



Keystone Recreation, Park & Conservation Fund

Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education An Island of Green

The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education is an oasis of forests and fields in densely developed Philadelphia. Thanks to the Keystone Fund, a conservation easement permanently protects it for enjoyment by future generations.




Founded in 1965, the Schuylkill Center is one of the first urban environmental education centers in the country. Two sisters, who envisioned an “island of green” where city dwellers could connect to nature, gifted 11 acres of farmland and woodland to make their vision a reality. In the decades following, the Center expanded its green footprint, acquiring a total of 340 acres.

In the past decades, two million people have visited the center or benefited from its programming. They have walked its three miles of public trails, raised food in its community gardens, picnicked, attended classes and more.

The Center is a pioneer in the work to connect children to the outdoors. It offers public programs for all ages, beginning with preschoolers; engages schools in diverse nature programming; and runs a popular summer camp program. In the fall of 2013, the Center opened the Schuylkill Center Nature Preschool, Pennsylvania’s first nature-based preschool, immersing toddlers in nature and the outdoors.

Open space is rare in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia where the Center sits. The Center’s valuable land began to attract developers and, if sold, could have offered much-needed funds for the non-profit organization. The Schuylkill Center’s Board of Directors faced difficult decisions about the future of the land.

In the end, they chose conservation. In 2011, a \$750,000 Keystone Fund grant was used to purchase a conservation easement on 325 acres of the property; the conservation easement, acquired by Natural Lands Trust, ensures the land will forever be protected and remain a place of learning and inspiration for the people of the city. 

Project Spotlight

Keystone investment: \$750,000

Total project cost: \$40.9M

Project leader: Natural Lands Trust

Key local partners:
Schuylkill Center for Education

County: Philadelphia

Fun fact: The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education is the largest privately owned parcel in the city of Philadelphia and contains diverse habitats including woodlands, meadows, ponds, and wetlands. It boasts nesting populations of rare bird species like the Blue-winged Warbler, and trees believed to be more than 250 years old.



The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund was established in 1993 with overwhelming bipartisan support both in the General Assembly and through a voter referendum. A portion of the state Realty Transfer Tax has been dedicated to the Keystone Fund for more than two decades. Each dollar of Keystone Fund investment typically leverages three dollars or more in direct local investments in our parks, trails, community green spaces and libraries.

Read more about the Keystone Fund at KeystoneFund.org