

Funding Sources for Land Preservation in Pennsylvania as of March 2026

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1. Pennsylvania State Funding Programs

Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACEPP)

Administered by the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** through the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board, this program purchases **development rights on farmland** to permanently protect it from non-agricultural development.

Key features

- Permanent agricultural conservation easements
- State funding combined with **county and municipal matching funds**
- Land remains privately owned and farmed

Pennsylvania has preserved **hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland through easement purchases**, making it one of the most active farmland preservation programs in the United States.

Funding sources include:

- State appropriations
- A dedicated **cigarette tax revenue stream**
- Matching county and municipal funds.

Environmental Stewardship Fund (Growing Greener)

Administered by the **Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection**.

Eligible uses

- Open space preservation
- Watershed protection
- Habitat restoration
- Park land acquisition

The Environmental Stewardship Fund allocates millions annually toward land conservation projects across Pennsylvania.

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Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2)

Administered by the **Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**.

Funding uses

- Land acquisition for parks and natural areas
- Trail corridors
- Greenways
- Conservation easements

Recipients may include:

- Municipal governments
- Nonprofit land trusts
- Counties

Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund (Keystone Fund)

This state fund supports:

- Local park acquisition
- Open space preservation
- Trail and greenway development
- Historic resource protection

Funding comes primarily from realty transfer taxes.

Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVEST)

Administered by **Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority**.

While focused on water infrastructure, PennVEST funding can support **land acquisition for watershed protection and source water protection projects**.

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2. Federal Land Preservation Funding Programs

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Administered by the **Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)**.

Provides financial assistance for:

- Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

These programs help protect farms and restore wetlands by funding permanent conservation easements.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Also administered by the **Natural Resources Conservation Service**.

Supports large-scale conservation projects involving partnerships between:

- States
- Nonprofits
- Conservation districts
- Private landowners

Pennsylvania has received **multi-million dollar RCPP awards** for regional conservation initiatives.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Administered by the **National Park Service**.

Provides grants to states and municipalities for:

- Park acquisition
 - Open space preservation
 - Recreational land protection
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Delaware River Watershed Conservation Fund

Managed by the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**.

Supports projects in the Delaware River Basin including:

- Watershed land protection
- Habitat restoration
- Water quality improvements

Projects in Pennsylvania have received significant funding for conservation and restoration activities.

3. County-Level Funding Programs

Many Pennsylvania counties operate their own farmland preservation programs funded by **county tax revenue and state matching funds**.

Example:

Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Program

Administered by **Bucks County Planning Commission**.

The program purchases agricultural conservation easements and has preserved:

- over **19,000 acres**
- more than **250 farms** since its creation in 1989.

County programs typically use funding from:

- County bond issues
 - Dedicated tax programs
 - State matching funds
 - Municipal contributions
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4. Municipal Funding Sources

Municipalities in Pennsylvania often fund land preservation through:

Open Space Taxes

Many townships adopt **earned income or property tax millages** dedicated to open space.

Bond Referendums

Voter-approved bonds that finance large-scale preservation programs.

Transfer Taxes

Some municipalities dedicate a portion of **real estate transfer taxes** to conservation.

Municipal Preservation Partnerships

Some counties provide additional funding to municipalities that contribute funds to farmland preservation purchases.

5. Nonprofit and Land Trust Funding

Nonprofit conservation organizations frequently partner with governments to fund land preservation.

Examples include:

- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land
- Heritage Conservancy
- Brandywine Conservancy
- Natural Lands

Funding mechanisms used by land trusts include:

- Private donations
- Conservation buyer programs
- Conservation easement purchases
- Foundation grants
- Corporate sponsorships

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6. Private and Foundation Grants

Several private foundations fund conservation efforts in Pennsylvania:

Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

Supports projects that protect water quality and watershed lands.

William Penn Foundation

Funds watershed protection and open space conservation in the Delaware River Basin.

Community Foundations

Regional foundations may fund conservation projects through competitive grants.

7. Other Funding Sources

Additional conservation funding may come from:

Mitigation Banking

Developers fund preservation to offset environmental impacts.

Carbon Offset Programs

Landowners receive payments for maintaining forests that sequester carbon.

Agricultural Programs

Farm programs that support soil conservation and land stewardship.

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Typical Land Preservation Funding Structure in Pennsylvania

Most preservation projects combine **multiple funding sources**:

Example structure:

Source	Typical Share
State farmland preservation funds	30–50%
County funds	20–40%
Federal grants	10–30%
Municipal contributions	5–20%
Nonprofit/Private funds	5–15%

This layered funding approach allows preservation of large tracts of land that would otherwise be too expensive for a single agency.