



# Somerset County Conservancy A Charitable Trust

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

## Newsletter

Spring 2025

### President's Message Spring 2025

Jeff Payne



There have been very exciting developments at your Somerset County Conservancy since our last Newsletter! Enclosed articles in this edition will discuss a new property addition to the Kimberly Run Natural Area, moving of our AMD treatment sites into a new conservancy, partnerships with other groups and agencies to help manage the KRNA more effectively, activities for kids, fun facts about critters and reports of outings enjoyed by many.

We are continuing our membership drive for 2025 so it is a great time to invite a friend or family member to join the SCC. Be sure to plan to attend one of our events, participate in a work party or just enjoy a relaxing nature walk through the beautiful trails in the KRNA.

### KRNA Endowment

Jeff Payne

The SCC has established an endowment to supplement the funding necessary to take care of the KRNA. The majority of the money necessary to run the SCC and maintain the KRNA has traditionally come from your yearly memberships and donations. As the size of the KRNA has increased various habitats, structures, and trails need yearly work and we have found the need to identify additional funding streams. Endowments work by investing money (we use the Somerset Trust Company Common Trust Fund) and then using a percentage of the fund (typically 4% will allow modest principle growth) to supplement the yearly budget. Contributions to this very important fund can be made in a variety of ways. Outright donations earmarked for the endowment work great, gifts from required minimum distributions from IRA's can possibly avoid income taxes, memoriums or honorariums (for that hard to buy for person), or gifts can be made through wills before estate taxes are applied.

Our endowment has a good start but will need to grow to help maintain the KRNA and help to continue and improve the SCC's programs into the future. Please consider a gift to your SCC's Endowment Fund.

## **SCC Abandoned Mine Treatment Sites Turned Over to New Conservancy**

Jeff Payne

An important era of the Somerset County Conservancy came to a close February 25, 2025, when the SCC turned six abandoned mine drainage (AMD) treatment site properties over to the newly formed Bottomlands Conservancy.

When Dave Mankamyer, then a County Commissioner, conceived of the idea of forming a Conservancy in 1994 the principle reason was to hold land to construct treatment sites for the pervasive AMD sites that had fouled our local waterways. An environmental, health and economic disaster, our polluted streams were the legacy of unregulated coal mining practices prior to 1977.

New ideas were being conceived on using passive methods involving water flowing through vegetation, mulch and limestone beds to increase alkalinity, raise pH and drop out metals such as iron, aluminum, and manganese. Various SCC Board members, including Dan Seibert (National Resource Conservation Service), Dave Steele (Somerset Conservation District) and Lenny Lichvar (Southern Alleghenies Conservancy, then Somerset Conservation District) were instrumental in designing and finding funding to construct these systems. Other groups such as the Stoneycreek River Improvement Project were formed to advocate for and help implement projects on both lands the SCC held and elsewhere.

The first in the nation construction of a so-called SAP system was at our Oak's Trail Site. An educational trail was installed and over time many visitors, including the Secretary of the Interior and US Senators, toured the site to see this successful method being employed to clean the water. The Hawk View and State sites were added close by on the Stoneycreek and an upstream site on Lambert's Run was installed. Water quality in the overall Stoneycreek was remarkably improved with the formerly sludgy, orange water flowing past the Borough of Hooversville clearing up to the point trout once again were swimming in the river.

A very large alkaline discharge containing vast amounts of iron discharging into the Quemahoning Creek just upstream from the public water supply in the Quemahoning Reservoir was our next project. Serpentine dikes were constructed to increase retention time allowing the metals to fall out before entering the creek. Our final property on Coal Run near Salisbury was our only active Treatment site. Here a water-powered wheel dispensed lime slowly into an acidic discharge.

The SCC cared for the properties with trimming and mowing trails for many years. Herculean efforts from the Somerset Conservation District, then led by Lenny Lichvar, secured funding and oversaw construction as the systems needed rehabilitated after 15 – 20 years of service. But, as the SCC's resources and efforts became more focused on the enlarging of Kimberly Run Natural Area, a search for a long-term steward of the AMD sites was initiated.

A winning solution was found when the Bottomlands Conservancy was formed with the focused mission of owning lands where AMD abatement systems are present or could be constructed. A business called InnoH2O will work closely with the new Bottomlands Conservancy to ensure long-term maintenance and updates keep the waters clean. The SCC has great confidence that, in turning over ownership of these six sites, the leaders of the new group, including Lenny Lichvar, Mike McCluskey and Logan Lichvar, will work hard to maintain and restore the valuable water resources of our region.



## Creature Feature - Snow Flea

Scott Bastian

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in awhile, you could miss it." That movie quote from one Ferris Bueller sums it up well: if you don't take a closer look once in awhile, then you'll miss seeing things in life like... Snow Fleas.

Our winter walk on January 18<sup>th</sup> at Kimberly Run was as memorable for the Snow Fleas (*Hypogastrura nivicola*) as much as anything else. At one spot, there were hundreds of them; although they were still rather easy to miss if you weren't watching closely.

Snow Fleas are not fleas. In fact, they are not even classified as insects anymore; they're actually members of a group of species known as "springtails" and are more closely related to crustaceans. They do, however, jump like a flea and are also similar in size to their namesake. The ability to launch into the air is afforded by an appendage called a furcula which is kept folded under tension beneath the body. That ability helps them to escape predation.

Snow Fleas are active all year: they're just more easily observed in winter when they mass on snow. Snow Fleas have an antifreeze protein in their system that allows for activity in cold seasons, but they may also be encountered in leaf litter, loose soil, or rotting logs the year around. Some species of springtails prefer caves, and others are even canopy dwellers. There are likely as many as 30-40 different species of springtails in most temperate woodlands. [There are *thousands* of species of springtails worldwide.]

Wherever they are found, the universal requirement is moisture: springtails are very sensitive to desiccation. In fact, springtails possess the ability to reduce their body size (through molting) by as much as 30% when temperatures rise enough and humidity drops. A smaller size is advantageous to their survival in such conditions due to concomitant higher metabolic rates and energy requirements.

What do they eat? Springtails subsist on decaying plant matter, sap, algae, fungi, and other microbiota. What eats them? Predators include mites, arachnids, beetles, ants, and centipedes.

How long do they live? Two years would be a pretty typical lifespan.

Snow Fleas may occasionally invade homes if there is excessive moisture there. Treatment is simply to dry up the affected area. It should be noted that they are harmless, not parasitic and do not carry disease. But they ARE beneficial to soils through their decomposition activities and abetting the spread of microorganisms. Moreover, scientists are investigating Snow Flea antifreeze proteins to potentially aid in deep-cold organ transplant transport as well as producing better ice cream!



Snow dweller + antifreeze + cold transport + ice cream = cool critter.



## Many Hands Make Light Work - 2025 Spring Tree and Shrub Plantings

Adam Katrancha

The many hands of the enthusiastic volunteers made light work of the Somerset County Conservancy's March 23 tree and shrub planting day. With nearly 100 potted trees and shrubs procured from a variety of sources at no cost, a small contingent arrived at the Menser parking lot late in the morning to organize and place materials for the afternoon work crew. Spurred by a beautiful day and the apexing sun, the eager workers arrived with cheerful spirits and tools in hand.

The ambitious, early arrivals commenced planting with a small number of balsam fir and white spruce in a somewhat secluded opening between the Menser parking lot and Tree Swallow field. If successful, these native conifers will provide evergreen diversity and thermal cover for wildlife.

The vernal pools along Menser Road provided an ideal setting for wetland obligate buttonbush along with the moisture loving red chokeberry. A single highbush cranberry, a native viburnum that produces red fruit suitable for consumption, will provide variation to the lower growing plants. The showy flowers, abundant berries, and colored stems of the different shrubs will provide wildlife with food and cover across all seasons and provide a buffer contrasting the adjacent grassland.

The nearby Tree Swallow field provided the location for the development of a shrub border zone between the grassland and adjacent woods. The eastern edge of the field is currently populated with invasive autumn olive, multiflora rose and honeysuckle. Preparatory work for this location, completed in weeks prior, included herbicidal basal spray of the invasive species to eliminate the aggressive competition. The treatment, consisting of an herbicide mixed in oil, is applied with an encompassing spray directly to each stem. While the results are not immediately evident, the oil carries the herbicide into the plant's vascular system and, over the next growing season, will disrupt the normal biological processes, leading to the eventual death of the invader.



The potted shrubs, already staged for planting, consisted of red and black chokeberries and a variety of dogwoods suitable for the moist, but not saturated soils along the edge of the field. A few taller blackhaw viburnums were placed in the more open areas along the border to take advantage of the increased sun availability. Spicebush, the host plant for the Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly, were installed in a small island of trees between trails.

With each planting, a protective tree tube was staked in place and the label for each plant secured to the stake. Over the upcoming seasons, the conscientious effort by these volunteers will improve the diversity of Kimberly Run Natural Area, provide improved resources for wildlife, and add to the aesthetic beauty of property. When you visit and walk the trails, take time to inspect the growing shrubs and learn their names. Find a favorite and watch it mature. Look for blooms and butterflies, berries and birds in upcoming years. With the expansive acreage and variety of habitats, Kimberly Run Natural Area offers every member the opportunity to explore and contribute to the Somerset County Conservancy's mission. Come join the fun. We hope to see you at an upcoming event.



## Memorial Donations

### Memorial \$4,700 In Memory of Janet Payne

W. Robert & Cheryle Schwarz	Carolyn Payne
Douglas & Elena Brant	Jeff Payne
Robert & Susan Hook	Daniel Jenkins
Ross & Susan Moon	Harvey Frankel
Agilent Technologies	Leslie While
Stephen & Amanda Peck	Edward Stout
Alice Richardson	A. Burkhardt
Jim & Meg Moses	Jennifer Wolf
George & Gloria Finckenor	Judith Clark
Robert & Pamela Diesel	Thomas Rothfuss
James & Margaret Payne	Miria & Jeff Finckenor

### Memorial \$890 In Memory of Bradley Keim

Jeffrey Payne, DVM  
 Debbi Prosser  
 Susanne Sturni  
 George & Wanda Shreffler  
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 Jake & Linda Witherell  
 Evelyn Bowman  
 Amy Beahan  
 Nancy Forlines & Mark Keim  
 Terry & Dianna Stevens  
 Kristen S. Cook  
 Marilyn & Joe Duplinsky  
 Mark & Pamela Miller

### Memorial \$2,500 In Memory of Lester Brunell

A. Isgan

### Botany Walk

Scott Bastian

It was a good day for a botany walk. [In truth, all days are good for botany walks!] The SCC hosted a winter botany walk at Kimberly Run on January 18, 2025. The snow was deep enough that no evergreen ferns or wildflower skeletons were readily found, but there were plenty of trees and shrubs to study. Our crew of 12 attendees meandered around through the woodlands and just enjoyed a scenic winter day that ended up at the cabin where we had a roaring fire and plenty of marshmallows for toasting. One of the highlights of the walk was actually a hexapod: we found Snow Fleas. If you've not had the pleasure of their acquaintance, please read the Creature Feature elsewhere in this newsletter.



Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> when the Conservancy will host a get-together where YOU can actually be part of the show. Bring your *nature-related collection* (a part or the whole; small or large) for a show-and-tell at the cabin. Ideas for you to share include: skulls, taxied mounts, tanned hides, antler sheds, nature books, leaves, fishing equipment, tied flies, hunting paraphernalia, nature photos, rocks, minerals, gems, fossils, insect collection, seashells, wood carvings, wildlife drawings/paintings, apiary items, etc. Even a single item that you'd like to share would be fine. Let us know if you need some table space or floor space and we will accommodate. Direct inquiries to [jandsbastian@gmail.com](mailto:jandsbastian@gmail.com). Event will be rain or shine and we'll begin at 2 PM and wrap up between 3- 4:00. Light refreshments will be provided. Turn out and share your savvy!



## **Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Projects at Kimberly Run Natural Area**

Adam Katrancha

A little over two years ago Kimberly Run Natural Area (KRNA) doubled in size with the addition of the Menser Farm property. This tract added an expanse of adjacent forest along with nearly 70 acres of fields and grasslands in various states of invasion from undesirable plant species, mostly consisting of the invasive shrub autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*).

The fields also consisted of a mixture of warm and cool season grasses. While a mixture of grasses and forbs provide diversification and structure, non-native cool season grasses emerge earlier in season and grow denser, out-competing the more desirable forbs and warm season grasses that make better bird nesting habitat. With the help of the Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC) prescribed fire crews, both autumn olive and the undesirable herbaceous vegetation have been kept in check in the original KRNA Bluebird Trail field along Route 219, where pheasants are regularly stocked and the northern harriers (*Circus hudsonius*) have been known to nest.

With the daunting task of trying to remove the invasives plants in the new fields while also maintaining the existing open spaces on a limited resource budget; new sources of assistance were in need. After a series of exchanges through a network of conservation partners, Emma Keele, a wildlife biologist with the Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Project, contacted Jeff Payne with an exciting program offering assistance specifically for grassland restoration and development. On an outwardly dreary October 16, SCC Directors Jeff Payne, Fred Will, and Jim Moses met with Emma and her colleagues Jacob Crestani and Patrick Grunwald (Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever), both also wildlife biologists, to share in SCC's mission and hopes for grassland restoration.

Meeting in the Menser Road parking lot at 9:00 AM, Jeff provided the guests with the history of KRNA and the challenges faced with the expansive lands under their stewardship. With enthusiasm Emma explained that the Grassland Project is to help property owners and land stewards overcome the very challenges faced by SCC. Standing in the parking lot, the group easily viewed the emergent autumn olive in the field along Menser Road. Crossing Menser Road to the east, they then observed the former field and road border suffering extended neglect and exhibiting significantly more mature and higher numbers of invasive shrubs as well as the invasive common teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*). Recognizing that different management practices would be needed for the different levels of alien invasion, Emma jotted notes and the group discussed mechanical mowing, herbicidal broadcast spraying, manual cutting with stump treatments, and different reseeding methods. Building on each other's experience and ideas, the group moved onto the Tree Swallow Loop and then Overlook Loop fields, devising plans that would hopefully control the autumn olive emerging in the fields as well as the seed sources on the encroaching borders. With an eye for diversified habitat, Emma also posed the idea of creating brush piles with the larger, manually cut autumn olive rather than requiring the more laborious removal of discarded woody material.

With the review of the Menser Farm fields complete, the group proceeded to the more well known KRNA fields encompassing the Bluebird Loop where, from the elevated vantage point near the kestrel nest box, they again evaluated the past practices and current condition of the field. These fields, having received more periodic maintenance by SCC and the PGC did not exhibit such severe degradation, but ideas to enhance the grasslands were again put forth. The group then proceeded to the red cabin where the large KRNA map was laid out where each field was numbered and enhancements for each were discussed. In all, over 100 acres of improvements were proposed. She also broached the idea of holding tours and installing signage to share the developing habitat possibilities with other landowners and interested visitors.

***On the picture to the right, project coordinator Emma Keele takes note as Jeff Payne shares the history of property.***

## NATIVE PLANT WORD SCRAMBLE

RDE MALPE

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IWETH KOA

---

LGDRNOOED

---

RSAUG APELM

---

RSTANEE KCEHOML

---

ERNF

---

AEPMPLYA

---

MWAPS WDEIMLKE

---

ELABMEB

---

RLYRBEEUB

---

Native plants are those that occurred in Pennsylvania before European settlement. More than 2,100 native plant species make up the biological diversity of Pennsylvania.



Bee Balm



Native Fern

## Waterfowl Migration

Jeff Payne

The SCC sponsored waterfowl identification outings at the Somerset Lake Nature Park on both March 8 and 15. On the first day the lake was still 95% frozen but still had about 8 species including beautiful N. Pintails and Green-winged Teals. The second day found the lake thawed out with the same number of species but a different mix. Even though we did not catch a major "fallout" of migrating waterfowl, the 25 combined participants got to see some magnificent waterfowl through scopes and learn more about dabbling and diving ducks, migration and the importance of lakes like Somerset Lake for resting and feeding migrating birds. The next scheduled birding outing will be at KRNA May 10.



Chris Payne talks to the waterfowl identification group that came out for the event.



# Schrock Property Addition to Kimberly Run Natural Area

Jeff Payne

Since our last Newsletter there has been a new 24.5 acre addition to the KRNA! The Schrock Property fronts on Craig Rd., just as you turn off Berlin-Plank Rd. and head to the main entrance. It is wooded and abuts the original KRNA property near the White Trail. Somerset Twp. has agreed to help construct a parking area out front and a new trail through these beautiful woods has been laid out. Watch for announcements for trail building days if you like to volunteer as we have 1/2 mile of new trail to construct.

It is with gratitude that we thank the nearly 100 donors; individuals, businesses and clubs, who have donated the match money needed for us to apply for a DCNR grant. If our grant application is successful, we will have the acquisition cost of this parcel paid for and will have expanded the KRNA to 670 acres! We can still use donations for the parking lot, signs and trail construction. Donations can be sent to SCC, PO Box 241, Somerset PA 15501 marked Schrock property.

The Board offers our sincere thanks to the following donors for their generosity: (If we forgot anyone please let us know!)

## KEYSTONE HEMLOCK

Elsie Geiser

Roger & Donna Schrock

Somerset Trust Company

## MOUNTAIN LAUREL

Jenner Rod & Gun Club Inc.

Carole MacMullen

Jeff Payne

## APPALACHIAN BLUE VIOLET

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Somerset County Sportsmen's League

Eva Strang

## LADY'S SLIPPER

Andrew & Cassandra Cook

Dave & Mary Ellen Fetchko

Marie Katrancha

Alicia Weaver

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## CINNAMON FERN

Agilent Tech match (Matthew Payne)

Henry Cook

Colin & June Deakins

Fraternal Order of Eagles

Greater Ferndale Sportsmen's Club

Randy & Linda Musser

Matthew Payne

Jan & Alan Peterson

STC Trivia Team (Bastian, Pelliccione,

Mullens, Mostoller, Petrosky, Ash)

Dan Jenkins

## BOG SUNDEW

Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society

Travis & Beth Anderson

## BOG SUNDEW cont.

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Dennis & Rosemary McGlynn

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## **Bluebird Trails**

Fred Will

It has been another busy year on the Kimberly Run and Mensur Bluebird trails. Last summer, the Girl Scouts got new boxes from the Pennsylvania Game Commission, painted and prepared them for installation. But because of short staffing and a big workload The Pennsylvania Game Commission was not able to get the mounting poles installed until early March this year. After the new polls were placed, nine new boxes were installed around the roadside loop at Mensers and seven broken boxes were replaced at Kimberly Run. The scouts helped clean the boxes on the Menser Tree Swallow loop on a cold, windy day in mid-March. Fred Will and Steve Peck cleaned, replaced and installed new boxes in March. With the newly installed and replaced boxes the total number of boxes is now 61. The total number of nests in boxes cleaned from 2024 were 19 tree swallows, 9 blue birds and eight wrens.

The Bluebirds are arriving early this year. Fred Will had a pair of Blue Birds building a nest the last week of March. And one was spotted sitting on the sign at Menser's parking lot on March 27th.

A big thank you to Girl Scout Troop 52906. They have been helping to install and maintain Bluebird boxes since 2019. And they are now anxiously waiting for warmer weather to work in the Native Pollinator Garden they planted last year.

## **Kimberly Run Teaberry**

Fred Will

A huge Thank You goes out to George and Susan Walker of White Horse Brewery, LLC. A while back, while talking with George, it was mentioned he would make a special brew for the Conservancy. After some discussion, the name Kimberly Run Teaberry was given to the brew. Saturday, March 29th a special event was held at the brewery for the release of Kimberly Run Teaberry. Thank you to the large crowd that attended to enjoy good food from the Cooking Contractor and to spend an enjoyable evening, and of course sampling Kimberly Run Teaberry and the many other beers on tap. Kimberly Run Teaberry will be available on tap till it is all gone. They do not can or bottle their beer, but it is available for takeout if you supply your own clean container of any size. A portion of all sales of Teaberry will be donated to the Somerset Conservancy. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!

**We need your support. Please send in your membership today!!!**

_____ \$25 Individual Membership	_____ \$100 Patron, Club, Organization	
_____ \$30 Family Membership	_____ \$750 Lifetime Membership	_____ Additional Donation
_____ \$75 Sustaining Membership	_____ \$1,000 Corporate Membership	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail address: (for periodic event updates) \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me for volunteer opportunities, we will send an email to see if you can help \_\_\_\_\_

We are a 501(c) (3) non-profit Land Trust organization. All Donations are tax-deductible.

\*memberships can be mailed to:

SCC

PO BOX 241

Somerset, PA 15501



## **Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Projects at Kimberly Run Natural Area cont.**

Grasslands are one of the most threatened habitats, with losses to development and natural forest succession. With the support from the Pennsylvania Priority Grasslands Project, additional restoration of KRNA's grasslands will hopefully provide refuge for the threatened species along with educational opportunities to share SCC's stewardship message. With this partnership, SCC is committing to the maintenance of these grasslands and will continue to promote the habitat and diversity of this endangered ecosystem.

In addition to the grassland improvements, Emma, Patrick and Jacob presented programs that could provide further benefits for SCC's stewardship ambitions. Emma expounded on an oak enhancement program and will investigate the feasibility of its implementation. Jacob explained his collaboration with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and described how grants could assist with funding to complete a forest stewardship plan and even provide funding for ongoing habitat improvements.

In mid-January Emma notified SCC that the KRNA plan had been approved for grassland funding. With support from conservation partners and some patience, these improvements will hopefully restore habitat for the 14 grassland bird species of greatest concern (6 are threatened or endangered).

Following their initial meeting, Jim Moses submitted an NRCS application for a grant funding the development of a forest stewardship Plan. NRCS approved consulting forester Shannon Farrell was subsequently contacted and met with several SCC Board members in January to gain an appreciation for SCC's goals and vision. In the last week of March, Jeff Payne was notified that SCC had been awarded the grant. This plan will help the SCC board and membership better understand and appreciate the forests under their stewardship and be a catalyst for additional grants and funding.

With so many improvements and projects, it is hard not to get excited about the future of KRNA. SCC holds programs exploring different aspects of the property through all seasons. If you have never been to one, or have not visited lately, join an outing and see what is new. Your participation and membership help ensure the Conservancy's role in preserving this magnificent resource for the future.



**Somerset County Conservancy**  
**PO Box 241**  
**Somerset, PA 15501**

**HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!**  
*Pass this newsletter on to a friend and ask them to join.*

Enclosed is: \$ 25 Individual Member

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### Word Scramble Key

RED MAPLE FERM  
 WHITE OAK MAVAPPLE  
 GOLDENROD SWAMP MILKWEED  
 SUGAR MAPLE BEEBALM  
 EASTERN HEMLOCK BLUEBERRY



Make checks payable to  
 and mail to:  
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 County Conservancy  
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