



The

Allegheny Valley Conservancy

In this first edition:

Message from
President John
Holden

Featured Property:
Dotter

Future Acquisitions

Our First Annual
AVC Day

Membership
Information

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Board of Directors**

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Secretary: Sue Hilton
Treasurer: Steve Schenck
Board of Directors:
Lance Bowes
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Debra Frawley
Kim McCullough
Andrew Turner

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A Greeting from AVC President John Holden

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Allegheny Valley Conservancy! We are excited to bring you news of our latest initiatives and updates on our land protection efforts. Since 2002, the Conservancy has worked with landowners in the Allegheny River and French Creek watersheds who share our love of the valuable resources in Northwestern Pennsylvania, to conserve and enhance nearly 1000 acres of important land and water resources.

In this issue, we share information about our plans for the future, and our first annual Allegheny Valley Conservancy Day. In each upcoming newsletter, you'll also find information about a featured property. In this issue, we discuss our most recent acquisition, nearly one mile of Allegheny River riparian area in southern Venango County.

I hope you find the news about the Conservancy and our projects as exciting as we do and thank you for your continued support.

John Holden, President



Allegheny Valley Conservancy

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The Dotter Tract

With this issue the Allegheny Valley Conservancy is introducing a series of stories that will focus on a “featured property.” We will try to tell the story behind the land and particularly how each tract relates to the mission of the AVC.

The missions of the AVC include the preservation of open spaces, the protection of biological diversity, the enhancement of recreational opportunities, and the promotion of land stewardship via outreach and education. All our properties score high in at least one of these areas, but our first featured property in this series, the Dotter Tract, contributes heavily in all the above-listed areas.

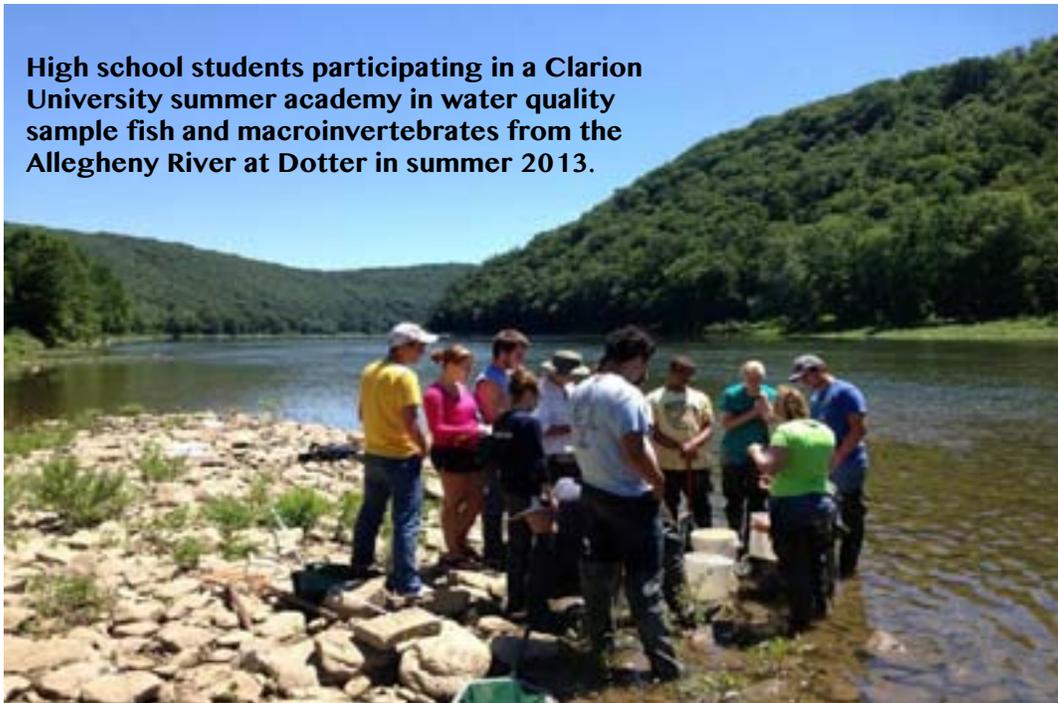
The Dotter Tract consists of 16 acres of land and one-half mile of frontage on the Allegheny River, located three miles north of Emlenton. Accessed via Dotterer Road, the tract is mostly sandwiched between the Allegheny River and the Allegheny River Trail, a rails-to-trails project of the Allegheny Valley Trails Association. There is an AVTA parking area adjacent to the tract which provides easy access.

Dotter was once a small collection of homes, named for an early settler family that lived at this site, but little remains of the community beyond the name. Like much of the property along the Allegheny River, the land was acquired by the

railroads in the 1860's and held by a succession of companies. A rail stop, named Dotter Station, was for a time located here, and a railroad siding, used to stage tanker cars for the Emlenton Refinery, was also located at this site. The railroad ceased operation in the 1980's and the property passed into private ownership. It was eventually acquired by the Conservancy in 2009, with assistance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

The tract has succeeded to forest and is populated with deciduous species including black birch, sycamore, aspen, black cherry, tulip poplar, and sugar maple. Like all Conservancy properties, the Dotter tract is open to the public. The Conservancy, in collaboration with the PA-DCNR and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, has developed a canoe launch at the site. The launch includes a staging area where boats can be unloaded from vehicles and a trail down to the river. The entire riverfront

High school students participating in a Clarion University summer academy in water quality sample fish and macroinvertebrates from the Allegheny River at Dotter in summer 2013.



is open to fishing and primitive camping. There are few locations that provide public access to this portion of the Allegheny River, so the Dotter Tract provides a critical portal to the river.

This reach of the Allegheny River has been identified as an area of exceptional biological diversity. We have not yet performed a thorough biological survey of the Dotter Tract, but species inventories have been conducted at the mouth of Mill Creek, one mile upriver. These surveys show that the river and its associated floodplain are home to a number of rare fish, mussels, and riparian plants. To provide one example, the river here is inhabited by the mountain madtom, a cryptic little catfish that lives beneath the cobbles and boulders of fast riffles during the day but ventures forth at night to forage. Within Pennsylvania, the mountain madtom is listed by the state as an endangered species, as within Pennsylvania it is only known to occur in certain restricted reaches of French Creek and the Middle Allegheny River. The mountain madtom is dependent on clean, silt-free water, and undisturbed riparian buffers are critical to the preservation of clean water, so the conservation of this and other aquatic species ultimately depends on protection of the riparian corridor. The vegetated floodplain is home to a number of rare plants, including the blue false-indigo, a species of concern in Pennsylvania.

Because the Allegheny River is such an important recreational destination, the Dotter tract has quickly become a popular gateway to the river. Anglers fish the river, kayakers use the launch, and bikers take a detour from the trail to wander down to the river for a picnic. Thus, the Dotter tract is serving a breadth of missions, simultaneously protecting our open spaces and biological diversity, but also providing public access to the river and its floodplain.



Devin Lineman lives near the Dotter property and is a frequent visitor to the site. We asked him to write a few words describing his experiences.

The Dotter property, along the Allegheny River, is one of my favorite places to explore during the summer. The river has a lot of good fishing opportunities, and I've caught many nice bass and catfish at this site, and a few large muskie and pike too.



It also has an easy to access boat launch that my friends and family use often for kayaking along this beautiful stretch of river, and we sometimes swim in the river too. It isn't easy to find good places to access the river, and I would guess that we visit the Dotter a couple of dozen times each year.

The First Annual AVC Day

The Allegheny Valley Conservancy held its first annual Allegheny Valley Conservancy Day on June 29, a meet-and-greet event designed to provide information about our organization to area residents. Held outside of the SaltBox Visitor Center at the trailhead of the Allegheny River Trail, board members and special guests Judge William White and his wife retired State Senator Mary Jo White met with interested folks and trail visitors all afternoon. A large map highlighting our properties and easements and informative displays helped people see what we do and what areas of the region are being protected through our efforts. The Whites have an easement on their property along French Creek, and are strong supporters of conservation. Their participation was very much appreciated.

John manned the grill and served up hot dogs throughout the day, and the weather was very cooperative. We plan to hold this event every June as a way to spread the word about the Conservancy's work. Help us educate your neighbors and friends about the need to protect the beautiful and natural areas in our region for future generations.



Conservancy board members Jim Holden, Deb Frawley and Andy Turner, in the red hat, talk with Judge Bill White and another interested visitor during the first AVC Day.



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What's Up Next for the Conservancy

The Conservancy plans to continue its relationship with the Allegheny Valley Trails Association to preserve property adjacent to the rail trail system. As the trail system was developed, and as it continues to do so, property beyond what is needed for the trail right-of-way comes into the possession of the organization. The Conservancy is working with AVTA to identify these properties and place easement protection on some of them to maintain the natural resources and scenic beauty of the region. The results of the trail system's development include improved water quality, wildlife habitat and health of the forests and riparian lands.

In addition, as a member of the Council on Greenways and Trails, the Conservancy is helping to implement the Greenways Plans, a large-scale collaborative effort that seeks to protect the natural resources along the trail and river corridors of northwestern Pennsylvania, improve air and water quality, sustain woodlands, open space, and offer an improved quality of life for its residents.

"Green infrastructure is defined as an interconnected network of natural areas and other open space that helps preserve natural ecosystem values and functions, sustains clean air and water, and provides a variety of benefits to people and wildlife," according to the natural plan. The Conservancy is a contributor to the protections established as goals. For more information about the Greenways Plans for the region, go to <http://northwestpa.org/greenways-block-grant-program>.

Supporting the Allegheny Valley Conservancy

Those of us who live, work or play in northwestern Pennsylvania have the pleasure of viewing the beautiful scenery, fishing, swimming, kayaking or canoeing on French Creek or the Allegheny River, hunting in the great woods and enjoying the wildlife.

The Allegheny Valley Conservancy is a non-profit land trust that seeks, among other goals, to protect the watersheds of the Allegheny River and French Creek, and to preserve, protect and maintain open space in the region. We use two principle tools: the conservation easement or ownership of properties within these watersheds.

Our Conservancy has had amazing success in securing several easements that currently protect more than 840 acres in Venango County. These easements protect some of the most important, scenic and valuable places in the county.

We can't continue to do this without your help. The Conservancy asks you to support our organization - either as a member or providing just a donation. Becoming a member is for your benefit as well as ours. Your benefits:

- Your contribution to the preservation of the ecologically-valuable open and wild spaces in northwestern Pennsylvania;
- Your contribution to increasing public canoe and kayak access within the watersheds of the Allegheny River and French Creek;
- This annual newsletter;
- An invitation to Conservancy events and activities;

Please send your name, address, phone and email to the Allegheny Valley Conservancy, P.O. Box 96, Franklin, PA 16323, along with your membership check in one of the following categories: Individual: \$20; Family: \$25; Patron: \$50; Benefactor: \$100; or Lifetime: \$1000. If there are other ways you might like to help, such as volunteering with easement monitoring, research, publicity, membership or fundraising, please include this information. Someone will contact you about how your skills and talents could help with our mission.

If you'd just rather make a donation, that would be very appreciated. Just send your check to the Allegheny Valley Conservancy at the above address. Thank you very much.

Watch for information about our Annual Meeting. Once the details are confirmed, we'll send them to you!