



# Somerset County Conservancy A Charitable Trust

Conserving Land...Enhancing Habitat...Educating the Community

## Newsletter

Fall 2023

### President's Message Spring 2023

Jeff Payne

It has been a busy summer season for your Somerset County Conservancy with both numerous outings and some exciting improvements at the Menser addition at Kimberly Run Natural Area (KRNA). We have had walks looking for birds, amphibians and ferns; planted native pitcher plants; built trail; erected signs, and created a new wetland area. We had a very successful picnic with explorations afterwards. As I write this we are looking forward to a mushroom identification walk and a campfire evening.

We established a KRNA Maintenance Endowment which was a long-time goal for one of our founding Board Members, Lester Brunell. Lester was excited to see this fund initiated, unfortunately we lost him shortly thereafter. Godspeed to you, Lester, and revel in the green forests beyond.

This newsletter contains information about all the above and more-we hope you enjoy your read. We also look forward to seeing many of you at our Annual Meeting and dinner December 6 with guest speaker, Travis Anderson of the PA Game Commission on control burns and their role in habitat management.



### Save the Dates!

<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>8:00 p.m. Star Party at Laurel Hill</b>
<b>Oct 21</b>	<b>6:00 p.m. Campfire at KRNA</b>
<b>Dec 6</b>	<b>6:00 p.m. Annual Dinner</b>

[www.somersetcountyconservancy.org](http://www.somersetcountyconservancy.org)

# Menser Property Addition Projects

By Jeff Payne



Installing signs at KRNA.

There have been several exciting projects occurring at KRNA Menser Addition this summer. Trail development continues with work on the many trails skirting the field edges on the west side of Menser Rd. There is a new trail being developed starting on the connector trail between the old KRNA White Trail and Menser Addition. There have been two successful work days and the new trail meanders to the north through a wooded area and



Cleaning site of invasive brush.

will eventually follow a rocky feeder stream and come out in the field at the property's north end. Hard work, fueled by a few pizzas, has resulted in about .3 miles being completed.



Completed pot hole starting to fill

New signage has been installed on the Menser Addition side and the property boundaries were marked with a more durable white paint.

A very exciting project has been the development of a demonstration wetland creation project immediately adjacent to the parking lot on Menser Rd. The PA Game Commission helped by clearing the site of invasive Autumn Olive, Multi-flora Rose and



Placing rocks.

Japanese Honeysuckle with an awesome brush clearing machine. With the design help of Mark Thomas, who works with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and the Pennwest Universities, and with Maust Excavating doing the earth work, we have made about 1/3 acre of shallow wetlands which should fill through the winter months. We



Seeding & mulching.

have wildflower seed as well as wetland seed to plant later in the fall. It will be interesting to watch the maturation of this wetland and to see the creatures that populate it over time. If successful we may attempt a larger "net gain wetland" project

on the east side of the road at a later date.

# Creature Feature

By Scott Bastian

Many mushrooms have really cool names — this one perhaps preeminent among them all. The ominous handle says it well: Eastern Destroying Angel (*Amanita bisporigera*) is one of the deadliest mushrooms on the planet. There is no danger in handling them, but woe unto the accidental consumer. Cooking and desiccation (drying) do not negate the toxic properties.



The mushroom is actually rather attractive with a white **cap**, a white skirt-like **ring** high up on the **stipe** ("stalk") that is a remnant of a **veil** which formerly covered the white **gills** when the fungus was young. The gills are not attached to the stipe. There is also a white **volva** ("cup") at the bottom of the stipe that appears as if the whole of the organism was contained within it and hatched out. Indeed, the volva originally covered the entire mushroom. The mycelium ("roots") forms a symbiotic relationship with the roots of oaks, in particular, and also conifers. In sum, beware of any white mushroom with a ring and a cup present.

The Destroying Angel (*Amanita bisporigera*) and the Death Cap (*Amanita phalloides*) account for the overwhelming majority of deaths due to mushroom poisoning. There are a number of other species within the genus *Amanita* and none should be consumed (or very nearly none). The amatoxins present in the fruiting bodies savage liver and kidney tissue. Symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps do not appear for 6 to 24 hours, by which time the damage is done.

Actually, not that many people die in the U.S. from this particular toxicosis, due in part to advancing knowledge of supportive care and the success of informative campaigns to educate would-be mushroom hunters. There is no antidote, but there are reports of medical success in treatment of amatoxin poisoning using "anti-hepatotoxic" compounds from the Milk Thistle plant.

Oddly enough, Box Turtles can safely eat Amanitas: I once saw it happening in the wild. However, people have died from eating the turtles that ate the mushrooms! More commonly, poisoning incidents involve identification confusion with popular edibles such as Meadow Mushroom and other *Agaricus* species. In the young button stage, Amanitas look like puffballs, which can also spell trouble.

If you want to forage for wild mushrooms, the rewards can be great - their taste easily bests what you find on the grocery shelves. But it's a really good idea to master recognizing the dangerous ones first. Remember the wry quip "all mushrooms are edible at least once" or the sage observation that "there are old mushroom hunters and there are bold mushroom hunters... but there are no old, bold mushroom hunters."

My wife, Jill, son Andy and I found the pictured Angel while hiking along Kimberly Run during the annual picnic a couple years ago. Keep an eye out to find your own specimens; mostly in late summer months and early autumn after a nice rain spell. And remember

# KRNA Endowment Fund Established

By Jeff Payne

Kimberly Run Natural Area has been expanded into a wonderful 646 acres of varied habitat all open to the public. Along with owning such a large piece of property comes the long-term responsibility of managing and improving the property which, of course, costs money. In the past, annual memberships and donations have largely covered the SCC annual budgeted expenses. The Board of Directors realized that ever increasing costs necessitate having varied funding sources to meet these maintenance costs. Money has been set aside in an Endowment Trust with a percentage of the principle being available yearly for upkeep, maintenance and small projects at KRNA.

While we have a good start, we are actively looking to grow the fund to better cover ongoing costs. We can accept gifts directed into this fund. Please consider an outright gift, a tax-free disbursement from an IRA or even naming this fund in a will. The benefits will be ongoing for the long term!



## *In Memorial of Lester Brunell*

Lester Brunell was a founding member of the Board of Directors of the Somerset County Conservancy in 1994. He was passionate about conservation and the things he felt the Conservancy should be involved in. He served many years on the Board as our Recording Secretary and many more years as Chairman of our Community Relations Committee. Lester served as our Delegate Representative to the Pennsylvania Land Trust meetings. He was a leader in the Capacity Building Projects we undertook. He was an active participant in all our workdays, building trails and building bridges, attending executive meetings, strategic planning sessions. Lester sometimes referred to himself as “our resident Curmudgeon”! Curmudgeon or not Lester will be greatly missed! 29 years of service to the Conservancy and the Community. Well Done Lester! Thank You.

## *Donations In Memorium*

of

### **Lester Brunell**

Jim and Meg Moses

Vonnie Scott

Randy & Deborah Miller

Sam & Denice Underwood

Kimberly Brant

Bob & Susan Hook

Kevin & Susan Knutsen

Marsha Welsh

Jeff &Carolynn Payne

# Somerset Lake Action Committee Update

By Jeff Payne

SLAC volunteers Len Lichvar, Larry Adams, Sandy Cline, Dan Jenkins, Jeff Payne, and James Payne participated in the Lake Days event sponsored by the PA Fish and Boat Commission and Commissioner Don Anderson. The 2-day event in May brought in school kids from most of our local school districts. The students had participated in either Catfish-in-the-Classroom where they raised catfish to be released or they helped construct wooden fish structures which were weighted and placed in Somerset Lake for underwater habitat. SLAC folks discussed the process used to facilitate state funding for dam repairs and the process of helping start the County leased Somerset Lake Nature Park. The students also learned about boat safety, fish habitat, fish biology and dam engineering from various members of the PFBC. All participants learned a lot and had a good time.



PFBC Commissioner Anderson and past Commissioner Lichvar “Marry the Waters” of the old and new Somerset Lake



In addition, SLAC through the SCC administered a Reservoir Habitat Grant which allowed the PFBC to stabilize a large section of bank with rock groins and to purchase 199 short vertical plank structures which are submersible wooden habitat structures to make productive fish reefs in the lake bed. Several SLAC volunteers helped place the structures on separate work days.

## Geology Walk

By Scott Bastian

On Sunday, May 7th, the Somerset County Conservancy held a geology walk & talk at Kimberly Run. Geologists Tony and Cindy Slatcoff shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for the science of geology with a group of 14 attendees. The pair brought a large assortment of rocks, minerals and fossils from their collection for the group to examine and then took a brief walk from the parking lot down to the sandstone cliffs along the trail to the cabin and talked about features of that rock face and when the rocks were formed. Turns out they pre-date the Revolutionary War! [by many millions of years] Although the walk was cut a little short by rain, it was an enjoyable and educational outing.



## Native Plants

By Pam Diesel



Ironweed

A native plant is one that occurred before settlement by Europeans. Native plants include: ferns, grasses, sedges, rushes, flowering perennials, annuals and biennials, woody trees, shrubs and vines. Pennsylvania has 2,100 native plant species.



Bee balm

Native plants are adapted to local soils, climate and conditions. They require little maintenance such as soil amendments and water. They attract native pollinators such as: bees, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds. They provide food for birds and insects.

In sunny and moist areas such as those recently created on the Menser property of the Somerset County Conservancy. The following native perennials will grow: milkweed, Joe-Pye weed, cardinal flower, ironweed, garden phlox, Virginia creeper vine, bee-balm, sundrops, sunflower and wild geranium. Somerset County Conservancy will plant native plants on their property and not invasive or non-native species.

## Bird Outing and Pitcher Plants

By Jeff Payne



Greg Gdula  
planting pitcher  
plants

One of the spring's scheduled outings was a bird walk at KRNA. The weather turned out to be fairly non-cooperative with 50 degree temperature and rain. Jeff Payne led the 6 brave participants through mostly quiet woods but we did get a brief flurry of activity back near the fields where a couple warbler species, Scarlet Tanagers and an elusive Gray-cheeked Thrush were spotted. A couple days later the area was alive with birdsong and flight which just shows why it is called birding and not bird watching.

An exciting extension on this soggy day was the planting of some carnivorous pitcher plants in the bog areas of KRNA. The approximately 15 plants were generously supplied by Greg Gdula and compliment the cotton grass, sundew and bog goldenrods already found there. Pitcher plants are a plant that passively capture and digest insects in low fertility, acidic soils. These plants are common further north and are still found in some remnant bogs left over from the previous ice age at our latitude. They had been lost on KRNA possibly in the relatively recent past when attempts to drain the bogs were partially successful. We are trying to reestablish the hydrology and some plants which have been lost due to recent human interference.



*There was a lot of participation from the attendees and many critters on the trail.*

## Frog Walk

PA Woods and Forests' final but most successful Frog Walk of the year was held at Kimberly Run Natural Area.

What is a Frog Walk? Frog walks are nights filled with croaks, trills, and splashes as Aaron entertains and educates the people in our community about the creatures that live in our backyards.

The Frog Walk at Kimberly Run was lively. Capouellez presented and educated the attendees on over ten target species that PA Woods and Forests prioritizes. He states, "I had the opportunity to present the toads, wood frogs, snails, and salamanders in the woodland habitat and the bullfrogs and green frogs in the field habitat."

Check out Woods and Forests Media on YouTube, select the "Frog Week 2023" playlist, and click on episode 8 to see Somerset County Conservancy's beautiful nature preserve. Kimberly Run is spacious and offers diverse walking trails. It provides the perfect woodland and open-field habitats for thriving amphibians and reptiles. The Somerset County community is also partial to this trail, and it's easy to see why. Experience the excitement and love for this beloved preserve in episode 8 of the playlist.

PA Woods and Forests is grateful to the Somerset County Conservancy and its community members for their enthusiasm and involvement in the non-profit's conservation efforts.

## Ferns

By Scott Bastian

Nineteen species of ferns and fern allies presented themselves for inspection on fern walks held at KRNA this summer. On June 25th, Scott Bastian led a group of 18 people on an easy walk through the trails to learn more about the local representatives of a group that encompasses more than 50 species around the county. There were also many specimens displayed to showcase additional species not encountered on the walk. Participants had the opportunity to eat some cooked Ostrich Fern fiddleheads --a new experience for most folks. Like so many things in the natural world, the closer you look, the more interesting it gets. So it is with ferns. A second walk on September 1st located the cast of characters once again. That's one nicety of botanizing: once found, a given plant species will stay put and allow repeated examination all summer (and often for many years after). Both walks were pleasant events through the beautiful woods of Kimberly Run.



## SCC's 2023 Fall Picnic

The occasional light drizzle could not dampen the spirits of anyone, young or old, who attended the annual fall picnic of the Somerset County Conservancy. The gathering was held on September 17<sup>th</sup> at the red cabin area of the SCC's Kimberly Run Natural area. The nearly 40 members and guests feasted on masterfully grilled burgers and hotdogs as well as a delicious variety of covered dishes and desserts provided by members. But even more enjoyable than the tasty and sumptuous meal was the camaraderie of the nature loving outdoor enthusiasts as they shared stories of their experiences and ideas for promoting and sustaining the ambitious projects and goals of the Conservancy and its many partners.

Thanks to Jeff Payne and Roger Latuch, who hauled their quads to the picnic, many folks were given the opportunity to explore the trails of the KRNA and recently acquired Menser Farm addition on four wheels.

Be sure to mark your calendars for upcoming SCC events such as guided trail walks, trail work parties, and the annual banquet on December 6<sup>th</sup>.



Board Members from left to right: Steve Peck, Jim Moses, and Fred Will.



**Somerset County Conservancy**

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**Somerset, PA 15501**



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and mail to:

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