

I know of no movement . . . as convincing, as effective, as compassionate as the land trust movement. It is like water, seeping into the most unexpected places; rising, falling, rising, falling, filling the basins of the human heart.

-Terry Tempest Williams (author)

**THE PINE CREEK VALLEY
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION:
REFLECTIONS 2007**

This year the Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association (“Pine Creek”) celebrates its 20th anniversary.

Twenty years ago a small group of thoughtful and dedicated citizens gathered to form an organization which they hoped would become the watchdog of the exceptional resources of the Pine Creek Valley Watershed of Berks County, Pennsylvania. Not in their wildest dreams, however, could Pine Creek’s founders ever have imagined the profound impact which their decision would have on their community in the years to come. In 1988, at the recommendation of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and through the efforts of Pine Creek volunteers, the *entire* Pine Creek Watershed, consisting of approximately 7200 acres located in District, Pike, Rockland, and Oley Townships of eastern Berks County, was upgraded to *Exceptional Value* status, the highest designation any stream or watershed can obtain in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Since its founding two decades ago, Pine Creek has worked to protect the natural resources of our area. It has assisted landowners to preserve beloved family lands, cooperated with local townships to ensure sound land management practices, and monitored uncontrolled development in environmentally sensitive areas. As its influence has spread, Pine Creek has cast its sights well beyond the boundaries of its own watershed: it has worked to conserve neighboring sister watersheds; it has formed lasting partnerships and alliances with other lands trusts and environmental organizations; and it has forged strong ties with many governmental agencies charged with the safeguarding of our natural resources. Over the years, Pine Creek has justifiably built a sound reputation as a staunch and unrelenting defender of the resources of the *Oley Hills* region of eastern Berks County.

The dawn of the 21st Century has borne witness to many significant accomplishments for the Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association and its allies. In celebration of Pine Creek's 20th anniversary, this report will highlight some of these achievements.

1. **Pine Creek's First Growing Greener Grant.**

In 2000 Pine Creek was privileged to be among the first recipients of a Growing Greener grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection ("DEP") for the preparation of a watershed study and protection plan (the "Plan"). The Plan was completed in June 2002. It documents in detail the natural resources of the Pine Creek Watershed and proposes various means to preserve the watershed area including the implementation of conservation zoning and the use of more permanent forms of land protection such as conservation easements. The Plan can be viewed and/or downloaded from Pine Creek's website – www.pinecreekwatershed.org.

2. **Second Growing Greener Grant.**

In 2002 Pine Creek received a second generous and deeply appreciated Growing Greener Grant from DEP to implement the various recommendations contained in the Plan and to begin preparation of a similar plan to include the neighboring Oysterville Watershed, also an *Exceptional Value* Watershed. The Oysterville Protection Plan was completed in the spring of 2006.

3. **Oysterville Watershed Protection Project.**

As a follow-up to its Oysterville Protection Plan, Pine Creek, in partnership with the Berks County Conservancy, Natural Lands Trust, and Stroud Water Research Center, has launched an ambitious project in the Oysterville Watershed involving landowner outreach and specific targeted efforts to preserve this picturesque valley located primarily in District and Pike Townships. The major purpose of this initiative is to encourage long-term stewardship of the natural resources of the Oysterville Watershed, to ensure protection of the *Exceptional Value* upper watershed, and to work toward future upgrading of the lower watershed which is currently classified as a Cold Water Fishery. The project will be funded in part through a generous grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as part of its Delaware Estuary Program.

4. **Permanent Protection of Oley Hills Properties.**

As the next critical stage in its development, Pine Creek is working with its partner organizations to ensure the *permanent* protection of significant tracts of land in the *Oley Hills* region. In the last six years alone Pine Creek and its partners have been responsible for the permanent protection of the following properties:

a. **Pike Township Farm.** A 104-acre farm located in Pike Township in two *Exceptional Value* watersheds, the Pine Creek Watershed and the Oysterville Watershed, will continue to be used as a farm by its new owners. The property, consisting of rolling fields and forested areas, was sold upon the death of its owner. Through a generous grant from the *The New York Community Trust – William B. Butz Memorial Fund*, Pine Creek purchased the development rights to the property. In exchange, the landowners deeded a conservation easement on the property to the Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association and the Berks County Conservancy. Working in partnership, Pine Creek and the Berks County Conservancy now jointly hold an easement on this special property ensuring that it is maintained as a farm in perpetuity.

b. **Headwaters Protection.** A 57-acre parcel of land located in the headwaters of the Pine Creek Watershed has also now been protected by a conservation easement. A generous grant from Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (“DCNR”), coupled with a donation of a portion of the development rights by the landowner as matching funds, has made possible the permanent protection of this unique tract. A conservation easement has been deeded jointly to Pine Creek and the Berks County Conservancy.

c. **Lobachsville Trout Hatchery.** The Oley Coalition consisting of Oley Township, Pine Creek, and the Pike Oley District Preservation Coalition (“POD/PC”) fought a lengthy battle on three legal fronts against the Wissahickon Water Company of Philadelphia which had proposed to extract 288,000 gallons a day from the well at the Lobachsville Trout Hatchery. The Coalition’s opposition was effective. In October 1996, the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board ruled in favor of the Oley Coalition and against Wissahickon. It was a precedent setting decision that also revised the rules for permit review for water withdrawal applications. Wissahickon withdrew its permit applications. Four years later in 2000, the Oley Coalition and its partners purchased the development rights to, and now jointly hold a conservation easement on, the Trout Hatchery site, thereby protecting its 44.49 acres in perpetuity.

d. **Trout Hatchery Wetlands.** With matching funds from DCNR and a very generous donation from POD/PC, Pine Creek recently purchased the 23-acre parcel adjacent to the Lobachsville Trout Hatchery. The property consists of *Exceptional Value* wetlands forming part of the Bieber and Pine Creeks. This special wetland area played a crucial role in testimony at the Wissahickon hearings. Pine Creek has granted a conservation easement to Albright College and the Berks County Conservancy, thereby ensuring that this unique property will be protected in perpetuity. The acquisition of the Trout Hatchery wetlands represents the final piece in the Oley Coalition’s efforts to protect the Lobachsville Trout Hatchery site and its adjacent 60+ acres of *Exceptional Value* wetlands from commercial exploitation. The 23-acre parcel will continue to be used for nature study by Albright College under the direction of Dr. Susan Munch and her colleagues.

e. **Lorraine Hunter Property.** Lorraine Hunter, a Rockland Township landowner, has donated a conservation easement to be held jointly in perpetuity by Pine Creek and the Berks County Conservancy. This easement will protect a beautiful 81-acre property consisting partly of farmland and partly of woodland located in the Pine Creek Watershed. A tributary of the Pine Creek originates on Ms. Hunter's property. We send a very special thanks indeed to Lorraine Hunter for protecting her beloved property and an important resource of the *Oley Hills* for generations yet to come. This property adjoins three other properties located in Rockland and Longswamp Townships which have also now been protected by conservation easements through the foresight of their owners.

f. **Elda Reider Memorial Preserve.** In 2000 Pine Creek purchased a 44-acre tract from the Berks County Conservancy. Through the efforts of Pine Creek, this property had previously been donated to the Conservancy by its owner, Elda Reider, in loving memory of her parents and grandparents. A conservation easement protecting the tract is held by the Berks County Conservancy.

g. **Headwaters Farm.** In 2006 Arthur Trumbauer and his family sold the development rights to a 94-acre farm located in the headwaters area of the Pine Creek Watershed. It was the Mr. Trumbauer's wish that this property be protected in perpetuity. A conservation easement was deeded jointly to the Berks County Conservancy and to Pine Creek. The funding for the acquisition of the development rights was made possible by a deeply appreciated grant from the *New York Community Trust – William B. Butz Memorial Fund* in memory of William B. Butz. Following the sale of the development rights, the Trumbauer property was sold to a farmer who will continue to farm the land, guided by a comprehensive conservation plan. Best management practices are currently being installed to enhance the water quality of these source waters.

h. **DCNR Grant.** The Berks County Conservancy received a substantial grant from DCNR to purchase the development rights to a critical property located primarily in the Oysterville Watershed, containing headwaters of Pine Creek and Oysterville Creek. As of the date of this writing, this 336-acre parcel is protected by conservation easements held by the Berks County Conservancy.

Over 1,100 acres in the *Oley Hills* have now been protected in perpetuity by conservation easements thanks to the efforts of land trust organizations, private foundations, and various state and local government agencies working in partnership.

5. **Stream Upgradings.**

In the last six years, the upper reaches of the Oysterville Watershed and portions of the Northwest Branch of the Perkiomen have also been upgraded to *Exceptional Value* status. The *Oley Hills* region is Berks County's most pristine watershed area. It forms the headwaters of five *Exceptional Value* streams: Pine, Bieber,

Oysterville, Sacony, and West Branch of the Perkiomen, which furnish water to three of the Schuylkill River's major tributaries: Manatawny, Maiden and Perkiomen Creeks. Pine Creek and its partners have been instrumental over the years in urging the upgrading of adjacent sister watersheds and in extending their conservation efforts to these areas.

6. **Joint Planning.**

Through the encouragement of the Berks County Commissioners and the Berks County Planning Commission, several municipalities have been working together to complete joint comprehensive plans. District, Rockland, Longswamp Township and Tipton Borough have now ratified a joint comprehensive plan. Discussions are currently underway with respect to the zoning which will implement the Plan. Pike Township, Colebrookdale and Boyertown have also implemented a joint comprehensive plan. The effect of these plans would be to concentrate growth in the more populated areas which also have the infrastructure to accommodate the expansion. Watershed areas like Pine Creek and the Oysterville would then experience less development pressure. Pine Creek volunteers continue to attend joint planning meetings in order to monitor the progress of joint planning in the municipalities affecting our watersheds.

7. **Scrutiny of Sewage Planning Modules.**

Through its environmental attorneys and consultants, Pine Creek is in the process of reviewing sewage planning modules relating to *Exceptional Value* streams, particularly those in Rockland Township which to date has had no base sewage facilities plan (Act 537 Plan). Pine Creek's goal is to require the affected municipalities and DEP to provide stricter scrutiny when reviewing planning modules which relate to *Exceptional Value* watersheds. The greatest threats to our watersheds in the *Oley Hills* is degradation caused by failing septic systems or systems placed in areas of marginal soils and highwater table. These non-point sources of pollution should be as strictly scrutinized as those of point source discharges since their impact upon our *Exceptional Value* watersheds is equally great.

8. **Partnerships Strengthened.**

Pine Creek continues to strengthen relationships with its partner organizations including the Berks County Conservancy, POD/PC, the Pike and District Township Environmental Advisory Councils, and the Berks County Conservation District. It now co-holds numerous conservation easements affecting lands in the *Oley Hills* with the Berks County Conservancy. POD/PC has celebrated its 12th anniversary, and recently the Berks County Conservancy celebrated more than 30 years of land conservation and historic preservation, as the leading agent for the conservation of the environment in Berks County.

Pine Creek has also fostered ties with local municipalities interested in natural resource protection such as Oley and Pike Townships. For example, Oley Township was one of Pine Creek's principal partners in the community initiative to

protect the Lobachsville Trout Hatchery from the Wissahickon Water Company. Oley Township has long been in the forefront of natural resource conservation. More than 7,000 acres of prime agricultural land have now been permanently protected in Oley Township, and Oley is the only township in the United States to have been placed in its entirety on the National Register for Historic Places. Pike Township has also been active in natural resource conservation. It was the first Berks County municipality to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain professional GIS mapping of its environmental resources. It was selected for the program due to its outstanding natural resources and the willingness of the Pike Township Environmental Advisory Council and other Pike Township residents to provide volunteer participation in the process.

9. Recognition of *Oley Hills* as Federally Protected Area.

The *Oley Hills* region lies in the geographic core of the Reading prong geologic formation of the Pennsylvania Highlands. The Pennsylvania Highlands region has gained recognition as a federal conservation region, and the passage of the Highlands Conservation Act in 2004 earmarked funds for the purchase of land or conservation easements for properties with high conservation value as determined by the U.S. Forest Service.

10. The Promise of the Coming Years.

The years ahead hold great promise for Pine Creek and its allies. In the coming years, Pine Creek will continue to concentrate on natural resource and land protection in the *Oley Hills* region. It will strengthen ties with its partner organizations such as the Berks County Conservancy and POD/PC. It will advocate the use of conservation zoning and smart growth techniques. And, most importantly, Pine Creek will continue to work toward the *permanent* protection of critical properties. It is hopeful that other sources of funding at the county, state, and Federal level will become available for the purchase of development rights in the *Oley Hills* region, thereby allowing landowners to voluntarily protect their beloved properties for generations yet to come.

The following excerpts from the opening address of the National Land Trust Rally in Snowmass, Colorado, October 15, 1999, by Jean Hocker, then President of the Land Trust Alliance, seem particularly apt as we reflect upon the opportunities which lie ahead:

“We live in a time of change unimaginable just a short time ago. Unprecedented prosperity has brought development to parts of the country we never thought would be touched by sprawl. Technology has given us the ability to share information and ideas in exciting new ways. In many parts of the country, land conservation no longer means saving individual parcels of land; rather it means confronting threats to huge blocks of land whose wholesale conversion is imminent. All of this is bringing changes to the way land trusts operate . . .

As we approach a new decade and a fresh century, we have opportunities never imagined by the Bostonians who formed the world's first land trust more than a century ago. Although the urgency of our work sometimes seems overwhelming, we have more tools, more recognition, more resources, more support than they could have dreamed of.

How we seize these opportunities now will determine how generations 100 years hence look back on our labors. Looking around the room, and at the land trust movement you represent, I have no doubt whatsoever that they will be grateful beyond measure." Reprinted from Exchange, The Journal of the Land Trust Alliance, Volume 18, No. 4, Fall 1999.

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THE PINE CREEK VALLEY
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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