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Hollow Oak Land Trust

Hollow Oak Land Trust: Creating a Network of Greenways in the Airport Corridor

Sean Brady, Executive Director, Hollow Oak Land Trust

Hollow Oak Land Trust wants to change the game.

Conventional wisdom holds that economic development comes at the expense of greenspace. But, Hollow Oak Land Trust's Executive Director, Sean Brady, knows conservation of natural areas can be used to stimulate economic development by leveraging what people in suburban areas really want: more trails.

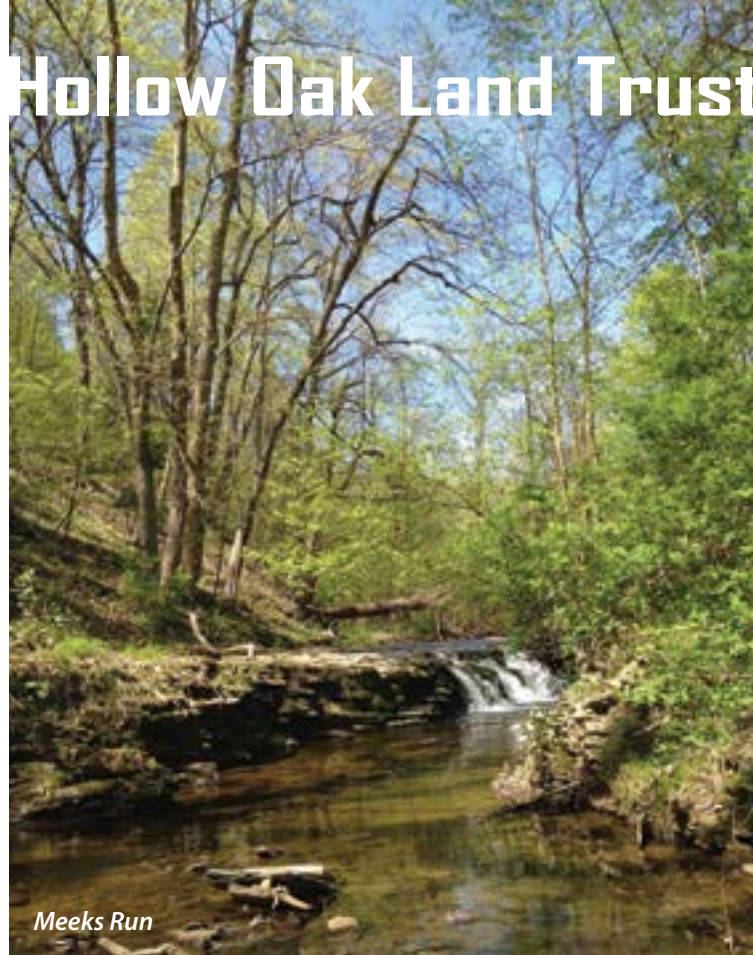
With over 20 years' experience in conservation, Hollow Oak Land Trust owns and manages 400 acres of natural areas in the Pittsburgh International Airport corridor. The nonprofit organization preserves wildlife habitat, protects water quality and provides free public access to places to hike, bike and relax in the great outdoors.

Hollow Oak is gearing up for a massive volunteer effort to develop and maintain a sustainable trail system within its conservation areas. Volunteers are recruited through organizations such as Allegheny Cleanways, Pittsburgh Cares and Pittsburgh Trails Advocacy Group (PTAG), as well as from corporations seeking to improve the region and to engage their employees through community development initiatives. On these scheduled outings, volunteers get to know their neighbors or fellow employees, burn off some calories and learn more about the natural world in their own communities. And when they're done, they have a trail close by to enjoy. That's a win-win situation for people and for nature.

But that's just the beginning.

Hollow Oak Land Trust has teamed up with Moon Township to conceive a comprehensive network of linked municipal parks, conservation areas and trails. Brady envisions greenways serving as wildlife corridors and as trail connectors among all of the township's greenspace destinations.

The Montour Woods Greenway is Hollow Oak's first such project. Working with Moon Township and local landowners, they seek to establish a 10-mile trail loop linking three local natural amenities: 300-acre Moon Township Park, 46-mile Montour Trail, and Hollow Oak Land Trust's 260-acre Montour Woods Conservation Area. The loop will lead from Moon Park down the wooded stream valley of Meeks Run (below Hassam Road) to the Montour Trail, then continue up the Montour Trail about three miles to Trout Run and follow that wooded stream valley (below Hookstown Grade Road) up to the public Moon Golf Club, where it will reconnect to Moon Park via property owned by Pittsburgh International Airport. As a bonus to this trail loop, Hollow Oak hopes to establish a new conservation area along Trout Run as a nature-based destination.



Meeks Run



"This greenway project can increase property values within 2,000 feet by as much as \$40,000 and save municipalities tens of thousands of dollars in stormwater treatment."



Not only will Hollow Oak’s project bring nature closer to where people live and work, it will improve air and water quality, protect wildlife habitat, and also boost the local economy. Based on a 2010 study by Carnegie Mellon University and the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, property values within 2,000 feet of this greenway project can increase by as much as \$40,000 and save municipalities tens of thousands of dollars in stormwater treatment. And while land conservation is paid for once, the cost of land development never ends. Trees and native plants absorb rainwater and reproduce naturally, rather than requiring expensive infrastructure maintenance. It’s nice to let Mother Nature mop up after her own storms!

In the suburban environment, family schedules are tight with precious little free time for unstructured recreation. Busy schedules and an overabundance of electronic entertainment are disconnecting children from the outdoors. This new reality of passive screen-watching has cut kids off from interaction with nature, interaction which is vital to healthy childhood development. “Nature Deficit Disorder” describes this phenomenon in Richard Louv’s groundbreaking book, *Last Child in the Woods*.

Having local nature reserves with trails for hiking and biking is a luxury that, thanks to organizations such as the Hollow Oak Land Trust, is free to everyone. Greenways provide great opportunities close to home for exercise, refreshment and relaxation in nature. They also boost the benefits of existing parks by effectively growing them through connections to other amenities. The public-private partnership of Moon Township and Hollow Oak Land Trust provides a best-of-breed approach to preserving greenspace, minimizing municipal expense and stimulating economic development. Hollow Oak currently protects land in six townships and invites collaboration with additional municipalities to establish more conservation areas and greenways throughout the rapidly developing Airport corridor.

Hollow Oak Land Trust is supported through memberships and donations. Brady invites individuals, families, corporations, local businesses and organizations to join. Or, contact Hollow Oak Land Trust to find out how you and your company can volunteer to help build the trail system. For more information: (412) 264-5354 or info@hollowoak.org.

Learn more:

Contact Sean Brady
412.264.5354
info@hollowoak.org