

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy Mission and Principles

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was founded in December 1996 by a group of citizens concerned with the deteriorating conditions of Pittsburgh's historic city parks.

A nonprofit organization, the Parks Conservancy has worked closely with the City of Pittsburgh since 1998 under an official private interest partnership agreement to restore the city's parks.

To date, the Parks Conservancy has raised over \$126 million for parks and has completed 22 [major improvement projects](#). Currently active in 22 of the city's 165 parks, the Parks Conservancy has expanded into community and neighborhood parks throughout Pittsburgh.

Our Mission

Improving quality of life for the people of Pittsburgh by restoring the park system to excellence in partnership with government and the community. Projects and programs are conducted with respect for the environment, historic design, and the needs of our diverse region.

Our Vision

Wide appreciation and enjoyment of a sustainable park system whose landscapes, facilities and programming set world standards of excellence.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy works in close partnership with government and the community on major park improvement projects. Critical to the Parks Conservancy's work on these projects is respect for the environment, historic design, and the needs of our diverse region.

Our parks are our classrooms.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the value of healthy habitats and ecosystems, and the relationship between humans and nature.

We believe that parks—including local neighborhood parks—provide unlimited opportunities for scientific inquiry, observation, wonder, creativity, exploration, and learning.

Many of our environmental education programs promote learning about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) through immersion in the natural world.

Our buildings are our teaching tools.

Our Neighborhood Environmental Learning Centers, like the Frick Environmental Center, will demonstrate to visitors how to live more sustainably. We at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy strive to operate sustainably, too.

We use water and energy respectfully, carefully consider the materials that we use, discourage waste, and encourage proper disposal. We strive for diversity within our organization and make everyone feel welcome here, just as we do in the parks.

We look for ways to be healthy, and we value the restorative power of nature. We are thoughtful in our operations to remain true to our mission. We respect our history, our planet, and the communities we serve.

PARKS ARE THE ULTIMATE CLASSROOM



Pittsburgh
Parks
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STEM EDUCATION



PARKS ARE THE ULTIMATE CLASSROOM

Through trusted partnerships with regional schools, **The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy provides a nationally recognized STEM-based** (science, technology, engineering and math) **learning experience to students from pre-school through high school.** The Parks Conservancy's STEM education programs use Pittsburgh's thousands of acres of parkland as the ultimate classroom, allowing students the opportunity to learn scientific ideas and concepts in the great outdoors rather than a traditional classroom.

The vibrancy of nature, the calming benefits of being outdoors, and carefully designed multi-contact classes taught by world-class naturalist educators have given the Parks Conservancy's STEM education programs high marks from educators and students alike. Centered at the Frick Environmental Center in Frick Park, programs explore our regional parks, and learn the sciences through hands-on experiences in the natural world.



PITTSBURGH PARKS CONSERVANCY STEM EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Children in the Parks Conservancy's **Nature School** (ages 3 – 5) explore parks, and interact with the outdoors through use of their senses, and through stories, songs, and projects that teach respect and appreciation for the environment. First graders in **Habitat Explorers** take part in guided exploration activities in Frick Park, where they observe how organisms live in various habitats throughout the year, and engage in stewardship projects including seeding and bird feeder creation. The fourth graders in the **Park Stewards** program are guided to discovery through real-life scientific illustration and sensory journaling, analyzing components of a park site to observe how it changes over time.



Older students, like the middle schoolers in **Ecosystem Investigators**, evaluate the health of forest and stream ecosystems, employing the tools and sampling methods used by scientists in the field to collect data as they gain an understanding of the connection between the health of ecosystems and the benefits they provide. **High School EcoStewards** (ninth-twelfth grade) classes adopt a quarter acre of park land, tending to it year-round and recording their experiences in field journals. Students work



in teams to perform ecological restoration projects, identify native and non-native plant life, and learn about the value of parks and green spaces. Adults who are passionate about lifelong learning take part in **OSHER** classes that get them into our city's green spaces to learn about watersheds, healthy ecosystems, and environmental equity.

STEM EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EQUITY

STEM education in our city parks makes lasting impressions on students, giving all the same opportunity to be exposed to the positive effects – both physical and intellectual – that learning in nature provides. **With students in 58 classes from 23 schools, young people from a wide range of public, private, and charter schools take part in Parks Conservancy STEM education programs.** Consistent park visits and guidance from seasoned professional educators are key to the success of Parks Conservancy's STEM education programs, creating trust, stability, and sustained engagement and curiosity. Parks Conservancy educators have over 15,000 hours of contact with kids age 3 – 18 each school year, ensuring that students have personal attention as their STEM interests are fostered.

Teachers whose students have participated in Parks Conservancy STEM programs trumpet the effects they have on their students, with many describing increased enthusiasm and enlivened senses that leads to new ways of thinking and problem solving. **“Environmental education and greenspace equity is a primary tenet for the Parks Conservancy’s work,”** said Parks Conservancy Director of Education Camila Rivera-Tinsley. “The parks and all their wonders are truly a uniting force for the city, and are meant to be shared and enjoyed by all. The Parks Conservancy’s STEM education programs give the opportunity for a wonderfully diverse slate of students to enjoy the myriad of benefits of learning from the natural world.” Indeed, waiting lists of schools wishing to participate in Parks Conservancy STEM programs show the demand for this unique, inspiring approach to teaching science subjects through our city’s vibrant park system.



For more information on Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy STEM education programs, please contact us at 412.682.7275, or visit www.pittsburghparks.org.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy’s environmental education programs are approved for Pennsylvania Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) contributions.

