



Middle Creek in Motion

Winter 2021

Thank You to Our Volunteers

Middle Creek is noted as a special place for many due to its diverse habitat and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities, as well as a place to hunt and participate in other forms of recreation. However, Middle Creek would be a very different place without its dedicated volunteers. In this issue of *Middle Creek in Motion*, we want to highlight some of our volunteers who have been active with us from a few months to many years. We also have a part-time staff member who is retiring in January and also deserves a big “thank you!” If anyone is interested in volunteering in the future, please reach out. We have forms that can be filled out in the visitors center (once construction is complete) and we can also be reached via our email address (mentioned at the bottom of the last page). There are opportunities to assist with bluebird houses, gardening, invasive species removal, maintaining hiking trails, and more!



Pictured left to right: John Shuman, Kayla Isaacs, Eva Stahley, Ken Reinard, Ellen Rupp, and Bill Craychee.

If you have visited the visitors center this growing season, you probably noticed the flower beds full of blooms, pollinators, and birds. Our volunteer garden crew, which is managed by our part-time employees, Ellen and Eva, has been busy each week to keep it looking nice and neat. Now, if you have been coming to Middle Creek for many years, you may remember when some gardens were overgrown or others didn't exist at the time. Our volunteers spent one day every week nurturing the gardens, which also makes excellent habitat, thanks to the use of many native plant species.



Photo by Joe Endy

What's New?

Middle Creek is always in motion! There are some new developments and updates happening as you read this. Near the visitors center, a new bird banding pavilion has been built that will be used for the Game Commission's new songbird banding program which will help to collect data on migratory bird species in the spring and fall. Construction is underway for a new archery range near the Willow Point Trail. Progress on the Conservation Heritage Museum continues and new property was recently acquired that will be added to nearby State Game Lands. Additional details on one of these projects and more can be found in this newsletter.

What's Coming Up?

In 2022, we have high hopes for many events coming to Middle Creek. There will be a speaker series and outdoor explorer series each with one event a month (see back page). The calendar of events will be posted at information kiosks (bulletin boards) around Middle Creek.

Volunteer and Employee Spotlights



If you've driven through Middle Creek or walked some of the trails that are along grasslands, you've most likely seen the many bluebird boxes on posts. We recently thanked one of our longtime volunteers, Bill Seifert, for his many years of monitoring bluebird boxes. Bill started as a monitor after Dick Brown started the project in 1998. Bill has always been at the work meetings during the winter that would take place at the old crew workshop. Even for the modest bluebird box, there have been many changes over the years. Lots of the boxes employ different types of predator guards that discourage predation of nests by snakes, mammals, and other birds. In fact, when Bill stopped by for us to thank him, he was mainly there to pick up some wire mesh that is being used in the bottom of some of the bluebird boxes to study if their incorporation results in higher fledging rates.



Another longtime volunteer turned part-time employee in 2008, is Anne Sherman. Anne started as a volunteer with the Bluebird Project in 2000 and eventually took charge of the project after Dick Brown stepped down. Anne has also been an integral part of our education staff at Middle Creek. Many teachers and other local organizations have contacted us over the years asking "Is Anne available to teach a program? She taught us last year and we loved her!" After over 20 years of being a steward of the bluebirds at Middle Creek, Anne has decided she will be spending her days traveling (or like the bluebirds, migrating) and visiting family and friends. An excellent writeup on Anne's service was featured in our Fall 2020 newsletter. If you have interest in volunteering with our Bluebird Project, please email us at middlecreek@pa.gov.



Donation from Middle Creek Wildlife Photographers



Pictured left to right: Bill Friggle, Lauren Ferreri, Joe Endy, Tish Bachleda, and Mike Bachleda

Recently, Joe Endy asked Bill Friggle about producing vehicle decals and magnets for members of the Middle Creek Wildlife Photographers Facebook group. Bill agreed it was a good idea. Mike & Tish Bachleda, owners of The Tweed Weasel Folk Art & Primitives in nearby Schaefferstown, PA, offered to help finalize the design idea and produce the pieces — donating all time and materials, including full sponsorship and the \$375 needed to print everything. The decals and magnets were then offered to group members for a donation of \$5 per piece, with 100% of funds collected through The Tweed Weasel being donated directly to Middle Creek WMA & PA Game Commission. A total of \$505 was collected over the past year and then presented to MCWMA manager, Lauren Ferreri. We thank our local photographers for their continued support and beautiful photographs that grace our newsletters!

Scouts in Action!

We've been lucky to have several scouts come to Middle Creek to plan and assist with various projects. One was an Eagle Scout project which was conducted by Jake M. and his fellow scouts, where they built a pavilion that will be used as our upcoming bird banding station. The station will consist of numerous net lanes where songbirds will be identified, recorded, and banded before being released. This will help us to better learn about migrating songbirds and to monitor their populations.

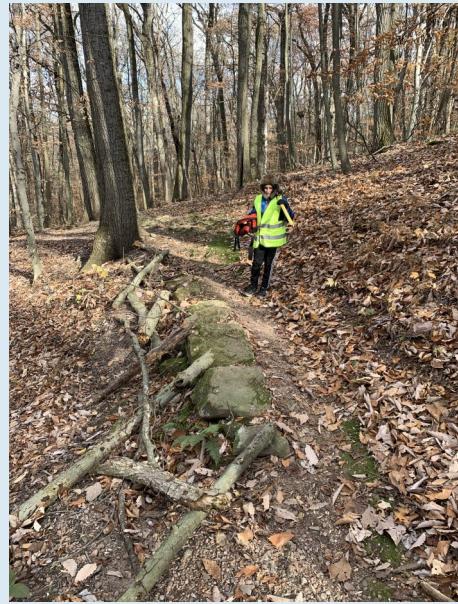


Jake M. at his completed project (L) and members of his troop assisting with the project (R).



Scouts in Action! (Continued)

Our additional project was recently completed by Ethan S., who needed to complete 6 hours of community service which was related to either public health or the environment. This was part of the 50th Anniversary Environmental Protection Agency Award, which was a collaboration between the EPA and Scouts BSA. Ethan helped to install 5 water bars along the Millstone Trail and also cleaned out some older stone water bars and placed vegetation to block unauthorized sections of trail that were causing erosion. All of these efforts will reduce erosion of the trail and will help to ensure the long-term integrity and sustainability of the trail.



What's in Motion at Middle Creek?

When will the Visitors Center open?

The visitors center will reopen on February 1st, 2022. The center has been closed since March of 2020 because of closures related to COVID-19 and more recently due to the construction of the Conservation Heritage Museum addition that has been built onto the north side of the center. The addition of the Conservation Heritage Museum will be completed sometime in the spring of 2022 and will feature Pennsylvania's rich conservation heritage as well as detailed history of the formation of the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Migration Forecast

Every year, tens of thousands of snow geese descend onto Middle Creek in the months of February and March. While it is difficult to predict when the peak migration will be, mid-February to the beginning of March has been the best time to see the largest number of snow geese in recent years.

This year, our center will be open starting February 1st. The tour route will open March 1st with the chance that it will also be open on the weekends during snow goose season as needed to direct crowds. Middle Creek staff recommends visiting during the week if possible since weekends can be extremely busy. Peak viewing times are at sunrise and sunset although mornings are less busy.

Want to learn more about Snow Geese migration at Middle Creek? Check our Snow Goose Story Map online by clicking [here](#).

What's in Motion at Middle Creek? (Continued)



What's being built out by the Willow Point parking lot?

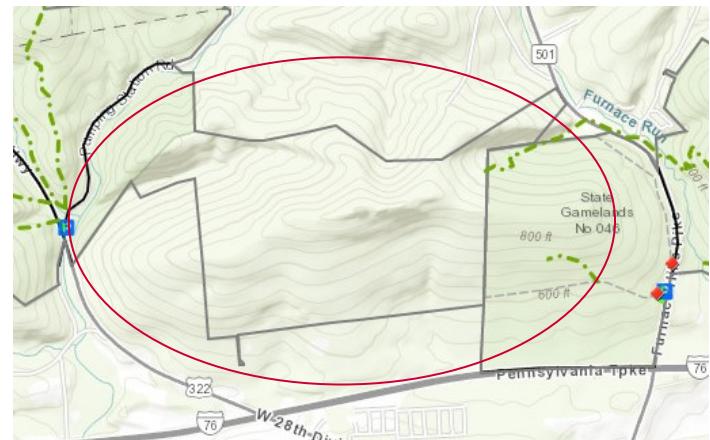
An accessible archery range is being constructed just off the Willow Point parking area. This location was chosen to be least impactful to habitat, wildlife, and the various user groups of Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. This location is already tied to a parking area that only hits capacity in the late winter/early spring months when snow geese are here which is a time of the year when we anticipate the archery range seeing the least activity. This location is also in a restricted access area with high visibility so people being down range beyond the targets shouldn't be an issue as compared to, say, somewhere around the Visitor Center or a part of the Game Lands open to public access. The footprint will be roughly one acre and will consist of cement paths to each of the target stations (10, 20, 30, 40, & 50 yards) among the mowed grass area. There will also be shooting benches to accommodate crossbow users and bow hangers to properly hang gear when going down range. Funding for the range consists of 90% Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Funding which are revenues generated from manufacturers excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment.



Archery Range Construction as of December 1st

Are there new Game Lands west of Route 501?

Approximately 397 acres have been added to the State Game Lands system in the Furnace Hills! The Pennsylvania Game Commission recently acquired the southern 1/3 portion of the J. Edward Mack Scout Reservation (Camp Mack) property which will now connect State Game Lands 156 and State Game Lands 46 (aka Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area). Without conservation grants and partners such as Natural Lands, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and local municipalities, acquisitions such as this are not possible. The land was initially divested from the Boy Scouts' Pennsylvania Dutch Council to Natural Lands which is a non-profit based out of Delaware County that focuses on preserving open space. At the same time the land was then transferred to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The approximate \$2.9 million dollar price tag was paid for by a \$1.5 million grant from the Federal Highlands Conservation Act, a \$1.0 million grant from DCNR, and \$441,000 from the PA Game Commission. Besides permanently conserving these forested lands in the important Furnace Hills, these lands will now be open to public hunting and all outdoor enthusi-



Area of newly acquired Game Lands connecting SGL 46 and 156



Editor's note: a HUGE thank you to all who offered their photographs for this newsletter. There were many submissions and far too little space!



American kestrels are a wonderful site to see in Pennsylvania. They are the state's smallest falcon and are common on farms and around grasslands. Although many kestrels from further north will migrate, some in Pennsylvania are seen throughout the winter. A gradual decline in kestrels has been noted and the Pennsylvania Game Commission has been increasing conservation efforts in the southeast since 2015.

Photo by Mike Bachleda

The beautiful snowy scenes of rural Pennsylvania, in the opinions of many, are some of the most beautiful that can be seen. Stick a red barn in the photo and some would consider that iconic art. However, these scenes are wonderful to look at until we get a few additional inches of snow and ice and have to drive in it. Either way, if we end up at home, it's the best time of year to put some bird seed out in the feeder and watch what arrives, all while reading a good book.

Photo by Melodie Bechtel



Some of the most popular waterfowl to view at Middle Creek arrive in the spring, when it still feels very much like winter. It doesn't help that these species have names that include "snow" and "tundra," which is more a reference to where they are going than what it's looking like in Pennsylvania when they arrive, although it sometimes feels like both the arctic circle and Pennsylvania could be the same this time of year.

Photo by Andy Weidman

Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

January—March 2022

January 12th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: *Rearing and Reintroducing the Regal Fritillary Butterfly*

The eastern regal fritillary butterfly (*Argynnis idalia idalia*), was once a common species in much of the mid-western and northeastern United States. Over the last several decades, an extreme decline in numbers occurred, primarily due to the loss of native grassland habitat. The most significant decline took place in the East, where one known population still exists at Fort Indiantown Gap National Guard Training Center (FIG-NGTC). In an effort to conserve the rare butterfly, FIG along with multiple partnerships such as ZooAmerica and the Pennsylvania Game Commission, developed a reintroduction plan aimed at establishing new viable populations.

February 5th at 11:00 am at Willow Point: *Migration Magic*

Join the Middle Creek staff at Willow Point to learn about why snow geese love Middle Creek and stop in such large numbers in the spring. This program will discuss the history behind the creation of Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, the science of snow goose migration, what other species of importance stop by in the spring, what habitat is important for geese, hunting & photography opportunities, and more! Dress for the weather and bring your binoculars if you have them.

February 9th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: *Wetlands: How can we manage them for wildlife, humans, and the planet*

The ability to understand multiple areas of study is the key to any effective environmental management. The unique position of wetlands on the landscape operates hand-in-hand with the importance of the functions and services they provide. How can we best manage these complex habitats, especially when goals come in conflict with one another? This presentation will provide an overview of wetland habitats and their complexity as well as the large number of uses they have for society. We will then discuss the challenges behind wetland management including how best to reconcile multiple uses and services at the same time as we consider social and environmental needs.

March 9th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: *The Pacific Crest Trail: A Hiker's Journey and General Guide to Thru Hiking*

Attempting a thru-hike of The Pacific Crest Trail, a 2,650-mile scenic trail traversing the states of California, Oregon and Washington is as exhilarating a life decision as it is nerve wracking. The nerves settle quickly, however, and you soon realize you are in the midst of a beautiful, magical and life changing experience. Throughout this lecture we will dive into that beauty and discuss the inspiration/motivation behind this thru-hike, logistics, the preparation process, gear, food, expectation vs. reality, mistakes learned from and of course some personal stories from along the way. By the end, you may just be ready to go tackle your first (or yet another) thru-hike!

March 12th at 2pm in front of the Visitors Center: *The Science of Antler Growth in Deer and how to Hunt Antler Sheds*

Come learn the how's and why's of the growing outdoor activity of shed hunting. We will take a closer look at the antler growth cycle, and what eventually leads to the opportunity to go look for sheds. We will also discuss some tips and tactics for how to possibly make your shed hunts more successful. Weather permitting, we will head outside to search for antlers.

Contact us! Have a question or comment about Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area? We would love to hear from you! Please contact us at middlecreek@pa.gov.