

FRENCH CREEK WATERSHED



Mission Statement:

French Creek Valley Conservancy promotes the environmental integrity of the French Creek watershed and its environs, and advocates the protection of natural resources in the watershed to the aesthetic, ecological, recreational and economic benefit of the citizens of the area.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy protects, conserves and restores land and water for the diversity of the region's plants, animals and their ecosystems. Through science-based strategies, collaboration, leadership and recognition of the relationship between humankind and nature, WPC achieves tangible conservation outcomes for present and future generations.

LANDOWNER INCENTIVE PROGRAM

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What is the Landowner Incentive Program?

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) provides financial incentives to private landowners to protect land through conservation easements. It also provides technical assistance and help in developing conservation plans. Conservation easements and conservation planning will further the protection of the French Creek watershed through the voluntary participation of conservation-minded private landowners.

The U.S. Department of the Interior created the Landowner Incentive Program in 1997. This program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provides federal funding to private landowners to restore, enhance or manage rare species habitat on private land. The program recognizes the importance of private lands to habitat protection and the need to have the support and cooperation of landowners. LIP projects can involve a variety of conservation activities and management actions. They include removing exotic plants, adapting grazing practices to

enhance vital streamside habitat, providing in-stream or stream bank stabilization to benefit aquatic life, and encouraging permanent protection of land through conservation easements.

What are the Areas of Focus?

LIP focuses on species in need of special protection. Some of those species live in the waters of French Creek and its tributaries, including several threatened fish and endangered mussels. Other Pennsylvania species addressed through LIP are the Indiana bat, eastern massasauga rattlesnake and bog turtle.

French Creek is a glaciated watershed representing one of the last remaining, largely intact ecosystems in the Ohio River drainage. French Creek and its tributaries contain 26 species of freshwater mussels (two listed Endangered at the state and federal levels) and over 80 species of fish (15 listed as Pa. Threatened or Endangered). LIP will benefit the above-mentioned species through acquisition of easements, direct habitat improvements, management against non-native invasive species, and improvements in water quality.

What is a Conservation Easement?

Conservation easements are a voluntary way to preserve land while keeping it in private ownership. The easement allows the landowner to:

- Continue to own and use the land;
- Retain full control over who may have access to the property; and
- Sell it or pass it on to heirs.

The easement is a legal agreement a property owner makes with a qualified conservation recipient (such as a public agency or qualified land trust such as Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and French Creek Valley Conservancy) to restrict the type and amount of development that may take place on his or her property. This agreement is unique to each property and is tailored to meet the personal needs of the landowner and conservation objectives of the land trust. The landowner and land trust identify the rights and restrictions on use that are necessary to

protect the conservation values of the property such as wildlife habitat, open space, forest and agricultural features. The easement is in perpetuity, meaning the provisions of the easement continue forward into time even after the landowner sells or transfers the property.

A conservation easement may be purchased by a land trust or donated by the landowner. A donated easement may qualify as a charitable contribution and provide tax benefits such as a charitable tax donation on federal income taxes. The value of the conservation easement and any accompanying stewardship donation are deductible on your federal income tax form as a charitable contribution, up to 30 percent of the adjusted gross income for that year and carried forward for five additional years.

How Can Landowners Get Involved?

Landowners with stream front property along French Creek and its tributaries have an opportunity to work with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and French Creek Valley Conservancy to protect their land for future generations. Please contact us to learn more about conservation easements and how they can benefit you. We can also work with you to develop a conservation plan that will help to protect your land and the stream banks along French Creek and its tributaries.

For further information about the LIP program, please feel free to contact the following:

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
209 Fourth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
Phone: (412) 288-2777
Email: info@paconserve.org
Web: www.paconserve.org
or

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Photo by Rob Criswell