

June 24, 2007

To the editor;

The citizens of the Commonwealth will lose an irreplaceable natural treasure of statewide significance if the Rendell administration transfers 1800 acres of land along Spring Creek in Centre County to Benner Township and Penn State University. This property currently is part of the State Correctional Institution at Rockview.

In December 2006, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) presented a report to the Benner Township which discussed the value of Spring Creek Canyon for natural communities stating

"The Spring Creek Valley is an extremely unique area in the county and the state. The creek itself is a world-class trout fishery and hatchery, because it is enriched with minerals from the surrounding subsurface limestone geology, and because it is surrounded by natural vegetation that helps preserve the water quality."

The WPC pointed out that the Spring Creek Valley was given the highest ranking of Exceptional Significance as a Biological Diversity Area in the Centre County Natural Heritage Inventory report of 2002. Their field studies and research found that nine species of special concern have been documented to live in the valley within the past 10 years. Although the WPC report made 16 recommendations, the most significant were that: 1) invasive species should be controlled; 2) uplands adjacent to the canyon should be reforested; 3) the amount of roads should be reduced; 4) pesticides should be prohibited; and, 5) an ecologically-based management plan should be developed.

The WPC's recommendations for reforestation have not been supported by Benner Township, Penn State University, or DCNR. PSU intends to conduct production agriculture on the uplands, and conduct agricultural research, further endangering this ecologically unique area.

Juniata Valley Audubon is concerned for the long-term future of this property. It lies adjacent to an I-99 interchange, halfway between Bellefonte and State College. It takes little imagination to envision that some years into the future the upland portion of the property that is scheduled to be transferred to PSU will eventually become some sort of development, notwithstanding PSU's present interest in agriculture. Sportsmen's groups and conservationists have already announced their opposition to transferring the land to entities that do not have the mandate to protect land in its natural state.

To ensure that this land can never be sold for development, Juniata Valley Audubon supports transferring it to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The Game Commission needs this land to replace about 900 acres of Game Lands that Penn State adversely affected by the spraying of sewage. Instead of helping the Game Commission obtain the Rockview property, Penn State has actively thwarted them.

We ask that all Pennsylvanians join with us to ensure that the land is protected in perpetuity for wildlife by supporting the transfer of this land to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Juniata Valley Audubon asks our legislators to oppose any legislation that would transfer this land to Penn State and Benner Township. We ask that the Governor not be permitted to give this priceless land to Penn State and that the Game Commission be allowed to purchase this land.

Sincerely,

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