



Blackbird-Millington Corridor Conservation Planning

Results of the March 9th and March 10th Community Workshops



Who attended the March 9th and 10th Workshops? A total of 76 people attended at three workshop locations and times. Participants were primarily residents of the Corridor, many of which have lived here for decades, some for centuries, and several for their entire lives. They include farmers, loggers, hunters, businesspeople, scientists, conservationists, retirees, and families.

What were the common concerns? Participants are concerned about maintaining property rights, rights to farm, and access to hunting, fishing, and recreational areas, and about outside influence/control. They are also concerned about the quality of water and air, wildlife and habitat loss and preserving values for future generations.

What were the common values expressed by the community?

- The Value of Open Space... having privacy from neighbors, traffic, light pollution, and commercial activity and having room for things like gardening and walking/training dogs without leashes.
- The Value of Nature... having the sights and sounds of nature at home and a variety of wildlife habitats and natural areas nearby, for hunting, observing nature, kayaking, boating, fishing, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and camping.
- The Value of a Rural Lifestyle... kids growing up playing outside, neighbors who are friendly and open, a connection to history (and future generations), local support, infrastructure, and freedom of stewardship for farming, social activities that revolve around school events, church dinners, and local seafood restaurants, a mix of people and landscapes, and a lack of stress and peaceful feeling.
- The Value of Clean Water and Air... contributes to and is made possibly in part by all of the above.

What are the specific places of concern to the community?

- Blackbird State Forest and other forested land
- Farm fields and ponds
- Tidal Marshes of the Delaware River/Bay
- Blackbird Creek and Cypress Branch
- Scenic Country Roads: Route 9, Clayton-Delaney Road, Blackbird Landing Road, St. Andrews School Road, Union Church Road, Townsend-to-Golts roads, and Eagles Nest Landing Road

What's Next?

Attend one of the next round of workshops on **Monday, April 26th from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Millington Elementary School** or **Wednesday, April 28th, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Blackbird Community Center**. Bill McGowan of the University of Delaware's Cooperative Extension will facilitate a discussion about conservation choices and additional information about the Corridor's natural habitats and species will be provided, including a presentation by Jim White, Associate Director of Land and Biodiversity Management for the Delaware Nature Society and co-author of *Amphibians and Reptiles of Delmarva*. Refreshments will be served and the agenda will be the same at both workshops.

Answers to Questions Raised by Participants

Q: Why was this area the focus of attention?

A: The Corridor was identified by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as a conservation priority in the region based on the concentration of important natural habitats there (like woodlands and coastal plain ponds), the balance of stewardship existing historically between the uses of families in the area (for farming and forests) and natural habitat, and the likelihood of successful conservation made probable by the foundation of existing conservation lands there.

Q: What is the acreage, the land use and coverage, and other statistics on the Corridor?

A: The Corridor includes approximately 52,000 acres. About 25,000 acres are forested and about 6,000 acres are open water and wetlands. The remainder is primarily agricultural fields, with some residential and commercial development, mostly along roadways. A fact sheet with more detailed information will be provided at the April workshops.

Q: What are your true plans and have you done this for similar corridors?

A: Our true, long-term plan is to protect as much of the critical remaining habitat in the Corridor as is possible and feasible with limited resources. To do this we must cooperate with other organizations, agencies, and people with similar interests (including the community) and choose the most important places/features to protect. So, our planning process is designed to do both. It's based on a methodology used successfully by TNC in many different places and on many different scales, but usually does not include as much input from the community as we are seeking here. Because each place has its own unique set of physical and natural features, as well as its own set of people and organizations involved, it is difficult to point to a good example for what we hope to achieve here. However, we will try to provide such an example at the April workshops.

Q: What is The Nature Conservancy doing with land and water?

A: TNC has protected over 97,000 acres on the Delmarva Peninsula, primarily through the acquisition of land and easements. On TNC-owned lands, we work to maintain or even create new habitat for a diversity of plants and animals. On conservation easements lands, we insure that lands are maintained and in the natural state required by the easement agreement, and provide advice for implementing conservation management strategies. Conservation strategies under either arrangement can include things like planting trees for reforestation, fencing off stream corridors to create riparian habitat and reduce sedimentation, and managing trails to minimize erosion and provide access.

Q: How are you going to keep land open?

A: Answering this question is what the conservation planning process is all about. There are a number of tools used by TNC (and others) to protect land, including fee acquisition, conservation easement acquisition, management agreements and incentives, and landowner education. Each can be varied and combined for an assortment of conservation options, not all of which are feasible to implement, appropriate for a particular area or resource, or acceptable to the community and landowners. We seek to develop a set of strategies that is all of the above: feasible, acceptable, and appropriate for the Corridor. To learn more about how TNC protects land, pick up an ACORNS newsletter at the April workshops.

Q: What do you expect of landowners and the public/taxes?

A: TNC is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization that relies on working with willing landowners to implement land conservation. Our only expectation of landowners and taxpaying residents during this year-long planning process is that they participate in community workshops and provide us with constructive input and feedback. What we expect from them in the future will depend largely on the strategies we develop this year. So, constructive participation in the planning process is the best way to help shape future expectations.

Q: Where are we going to get the money to make this possible?

A: Creating a conservation plan is the first step to cultivating the funds that will be needed to finance conservation in the corridor. If we can identify a prudent set of strategies, we (TNC and other organizations and agencies working in the corridor) can estimate the funding needed to implement protection efforts, and raise the funds necessary to do so. The Nature Conservancy is committed to land protection in the Corridor and has the ability to raise funds from its members, private donors, and other grant sources for this purpose, but we need a sound plan in order to raise funds successfully.

Q: What kind of information/advice can you offer for making land more useful for the environment/nature?

A: There are many things residents and landowners can do to help make their farms and forests good habitat for wildlife. At the April workshops, copies of a new brochure that summarizes some of the tools and programs available to help landowners create and maintain wildlife habitat will be available. Part of the conservation planning process will be considering the type and format of education and information that would be most helpful to landowners and residents in the Corridor for improving the environmental quality of their lands.

Q: For buffers, are we going to pay for loss of tillable farmland?

A: We don't know yet. Since riparian corridors are one of the important conservation areas in the corridor, it is likely that we will want to provide incentives for creating buffers at some point. These are the kinds of choices we need to evaluate when developing strategies for the Corridor. Whether we would be able to compensate farmers for loss of tillable farmland will depend on the relative importance of buffer creation and the availability of funds.