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Crow's Nest: Some very good news!

Field Notes (https://natlands.org/category/field-notes/)

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By Natural Lands

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We can all use some good news right now, so here are a couple conservation success stories. I've been waiting to share my great excitement: over the last few weeks Crow's Nest Preserve has grown by 91 acres, or almost 15%!

We've recently acquired two new parcels more than a mile apart that protect significant lands from development and allow us to manage them for wildlife habitat and public enjoyment. One is the former Warwick Woods Campground, 82 acres of very nice woods. The camp was well named, as the forest canopy is closed over most of the property, which also includes 14 acres of woods added through a trade with the adjacent quarry (so that they could obtain the land where their access road is located; prior to that, there was only a handshake agreement that the quarry had access along one edge of the campground).

There are a dozen buildings on the property, and an auction the campground held last [illegible] gave high-bidders the opportunity to strip them of anything of value. Strip they did, leaving one building half-collapsed and others pretty well gutted. (We had looked into reusing some of the buildings, but they all would have required significant maintenance that simply wasn't in the budget.) Nevertheless, we have gained some items of value for use here and there on the preserve. Above, Alec helps guide a picnic table off the deck of the game room—one of six picnic tables that didn't get sold at auction. We've also recovered hardware, lumber, and gravel that we've been able to use elsewhere at Crow's Nest.

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Here are a few scenes from the campground, a reflection of its place in time. We will miss the campground, they were very good neighbors to us.

First Energy, Inc. disconnected electricity from the property and took away several electrical transformers. Polycor, the owner of the adjacent quarry, has agreed to complete the building demolition, for which we are very grateful. There are a couple wells to fill, some septic tanks that have been pumped and will be crushed in place. It's a big job.

I spent some time this winter on the Sisyphean task of pumping the pool dry, using two small pumps in parallel. We were told that the pool leaked, but as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't leak nearly well enough. At this point I've lowered it from what you see here, to dry at the shallow end and only a little in the deep end. But every time it rains... I can just

barely keep up with that. The pool will be broken up and filled in, covered in topsoil. Short [illegible] we may turn this area into a meadow, and long term it may return to forest like that which surrounds it.

We plan to retain some of the gravel roads that run through Warwick Woods—they make access to the woods easy on a preserve which is otherwise often muddy for significant portions of the year. The gate on Trythall Road (pictured below) will be opened for special events. Otherwise access is on foot while hiking other trails at Crow's Nest. There is a direct connection between Warwick Woods and the Horse-Shoe Trail, which now runs through Crow's Nest for more than a half mile. We met with the trail maintenance crew of the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy to plan on collaboration and trail needs.

Other projects we've done at Warwick Woods over the last couple months getting it ready for the preserve is adding front gates, clearing the gravel roads we want to keep, and recycling used tires, motor oil, and propane tanks. We've collected fluorescent bulbs

from all the buildings and any we can't give away we'll send to Bethlehem Apparatus for mercury recovery and recycling. Preserve managers from Green Hills and Cheslen have salvaged deck railing materials and fencing from Warwick Woods for use at those preserves. Teen volunteers in our naturalist program have flagged all the above-ground utilities that need to be removed and started removing the fire rings from many of the 120 campsites. We're using that rock for several other projects: stepping stones near our wire bridge, to fill in an eroded section of Horse-Shoe Trail along Mine Run, and to shore up the sides of the HST in a section which is an elevated "turnpike" above the muddy forest floor. You'll find gravel from the campground along the shoulder of Harmonyville Road now, and some of their decorative river rock is now incorporated into our "tree stump tic tac toe" games in the kids' play areas.

We've posted much of the boundary and started managing some of the invasive species on site: winged euonymous, vinca, English ivy, Japanese pachysandra, multiflora rose, privet, and lesser celandine. Although these species are present their numbers are manageable and overall the quality of the woods is good.

Early in the process of looking at these woods we realized their value not only as what they are—pretty high quality woods even though they have a long history of human use—but also as a buffer to the existing "Deep Woods" section of existing Crow's Nest Preserve. Both existing and these new parts of the preserve are great places to see spring ephemeral wildflowers such as round-lobed hepatica, trout-lily, wood anemone and rue-anemone, as well as ground pines (*Lycopodium*) and many ferns adorning the mossy rocks. Mine Run burbles over boulders in our Deep Woods on its way to meet French Creek at St. Peter's Village. We quickly realized that if the adjacent lands were cleared and developed, and then planted with non-native ornamental plants typical of residential and commercial real estate developments, there would be a profound impact on the quality of the woods we were already protecting and managing nearby. Now we have the opportunity to protect both sides of the Horse-Shoe Trail here as high-quality woods, instead of one side poorly and the other not at all.

The Warwick Woods land was purchased with funding by Warwick Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Virginia Cretella Mars Foundation. Thank you to each of these for their support!

Currently the property is closed. Once the building demolition is complete we will be able to open it for you to explore. Meanwhile, you can see some of it from the Horse-Shoe Trail.

In more good news, we added nine more acres along French Creek at the upstream end of the preserve, just downstream from French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site.

The property includes a nice meadow (above) and vernal pools in the woods (below). These temporary ponds dry up in summer; since they don't support fish they are ideal habitat in which wood frogs and salamanders can lay their eggs.

We also posted boundary here and we've started cleaning up some dumps that were on the property. In the couple weeks since we added it to the preserve we've started cutting and spraying Japanese barberry, ailanthus, multiflora rose and privet on the uplands here.

This land provides a key forest buffer for French Creek and is one more place where hikers on our trails won't have to be looking into someone's backyard, as it would have been if it had been developed.

These were unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to add land to Crow's Nest in places which will make a difference for plant and animal habitat and improve the quality of visitors' experiences here. I didn't think we'd ever have an opportunity to grow the size of the preserve this much so I'm pretty blown away by the opportunity.

Keep in that while the preserve has grown by 15% our funding or endowment has not grown at the same rate. We welcome your support and will continue to rely on volunteers to get our work done here!

‹ mariton: tuliptrees and white ash (https://natlands.org/mariton-tuliptrees-and-white-ash/)

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