

Our History

On July 20, 1988, Headwaters Charitable Trust was formed by a seven-member board approving a “Declaration of Trust” which outlined the purpose of this new organization. The Trust was formed as a publicly supported foundation to seek private and public funds to finance natural resource based economic development in Northcentral Pennsylvania. Due to the need for our service our work has expanded beyond this region.

The Trust, by declaration, is enabled to purchase or accept property and to make distributions of funds for charitable purposes. Many of the Trust’s most successful projects involved purchasing damaged land for the betterment of the environment in support of local economic development. This niche set us apart from other land conservancies who were purchasing pristine land for preservation. Our support has ranged from scientific/technical assistance to acting as a full grant sponsor and project manager for large scale projects or organizations with little or no fiscal capacity. Several of our first efforts included the construction of canoe access sites along the Clarion River, a Wood Products Video Library for vocational technical schools and the purchase 305 acres of degraded coal mined land for wildlife habitat and water quality improvements.

Beginning in 1993 the Trust worked on the establishment of land-based trails. The Clarion- Little Toby Trail, Wolf Run Trail, Snow Shoe Rail Trail and Clearfield to Grampian Trail have become synonymous with Headwaters work to establish an interconnected systems of greenway corridors and trails benefiting local users and visitors. In 2017, we raised over \$2.3M to acquire the Knox to Kane Railroad corridor; a 73.8 mile tract of land to be converted to a trail in Clarion, Forest, Elk and McKean Counties.

In 1994, the Trust administered funding to expand the first sustainable agriculture program known as the PA Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA). PASA’s mission is to build a more economically-just, environmentally-regenerative, and community-focused food system through education and research that directly supports farmers. PASA’s annual conference held in February each year now boast over 1,400 attendees.

Our rich history of success can be attributed to the diversity of our programs. Perhaps most prevalent has been our work to restore water quality and fish habitat. Of the 172 projects Headwaters has supported, 65% have focused on water quality improvements, fishery restoration and rural water access for fire protection. The founding members of the Charitable Trust lived in the “headwaters” of the Genesee, Susquehanna and Allegheny River systems; hence the name “Headwaters”.

As we look to the future, Headwaters will not stray from our roots. We recognize that our enduring relationships with funders, government, community groups and the public is key to our success. Over the past 30 years, Headwaters Charitable Trust has raised more than \$13.7M to benefit our rural communities. Even with our successes, we now find we must continue to redefine our niche. In 2016, the Board initiated a new strategic direction that highlights more of the economic impacts of our work. Our tag line “Employment, Enjoyment, Ecology” is predicated on a restoration economy that increases green collar jobs in water management, recreational development and agricultural sustainability. There is a ripple effect on economic impact from direct jobs, supply chain jobs and tourism/recreation jobs. Our new approach is a big challenge to show the importance of natural resource restoration on local economies and we are very excited to take on this new endeavor.