



Long Pond Barrens in Monroe County, Pennsylvania © Melisa Soysal / TNC

## Creating Healthy, Resilient Forests in Pennsylvania

*TNC stewards and manages forests within a highly connected landscape in northeast Pennsylvania*

The mesic till barrens of the southern Pocono Plateau are thought to contain the greatest concentration of globally rare plant and animal species of any terrestrial ecosystem in Pennsylvania. Shrublands, swamps and wetlands co-exist here in a complex mosaic amidst boreal and northern hardwood forests. It is a special natural space within our state.

Still, not every forest is automatically healthy. Fire historically shaped this ecosystem, but fire suppression in the 20th century resulted in significant declines in the abundance of rare species, natural tree canopy gaps and varied forest structure. Meanwhile, forests are increasingly threatened by competition from overabundant species like American beech and hay-scented fern along with non-native invasive plants.

At TNC's Hauser Nature Center and the Long Pond Preserve complex, TNC has worked with partners to acquire land holdings, complete an ecological management plan and establish a prescribed fire program for this unique landscape. Alongside the Pennsylvania Game Commission, TNC has used controlled burning to restore more than 2,000 acres in the barrens over the past decade.

This year, with support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, TNC has identified a 9,600-acre Dynamic Forest Restoration Block (DRFB) where targeted management efforts will make a big impact in overall forest health. The DRFB is comprised of land holdings either owned by TNC or managed by TNC under a conservation easement with Bethlehem Authority. *(continued, over)*



Wild blueberries can be found seasonally along the trails at Long Pond. © John Hinkson/TNC

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Vegetation returning weeks after controlled burning at Long Pond Barrens © Melisa Soysal / TNC

*(continued from front)* “As land managers, we’re assessing the forests within this area and asking: What do they need in order to become more resilient and support wildlife in the future?” says Kevin Yoder, Director of Land Management for TNC in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

TNC uses controlled burning to thin the forest so that sunlight can reach the forest floor and allow fire-tolerant plants to return. In spring 2024, crews successfully burned 35 more acres in the Long Pond barrens. Weeks later, the newly revived vegetation was already appearing, which will ultimately benefit bird species like the eastern whip-poor-will and the golden-winged warbler.

Under the guidance of its forest management plan, TNC is implementing additional forestry tools such as treating for invasive species and thinning to promote hemlock and red spruce, which provide important thermal cover and habitat diversity.

The best part: The public can experience these restoration projects themselves 365 days a year at Hauser Nature Center, which features a 0.8-mile universal access loop as part of Cathy’s Trail. Hauser’s proximity to Philadelphia and New York City makes it an excellent choice for a day out in nature, and TNC is developing new educational events and interactive birding tours for 2025.



The entrance to Cathy’s Trail © Melisa Soysal / TNC

“Protecting land is a great first step, but it’s really only the beginning,” Yoder says. “What comes afterward is just as important. We want to ensure that TNC always has adequate resources to steward these lands in perpetuity, because that’s how we’ll create dynamic, healthy forests that will thrive and be home to wildlife long into the future.”

**Learn more about our Pennsylvania forest restoration and watch a video of TNC land stewards in action at [nature.org/PAforests](https://nature.org/PAforests).**

## PENNSYLVANIA DELAWARE



The secretive black rail © iStockPhoto

### Uncovering the rare species of Delaware

Delaware State University researchers recently found evidence of black rail—a federally threatened bird species—nesting at TNC’s Milford Neck Preserve in southern Delaware. The notoriously elusive black rail is just one of many notable species that can be found enjoying the conserved habitat at our First State preserves. Other sightings include the Hessel’s hairstreak butterfly; the migratory red knot; yellow crested orchids; Delmarva fox squirrels; and even a recently discovered firefly species, *Photuris mysticalampas*.

The new findings are particularly encouraging because Delaware wildlife species are facing numerous pressures, including habitat fragmentation, alteration and conversion. Climate change and sea level rise are straining the amount of viable habitat, leading species to retreat to only the most pristine conserved areas.

*Read more about rare species found in Delaware and see a photo gallery by visiting [nature.org/delaware](https://nature.org/delaware).*