

# Green Burial Pittsburgh

A Nonprofit Cemetery Association

## Newsletter

Vol.1, No. 1, May 2008



### Our Mission is:

1. To promote **natural burial** in the Pittsburgh area as an environmentally friendly, lower-cost alternative to conventional burial practices or cremation,
2. To establish **conservation burial grounds** near Pittsburgh that only allow natural burial, and
3. To use a portion of cemetery income to help restore burial ground lands to a naturalized state and to acquire additional land for conservation.

**Natural burial** means no embalming fluids are used, caskets (if any) or shrouds are biodegradable, no burial vaults are used, burial is 2 ft. below the ground surface so decomposition nurtures plant growth, and grave markers (if any) are natural stones flat to the ground.

**Conservation burial grounds** are defined by the Green Burial Council as green cemeteries that involve an established conservation partner, which holds a conservation easement on the land, are operated in accordance with the principals of restoration ecology and meet the Green Burial Council Conservation Burial Ground Standard. ([Link](#)).

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### Biodegradable Coffins



Pine Box

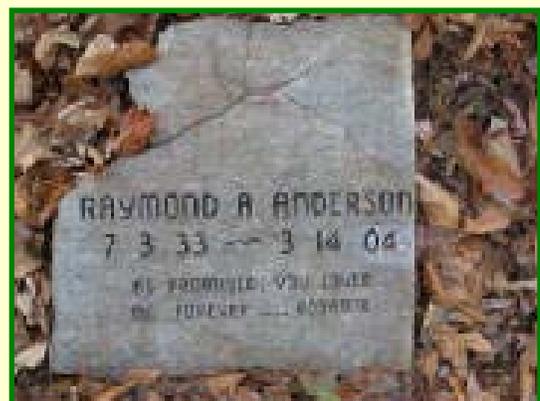


Cardboard Box



Wicker

### Natural Stone Marker



## Land Issues



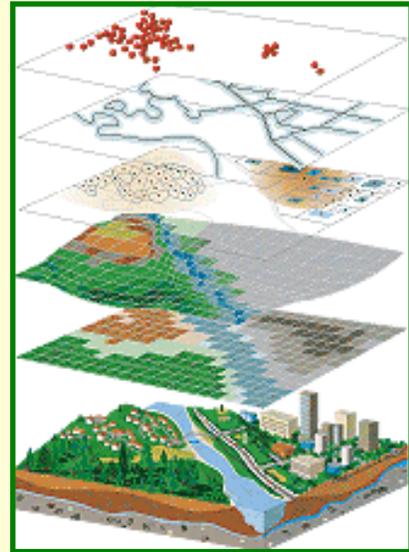
The first order of business in establishing a conservation burial ground is to have a piece of land in mind. Some key criteria for an ideal site might include:

- Size: 10 -100 acres (40 acres is ideal).
- For cost reasons, stay away from rapid residential or commercial growth areas.
- Zoned agricultural or low density residential.
- Easy and safe access to a public road.
- Flat area near road for parking.
- 4" to 5" of topsoil.
- Relatively flat or rolling hills.
- Non-hydric soils.
- Some open meadows or sparsely vegetated areas and not densely treed.
- Burial ground at least 100' from water that feeds a public water supply.
- Few or no immediate residential neighbors.
- An existing out-building or barn that could be used as a chapel would be a plus.

That's a nice wish list, but how do we find such a property?

**GIS Study at Pitt.** That's exactly the question we posed to Professors Hirtle and Karimi at the University of Pittsburgh's Computer Science Department. Turns out they are expert on geographic information systems (GIS), which integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geo-

graphically referenced information. Or in plain speak, they can plug our green burial land criteria into their computer and look at different parcels around the area to see which ones might match.



GIS Map Layers for Individual Criteria

The good news for GBP is that Professor Karimi has a grad student who is just looking for a project like this and she will be working for us on it this summer.

**Conservation Easements.** Once a target parcel has been found, we can then approach the landowner to see if he or she might be interested in conserving his or her land with a conservation easement held by a local land trust. Why would he or she do that?

A lot of reasons, really. First, a conservation easement on the land takes it off the tax rolls, which could be a big issue for retired farmland facing exploding real-estate taxes. Second, easements don't limit the owner's recreational use of the land. And the land can still be passed on to family members after the owner's death. Finally, since Green Burial Pittsburgh will take care of burial ground maintenance, the owner's maintenance costs for caring for the land may even be lowered.

In fact, some green cemeteries in the US got their land when a donor figured out it was his or her best financial interest to donate land through a conservation easement to create a conservation burial ground. Continued on page 3

## Land Issues, continued

**Pioneer Cemeteries.** Many cemeteries established before the Civil War were, in fact, green cemeteries. Since embalming was first needed to preserve bodies shipped home from battle, it was not widely used before then. And because no states laws require that bodies be embalmed (even now), most of these older cemeteries were free of toxic embalming fluids.



Today, many of these early 'green' cemeteries are 'mothballed' and have not been used for burial for many decades. Typically, they are maintained by members of the families buried there decades before. Pioneer cemeteries are sometimes good candidates for conversion to modern conservation burial grounds, even though they may be smaller than we would typically like.

Here's why:

- Since they are already zoned as cemeteries, zoning should be less of an issue.
- Neighbors already live near a cemetery, so should be less concerned about a change in use than might neighbors near a new green burial site.
- Family members maintaining the cemetery might be elderly and would welcome Green Burial Pittsburgh relieving them of this job, as long as the original cemetery is well maintained.

Green Burial Pittsburgh has identified nine such cemeteries in Allegheny County. We recently learned one of the will not work for us, but we are exploring our options with the others, and we'll start looking in other nearby counties.

**Other Land Options.** Perhaps GBP could work with a religious organization near Pittsburgh that shares our values and has available land to use for this purpose. A good example of this is The Honey Creek Woodlands ([Link](#)) conservation burial ground located on the grounds of The Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia.

Also, as we promote green burial to a wider audience, perhaps a landowner who shares our values will step forward to donate the land for our first site.

## GBP Allies

There are many organizations in SW Pennsylvania that should be natural allies of the green burial movement. The ones we have identified so far are:

- Sierra Club Allegheny Group ([Link](#))
- Allegheny Land Trust ([Link](#))
- Audubon Society of W. PA ([Link](#))
- Fox Chapel Area Land Trust ([Link](#))
- Friends of the Riverfront ([Link](#))
- Funeral Consumers Alliance of W. PA ([Link](#))
- Hollow Oak Land Trust ([Link](#))
- Montour Trail Council ([Link](#))
- Nine-Mile Run Watershed Association ([Link](#))
- North Area Environmental Council
- PennFuture ([Link](#))
- Pennsylvania Environmental Council ([Link](#))
- Pine Creek Land Conservation Trust ([Link](#))
- Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy ([Link](#))
- Saving Graves ([Link](#))
- South Fayette Conservation Group ([Link](#))
- Student Conservation Association ([Link](#))
- Sustainable Pittsburgh ([Link](#))
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy ([Link](#))

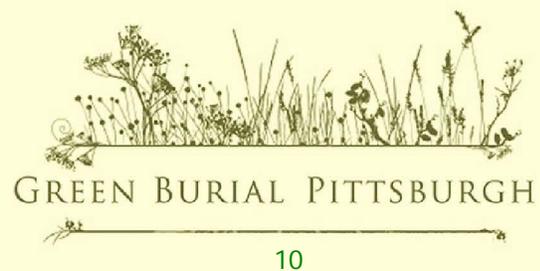
We have approached many of these organizations and have started to forge working relationships with a few of them, but we need your help with this.

If you know people at any of these organizations and are willing to introduce GBP to them, we provide you with background materials and then go with you to meet with them. We would be pleased to meet with them, make presentations at their meetings and help in whatever ways we can to support their conservation efforts.

Also, if you are aware of other organizations you think GBP should know about, please let us know.

## Logo Designs

We don't have a GBP logo yet, so we aim to fix that. Below are some candidates we are considering. We welcome your comments and suggestions on these. Also, we would like your suggestions on a name for this newsletter. Please email your logo choices and newsletter name suggestions to [mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org](mailto:mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org).



## Green Burial in the News

**Eco-friendly funerals.** "When people ask Dave Drapac about his plans for a cemetery where people can be buried without chemicals or even a coffin, their responses tend more toward "cool " than "yuck. " [more...](#)  
-Wisconsin State Journal, April 18, 2008

**Columbia man wants to bring ashes to ashes to the masses.** So in an effort to "go green," you bought the hybrid, insulated your house and ride your bike to work. You're done, right? Well, not quite. Bill Goddard of Columbia wants you to know there's another way to reduce your impact on the environment, and it involves returning to the Earth. That is, returning yourself to the Earth. [more...](#)  
-Columbia, MO Tribune, April 17, 2008

**Victoria funeral parlour promotes green burial option option.** People can now reduce their environmental footprint even after they've stopped walking the earth. A Victoria funeral parlour is promoting cardboard caskets covered in wood veneer and urns made of compressed cotton, rice and other biodegradable materials to provide the dearly departed and their loved ones a greener burial option. [more...](#)  
-Vancouver, BC Sun, 2008

**Eternally green: Woodland burials are a natural alternative to an embalmed afterlife.** There are green buildings, green cars, even green weddings. Now comes one of the latest, and ultimately last moves, environmentally conscious consumers can make -- green burials. [more...](#)  
-Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 30, 2008

**The green goodbye.** Eco-friendly burials eschew headstones, embalming and pricey caskets made from exotic imported wood. [more...](#)  
- Toronto Star, January 26, 2007

**Natural Burial: The Ultimate in Recycling.** When a loved one dies, environmental issues may not be top of mind for grieving family and friends. However, the average funeral and burial are very un-green. [more...](#)  
-Natural Life Magazine, March/April 2008

**Proposed 'green' cemetery deferred.** An often noisy crowd was not happy at Monday's zoning meeting when an application for a proposed natural or 'green' cemetery at 4600 Davis Road in Bibb County was deferred once again, this time when the vote was split 2-2. [more...](#)  
-The Macon (Georgia) Telegraph, April 15, 2008

## Links to US Natural Burial Grounds

[Cedar Brook Burial Ground](#), Limington, ME  
[Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve](#), Newfield, NY  
[Eternal Rest Memories Park](#), Dunedin, FL  
[Glendale Memorial Nature Preserve](#), Glendale, FL  
[Ramsey Creek Preserve](#), Westminster, SC (1st in the US)  
[Honey Creek Woodlands](#), Conyers, GA  
[Commonwealth Conservancy](#), Santa Fe, NM  
[Ethician Family Cemetery](#), Huntsville, TX  
[Forever Fernwood](#), Mill Valley, CA

## Volunteer Opportunities

We are always looking for volunteer help of many different kinds. Please contact us for information on current needs.

## Contact Us

We depending on word of mouth marketing reach others who may be interested in the benefits of natural burial and conservation burial grounds. Please forward a copy of this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested.

To subscribe to this newsletter, send an email to [mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org](mailto:mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org) with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

To unsubscribe from this newsletter, send an email to [mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org](mailto:mcquillin@greenburialpittsburgh.org) with the word UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

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