The Sycamore



Years

30 Years At a Glance

2,980
Acres

196
Easements

298
Miles of Streams

4
Public Nature Preserves

17
Years of Bird Banding



THIRTY YEARS LATER...STILL GROWING THE VISION!

Thirty years ago, a small group of friends and neighbors gathered in the blacksmith shop at White Horse Corner to form the Willistown Conservation Trust. We shared a vision of a future where the remaining open spaces of the Willistown Countryside are preserved forever and where future generations (people) and nature thrive together.

Today, because so many of you - from landowners, to volunteers, donors and dedicated staff - have supported that vision, not only are more than 7,500 acres of Willistown's precious rolling hills, stream valleys and woodlands preserved forever, but our programs in sustainable agriculture, stewardship, bird and watershed protection are renowned far and wide. Our network of trails and preserves connect people with nature every day. Like you, it has given us such pleasure to support these successes through donations to the Annual Fund, land acquisition, and capital campaigns.

We now invite you to join us in one of the most pleasurable and impactful gifts of all - a commitment to the Legacy Society. Jim and I have added to our bequest and ask you to help meet the goal of 30 new Legacy Society members by the end of 2026.

We thank you for your generosity and commitment to the next 30 years of "growing the vision" - for the benefit of future generations (people) and wildlife forever.

Bonnie & Jim Van Alen



PS It's as easy as adding a paragraph to your will. Please consult with your financial advisors, and feel free to call _____ for information on all ways to give through the Legacy Society.

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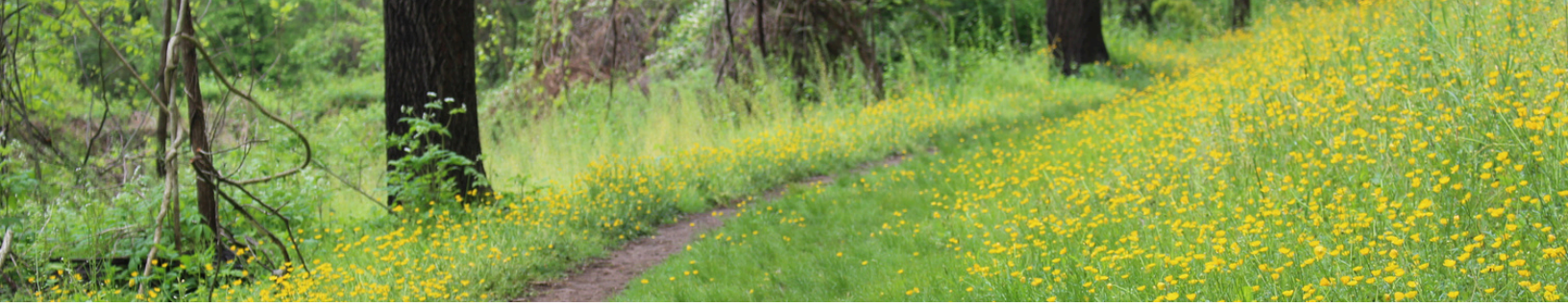


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1996

WCT is Founded

2000

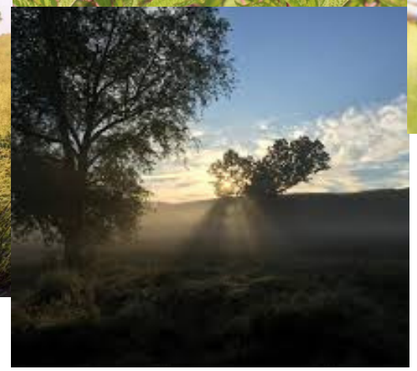
1st Long
Range Plan



2002

Ashbridge Preserve
Preserved





2005

Kirkwood Preserve
Preserved

2006

1st Bird Monitoring
Season



2008

Rushton Farm Share
Program Begins



2009

Rushton Bird Banding
Station Opens



2014

WCT Begins campaign for
Rushton Conservation Center



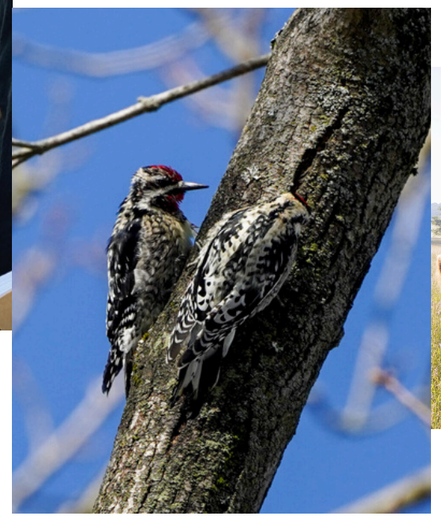
Celebrating 30 Years | Years 1996 - 2014

2016
Motus Collaboration





2018
Rushton Nature Keepers



2019
33 Acre Woodpecker
Woods Property Donation

2022
Grassland Bird
Collaboration Formed





2023
Kestrel Hill Preserve is
Protected

2025
2nd State of Our Streams
Report is Published



Celebrating 30 Years | Years 2016 - 2026

Where Are They Now? | Past Rushton Farm Interns

For 19 years, Rushton Farm has combined regenerative agriculture with education, community engagement, and food-system awareness. Through school visits, garden clubs, service-learning projects, and volunteer opportunities, the farm teaches people of all ages how small-scale agriculture can produce nutritious food while protecting the surrounding ecosystem. The internship program is central to that mission. Open to anyone eager to work outdoors and learn what it takes to sustain a community-supported agriculture operation, the program has hosted one to two interns a year, several of whom have pursued careers in agriculture and related fields. We checked in with a few former interns to hear how Rushton shaped their paths and what work they are doing today.



Matt Danelutti
Newtown Square

Matt worked closely with Noah Gress, Rushton's Community Farm Program Manager, when Noah joined the farm nearly 15 years ago. Matt later worked at a couple of other small farms in the area and is now a farm manager at Urban Roots in Newtown Square.
I worked at Rushton during the 2012 and 2013 seasons. My time there instilled in me a sense of fortitude, purpose and humility that has helped me to further a career in small-scale local agriculture that I'm still very much involved in today.

"Though methods and technique are rarely the same from one operation to the next, there were many invaluable things I picked up during my tenure at the farm. Skills of observation, bearing witness to the changing of the seasons and the crops along with it, the value of time and conscious, deliberate action and motion and the ability to work with and adapt to others are just a few of these. I'm currently managing 20 acres of crops at Urban Roots down the street in Newtown Square. I'm very grateful for Noah, Fred and the Willistown Conservation Trust for helping me get started in a career that I cherish."



Cooper Schlegel
Doylestown

Cooper interned at Rushton in 2017 while still in high school. He already had a strong passion for agriculture and an exceptional drive to learn!
I interned for Rushton the summer between my junior and senior years of high school. I ended up going to Penn State where I majored in Agribusiness Management. I did two internships while in college, one with the Rodale Institute and another with Growmark FS, a company that sells seeds, fertilizer and crop protection.

"I currently work for Burpee Gardening as a product manager where I work with seed vendors and Burpee's breeding team to identify and introduce new varieties of vegetables, flowers, fruit, and herbs. I coordinate Burpee's plant trials at their research farm in Doylestown, PA, where I arrange comparisons to be grown out against potential new varieties. I also coordinate photography for new varieties, manage new item procurement, and all the back-end work required to launch new items on our website and in our catalog.

My internship at Rushton gave me a really strong foundational understanding of vegetables production. It helped me understand the seasonal nature of growing food as well as the different tasks needed to produce certain crops. I've since built on this knowledge base, but Rushton was my first real experience working on a large farm, so it opened my eyes to the world of ag, which I'm very grateful for."



Maria DiGiovanni

Washington DC

Maria worked at Rushton in 2023 and 2024. After earning a degree in International Agriculture from Cornell, she joined the farm to complement her formal education and expand her knowledge base to include some real, hands-on, in the dirt, farming skills!

“I earned a Bachelor of Science in International Agriculture and Rural Development from Cornell University, where I engaged in activities including hunger relief, farmworkers, and food writing. I worked at Rushton Farm the summer before I embarked on the Fulbright Scholarship in Italy. For nine months, I conducted interviews and fieldwork to study why and how young small-scale farmers pursued sustainable agricultural livelihoods in Calabria, a southern region facing high rates of unemployment and depopulation. I met many people who chose to move to rural Calabria to connect with nature and live alternative lifestyles, perceiving their farms as much more than a business. My findings compelled me to consider the unique conditions which the region provides to support these farmers’ goals and how such livelihoods could be replicated to support community and economic development in other rural areas.

I now work in Washington, DC at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). As a Research Analyst in the Director General’s Office, I translate research on food systems and global development into speeches, presentations, and other communications materials for diverse audiences. These materials prepare the Director General to inform research and policy priorities at conferences, ministerial meetings, and roundtables around the world. “

Abby arrived at the farm in 2020, during the first summer of the pandemic, hoping for a chance to volunteer. Eager to be outdoors and working hard rather than cooped up inside, she returned day after day and worked tirelessly for a few weeks before we finally got wise and put her on the payroll. We were able to persuade her to stay for the better part of three seasons!

“After interning at Rushton farm for multiple summers between 2020 and 2022, I completed a bachelors at the University of California, Davis in Plant Sciences specializing in crop production and soil sciences. While at Davis, I helped manage the Market Garden at the student farm and ran their intern program for three years. The 23-acre farm operates similarly to Rushton, producing for a large fruit and vegetable CSA that runs year round. I enjoyed mentoring dozens of students, volunteers and community members and worked to create a positive and inclusive space.

Following graduation in 2025, I am back in Pennsylvania and halfway through a master’s degree in Agricultural and Environmental Plant Sciences at Penn State University. My research focuses on reducing herbicide usage in commercial fruit orchards throughout the region. I am testing cover cropping as an alternative to chemical treatment in conjunction with Penn State Extension.”



Abby Oswald

Penn State

Rushton Farm has welcomed interns from nearby communities and as far away as France. Since leaving the farm, they have pursued careers in fields ranging from writing and accounting to global health, ecology, food insecurity, agriculture, and food-systems research. Rushton’s farmers believe everyone can benefit from experiencing the joys, challenges, and wide-ranging skills involved in growing food, regardless of their chosen career. We are proud to have played a part in our interns’ journeys and eager to see how their time at Rushton continues to shape their work, values, and aspirations.

Beneath the Surface

An Overview of Willistown's Fresh Water Ecosystems

Since 2018, the WCT Watershed Protection Program has monitored water quality at ten sample sites in the headwaters of Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks. Heartfelt thanks goes out to all of the incredible people who have contributed to this report.

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Beneath the Surface

Celebrating Nine Years of the Watershed Program

Since 2018, the WCT Watershed Protection Program has monitored water quality at ten sample sites in the headwaters of Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks. Heartfelt thanks goes out to all of the incredible people who have contributed to this report.

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Next time you go for a drive, pay attention to how many bridges you cross. Even on a short drive, you will likely cross at least one, perhaps one you never noticed before. Streams and rivers are everywhere in Pennsylvania – the state has approximately 86,000 miles of flowing water – but many smaller streams often go unnoticed. Flowing through small culverts, disappearing into thickets of invasive vines and shrubs, it is easy to miss all of the streams in our area. Yet, these streams are valuable natural resources, providing drinking water for millions of people, important recreation opportunities, and critical wildlife habitat.

There are over 190 miles of streams in Willistown Conservation Trust's focus area, which includes the headwaters of Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks. These streams start along the Route 30 Corridor and stretch down towards Philadelphia before flowing into the Delaware River, connecting numerous communities along the way. Protecting water quality has long been integral to WCT's work, due to recognition that activities in the headwaters have an outsized impact on downstream water quality. However, it was not until 2017 that the Watershed Protection Program (WPP) was formally established through generous funding from the William Penn Foundation.

The goal of the WPP is to ensure the long-term health of Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks through monitoring, restoration, and best management practices. Though there had previously been some research and monitoring efforts in the region, this work was sporadic and limited geographically. These headwater streams are densely branched, made up of numerous tributaries that are independent systems until they flow together. Studying just one branch of a stream does not tell you much about the rest of the stream, just as collecting an annual sample does not tell you much about how water quality varies throughout the rest of the year.

To that end, the first priority of the WPP was to establish regular sample sites in each watershed. With guidance from Drexel University's Academy of Natural Sciences (ANS) and with generous permission from landowners, ten study sites – five in Ridley Creek, four in Crum Creek, and one in Darby Creek – were selected. The first monitoring date was January 22, 2018, and WPP staff have faithfully visited these sites every four weeks since. From bitterly cold January mornings to steaming July afternoons, we have braved a range of weather conditions, only cancelling sample days due to the COVID-19 pandemic or dangerous field conditions.

Each sampling visit follows the same rhythm: arrive by 7:00 am, check calibration on our YSI (our powerhouse sensor, which measures water temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, specific conductivity, and more), load up the car, and head to our sample sites. At each site, we split into teams. One team measures discharge, or the amount of water flowing through the stream, and the other fills bottles for in-lab analysis and collects readings from the YSI. Back in the lab, we test samples for salt pollution and filter them to study sediment pollution. We send additional samples to ANS for nutrient analysis.

In addition to water chemistry data, we collected annual aquatic macroinvertebrate samples from each sample site for five years. Aquatic macroinvertebrates are organisms that live all or part of their lives underwater, are visible to the naked eye, and lack a backbone. This is a diverse group, including insects (i.e. mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies, dragonflies, etc.), crustaceans (i.e. crayfish, scuds), bivalves (clams and mussels), aquatic worms, and more. These organisms can live for multiple years under the water and have differing levels of sensitivity to pollutants; consequently, the abundance of different groups reflects long-term water quality.

WATERSHED HIGHLIGHTS

2003 - WCT hosts riparian plantings
2005 - WCT leads pond and stream workshop
2018 - Watershed Protection Program Begins

Opening the Gates

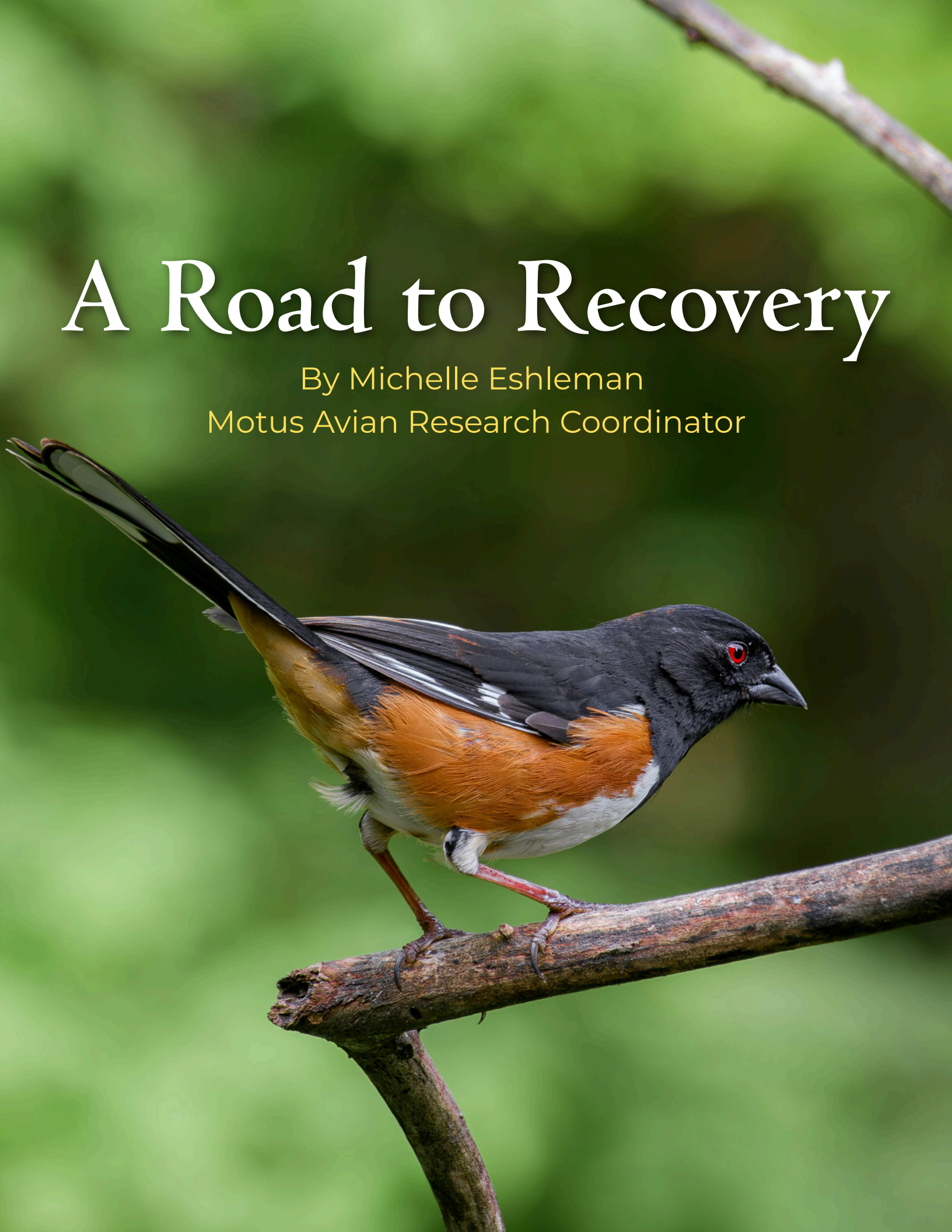
WCT'S Newest Preserve

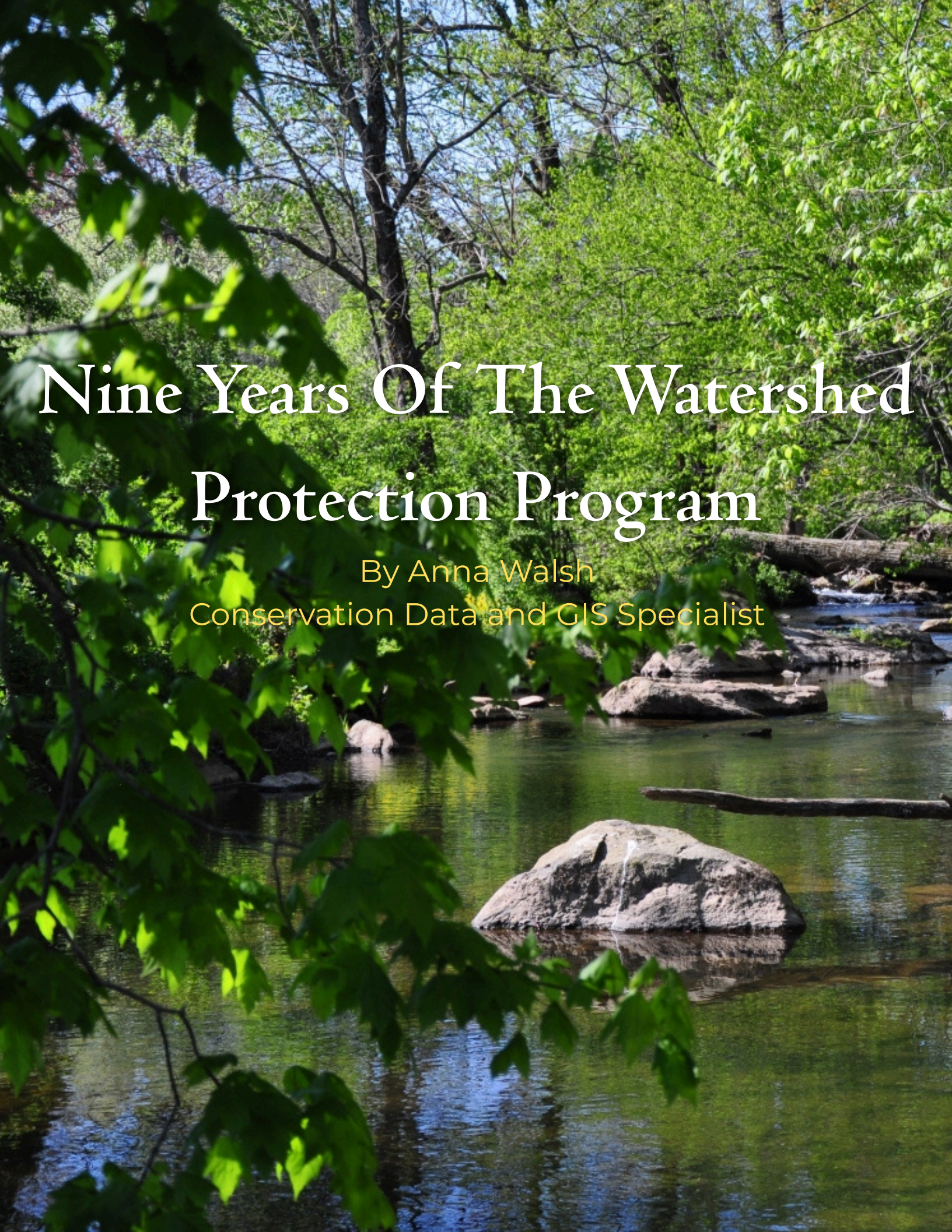
30 Years of Canopy Change

By Nicole DeLizzio, Stewardship Manager

A Road to Recovery

By Michelle Eshleman
Motus Avian Research Coordinator

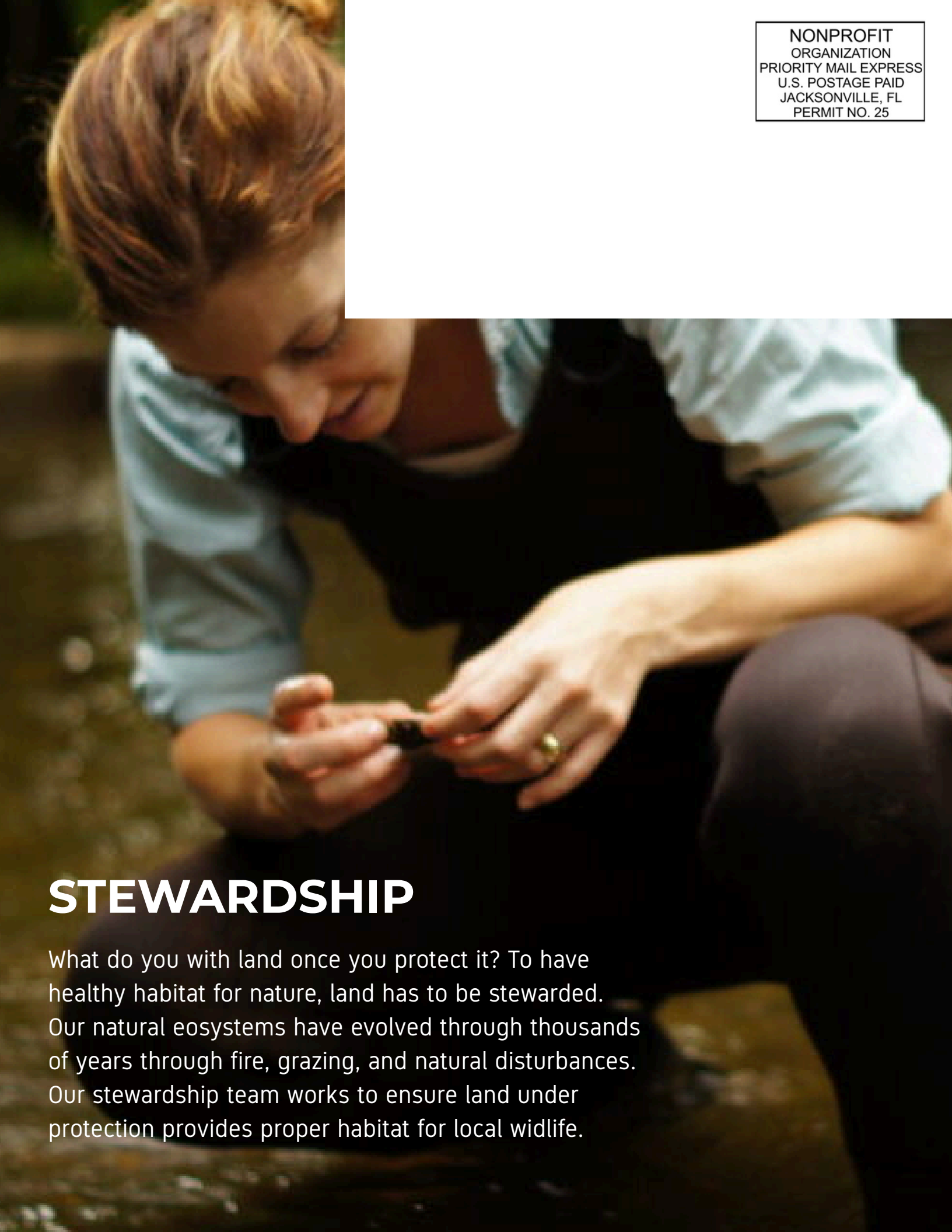




Nine Years Of The Watershed Protection Program

By Anna Walsh
Conservation Data and GIS Specialist

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
PRIORITY MAIL EXPRESS
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
JACKSONVILLE, FL
PERMIT NO. 25



STEWARDSHIP

What do you with land once you protect it? To have healthy habitat for nature, land has to be stewarded. Our natural eosystems have evolved through thousands of years through fire, grazing, and natural disturbances. Our stewardship team works to ensure land under protection provides proper habitat for local widlife.