



SYMBIOSIS: Water and Land Conservation

There is something universally calming about the sound of water whether it's lapping gently at the shore, slowly carving a riverbank or tumbling over rocks and branches in a stream. Even the aggressive sound of waves crashing against rocky cliffs seems to speak quietly to some part of the raging beast in us all.

As a *land* trust, our mission is to preserve, protect and enhance *land*. However, from the beginning the mission of the Conservancy has been intimately tied to the waterways of the Rancocas Creek Watershed, as is the land we seek to preserve. We chose to focus on acquiring land that supports the headwaters of the three main branches and 52 smaller tributaries of the Rancocas Creek, and 26 years later that is still the first consideration in every acquisition.

This was not an accident, nor a fancy. Land and water have an obvious symbiotic relationship. Roots from the plants that grow along stream banks and wetlands stabilize the soil and help control the flow of the water.

A healthy riparian environment is essential to maintain clean, healthy waterways.

Land that is preserved as part of the natural habitat helps to conserve water and keep it clean for human uses. Soil provides a filter that helps mitigate the pollutants that

would otherwise foul the water, and clean water feeds the habitat it touches. As urban and suburban development continues to spread into natural areas, there is more paving and more, faster stormwater "run-off" filling the streams and

introducing pollutants from fertilizers, roadways and other waste. There are also more "introduced" plants that out-compete the native species, taking their place in the habitat. They can also attract more non-native wildlife, especially insects that may damage native plants. Development is inevitable of course, and in many ways beneficial, but it also makes our work and our mission more significant.

Caring for both land and water helps provide natural habitat that attracts and sustains the native plants and wildlife essential to a healthy, balanced ecology. How can you help? Be aware of what's around you, in your yard, your town, in your favorite wild places. Plant native species; if you do have non-native plants, particularly those that spread easily, make sure

they are contained. Limit the use of lawn areas to spaces where they actually provide a useful benefit. Lawns are shallow-rooted and water-demanding; be judicious in when and how you irrigate your yard. Over-spraying onto roads,



Rancocas Creek

continued on page 2

A Homecoming Tale

On April 25th, Mark Thomas left his home on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River and drove 1300 miles east to the landscape of the Rancocas Creek watershed in upper South Jersey. From the grand bluffs and vistas of the continent's largest watershed, Mark drove across prairie, woodland, mountains and, finally, the Delaware River to the place where, 29 years earlier, he had listened to a wood thrush sing in the Pemberton Beech woods. Intimate in scale, gentle in swale and rise, Mark's heart fell in love with the watershed and its natural beauty and holds it dear to this day.

Though life took him other places, now, years later, with loss of family and the conclusion of professional ties, he followed his lifetime love back to its source: the Rancocas Creek. Here he hopes to spend the rest of his life in ministry to the leafy, tea-brown stream and to the people who call its watershed their home. Welcome home, Mark.

American Beech

It would not be too great a stretch to say that the Rancocas Conservancy owes its life and work to the American Beech tree. It was one of the things that attracted Mark Thomas, Conservancy founder, to the woodlands along the Rancocas Creek. Standing straight and tall in a park-like grove with dogwood, spice bush and holly scattered throughout, the beeches commanded attention.

The beech tree is easy to recognize. Its straight trunk and smooth, light gray bark signal its presence even when surrounded by other trees. Beeches usually grow without branching for most of their 50' – 70' height. The tall trunk supporting a crown of green foliage is diagnostic and quite striking. The bark is a tempting canvas for lovers and scribes, and often trees are found with names or initials carved in them. Deny temptation if you happen upon them. The carvings don't heal; they stay in the trunk for the life of the tree. But those lives, as long as 300 or more years, can be cut short when fungus or bacteria find their way in through the man-made breaks in the bark.

The leaves are distinctive with the underside lighter than its dull green top. The saw-toothed edge of the elliptical leaves and the many parallel side veins are characteristics easily identified, and the fact that they decompose slowly results in a thick layer of leaves under the tree, giving ample examples to evaluate. In the fall the leaves turn yellow or brown, often staying attached to the branches throughout winter.

The leaves emerge in spring as lacy tassels. As the leaves unfold, the flowers also appear. The male flowers are small, yellow clusters in ball-like shapes. The female flowers are even smaller, and found on the ends of new twig growth. When pollinated, these flowers form an edible nut which is eaten by many mammals and birds. It is an interesting aside that before they went extinct Passenger Pigeons were among the species that used beech mast as a diet staple, often arriving in large flocks that threatened to break the branches they roosted on.

Our Stavola/Beechwoods Preserve in Pemberton is still home to that stand of Beech trees that over 25 years ago attracted the attention of a young man new to the area. This winter is a good time to walk the trail and find those trees with the smooth gray trunks.



American Beech grove

Symbiosis continued from page 1

driveways and sidewalks is not only wasteful of water, but also adds pollutants picked up on its way to our lakes, streams and marshes. Better yet, plan a raingarden to capture water from your roof and driveway and add sections of native flowering plants to attract beneficial insects and birds. Make your personal landscape a reflection of the Rancocas and do your part to enhance the health of our watershed.

For more information about rain gardens and native plants go to our website (www.rancocasconservancy.org) or see our Facebook page for links.

RANCOCAS CONSERVANCY

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MISSION

The mission of the Rancocas Conservancy is to preserve, protect and enhance the ecological and cultural integrity of the Rancocas Creek Watershed.

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Rancocas Conservancy Board of Trustees (left – right) Joe Augustyn, Steve Doughty, Barbara Rich, Brad Atwater, Jessica Sanchez, Rick Brown, Mark Thomas, Mark Shourds, Steve Tambini, Rob Hofstrom; (absent Laura Bishop, Jack Cresson)

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Annual Meeting 2017

One of the highlights of the Conservancy's year is our Annual Meeting and Dinner.

Held each September, this event gives us the opportunity to meet with some of our supporters in a casual and festive atmosphere, report on our achievements for the prior year, share our plans for the future all while enjoying good food and good friends.

Following are photographs of some of the highlights of our 2017 Annual Meeting.

Clockwise from top left:

- *Mark Thomas (right) presents the Thomas/Rich Award to Glenn Malsbury.*
- *Members enjoy a guided pre-dinner walk along the Creek.*
- *Margo Pellegrino talks about the work of Paddle4Blue and its connection to the Watershed.*
- *Rancocas Creek at dusk.*



YES! I want to support the Rancocas Conservancy in their effort to preserve and protect the Rancocas Creek.

Please select you level of support

- Individual _____ \$ 35.00
- Family _____ \$ 50.00
- Patron _____ \$ 125.00
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Please make your check payable to the Rancocas Conservancy
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I would like to volunteer my time to help the Rancocas Conservancy grow!

We invite you to participate in the activities of the Conservancy. Please consider volunteering in a way you find personally rewarding. Volunteers are needed in the following areas:

- Environmental Education
- Newsletter
- Special Events
- Membership
- Publicity/Media Relations
- Land Stewardship
- Fund Raising
- Historian

Go online at www.rancocasconservancy.org to donate now.

Preserves of the Rancocas Conservancy

Over the Conservancy's 26-year history we have acquired, or helped partners in the acquisition of, over 2500 acres of critical conservation habitat in the Rancocas Watershed. In the next several newsletters we will tell you about our properties, starting with two of our more remote Preserves.

Piper's Corner Preserve in Shamong Township is an interesting forest fragment (93.37 acres) surrounded by suburban housing developments. It is near several large camps and the Wharton State Forest which adds to its conservation value. A spring on the Preserve starts the flow of Haynes Creek which ultimately joins the Southwest Branch of the Rancocas Creek.

There is a marked trail on the property, but finding the trailhead can be a little difficult since the property is set back from the road. Once on the primary trail, there is a smaller marked trail that leads to an old charcoal pit and remnant 'kilns' that were last used centuries ago.

Friendship Creek Preserve is on the eastern edge of Tabernacle Township. This large (249.81 acres) property is in the forest between Powell Place Road and Tabernacle-Chatsworth Road but not directly accessible from either one. The headwaters of Friendship Creek and Bread and Cheese Run are located here, both joining the south branch of the Rancocas Creek.

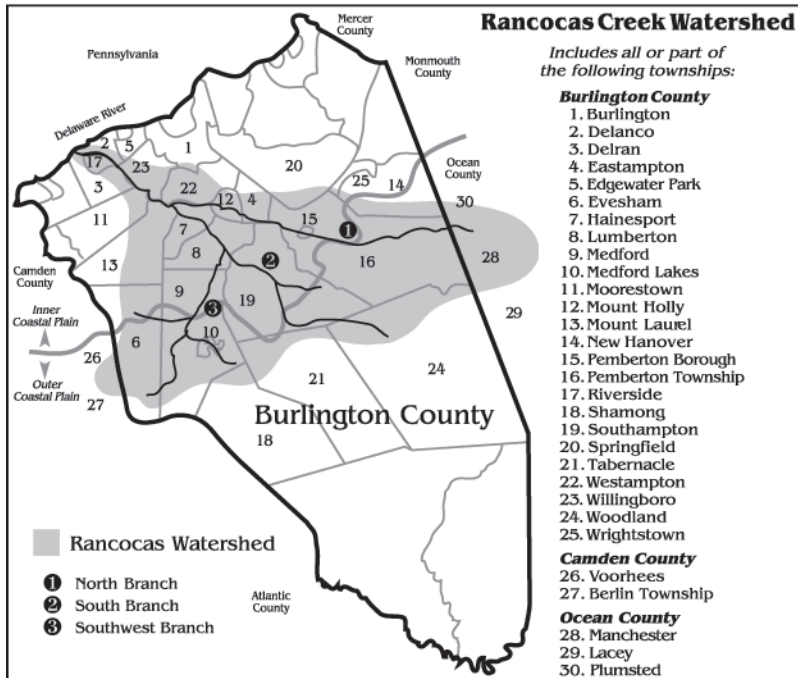
This was once a thick Atlantic Cedar swamp, but logging over the years thinned the trees considerably. One of our goals with this property is to help restore these magnificent trees and the larger swamp habitat they anchored. We are also in the process of marking a trail that will eventually lead visitors to the interior of the forest.



Students working on the trail at Piper's Corner

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