thoreau's writings with exquisite photographs of nature taken by Eliot Porter. Published in 1962, Porter's book opened the eyes of this city-bred woman to the wonders of the natural world and the excitement of photography. No doubt many trace their interest in the conservation movement to this publication which was a fore-runner in fine art color photography.

Porter's love of nature photography began with the acquisition of a camera in 1912, at age eleven. His first subjects were the birds around his suburban Chicago home and the family summer retreat on Great Spruce Head Island, ME. Educated to work in biochemical research (B.S. and M.D. degrees from Harvard), Porter pursued photography as a hobby. Only after a very successful exhibit of his black and white photographs at the New York gallery of Alfred Stieglitz in 1938, did Porter leave his medical career to become a full-time photographer. Almost immediately, he embraced the new technology of color photography and dye transfer color printing, thus becoming the first established photographer to use color. Whereas Ansel Adams and Alfred Stieglitz continued to exhibit in black and white, Eliot Porter excited his audiences with a palette of provocative colors. By the end of the 1970's, art museums had accepted the use of color in photography. Porter continued to make prints, assemble and publish books, and display his art until his death.

To appreciate the work of this world-renowned artist-photographer, visit the Amon Carter Museum website: www.cartermuseum.org/collections/porter/index.php The museum, located in Ft. Worth, Texas, was given Eliot Porter's professional archives in 1990.

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Photo Shoot Outings

Within the Westmoreland Conservancy there is a band of intrepid photographers, eager to crawl over hill and dale in search of interesting things to capture on film or memory card. It's Fall Color Time again! Our next scheduled outing is Friday, October 14 at Ohio-pyle. If you would be interested in joining us for one of our adventures, feel free to e-mail us at: contact@westmorelandconservancy.org.

April Newsletter: Biodiversity Challenge

There was a challenge issued by Dick Byers in the April 2005 newsletter for everyone to pay close attention to their yards this year and keep track of what was observed. This is the Biodiversity Contest, and it's time for everyone to send in their results. Your lists can be sent to us at Westmoreland Conservancy, P.O.Box 446, Murrysville, PA 15668 or they can be e-mailed to us at newsletter@westmorelandconservancy.org. The results will be posted in the January 2006 issue.

Donations for Silent Auction

We are looking for local artists and crafters to donate items to be auctioned at our Spring 2006 Annual Dinner. Birdhouses, feeders, flower arrangements, framed photos, paintings and artwork are welcome. Contact Joanne Kendall at hjkpittsburgh@alltel.net or Shelly Tichy at 724-325-5523 or at newsletter@westmorelandconservancy.org.

Duff Park Nature Hike

By Dick Byers

July 23rd was a beautiful morning for the Duff Park nature outing. It was cool and sunny, making for comfortable trail walking. We started in the parking lot and followed the trillium trail for a while, then cut back to the coronary trail, headed down to the bike trail and finished there close to noon. July is not a great wildflower month, although we found over a dozen species in bloom, so we concentrated on tree identification. The participants left being able to recognize most of the trees in Duff Park.

Of all the things there are to identify in nature, trees are the easiest and fastest to learn for two reasons: First, there aren't that many species of trees, as compared to other organisms. In the tropics you could find 100 species of trees on a single acre, but you couldn't find that many species in the entire Murrysville area. You would have a very hard time finding 70 species in Murrysville, even when including the many cultivars people buy from nurseries to landscape their homes. Last November the Westmoreland Bird & Nature Club did a tree identification walk in Murrysville and set a goal of finding 50 species. We were successful, but it took us four hours in three different locations and we had to count the nursery cultivars on the Sloan school grounds. On the five Westmoreland Conservancy reserves we have identified only 49 species of trees. There may be some small understory trees we haven't found yet, but for now the number of tree species on our 274 acres stands at 49. Duff Park probably has about 30 species. We found about 20 of them on our morning walk. Learning to identify 20 tree species in a single morning is an achievable goal.

Secondly, trees don't disappear for part of the year like wildflowers, reptiles and insects. Trees present themselves to you throughout the year with identifying features in every season. Some people have the mistaken idea you can only identify trees when they are in leaf. Nothing is further from the truth. I passed around a small leaf collection at the beginning of the walk representing nine species of trees that all have the same type of leaf. If you had to rely on the leaf alone, it would be impossible to identify those nine species. You have to rely on other features. Bark, buds, flowers, fruit, leaf stems, leaf scars, bud scales and lenticels are some of the other characteristics you can use to identify trees. You can even positively identify a few by smell. Sassafras, cherry and birch have distinct odors. The trunk and the bark is the first thing I look at. If I don't recognize the species from that, then I start looking at the other features. Many trees can be easily identified by the bark alone. By the time the walk was over Jan and Mount Fitzpatrick were recognizing beech, black birch, hop hornbeam, black cherry, shagbark hickory, chestnut oak, ironwood and sycamore by just the bark characteristics. Other trees can be easily identified by the bud. Bitternut hickory, for example, is more easily recognized in the winter by the bright yellow terminal buds. Many tree species have distinctive leaf scars (marks on the twig where last year's leaf was attached), so if you restrict your identification time to just the leaf season, you'll never know your trees. Besides, to really know a tree well, you should know it in bud, flower, leaf, and fruit. Then you should observe what color it turns in the fall and note the branching pattern after the leaves have fallen. That means you should be looking at trees with a discerning eye in every season. There is no best time to start. You can start learning your trees today, tomorrow, next week, or next month.

Perhaps I should end this recap here, but I would feel guilty if I gave you the impression there aren't any problems with tree identification. You will run into a few roadblocks. The biggest problem is usually within the species of a genus. The willows are a good example. My Petrides field guide to eastern trees describes 54 species of willows, 26 of which are in Pennsylvania and at least 14 species in Westmoreland County. Determining you have a willow is easy. Which species it is usually requires the botanical keys. Some oaks can pose problems. Red and black oaks have the same type of leaves, the bark is similar and the growth patterns are indistinguishable. Young trees are easy to tell apart because you are within reach of the leaves and buds. Black oak leaves have tufts of hairs at the leaf vein junctions on the under surface and the buds are hairy. The leaves and buds of red oak are smooth, but if the leaves and buds are out of reach on mature trees, you'll have to find a branch that has blown off or look for acorns on the ground. The inner bark of black oak is deep orange, but so is the inner bark of a few of the red oaks, so it isn't the reliable feature that some field guides claim it to be. Also, the hair tufts on the leaves of the black oak are shed in late summer leaving the leaf indistinguishable from red oak. I usually can't tell red from black oak if the trees are mature and I can't reach a branch to look at those end buds. Hybridization between the oaks also occasionally occurs producing a few trees that will confuse even the most polished dendrologist, but overall, these problems are minor. Most trees are easily identified in any season. Don't wait for leaves to appear to start learning them.

WHAT IS WILDLIFE REHABILITATION??

Pamela Paulisick
Pa State Licensed Rehabilitator

WILDLIFE IS THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THE ELEMENTS WHICH COEXIST WITH MAN IN A CONTINUING CYCLE OF RESPECT. OBSERVE THE WONDERS OF NATURE AND FEEL JOY KNOWING THAT WE'RE ALL A PART OF A GLORIOUS PATTERN OF LIFE.

HONOR IT. -Anonymous

Do you ever wonder what happens to the babies of those animals you see hit on the side of the road, or the bird who hit's the window of your home and lies limp on the ground, animals whose mom abandons them for one reason or another, or animals who are displaced due to environmental or growing populations?? When people find wild animals whose life is threatened, these found "babies" are brought to a wildlife rehabilitator to help. Wildlife rehabilitation is the process of rescuing, raising, and high quality care for wild animals that have been injured by cars or people, orphaned because mom died or sick due to parasites and disease, with the ultimate goal of returning them back to the wild.

For rehabilitation to be deemed successful, these released animals must be able to truly function as wild animals, which would include but not limited to, recognizing and obtaining appropriate foods, selecting mates of their own kind, reproduction and show an appropriate fear of potential dangers such as cars, people, dogs etc.

Wildlife rehabilitators are trained, skilled and state permitted by the PA Game Commission to provide the specialized care it takes to help these wild creatures become wild again. Releasing these wild babies back to their 'birthright' of freedom takes a lot more than compassion. Caring for these animals is very different than caring for your dog or cat. They need special diets, feeding, administering meds, vaccinations, cleaning and, building, if necessary, the required caging, and finding suitable release sites for each species that you do. We are trained to asses if the animal truly needs rescued as well as safely capturing, handling and transporting these babies. Much time is spent on food prep, feeding, cleaning, transporting to vets and paperwork, paperwork, and more paperwork!! Some of these mammals need fed as much as six (6) times a day, while songbirds are fed every fifteen (15) minutes for a twelve (12) hour day. Some wildlife spends as much as five(5) months (raccoons) in our care. It can be a very demanding activity from mid March until late October. We work 24/7, which includes weekends and holidays.

Determination of care is assessed by the rehabilitator and their sponsoring vet, as to growth, diet and preparing for eventual release back to the wild. We work with many professionals, including biologists, game commission officials, veterinarians, and nuisance control people. We all work together to avoid or alleviate many of the problems that occur when people and wildlife come into contact. People call not only about injured or orphaned wildlife but also with questions and problems that they may be having with wildlife in their houses or yards. We can advise callers of ways of dealing with their wild neighbors humanely, whether they have squirrels in their attics or robins nesting on their porchs. Some animals will need our help and other calls can be resolved over the phone. In this way we also can help educate the public about their fears or misconceptions, encourage appreciation, and respect of wildlife and nature.

People may be attracted to wildlife rehabilitation because it sounds so rewarding, enjoyable and exciting. It can be all of those things. However, it is also difficult, stressful, tiring and at times frustrating. It takes a lot of commitment of time and energy as well as space for properly raising these animals. We know when, how and where to release wildlife, and have the necessary permits (state and federal) to temporarily possess and care for these babies. It also takes money... we do not get paid or reimbursed for our services or expenses by the state or federal government. Rehabilitation is not about "cuddling" wildlife or keeping them as pets, but keeping them wild. Its about releasing those wild animals that can recover, while also recognizing that some will die and some must be euthanized. Your reward for hundreds of hours of work is the release of an animal back to the wild.....the moment an owl takes flight, or an opossum runs away from you, is when you know you've been successful and your heart has been rewarded 10 fold.....

It is, overall, the joy of seeing an animal return to its natural habitat, healthy and wild again.

Westmoreland Conservancy
P.O. Box 446
Murrysville, PA 15668
contact@westmorelandconservancy.org

Schedule of Upcoming Events

Friday, October 14: Photo shoot outing at Ohiopyle.

Wednesday, October 26: Conservancy Meeting

Wednesday, November 16: Conservancy meeting at Municipal room in Library. Date changed due to Holiday. Happy Thanksgiving!

Wednesday, December 28: Conservancy Meeting

2005 Board of Governors/Officers

Officers: President – Mount Fitzpatrick
Vice President – Shelly Tichy
Secretary – Doug Bauman
Treasurer - Bjørg Granger

Governors: Dick Byers, Theo van de Venne, Charlie Conway, Don Harrison, Richard Wagner, Cary Bohl, Hank Kendall, Katie Blackmore

The meetings are open, and we look forward to seeing you there. Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of each month at the Murrys ville Library at 7:30 pm.

October 26th
****November 16th**
December 28th

**** Date changed (3rd week) for Holiday conflict**

The next Newsletter is scheduled for **January 2006**.

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WESTMORELAND Conservancy

An all volunteer, non-profit, 501c-3 Corporation dedicated to acquiring and preserving rural and rustic lands for the public good.

Westmoreland Conservancy Membership Application

P.O. Box 446
Murrysville, PA 15668

Membership Levels

Individual.....\$15.00
Family.....20.00
Business membership.....40.00
Additional Donation.....\$_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State _____ Zip Code_____

e-mail _____

For your convenience, you may also renew your membership or give donations through our website at www.westmorelandconservancy.org

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