

2019 J. Roy Houston Conservation Partnership Award

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association



The Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association, a group of nearly 100 area citizens who share an interest in caring for trees, forests, and woodlots, is celebrating 30 years of helping private forest owners be good stewards of these valuable natural resources.

The group provides an important conservation service, as 91% of the woodland in Westmoreland County is privately owned.*

Well-managed woodlands benefit the larger community in important ways, contributing to water quality by acting like a natural filter for rain, and improving air quality by reducing greenhouse gasses.

Beyond these larger benefits, properly stewarded woodlots benefit their owners as well, in ways that range from providing income from harvesting timber to the passive pleasure of creating habitat for wildlife.

The all-volunteer, non-profit woodlands association sponsors lectures, field trips, and workshops on the variety of forest-related topics that members are interested in, and the public is always welcome to attend.



Foresters have led the group on a “Winter Woods Tree Identification” walk, botanical experts have talked about forest mushrooms and ginseng, and managers of the Ames sawmill in Donegal Township recently invited the group to tour its production facility, which gets its wood from the local area.

One of the largest-attended offerings was a lawyer speaking on oil and gas rights during the height of the Marcellus gas-well-drilling interest.

The woodlands group also introduces its members to a variety of forest-related resources, including current news links and organizations and programs such as the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Tree Farm Program, Penn State Extension’s forest and woodlot resources, and the Pennsylvania Forestry Association.



In addition to a newsletter, the association created a website in 2010 and a blog in 2018.

Members sometimes participate in community projects, such as they did recently by helping to plant trees in Ann Rudd Saxman Nature Park.

Some members of the association have received certifications from the American Tree Farm System and the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program. Some also have formal stewardship plans for their woodlot.

In 2015, husband and wife WWIA members Janet Sredy and Raul Chiesa received a national honor for their work rehabilitating blighted woodlands near the Rostraver Airport. “WWIA has given us some of the tools we needed to turn the property around and helped put us in touch with experts, from service foresters to wildlife diversity biologists, who contributed their expertise to reclaim the land,” says Ms. Sredy.

* 2005 figure



Westmoreland Conservation District