

**Caruso Conservation Easement
 West Rockhill Township
 Bucks County, PA**

Project Description:

West Rockhill Township, partnering with Natural Lands Trust, has placed 24 acres of valuable land under protection with the assistance of a Growing Greener 2 grant from DCNR in the amount of \$182,400. The area under a new conservation easement held by Natural Lands Trust, runs along the Ridge Valley Creek and contains mature deciduous woodlands and large diabase geology. The land is truly a treasure in an area that has seen a 47 % increase in urbanization and only a small population increase within the last few decades. This parcel will form part of a greenway from the Unami Forest in Montgomery County to the Quakertown Swamp in Bucks County, which has been identified as a area of highest priority in both County's Natural Area Inventories. Greenways are vital for species migration, the overall health and biodiversity of organisms, and help keep populations stable.

The easement will also help to protect critical riparian areas along the Ridge Valley Creek which is part of the Ridge Valley Watershed, also a Priority 1 natural area in Bucks County. West Rockhill



Township approached DCNR because the Caruso parcel was identified as such high priority on both Township and County plans for both scenic value and environmental benefits to the community. Local support for this project was largely due to the Natural Lands Trust, West Rockhill Township, Heritage Conservancy, and the Upper Perkiomen Watershed Coalition's efforts to reach out to local landowners.

Quote: "This project is the result a broad support at the state, county and township levels working closely with a land trust and a private landowner, to protect an important property in the Unami forest. Natural Lands Trust was very proud to be entrusted with a conservation easement on this beautiful property." - Drew Gilchrist, Project Manager, Natural Lands Trust

According to Project Manager Drew Gilchrist with Natural Lands Trust, the Ridge Valley Creek area is "one the few streams in the SE PA region to be forested its entire length, contributing to its high water quality. It is also designated as an Audubon "Important Bird Area" and is part of the PA Highlands." Leaving this forest intact will result in higher water, increased storm water absorption, and reduction in sediments and nutrients entering the creek.

Amount of Keystone funding awarded, year and matching sources:

- 2006: \$182,400 Growing Greener 2 Grant
- Matching Funds - \$209,500
- Bucks County Natural Areas Program - \$186,400
- West Rockhill Township - \$18,100
- William Penn Foundation - \$5,000