

Groups complete protection of 1,400 acres of Wilkes-Barre Mountain

Staff report

Regional conservation partners North Branch Land Trust, Earth Conservancy, and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation of Natural Resources (DCNR) have finalized the conservation of 1,400 acres in Hanover and Newport township known as Wilkes-Barre Mountain, including the Hanover Reservoir.

Now under the stewardship of DCNR's Bureau of Forestry, Little Wilkes-Barre Mountain has officially joined the Pinchot State Forest system and will provide natural connectivity in perpetuity. These acres add significantly to the existing greenway corridor along the Penobscot Mountain ridgetop and help connect the Bureau of Forestry lands at Moca-naqua and Arbutus Peak.

The project area also adds to a greenway corridor that spans approximately 80 miles running northeast from Luzerne and Carbon counties to Pike County and the Delaware River.

"Earth Conservancy is pleased to continue its partnership with the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and North Branch Land Trust in conserving local forests for public benefit," said President/CEO Terence J. Ostrowski. "This project — totaling 1,400 acres — will preserve the undisturbed ridgeline of the Wilkes-Barre Mountains between Sugar Notch Gap and Alden Mountain Road and protect the gem in those woods — the Hanover Reservoir. All will now be part of the Pinchot State Forest."

Ostrowski said the project also supports Earth Conservancy's mission of allocating 10,000 of its original 16,000 acres of former Blue Coal land for greenspace and recreation.

"We now are within a few hundred acres of that goal," Ostrowski said. "Wild areas like these are integral to the character of Lower South Valley. By transferring ownership to the Commonwealth, we help safeguard the region's natural beauty and its ecosystems and improve its quality of life."

This important tract protects habitat and threatened or endangered species including the Indiana Bat and the Northern Long-eared Bat, a cold-water fishery, and scenic mountain highlands. The mosaic landscape consists of a mix of dry oak heath and hemlock conifer forested woodlands, reclaimed fields from past surface mining and ridgetop rock outcroppings. Water features on the property include cold-water tributaries of the Susquehanna River, the Hanover Reservoir, and various wetlands and vernal pools.

"North Branch Land Trust is thrilled to have a hand in conserving this stunning ridgeline," said Executive Director Ellen Ferretti. "The diversity of habitats, wildlife, and plants, in this tract is a wonderful representation of magnificent Northeastern Pennsylvania's natural resources. The Hanover



Wilkes-Barre Mountain, including the Hanover Reservoir.

Reservoir is an area of adventure and nostalgia for many members of the local community. We are overjoyed to see these lands and waters conserved in perpetuity for the benefit of future generations."

The public benefits from conservation of this site in perpetuity are numerous: promote groundwater infiltration by retaining a permeable forested tract; protect reclaimed surface mined areas that if disturbed could create acid mine runoff; protect cold water fishery and brook trout habitats that drain directly into the Susquehanna River; protect wetlands, floodplains, and seasonal vernal pools; protect known critical habitat for threatened or endangered species; and protect environmentally sensitive lands for health, habitat, and biodiversity for future generations.

"As the steward of Pennsylvania's public lands, we are excited to join our partners in acquiring this land for conservation within Pinchot State Forest," said Pinchot District Forester Nicholas Lylo. "This partnership gives us the opportunity to sustain healthy forests, protect important wildlife habitats and expand recreation opportunities for locals and visitors to the region looking to experience the majesty of Penn's Woods."

Living adjacent to a portion of the new State Forest tract, Chris and Gail Stasko of Warrior Run said, "We couldn't ask for better neighbors. We've known this vista for almost forty years, and over all that time the view has only been getting better and better. Rocky strippings have been reclaimed by this beautiful forest that is enjoyed by so many in the community. We love it for its accessibility. We love to see the porcupines, the deer, the bear, the turkeys, all the wildlife that call it home. We are thrilled that it's in great hands and that it can continue to be enjoyed by many in stewardship of a beautiful future."

Funding assistance has been provided by DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Keystone Recreation Park and Conservation Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund as well as



Submitted Photo

A \$488,947 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), awarded to Vincent Farallo, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology at The University of Scranton, will allow for the participation of 30 or more undergraduate students, who will learn cutting-edge respirometry techniques as they research the physiology and chemical ecology of poison frogs.

generous donations from Earth Conservancy.

DCNR: 2024 River of the Year nominations open through Nov. 10

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn this week announced that Pennsylvanians are being asked to nominate their favorite waterway for the 2024 River of the Year.

"For several years we have seen an increasing number of people seeking outdoor recreation opportunities and those new users continue to express a desire to spend more time immersed in nature," Dunn said. "With so many additional people enjoying the outdoors and connecting to the Commonwealth's waterways in droves, recognition of River of the Year continues to grow in value and prestige each year. I look forward to this year's competition and seeing public support of our beautiful water trails as people select the Pennsylvania 2024 River of the Year."

The Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR) administers the River of the Year program with funding from DCNR.

The nomination period is open through 5 p.m., Friday, Nov. 10. Selected nominations will be voted on by the public beginning in late November.

For more information about the River of the Year visit the POWR website, or to nominate a river or waterway visit the Pennsylvania Environmental Council website.

Pennsylvania's River of the Year is an honor designed to elevate public

awareness of specific rivers and recognize important conservation needs and achievements. River of the Year designations have been presented annually since 1983.

"POWR is excited to announce the opening of the nomination period once again for the 2024 Pennsylvania River of the Year," said POWR spokesperson Janet Sweeney. "River of the Year is a highly anticipated program that highlights the Commonwealth's waterways. We look forward to another chance for all Pennsylvanians to support their favorite waterway in friendly competition with others across the Commonwealth."

All Pennsylvania waterways are eligible for nomination, except for the past five ROY winners below:

2023 – Susquehanna North Branch
2022 – French Creek
2021 – Shenango River
2020 – Lackawanna River

2019 – Clarion River
After a waterway is chosen, local groups implement a year-round slate of activities and events to celebrate the river, including a River of the Year Sojourn. The nominating organization of the winning river will receive a \$10,000 leadership grant to help fund their River of the Year activities.

University of Scranton professor is awarded nearly half-million dollar grant

Vincent Farallo, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology, was awarded a \$488,947 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to research the physiology and chemi-

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cal ecology of poison frogs.

The funding for the three-year project will allow for the participation of 30 or more undergraduate students, who will learn cutting-edge respirometry techniques as they work with faculty members.

The study will also allow for the development of a frog breeding colony, which can be used for this — as well as future — research projects.

"Amphibians are especially susceptible to climate change as their physiologies, specifically respiration and other aspects of metabolism, are dependent on specific temperature and moisture conditions," said Dr. Farallo, explaining that Neotropical poison frogs in the family Dendrobatidae, which will be used for the study, "also have specialized physiologies that allow them to sequester dietary alkaloids to be used as chemical defenses."

"Poison frogs, many of which are lethal in the wild, are no longer toxic in captivity," said Dr. Farallo, explaining that their diet in the wild of ants and mites, enables their toxicity through a process called alkaloid sequestration. The frogs' diet in captivity of fruit flies does not allow for them to maintain poisonous toxicity. The frogs do, however, retain their unique, bright coloring.

The study will allow for controlled levels of alkaloids to be reintroduced to the dendrobatid frogs and then measure how alkaloid sequestration by the frogs impacts ecologically relevant physiological processes, such as metabolism.

Dr. Farallo will train undergraduate students at Scranton to use sophisticated equipment to measure the frogs' metabolism. They will collaborate with co-investigator Ralph Saporito, Ph.D., a chemical ecologist and professor of biology at

John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio, and undergraduate students at John Carroll for chemical analysis.

"The breeding of colonies of frogs will provide long-term capacity and flexibility to enable future University students and faculty to conduct multiple research projects for years to come, long after this project has concluded," said Dr. Farallo, who noted that the colonies will also allow for future community outreach programming with area schools and community groups. "The charismatic nature of the frogs will also allow for outreach events, engaging the community to learn about ecophysiology and conservation."

DCNR accepting nominations for 2024 Pennsylvania Trail of the Year

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn this week announced that Pennsylvanians are being asked to nominate their favorite trail for the 2024 Trail of the Year.

"We are eager to receive applications for the 2024 Trail of the Year and to once again highlight Pennsylvania's top trail," Dunn said. "The Commonwealth has some of the best natural resources in the nation and uplifting our trails is important to the future of outdoor recreation. I look forward to the competition and seeing which trail comes out on top."

If you know of a trail that provides unique opportunities, encourages and celebrates diverse user groups or enhances your community, please nominate it for the 2024 Trail of the Year. For consideration, a nomination form and supporting documentation must be submitted online by Nov. 10, 2023.

Each year, the Pennsylvania Trails Advisory Committee (PTAC), designates a Trail of the Year to help build enthusiasm and support for trails and raise public awareness about the value of Pennsylvania's Trail network. The Advisory Committee is charged with implementing the development of a statewide land and water trail network to facilitate recreation, transportation, and healthy lifestyles for all. Pennsylvania is home to over 12,000 miles of trails.

The winning trail will be recognized in a news release by DCNR, a commemorative poster for statewide distribution, a trailhead marker along the trail, and a grant for educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection on the trail.

The Mount Jewett to Kinzua Bridge (MJ2KB) Trail is Pennsylvania's 2023 Trail of the Year.

Visit the Pennsylvania Trail of the Year web page for more information about where to submit the form and supporting materials. The Trail of the Year will be announced in early 2024.

Reach Bill O'Boyle at 570-991-6118 or on Twitter @TLBillOBoyle