Somerset County Conservancy

Fall 2026



NEWSLETTER

Conserve the Land... Enhance the Habitat... Educate the Community

Ensuring the careful management, protection, and sustainable use of Somerset County's natural resources.

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From the President

The SCC and Kimberly Run Natural Area have been hopping since our last Newsletter in the Spring. Your hard-working Board has organized numerous well attended and interesting outings, our annual picnic, and several work days. We are progressing on our PA priority Grasslands and Natural Resource and Conservation Services forestry projects and are working on a land donation contiguous to KRNA that would help protect the watershed. We are working to reroute a portion of our popular White Trail to attempt to accommodate some busy beavers who have moved in and flooded portions of the original trail. We have contracted with Makayla Neely Stoliker to assist with membership, newsletters, meeting notes and publicity as well as C.J. Livengood to help with trails and general maintenance- a warm welcome to both! Many interesting stories on these subjects and more will be found inside.

The Kimberly Run Natural Area is a wonderful property and we are continuing to work on long range planning to provide an Environmental/Nature Center for the community and to hire a Director to help oversee our many projects. We are happy to report a recent surprise donation from the Elizabeth Piersol estate which we were able to put into our long term endowment that will eventually be able to sustainably fund the above. There is an opportunity this year to take a tax deduction of $1000 per person for charitable giving above the standard deduction. Please consider a gift to the Endowment fund through this method, estate planning or other charitable donation methods to help us reach our goals.

We are starting to plan for the Annual Dinner and meeting for members that will be on Wednesday December 2 in the newly renovated Dome Room of the Somerset Trust Building on N. Center Ave. Invitations will be forthcoming. We hope to see you there!

Jeff Payne

Join Our Next Community Event!

Join to take part in our Annual Dinner
December 2, 2026

Kimberly Run Natural Area
174 Craig Rd.
Somerset, PA



Somersetconservancyevents@gmail.com

Somerset County Conservancy

Invasives Removal Work Party



The morning of July 31, 2026 was a beautiful, cool morning and a great crew turned up to do spot treatments of alien, invasive woody plants that were popping up around the wetlands at the Menser parking area and in the Tree Swallow and the entrance to the Overlook Fields. Pictured are Dan Jenkins, Sgt. Travis Anderson, PGC, Jim Moses, Steve Peck, Susan Levy, Adam Katrancha, Greg Gdula, Jeff Payne and not pictured Sandy Cline. We spot treated several hundred young plants under the supervision of Sgt. Anderson during the morning.

Invasive woody plants include Multiflora Rose, Autumn Olive and Japanese or Bush Honeysuckle. These plants were often deliberately introduced originally because they were ornamental, made "living fences", provided fast-growing cover or produced a berry for food. Unfortunately, as is often the case, the big picture was not carefully thought out ahead of time. These alien plants have few natural controls, usually leaf out before our natives, grow fast into impenetrable thickets and crowd out our native species. The berries are often of lower nutritional value or produce off cycle for migratory bird species. When birds do eat them, the seeds are very efficiently spread along with a bit of fertilizer. The SCC has been aggressively fighting these invasives and we are making progress through programs such as the PA Priority Grasslands, NRCS supported Forestry Programs and workdays such as this. We will continue to do battle and although we can never completely win the war we can greatly suppress these invaders with mowing rotations, spot treatments, controlled burns etc. To do nothing would be surrendering to a blighted and diminished landscape.

-Jeff Payne

Moth Night

Including just a few of the finds from the evening below!

Our natural history outing for the month of July featured "lighting for moths" as well as using bait traps to attract various species in for identification. Although a rather atypical time for our adventures, we still had some human visitors show up to see winged visitors at the traps from 9 PM to midnight on July 24th at the cabin. An old set-up of M.A.S.H. unit lights (courtesy of "Mothman" John Laskowski from years gone by) trained onto hanging white linen sheets, along with Ultraviolet light traps and fermented banana/brown sugar/beer concoction slapped onto tree trunks brought more than 40 species in for census. If you think moths are all just similar little brown jobs , you should attend our next trapping session: there are over 10,000 species of moths north of Mexico and many of them are dazzling, indeed.

-Scott Bastian



Gray Spruce Looper Moth



Lesser Maple Spanworm Moth



Brown Pine Looper Moth



Porcelain Gray Moth

Somerset County Conservancy

Fall Cankerworm Update

First a correction: we received very generous donations from both the Somerset County Sportsman's League and Dan Jenkins towards the Bt spraying this spring and they were inadvertently overlooked in the last Newsletter's acknowledgements. We sincerely thank them and I apologize for the oversight.

The helicopter spraying took place in a very timely manner. We had been seeing small cankerworm caterpillars prior to the spraying. We were also helped by the spring weather pattern where the unseasonably warm late April and early May was followed by frosts and cold during the first half of May which suppressed the recently hatched caterpillars. We are seeing very little new damage and healthy green leaves with the help of the much wetter summer.

On a sobering note, last year's infestation and subsequent drought did kill a significant number of large oaks in the central region of Kimberly Run Natural Area. Another year of attack and dry weather would have been devastating. We will put sticky bands on trees this fall to be thorough in monitoring, but we do not expect to find significant numbers of female moths. We will report our findings to the Community Foundation of the Alleghenies as follow up results from their generous grant.

-Jeff Payne

Grassland Management Outing with Emma Keele



Photo by Aaron Capouellez

June 20, 2026 was a beautiful day at the Menser side of KRNA. A group of interested participants was led by Emma Keele, project manager for the SCC's PA Priority Grasslands Project, through the various fields being managed under that project. Emma explained the importance of grasslands for various insect and bird species-many of which are experiencing serious population declines. Management practices, which started in 2025, included spot treating of invasive woody vegetation, forestry mulching to remove large invasive non-native shrubs to allow later mowing, more general herbicide treatments to allow a clean slate of soil, and the planting of carefully selected seeds designed to germinate into a meadow-like mixture of native wildflowers and shorter grasses. This should allow many insects, including butterflies, and eventually grassland breeding bird species to colonize the fields.

Maintaining healthy grasslands will take active management. Mowing or prescribed fire regimens (done by trained PA Game Commission specialists) repeated every 2-3 years will be required to limit the invasion of alien woody plants such as Autumn Olive, Multiflora Rose and Japanese Honeysuckle. We have 35 acres that were cleared completely and replanted and another 70 acres that had spot invasive removal and mowing. With this much area we look forward to many blooms, butterflies, and birds ranging from Bobolinks to American Kestrels to sparrows to be using the fields in the coming years. Whitetail deer fawns, Wild Turkey broods and our transient fall Ring-necked Pheasant population will also have a place to find food and shelter.

We hope everyone gets a chance to walk the trails surrounding the Overlook, Roadside, Tree Swallow, East Menser and Bluebird fields to view the progression of vegetation and wildlife taking place. There is always a lot of nature to explore at Kimberly Run Natural Area!

-Jeff Payne

Somerset County Conservancy

MUSHROOM FORAY



On Sunday September 6th, KR hosted what has become our annual mushroom foray. Recent wet weather and a nice afternoon combined to make it the most productive outing we've had to date.

Attendance reflected the popularity of this walk --roughly 45 people enjoyed the education/enjoyment combo. One of the premier mushroom clubs of the northeast has its annual foray every fall over the Labor Day weekend in Somerset County. The Mycological Association of Washington DC gathers at Sequanota as their base and scours the local wilds for fungi of all sorts over a three day period. The benefit for our Somerset County Conservancy is that one of their outings has become the walk at Kimberly Run during that holiday weekend. Through this association, SCC enjoyed the expertise of some top names in mushroom identification.



This year, Tom McCoy, president of the DC group, along with Dave Wasilewski, president of the Wyoming Valley Mushroom Club, Dr. Jeff Darita & Dan O'Brien of the Central Pennsylvania Mushroom Club, along with other club members led the way through our woods and found a great diversity of interesting mushrooms to identify, discuss, and present to our membership. Mark your calendars for next Labor Day!

-Scott Bastian



Bat Outing



Many thanks go out to the Pennsylvania Game Commission for providing a night of education and presentation about our local bat species. A crew of five Game Commission personnel visited KR on the evening of Friday August 1st to set up their mist net traps and try and catch some bats to examine. Although we did have some Large Brown Bats flying around over head during the presentation, we weren't able to trap any in the elaborate net systems that the Commission set up across Kimberly Run. That notwithstanding, the team, headed by Commission biologist Mollie Byrne, shared a wealth of first-hand experiences and natural history regarding bat lore.

-Scott Bastian

Spring Tree Planting at KRNA



Sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the 10 Million Trees for Pennsylvania program eventually expanded beyond the namesake watershed and is supporting water quality enhancements and habitat restoration activities at Kimberly Run Natural Area (KRNA). With an eight-year goal to plant 10 million trees across Pennsylvania, 7 events in Somerset County contributed 10,881 trees according to the website (https://tenmilliontrees.org/).



Nursery stock and materials ready for planting

The eight-year goal, set in 2018, concluded with a plethora of potted trees and shrubs, totaling nearly 300, for fall 2025 planting at KRNA. As drought conditions hardened the soils of most upland sites, a few impromptu excursions planted wetland shrubs along the newly constructed Fern Trail to help buffer the adjacent residence. Another outing installed and protected low-land tolerant trees, mostly River Birch, Pin Oak, and Silver Maple, near the roadside swale paralleling Route 219 as a bulwark against the din of the highway. These plantings, made obvious by the ubiquitous blue and green tree tubes protecting the tender plants from the overabundant white-tailed deer, offer easy to observe progress of the maturing plants. The remaining 180+ plants were heeled into gardens for winter keeping, waiting for the warming ground and moist soils of spring.

Abundant sun and comfortable temperature greeted the tree planting crew on March 21, 2026. Even though spring rains from the preceding week muddied the trails, the nursery stock and willing crew made their way to the designated planting site at the northeast corner of the Bluebird Field. More wetland shrubs were placed around the potholes. In a few years, willows, blooming with the earliest of flowers, will offer nectar to the emerging insects. Buttonbush and dogwoods will provide late season soft mast to birds fueling for fall migration. Upland plants, such as Spicebush, will serve as the host to the Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly while balsam firs and red cedars provide contrast and cover in the now open corner of the regressing field. With the army of volunteer tree planters never materializing, the outnumbered workers eventually accepted that the job would not be completed in one day. So, with many plants still in their pots, a second planting day was scheduled for the following week.

Again, Mother Nature did her part by providing a beautiful day of sun on March 28. A small crew arrived early and staged plants, tree tubes, and wood stakes. Spurred to more strenuous action, planting was along the southern edge of the Bluebird Field, building a shrub border zone between the grassland and overtopping forest. Eventually, this zone of intermediate vegetation will provide food and cover to a variety of wildlife, increasing diversity and resiliency to the varied habitats of KRNA. As the sun transited the sky, pleasant distractions often interrupted the work. Swallows and Bluebirds surveyed potential summer homes. Brightly colored feather finds were inspected as were the vernal pools stocked with amphibian eggs. As the last shrubs were planted and materials gathered, the workers found satisfaction in their contribution to the ecosystems and future of KRNA.

As a non-profit land trust, Somerset County Conservancy relies entirely on membership support and volunteer labor to maintain Kimberly Run Natural Area. While sporadic grants help take on some of the larger projects, things like trail clearing, bluebird box maintenance, bridge repairs, and tree planting are completed entirely by volunteers. KRNA needs your help so look for an opportunity to support your conservancy. The joyful camaraderie and satisfaction of helping to maintain such a wonderful place offer immeasurable rewards.

-Adam Katrancha



PLANTING SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

Somerset County Conservancy





Vivian Walker was excited to help her mom, Megan, and Dan Jenkins with tree planting at KRNA



WE ARE ALWAYS IN NEED OF VOLUNTEERS
OUR AMAZING MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS ARE WHO MAKE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE!

BE SURE TO SPREAD THE WORD OF ALL THE GREAT WORK KRNA IS DOING TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY!

NRCS Grant

Somerset County Conservancy's (SCC) sustainable forest management initiatives at Kimberly Run Natural Area (KRNA) are expanding in scope and practice through support from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The initial NRCS grant, valued at $6,739 for the development of a Forest Management Plan, was awarded in 2025. Farrell Forestry LLC was contracted to develop the Forest Management Plan. Throughout 2025 Mr. Shannon Farrell explored the property, collecting inventory data, and evaluating the condition of KRNA's forests. The plan was completed in December 2025 and provides a detailed analysis of the forest's current conditions as well as recommendations for restoration of degraded areas.

The Forest Management Plan divided the property into 11 distinct forest stands for analyses and recommendations based on forest age classes, species diversity, and past management activities. Most of the stands are 80%-100% stocked, meaning the forest trees are neither sparse (understocked) or overcrowded (overstocked) and are spaced so they efficiently use sunlight, water, and nutrients without excessive competition. A few stands were understock and a few others overstocked.

The greatest concern throughout all the forest tracts was the control of invasive species of grasses and shrubs. In 2026 SCC applied to the NRCS for cost sharing grants that will aid in the control and removal of the invasive vegetation and provide supplemental plantings of native tree and shrub species throughout KRNA. In May 2026, NRCS awarded SCC with a structured six-year grant program schedule to complete all the forest restoration activities recommended in the Forest Management Plan. SCC applied for the full grant and is awaiting contract execution by USDA/NRCS.

-Adam Katrancha

PLEASE SEE THE INSERT FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PROJECT





Example photos of the proposed tree plantings that will be completed with the NRCS grant funds.



Creature Feature Timber Rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus)



You go for a walk in the woods one week and spy a Cottontail rabbit. The very next week, you travel the same route and come across a 3-foot Timber Rattlesnake coiled up and buzzing loudly alongside the trail. Fast forward ten years down the road -- which encounter do you vividly remember? Both are interesting to observe in the wild; but rattlesnake memories have staying power! The potential danger and excitement earn them a spot in your deep recesses.

Most people have limited experience with the serpent named Timber Rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus horridus) — and they're probably glad of it. But, like virtually all living things, these snakes deserve a closer look. Rattlers formerly occurred at Kimberly Run, but now are limited mostly to mountain ridges within Somerset County. Conservation efforts are helping their numbers recover from a precipitous decline in years past.

Timber Rattlers are snakes of the rock -- the most likely way to find one in Somerset County is to find open areas on the mountains with large, exposed rocks: power line cuts often provide that combination. The snakes gather and overwinter in deep rock chambers ("dens") and emerge in spring when oak leaves are the size of squirrel's ears. In their summer range, they may be found in the middle of the woods, but more often will be where they can lay in the sun to absorb heat. Being ectotherms (aka cold-blooded), they rely on external heat sources to achieve desired body temperatures. Gravid females will congregate at summer gestation sites, which are often mistaken for dens. This facet of their ecology has made them exceptionally vulnerable to human persecution, wherein people bent on their destruction can significantly harm a local population by destroying a year's production at one small site.

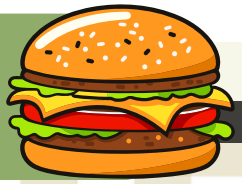
Our Timbers come in two main color forms –yellow and black– both with chevron bands across their back. Populations in other parts of the country are more uniformly an overall brownish base color in their appearance. Yellow or black (or intermediate), the tail is always velvety black below the rattles. There is a population close to the county that is known to produce albinos in some years. The record length for this species is 74.5 inches, although half that length is much more typical and still constitutes a large snake. A diet of mice, rats, chipmunks and squirrels is the mainstay, but occasional other small animals and birds are taken. Bobcats, hawks, skunks, coyotes and foxes are all known to predate Timber Rattlesnakes.

While the bite from a Timber Rattlesnake is potentially lethal, that outcome is quite rare. In a typical year, perhaps 8000-10,000 venomous snake bites occur across the United States. Of that number, most years see fewer than a dozen fatalities. A man hunting snakes was bitten in Somerset County in 2026, fortunately making a full recovery. Timbers are generally shy and reclusive but will bite you if you inadvertently touch them or step on them. The goal of first aid is to get the victim to a hospital as soon as possible. Watch where you place your hands and feet in venomous snake country.

If you give them a chance and learn more about them, don't be surprised if you find yourself looking forward to a wild encounter. "Get out there" and see some rattlesnakes!

-Scott Bastian

SCC ANNUAL PICNIC



SCC's annual fall picnic was held on September 26th . Unlike many past years the weather was beautiful the entire day. Dan Jenkens did a marvelous job keeping the campfire burning all day in spite of all the wet wood we had on hand. Steve Peck, our Land Manager took over the grilling duties this year and did a fine job grilling all the burgers and hot dogs donated by Roger Latuch. Roger has donated the burgers for the last 20 years. Thank You, Roger. Attendance was lower than in the past. This year we tried to notify members only through e-mail instead of mailing postcards as we had done in years past. That didn't work out as well as anticipated so we'll probably try both E-mail and Postcards in the future. Thank you to all our members that did come.

-Jim Moses

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE WHITE TRAIL AT KRNA?

For years we have been hoping Beavers would move into the eastern section KRNA to enhance the wetlands there. Last year we found that Beaver had taken up residence in a tributary of Kimberly Run and their dam almost flooded the trail. We were pleased to have them because the pond created a great viewing area along the trail. That was last year, apparently the beavers needed to raise the dam higher and build a few more structures for their growing family. Now the entire area along the trail is flooded and there is not any higher ground around to construct a bypass trail or make a dry path around the wet area. So, for now, the White Trail instead of making a 2-mile loop will be an "out and back" along the same path trail.

On the southern side of the Boy Scout Bridge on the White Trail, we are in the process of opening an additional loop, so that there is an additional path to walk without backtracking. This path is under construction and is marked with red surveyor tape and is available to use now.

We are still pleased to have resident beavers on KRNA and are willing to be inconvenienced while they are in residence.

-Jim Moses









Kimberly Run Education



What macroinvertebrates live at Kimberly Run? What is a macroinvertebrate? Macro means large and invertebrate meaning no backbone. Macroinvertebrates are insets, their larvae and nymph stages and larger organisms like crayfish.



Organisms found this past May 18, 19, 21, and 22 by Somerset Area Senior High School biology and environmental science classes were larvae and nymphs of mayfly, stonefly, caddis fly, damselfly, alderfly, and dragonfly. Other organism found were riffle beetles, water striders, water mites, crayfish, water fleas, scuds, back swimmers, black nose daces, red backed salamanders, and slimy sculpins.



These organisms show the diversity of life in Kimberly Run and also show the health of the stream. Mayfly nymphs can only live in clean water since their gills are on the outside of their bodies. The abundance of these nymphs indicates a clean stream. Specimens were collected in the stream and identified in the classroom. Education outside of the classroom leaves a lasting impression. Ben Franklin said "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."

-Pam Diesel

Backyard Bugs

Word Search

ANT
APHID
BEETLE
BUTTERFLY
CICADA
COCKROACH
DRAGONFLY
EARWIG
FLEA
FLY
GRASSHOPPER
LACEWING
LADYBUG
LOCUST
MOSQUITO
MOTH
PRAYING MANIS
SCORPION
SPIDER
STINK BUG
TERMITE
TICK
WASP
WEEVIL

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Somerset County Conservancy

Kimberly Kidz

Growing up my grandfather would take my brother and I into the woods any chance he got. We were both so eager to learn the way of a woodsman and learn about nature, its beauty, and hear his knowledge regarding the forest. Whether it was early summer watching a young fawn nurse from its mother while we picked berries for a pie, catching a glimpse of a majestic buck running through the yellow maple leaves while cutting wood above our farm, or trudging through the snow and seeing a ruffed grouse digging for the last of the wild grapes, these are all wonderful memories that I hold onto and can't wait to pass on to my children. This is why I am humbled to serve as a board member of the Somerset County Conservancy and promote the Kimberly Run Natural Area.

The Somerset County Conservancy takes great pride in caring for and nurturing the wildlands of Somerset County. They create opportunities for the youth to gain knowledge and experience nature. This year there is a new opportunity for the youth, Kimberly Kidz, named after Kimberly Run Wild Area that sits in the heart of Somerset and is the lifeblood of the Conservancy. Kimberly Kidz membership helps the Conservancy promote, expand, and maintain the area for wild nature that it holds. There are trails to walk, wetlands to explore, and timbers to marvel at. All throughout the year there are excellent education experiences. Kids can participate in bat, frog, and grassland walks, bird watching, mushroom, and tree planting days.

Kids need to experience the wild wonder of watching monarchs float above the milkweed and hear the bullfrogs croak around a pond or see a flock of doves take off and skirt an open field on a sunny afternoon. The opportunities are endless in nature and abound within Kimberly Run. The Kimberly Kidz membership is the golden ticket for young explorers to gain the knowledge and experience of the wild and learn about the world outside. This membership also helps the Conservancy maintain a future for other kids and retain the Kimberly Run Natural Area.



To sign a youth up, please sign up on the website at www.somersetconservancy.org or find us at one of the many events throughout the year!

Imagine how your child will feel holding their own membership card as a ticket to nature!

Sincerely,
Jonathan Yoder
District Manager
Somerset Conservation District





Word Search

SOLUTION

A	X	Y	R	V	C	O	C	K	R	O	A	C	H	G	C	L
N	L	N	J	J	U	Y	S	N	C	S	O	E	O	A	G	S
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Somerset County Conservancy
PO Box 241
Somerset PA, 15501

Help Us Spread the Word!

Pass this Newsletter onto a friend and encourage them to join or donate!

Enclosed is:
- __$25 Individual Member
- __$30 Family Member
- __$75 Sustaining Member
- __$100 Patron, Club, Organization Member
- __$750 Lifetime Member
- __$1,000 Corporate Member

Forestry Management Project Donation
$_____

Forestry Management Project Pledge
$_____ Years ____ to ____

Make checks payable and mailed to: Somerset County Conservancy
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Somerset PA, 15501

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