



2026 POST Report

Annual Report on
Protected Open
Space in 2025

Celebrating 25 years of Mapping Protected Open Space in Chester County

The Annual Report for Open Space Protected during 2025

as of December 31, 2025

32.2% of Chester County

or 156,566 acres of protected open space has been preserved, an annual increase of 1,385 acres.

For over three decades, Chester County has been the home of one of the largest land preservation efforts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Landscapes3*, the county's comprehensive plan, lays out a clear framework for these efforts through its "How We Preserve" goal.

The Planning Commission has collected information summarizing the amount of open space protected in Chester County each year since 2000. Starting in 2011, the Planning Commission has used the Protected Open Space Tracking (POST) system to map and assess open space. POST is a web-based database and mapping program designed to record protected open space and link those data to the County's existing tax assessment records.

Most of the open space protected in Chester County has been preserved by the efforts of non-profit land trusts or the county's Agricultural Land Preservation Board. The cooperation of these organizations and private landowners has been the foundation of success in protecting Chester County's open spaces for over 25 years.

An estimated 156,566 acres of protected open space, or 32.2% of the County, was protected as of December 31, 2025. This total is an increase from December 31, 2024, when it was 155,182 acres, or 31.9%. This calculation is based on a total Chester County area of 485,845 acres, as measured by the POST system. An estimated 1,385 acres of open space were protected in 2025.



Annual Trends for Year 2025

Protected Open Space 2016 Through 2025

Year	Acres Protected Annual Increase*	% of County Protected Land Annual Increase	Acres Protected Cumulative Total	% of County Protected Land Cumulative Total
2016	1,916	0.4	132,862	27.3
2017	4,081	0.8	136,942	28.2
2018	3,732	0.8	140,674	29.0
2019	2,563	0.5	143,237	29.5
2020	2,182	0.4	145,420	29.9
2021	3,229	0.7	148,648	30.6
2022	2,055	0.4	150,703	31.0
2023	1,882	0.4	152,585	31.4
2024	2,597	0.5	155,182	31.9
2025	1,385	0.3	156,566	32.2

*This table presents a compilation of protected open space over the past ten years through a combination of county funded and non-county funded efforts. The acreage of all protected open space in 2025 is the lowest of any annual amount in the previous 10 years. During that time, the increase has typically been between 2,000 and 3,000 acres, or an average of 2,562 per year.

Protected Open Space (POS) Annual Changes 2016 Through 2025

Year	Federal, State & County Parks	Agricultural Preservation Easements	Municipal POS & Recreational Parks	Land Trust Eased & Owned in-Fee	Homeowner Association POS	All other POS
2016	26	995	110	822	395	55
2017	468	1,327	152	2,476	28	42
2018	476	1,573	196	909	364	357
2019	80	1,247	250	765	256	302
2020	337	613	43	413	213	577
2021	0	1,424	259	1,265	456	71
2022	166	584	82	609	546	79
2023	0	425	424	319	655	59
2024	0	502	516	784	720	187
2025	145	754	222	200	64	0



145 ACRES of Federal, State and County Parks

The parks category grew by 145 acres, all of which were County Park properties, mostly associated with future trails or trailheads. Typically, the annual added acreage of this category fluctuates widely from year to year.



754 ACRES of Agricultural Preservation Easements

County-funded Agricultural Preservation Easements protected 754 acres (or 55% of the total 1,385 acres of open space protected in 2025). This acreage is the highest it has been since 2020. Prior to 2020, Agricultural Preservation Easement totals commonly exceeded 1,000 acres per year.



222 ACRES of Municipal Protected Open Spaces and Recreational Parks

Municipal recreational parks grew by only 4 acres, and municipal non-recreational open space grew by 218 acres, for a total of 222 acres. Typically, the annual added acreage of this category fluctuates widely from year to year.



200 ACRES protected by Land Trusts

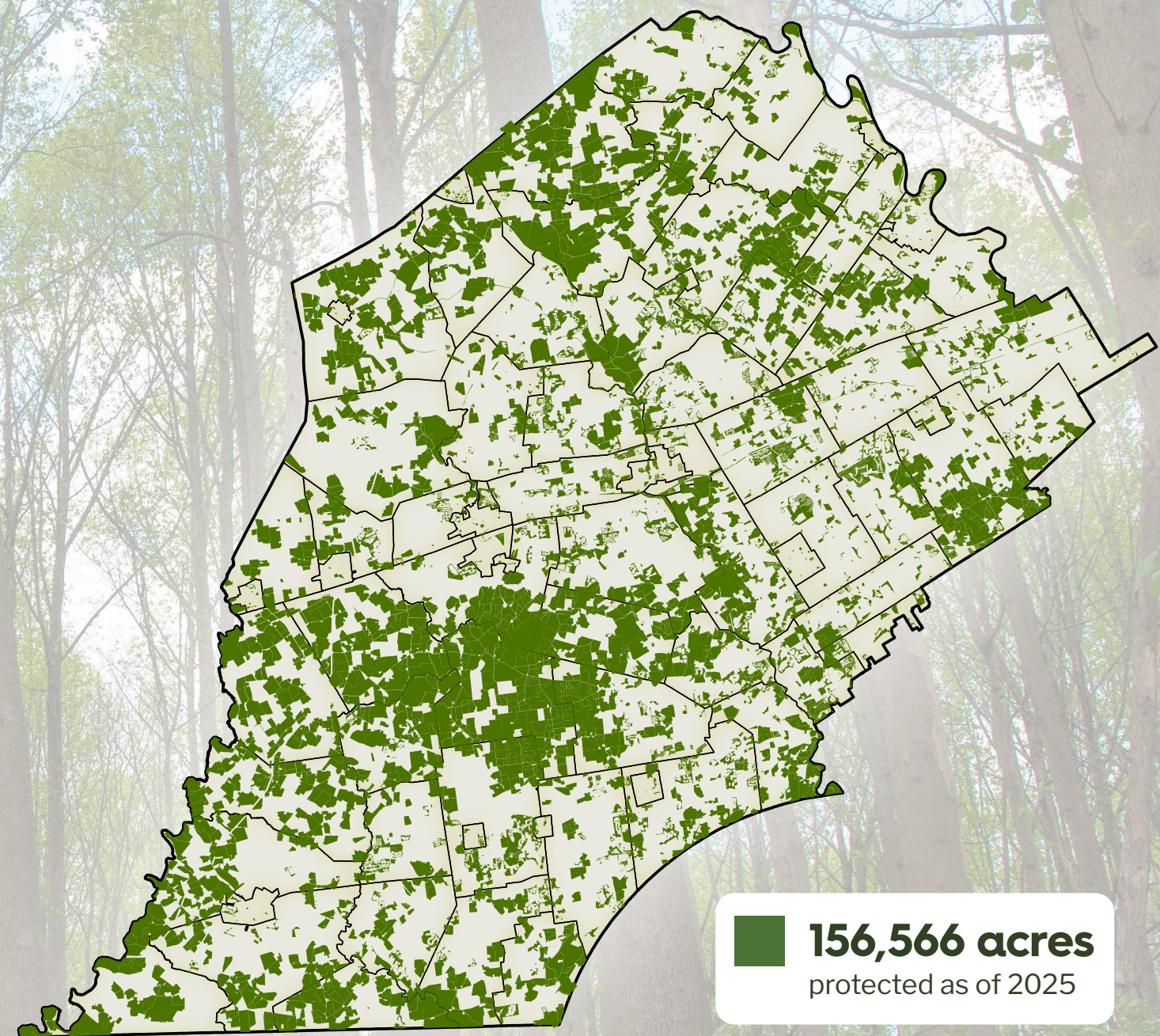
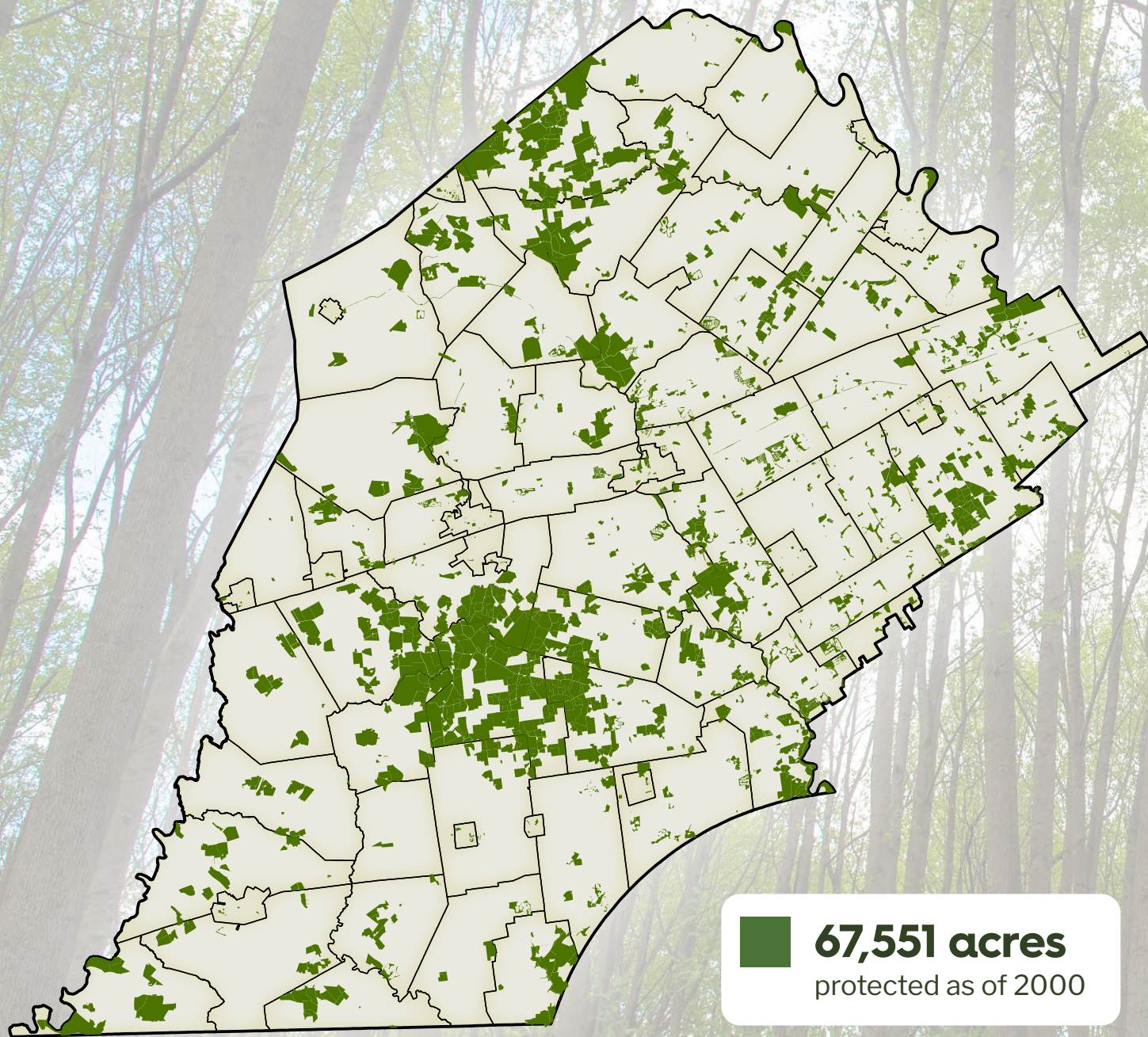
Land trusts protected 200 acres through conservation easements. Land trusts protected no in-fee acres during 2025. The 200 acres protected by the land trusts is the lowest in ten years. Recently, the annual added acreage of this category has been fluctuating widely from year to year.



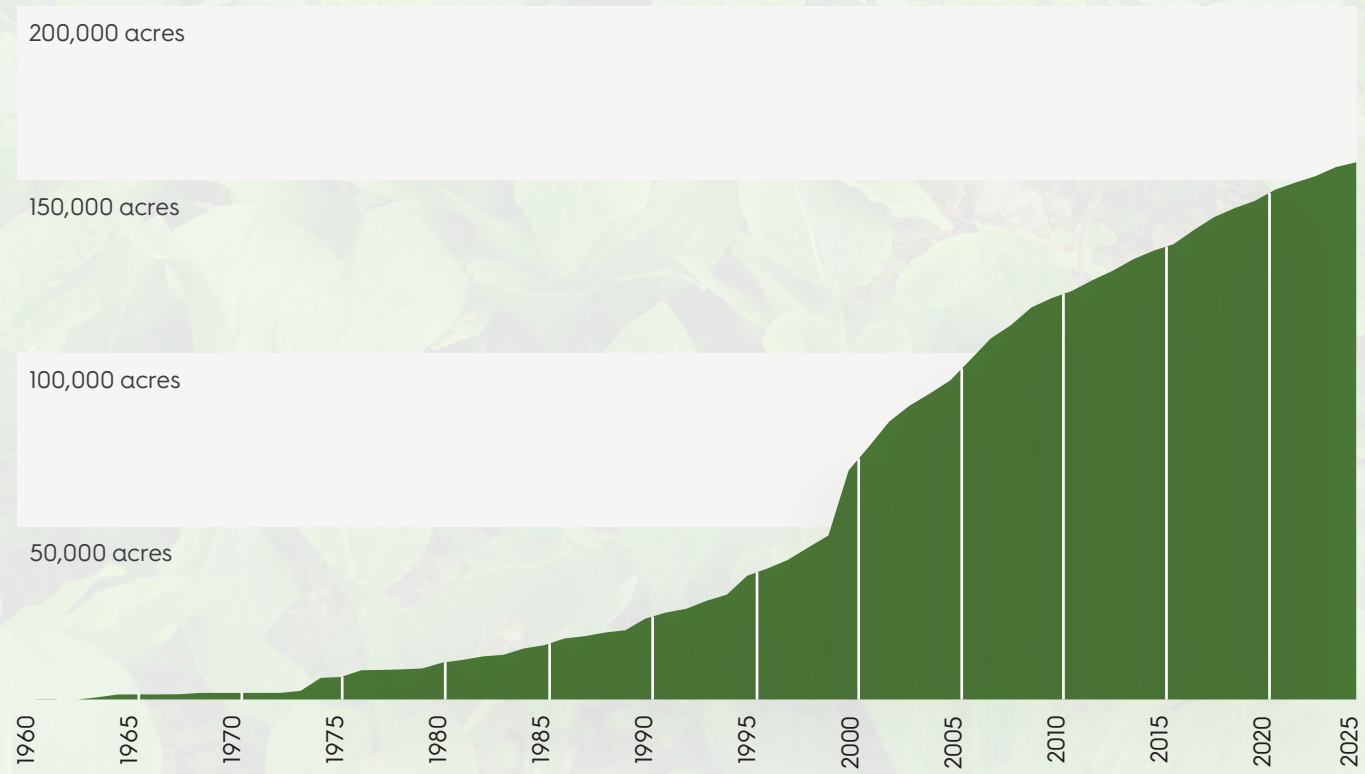
64 ACRES protected by HOAs

Homeowner Associations (HOAs) protected 64 acres in 2025, which was the lowest since 2018. Typically, the annual added acreage of this category fluctuates widely from year to year.

The two maps below show the protected open space mapping from 2000 and 2025. Protected open space in 2000 totalled 67,551 acres, but by 2025 was 156,566 acres. **This is an increase of 51,869 acres.**



Total Protected Open Space 1960-2025



Based on stakeholder interviews, there is no single explanation for the recent decline in the protection of open space, but rather a combination of reasons.

Open Land Availability

The county's land trusts are currently pursuing many protection projects in Chester County. However, there are fewer multi-hundred-acre properties available to protect than in the past. This also means that coordination must be undertaken with more landowners each year.

Maintaining Eased Property

Land trusts must now expend more staff time and funding to maintain properties already protected. This issue is an ongoing nationwide trend. Conversely, some landowners wish to add extra protections to their easements, which requires staff time but adds no additional acreage.

Rising Land Costs Complicate Protection

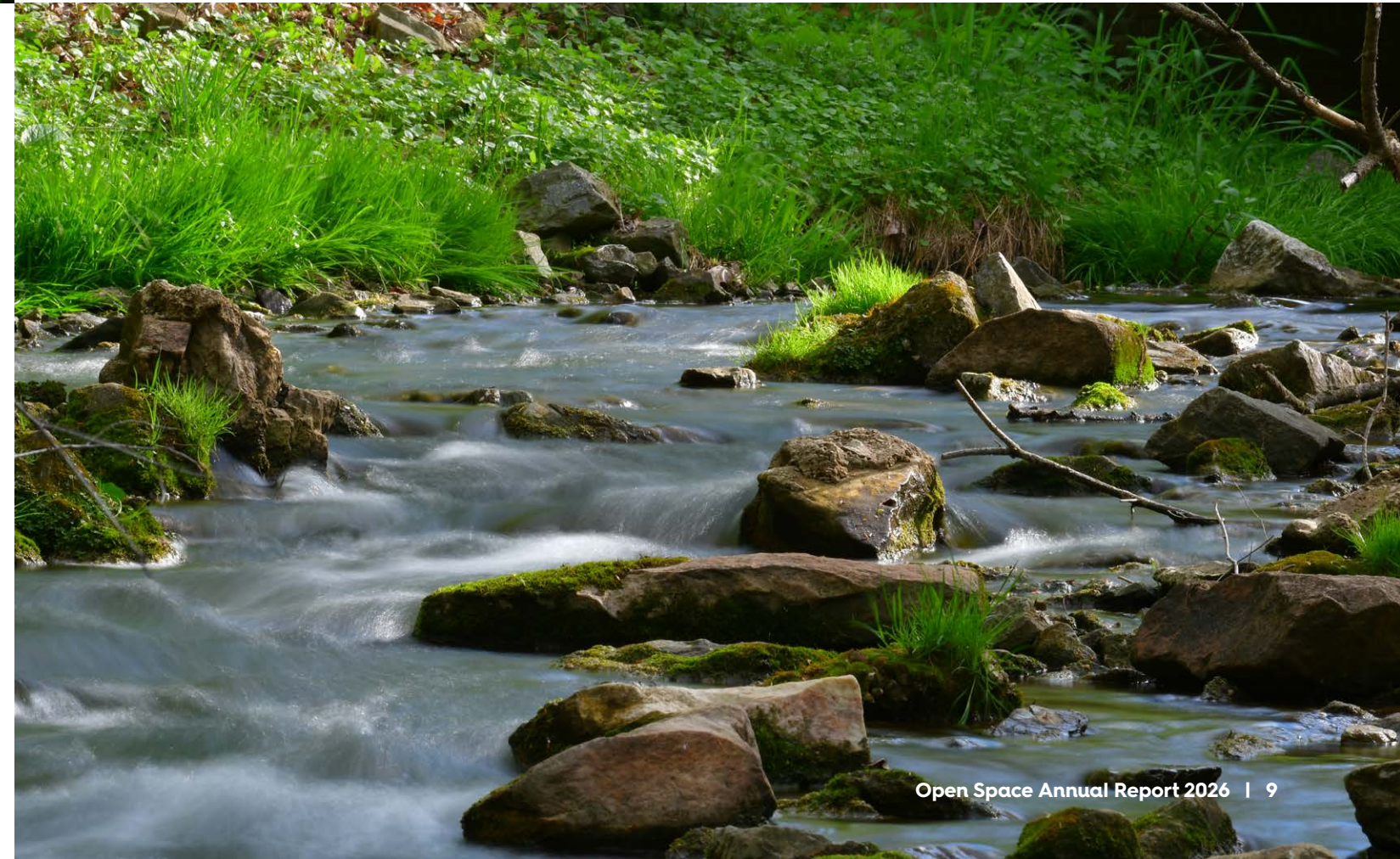
The time needed to protect open space is generally 18 months, with some efforts lasting years. But the county is now so desirable for development that builders can pay the landowner more quickly.

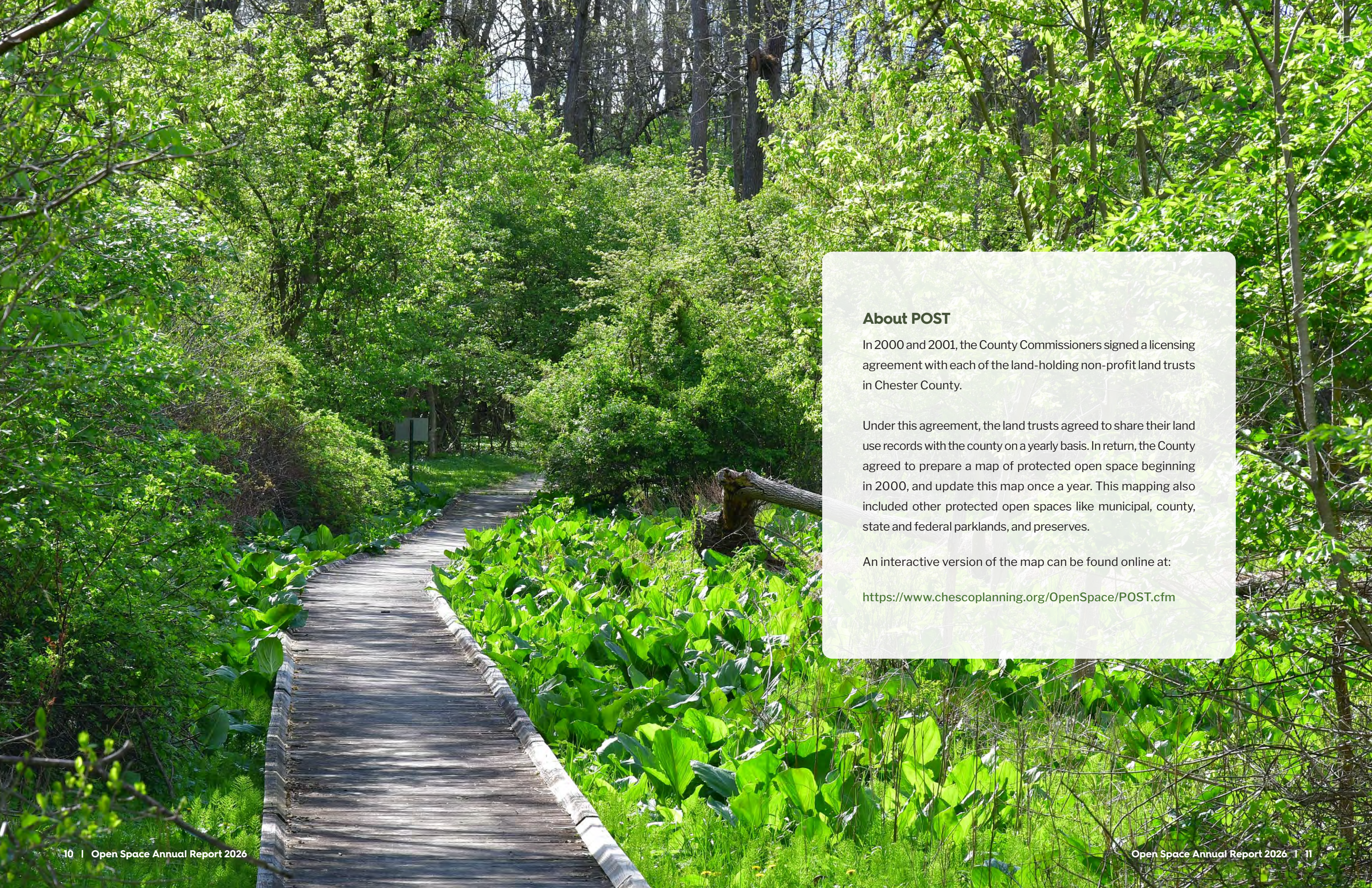
Funding Issues

Land trusts are spending more time fundraising to make up for reduced public and private funding. Uncertainty about future funding means that landowners considering easing their land in the coming years are more cautious about even beginning the protection process.

Long Term Trends in Open Space Protection

The Protected Open Space Tracking (POST) system includes data dating back to 1960, and was used to generate the chart above. This chart shows how open space protection was gradual from the mid-1980s through the 1990s. From 2000 to 2010, there was a 73.6% surge in protected open space due to increased funding, greater acceptance by landowners, and the development of efficient land preservation programs by land trusts and other organizations. Although the pace of protection has slowed in recent years, the total open space in Chester County has roughly tripled from some 50,000 acres at the beginning of the century to over 150,000 acres today.





About POST

In 2000 and 2001, the County Commissioners signed a licensing agreement with each of the land-holding non-profit land trusts in Chester County.

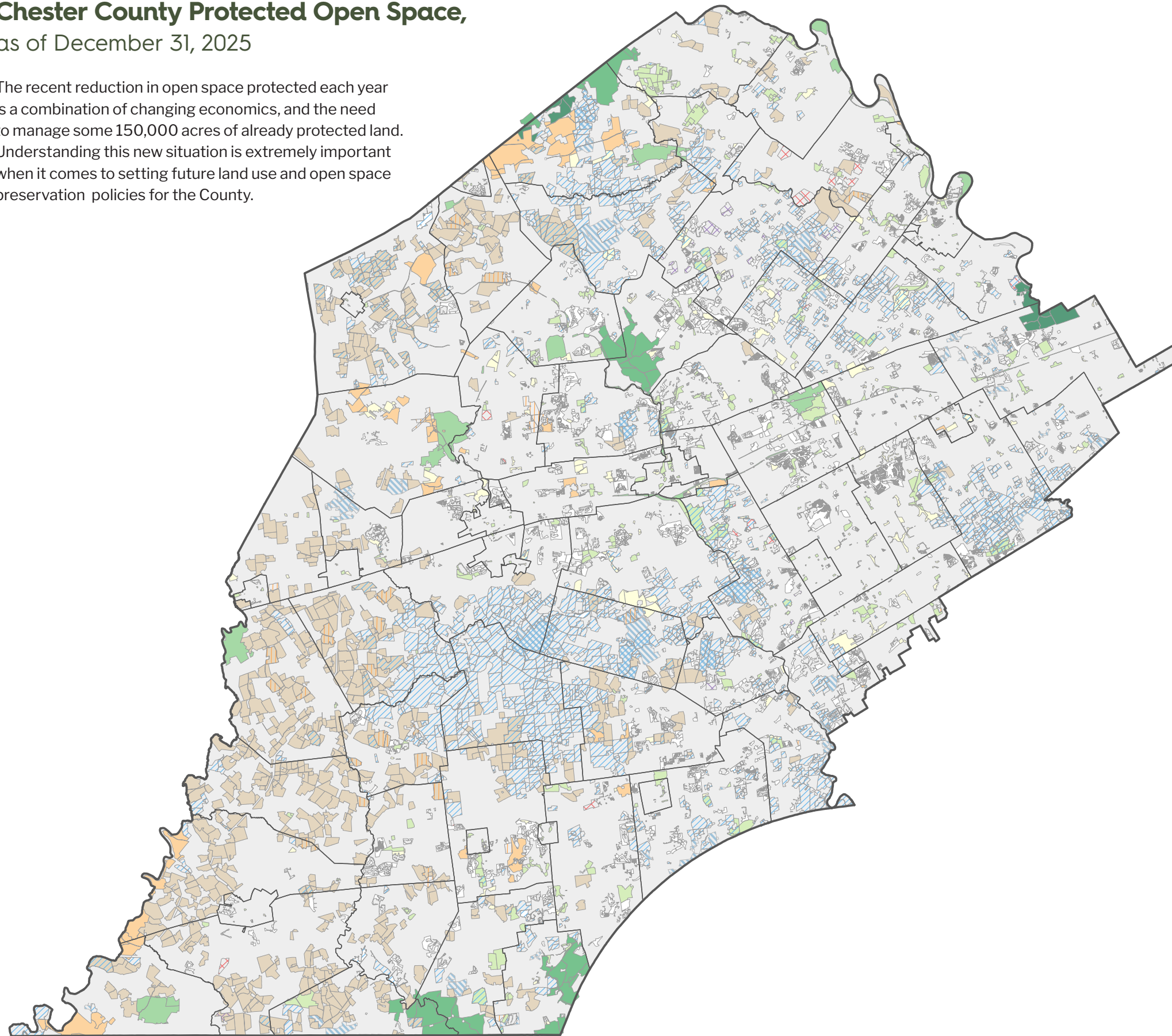
Under this agreement, the land trusts agreed to share their land use records with the county on a yearly basis. In return, the County agreed to prepare a map of protected open space beginning in 2000, and update this map once a year. This mapping also included other protected open spaces like municipal, county, state and federal parklands, and preserves.

An interactive version of the map can be found online at:

<https://www.chescoplanning.org/OpenSpace/POST.cfm>

Chester County Protected Open Space, as of December 31, 2025

The recent reduction in open space protected each year is a combination of changing economics, and the need to manage some 150,000 acres of already protected land. Understanding this new situation is extremely important when it comes to setting future land use and open space preservation policies for the County.



Types of Open Space

- National Historic Parks
- State Parks
- County Parks
- Municipal Recreation (Active & Passive)
Includes only municipally owned parcels that have been developed and are used for active or passive recreation. Schools and municipal buildings or offices are not included.
- Municipal Open Space (Non-recreational and Undeveloped)
Includes municipally owned parcels that have not been developed for recreational use, or parcels which have been designated as non-recreational open space, including wildlife, floodplain and natural resource preserves.
- Agricultural Conservation Easements
- Homeowner Association Open-Space
- Managed Lands Owned In-fee
Includes State Game Lands, State Forests and land owned in-fee by the PA Fish and Boat Commission, the Chester Water Authority or the Chester County Water Resources Authority.
- Managed Lands with Public Sector Easements
Includes land eased by the Chester County Water Resources Authority and easements that have been funded with County Grants that restrict future development.
- Parcels with Land Trust Easements
- Parcels Owned In-fee by Land Trusts
- Municipal Purchase of Development Rights
- Municipal Transfer of Development Rights

Sources

- Lakes, ponds, streams and rivers were provided by Aerial Data Reduction Associated through sublicense to the County of Chester, 1994.
- Parcels owned by homeowner associations, land trusts, water authorities, utilities, and by the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Chester County were provided by the Chester County Tax Assessors Office and the Bureau of Land Records E-PIN system, 2025.
- Parcels with agricultural conservation easements were provided by the Chester County Agricultural Land Preservation Board, 2025.
- Parcels with Water Resources Authority easements were provided by the Chester County Water Resources Authority, 2025. Parcels with land trust easements were provided by the Brandywine Conservancy, the Brandywine Valley Association, the French and Pickering Conservation Trust, the Land Conservancy of Southern Chester County, the Nature Conservancy, Natural Lands, the Open Land Conservancy of Chester County, the Pennsbury Land Trust, and the Willistown Conservation Trust, through a license agreement with Chester County, 2025

Notes

1. The Chester County Planning Commission defines Protected Open Space as: "Land and water areas that have little or no development; are used for recreation or preserving cultural or natural resources, including productive agricultural soils; and are protected either permanently or on a long term basis."
2. The information presented is based on data received from various contributing sources. Polygons that contain easements may only contain partial easements. Therefore, the area of a polygon presented may be larger than the actual area of the land that is eased.
3. Chester County is not permitted to distribute to any private or public entity, electronic data or mapping depicting parcels presented on this map that contain land trust easements, except as set forth in the licensing agreements between the land holding land trusts and the County of Chester.
4. Disclaimer: This map was digitally compiled for internal maintenance and developmental use by the County of Chester, Pennsylvania to provide an index to parcels and for other reference purposes. Parcel lines do not represent actual field surveys of premises. County of Chester, Pennsylvania makes no claims as to the completeness, accuracy or content of any data contained hereon, and makes no representation of any kind, including, but not limited to, the warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular use, nor are any such warranties to be implied or inferred, with respect to the information or data furnished herein.



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