

HIGHLANDS LAND LINES

October 2008

A Guide to the Stewardship of Lands Under Conservation Easements with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy

WELCOME

Welcome to the first issue of Highlands Land Lines, the Delaware Highland Conservancy's newsletter specifically for property owners with conservation easements on their property. The Conservancy thanks you for being part of the special group of individuals dedicated to conserving the natural fabric of land in the Upper Delaware region.

Whether you are an individual property owner, a farmer, a member of hunting and fishing club, or someone who has purchased property with an easement already in place, you share the same concerns regarding your easement: the desire to see the beauty and ecological health of your lands sustained now and for future generations.

The Highlands Land Lines is a guide and resource related to the stewardship of lands under easements. You will find in these pages answers to your stewardship questions, new ideas for caring for and protecting your land, and places to gather good information and productive suggestions regarding effective conservation practices.

The Conservancy is fully invested in supporting you in your conservation goals. Please feel free to call us at 570-226-3164 or at 845-794-3000 ext. 3228 with any further questions you may have regarding your easement or stewardship of your land.

POND CARE

Ponds provide beauty, outdoor recreation, and ecologically diverse habitats for plants and wildlife on your property. However, without the proper care, ponds can become algae-laden, odorous, and attractive to mosquitoes.

How your pond is constructed and maintained plays an important role in the longevity of your pond. According to the Penn State Water Resources Extension (PSWRE), a shallow, nutrient-rich pond exposed to sunlight with little water flowing through it will fill up with algae and aquatic plants. As a result it may end up with very little animal life due to low oxygen levels. Conversely, a newly created, deep, spring-fed pond may have little life of any kind because of low temperatures and lack of food supply.

Regardless of the type, all ponds age. Through a process called eutrophication, ponds eventually fill with algae and aquatic plants, and become bogs. Overtime, bogs become dry land once again. In order to keep your pond healthy, your job is to slow this process as much as possible.

PSWRE states that a pond's long life depends on limiting input of nutrients into the water. This can be achieved by capturing sediment before it enters the pond, limiting the amount of nutrient use within the pond's watershed, such as fertilizers and livestock waste, and preventing the addition of organic matter into the pond and into waterways which feed it. Flushing nutrients from the pond is encouraged by a clean, year-round water supply and mechanical removal of plant vegetation. Also consider aerating the water which will support aquatic life and promote the efficient decay of waste material. Keeping the surface clear of plant cover and open to wind action aids aeration as well.

Healthy riparian borders of native plants will also keep nutrient rich runoff from entering your pond. (See "Caring for Your Water", p. 2)

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Photograph of a healthy pond and vegetative buffer

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If you are considering adding a pond on your property remember to review your easement to see if the action is permitted or needs approval under the easement terms. Giving us a call can help answer any questions you may in this regard.

For more information on ponds visit PSVRE's "**Pond's Construction, Maintenance, and Ecology**" at <http://water.cas.psu.edu/Pond%20Maintenance.htm>

CARING FOR YOUR WATER

Streams and rivers running through your property provide beauty, recreation, refreshment for tired feet on a hot day and are part of what makes excellent habitat for wildlife visitors. Streams and rivers are also a vital part of the overall system of clean healthy drinking water for the region. As a good steward and a good neighbor, caring for your streams and waterways is a primary concern and rewarding pursuit.

Riparian buffers—native trees, shrubs, plants, and groundcovers—planted along stream and river banks are the single most effective protection for streams and waterways. These buffers filter polluted runoff and create a transition zone between water and human land use. They prevent erosion and pollution and keep water and the aquatic life living in it clean, healthy, and beautiful. Native plant buffers also create complex natural ecosystems that are habitats for diverse wildlife communities dependent on native plants and on the water the plants protect.

Here are some useful tips from the Connecticut River Watershed's Introduction to Riparian Buffers:

How big should a buffer be? One size doesn't fit all.

There isn't one generic buffer which will keep the water clean, stabilize the bank, protect fish and wildlife, and satisfy human demands on the land. The basic bare-bones buffer is 50' from the top of the bank. You improve water with every foot of buffer.

To stabilize eroding banks. On smaller streams, good erosion control may require only covering the bank with shrubs and trees, and a 35' managed grass buffer. If there is active bank erosion, or on larger streams, going beyond the bank at least 50' is necessary. Severe bank erosion on larger streams requires engineering to stabilize and protect the bank - but this engineering can be done with plants.

To Filter Sediment and Attached Contaminants from Runoff. For slopes gentler than 15%, a 35' wide buffer of grass works. Greater width is needed on steeper slopes.

To filter dissolved nutrients and pesticides from runoff. A width up to 100' or more may be necessary on steeper slopes and less permeable soils to allow runoff to soak in sufficiently, and for vegetation and microbes to work on nutrients and pesticides.

To protect fisheries. Buffer width depends on the fish community, however, studies show that the wider the buffer, the healthier the aquatic food web.

To protect wildlife habitat. Buffer width depends upon desired species: 300' is a generally accepted minimum. Much larger streamside forest buffer widths are needed for wildlife habitat purposes than for water quality purposes. The larger the buffer zone, the more valuable it is.

To protect against flood damage. Smaller streams may require only a narrow width of trees or shrubs; a larger stream or river may require a buffer that covers a substantial portion of its flood plain

To Grow Valuable Products. Buffer width depends upon the desired crop and its management. Don't forget to consider tax incentives and cost-share programs when looking at the economic return from a riparian buffer.



A healthy natural wetland

Photo by David B. Soete

For more detailed information on riparian buffers visit:

Riparian Buffers at <http://www.crjc.org/riparianbuffers.htm>

National Resources Conservation Service; Buffer Strips: Common Sense for Conservation at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/buffers/>

Stroud Water Research Center; Riparian Forest Buffer Program at <http://www.stroudcenter.org/research/riparianbuffer.htm>

HANDLING INVASIVES

This time of year, the Conservancy has our monitors in the field to check on the conservation easements that we hold. All our monitors agree: Invasive plant species are a land management and stewardship issue facing many landowners.

Invasive plants are species that have been introduced into an environment in which they did not evolve. Because they are not growing on their home turf, they are free from natural predators and from the array of natural controls that would limit their reproduction and spread.

Handled in a timely way before plant populations get out of control this problem can be relatively easy to manage. Waiting too long to control these unwelcome guests can result in a costly headache for landowners.

Removing invasive species from your property is important as is reintroducing and encouraging the growth of *healthy native plants*. Here are some tips and information links for dealing with invasive species and ensuring the lands you steward are hosts to native species.

DO NOT cut invasive species down above the roots and throw them in or near streams where they can be carried to new locations. Be careful not to transport invasive species fragments or seeds on equipment, vehicles, or clothing.

DO secure all cuttings including crowns (tops) and roots off the ground or on a tarp so fragments won't sprout. Dry **completely** and burn (a burning permit may be required) being sure crowns of plants are in the center of the fire to ensure thorough combustion.

DO NOT move soil where invasive species had been to new areas or let contractors deliver fill to your property that may contain invasive species fragments or seeds.

DO NOT use invasive species as screens or for beautification, no matter how attractive the plant species may be.

DO plant native plants, shrubs and trees to cover bare soil and to make your property healthy and beautiful for you and sustainable for native wildlife populations.

For more information on invasive plant species contact the Nature Conservancy: Delaware River Invasive Plant Partnership at (570) 643-7922; the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: Bureau of Forestry at (717)787-3444, or the New York City Department of Environmental Protection Stream Management Program at (845) 340-7515.

Also, visit these websites:

National Park Service Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River: <http://invasivespecies.gov/>

Ecology and Management Invasive Plants Program at Cornell University: <http://www.invasiveplants.net/>

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: Landscaping with Native Plants and Invasive and Exotic Plant Management Tutorial: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/>

PA Native Plant Society: www.pawildflower.org

Wild Ones: Natural Plants, Natural Landscapes: <http://www.for-wild.org/>

National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife: <http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/>

US EPA Green Landscaping with Native Plants: www.epa.gov/greenacres/



Multiflora Rose - a common invasive plant in the region

OCTOBER WORKSHOP

Learn more about invasive species and native plants at the **Native Plant Training Workshop** organized by The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development to be held at Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, NY on **October 22, 2008 from 8:30AM to 5PM**. Cost is \$25 before Oct. 8; \$30 for later registration.

Participants will learn techniques and methods for reintroducing native plants to areas that have been managed for the control of invasive plants and also how to preserve existing native plant habitats.

For more information:
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TAX INCENTIVES – GOOD YEAR FOR EASEMENTS

Expanded Tax Incentives for Easements Extended to December 2009

If you have an easement and wish to expand it to cover additional acreage or if you want to make your current easement more comprehensive (e.g. extinguish a reserved right to build a 2nd house on the property) you may qualify for a federal income tax deduction. The 2008 Farm Bill passed in May of this year expands tax incentives for conservation easements until December 2009.

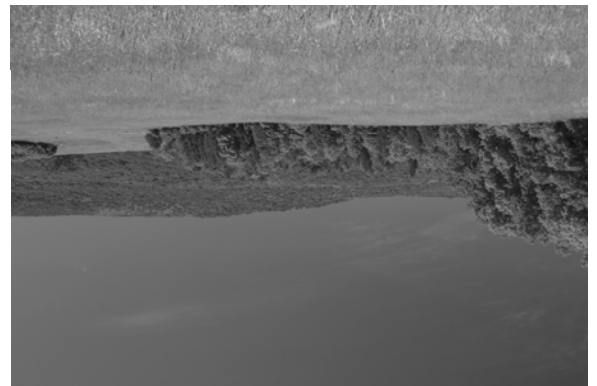
Expanded incentives:

- Raise the deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% to 50%.
- Allow qualifying farmers to deduct up to 100% of their income.
- Extend the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.

These expanded tax incentives are powerful tools for helping modest-income easement donors to receive greater credit for donating valuable conservation easements on their properties.

December 2009 is the expiration date for the expanded incentives; and time, we all know, moves quickly. Contact the Conservancy soon if you are interested in learning more about protecting additional land or about strengthening your easement. You can reach us at 570-226-3164 in PA and at 845-794-3000 ext. 3228 in NY.

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