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Profile of a Conservationist

Denny Nurkiewicz

Allegheny Front Land Protection Manager

Born in Youngstown, Ohio, and raised in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Denny Nurkiewicz has strong connections to Appalachia—a landscape that he is now working to conserve. TNC's land protection work is focused on conserving the most resilient and connected landscapes in the world, and in the Central Appalachians, that landscape is the Allegheny Front.

Prior to joining TNC, Denny worked with a variety of utility and energy companies leading land acquisition projects across the United States. This experience will be invaluable as Denny now works to protect land with high conservation value in a region with deep cultural connections to energy development.

Denny says, "My work is rewarding because I know that I'm part of a team that's building a legacy that will bring innumerable benefits to so many people for a very long time."

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New Grant Boosts Forest Conservation in Maryland



Finzel Swamp Preserve is a haven for Central Appalachian species and contains the headwaters to the Savage River. © Kent Mason

Last summer, The Nature Conservancy announced a \$200 million grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) toward nature-based solutions, supporting significant reductions of carbon emissions across four states: Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. The grant is a historic award from the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) Program—established as part of the bipartisan Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

Of those funds, \$42.5 million has come directly to TNC's Maryland/DC chapter to support land protection and improved forest management across nearly 30,000 acres of forest in the Appalachian Mountains of western Maryland. TNC has identified the Appalachians as a globally important geography for tackling climate change and conserving biodiversity. This ancient chain of forested mountains, valleys, wetlands, and

rivers—stretching 2,000 miles from Alabama to Canada's Maritime Provinces and covering nearly 200

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Eastern screech owls (*Megascops asio*) depend on healthy forests. Look for new species trading cards in future magazine editions.



Eastern Screech Owl

Megascops asio

million acres—nurtures a rich variety of wildlife, cultures, and communities. The EPA grant has provided the Maryland/DC chapter with substantial capital to reach our conservation goals across our slice of the Appalachians.

Meeting those goals in western Maryland will require new protection and improved management of nearly 30,000 acres of strategically identified forest land, which will double the amount of land that TNC currently owns and manages in that part of the state. Such a dramatic increase in acquisition and management over such a short timeframe will require a proportional increase in staffing and capacity to support our land management and stewardship efforts during and beyond the five-year grant period. As we acquire new properties with the closely designated CPRG grant money, private funding will allow us to promptly initiate projects that will create lasting, sustainable change for this global focal area. If you would like to support this work, please consider giving a gift that your grandchildren can someday stand on.

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Eastern Screech Owl

The Eastern screech owl is a relatively small bird of prey more often heard than seen, but they don't really "screech." Listen for the gentle "tremolo" calls they make anywhere in the Eastern half of the United States, which are very different from the traditional "hooting" of their larger cousins.

The screech owl prefers to nest in tree hollows in large, mixed-age forests, but it is adaptable and can live near humans. You can even build nest boxes for them!

© Kent Mason



TNC staff explore the newly acquired property near the Potomac State Forest. Currently much of the property is a red pine plantation, which will eventually be transitioned to mixed hardwood forest more typical of the region. © TNC

Allegheny Front Land Protection Ramps Up

Stretching from West Virginia's 920,000-acre Monongahela National Forest, north through western Maryland's 54,000-acre Savage River State Forest, then farther north up into two million acres of conserved land known as the Pennsylvania Wilds, is one of the most critical conservation landscapes in the Appalachians: The Allegheny Front. This 165-mile escarpment provides a nearly continuous forested corridor connecting some of the region's largest existing conservation lands. Much of the Allegheny Front is part of the Appalachians' Eastern Continental Divide, dividing headwater streams between the Ohio River Basin and the Chesapeake Bay. The forested slopes and headwater streams of the Allegheny Front are critical for providing clean drinking water to millions of people within this landscape and beyond.

The Nature Conservancy has identified the Allegheny Front as a priority landscape within the globally important Appalachian Mountains. TNC's Maryland/DC, West Virginia and Pennsylvania chapters are working in lockstep to identify and protect properties that serve as the connective tissue between the existing conservation lands within the Allegheny Front. Last fall, the Maryland and West Virginia chapters closed on a combined 1,500 acres of Allegheny Front properties that connect tens of thousands of acres of public lands. And between TNC's Maryland/DC, West Virginia and Pennsylvania chapters, we have more than 12,000 acres of additional projects actively in the pipeline and potentially protected by the time this article is published.

To learn more about the flora and fauna of the Allegheny Front, visit nature.org/alleghenyfrontspecies



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