



**Testimony to the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee and
the Local Government Committee**

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March 2, 2015

Chairman Yaw and Chairman Hutchinson:

Natural Lands Trust is grateful for the opportunity to express our strong support for the funding provided via the Marcellus Legacy Fund to conservation and recreation projects at the local level.

Natural Lands Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization serving eastern Pennsylvania. Since its founding in 1953, the organization has preserved well over 100,000 acres of important natural, agricultural, and recreational lands. Today, millions of Pennsylvania residents enjoy the ecological, economic, recreational, health, and scenic benefits that these lands provide.

Since the Department of Community and Economic Development established the Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program in order to invest Marcellus Legacy Funds in local conservation efforts, Natural Lands Trust has received seven grants totaling more than \$1.26 million. These funds are helping to preserve important natural areas and community open spaces in rural areas of Berks and Chester Counties and in urban areas such as Philadelphia and eastern Delaware County. The grants are also helping to create new trails and improve access to public and private recreation areas.

In Philadelphia, Marcellus Legacy Fund grants are helping to preserve a 49-acre parcel adjacent to Tacony Creek Park in the city's northeast; a 55-acre arboretum in the Germantown neighborhood; and, a 13-acre site along the Delaware River, which is an important link in a greenway and park system that is revitalizing the city's waterfront. All of these properties provide vital recreation areas for the city's residents and help to ensure that its scarce open spaces are protected, forever.



In Delaware County, Marcellus Legacy Fund grants are helping to permanently protect a 35-acre parcel of land along Darby Creek in Darby Borough. The property represents a critical link in the Darby Creek Greenway and will be a treasured park resource for the community. In addition to the grant provided to Natural Lands Trust, Delaware County has stated its intention to allocate a portion of the funds it has received from the Marcellus Legacy Fund to aid in the acquisition of the property.

Marcellus Legacy Fund grants are playing an important role in improving access to recreational areas in Berks and Chester County by supporting the development of a trail that connects French Creek State Park with Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site; acquisition of a 54-acre addition to French Creek State Park, resulting in preservation of a previously unprotected segment of the regionally important Horseshoe Trail; and, providing enhanced access for visitors to Natural Lands Trust's Sadsbury Woods Preserve located in Sadsbury and West Caln Townships.

The grants provided through the Marcellus Legacy Fund are creating remarkable leverage. The \$1.26 million in grants that Natural Lands Trust has received will result in \$9 million in conservation and recreation projects – a ratio of \$7 of impact for every \$1 of Marcellus Legacy Funds invested.

The local benefits of these conservation efforts are significant. As documented in the GreenSpace Alliance and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's report "Return on Environment," home owners in southeastern Pennsylvania that live proximate to open spaces experience higher property values. The GSA/DVRPC report also states that \$187 million is generated through tourist activity associated with protected open space in the five southeastern Pennsylvania counties, with economic activity associated with protected open space generating \$30 million per year in state and local tax revenue. In addition, exercise on protected open spaces avoids over \$1.3 billion in medical costs, worker's compensation costs, and productivity losses.

Access to trails and open spaces has proven health benefits, as well. Research has shown that people who have easy access to trails are more active. In one study, 55% of residents near a trail reported walking more after it opened. More physical activity can result in decreased incidents of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic



diseases. Research has indicated that there are substantial mental health benefits to spending time in the outdoors, as well.

The Marcellus Legacy Fund has proven to be a successful and cost-effective tool for preserving Pennsylvania's forests, fields, and farms, as well as for providing greater access to the state's great outdoors. The results are tangible and lasting and thus represent a smart investment in the health and prosperity of the Commonwealth for generations to come.