

Action Alert
The State Is Giving Away Our Land!

The Rendell Administration proposes to transfer 1800 acres of land along Spring Creek in Centre County to Benner Township and Penn State University. Benner Township is to receive the canyon portion of the property that includes Spring Creek to the top of the bluff. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has told Benner Township to act as if PSU is going to get the uplands above the bluff. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission will hold land at each end of the canyon, essentially being the gatekeeper. The attached map shows the approximate boundaries of the property outlined in blue.

We are 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 be some sort of development, notwithstanding PSU's present interest in agriculture.

To ensure this land can never be sold for development, the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club supports transferring this land to the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The Game Commission needs this land to replace about 900 acres of Game Lands Penn State adversely affected by spraying treated sewage on the property. The US Fish and Wildlife Service informed the Game Commission this violated Federal regulations as the use of the land for hunting and wildlife had been adversely affected. Instead of helping the Game Commission obtain the Rockview property, Penn State has actively thwarted them.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to make this parcel a major asset to the surrounding communities by revegetating the uplands with warm season grasses, that will provide habitat for grassland birds, pheasants, and other wildlife typically found in large expanses of grassland habitat. Shrub and grassland habitat will be a bird watchers paradise and protect the water quality in Spring Creek. Interpretive trails will educate young and old alike to the wonders of nature and providing a natural area in an urbanizing environment. Pheasant stocking will allow fall hunting. In short, this area could be a major asset to the community.

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.

We ask that you join with us to ensure that the land is protected in perpetuity for use by hunters and recreationists, as well as providing outstanding habitat for wildlife, by supporting the transfer of this land to the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Time is of the essence. Senator Corman has draft legislation that would give this land to Penn State and Benner Township, but he has assured the conservation community he would not move legislation until there is consensus.

Representative Hanna strongly opposes the Game Commission receiving this land and has stated this land should be transferred as soon as possible to Penn State and Benner Township.

Please contact your legislator and ask them to oppose any legislation that would transfer this land to Penn State and Benner Township. Ask that the Governor not be permitted to give this priceless land to Penn State. Ask that the Game Commission be allowed to purchase this land. The Game Commission has actually offered to pay twice the amount Penn State has offered.

Please contact Ed Perry at 814-466-7060 or email at ep1966@comcast.net to join our coalition or help spread the word.

Background Information

For the past 3 years, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), at the direction of the Rendell Administration, has been attempting to transfer about 1800 acres of land owned by Rockview Penitentiary, to Penn State University (PSU), and Benner Township. Rockview Penitentiary has owned this land for many years and has farmed the upland portion in the past. However, but except for a small area, most of the property has not been farmed for over 10 years.

The property to be transferred extends roughly from Fisherman's Paradise about 2 ½ miles upstream to Rock Run Road, and includes the Spring Creek Canyon and about 1400 acres of uplands adjacent to the canyon (see attached map). Benner Township is scheduled to receive the canyon portion of the property, extending from Spring Creek to the top of the bluff. The DCNR has told Benner Township to act as if PSU is going to get the uplands above the bluff. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission will hold land at each end of the canyon, essentially being the gatekeeper.

The DCNR gave \$30,000 to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) to produce a report that addressed the natural resource values of the property. In December 2006, WPC presented their 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. The DCNR now proposes to spend more state funds for a grant to develop a Master Plan for the area.

Pending Legislation would transfer land marked with #1 to Penn State University. The area marked as #6 would be transferred to Benner Township.

