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*A Pennsylvania native, the Pileated Woodpecker is known for its unique homes, which are created from burrowing into tree cavities with multiple entrance points to their nest site.*

*Photo by D. Upmalis*

SUMMER 2021



# COMMON GROUND

*"Protecting our rural character and natural resources through community-based land conservation."*

## Balukas Easements Push Conservancy Past 5,000 Acre Milestone



*Lary Brandt and Rick Balukas*

### *You can make a difference!*

#### **Leave a Legacy, Plan a Gift.**

When you include the Conservancy in your estate plans, you help secure the future of our region's natural resources and rural character for future generations. Planning today extends your impact beyond your lifetime.

**Get Involved — Volunteer!** Tinicum Conservancy would not exist without its volunteers. We need help with mailings, research, event planning, and more! If you prefer the outdoors, we need folks to take part in our River Road cleanups.

*Please contact Tinicum Conservancy trustee Karen Budd at (610) 294-9069 or email kbudd3030@gmail.com for questions and more information.*

#### **Double Your Impact with an Employer Matching Gift.**

Maximize your Conservancy support with an employer matching gift. Many companies make it easy to double or triple the amount you donate! Check with your human resources department.

**Conserve Your Property.** Preserving your land is a lasting way to contribute to our community.

*Please contact our executive director, Jim Engel, at 610-294-1077 or email jengel@tinicumconservancy.org for questions and a confidential discussion about your options and opportunities.*

## JOIN TODAY

Your gift can make a positive impact to help protect your community for your family and future generations.

The Tinicum Conservancy is a private non-profit organization that depends on charitable contributions to steward over 5,000 acres conserved, to protect the environment, and to educate the community about our mission. Your support is essential to realizing our shared purpose.

Every gift makes a difference. Use the envelope inside or visit [tinicumconservancy.org](http://tinicumconservancy.org) to donate today. *Thank you.*

"The conservation easement must go on," was the appropriate battle cry for the Conservancy's success in 2020 in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

Completing easements is a process which requires patience and persistence during normal times, but during 2020, it required an even more heroic effort from everyone involved.

In December, the Conservancy completed its second and third easements of the year with Rick Balukas and his partner, Lary Brandt, along with additional financial support from Tinicum Township for a second 25-acre lot. At the successful

completion of these two easements, the Conservancy now officially has protected more than 5,000 acres of land in six townships.

Rick's 40-acre property sits near the intersection of Smithtown and River Roads. It encompasses a significant section of the scenic Smithtown Creek, rugged hillsides, open meadows and filtered views of the Delaware River and New Jersey.

Rick and Lary first considered creating a conservation legacy in 2010, but 2020 ended up being the year that everything came together in spite of the unique year that unfolded.

*continued on pg. 3*



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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Tinicum Conservancy  
 965 River Road  
 P.O. Box 206  
 Erwinna, PA 18920  
 610-294-1077  
 fax: 610-294-2906  
 info@tinicumconservancy.org  
 www.tinicumconservancy.org



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

The Tinicum Conservancy is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization established in 1992. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

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- Like us on Facebook
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**NEAL'S NATURE NOTES**

A letter from our President



Every year, people move into and out of our local communities. It's a natural process that has happened as long as people have inhabited this region. But this last year, the pace of property sales increased significantly, so we have a lot of new neighbors to welcome to our little corner of the world.

Everyone can see the natural beauty of our rocky hillsides, fresh water streams, deep forests and historic farms — they define what's special about the area in which we live and have served as the inspiration behind the Conservancy's mission for nearly 30 years. With the unfailing support of our residents, the Conservancy has protected more than 5,000 acres. But there's still more work to be done - and that's where you come in!

If you're one of our new residents, I want to take this opportunity to welcome you on behalf of the entire Conservancy's membership and staff. There are hundreds of us involved from all over the area, donating time, resources and expertise wherever needed, but we always have room for more.

Once you've settled in, I urge you to get involved in one of our local organizations

and support the causes to which you are drawn. Local schools, emergency services, civic associations, road cleanups, and local government are all supported by neighbors like you. And of course, we hope you'll consider joining our family of members at the Tinicum Conservancy. By joining, you can help ensure that the unique beauty of our community remains protected for you, your family and future generations.

Consider giving us a call or sending us an email to find out how you can help protect the place we all love.

Here's to a safe and healthy year for all of us,  
 —Neal Feigles

**save the date**

**friday, sept 10**

**OUTDOOR MOVIE NIGHT**

**FREE** and open to all community members.

Join us on a stunning 80-acre conserved farm for movie night on a huge 21-foot movie screen! *The Biggest little Farm* is a multi-award winning, visually stunning and deeply compelling story of two city dwellers (and their dog) who decide to build a 200-acre self-sustaining farm literally from the ground up. *Rated PG-13 for mild violence and adult language.* Social distancing and other safety measures will be required according to current CDC guidelines. BYO chairs, blanket and refreshments.

**RSVP** by Sept. 3rd to 610-294-1077 or [mfell@tinicumconservancy.org](mailto:mfell@tinicumconservancy.org).



*Getting the Balukas easements done during COVID with (from left to right) Lary Brandt, Tim Hall, Mary Pucci, Norm MacArthur and Rick Balukas*

**Balukas Easement (cont. from pg. 1)**

As often happens with conservation projects in Tinicum and surrounding communities, the landowner receives help in completing the easement from both the municipality and the non-profit. In Tinicum, the township and Conservancy have a special partnership through an MOU which guides how they work together with the landowner.

“Conservation easements require good cooperation between all parties to ensure their completion,” explains Jim Engel, Executive Director of the Tinicum Conservancy. “Rick and Lary followed

through on everything we asked them to do, and the Township open space committee was always there to help.”

Rick's commitment to the property extends beyond the conservation easement to include the inoculation of more than 100 ash trees to protect them from the Emerald Ash Borer.

Why did Rick agree to the conservation easement? Rick says that decision was easy. “My partner Lary and I loved this property so much we wanted to make sure that it remained a beautiful place for generations to come.”

**CELEBRATING**  
**5000**  
**ACRES**  
**protected**



**Dear River Road Cleanup Volunteers,**

Thanks for the great turnout on what could have been a soggy morning. It turned out to be a nice day and we picked up 27 bags of litter, 3 truck tires, some car parts, a nice soccer ball and, of course, a wheel cover.

Thanks also to the Tinicum Police for helping us to stay safe and especially to Mark Compas, who also pitched in to help us transport some of the more unwieldy items. See you next time. —Graham Place

# Jim Engel: Celebrating 13 Years of Service

It was January 2008. Except for a brief unsuccessful period with an executive director, the Conservancy had been an all-volunteer organization since its inception in 1992. Our office was located in a tiny office above the Stover Mill and we were swamped with an increasing number of acres under protection, a need to diversify and grow our fundraising program and a load of stewardship work. We needed help! When Jim Engel walked in the door for an interview, it was a breath of fresh air! Here we are 13 years later with 5,000+ acres under protection and a beautiful office on River Road!

Jim grew up in California. After a childhood of hiking, camping, and fishing throughout the West and an emphasis at Colorado State on environmental education and natural resources, his life would be devoted to the outdoors and the environment. At 9 years old he was leading Ranger Rick programs for his friends. Jim read every classic book on conservation, his idol being John Muir. At the age of 13 he first became aware of the importance of land trusts when The Nature Conservancy bought 80% of Santa Cruz Island, thereby protecting a whole ecosystem 90 square miles in size. He remembers being impressed that a nonprofit group could accomplish this kind of land protection.

Jim's increasing awareness of what intense development pressure was doing to the landscape everywhere led him to leave his 10-year involvement in environmental education in favor of land preservation. There followed 8 years (1998-2005) as Executive Director of the Ojai Land Conservancy in Ojai, California. The organization grew from a one-person staff to six, and from a budget of \$45,000 to \$475,000! One major accomplishment was the acquisition of a 1600-acre property adjacent to a national forest including 3 miles of river.

Fortunately for us, in 2005 Jim moved with his family to Long Valley, New Jersey. Specializing in Philanthropy and Development, Jim first worked with New Jersey Conservation Foundation and then The Nature Conservancy. Who could have asked for a better skill set when it came to helping and growing the Tincum Conservancy? Jim had expertise in fundraising, land protection and stewardship, legal and land use issues, staff and consultant management, government



agencies, communications and public education. The ideal executive director of a small land trust must be a jack of all trades. Above all, that person must be good with people. That is what walked in our door when we needed it most!

If asked what Jim considers his biggest accomplishment with the Tincum Conservancy, he answers, "Surviving that first year!" Not only did he have to learn the organization, the properties under its protection, its members, and its community, and try to find time to fund raise, but that year we were bringing on 11 new conservation easements. That is a tall order for any land trust. One of those easements was the most complicated in our

history, involving federal, state, county, and township funding!

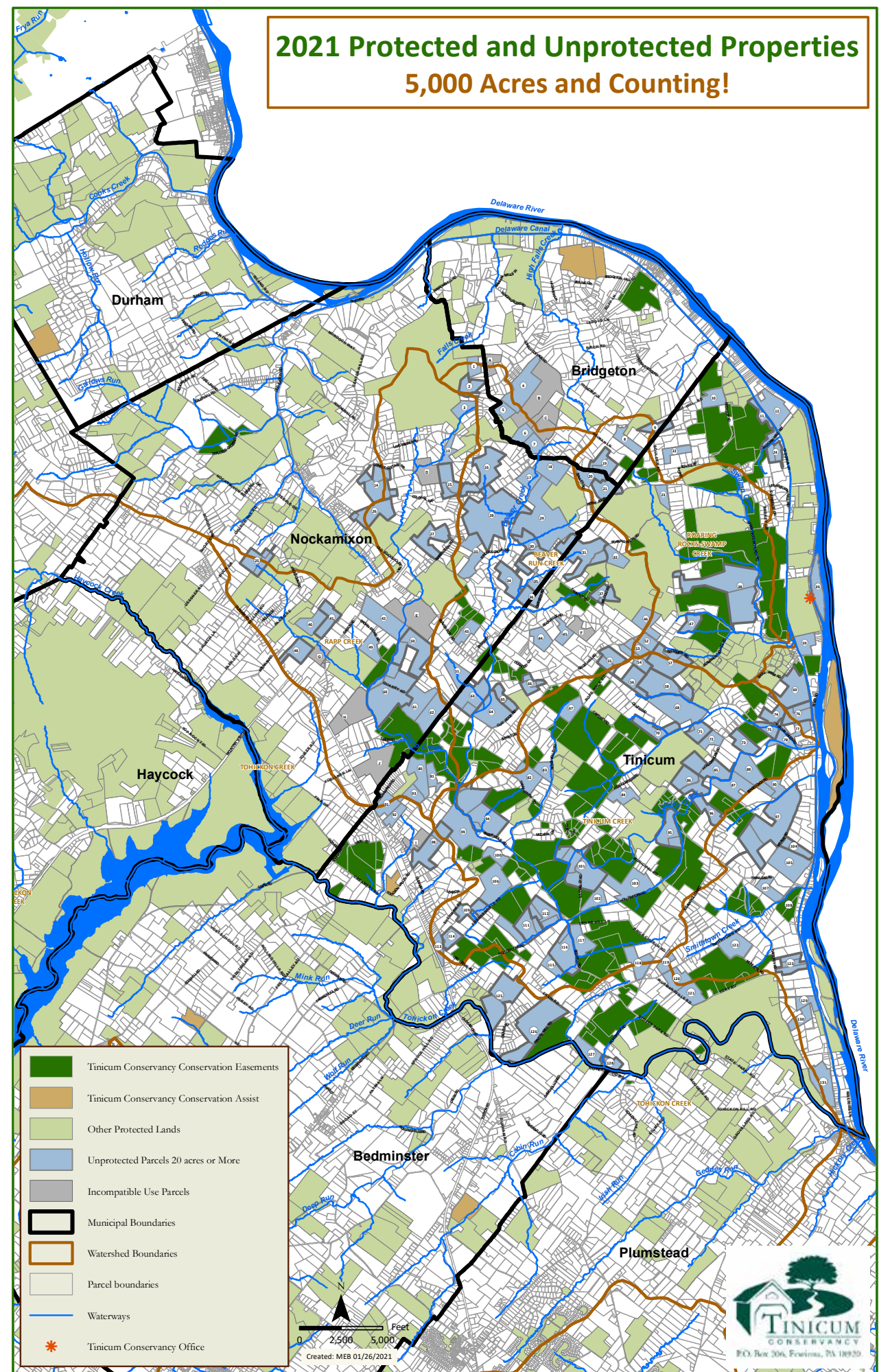
Much more can be added to that "biggest accomplishment." Jim is encyclopedic about his constituency. He really knows this community and the properties we protect. Jim has found funding from foundations and government, but most importantly Jim has encouraged a vast number of community members to support the conservancy at a very high level. Jim also manages a highly dedicated and committed staff including Kelly Germann and Maria Fell who have been with the conservancy for over 10 years, and now Scott Berman, who joined the staff in February 2020.

Jim is intensely aware that land is a very personal thing. Landowners are understandably sensitive about their properties. Jim's main message to landowners is two-pronged. One, for those landowners who are both conservation minded but also have an economic incentive, a conservation easement is the way to go. Too complicated a process? The Conservancy works with the landowner every step of the way. Too many restrictions for the future? A conservation easement does not mean that the property is frozen in time. The easement, if written correctly, allows for future improvements and has flexibility for future generations.

Secondly, protecting one's property represents an important legacy to the family and to the community. The saying, "You can't rule from the ground" does not apply here. Protection of the land lives on long after we are gone.

Modesty forbids Jim from patting himself on the back. He attributes his success to the commitment of staff, trustees, landowners, volunteers, and community. He asserts that, "in a lot of ways people made it easy for me." Yes, that might be true but nevertheless, Jim, we are so grateful for all that you have done.

—Karen Budd



5,000 ACRES PROTECTED

# Kelly's CORNER: Beautiful, Bizarre, Brood X!



As I write in early May, we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Brood X, the 17-year “periodical cicada,” (those cicadas whose nymphs emerge from the soil in large numbers periodically), aka the Great Eastern Brood. Where were you 17 years ago, in 2004, when they were last among us?

By late May, they are likely deafening, you’ve already disentangled a few from your hair and you’re tired of telling your dog (or cat) to stop eating them. But don’t miss your chance to get to know these truly fascinating creatures up close. Cicadas do not bite or sting, but their prickly feet can be disconcerting if gripping your finger.

To correct a common misnomer, cicadas are not locusts, even if their arrival seems to be a plague of biblical proportions. Cicadas are in the Order Hemiptera, related to aphids and leafhoppers, and they cause little damage to anything except our eardrums. Locusts, on the other hand, are in the Order Orthoptera, related to grasshoppers, and can produce major agricultural damage.

First described and historically documented in 1715, and later described in detail by John Bartram in the mid 1700’s. Brood X is the 10th and largest brood of 15 known 13-year and 17-year periodical

cicadas that are native to the eastern US. Periodical cicadas are a phenomenon unique to the eastern US. This happens nowhere else on earth. So, Brood X is a big deal.

They have been waiting, too. After 17 years living 10-12” underground, their arrival requires a perfect trifecta of conditions. Once the ground temperature hits 64 degrees, plus two days in a row with air temperatures above 80 degrees and a soaking rain, billions of cicadas will start to emerge across the eastern U.S. in 15 different states from Georgia to New York, west to the Mississippi and to a few Midwest states. Yes, *billions*.

During the night, ghostly white, red-eyed nymphs will dig out of the soil and begin to climb trees (or anything vertical). The



nymphs will split their exoskeletons to release a soft-bodied insect with glassy wings. Through the night, their 2” long bodies harden and darken to black and orange. Then the screaming begins.

These guys have an exceptionally loud song, produced by rapidly buckling and unbuckling a series of ridged ribs called tymbals, and amplified by a body that acts like a resonance chamber. Brood X in groups produce about 100 decibels of sound. That’s akin to a jackhammer, a power lawn mower, or sitting in the 10th row at a rock concert. Only males make the sound, and only to attract females. If you hear a brief lull in the volume, it means that some dude scored.

After mating, the female uses a saber-like organ called an ovipositor to cut V-shaped slits in the bark of young twigs. She lays about 20 eggs in each, for a total of between 400-600 eggs. In approximately 6-10 weeks, by late July, the eggs will hatch. The nymphs cast themselves off the branch, plummet to the earth, and burrow into the ground to feed on the juices and sap of tree roots and silently develop for almost 2 decades.

Cicadas provide many ecological benefits: They are a food bonanza for many animals, which often enjoy a spike in populations

the following year. Even butterflies benefit when cicadas become the preferred food for a year instead of caterpillars. Cicada decomposition is a “nutrient cache” for soil and plants. Underground, the nymphs construct tunnels that help aerate the soil and allow for tree roots to get more access to nutrients and oxygen for growth.

13- and 17-year periodical cicadas (versus annual cicadas) have synchronized their development on specific cycles and survive as a species by arriving in massive numbers: up to 350 per square yard in sunnier spots. Their massive numbers overwhelm predators, who can eat all they want and there will still be millions of cicadas left. This is a protective strategy called “predator satiation”. We also see predator satiation in plants, for example when oaks, hickories, beech and maples have “mast years.”



For us math geeks: Glenn Webb, a biological mathematician at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, has done mathematical modeling that suggests that if periodical cicadas didn’t use prime-number cycles, they’d drop dramatically in numbers or go extinct. (For more info on

this fascinating math-in-nature concept, check out: <https://www.livescience.com/periodical-cicada-prime-numbers.html>)

Virtually any creature will eat them, and their predators are many: people, dogs, cats, rodents, opossums, raccoons, reptiles, amphibians, birds, fish, other insects, arachnids, and cicada killer wasps. Underground, moles and other insectivores eat their larvae. But there’s one marauder that cicadas definitely have not learned to outsmart: a group of parasitic fungi called *Massospora*, aka *Zombie fungus*. Infected with these insect-eating spores as they emerge from the ground, cicada bodies will begin to dissolve from their white-spore-covered butt-ends. The parasite drugs the cicadas with psychedelic chemicals that cause them to continue flying about and mating (further spreading the fungus) even as their bodies are liquifying and their butts are falling off. Hence the zombie part. And as tempted as a person might be to sample some of those mind-altering effects, a human adult would have to consume between 300,000-1,000,000 infected cicadas to get even a mild BUZZZZZZZZZZ.

Don’t miss your chance to get to know these creepy-cool creatures. They will be gone before Labor Day, and they won’t return until 2038. Right about the time your 2021 newborn child or grandchild is learning to drive, these cicadas will be back.

## check our calendar of events

Our calendar is back up and in full swing! Visit our UPCOMING EVENTS page or join our email list at [tinicumconservancy.com](https://www.tinicumconservancy.com) to receive alerts of educational events, seminars and other conservancy happenings.

## Hip Hip Hooray!

Here’s a giant round of applause and our heartfelt appreciation for the conservancy’s volunteer easement property monitors! In spite of 2020 lockdowns and quarantines, our volunteers continued to stay in touch and offer help whenever they could. In early 2021, every existing volunteer returned eager to work and willing to learn new programs and procedures to improve safety and efficiency. In addition, 12 intrepid new volunteers recently trained online and are now working with us in the field. Tinicum Conservancy simply could not be successful in our mission without the generous contributions of every volunteer. We are so grateful to have the opportunity to work with every one of you. Thank you!

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Al Gillen        | Kelly Simcox    |
| Bill Cahill      | Ken Rogers      |
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| Keith Goggin     |                 |

\*Also donors and/or landowners of conservation easement property