

NaturalLandscapes

Newsletter and 2020 Annual Report for Friends of the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust

Fall 2020

REFORESTERS: AGENTS OF CHANGE IN AN INVADED LANDSCAPE

by Maria Paula Mugnani, Research and Restoration Coordinator

Like much of the Northeast, Pennypack Trust land has an agricultural history, which is evident in the Trust's younger trees, patchy forest canopy and fields that dot the landscape. The Trust's forests, which are less than 50 years old, have been tasked with recuperating in spite of the multitude of invasive plants dominating their understories and strangling their tree crowns. This problem, coupled with the challenges of an urban setting, will require long-term commitment and diligent management in order to restore the hundreds of acres and sustain forest regeneration and a diverse mix of native species.

Although Trust staff has planted thousands of tree saplings over the years, some have succumbed to deer browsing, exotic pests, and invasive species like porcelain berry, mile-a-minute, and Oriental Bittersweet. Putting wire cages around saplings and wrapping them in tubes may help protect them from deer, but fast-growing vines can scale cages and smother them in a matter of months. With almost 40 plantations and counting, staff cannot protect the saplings by themselves.

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Reforester Debra Kessler.

Pandemic Park

by Kevin Roth, Education & Outreach Coordinator

Before the Coronavirus pandemic, most people would've had a difficult time imagining a world without social gatherings, air travel, and in-class learning. However, this quickly became our new reality. With just about everyone pretty much doing everything from home, people needed a change of scenery. The Pennypack Preserve was one of the few local outdoor spaces that remained open while many national, state, and local parks closed.

It became clear that people needed the outdoors now more than ever. The outdoor recreation market largely surged. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission sold 130,000 more fishing licenses this year than they had in 2019, and downloads of Cornell University's bird identification apps went up 102%. Many of us tried to buy a kayak, paddleboard, or swimming pool this year only to find that they were sold out. According to Executive Director Chris Mendel, the Trust saw a 400% increase in visitors this last spring. Controlling record crowds

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Enjoying the view to Meadow Crossing. Photo by Kathy Leister

Pandemic Park

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became the order of the day. Parking lot management, trail erosion, vandalized signs, unsolicited trails blazed, and a spike in foraging resulted in near constant habitat encroachment.

Our members and staff worked tirelessly to make sure the sudden influx of community members enjoyed the preserve without creating lasting negative impacts. We reconfigured trails and made ambitious plans to armor hundreds of feet of trails this coming winter. We also designed new maps and freshened our trail identification signs to make navigation easier for visitors. Our members gathered countless bags of trash during our socially-distanced creek cleanup. And a few of our most dedicated volunteers, like Kathy Howard and Lori Voltmer, regularly patrolled trails while handing out maps, membership envelopes, and cleaning up.

Instead of closing our gates, the Trust worked to serve the local community and give them the outdoor escape they needed. While one of our

core mission tenants is to create a refuge for native plants and animals from the developing world, the Pennypack Preserve is clearly an essential habitat for us humans too. Abington resident Beth Hanson summed up the thoughts of many in her hand-written thank you letter to the Trust: "Just wanted to say thank you for keeping the trails open during this pandemic. It has kept me sane to walk through the trees, see the deer and foxes, and stay in shape. I know it got nuts at times with tons of people, but your workers handled it all very well."

The Trust was an essential refuge during the pandemic and at other turning points in our lives, all of us have a job to do to keep this preserve clean, maintained, and funded for generations to come. 🌿

REFORESTERS: AGENTS OF CHANGE IN AN INVADED LANDSCAPE

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Earlier this spring, the Trust, led by Josh Bruce, introduced “Reforesters”, an adopt-a-plantation program that matches volunteers to their own plantations and gives them hands-on training on how to identify plant species, monitor forest health, and care for saplings. Many volunteers, like Connie and Mike Czaplicki, were long-time trail hikers and event attendees who decided they wanted to give back to the Trust. “We had no experience in doing this, but with the guidance and instructions provided, it was easy for us to get going,” Mike Czaplicki said. “We find the experience a great way to spend some more time at the Trust, enjoying nature while doing something to restore and preserve a part of it.”

Each month, Reforesters visit their plantation at their leisure to free saplings from vines, identify and protect natural tree regeneration, and submit a brief report on sapling survival. The Trust provides work gloves and gear required for sapling care, and staff are available to provide guidance. Thanks to the dedication of Reforesters, not only has the program yielded a high sapling survival rate just in its first year, but it's also saved many naturally occurring tree seedlings that now have a chance to reach the canopy.

As the program season wraps up until Spring, Julie Piotrowicz says she will miss observing wildlife and the change of pace her plantation provided. “For me, I enjoyed being off the trail in the quiet of the woods,” Piotrowicz said. “I've had a six-point buck leap by me and a gaggle of turkeys waddle away. Each time I return to my area, I see more and feel such a personal responsibility and satisfaction in contributing to the health of the forest.”

While Reforesters join the program expecting to be agents of change, reversing the progress of invasives in their forest, some find that the experience changes them as well. “As a one-year-old PERT volunteer and member

from Philadelphia's lower northeast with limited biology and ecology knowledge, being a PERT-trained Reforester has added a new path of productivity, purpose and enjoyment to my life,” Debra Kessler said. “I invite you to make a couple of hours a month and join the Reforesters volunteer team. Your reward is personal and the forest will flourish, too.” 🌿

Reforester Connie Czaplicki



Reforester Mike Czaplicki

INTERESTED IN JOINING REFORESTERS?

We have plenty of plantations seeking adoption. Simply answer a few questions on the Reforesters Volunteer application on our website (www.pennypacktrust.org/support/reforesters) detailing your preferences for outdoor work and plantation type, and we will match you to a plantation and contact you for training!



Reflections on 50 Years

by Chris Mendel, Executive Director

We are all the beneficiaries of many lifetimes and generations dedicated to preserving and creating the new natural landscapes of Huntingdon Valley from former farm fields, woodlots, and rock quarries.

Having been here just a little over two years, I've scrolled through thousands of archival files and photos. Some of these files and pictures very poignantly document people who've spent decades of hard work protecting this landscape to see it become something natural and healing relative to the expansion of metropolitan Philadelphia.

So many folks have labored at the Trust for years, whether that work was planning for the preserve's future, or overcoming the legal hurdles in acquiring more land, or developing social networks to raise members, doing the uncomfortable work of reaching out to friends and family to urge them to become members,

serve on the board, or raise their annual donation by a hundred dollars. And people have donated thousands of hours of back-breaking work on reforestation efforts, excavation of ponds, and the removal of truckloads of debris.

Fifty years has also enabled us to transcend generations. There are more detailed examples of this in other annual reports. It's

no easy feat for a son or daughter to follow in the footsteps of their parents and dedicate their spare

time to the nurturing of the Trust and its growth.

As an outsider to much of this, it's been humbling to see the depth of care people have put into the Trust over the years, as if the Pennypack were their own child. In the words of our volunteers, their work here at the Trust has been some of the most important work they've done in their lives. The tremendous amount of emotional, mental, and physical energy that's been put into the care and stewardship of the Trust is truly inspiring, and I'm positive that this isn't unique to us alone. So many volunteers and members from other organizations and trusts across the state have the same kind of passion running through their veins, decade after decade.

On behalf of all of us who've taken a simple stroll through the meadows, witnessed floodplain naturalizing in our area, or walked the ruins of Creek Road to see forests emerge on either side, we say thank you for the first 50 years of hard work. The future will not be easier than the past. We have to continue to the hard work and dig deep for the positive energy that will drive us through the next 50 years. 🍁



The Ladd Family at the Pennypack Trust's Pop-Up Hayride event. Photo by Lara Thrapp.



Unveiling plans for the Pennypack Wilderness.
Left to Right: Owen "Ose" Freeman, Feodor Pitcairn,
David Widwer, member of the PA Game Commission.



Dr. David Robertson at a volunteer
appreciation picnic.



One of the first creek cleanup events in the early 1970s.
Township trucks and even the national guard helped with the effort.



If you weren't able to see some of our archival images
featured on our 50th birthday self-guided hike,
you can view them on our website at
<https://pennypacktrust.org/about/history/>



THANK YOU!

On behalf of all of us who've taken
a simple stroll through the
meadows, witnessed floodplain
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Time to Appreciate Coyotes

by Chris Mendel, Executive Director

For the first time in nearly a decade, there's a mating pair of adult coyotes living inside the Pennypack Trust. Coyote populations have been episodic at the Trust.

Around the year 2011, Bryn Athyn College Wildlife Biologist Dr. Eugene Potapov regularly observed coyotes

harassing groups of deer, but after mange fatally broke out among the coyotes, none but a few hunters caught sight of them again for nearly 8 years.

The coyotes' silence was oddly conspicuous, as if they knew that their presence at the Trust was tenuous. This past spring I heard a report that a den had been found on the property. Pups were confirmed. In late summer, an injured yearling was spotted by a neighbor and then by Shiloh Silverman, a wildlife photographer. Staff started seeing individual coyotes around headquarters at dawn. In early fall, I heard their characteristic yips and yowls at night, so, as a wildlife enthusiast, I was excited to have confirmation that the coyote sighting reports were true. But when I mentioned coyotes to certain hikers and members, I was immediately reminded of how vilified these animals are in the United States. And it's not just Americans who felt this way about coyotes. One of our hikers who was originally from Ukraine was visibly shaken when I told her that coyotes had been spotted near Peak Woods very recently. Other neighbors were quick to confess that in years past, they or their friends had shot or trapped them. Stories of small family dogs being harassed in their backyards came up.

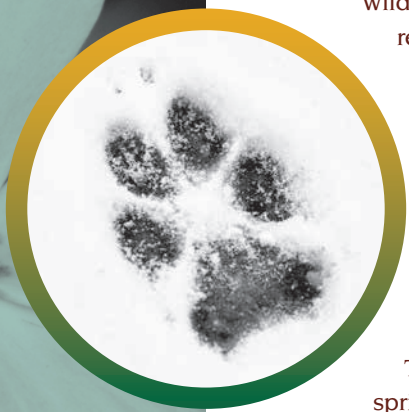
I believe that the coyotes' bad reputation comes from a time not too long ago when family farms were still prevalent which raised sheep, chickens, and the like. Both foxes and coyotes will prey on farm animals, particularly young ones, at night or in the early morning. However, unlike the fox, who's a solitary hunter, coyotes often hunt as a group. Their ability to work as a team can sound frightening. A pack of coyotes can wield an impressive appetite, but

sometimes they just kill their prey without eating it (something foxes also do). Adult coyotes can range from 30 to 60 pounds, making them one of the largest omnivores in our area, second only to us.

Our parents and grandparents may remember coyotes on their farms, but these animals are really evolved for the Great Plains and have been "on the run" from massive hunting pressure, finding and filling open niches wherever possible. There wasn't a conclusive record of coyotes in Pennsylvania until 1940. Gray wolves dominated eastern forests until they were hunted to extinction in 1892. Only after their removal were coyotes able to move in from New York and Ohio. As farming, hunting, and trapping pressure waned in the 1960s, coyotes "arrived" in our early successional forests and were seen more frequently.

Deer is the most prevalent animal protein in their diet. Coyotes kill fawns, and they prey on sick or wounded adults and deer carcasses from road accidents. They also eat rabbits, voles, mice; up to 13 different genera of mammals, making them a generalist omnivore niche competitor with foxes, raccoons, and possums.

Ecologically speaking, one of the most important aspects of coyotes is that they "keep things moving." They harass groups of deer, compete directly with foxes for territory, and kill feral cats. Without pressure from coyotes, populations of deer, foxes, raccoons, and possums tend to move only in relation to human activity. If these typical urban wildlife species get comfortable, particularly with a human-related food source, their gregarious social habits can make them vectors for disease and pests. Heartworm, mange, rabies, and distemper can spread quickly among them. "Coyotes keep them on their toes," according to Arron Facca, Furbearer Specialist with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. One or two mated pairs of coyotes and their immature young can range over a forest the size of the Trust and keep a number of other species "in motion," thus keeping communicable diseases at bay.





WE CAN COEXIST WITH COYOTES **BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN FOR SOME TIME**

An injured yearling coyote near Peak Woods. Photo by Shiloh Silverman (@Silverpark.wildlife on Instagram)

It's likely that coyotes have been among us for many years and it's only now that there's a larger juvenile population that their presence is more easily detectable. But this in itself is important to note: we can coexist with coyotes because we have been for some time. Coyotes and beaver are fulfilling ancient and necessary roles by reinstating less human-driven dynamics in forest ecosystems. My hope is that we'll learn to see their presence and their behaviors as fulfillment of their natural roles and that it's us who've been given a second chance to adapt to them. 🌿



President's Letter

Rounding 50 with Momentum!

Gilbert P. High, Jr. | *President of the Board of Directors*

Dear Members,

Pause for a moment and reflect on the fact that this is the Pennypack Trusts' 50th year of existence. How far the vision of its founders has been carried by them and by the Trusts' dedicated members. You should feel so proud. We expected to have a 50th year filled with celebratory events; however, COVID-19 forced us to put those plans on hold until next year. When the tumult caused by this virus wanes with the medical intervention on the horizon, we will find ways to make the 50th +1 celebration fun-filled, reflective, and forward looking and, most importantly, safe.

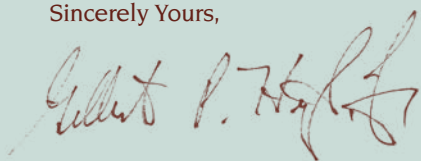
Even though the stars did not align for us to launch all the events that we had planned for 2020, the Trust has found itself to be a respite for those forced to stay close to home. We have experienced a tremendous rise in visitors (and in membership), affirming that the Trust is indeed a welcoming place for those needing its special offerings. So despite these trying times, our dedicated staff, fully committed to the Trust's mission, strives daily to connect our membership to this place, and do our part to keep each of us grounded and in touch with the natural world around us.

And the Trust is doing important work that other open spaces are not. I'm reminded of one of the Pennypack Watershed Association's slogans "We care about tomorrow." The evidence of that is all around us and our current work underscores it. We are a seedbank for native plants. Just this year we've planted over 700 trees within our boundaries and another 200 in upstream communities.

We continue to be an essential refuge for 205 migratory bird species, and here again we hope to help our neighbors manage their lands to expand the life-giving habitat these birds need through the seasons. We will continue to be a leading example of conservation efforts that safeguard clean water, clean air and natural habitat.

We care about tomorrow, and because of you, tomorrow is looking bright!

Sincerely Yours,



Left to Right, Executive Director Chris Mendel, Former Board President Bill Weihe, Founding Board President Feo Pitcairn, current Board President Gilbert High, Jr.



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(Active members July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

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Jennifer Meissner
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Edie Miller
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Anna Mindel
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John and Joanne Monahan
Ara Moomjian
Paul and Dorothy Morse
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Karen and David Kent
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Arthur and Debra Klotz
John and Susan Knauss
Rich and Jill Knudsen
Jamie G. & Peter Koh
Dave Blanton and Pamela Kops
BettyJean Korson
Jeffery and Denise Krenski
David Fuller & Janet Krettek
David Krutsch
Don and Rosemary Ladd
Susan and Al LaManna
Keith and Barbara Lawrence
Susan Lee and Sam Clover
Kristine Lehman
Marilyn and Stephen Leonard
Louise Lisi
Cynthia Little*
Chris and Cheryl Lockard
Norman M. Loev
Meryl Hyatt and Steve Long
Kate and Dave Lorenzi

John Rateike*
Diane and Lowell Reed
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A SPECIAL
THANK YOU 
to our editor: Kaitlyn Waller

2020 FISCAL YEAR IMPACT

MORE THAN **150** VOLUNTEERS

RE-FORESTERS16
STREAM KEEPERS37
FREE A TREE VOLUNTEERS75+
BARN SITTERS17
OFFICE VOLUNTEERS8

50% MORE NEW MEMBERS COMPARED TO 2019

776 TREES PLANTED

852 TOTAL ACRES

OWNED725
EASED127
POTENTIAL GROWTH716

6 RARE PLANT SPECIES FOUND

OVER **\$190,000** WON IN GRANTS

600+ PROGRAM ATTENDEES

30% MORE UNIQUE CLASS OFFERINGS THAN LAST YEAR

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FINANCIAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2020

Revenues and Support	
Membership and Annual Appeal	\$ 245,125
Endowments	339,175
Unrestricted Contributions	124,328
Programs and Retail Sales (net)	21,606
Grants	190,917
Other	33,366
Total Revenues and Support	\$ 954,517
Expenditures	
Ecological Restoration and Stewardship	\$ 479,072
Membership Programming and Communications	127,107
Administration	240,134
Facilities	108,012
Total Expenditures	\$ 954,325



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We hope that this is a complete list of our members during our 2020 Fiscal Year, and apologize for any inaccuracies or omissions which may have occurred during compilation.

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We offer our condolences to all the donors who have lost a loved one or friend and who have chosen to honor their memory with a donation to Pennypack so that their legacy and what they loved will endure. These gifts were received between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020

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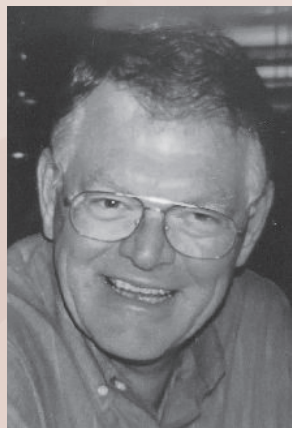
REMEMBERING HYLAND JOHNS AND WALTER VANBUREN, JR.

by Chris Mendel, Executive Director

This past year, the Trust lost two highly dedicated leaders of the Pennypack Trust.

Hyland R. Johns was a life-long resident and former mayor of Bryn Athyn and a board member of the Trust for 16 years. Hyland worked for Asplundh Expert Tree Care for nearly his entire professional career. He also pioneered a long-term study that examined the ecological impacts of various mechanical and chemical management methods on utility corridors. This research is still going on at State Game Lands 33 to this day.

Hyland initially served on the board as a representative of the borough of Bryn Athyn and then became an elected board member. He served on the development committee and was always brainstorming over who would make a good donor. Dr. David Robertson summed up the thoughts of many who knew him at Pennypack: "He was eminence and grace, measured, controlled, thoughtful, and was always well respected. He had a large perspective on things." Hyland served until he was 91.



Walter VanBuren, Jr. served on the board for 14 years and shepherded the Trust's fledgling endowment into the durable financial engine that it is today. But he did more than just oversee the Trust's endowment. Mr. VanBuren quarter-backed an over \$2 million capital campaign that enabled the Trust to purchase of over 20 acres from the Lords New Church and remodel the visitor center. As a board member, Walt chaired the membership and executive committees. Bill Wehienmayer remembers that he "asked Walt to be on the board as a reach and he surprisingly said 'yes'. Walt really rolled up his sleeves. He was very committed. But more than that, he and his wife Dinny would take walks across the meadow regularly. To him the Trust was his therapy."

Speaking of both Walt and Hyland, Mr. Wehienmayer added, "They are part of the vanishing breed of very nice and giving people – gentlemen, really. They were both great ambassadors for the Trust." While the Trust is currently being led by gifted and dedicated people, we are always on the look-out for the next generation of leaders like Walter and Hyland. Any organization worth its salt must have that deep-seated steadiness and calm that these two men exemplified. 🌿

BUILDING CAREERS IN CONSERVATION

By Maureen Farley, 2020 Robertson Intern

In 2017, the Trust started the Robertson Endowment, an endowment aimed at advancing education, recognizing the preserve's importance to regional conservation, and cultivating the next generation of environmental stewards. Now in its third year, our internship program fosters relationships with young conservationists, challenging them through a broad range of tasks to help them find their professional focus.

Through our internship program, we're able to help shape young talent, and each intern contributes something unique that changes the way we think about the work we do. This year, we had a diverse pool of talent – from membership and communications, to stream ecology and restoration. Our interns approached Pennypack Ecological Restoration trusts from many different professional pathways.

Steven Hanna found his place in membership and community outreach during his internship. Steven graduated from Penn State University's Biobehavioral Health undergraduate program with a passion for building healthy communities through environmental interaction. Steven used his time at Pennypack to dive deep into our membership and outreach systems, creating strategic training tools for Pennypack employees and streamlining online processes. Steven also worked on the stewardship and restoration team. Steven said "working outside in the field gave [him] context and a greater appreciation for understanding how Pennypack operates." Steven is currently back at Penn State University working as a teaching assistant and student researcher, pursuing his master's degree in recreation management. The Trust is grateful for Steven's enthusiasm and contributions.

Rachel Zobel joined Pennypack as an intern after graduating with a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. She helped two highly dedicated volunteers, Peter Gkonos and Nick Mascello, who've been surveying macroinvertebrate populations in the Pennypack creek. This information will help give some context for both water quality and land quality, and better inform stewardship practices. Rachel is passionate about water quality and microplastics, and through her research at Pennypack, she was able to network with local water health experts, expand her research skills, and gain practical and transferable field experience. Rachel is currently an adjunct professor at Gwynedd Mercy University and Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, and is

pursuing a PhD from the University of Delaware to achieve her goal of working in stream restoration.

Hannah Thomas, an environmental science and geology student at Temple University, worked directly with the stewardship team to accomplish several restoration projects during her time at Pennypack. More specifically,

Hannah worked to remove invasive wisteria throughout an area along the Montgomery County Rail Trail, which will be replanted with native plants this winter. Hannah also set up protective cages around young trees and worked to keep the trees clear of invasive plants. Hannah plans to continue working toward her bachelor's degree and gaining transferable field experience through volunteer work.

After graduating from West Chester University of Pennsylvania with a degree in communications studies, **Maureen Farley** went on to work for an environmental nonprofit organization. Maureen had always had an interest in working outside, and she got her first glimpse into the environmental field after volunteering on farms throughout the United States with World Wide Opportunities for Organic Farming.





Spring/Summer interns left to right Maureen Farley, Rachel Zobel, and Hannah Thomas

During her internship at the Trust, Maureen split her time between working outside with the stewardship team clearing trails, maintaining tree planting sites, and working with the education coordinator, Kevin Roth. Maureen learned how to plan environmental education events, measure stream water quality, and she filmed and produced several videos for

the Trust in order to further establish our online presence. Maureen concludes "I'm so grateful for the connections, skillset and practical experience Pennypack was able to offer during this internship."

The Robertson Endowment is funded through the generous donations of our members, who have collectively given over \$500,000 to support our educational mission. This year, the Trust received an additional 3 year \$60,000 grant from BLBB Charitable. This grant was crucial for the expansion of every sector of our work, from administration, outreach, research, and stewardship. Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust is so grateful to BLBB Charitable and the many generous donors who support the Robertson Endowment. 🌿



THE ROBERTSON ENDOWMENT FOR EDUCATION

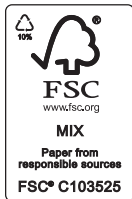
The Robertson Endowment is an important driver of change, constantly infusing our team with new energy, ideas, and approaches. The Trust needs to grow right along side these young professionals. If you would like to support the Robertson Endowment, please make a donation and label your check or credit card information with "Robertson Endowment Gift." You may also contact Executive Director Chris Mendel at 215.657.0830 or cmendel@pennypacktrust.org for more information.



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THE MISSION OF THE TRUST

and its membership is to
protect, restore, and preserve the lands of the
Pennypack Creek Valley so that they:

Remain forever an enhancement to the quality
of life in our community,

Support forever a natural landscape populated
by native plant and animal life, and

Become a standard of excellence for innovative
restoration and stewardship practices to be shared
with other individuals and organizations joined in
a common commitment to the environment.

