



CACAPON & LOST RIVERS
LAND TRUST

News from the Watershed

Spring 2026

Protecting the forests, farms, rural heritage, and waters of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Watershed

SEE INSIDE:

Our Farm
Pond



In a
Landowner's
Words



Call of the
Wild



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HAPPY SPRING, DEAR SUPPORTERS!

Redbuds are blooming, whip-poor-wills are singing, and the river beckons for a good day's paddle. Here at the Trust, we're ringing in spring with several exciting conservation projects, from a Hardy County sheep farm to a verdant North River mountainside. Taking advantage of the good seasonal weather, we're also making annual visits to the 15,146 acres entrusted to our care by area landowners. We thank you for your vital support as we join forces with our landowner partners to ensure that the forests, farms, rural heritage, and waters we all love continue to thrive far into the future.

Emily

Emily (Warner) Merrill



What is Conservation Easement Stewardship?

A conservation easement, also known as a land protection agreement, is one of the primary tools to achieve long-term protection for land, ensuring its natural and agricultural values endure for future generations. Written as a legal deed, a conservation easement establishes guidelines for how a property can be used, such as limiting subdivision or protecting wildlife habitat and farmland.

Once a conservation easement is in place, the responsibility of stewardship begins. Land trusts work closely with landowners to monitor and uphold the terms of the agreement through annual property visits, ongoing communication, ownership record updates, and connections to technical experts in areas like forestry, stream health, and agriculture. In some cases, stewardship may also involve legal defense of the protected property. Through dedicated time, expertise, and resources, stewardship ensures conserved lands remain healthy, productive, and protected for generations to come. All the while, easement landowners can reap peace of mind and significant tax benefits.



Our Farm Pond

Dear pond back yonder,
Mostly overlooked. Enormously important. That's you.

Many of the critters who live in your waters or on your edge take you for granted, believing, perhaps, that you've always been there and always will be. We humans fail to appreciate the extraordinary diversity of animals, plants, and insects that depend on you. You reside at the way-back of our pastures and, living our busy lives, we don't pay you enough mind.



Although an old farmer created you for his cows long ago, you have become far more than a simple watering hole. Your surface is beautiful and you have substance in your depth. Your moods change with the weather but you're

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always present. Your gift of water is trustworthy — at least for now.

Like any good local bar, you gather in a gang of nocturnal regulars: deer, bobcat, coyote, fox, fisher, bear. And, of course, you're there for the birds, too, and host a family of water snakes, camping out below an overhanging thicket. When the mother leaves her nest, her head periscopes above your surface, followed by a traveling trail of undulating ripples. Your resident frogs fall silent.

Of all your families and visitors, my favorites are the dragonflies: ebony jewelwings, fragile forktails, seepage dancers, among others. What a cornucopia of color. And let's give a hand to the odonatologists who named them.



“Although an old farmer created you for his cows long ago, you have become far more than a simple watering hole.”

“Let's skip the fancy words,” I can hear you say. “What's an odonatologist?”

Well ... I had to look it up myself. It's someone who studies dragonflies.

With deep appreciation,
A wannabe odonatologist



Call of the Wild

In the spring and summer a familiar voice echoes through the Cacapon Watershed: *Whip-poor-will!* *Whip-poor-will!* Though rarely seen, the Eastern Whip-poor-will is a defining sound of this landscape—and a sign of a healthy, dynamic forest.

These nocturnal migratory birds—part of a group known as nightjars—arrive from the southern U.S., Mexico, and Central America, settling into open woodlands and forest edges as early as April. Whip-poor-wills are most active shortly after sunset until just before dawn, spending the hours feeding on moths and other flying insects; defending their turf; and belting out their signature song.

According to Richard Bailey of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, whip-poor-wills are an indicator species whose presence reflects a healthy “mosaic” forest. Such landscapes include both mature stands and patches of young, early-successional growth. Without these habitats, whip-poor-will populations may decline.

While the species has been struggling range-wide, the Cacapon Watershed is a stronghold, with numbers suspected to be increasing. Still, challenges remain.

“Whip-poor-wills are an indicator species whose presence reflects a healthy “mosaic” forest. Without these habitats, their populations may decline.”

There are things we can do to help protect these remarkable creatures, such as driving carefully at night, reducing outdoor lighting, and supporting forest stewardship. By reporting sightings—or even just the distinctive calls—through an app like eBird, community members can also assist scientists to track populations.

On the next clear evening, step outside and listen up for one of the watershed's most iconic voices. It's unmistakable!

Protecting Forests and Farms for the Future

As of May 2026, the Trust holds land protection agreements on more than 15,000 acres of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Watershed. While still privately owned and managed, these properties are secured as intact forest and farmlands for the future. In protecting these lands, the Trust and our landowner partners have given all watershed residents and visitors the gift of serene countryside, clean air and water, and habitat for our furry, feathered, and scaly neighbors. Right now, the Trust is working with area landowners who own another 5,250 acres. These properties include a 170-acre sheep farm in Hardy County, a 560-acre forested mountainside overlooking the North River, a possible Native American burial site, and the 470-acre tract of a former timber company.



Your support can make a vital difference in these important projects!

IN A LANDOWNER'S WORDS



Gene E. Fisher, President, Forest and Stream Protective Association

“To put in words what I feel about this land is next to impossible . . . The heritage and spirits of my grandmother and grandfather and the caring and love shown for this land by my father are present here.”

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CWC MOMENTUM: STRONG EARLY PROGRESS TOWARD 2030 GOALS

The Cacapon Watershed Collaborative (CWC)—a partnership of landowners, farmers, conservation groups, and state agencies—continues to build momentum in safeguarding the watershed's ecosystems and way of life. Since finalizing its strategic plan in 2023, the Collaborative has made measurable strides across its priority areas.



To date, CWC partners have protected 543 acres of farmland, advancing toward a goal of 1,500 acres by 2030, while also conserving 1,546 acres of forestland. Together, they've also secured \$1.6 million for land protection—exceeding the original \$1 million goal.

On-the-ground restoration is underway, including 12 acres of newly planted riparian buffers and four completed brook trout habitat projects, bringing the Collaborative close to its long-term fisheries goal. In addition, nine new forest stewardship plans were completed in 2025 alone, surpassing annual targets and reinforcing a commitment to sustainable forest management.

Together, these accomplishments reflect a strong start and a shared commitment to preserving the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Watershed for generations to come.

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