

WWIA NEWS

Spring 2025

President's Message

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

It has been a rather trying beginning to 2025 for me as your WWIA president. Things started going sour before the end of 2024 with a very bad cold and bronchitis/cough that I just could not shake. I finally got back to normal health in early January.

Then halfway through February I caught Flu-A and it knocked me down so hard I ended up in the hospital with an IV drip, a temperature of 104°, and no energy or strength whatsoever. Getting over that bug took multiple weeks. I am glad to finally be back to my former self, for the most part.

Needless to say, my WWIA programming efforts were substantially impeded. I was able to firm up only a few programs for 2025. I was seriously considering not running for another term as president in the elections at our business meeting in October.

At the board meeting on April 10, I was rescued by Lois Noonan, an associate director and longtime member of WWIA. Lois volunteered to serve as program director, which will take an enormous burden off me and let me focus on other aspects of the president's job. Thank you, Lois!

This year we're featuring two programs by Aaron Capouellez, whose program last year on amphibians was so enthusiastically received. On Thursday evening, May 22, at the WCD Barn, Aaron will give another Critter Talk. This one will be about carnivorous plants and invertebrates in PA and beyond.

Then on Sunday, July 27, WWIA is one of several groups sponsoring a Frog Walk. That night Aaron will guide us around the ponds and ephemeral pools near the Westmoreland Conservation District.

It takes a village, but once again we'll be bringing you a year of programs to spark your enthusiasm and satisfy your curiosity.



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In Memoriam: Bob Ackerman and Tom Wandrisco

We are deeply saddened to share the loss of two stalwart WWIA members.

Robert Lloyd Ackerman

September 3, 1925 - March 9, 2025

Robert Lloyd Ackerman, 99, of New Alexandria, passed away peacefully on Sunday, March 9, 2025. He was born on September 3, 1925, in Greensburg, the son of the late Lloyd W. Ackerman and Anne S. Ackerman (née Saul).

His family, including his wife of 65 years, Margaret, and many friends, will miss him. He will long be admired for his humanitarian heart, integrity, and Abe Lincoln-like honesty.

Bob graduated from Greensburg High School and earned a degree in chemical engineering from Pitt.

His distinguished career began at PPG, where he developed a groundbreaking chemical for a spray gun that prevented icing on fighter pilots' windscreens, ensuring visibility at high altitudes. It played a crucial role during the Korean War and is still used in aviation.

His career took him to Koppers Co. in Pittsburgh and the Arabian American Oil Co. in New York City. He met his British wife, Margaret, in New York. They married in 1959.

They moved to Saudi Arabia for 10 years, raised three children, and traveled extensively, embracing new friends and cultures.

In 1976, Bob joined the Oil Service Co. of Iran, where he and his family lived for several years. When Bechtel Corp. employed him in England, he designed a helipad for a North Sea oil platform. For Bechtel he oversaw construction of a new refinery in Borneo, Indonesia, and managed the Ok Tedi Mine in Papua New Guinea.

In the early 1980s, he retired to the family home purchased in New Alexandria in 1930.

A long-time member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Greensburg, Bob served as a deacon and president of the Council.

His passion for conservation led him to

serve as president of WWIA for many years.

He was also an associate director of the Westmoreland Conservation District and a director of the Loyalhanna Watershed Assn.

Bob was also a tireless advocate for peace in the Middle East. He worked alongside United Church of Christ pastors to foster dialogue between Muslim and Jewish communities. His letters and articles appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Tribune-Review*, and *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, among others.

Bob was a devoted father to Julia Glenister (husband Christopher), Janet Fuhrmeister (husband Kurt), and Robert Peter Ackerman. He was a proud grandfather to Kara (husband Jack), Geoff (wife Ksu), Morgan, Marc (wife Nina), Devon, and Ian, and a loving great-grandfather to Finn.

Memorial contributions may be made to Trinity United Church of Christ (139 Main St., Greensburg) or Cross Your Paws Rescue (PO Box 745, Smithton, PA 15479).

Thomas A. Wandrisco

June 5, 1928—December 15, 2024

Thomas A. Wandrisco, 96, of Greensburg was born June 5, 1928, in Pittsburgh, the fifth child of Gustave and Marcella Wandrisco.

He was a member of the Parish of the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, Greensburg. Tom studied forestry and agriculture at Penn State. He served in the US Navy Reserves aboard the *USS Strickland*.

Tom spent his early career working for J.M. Brun on landscaping for many large projects, including Gateway Center; the NYC Housing Authority's Edenwald, Brevcort, and George Washington Carver projects; Brooklyn College; New York Museum of Art; the UN Complex;

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In Memoriam continued from page 2

Cotton Bay Club, and the Towers of Cable Beach in the Bahamas.

Tom was happily married to Nancy (King) for many years until her passing. They were active supporters of Nittany Lion Football, and Tom was active in many service organizations, including the Jaycees and Lions Club.

He started Green Thumb Nursery, through which he spent many years beautifying

Westmoreland County.

Tom created many scholarships honoring Nancy and other family members at universities including Seton Hill, Saint Vincent, Duquesne, Grove City, Pitt, and WCCC.

Memorial donations may be made to the Nancy and Thomas Wandrisco scholarship for students from Derry and Latrobe. Send to Westmoreland County Community College, Attn: Pam Mowrer.



Aaron Capouellez to Lead Critter Talk May 22, Frog Walk July 27



Aaron Capouellez at Nathan's Divide near Ebensburg.

May 22 Critter Talk: Carnivorous Plants and Invertebrates

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association will host a talk on **Thursday, May 22, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.** at the J. Roy Houston Conservation Center (the Westmoreland Conservation District barn behind the Donohoe Center) at 218 Donohoe Road in Greensburg. There will be a social half-hour starting at 6:30.

The talk is open to the public. It is free to WWIA members and students with a current student ID; it costs \$5 for all others. **Please call Tammy at WCD (724-837-5271, option #1) by Tuesday, May 20, to register.**

Back by popular demand is Aaron Capouellez, founder and president of the conservation

nonprofit PA Woods and Forests. He'll give a Critter Talk and a presentation about carnivorous plants and the invertebrates they feed on.

Aaron explains, "For Critter Talks, I bring several live animal ambassadors and field equipment to educate families about the creatures living in their yards."

Aaron is a passionate conservationist, biologist, and communicator dedicated to the preservation of Pennsylvania's native wildlife.

PA Woods and Forests protects amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, carnivorous plants, and their habitats through research, education, and citizen science initiatives.

At Woods and Forests Media, Aaron showcases the beauty of the natural world through cinematic storytelling, wildlife education, and natural exploration. The company produces engaging YouTube series such as Wild Vivariums, The Woods Uncut, All Seasons, and a podcast called Critters, Conservation, and Hiking.

July 27 Frog Walk

On Sunday, July 27, Aaron Capouellez will guide a nighttime **Frog Walk** around the ponds and ephemeral pools near the Westmoreland Conservation District.

WWIA is one of several groups sponsoring the Frog Walk. Aaron often guides these nature hikes to teach the community about the frogs and toads in their backyards.

Riparian Buffer Planting at High Horizons Tree Farm

By Rus Davies



My wife, Miriam, and I have run High Horizons Tree Farm for 40 years. We were approved for a Watershed Forestry Program of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to plant a riparian forestry buffer. The project was jointly funded by DCNR and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

The lead team for the actual planting was the Conservancy's Watershed team from their Indiana office. Staff from the Forbes Forest District office and the Westmoreland Conservation District also participated.

Last month they planted a 3.3-acre former pasture and 0.6 acre adjacent to a watercourse with 540 trees of 13 species (including three species of oaks) and 240 shrubs of 9 species that were selected for the site.

The total 3.9 acres were planted at the density of 200 per acre. The watercourse is an unnamed

tributary of Snyders Run.

A team of five laid out the tree tubes and stakes in four hours. The next day a crew of 22 did most of the planting in eight hours and a crew of 15 completed the planting the following day in four hours. That's 780 plantings in 12 hours for an average of 65 per hour.

The weather ranged from warm and clear the first day to rainy, cool, and windy on the second day to downright cold on the third day. The teams were very efficient and operated like a well-oiled machine.

My responsibility is to mow between the plants for three years to control invasives and maintain the tubes, which may be knocked over by deer. When the trees grow to the nets, placed on top of the tubes to prevent bird nesting, I'm also to remove the nets.

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I had the opportunity to share some history of High Horizons with some of the team. Mary Kolb was the executive director of the Frick Educational Foundation.

She was an alumna of the Women's College of Pennsylvania (now Chatham College), as was Rachel Carson, the biologist who wrote *Silent Spring*, thereby jump-starting the environmental movement.

High Horizons was originally Mary's retreat in the Laurel Highlands and eventually her permanent home.

She had a three-hole golf course she named Puppy Paws. The watercourse between the fields she named Dapple Creek. She entertained many visitors, including Carson.

Mary ran a summer educational event at Wilson College for many years, and I've been told that Rachel Carson was a speaker there.

I have photos and documents that show the progression of the property from retreat to permanent home. Mary put these pictures and brief progress reports on Christmas cards to friends and neighbors.



She willed the property to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Mary was treasurer of St. James Evangelical Church in Ligonier, the church where I maintain my membership. The now retired longtime pastor and his wife told me Mary envisioned a smaller version of Fallingwater.

I came to western PA for a job in December 1978. Miriam was teaching school back in Lansdale, so I stayed in Latrobe during the week and went "back east" on weekends. This gave me plenty of time to decide where to settle when the time came.

I happened upon a Ligonier Realtor who had the property listed, but an "open space easement in gross" in perpetuity was a condition of sale.

I have two lawyer friends, one in Rochester, NY, and one in Philadelphia. Bill in Rochester said, "It looks like you'd be buying a park."

Joe in Philly said, "Find out if Mary Kolb placed the restrictions or the conservancy did. If they did, you may have room to negotiate." He also gave me the names of three local attorneys.

Both attorneys in Latrobe said they thought the requirements in the 15-page easement were overly strict, but they didn't think they could do anything about them.

Flickinger and Flickinger, a father-son firm in Ligonier, was the third name. The father was the executor of Mary Kolb's estate.

I met with the Flickinger son and expressed concern about conflicts of interest.

He said, "You are absolutely correct that the potential is there. However, my father is not active in the firm. He is the corporate attorney for Kennametal. I can fairly represent your interest. I used to mow grass for Mary Kolb and I know the plumbing was not drained, so you may have damage. First, we must get the asking price down. And with these limits, you couldn't even spray the rosebushes that Mary planted. I'll call Tom Schmidt, the conservancy's

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Riparian Buffer Planting continued from page 5

attorney, and negotiate something reasonable."

The 15-page document is now 8 pages. Farming is expressly permitted, including all agriculture, horticulture, and silviculture activities.

We retained the name Mary Kolb used, High Horizons. In June 1985 we were enrolled as Tree Farm # 2410 by the American Tree Farm System. USDA lists us as Westmoreland County Farm 4831, Tract 11644.

In addition to ongoing maintenance activities, we participated in the county spray program for spongy moth and had a salvage harvest of 80 trees after the resulting mortality. In 2022 we did a commercial thinning that was surveyed, marked and supervised by a consulting forester.

We consider ourselves the current stewards of Mary Kolb's property. 🌿

2024 Westmoreland Fair Recap

By Mary Jane Busch

From August 16-24, eleven people staffed a forest stewardship exhibit at the 2024 Westmoreland Fair: Margaret Ackerman, Glen Busch, Mary Jane Busch, Levi Canon, Rus Davies, Michael Doucette, Terry Gates, Russ Gibbs, John Hilewick, Caitlyn Hogan, and Lois Noonan.

Due to the dependability, knowledge, and skill of these WWIA members, this event went off smoothly even though we had no organizational meetings and communicated via a few short emails. I want to thank these volunteers for their commitment to forest stewardship and this outreach event.

WWIA also appreciates the Bureau of Forestry Forbes District 4 sponsorship of this

program and the opportunity they gave to us to participate with them.

Volunteers engaged approximately 175 visitors in conversations about forest stewardship, explained Bureau of Forestry services, and encouraged attendees to join WWIA and apply for PA Forest Stewardship training. We distributed several hundred brochures, which may bring future inquiries.

The seeds of forest stewardship have been planted, which is the mission of both the Bureau of Forestry and our organization. We hope these engagements will bring future contacts with the BOF and us for advice in the future. Only time will tell if these seeds will sprout and grow.



WWIA's fair display
with Rus and Russ.

Recap of WWIA's October 2024 Program: Prescribed Burns and Carbon Offsets

By Lois Noonan



The guest speaker for WWIA's 2024 annual meeting was Melissa Kreye, PhD, associate professor and extension specialist in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management at Penn State.

Melissa's research focused on how forest owners make decisions regarding fire services and forest carbon markets.

She said that land management is either 1) producer focused, with a priority on financial incentives, or 2) stewardship focused, with a priority on protecting the land for wildlife habitat, aesthetics, and other purposes.

Stewardship landowners often believe they should be paid for good land management.

Prescribed Fire for Forest Management

A prescribed fire creates a disturbance that results in a favorable recovery. Example: improving an oak stand by decreasing competition.

In the Northeast United States, only 3% of landowners have used prescribed fires for forest management, far fewer than elsewhere.

Melissa's research focused on New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Prescribed burning is used more often in VA because it has had fire regulations and codes for much longer.

The Pennsylvania Prescribed Burning Practices Act took effect in 2009, and New York did not establish a fire code until 2012.

The main goals of landowners are to enhance wildlife populations, family recreation, aesthetics,

and timber production, according to Melissa's surveys.

Most landowners (72%) had low knowledge levels about prescribed burning. Most also thought fire risk was low and trusted fire implementers. Most (68%) would be willing to pay for prescribed fire services.

Melissa explained, "Because we don't have a fire economy in PA, we don't have many experts available to hire, so it costs a lot more, probably \$100 to \$200 per acre."

Reasons people were willing to pay include maintenance of forest health; control of ticks, pests, and diseases; and oak regeneration.

Early adopters of prescribed fire tend to own less than 125 acres, be younger and/or wealthier, and be involved in other landowner assistance programs on either the state or federal level.

Conclusions from the Study

1. PA landowners are "fire curious," but not yet convinced of the benefits of using fire on private lands.
2. We need to educate landowners about how to use fire safely and about ecological implications.
3. We need fire champions willing to work with landowners.

Pennsylvania has a prescribed-fire council whose missions are to share information among fire experts and to teach the public the benefits of

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prescribed fires. The council offers certification for prescribed burn managers.

Carbon Offsets

The second half of Melissa's presentation focused on forest owners' attitudes toward carbon offsets. She is developing a **Forest Owner Carbon and Climate Education** extension program.

"We want to make sure that every landowner has the information to make an informed decision regarding the use of their land for carbon offsets," she said.

To generate credits from a forest-based project, carbon is sequestered and stored on forestland and measured using set protocols.

Melissa first looked at existing research to see how much landowners wanted to charge for managing forest carbon. Respondents cited anywhere from \$5 to \$350 per acre per year.

"What motivates how much one wants to charge?" Melissa asked. It goes back to value-based decision making: "What's in it for me?"

Contracts have been developed for three categories of early adopters to carbon offset programs.

1. Passive forest owners, individuals who are not actively managing their forest.
2. Conservation stewardship-oriented owners, who are actively managing their forest.
3. Timber-production-oriented landowners.

Passive and conservation forest owners were willing to accept just \$3 to \$20 per acre per year. The going rate, \$10 per acre per year, is in the ballpark for them.

Landowners who sell timber expect higher compensation because they'd have to wait longer to make money from a timber harvest if enrolled in a carbon offset program.

Melissa's current research is focused on answering the following questions.

1. Do forest owners feel positive about carbon offset payment opportunities?
2. Do owners think communities would support

- them enrolling in a carbon offset program?
3. Do they believe they have the skills to engage in a program?
4. What do they perceive are benefits of the program?

Of the 147 respondents, 67% had heard about carbon offset programs. But only 8% had participated in one, though nearly one-third had been contacted by a project developer.

Overall, people have a positive attitude about carbon payment programs, and many were interested in participating.

Half said they rely on peers to learn about carbon offset programs, but 70% said they have not learned from other landowners.

Most forest owners preferred a contract with the following features:

1. **Type of management activity:** Protecting forest health is the management activity people most want to be paid for.
2. **Contract length:** 63% preferred a 5-year contract, 21% preferred a 20-year contract, and 16% preferred one year.
3. **Payment process:** Most preferred to be paid annually.
4. **Number of acres:** Most preferred to enroll all their acres.
5. **Payment rate:** 77% of respondents wanted \$250 per acre per year, but the going rate is only \$10 per acre.

Conclusions from the Study

1. Early respondents to the survey tend to be more interested in carbon opportunities.
2. Landowners could benefit from more opportunities to engage in peer learning.
3. Landowners need support to understand how to include carbon payments in their financial plan for their forest.
4. Current contract offerings appear to be a mismatch with the management objectives of some owners.

See the Penn State Extension website for more about forest carbon offsets. 



Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

2025 Calendar of Events

Saturday, May 10, 8:30-noon. “Making the Most of your Piece of Nature” at Twin Lakes Park Activity Center in Greensburg. Forbes State Forest is sponsoring. DCNR service forester Levi Canon will discuss backyard tree care, followed by DCNR service forester Russ Gibbs on managing invasive species, then Dr. Eric Burkhardt of Penn State on harvesting ramps. Register at <https://forms.office.com/g/xJf0skMYbd>
This event was designed in conjunction with the PA Invasive Replace-ive Program, but the program is full. To join the waitlist: <https://forms.gle/D5QwJwnqqWMVqXGg9>.

Thursday, May 22, 7:00 p.m., social period begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Westmoreland Conservation District Barn in Greensburg. **To register, call WCD at 724-837-5271, option # 2.** Aaron Capouellez will share his expertise about carnivorous plants and invertebrates in PA and beyond. Aaron is a graduate student in herpetology at IUP.

Sunday, July 27, evening. Aaron Capouellez will guide a **Frog Walk** around the ponds and ephemeral pools near the Westmoreland Conservation District.

Sunday, October 5, 1:00-3:00 p.m. The Annual **Walk in Penn’s Woods**. Location is yet to be determined.

Thursday, October 16. Social period & registration begins at 5:30 p.m. at the WCD Barn. Potluck dinner 6:00 p.m. and annual business meeting, including elections for officers and voting directors, 7:00 to about 7:15. Cat Pugh, a forestry extension educator at Penn State, will speak on the health benefits of spending time in the woods.

Tentative Program for 2025

We’re working on another program that we hope to schedule this year or next:

A tour of the Ritenour Lumber Company in Melcroft. They specialize in manufacturing custom moldings, hardwood flooring, tongue-and-groove paneling, and other millwork.

Please check www.westmorelandwoodlands.org for the latest information about program times and places. WWIA’s mission is to encourage good management of woodlands for aesthetics, timber, water quality and control, wildlife habitat, plant propagation, and recreation.



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c/o Westmoreland Conservation District
218 Donohoe Road
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Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Membership Application and Renewal - Dues \$10 per year

Name: _____

Phone: _____

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New Member ☐ or Renewal ☐

Date: _____

If you own property, how many acres do you own? _____

Approximately how many of them are wooded? _____

Make check payable to:
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