Successes at the Tinicum Conservancy come in many forms—conservation easements, environmental stewardship, and educational outreach, to name a few. We’re excited to report a land preservation success in an entirely new area.

The Tinicum Conservancy has developed and implemented a strategy that is not just a first for us, but for Pennsylvania: We are working successfully with landowners to extinguish unwanted oil and gas drilling leases on their properties. Individuals have had some success extinguishing leases, but this is the first comprehensive strategy put in place to remove multiple leases over a large area.

Though active drilling hasn’t taken place in Upper Bucks, oil and gas exploration and its infrastructure—like pipelines—do affect us and have caused concern for many residents. There are 360 gas leases in Nockamixon, Tinicum, and Bridgeton; many are in and around ecologically important areas and watersheds, including the Upper Tinicum Creek. Landowners signed these leases for a variety of reasons and under a variety of circumstances, and their opinions on fossil fuel energy and infrastructure may vary. However, current economic, political, and geologic issues make it unlikely that we will see gas drilling in our area in the foreseeable future.

Can the removal of oil and gas leases in our area lead to more conservation successes that look like this? See page 5 to read about how this part of Tinicum has reached 1,165 contiguously preserved acres—and counting! Photograph by Bruce Wallace.

FLAME OUT: EXTINGUISHING OIL AND GAS LEASES

A new Conservancy program simultaneously clears property titles—and the way for conservation.
Message from the President

"On anyone’s map—national, regional, county, river, or local—Tinicum is set aside as a treasure to be protected, preserved, conserved. It, and its immediate neighbors to the north and west are the lungs of the county. As goes the greenery of Tinicum, so goes the health of the rest of Bucks County."

That statement is from the Introduction to Tinicum Township’s Comprehensive Plan. The “Comp Plan” is a written distillation of community goals and attributes, and of its needs, concerns, and long-term priorities.

On a perfect day this past fall, I was lucky to be a passenger in a small aircraft and view the riches of our community—its waterways, its forests, its farmland, its historic hamlets—from an extraordinary vantage point, all laid out beneath me. I naturally assumed all residents cherish these attributes. But you needn’t take my word for it. Tinicum Township conducted a “Resident Survey” that proves it. Designed by the Township Planning Commission in partnership with the Bucks County Planning Commission, it was sent to every household in the township to gather information to help update the Comp Plan. The survey sought to find out:

- what residents like best about the township
- what are the most disturbing changes in Tinicum
- what are the township’s most important resources
- what are the most important resources to preserve
- how residents feel about open space preservation
- how residents feel about the expenditure of tax revenues in the township

More than 400 completed surveys were received, representing about 10% of the population. Perhaps you filled one out? Whether your answer is yes or no, the results ought to be of interest. Residents rated natural features such as hills, woodlands, and streams as the things they like best about the township. Things they like least are the loss of farmland and open space and the increase in traffic that results from development. A resounding 50% (49.9% to be exact) of respondents said the resource most important to them is groundwater. Drinking water quality and quantity was rated “very important” by 91.9%, with woodlands, streams and stream valleys coming in highly valued as well. It makes sense then, that those same resources (along with the Delaware River and River Road) were rated “most important to preserve.” And 81% of respondents agreed that the township should actively seek preservation of open space—even if it costs tax dollars.

For those of us at the Conservancy it is galvanizing to have hard data proving that we are doing a needed and worthwhile job. For our residents, it is a written distillation of community goals and attributes, and that the larger community’s goals dovetail precisely with our mission to protect and preserve our natural resources and rural character.

How fortunate we are to have a resident population, a township government, and a local land trust whose objectives are aligned!

"A resounding 50% (49.9% to be exact) of respondents said the resource most important to them is groundwater."

PS. The full Comp Plan is available on the township’s website at tinicumbucks.org

ALBUM: THE CONSERVANCY IN 2015

The barn at Bob Hanley’s Black Sheep Farm was the beautiful venue for September’s Membership Celebration.

Many hands made quick work at the October River Road Cleanup, the fourth and last of the year.

Membership Celebration host Bob Hanley (right), with Tim Philpot.

TC President Boyce Budd “entertains” the crowd with Executive Director Jim Engel at right.

Nancy Bousam running the Conservancy booth at the Arts Festival in July.

Conserved Property Walks in 2015, from left to right: John Quinley talks to a group about to walk his preserved farm, taking a sample from the pond for a water quality test at Norm MacArthur and Bill Novak’s Jugtown Hill Farm, John Nytesid of the Delaware Riverkeeper led a group over the Nockamixon property of Michael Muss and Ellen Chapman in May.

Photographs by Bill Cahill, Vicki Jenkins, Louanne McConnell and Maureen Santina.
Looking south from Chris Weaver’s farm. Its protection means another 64 acres will remain in agricultural use. Photograph by Bruce Wallace.

The recent protection of Chris Weaver’s Erwinna farm means that there are now 1,165 acres protected along, and on both sides of, Upper Tinicum Church Road from Geigel Hill to Red Cliff Roads. All the large properties in that area, except for one, are now preserved in perpetuity. A true conservation success.

“I don’t want to see any other houses on the property,” was Chris’s response when his mother was considering subdividing the property. She wanted to retire from farming and to do that she was looking to make a big financial decision, but Chris was determined to carry on the family farming tradition.

The Weaver family in Tinicum goes back to the 1700’s. Chris’s great uncle, Charles Weaver, first occupied the farm in March of 1919. Chris’s dad, Marlyn Rube Weaver, one of 13 children, bought it from his uncle in 1960. The farm is currently home to 10 Hereford cattle, though Chris expects to increase that number to 25. He practices rotational grazing so that he can hay the farm as well. He also has an excavating business. Chris jokes that he is in the two worst businesses as far as weather is concerned. In terms of natural resources, the property has great value as the headwaters of Swamp Creek.

The Tinicum Conservancy first met with Chris in 2012 about putting a conservation easement on his property. He was very receptive to the idea. His neighbor, Norman MacArthur, suggested that he might qualify for the Bucks County Agricultural Program which gives a landowner 100% of the value of the foregone development rights. To his great surprise the property was enthusiastically accepted. He was further surprised to discover that a landowner has a lot of flexibility, within set guidelines, to customize a conservation easement to accommodate his or her individual needs. It was important to Chris to negotiate an agreement that allowed him to continue existing businesses on the property, as well as provide for a future building, and an addition on the existing house.

It’s part of the Conservancy’s mission to help keep land in agricultural use, and for Chris, who says, “Farming is in my blood, family influences determined my future,” it’s also part of his “Too many farms have disappeared. This is where we get our food. It’s critically important for future generations.” Chris’s son now helps him on the farm and will most likely carry on the Weaver family tradition. Chris also hopes his daughter, will help out. “Times were really rough back in 2008, but now things are going better.” Good news for Chris, his family, and the whole community!

Common Ground comes out twice a year, and information to share. Stay connected with Tinicum Conservancy.

Visit our newly relaunched and updated website at tinicumconservancy.org

New features are in the works, so visit frequently!

Stay Connected...Keep in Touch...Don’t Miss a Thing!

Sign up for E-News. Go to tinicumconservancy.org and click on the NEWS icon.

Like us on Facebook!

Follow us on Instagram for frequent doses of beautiful landscapes, flora, and fauna.

Bill Stein, age 84, was shoveling gravel into his tractor when I entered his driveway off Tocicum Valley Road. Despite a recent surgery, he professed to be back in good health. He certainly looked it! Moving up to Tinicum from Philadelphia in 1960, he bought his 34-acre farm for $35,000, much to the chagrin of his parents who thought he was spending his life money on the former dairy operation. Bill and his family bought in horses for the use of such Philadelphia organizations as the YMCA, Girl Scouts, and other summer camps. Today the Ottsville property is still a horse farm; Bill’s daughter boards horses and teaches riding to children.

Through the years Bill was approached by numerous developers who promised him a fortune for the farm, in part because of its excellent frontage on the Tocicum Valley Creek, as well as frontage on three different roads, including Rte. 611. Bill found the developers untrustworthy and doubted the likelihood of seeing any money during his lifetime. What’s more,
VITAL VOLUNTEERS: Event Hosts

Margaret and Matt Balitaisari
Karen and Boyce Budd
Lisa Berkley and David Phillips
Laura Daval
Derek Foll
Jose and Beatriz Mirabal Garces
David Gaudette and David Maue
Phil Gillespie and Dan Randall
Glen and Cynthia Hale
Bob Hanley
Stu and Sally Horn
Jeff and Lorraine Keller
Martie and Neil Kyde
Stana and Richard Lensos
Luna Louden
Norm MacArthur and Bill Novak
Sally Mirkick
Gabriel and Maria Orozco
Joan and John Quinby
June Rothkopf and Paul Wieand
Andy Rouze
John Searsen and William Tomai
Sugie and Marty Weiss
Mary and Don Woodruff

"Event hosts don’t ‘just’ open their properties to us. They share their passion for conservation and the community we live in.”
—Executive Director Jim Engel

continued from page 5

he didn’t want to see the property—much loved by him and his family—carved up into housing units. Instead, he turned to conservation. His soils are excellent which made the property a good candidate to receive funding from the Bucks County Agricultural Preservation Program. The county program gives farmers 100% of the value of their conservation easements and Tinicum Conservancy had long urged Bill Stein to apply.

Bill plans to use the money he receives for his conservation easement to renovate the beautiful old 1847 farmhouse. His daughter plans to live there and take good care of the property. According to the easement (and Tinicum Township zoning), one additional dwelling may be constructed, but no subdivision can occur. By extinguishing the farm’s development rights, Bill has done the right thing for future generations and made a decision that will benefit us all in the Tinicum community.

—Karen Budd

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: Farmers Marc and Joanna Michini (and daughter Clover) were on the cover of the 2014 Fall/Winter Common Ground. The story detailed the challenges and successes of running their business on leased land conserved by Margaret and Matt Balitaisari. The story also made clear the Michinis’ goal was to eventually own a farm. Cut to fall of last year, Marc and Joanna closed on 38 acres in Radnor Township where they will continue to raise hogs, turkeys, and laying hens sustainably and humanely. Congratulations! Reach Purely Farm at purelyfarm@gmail.com. Photograph by Kathleen Connally.

RESOURCES

Our nearly 20-year effort to achieve Exceptional Value status for the Tohickon Creek is a topic familiar to Conservancy supporters. Our petition to DEP was turned down in 2012, but we persisted.

Our E-News will also provide updates to the Tohickon Creek campaign. (Sign up for E-News at tinicumconservancy.org) Twenty years on, we are excited to be at this crucial point, and ready to rally the community in support of the Tohickon.

We first wrote about the massive threat posed by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) to Pennsylvania’s forests, landscapes, and ecosystems in the Spring 2013 Common Ground. Unfortunately, infestations of the Asian green beetle continue to be a serious concern. Foresters and biologists are still working to find a chemical or biological control, but for now, Pennsylvania’s 300 million ash trees are vulnerable and if infected, will die quickly.

A balanced or “selective” management approach may include removal of some trees, treatment with insecticides, and replanting with other natives. Ideally, treatment of some native ash trees, especially rare species, will provide a seed source for future collection and preservation of their local genome.

Otisville’s Martie and Neil Kyde decided that losing even one of their ash trees was not an option. They hired an arborist who spent a day on their 30-acre, forested property identifying and tagging 39 ash trees with diameters of 4” or more. Next, licensed applicators spent a day injecting the trees with a chemical pesticide (Emamectin benzoate), mixed and measured specifically for each tree, to protect them from the EAB for at least two years.

“It wasn’t cheap,” says Martie. “We chose the more expensive of the two chemical options, because it is safer for the fungi and macroinvertebrates in the soil.” Martie says they’ll treat every two years until the EAB is no longer a threat. It’s a big expense, but it’s worth it to the Kydes—to protect the healthy forest ecosystem they’ve spent a lifetime caring for and calling home.

More information (including signs, symptoms, and a list of local arborists) is available on our website at tinicumconservancy.org.
Not Yet a Member?
Join the Tinicum Conservancy Today.

Why join? Membership support is critical to the overall success of the Conservancy. Our success benefits everyone who wants pure water, clean air, beautiful landscapes, and low municipal costs. We protect Tinicum’s rural character and natural resources through community-based land conservation. To do that we rely on our members. We are a private non-profit organization that depends on charitable contributions to steward the 4700 acres conserved through our efforts, to protect additional land, and to educate the community about our mission. Annual memberships start at just $50. Use the envelope in this newsletter or visit tinicumconservancy.org to join today.

Already a Member?
Consider Getting More Involved.

Volunteer. The Tinicum Conservancy would not exist without its volunteers. We need office help with mailings, research, and event planning. We can also use help outdoors—we are always looking for folks to take part in our River Road cleanups or invasive plant removal. If you have time to contribute, visit tinicumconservancy.org or contact Karen Budd, Volunteer Coordinator, at kbudd3030@gmail.com.

Become a property monitor. Our Resource Protection Manager trains and coordinates this team of crucial volunteers who make annual visits to walk the properties on which we hold easements. Email Kelly at tcresource@frontier.com or visit tinicumconservancy.org if you’d like to join the monitor ranks.

Leave a Legacy. When you include the Conservancy in your estate plans, you’re helping secure the future of Tinicum’s natural resources and rural character. Thoughtful planning today can extend your impact beyond your lifetime. Contact Executive Director Jim Engel at tinicumconserv@epix.net or 610-294-1077, to discuss estate planning.

Conserve your property. Preserving your land is a profound way to contribute to our community. Contact Executive Director Jim Engel at tinicumconserv@epix.net or 610-294-1077, to discuss an easement.