



# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

## YORK COUNTY OPEN SPACE & LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

be aware.  
be proactive.  
be engaged.

protect york's resources

What are open spaces and why should they be protected? Open space is publicly or privately-owned land and water that is:

- Providing areas for passive or active public recreation (parks and trails)
- Privately owned agricultural land managed for food and fiber production
- Predominately in a natural state
- Protecting natural or historic resources (water, air, soil, minerals, forests, wildlife)
- Preserving scenic quality and maintaining community character

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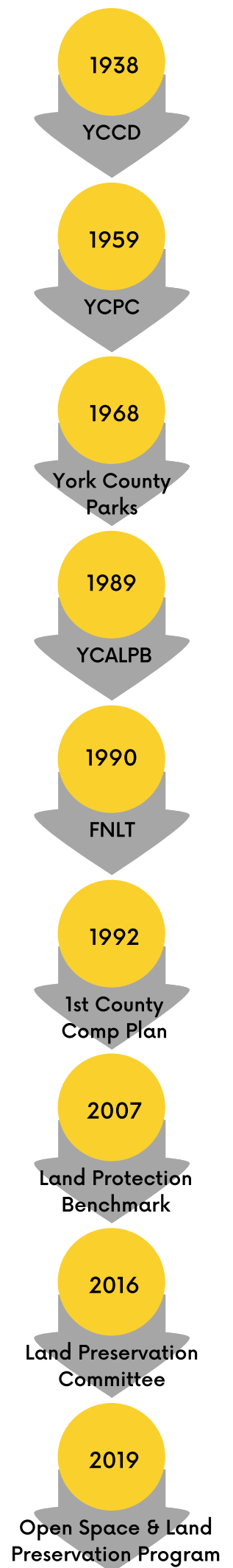


## BACKGROUND

Open space protection is nothing new in York County. Known for rich agricultural history, the land and its resources have always been important to the people of York County. In 1938, the York County Conservation District (YCCD) was founded to promote the wise use of natural resources in York County. The County Commissioners established the York County Planning Commission (YCPC) in 1959 with the mission to guide the future growth and development of the County while protecting natural resources. Increasing population and diminishing open space led the York County Commissioners to establish the York County Parks Department in 1968. Rocky Ridge County Park was acquired that same year. The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (YCALPB, 1989) and the Farm and Natural Lands Trust (FNLT, 1990) have been working to preserve high quality agricultural and natural area lands for decades. In 1992, York County adopted its first comprehensive plan with goals to direct growth and development to appropriate locations, to protect and preserve important natural resources, and to facilitate coordinated planning at all levels. An annual benchmark to protect 2,500 acres of land annually was established in 2007 but the County had fallen short of that goal since 2010. There is plenty of land to protect – the issue was a lack of predictable, dedicated funding for land preservation.

The York County Open Space and Land Preservation Committee convened in 2016. This group worked resolutely to research funding options and other land protection efforts. In summer 2019, a countywide education and outreach campaign was launched and in late summer public polling activities (random sample and voluntary) were conducted to gauge public support of open space protection. Overall, survey results showed overwhelming support for increased land protection efforts and dedicated funding for open space protection.

York County is situated within a day's drive of 40% of the US population. It is a beautiful and treasured place and its desirability causes development pressures. It is fitting that as our nation marked the 50th anniversary of Earth Day in 2020, York County launched the Open Space and Land Preservation Program. The tireless work of the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Committee and their stakeholders and partners, along with overwhelming support from York County residents, and the continued commitment and leadership of the York County Commissioners ensures protected open space for future generations.

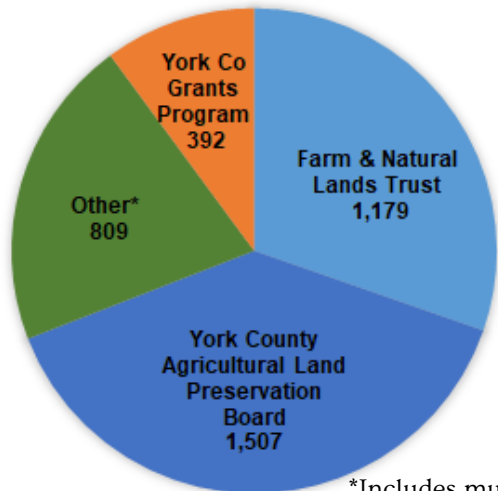




# YORK COUNTY OPEN SPACE & LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM IS FORMED

With the public support in concert with their commitment, the York County Commissioners took decisive action at the end of 2019 with a resolution formalizing the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Committee and dedicating funding to preserve open space. These funds will be used to meet the annual benchmark of protecting 2,500 acres, including agricultural preservation and natural lands easements, and County parkland acquisition.

2020 York County Open Space Protection (Acres)

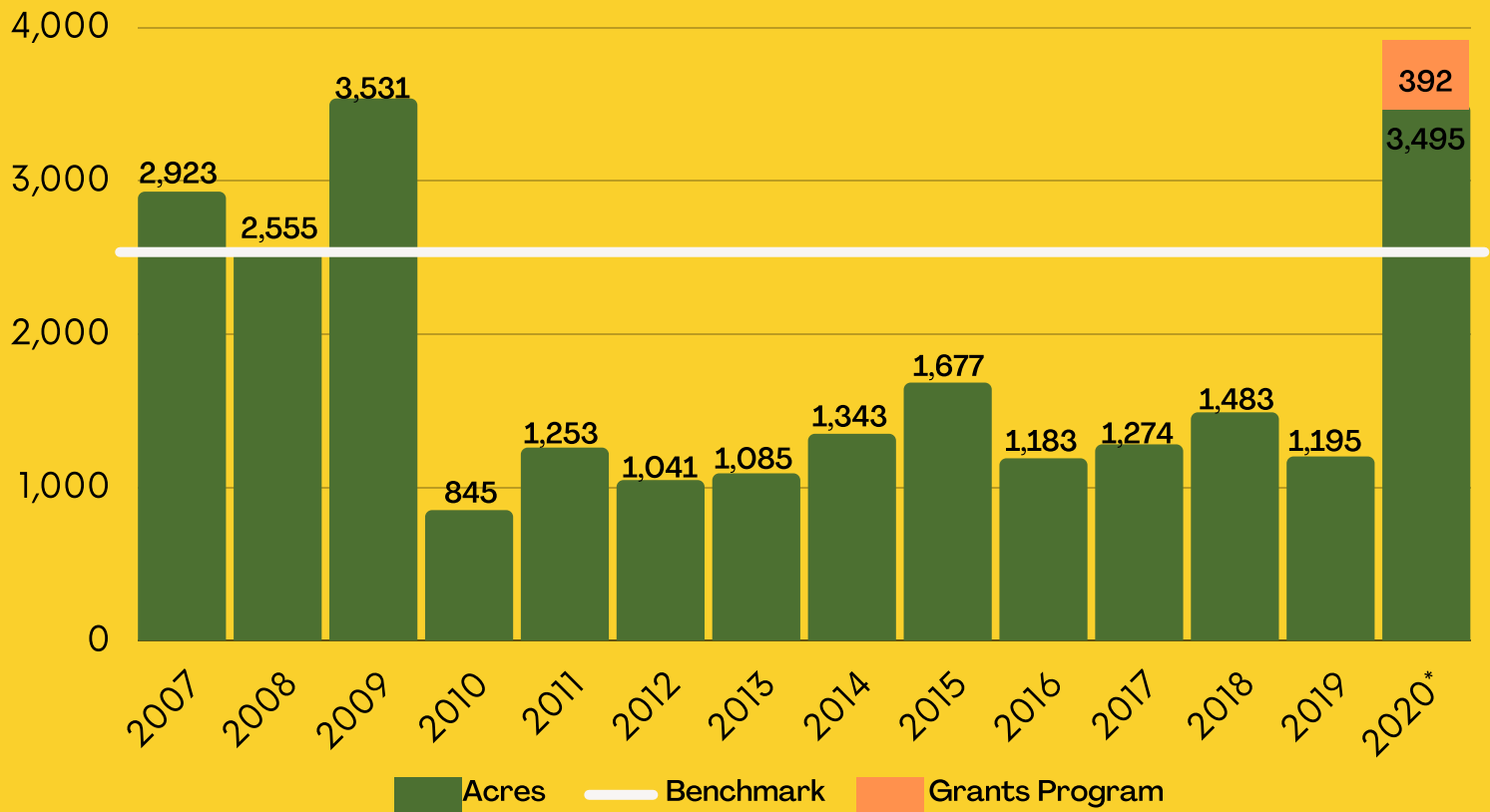


\*Includes municipal parks, lands dedicated as open space through subdivision process, and other protected land



## OPEN SPACE BENCHMARK

Annually, York County tracks the open space that is protected against the benchmark of 2,500 acres per year set forth in the York County Open Space and Greenways Plan (2006).



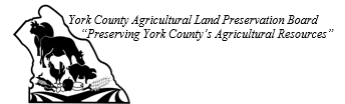
\*For the first time since 2009, York County has exceeded its goal to preserve 2,500 acres of open space.



# 2020 PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

## YORK COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION BOARD

In 2020, the Ag Land Preservation Board received 57% of the dedicated preservation funds. York County continues to rank 3rd in Pennsylvania in terms of acres of farmland preserved through PA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program. The YCALPB received 74 easement applications and inquiries by the February 15, 2020 application deadline for farmland preservation. 50 qualifying Applications on 4,479 acres for farmland preservation were ranked, selecting 16 farms on 1,507 acres for appraisal. In addition, staff conducted inspection visits on 138 preserved farms, covering 23,278 acres of productive farmland. The Program's conservation requirements contributed to additional conservation planning efforts on 72 tracts of working farmland, covering 7,362 acres. The YCALPB also participates with the Countywide Action Plan for Clean Water (CAP) efforts to assist with water quality efforts in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.



## FARM & NATURAL LANDS TRUST

2020 was a great year for the Farm and Natural Lands Trust. They received 17% of preservation funds and preserved 1,179 total acres, adding over 10 preserved properties in Chanceford, Codorus, Dover, East Hopewell, East Manchester, Lower Chanceford, Manheim, Shrewsbury, and West Manheim Townships. Because of the dedicated funding made available in 2020, FNLT was pleased to be able to work with several landowners who had wanted to preserve their properties for almost ten years. While FNLT still receives donated easements, there are some landowners for which this is not the right fit, so the added funding helps to complete the projects.





## 2020 PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS



### YORK COUNTY PARKS

For over 50 years, many have enjoyed all that the York County Parks has to offer. The Parks is comprised of 10 parks, one historic site, and the Heritage Rail Trail and its Northern Extension. In recent years, visitation throughout the system has hovered around 1.4 million visitors annually. John Rudy County Park boasts the most visitors at 409,763 in 2019. The Heritage Rail Trail and the Northern Extension had almost 300,000 users combined. The York County Parks Charitable Trust Board manages donations to the York County Parks with funds to support park improvements, support of special events, and the expansion of public park lands. York County Parks received 10% of the Open Space and Land Preservation program funds in 2020, which will be put in reserve for future parkland acquisition by the County.

### YORK COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

The York County Planning Commission is the County's lead agency regarding land use planning and responsible for the preparation and implementation of the York County Comprehensive Plan. The YCPC is the administrator for the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Program. The YCPC has also played a key role in the administration of the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Grant Program.





# 2020 PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

## YORK COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT



A lot is happening at the YCCD! Funding from the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Program was used to offset salaries for the District Ag Team staff. With turnover and new hires, staff will enable the YCCD to enhance its capacity to provide planning assistance to landowners and farmers to develop Agricultural Erosion and Sediment Control Plans. In 2020, staff wrote Ag E&S and Conservation plans on 107 tracts covering 5,347 acres. YCCD assisted farm operations with implementing conservation practices – installing stream crossings and stream fencing, watering systems for livestock and grassed waterways. Staff uses the State's Practicekeeper (PK) program to complete and document plan writing and mapping, to enter BMP implementation records and to report to the York's Countywide Action Plan for Clean Water (CAP) implementation team and DEP for credit towards the CAP nitrogen reduction goals. The District is developing a system to collect plan data and implementation from farmers and landowners to enter into the PK system. YCCD entered into an agreement with the State Conservation Commission to administer the Conservation Excellence Grant Program to fund the installation of planned BMP's necessary to obtain compliance with Ag E&S and Manure Management Regulations. The District was awarded \$1.25 million dollars for the effort to be completed in the next three years.



# YORK COUNTY OPEN SPACE GRANT PROGRAM

The County Commissioners have also designated 16% of the preservation funds for the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Grant Program. This voluntary grant program provides opportunities to municipalities and non-profits to provide matching funds for parkland acquisition and natural resource protection. A portion of the funding will also be set aside for municipal planning and ordinance updates that support open space protection. The grant program's inaugural round opened in late summer 2020. A grant workshop was held August 17, 2020. The application, program handbook, and other grant materials and information can be found on [www.yorkopenspace.org](http://www.yorkopenspace.org).



## 2020 Grant Awards & Funded Projects Land Acquisition

### York County Rail Trail Authority, \$55,380

Purchase of 8.5 miles/48.4 acres of dormant rail line in two separate sections, east and west of Spring Grove Borough. Acquisition of this land will advance the development of the Hanover Trolley rail trail providing connections to Hanover's Moul Field, Spring Grove Borough Park and Regional Recreation Center, and Jackson Township's Little Creek Community Park. The project benefits include providing public access to currently inaccessible natural areas; setting the stage for restoration and protection of the adjacent stream; increased future stormwater resilience; increased rail trail opportunities; and "trail town" economic benefits to these southwestern York County communities.



### Susquehanna National Heritage Area, \$100,000

The conceptualized Susquehanna Discovery Center will preserve the 19th century Mifflin farmstead which is an Underground Railroad/Civil War heritage site near the Susquehanna River in eastern York County. The funding from this program will go toward acquiring 67 acres of land to be conserved as a heritage park and natural lands preserve linked to the Susquehanna River with interpretive recreational trails. Benefits of the project include supporting and enhancing the economic development initiatives in Wrightsville Borough, interpretive and recreational trails, view of the Susquehanna River, protect the River watershed, and provide a riparian reforested buffer along Route 30.





# YORK COUNTY OPEN SPACE GRANT PROGRAM

The Grant Program will assist applicants with the purchase of properties that provide public access and one or more of the following benefits:

- Natural Resource Protection – lands that protect our water or other natural resources or provide wildlife habitat.
- Parkland – lands that provide active or passive recreational opportunities for current and future generations.



## 2020 Grant Awards & Funded Projects Land Acquisition

### Spring Grove Borough, \$42,428

This is a parkland acquisition of 6.87 acres in the Borough of Spring Grove. The parcel is adjacent to the Spring Grove Area School District administrative building and the River Rock Academy. It is an open area suited for sports fields and the large hill on the property would be great for sledding. Among the project benefits is that it is the only greenspace remaining in the borough; accessible to River Rock students and borough residents; near the Hanover Trolley Trail; and walking distance to the Spring Grove Community Park. It will provide numerous active and passive recreation opportunities to the Spring Grove community.



### Lancaster Conservancy, \$100,000

This is a natural land acquisition of 270 acres near Indian Steps Road in Lower Chanceford Township. Most of the property is forested and has a unique history as the former site of a YMCA camp in the 1960s. The many benefits of this project include the protection of nearly a mile of a headwaters stream considered a migratory fishery; provision of important habitats for fish, birds, and aquatic and terrestrial herps; and connections to several other preserved areas and recreational resources, including Susquehannock State Park, State Game Land #181, and a large tract of utility land. The property is located near the Mason-Dixon Trail and there is interest from that group to link trails through this land in the future.





# YORK COUNTY OPEN SPACE GRANT PROGRAM

Active recreation includes outdoor recreational activities, such as organized sports, playground activities, etc. that require extensive facilities or development or that have a considerable environmental impact on the recreational site.

Passive recreation includes outdoor recreational activities, such as nature observation, hiking, and canoeing or kayaking, that require minimum facilities or development and that have minimal environmental impact on the recreational site.



## 2020 Grant Awards & Funded Projects Planning Projects

### West Manheim Township Comprehensive Plan Update, \$14,544

West Manheim Township is implementing the steps necessary to fund a complete update of their 2005 Comprehensive Plan. The funds received from the York County Open Space and Land Preservation Grant Program will be targeted to sections of the plan related to parks, recreation, and open space, Primary Growth Areas/Rural Areas capacity analysis, existing land use conditions and map, and the related community outreach and engagement.

"The grant will greatly assist the [West Manheim] Township in developing a comprehensive plan that addresses community desires for the conservation of agricultural lands and open space. The collaborative effort to update the comprehensive plan made possible by the grant will ensure the rural character of West Manheim will endure for future generations of residents to enjoy."  
~Mike Bowersox  
Manager, West Manheim Township

### Dover Region Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, \$35,000

This is a multi-municipal planning initiative of Dover Township and Dover Borough. It was a recommended action item in the 2020 Dover Implementable Comprehensive Plan.

"The Dover Community is excited at the opportunity to work together through the new York County Open Space and Land Preservation Grant Program provided by the York County Commissioners. The project allows us to proceed with the "Common Ground Initiative" of developing a joint comprehensive parks, recreation and open space plan as outlined in the 2020 Dover Implementable Comprehensive Plan. Through the Comp Plan process, the Dover Community indicated they wanted us to work across municipal boundaries and with non-profit organizations to use our mutual resources for the collective good. Analyzing what facilities exist, what improvements are needed and what partnerships can be developed to provide services is to everyone's benefit to building a better community for all."  
~Laurel Oswalt  
Manager, Dover Township