PRESS RELEASE

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ClearWater Conservancy Breaks Ground on the Hamer Community Conservation Center in State College

State College, Pa. – August 6, 2025 – ClearWater Conservancy officially broke ground on the **Hamer Community Conservation Center** this Tuesday, marking the start of construction on a long-envisioned hub for local conservation, environmental education, and community connection within the Spring Creek Watershed.

The groundbreaking ceremony drew an enthusiastic crowd of funders, contractors, nonprofit partners, elected officials, ClearWater members, donors, volunteers, and supporters – each united by a shared commitment to protecting central Pennsylvania's natural resources.

"ClearWater Conservancy is excited to see our new home become a reality here in the heart of Spring Creek. At its completion, we will have an exemplary Hamer Community Conservation Center where we will be able to support our community with a place to meet." said **Donnan Stoicovy**, Board President of ClearWater Conservancy. "This new center will really bring ClearWater's strategic initiatives to Connect, Protect, Restore, and Steward the natural resources of our beautiful backyard of central Pennsylvania to a new level!"

"This center will be able to support our community like never before." said ClearWater Conservancy Executive Director **Elizabeth Crisfield**. "We'll be able to teach native plant and tree identification, offer fishing mentorships and macroinvertebrate workshops, host wellness and agricultural workshops, and inspire landowners to conserve their own land**.** We'll collaborate with partner organizations and help support the entire nonprofit community to better serve our region."

Barbara Fisher explained ClearWater's origin story, dating back to the late 1970s when a group of dedicated citizens campaigned to stop a mall from being developed on farmland in Ferguson Township, which is now home to Tom Tudek Memorial Park. "It took us 45 years for flight to happen, but it did. And now, we can perch on the bow and create our nest to overlook Spring Creek," said Fisher.

The center sits on a property with a **rich history of stewardship**. "From the late 1700s, until ClearWater purchased the property in 2021, the Housers, the Baylets, the Umbergers, and the Rockenbecks all cared for this place," said Crisfield. "In all

likelihood, this is the end of land ownership changes for this property. The ClearWater community will be stewards of this land forever."

Key Leaders & Partners Speak to a Shared Vision

The groundbreaking ceremony featured remarks from an inspiring lineup of speakers representing the many people and organizations who helped make the project possible:

- **Donnan Stoicovy**, ClearWater Conservancy Board of Directors
- **Barbara Fisher**, Founder, ClearWater Conservancy
- **Patrick Morse**, The Hamer Foundation
- **Eric Bernier**, Chair, College Township Council
- **Kerry Benninghoff**, PA State Representative
- **Sonia Kaufman**, Chief of Staff for PA State Representative Paul Takac
- **Chris Magent**, Alexander Building & Construction
- **Elizabeth Crisfield**, Executive Director, ClearWater Conservancy

ClearWater Conservancy honored former Executive Directors **Jennifer Shuey** and **Deb Nardone** for their years of leadership and lasting contributions to the organization's growth and impact. Both continue to support ClearWater tremendously and the staff and board are grateful for such generosity. A heartfelt thank you was given to Deb Nardone, who began the vision for a new home along Spring Creek. Her leadership began the process that led to the beginning of construction of the Hamer Community Conservation Center—a dream now becoming reality.

Following the ceremony, attendees were invited to join a short walk to nearby Spring Creek to see recent restoration efforts and enjoy the surrounding landscape the center will help protect.

About the Hamer Community Conservation Center

The Hamer Community Conservation Center at ClearWater Conservancy is a 10,392-square-foot, two-story facility designed to serve as a vibrant hub for community engagement, environmental education, and conservation leadership. The facility is being brought to life through the design work of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson (BCJ) and the construction management team at Alexander Building Construction. The building will feature a variety of spaces including basement-level workshop and program support spaces, private and open office areas, a library, a large meeting/community room, a kitchenette, and flexible gathering areas, along with outdoor demonstration zones and accessible pedestrian trails leading to Spring Creek.

The original barn on site, salvaged in March, will live on through the creative repurposing of its materials, including floor joists milled into the main entrance façade

siding, interior architectural elements from existing barn doors, hardware, and site benches that preserve its legacy. A standout feature of the project is its commitment to sustainability and heritage: solar panels, geothermal systems, and landscaping that incorporates original stone foundations will complement the timber-framed barn structure. The construction team is set to mobilize on site within the next few weeks, with project completion anticipated by August 2026.

Located within the Spring Creek Watershed, the **Hamer Community Conservation Center** will serve as ClearWater Conservancy's permanent headquarters and a hub for environmental education, collaboration, and on-the-ground conservation.

The center will include:

- Professional workspaces for conservation staff and partners
- Indoor and outdoor areas for public events, workshops, and learning
- Demonstration sites showcasing best practices in land and water resources stewardship
- Direct connections to nature through stream access

This new facility will greatly expand ClearWater's capacity to deliver conservation programs and engage the community in long-term stewardship and conservation of local lands and waters.

Thank You to a Community of Supporters

Special thanks were extended to the **Hamer Foundation**, whose leadership support helped make the project possible, as well as to the **Appalachian Regional Commission**, **Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program**, **Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Community Conservation Partnerships Program**, **West Penn Energy Fund**, **Happy Valley Adventure Bureau**, and the many individuals, families, and organizations who have contributed to this bold and collaborative vision.

Crisfield also credited **Ford Stryker**, a former board member and extremely dedicated volunteer, for helping bring this project to life. "Without Ford's ability to see this project from start to finish at a time when nobody else at ClearWater could, we would not have been able to thread the needle through the project."

The Hamer Community Conservation Center will serve as a vibrant headquarters and gathering space for conservation efforts across central Pennsylvania. Construction is underway, and ClearWater looks forward to welcoming the community into this new space in the near future.

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About ClearWater Conservancy
ClearWater Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to conserve and restore the natural resources of central Pennsylvania through land conservation, water resources stewardship, and environmental outreach in the community.