

## About ClearWater Conservancy

The mission of ClearWater Conservancy is to promote conservation and restoration of natural resources in central Pennsylvania through land conservation, water resources protection, and environmental outreach to the community.

Over the years, ClearWater has protected more than 4,000 acres of land through conservation easements and conservation partnerships resulting in public ownership of unique habitats and landscapes. In the year 2007 alone, ClearWater doubled the acreage it protects by conservation easements.

ClearWater Conservancy and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy recently joined forces to prioritize conservation initiatives for the Nittany Valley using a conservation tool developed by The Nature Conservancy called Conservation Action Planning. Western Pennsylvania Conservancy identified the Nittany Valley as one of its eight most important areas in the western portion of the state for protection, conservation, and restoration of land and water that supports native plants, animals, and important habitats. The Nittany Valley Conservation Action Plan will strategically guide ClearWater's future conservation and restoration actions over the next several years.

## The Barbara Fisher Volunteer of the Year Award

At ClearWater's 25th Anniversary annual banquet, the organization named a volunteer of the year award for Barbara Fisher, arguably ClearWater's most passionate and dedicated volunteer from its founding in 1980 through its Silver Anniversary in 2005. The first recipient of the Barbara Fisher Volunteer of the Year Award was William A. Hilshey, who began volunteering with ClearWater after retiring from a career in medicine and taking up a master's degree in Forest Resources from PSU. Bill is now ClearWater's Conservation Easement Manager.

*Everyone working together to conserve natural beauty  
and the environment in the heart of Pennsylvania*



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# Stories of Land, Water, and People

## The Fisher Farm Protected as a Labor of Love

I first met Barbara Fisher when she came bursting through my office door, carrying giant plastic bags filled with photographs and binders of information. She was answering an e-mail I sent requesting an interview about Fisher Farm, the 197-acre property she and her husband John protected with a conservation easement in December 2007. "I brought you some things," said this lovely and passionate woman, one of a handful of founders of the ClearWater Conservancy, and promptly began an enchanting and inspiring narrative.

When they were first married, Barbara and John were living the suburban lifestyle in Park Hills in Ferguson Township, raising their three children. Once the kids were grown and living on their own, Barbara decided it was time to let her husband "have what *he* wanted," a home situated in a scenic natural setting, far-removed from the hustle of society. One morning in 1986, Barbara noticed a newspaper listing for a farm with a stream running through it that was owned by Continental Coal Management Corporation, a German company that hoped to sell its investment quickly.



*Barbara Fisher, in the middle of her beloved farm.*

The property, with its pastures, wetlands and woodlands, was daunting at first to Barbara. “I was afraid to live out there, of such a big change. I had never lived in a place like that, out there all by ourselves—I thought we might get lonely,” she said.

But there was plenty to be done, which kept her company and gave her an outlet for her powerful drive. The existing residence, built from 1840 to 1860, was in disrepair, but still managed to charm Barbara with its historic significance and interesting quirks.

“When I walked into the house, I fell in love. Standing in the home’s foyer, illuminated by enormous windows, I was overwhelmed by its beauty. It spoke to me like the land did. Even the old wooden spool that was being used as the doorknob told me that this place had a rich history,” Barbara said. “And hearing the rain on the tin roof was awesome.”

Preserving the character of the farm was important to the Fishers. Restorations and improvements to the home and a variety of outbuildings were done according to Barbara’s style.



*Bill Hilshey, Jeff Sturniolo, Barbara and John Fisher, Jennifer Shuey, and Jeffrey Marshall at the Fisher Farm conservation easement closing.*

“John was very good about letting me do the renovations the way I wanted. He wanted me to feel comfortable.”

Barbara and John discovered not only the scenic and historic value in their new property, but also its environmental importance. Fisher Farm features exceptional value wetlands and a portion of Buffalo Run, a High-Quality Cold Water fishery stream. It also has rich soils and wooded areas that are home to countless wildlife species including least weasel, Blue Heron, migratory swans, and Kestrel.

The diverse land features allowed the Fishers to use the property to host many guests, one of their favorite activities. “The land constantly surprises you in how it can be used,” Barbara said. “We’ve held wedding receptions and ClearWater events here, and our grandson even had a boy scout-themed birthday party in our barn. We regularly walk, fish, hike, horseback ride, cross-country ski and sled with our friends and neighbors. Sometimes, hot air ballooners use it for emergency landings and become surprise guests.”

One of the most memorable events for Barbara and John though, was the wedding reception they held for their son John and his wife Katherine. The newlyweds rode to the farm on a horse-drawn surrey on a beautiful May afternoon and found their friends and family waiting to celebrate with them at the farm. The barn floor was converted into a makeshift ballroom dance floor. When John and Katherine left in the surrey, they were serenaded by a fiddler on the roof—a surprise arranged by Barbara.

Not long after they started all of their wonderful renovations to the farmstead, the Fishers were confronted with the need to protect

Fisher Farm’s land. They received multiple land-use proposals from developers and miners in the region, all of which threatened to encroach on the land’s scenic beauty, resources and wildlife inhabitants. More than forty township hearings later, the Fishers decided to open a new chapter in the history of their farm and protect it permanently with a conservation easement.

“I kept hearing in my mind the voice of George Beatty, a previous ClearWater President. He said to me, ‘Barbara, the most important thing you can do is save this land.’ The hearings brought us closer to our neighbors in the region and helped me realize that something had to be done. We would protect the land with a conservation easement,” Barbara said.

Barbara has always been passionate about conservation issues. She was one of the founders of ClearWater Conservancy in 1980, and continues to this day on the Board of Directors, so she knew much about the conservation easement process in theory. Navigating the complexities as a land-owner however was quite another thing.

Wanting to protect ClearWater from even the perception of a conflict of interest, she conceived of a partnership between ClearWater Conservancy and the Heritage Conservancy in Doylestown. Jeff Marshall, Vice President for Resource Protection at Heritage Conservancy made several visits to the farm and had countless conversations with Barbara.

The partnership is an example of how two land trust organizations can combine resources and expertise to reach a common goal and marks the first time ClearWater worked with another organization to co-hold an easement. At the time that Barbara is no longer on the ClearWater Conservancy Board of Directors, the conservation



*“Open space is so nurturing for our souls.”*

*~ Barbara Fisher,  
a founder of ClearWater Conservancy*

easement will be transferred solely to ClearWater Conservancy.

The agreement was reached on December 27, 2007, just before an end-of-year deadline, with the team working relentlessly to get the job done. “I am a firm believer that when you get good people working together on good ideas, good things will happen,” Jeff said. “I have been doing conservation work for over 20 years and this was by far one of the most worthwhile and enjoyable projects I have worked on because it became personal. I was willing to donate my vacation time to this project and work from a long distance because of the wonderful people involved.”

Working with the highly-regarded Heritage Conservancy also provided valuable lessons to the ClearWater staff, who are engaging in ever more complex land conservation projects.

Barbara and John have continued renovating and updating their farm and plan to keep inviting people to share its beauty. When asked her reason for entering into the easement agreement, Barbara explained, “The easement has allowed John and me to preserve the history of this land for future generations to learn and enjoy.”