

2026 – 2036 STRATEGIC PLAN

Through Nature Comes Life

MAY 2026



PENNYPACK ECOLOGICAL
RESTORATION TRUST



Our Mission

Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust and its members 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,
- Thrive as a natural landscape populated by native plants, animals, and aquatic life, and
- Become a standard of excellence in research and restoration practices to be shared with allied organizations.

Our Vision—*Remain Forever*

The Trust is recognized as a:

- Model for applied ecology that sustains life in natural areas amid an urban setting
- Nature preserve (not a park) of 2,000 contiguous acres
- Trusted resource, educator, and partner in the Watershed

Our Values

SUSTAINABILITY

We protect the Preserve so that its natural integrity remains intact and thrives for generations.

EDUCATION

We learn about ecology to deepen collective responsibility to protect, steward, and restore natural lands.

IMPACT

We pursue meaningful change in attitudes and behaviors to create lasting outcomes for communities and the physical landscape.

COLLABORATION

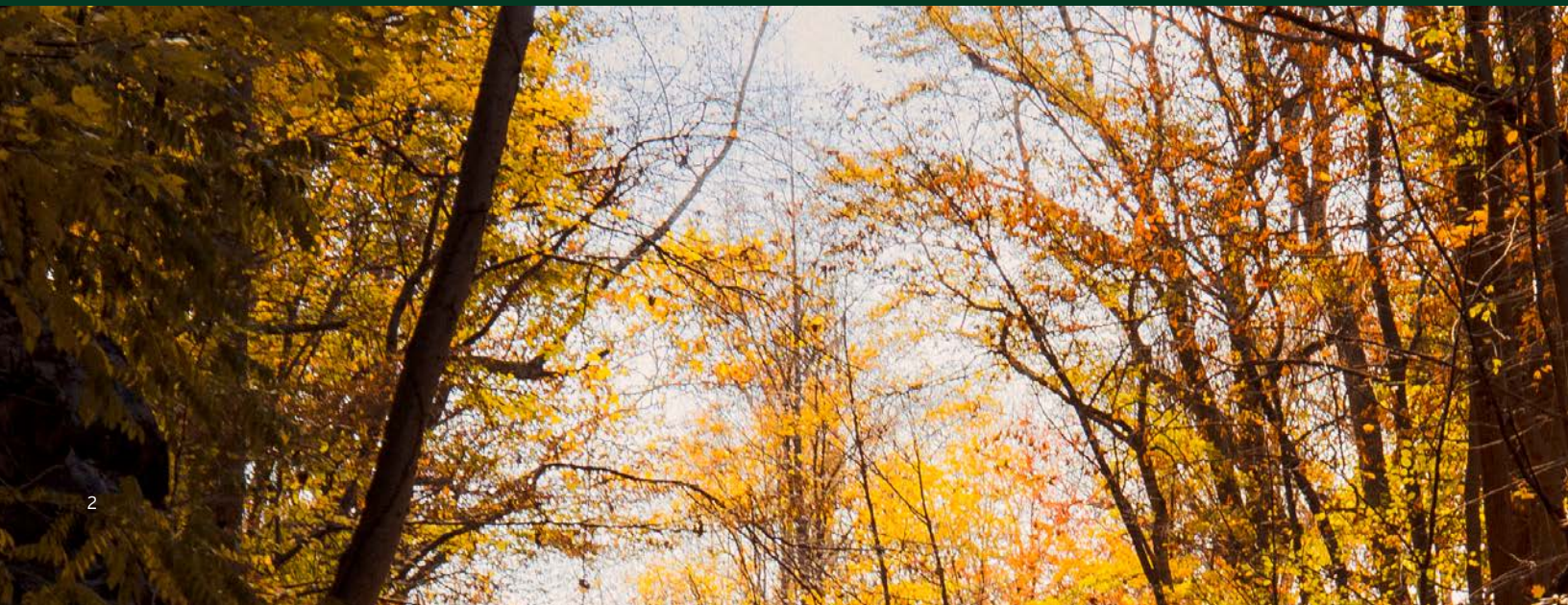
We seek collaborative partnerships that accelerate achievement of our mission and vision.

COMMUNITY

We foster relationships between people and nature to the benefit of both.

CONNECTIVITY

We will continue to grow our protected lands sustainably, choosing to grow through easements, partnerships, and wise acquisition of parcels contiguous to what we already protect.



ON THE RIGHT PATH

How can the Trust become an outstanding example of ecological restoration within a metropolitan area? This strategic plan sets the way toward that goal, building upon the success of the 2017 plan while challenging the Trust to meet new realities and advance its work on a larger scale.

*Photo By Janet Geissler.
Creek Trail 2023 Photo Contest Winner*

The Past

The Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust began as a watershed association in 1970. It has evolved to become a land trust, opened its doors as a nature preserve, and expanded the Preserve from 23 acres to 956 acres.

Recent growth and evolution were a direct result of the Trust's prior strategic plan. Launched in 2017, the plan called for expanding public learning opportunities, improving visitor experiences, and making nature education more visible. It guided the acquisition of targeted parcels including the June Fete Fairgrounds.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE

Gregg Asplundh
Board Member

Tripp Davis
Board President

Gilbert High, Jr.
Board Member

Alexis Isztwan
Former Board Member

John Peterman
Board Member

This effort was directed by Jennifer Shropshire, Consulting Associate with The Nonprofit Center.



The Future

Today, the Preserve sits amid an urban environment that is increasing in density and complexity. We cannot expect a return to the pristine landscapes once experienced by Indigenous peoples. The Trust can, however, seize an opportunity to become an outstanding example of ecological restoration within a metropolitan area. With greater resources—human and financial—the Trust can lead the creation of almost 3,000 contiguous acres of natural habitat.

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Maureen Malloy
Director of Development

Chris Mendel
Executive Director

Maria Paula Mugnani
Director of Research and Restoration

Luke Rhodes
Stewardship Manager

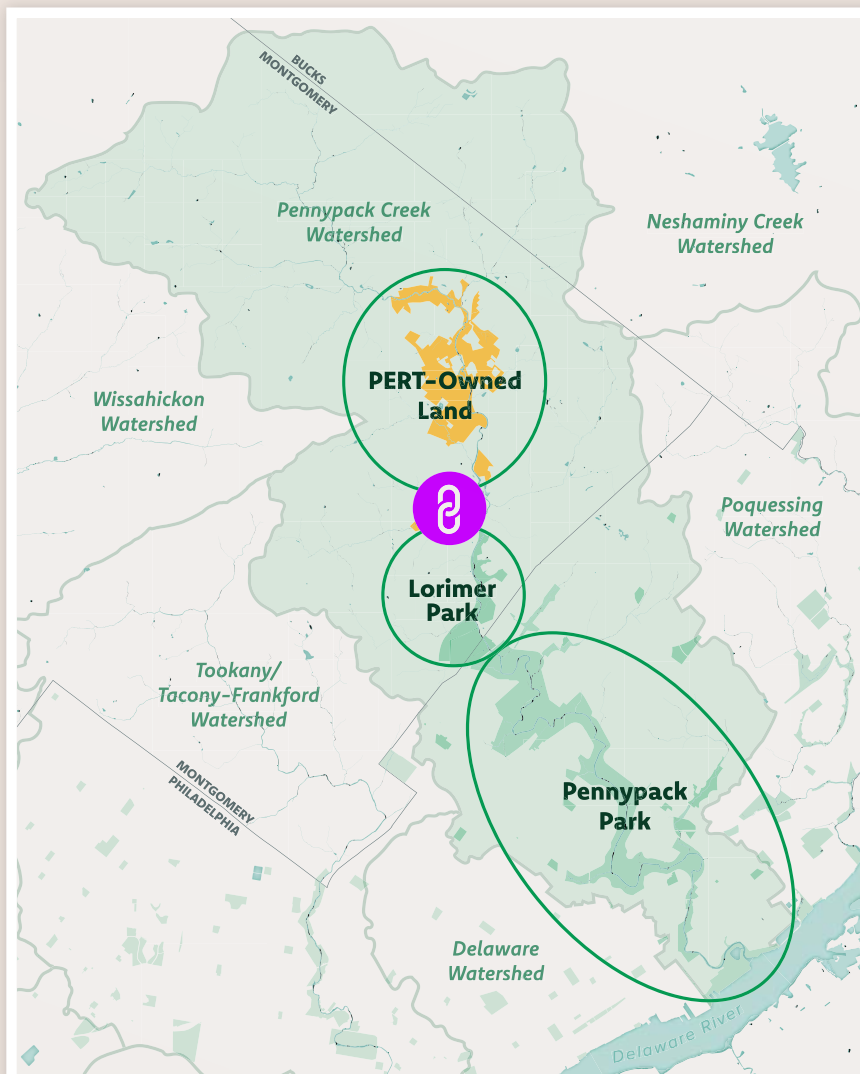
Kevin Roth
Director of Education

Meghan Taber
Volunteer Coordinator

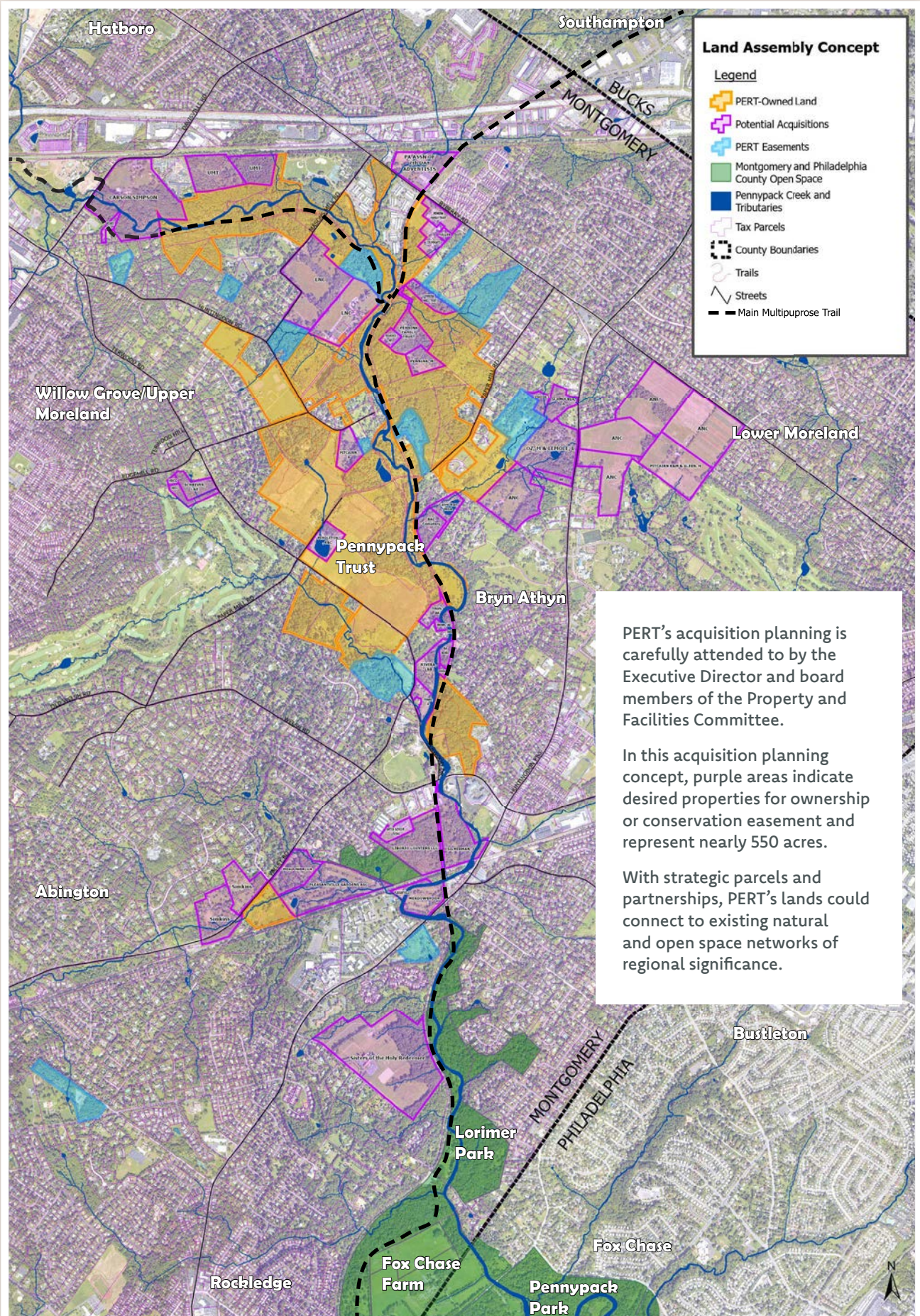
Abbi Winters
Communications Coordinator

Tiffany Young
Director of Finance and Investment

LINKING TO THE SIGNATURE LANDSCAPES IN OUR WATERSHED



Caring for the current footprint of the Preserve is *essential*. Protecting additional open space within an increasingly dense urban context is *critical*. **By building organizational capacity and acquiring key parcels**, PERT's lands could connect to Lorimer Park, which connects to Pennypack Park, to create **a contiguous mosaic of nearly 3,000 acres**, linking the Preserve with the easternmost reach of the Pennypack Creek Watershed at the Delaware River.





The Strategic Plan

Collectively, the three goals of this plan—**Healthy Ecosystem + Healthy Watershed**, **Engagement + Activation**, and **Readiness + Resilience**—honor the Preserve’s peaceful beauty and biodiversity, invite impassioned engagement and support, and promote learning and action to improve how the Trust restores land, protects water, and fosters healthy habitats.

This ten-year plan recognizes that activating healthy ecological connections is an ongoing, adaptive process. It directs stewardship to what is already under the Trust’s care while focusing restoration efforts on mitigating invasive species impacts, managing plant communities, and improving stormwater management throughout the Watershed.

Staff member Jackie macro sampling in the Pennypack Creek.



The Preserve will serve as a living demonstration site and hub for galvanizing conservation efforts.

This plan calls for the Trust to welcome and engage new neighbors—within and beyond its traditional reach of a 2.5-mile radius of the Preserve—and respond to their needs and interests by encouraging belonging and connection through education, volunteerism, and more accessible ways to enjoy the Preserve. The Preserve will serve as a living demonstration site and hub for galvanizing conservation efforts.

The Trust seeks to return to its watershed association roots. The plan guides a more proactive role in watershed-wide issues, engaging with staff of municipal parks and other land trusts in habitat management techniques as well as building the volunteer management capacity of allied organizations.

Fueling these ambitions requires new approaches to diversifying the Trust’s resources. While investment income remains a healthy financial foundation, alone it is not sufficient to ensure that the Trust grows in capacity and scope. Expect outreach and communications to tell compelling stories of restoring natural systems, interweaving and explaining ecological principles. In concert, the Trust’s research will buttress its identity as a nature preserve dedicated to conservation.

OVERVIEW OF GOALS & OBJECTIVES

This strategic plan is organized around three goals, each with three objectives. Collectively, the goals honor the Preserve’s peaceful beauty and biodiversity, invite impassioned engagement and support, and promote learning and action to improve how the Trust restores land, protects water, and fosters healthy habitats.

3 GOALS X 3 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES	GOALS		
	HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM + HEALTHY WATERSHED	ENGAGEMENT + ACTIVATION	READINESS + RESILIENCE
	1.1 Advance research and restoration practices for the Preserve’s distinctive habitats	2.1 Inform and engage people in taking responsibility for their ecosystem	3.1 Empower staff through greater capacity, infrastructure, skill building, and collaboration
	1.2 Protect high-priority open space from over development	2.2 Offer welcoming opportunities for public enjoyment and volunteerism	3.2 Direct board energies toward building and sustaining catalytic relationships and solutions
	1.3 Make a greater impact on the health of the Watershed	2.3 Increase the community’s philanthropic commitment to the mission and strategy	3.3 Enact a multi-year financial plan for growth and sustainability

Every objective includes corresponding initiatives, which are detailed on the following pages, to guide a separate implementation framework for tactical workplans and practices for assessment.



Pennypack Creek in autumn. Photo by Dan Hicks.

Spanning nearly 1,000 acres, the Preserve is the largest privately owned open space in eastern Montgomery County. It provides \$1.2 million in ecosystem services annually to residents throughout the Watershed. With its connected suite of woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, and streams, the Preserve is vital for clean air and water. Together, the Preserve’s dynamic habitats create a life-giving mosaic shared across a range of species from common decomposers to specialized predators.

GOAL 1

1

Healthy Ecosystem + Healthy Watershed

In the years ahead, the Trust will focus on proactive research and restoration techniques, creating multilayered habitats that can endure climate changes. **Caring for the current footprint of the Preserve is essential. Protecting additional open space within an increasingly dense urban context is critical.** To secure high impact parcels, the Trust will facilitate public and private



partnerships alongside its own strategic land acquisitions. To increase watershed scale impact among municipalities and the county, it will serve as a leader and collaborator in understanding the upstream and downstream effects of water on the entire ecosystem.

GOAL 1: HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM + HEALTHY WATERSHED	
OBJECTIVES	MAJOR INITIATIVES
1.1 Advance research and restoration practices for the Preserve's distinctive habitats	1.1.1 Reestablish a diverse, native, multi-layered structure in various habitats to maximize their resiliency and ecological function.
	1.1.2 Employ vigilant plant selection and proactive management that mitigates the impact of threats including climate changes and new outbreaks of invasive species, pests, and diseases.
	1.1.3 Incorporate systems thinking and species interaction into management of structure, function, and interplay of terrestrial and aquatic habitats.
1.2 Protect high-priority open space from over development	1.2.1 Set priorities for easements, direct ownership, or partner's purchase of high-impact open-space parcels that could enhance the health of the Preserve and Watershed.
	1.2.2 Partner with Montgomery County and municipalities, property owners, and community groups to advance conservation and environmentally sensitive development.
	1.2.3 Utilize a detailed acquisition plan to guide building connections with landowners so the Trust is known, trusted, approachable, and ready when an opportunity arises.
1.3 Make a greater impact on the health of the Watershed	1.3.1 Support municipalities, businesses, and homeowners in planting trees, creating forests, and improving stormwater management.
	1.3.2 Deepen partnerships with municipalities, offering specialized expertise to advance mutual interest in enhancing the quality of life of residents.
	1.3.3 Network with colleagues throughout the Pennypack Watershed to understand priorities and align strategies around community-based conservation.



Sean Bradley, a 2025 intern, leading a bird walk program. Photo by Kevin Roth.

United in their view of the Preserve as a beautiful, peaceful refuge, visitors from across the Watershed come to explore nature or sit in solitude. More than simply a recreational resource, the Preserve is a grounding-rod, a deep restorative physical and emotional well for tens of thousands of neighbors—from youths and elders—to draw from in all seasons, any day, from dawn to dusk.

GOAL 2

2 = Engagement + Activation

In the years ahead, the Trust will foster a deeper sense for place and the natural systems that keep us alive. It will position the Preserve as a **living classroom** that reveals ecological processes in real time and invites both service and learning. Programs rooted in place-based experiences will awaken ecological consciousness, encouraging visitors to **learn, volunteer, and give.**



The Trust will **lower barriers** that might prevent someone from feeling fully comfortable or capable of engaging. The awakening includes a call for broad, diversified support, emphasizing that service and philanthropy are essential to the Preserve remaining “forever.”

GOAL 2: ENGAGEMENT + ACTIVATION	
OBJECTIVES	MAJOR INITIATIVES
2.1 Inform and engage people in taking responsibility for their ecosystem	2.1.1 Tell the story of ecological restoration by using the Preserve as a demonstration site for sound practices and inviting visitors to experience the process and results.
	2.1.2 Evolve outreach and communications to respond to the area’s changing demographics, attract new supporters, and inspire collective action to improve the environment.
	2.1.3 Utilize a broad spectrum of technologies and approaches to develop immersive and interactive ways for people to learn, amplify their curiosity, and be a part of nature.
2.2 Offer welcoming opportunities for public enjoyment and volunteerism	2.2.1 Leverage volunteer interest in hands-on projects for all skills/ experience levels to effect afforestation, in partnership with townships, the county, and allied landowners.
	2.2.2 Offer choices for experiences, including guided groups, self-guided discovery, and opening oneself to the calming, restorative, healing properties of a natural setting.
	2.2.3 Put visitors at ease at the Preserve through clear wayfinding, safety tips, and paths that increase access for people with mobility concerns.
2.3 Increase the community’s philanthropic commitment to the mission and strategy	2.3.1 Clarify the “why” behind activities at the Preserve as well as the Trust’s purpose, strategy, and plans through storytelling and brand-building.
	2.3.2 Emphasize and elevate multiple pathways of financial engagement including membership, donations, volunteerism, sponsorship, and tax-credit funding.
	2.3.3 Build relationships with current and prospective donors to lay a solid foundation for robust major gifts and planned giving programs.



Tree planting day. Photo by Kyle Rose.

The Trust is a launch pad for careers in conservation. In the years ahead, the Trust will foster conditions where staff feel supported, connected, and equipped to realize their ambitions for the Preserve and for the trajectory of their career in conservation.

GOAL 3

3

Readiness + Resilience

The plan calls for board members to be informed and influential, stepping into **outward-facing leadership roles** as ambassadors and catalysts for high-impact relationships. To grow with intention rather than strain, the Trust will integrate disciplined **financial initiatives** so that implementation moves in sync with staff capacity and financial resources.

GOAL 3: READINESS + RESILIENCE

OBJECTIVES	MAJOR INITIATIVES
3.1 Empower staff through greater capacity, infrastructure, skill building, and collaboration	3.1.1 Enable staff departments to grow, to implement ambitious plans, and to collaborate with one another as specialized professionals.
	3.1.2 Foster cross-committee collaboration and more proactive, high-altitude planning to help ensure forward movement of complex initiatives and partnerships.
	3.1.3 Build and maintain processes and a work culture that are communicative, sharing, flexible, interdisciplinary, and collaborative.
3.2 Direct board energies toward building and sustaining catalytic relationships and solutions	3.2.1 Equip board members to be informed ambassadors and door openers by supporting their presence at Trust events and encouraging cross-committee knowledge sharing.
	3.2.2 Position the board as active champions for diversified, relationship-building fundraising, building bridges to new audiences/supporters.
	3.2.3 Convene board members and civic leaders, funders, and environmental partners for networking and collaborative discussions.
3.3 Enact a multi-year financial plan for growth and sustainability	3.3.1 Build the full board's capacity for financial oversight, in partnership with staff, to sustain strong financial performance in support of operations, capital needs, and new projects.
	3.3.2 Establish rolling revenue targets based on projections of endowment income to inform goal setting and planning for fund development and professional services.
	3.3.3 Refine the operating and capital budget development processes to align with staff-led work plans and priorities for implementation.

A Red-tailed Hawk is shown in flight, perched on a thick, dark brown branch. The hawk's wings are spread wide, revealing a pattern of brown and white feathers. Its head is turned slightly to the left, and its yellow eyes are visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest or natural habitat.**FROM 2026 TO 2036: TAKING FLIGHT**

In the years ahead, the Trust will support staff that implement local conservation, innovative restoration practices, collaboration, and outreach. The board will foster connections that enable sustained growth of a healthy local nonprofit and nature preserve.

*Red-tailed Hawk. Photo by Brent Guiliano.
First Place, Birds category, 2023 Photo Contest.*

Turning Strategy into Action

The scale of growth identified in this strategic plan—particularly around building and sustaining a healthy ecosystem and a healthy watershed—will require years. Partnerships take time to develop and become fruitful. Properties become available on their own timelines.

People and resources are the fuel for readiness and resilience in the face of new and evolving challenges and opportunities. Staff capacity and financial resources must be in place.

Equally important, for this strategic plan to be successful, it must be understood, embraced, and implemented with intentionality that guides how and why decisions are made, how teams collaborate, and how progress is assessed. This helps ensure that the plan becomes the tool that shapes the agenda, structure, processes, and scope of work for staff, volunteers, and the board.



An **Implementation Framework**, created by the Executive Director in collaboration with staff and board, will be used as an internal tool to assign responsibility for each objective, present sequencing, determine measures of progress, identify resource requirements and strategic partners, and set milestones.

Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to help assess whether or not implementation remains in service to the goals, objectives, and major initiatives. Key questions will keep our efforts focused on our core values, and our core assets (our land, our resources, and our people) growing sustainably.



Red Fox. Photo by Shiloh Silverman.

KEY QUESTIONS	
1	Are the Preserve’s habitats becoming healthier, more resilient, and more ecologically functional over time?
2	Are the most critical open-space parcels being secured to safeguard the long term health of the Preserve and Watershed?
3	Are more people—especially beyond near neighbors—developing a meaningful connection to the Preserve through their visit, learning, volunteering, and/or financial support?
4	Is the Trust building a broader and consistent base of financial support that aligns with strategic plan priorities?
5	Do the staff and board together have the capacity, structures, and relationships needed to implement the strategic plan?

Thank you.

For questions about this Strategic Plan, email us at contact@pennypacktrust.org.

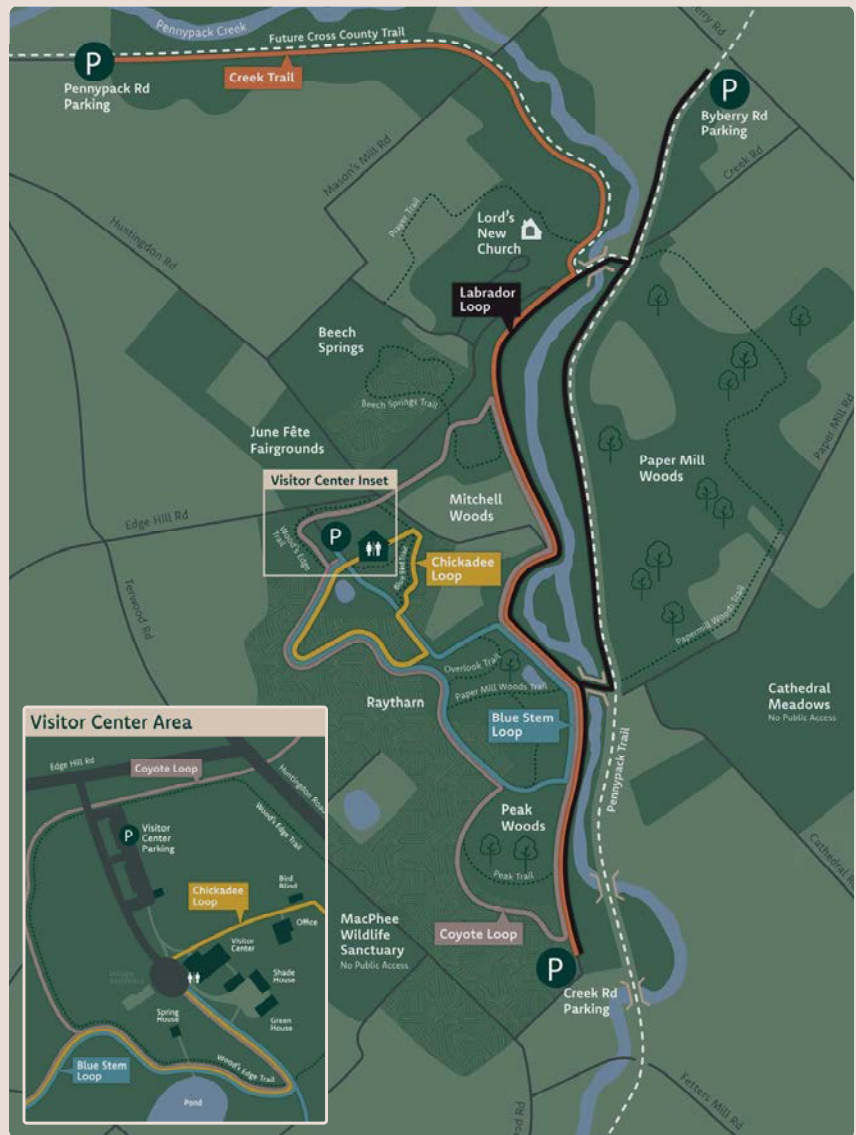
MAKE A DONATION

BECOME A MEMBER

Visit Us!

Stop by the Visitor Center and enjoy the trails on the Preserve.

Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust
2955 Edge Hill Road
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006
www.pennypacktrust.org
215.657.0830



Map Key



Visitor Center & restrooms



Parking



Woods



Preserve boundary



Grassland



Maintenance trail



Bridge

Multi-use trails

(dogs and bikes permitted)



Labrador Loop (2.0 mi.)

Wide, level, graveled trail through floodplain forest with views of Pennypack Creek, Crossroads Marsh, forest restoration and several sites of historic significance. Connects Montgomery County's Pennypack Trail to the Trust's Creek Trail.



Creek Trail (2.7 mi.)

Level paved, dirt, and gravel path; may be muddy in the winter and following rains. A highly varied forested floodplain experience that traverses the length of the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust. Connects to the County's Pennypack Trail and Cross County Trail.

Hiking trails

(foot traffic only; no pets or bikes)



Chickadee Loop (0.8 mi.)

Our easiest dirt trail features an incredible diversity over a short distance including beautiful meadows, a majestic old forest, and panoramic views.



Blue Stem Loop (1.6 mi.)

Intermediate difficulty with lots to offer: wetlands, grasslands, mature woodlands and the Pennypack Creek. Challenging terrain and a rewarding experience across dirt and gravel trails.



Coyote Loop (3.1 mi.)

Become immersed in an extended tour of grasslands, woodlands, the varied expressions of the creek, and its floodplain. Dirt, gravel and paved trail segments. Length and lots of elevation changes can be challenging for some.