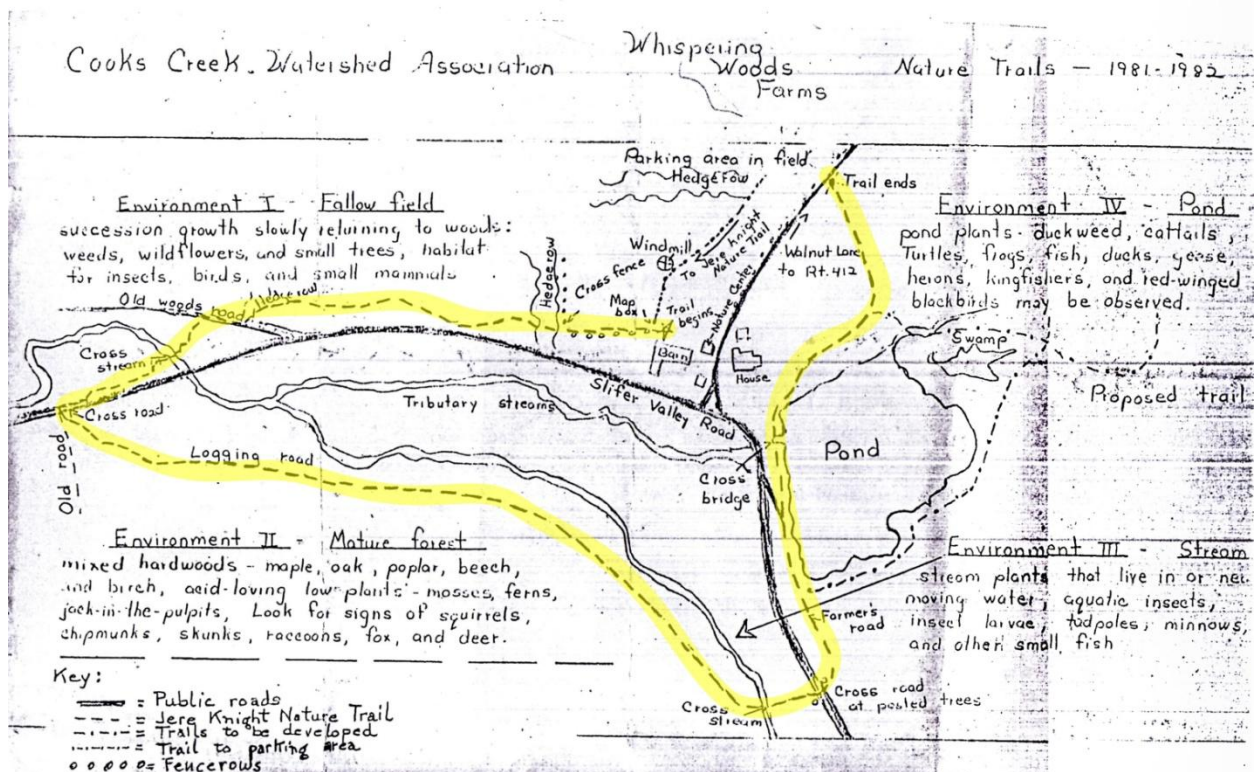


CCWS Jere Knight Trail article

In the late 1970's Peter and Joan Fuller purchased the 240 acre farm on Slifer Valley Road that they named Whispering Woods. Both of them had a dream of making the farm part of a larger community. They were long term members of Cooks Creek Watershed and donated one of their out buildings to be used as a nature center. During that period they preserved part of their farm property from any future development. In 1980, with the help of Cooks Creek members they created a nature trail that wrapped around their property on both sides of Slifer Valley Road. A very pretty part of the trail included an old logging trail that wound above a Cooks Creek tributary stream that runs almost year round. The trail was named Jere Knight Trail in honor of long time Cooks Creek associate and environmentalist, Jere Knight. The drawing below is the original trail layout from 1981-82



This is the original trail from 1981
 Trail along the pond and upper side of Slifer Valley Rd. no longer exists and is private property

Jere Knight was an amazing woman. She was a member of the 1930 Olympic fencing team. In 1932 she married Eric Knight, an editor and author. With a lot of editing help from Jere, Eric wrote the original "Lassie Come Home" book in 1940. When World War II began, Eric, who was English, began working for the US intelligence agency. Unfortunately in 1943 Eric was killed in a military plane accident in Africa that was likely caused by sabotage. Jere was not to be stopped by this tragic loss. Although she was a Quaker, she made an exception for the fight against Hitler. She became a major and won a bronze star for aiding the founding of the all Woman's Auxiliary Army Corps later known as the Woman's Army Corps or WAC. During the

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war she directed a team of cryptographers and reported directly to General Eisenhower himself. Eisenhower was even known to have requested Jere to dine with him while traveling through Europe. After the war Jere was a continuous champion for the environment and world peace. In 1967 she provided the editing for a Pulitzer Prize winning volume of the history of the British Empire written by a Lehigh Professor. In 1972 she attended the United Nations first global conference on the human environment. During that time she helped Cooks Creek get registered as exceptional value by collecting information and writing reports. Her real love was poetry and after a 1984 trip to Nicaragua she translated poetry by Central American women. Nine years later she published her own poetry "The Uphill View. She passed away in 1996 at the age of 88. Her son, Jeff Lindtner and his wife Barbara live in the same farm she and Eric purchased here in Springfield Township.

In 1993 Peter and Joan donated 64 acres of their property to Heritage Conservancy. The property became known as the Fuller Preserve. For the next 20 years the property was mostly left under disturbed except for mowing the open field in the center of the preserve. Around 2002 the American Chestnut Foundation, Heritage Conservancy staff and the local boy scouts planted a mixture of hybrid and pure natural chestnut trees in the center of the open field. The purpose of the planting was to cross pollinating Chinese Chestnut trees which are blight resistant with the American Chestnut. The off spring are then cross pollinate back to American chestnut trees for at least three generations which hopefully would result in trees that are 15/16 American and 1/16 Chinese but blight resistant. At each generation when the trees are 5 years old they are purposely infected with the blight to determine which ones have inherited the Chinese genes for blight resistance. When the final hybrids are successfully blight resistant their seed will be used to re-forest chestnut trees. The cross breeding at this grove will continue for at least ten more years. A fence was placed around the grove to minimize deer damage. The plan is to repair the fence and add a gate that has a path leading up to the trail so hikers can get a close look at a tree that once dominated the Eastern US. Before 1900 chestnut trees were plentiful on the eastern coast but by 1940 that had been almost totally wiped out by the blight. Some of these majestic trees would reach a height of 100 feet and have 50 feet of branch free trunks. Many of the early American barns were constructed of chestnut.

There has been a Heritage Conservancy - Art of Preservation - fund raiser at Kirkland Farm the last two September's and a third one is planned for this coming September 20th to raise funds and awareness for land conservation in Springfield Township and highlight the efforts of many individuals. Peter and Joan's gift of the Fuller Preserve has been honored at these events. At last year's event PPL presented Heritage Conservancy with a \$2,500 check of which a part was to be used for signage for the Jere Knight Trail. Since that time Heritage Conservancy staff and volunteer help have expanded the trail to a 1.8 mile loop trail. See the trail map below. Unfortunately Peter and Joan are not able to see the expanded trail on their former property because they were both involved in a horrific car crash that killed Joan in 2011. The trail and the property is a way however to forever honor what they gave to this community.

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The Trail starts on Slifer Valley Road a few hundred feet west of Walnut Lane. There is a pull off near the start of the trail but it will only accompany one or two cars. It is suggested that multiple cars should park on the side of Walnut Lane. There is a Nature Preserve sign at the beginning of the trail. There are presently pink ribbons marking the trail which is easy to follow. Dogs are allowed on the trail however the original agreement excludes horses.

Once you climb the steep bank the trail heads off to the left (East) along the old logging trail that runs above the Cooks Creek tributary. At the first fork in the trail you can bear left and cross under a large fallen tree and continue down to the stream. The trail continues East beside the stream and then takes a hard right turn back up the hill. As you climb up the hill bear left to follow the trail heading northwest until it turns inside a group of old growth trees. The trail turns 180 degrees and continues well above the creek and passes by a beautiful gorge on the Eastern side of the Fuller Preserve. From there the Trail winds up to a southern view of the neighbors large planted field before heading north towards the top of the Chestnut Grove in the center of the Fuller Preserve. The next section is a beautiful old growth area with little underbrush to block the view. After providing another view of the neighbor's fields the trail heads north back down the hill and turns west towards another old growth area. At the far west point there is a view of a small pond down at the bottom of the hill that can be seen when the leaves are down. Heading down from this high spot you cross a runoff ditch and then head back to a view of the Chestnut field before turning north. A sharp left turn on this section of the trail provides a last overlook of the creek at least when the leaves are down. The final loop takes you back to the start of the trail and down the steep bank to your car. Total distance is about 1.8 miles and takes about an hour of casual walking. The trail is mostly mowed but be sure to check for ticks.

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Trail Starts just West of Walnut Lane on Slifer Valley Road



You can see color pictures of the trail by googling “Jere Knight Trail Fuller Preserve” or type www.wpb-radon.com/jere.knight.trail.html

For more information about the trail you can call Bill Brodhead at 610 346-8484 or email at wmbrodhead@gmail.com

For Information about Heritage Conservancy events and volunteering to work on the trail or to be a part of the 3rd annual Art of Preservation event on September 20th contact: Shannon Fredebaugh at 215 345-7020 ext 104 or email at sfredebaugh@heritageconservancy.org

For more information on the American Chestnut Foundation and the work in the grove you can contact Tom Prugel at 610 346-6198 or email him at tmpugel1@verizon.net. The Penn State Science Coordinator for the North Central Region is Sara Fitzsimmons at w: [814 863 7192](tel:8148637192) or cell: [814 404 6013](tel:8144046013) or email at sff3@psu.edu