

**JOHN A. LAWRENCE**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

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Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
John Hallas  
Director of State Parks  
Rachel Carson Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

February 6, 2025

Dear Director Hallas –

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the development of a Final Conceptual Master Plan for Big Elk Creek State Park.

My comment will focus on priorities identified by the community during the public participation process over the past 18 months. These priorities, which especially speak to conservation needs and open space considerations, have been consistently expressed in public surveys sponsored by DCNR, town hall meetings, and the Big Elk Creek Task Force – which was assembled to provide input on the Master Plan proposal.

**I. REDESIGNATION OF BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK TO BIG ELK CREEK PRESERVE**

The redesignation of Big Elk Creek State Park to Big Elk Creek Preserve is foundational to any Master Plan that follows. Just as one cannot properly determine which way to travel if the destination is unknown, the Master Plan for Big Elk cannot be properly determined until the designation of the former Strawbridge properties under DCNR's control is resolved. Preserve redesignation has broad support from the Task Force, elected state officials, county government, local government, and local stakeholders.

**A MAJORITY OF THE TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED BY DCNR SUPPORTS PRESERVE STATUS**

During the six meetings of the Task Force, participants spent a great deal of time and energy discussing redesignation of the property from a State Park to a Preserve. After a tremendous amount of discussion, a majority of the Task Force signed a written statement concurring that any Master Plan must include “state redesignation from “Big Elk Creek State Park” to “Big Elk Creek Preserve.”<sup>1</sup> Signatories to this document include Task Force members Representative John Lawrence, Antea Consorto, Eileen Butler, James Nowland, Senator Andrew Dinniman, Carmela Ciliberti, Judy Jordan, Michael Corcoran, Gary Schroeder, Henrietta Bellman, and Kevin Warren.<sup>2</sup>

The issue is more than one of semantics. At the Task Force meetings, both Task Force members and DCNR staff agreed that DCNR manages a state Preserve differently than a state Park. While the term ‘preserve’ is not defined in statute, DCNR has stewarded lands designated as a state Preserve with a focus on low-impact recreation and limited infrastructure. Redesignation to Preserve status is of great value to many members of the Task Force.

#### CHESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SUPPORT PRESERVE STATUS

The Chester County Commissioners unanimously support Preserve status for Big Elk.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn dated December 10, 2024, the Commissioners state, *“White Clay Creek Preserve can, and should, serve as a model for retaining land as open space. Reverting Big Elk Creek State Park into a Preserve will benefit the citizens of Chester County and the Commonwealth.”*<sup>4</sup>

#### CHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS SUPPORTS PRESERVE STATUS

The Chester County Association of Township Officials supports Preserve status.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn dated December 14, 2024, CCATO states, *“We strongly endorse [efforts] to convert Big Elk Creek State Park into a Preserve.”*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> January 21, 2025 Statement from Members of the Big Elk Creek State Park Task Force, Bullet Point #1. Included as Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Letter Dated December 10, 2024 from The County of Chester, Office of the Commissioners. Included as Appendix B

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Letter Dated December 14, 2024 from Chester County Association of Township Officials. Included as Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

## OXFORD REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE SUPPORTS PRESERVE STATUS

The Oxford Regional Planning Committee supports Preserve status.<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn dated December 13, 2024, ORPC states, *“Oxford Region Planning Committee...urg[es] you to convert Big Elk Creek State Park into the preserve status that characterized this property long before DCNR’s acquisition of the property – a status consistent with the principles governing White Clay Creek Preserve (under which it had been purchased and managed), consistent with...the expectations of the residents of our Region.”*<sup>8</sup>

## ELK TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS SUPPORT PRESERVE STATUS

Big Elk Creek State Park is almost entirely within the borders of Elk and Franklin Townships in Chester County. In a letter dated November 4, 2024 to Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn, the Elk Township Supervisors unanimously state, *“the Elk Township Board of Supervisors strongly advocates for the return of a Preserve designation. We ask that DCNR reconsider its intentions for this valuable resource and publicly announce a plan to retain it as a Preserve.”*<sup>9</sup> In a letter dated November 20, 2024 to Secretary Dunn, the Franklin Township Supervisors unanimously state, *“the Franklin Township Board of Supervisors strongly requests the redesignation of Big Elk Creek State Park to a State Preserve with the understand[ing] of what that word means: the preservation of Big Elk Creek as a natural and lightly developed refuge for all.”*<sup>10</sup>

## SURROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES SUPPORT PRESERVE STATUS

Municipalities close to Big Elk Creek State Park, including East Nottingham Township, London Britain Township, Lower Oxford Township, Oxford Borough, and Penn Township all support Preserve status for Big Elk Creek. Letters from each municipality to Governor Shapiro and/or Secretary Dunn are included in Appendix G.

## FORMER LANDOWNER GEORGE STRAWBRIDGE SUPPORTS PRESERVATION OF THE PROPERTY HE SOLD WHICH IS NOW BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK

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<sup>7</sup> Letter Dated December 13, 2024 from Oxford Region Planning Committee. Included as Appendix D.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Letter Dated November 4, 2024 from Elk Township Board of Supervisors. Included as Appendix E.

<sup>10</sup> Letter Dated November 20, 2024 from Franklin Township. Included as Appendix F.

DCNR acquired nearly all of the property presently designated as Big Elk Creek State Park from George Strawbridge over a period of years. The Conservation Fund served an important intermediary role in the acquisition of the properties. In a letter dated January 25, 2024, Mr. Strawbridge states, *“while I was approached to sell this property many times over the years, I waited until I was able to broker a deal with The Conservation Fund whose purpose in securing the land was in line with my own ideals - to preserve open space.”*<sup>11</sup> He adds, *“It is my hope that...these lands [will] remain preserved in their most natural state possible which is in line with other lands in the immediate area...”*<sup>12</sup>

IN MY CAPACITY AS STATE REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE BIG ELK CREEK AREA, I HAVE CONSISTENTLY ASKED DCNR TO REDESIGNATE BIG ELK CREEK AS A PRESERVE

While I do not typically refer to myself as a supporting source, it is important that the letters I sent to you and Secretary Dunn are included as part of my comment on the proposed Big Elk Creek Master Plan. With this in mind, I stated support for Preserve status for Big Elk in letters to DCNR dated November 7, 2023; November 14, 2023; January 16, 2024; April 1, 2024; and July 10, 2024.<sup>13</sup> My correspondence to you outlines the reasons that Preserve status is important to me, the community, and various local stakeholders.

At the August 27, 2024 Task Force meeting, I offered a proposal to redesignate Big Elk Creek State Park as Big Elk Creek Preserve.<sup>14</sup> This proposal included a series of justifications for Preserve status. I have attached this document as an appendix to my comment and strongly encourage DCNR to consider it, as it was well received by many at the August meeting.

RETIRED STATE SENATOR ANDY DINNIMAN SUPPORTS PRESERVE STATUS

Senator Dinniman has been vocal in his support for designating Big Elk Creek as a Preserve. In a January 15, 2025 article published in the Chester County Press, Senator Dinniman clearly lays out the case for Preserve status, even quoting DCNR

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from George Strawbridge, Jr. dated January 25, 2024. Included as Appendix H.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Letters from Rep. Lawrence to DCNR. Included as Appendix I.

<sup>14</sup> Redesignating Big Elk Creek State Park as Big Elk Creek State Preserve, by Rep. John Lawrence. Included as Appendix J. Viewable at: <https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2024/Lawrence%20BEC%20Preserve%20Proposal%20Final.pdf>

officials stating the Strawbridge land would be added to the White Clay Creek Preserve.<sup>15</sup> This article in its entirety is included as Appendix K.

#### DCNR'S OWN YEARS-LONG, UNQUESTIONED POSITION ON BIG ELK CREEK WAS OFFICIAL DESIGNATION AS A STATE PRESERVE

Over a period of more than ten years, DCNR acquired adjoining properties from George Strawbridge and added them to the White Clay Creek Preserve. DCNR apportioned the White Clay Creek Preserve into two distinct areas known as the "Big Elk Creek Section" and the "White Clay Creek Section."<sup>16</sup> Both areas were displayed on DCNR's map of the White Clay Creek Preserve.<sup>17</sup> The general public and all associated stakeholders saw these plain actions by DCNR in light of the understanding that the Strawbridge properties would have Preserve status.

DCNR's sole entry to the Pennsylvania Bulletin regarding what is now Big Elk Creek State Park noted *"the property is adjacent to the Department's White Clay Creek Preserve and will provide passive recreation such a hiking, hunting, and wildlife watching."*<sup>18</sup> DCNR goes on to state, *"No recreational facilities are proposed to be developed...goals in acquiring the property include the conservation of extensive and diverse critical natural resources..."*<sup>19</sup> This statement is completely in keeping with the understanding of the general public and all associated stakeholders that the Strawbridge properties would have Preserve status.

DCNR told the public that Big Elk Creek would have Preserve status on multiple occasions. In a July 2020 Philadelphia Inquirer article entitled "1,000 acres once owned by Campbell's Soup Scion are now a Pa. Preserve," DCNR outlines initial plans for Big Elk. The article states *"DCNR will manage the land as part of the Big Elk Creek section of the White Clay Creek Preserve...since the property is part of a preserve, its*

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<sup>15</sup> Standing United Against DCNR's 'Bait and Switch' in plans for Big Elk Creek Preserve. Andrew Dinniman, Chester County Press, January 15, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> As of February 6, 2025, these designations still appear on DCNR's White Clay Creek Preserve website. Included as Appendix L. See:

<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dcnr/recreation/where-to-go/state-parks/find-a-park/white-clay-creek-preserve/history.html>

The designations also appeared on DCNR's Big Elk Creek website as recently as January 22, 2025. DCNR's archived Big Elk Creek website as of this date is viewable at:

[https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2025/4174\\_001%20\(003\).pdf](https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2025/4174_001%20(003).pdf)

<sup>17</sup> DCNR White Clay Creek Preserve map included as Appendix M and archived at:

<https://www.replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2022/DCNR%20WCCP%20Map%20Nov%208%202023.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Pennsylvania Bulletin, Vol. 49, No. 3, January 19, 2019, pg 284-285. Included as Appendix N.

<sup>19</sup> Id.

*use will be more restricted than a typical state park.”<sup>20</sup> In reference to Big Elk, DCNR park manager Lexi Rose is quoted stating, “...you’re not going to see too many overcrowded picnic areas or a swimming pool. A preserve is much more low-impact.”<sup>21</sup> (emphasis added.)*

In an extensive March 2020 PennLIVE.com writeup, DCNR Statewide Manager for Land Projects and Acquisitions K. Mike Redding elaborated on DCNR’s plans for Big Elk, stating that the area, “*will remain largely undeveloped for some time to come. And, it will always remain a place designated for low-impact recreation ...we plan to work with local partners to develop a plan for the land and how it fits into the landscape and adjoining open space in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland...the main attraction [at Big Elk] is the low impact recreational component itself. The quietness that a non-developed park brings has benefits for those wishing to explore nature without the development typically associated with a day-use or overnight park.*”<sup>22</sup> The article goes on to state that “*Under DCNR’s ownership, the Strawbridge properties will be managed within the White Clay [Creek] Preserve Elk Creek Unit.*”<sup>23</sup>

This lengthy statement from Mr. Redding clearly delineates DCNR’s position - a position that all stakeholders involved in the acquisition process clearly understood – namely, that the Strawbridge properties would (almost) connect Fair Hill Natural Resources Area in Maryland and White Clay Creek Preserve/Park in Pennsylvania and Delaware to create a unified, tri-state preserved wilderness area. Senator Dinniman affirms this in his January 2025 Chester County Press article, stating “*by combining these areas...we would be creating the largest land preserve between Washington DC and New York City.*”<sup>24</sup>

## THE PUBLIC’S SUPPORT FOR PRESERVE STATUS AT BIG ELK CREEK IS DISPLAYED ACROSS MULTIPLE CHANNELS UTILIZED BY DCNR TO GATHER PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK

DCNR’s stated guidelines for the development of a Master Site Development Plan require consideration of “*priorities identified by the community during the public*

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<sup>20</sup> 1000 acres once owned by Cambell’s Soup scion are now a Pa. Preserve. Frank Kummer, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 21, 2020. Included as Appendix O.

<sup>21</sup> 1000 acres once owned by Cambell’s Soup scion are now a Pa. Preserve. Frank Kummer, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 21, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Land deal grows Pennsylvania preserve to 3000 acres. Marcus Schneck, PennLIVE.com, March 10, 2020. Included as Appendix P.

<sup>23</sup> Id.

<sup>24</sup> Standing United Against DCNR’s ‘Bait and Switch’ in plans for Big Elk Creek Preserve. Andrew Dinniman, Chester County Press, January 15, 2025.

*participation process.*"<sup>25</sup> At a minimum, DCNR's public participation process requires a Study Committee, at least two Public Meetings, and Key Person Interviews. Optionally, DCNR can survey the general public to gather additional feedback.

Here, these public participation requirements took the form of the Big Elk Creek Task Force, back-to-back town hall meetings in late 2023 and early 2024, and numerous one-on-one meetings with local stakeholders over the past year. DCNR also executed two surveys of the general public to gather additional feedback. These mechanisms consistently show very strong support for managing Big Elk Creek in concert with the principles established at White Clay Creek Preserve over the past 40 years.

Broad and deep support for Preserve status at Big Elk is consistently displayed across multiple public participation forums. DCNR must consider preserve status as a priority identified by the community during the public participation process.

Given:

- Support for Preserve redesignation for Big Elk Creek comes from a majority of DCNR's Big Elk Creek Task Force, and
- Support for Preserve redesignation for Big Elk Creek comes from Chester County, the Chester County Association of Township Officials, the Oxford Region Planning Commission, municipalities within and adjacent to Big Elk Creek, and current and former state elected officials, and
- DCNR's original clearly stated position for what is now Big Elk Creek State Park, repeated to elected officials, the press, and the general public was that Big Elk would be managed as a Preserve, and
- DCNR's own duly established mechanisms for public participation show broad and deep support for Preserve status at Big Elk,

**DCNR should immediately redesignate Big Elk Creek State Park as Big Elk Creek Preserve.**

Additionally, as DCNR manages a state Preserve differently than a state Park, the Preserve redesignation issue should be resolved *prior* to the development of a Master Plan proposal.

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<sup>25</sup> Master Site Development Plan Guidelines and Example Scope of Work. Page 1. Viewable on DCNR's website at:  
[https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/PDFProvider.ashx?action=PDFStream&docID=1737924&chksum=&revision=1&docName=SOW+Guidelines+-+Master+Site+Plan+\(MSDP\)&nativeExt=doc&PromptToSave=True&Size=748032&ViewerMode=1&overlay=0](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/PDFProvider.ashx?action=PDFStream&docID=1737924&chksum=&revision=1&docName=SOW+Guidelines+-+Master+Site+Plan+(MSDP)&nativeExt=doc&PromptToSave=True&Size=748032&ViewerMode=1&overlay=0)

DCNR cannot fully evaluate a Master Plan for Big Elk until the designation issue is resolved.

## II. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE BIG ELK CREEK MASTER PLAN

As noted on the attached January 21, 2025 statement from members of the Big Elk Creek State Park Task Force, I encourage DCNR to include the following points within any Master Plan document for Big Elk Creek:

- A clear recognition that DCNR will honor their commitments made to the federal government, state officials, county officials, township officials, non-profit organizations, and the public at large over the previous fifteen years to steward Big Elk Creek Preserve solely as a wilderness area, limited to low-intensity, passive recreational opportunities in keeping with the DCNR’s management of the White Clay Creek Preserve since 1984.

Comments: As previously stated, local stakeholders, elected officials, and the general public desire assurance from DCNR about plans to steward Big Elk in the years to come. Any Master Plan for Big Elk should closely hew to DCNR’s management of the White Clay Creek Preserve for the past forty years and live up to the commitments DCNR made to stakeholders during the land acquisition process.

- A clear recognition that significant infrastructure, including overnight accommodations and concessions, are inappropriate given the commitment to low-intensity, passive recreation opportunities within a wilderness area.

Comments: DCNR broke the public’s trust during the November 2023 presentation at Lincoln University by offering a series of proposals for Big Elk Creek that stunned many in the community. Proposed overnight accommodations and infrastructure buildout concepts were the antithesis of stewardship commitments made by DCNR for more than a decade. Since then, DCNR has waffled in public statements on the future of overnight accommodations at Big Elk, using language such as “*overnight accommodations are off the table for now.*”

Additionally, DCNR falsely overstated public support for overnight accommodations at Big Elk Creek at several public meetings and continues to



present these same misrepresentations on their public website as of the date of this comment.<sup>26</sup>

## DCNR'S MISLEADING CLAIM OF MASSIVE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS AT BIG ELK

Referencing online public surveys conducted in Summer 2023, DCNR claims:

*Statewide survey data from the request for public input on Big Elk Creek State Park indicates a strong interest in expanded overnight opportunities. More than 64 percent of respondents supported camping at Big Elk Creek State Park.<sup>27</sup>*

## A REVIEW OF RAW DATA FROM PUBLIC SURVEYS COMMISSIONED BY DCNR SHOWS SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS AT BIG ELK CREEK, IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO DCNR'S CLAIMS

After obtaining the raw data from DCNR's Summer 2023 surveys via a Right To Know request, I reviewed the results of the comments submitted by the general public. An examination of the raw data from these surveys shows a much different picture than the supposed groundswell of support claimed by DCNR.

DCNR failed to ask survey participants if they desired overnight accommodations at all, instead inferring DCNR had already decided to include such accommodations in their plans. Instead, survey participants could only select what type of overnight accommodations they preferred.<sup>28</sup> Despite the poorly worded

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<sup>26</sup> Big Elk Creek State Park Planning Process Frequently Asked Questions, Last accessed February 6, 2025. Viewable at DCNR's website:

[https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL\\_PlanningFAQ.pdf](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL_PlanningFAQ.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Big Elk Creek State Park Planning Process Frequently Asked Questions, Page 3 of 6, Last accessed February 6, 2025. Viewable at DCNR's website:

[https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL\\_PlanningFAQ.pdf](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL_PlanningFAQ.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> DCNR took two public surveys during this timeframe. The results from these surveys are available on my website. For the specific questions referenced, see page 12 of the first survey available here:

[https://www.replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2022/1481\\_001.pdf](https://www.replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2022/1481_001.pdf)

and page 12 of the second survey available here:

[https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2022/1480\\_001.pdf](https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2022/1480_001.pdf)

question, many survey participants took advantage of a “freeform comment” section to make their views known. Fully 72% of those entering freeform comments specified they wanted no overnight accommodations of any sort.<sup>29</sup>

Further, the potential for overnight accommodations at Big Elk Creek was a key concern of over 500 residents who packed a Kemblesville town hall meeting with DCNR in early 2024. At that town hall, Secretary Dunn told the crowd that overnight accommodations were off the table “for now.” The uneasiness felt by this less-than-certain stance only compounded after a story on Big Elk Creek appeared in an Erie newspaper quoting Director Hallas stating, “We are going to continue to assess and study the opportunities for overnight opportunities in the future.”<sup>30</sup>

DCNR’s misleading use of its own survey results, compounded with DCNR’s differing public statements in different forums regarding the future of overnight accommodations at Big Elk directly led to tremendous uncertainty and public unease. The proposed Master Plan provides DCNR with an opportunity to reverse course and reassure the general public that their voices have been heard. The Master Plan must leave no doubt in the public mind on the Department’s stance on construction of significant infrastructure within Big Elk. The Master Plan offers DCNR an opportunity to reassure a wary public by putting commitments regarding current and future infrastructure in writing. DCNR must clearly and unequivocally state a firm position on overnight accommodations at Big Elk Creek in line with the clear intentions of both the Big Elk Creek Task Force and the general public as confirmed by DCNR’s own surveys.

- A clear recognition that DCNR will consult with Elk and Franklin Townships prior to constructing any infrastructure and honor both Township’s zoning codes.

Comments: I believe elected officials in Elk and Franklin Townships desire a good working relationship with DCNR. Previous actions taken by DCNR,

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<sup>29</sup> Both of DCNR’s online surveys offered an opportunity to add freeform comments. The freeform comments referenced from the first survey are viewable beginning on page 27 of the file available here: [https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2023/1495\\_001.pdf](https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2023/1495_001.pdf). The freeform comments referenced from the second survey are viewable beginning on page 41 of the file available here: [https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2023/1494\\_001.pdf](https://replawrence.com/Display/SiteFiles/420/OtherDocuments/2023/1494_001.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> A look at what's coming to Susquehanna Riverlands, Big Elk and Vosburg Neck state parks, GoErie.com. By Brian Whipkey, October 2, 2024. Viewable at: <https://www.goerie.com/story/sports/outdoors/2024/10/02/what-are-the-three-new-state-parks-in-pennsylvania-dcnr-camping-hiking-fishing-hunting-boating/75471542007/>

including disrespect for Elk Township's Springlawn Trail easement and Franklin Township's Mt. Olivet Road, have contributed to unnecessary angst. Additionally, DCNR has dismissed contentions that township zoning ordinances apply to their plans for Big Elk Creek.<sup>31</sup>

DCNR must take this opportunity to reset their working relationship with local municipalities. Instead of bulldozing local zoning regulations, the Master Plan for Big Elk Creek must include a clear commitment to honor respective Township zoning codes, with assurances that DCNR will consult with the Townships prior to construction of any infrastructure.

I strongly encourage DCNR to add these considerations to the Master Plan for Big Elk Creek.

Kind Regards –



John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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<sup>31</sup> Big Elk Creek State Park Planning Process Frequently Asked Questions. Page 2 of 6. Available at: [https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL\\_PlanningFAQ.pdf](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=7977336&DocName=BIEL_PlanningFAQ.pdf)

# APPENDIX A

JANUARY 21, 2025 STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE  
BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK TASK FORCE

We, the undersigned members of the Big Elk Creek State Park Task Force, appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the inception of the Master Plan for this treasured place. We believe the Master Plan must include the following:

- State redesignation from "Big Elk Creek State Park" to "Big Elk Creek Preserve."
- A clear recognition that DCNR will honor their commitments made to the federal government, state officials, county officials, township officials, non-profit organizations, and the public at large over the previous fifteen years to steward Big Elk Creek Preserve solely as a wilderness area, limited to low-intensity, passive recreational opportunities in keeping with the DCNR's management of the White Clay Creek Preserve since 1984.
- A clear recognition that significant infrastructure, including overnight accommodations and concessions, are inappropriate given the commitment to low-intensity, passive recreation opportunities within a wilderness area.
- A clear recognition that DCNR will consult with Elk and Franklin Townships prior to constructing any infrastructure and honor both Township's zoning codes.

We believe that these commitments, recognizing the unique resources of the area and respecting the similar nature of the adjoining Fair Hill Natural Resources Area, White Clay Creek Preserve, Peacedale Preserve, and other locally preserved property will best serve the environment, the community, and the state for generations to come.

Signed,

Rep. John Lawrence

Henrietta Bellman (#11)

Antea Consorto #15

[Signature]

Elizabeth M. Butler #16

Jan Paul #10

[Signature]

Caroline Celebati

Judy Jordan (Elk)

Michael Coonan (New London Twp)

Gary Schroeder

# APPENDIX B



# THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



**COMMISSIONERS**  
Josh Maxwell  
Marian D. Moskowitz  
Eric M. Roe

**OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS**  
313 W. Market Street, Suite 6202  
P.O. Box 2748  
West Chester, PA 19380-0991  
(610) 344-6100

December 10, 2024

Honorable Josh Shapiro  
Governor of Pennsylvania  
501 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Honorable Cindy Dunn, Secretary  
Pennsylvania DCNR  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

**RE: Big Elk Creek State Park**

Dear Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn:

We urge the Governor’s Office and the PA Department of Conservation and National Resources (DCNR) to convert Big Elk Creek State Park into a Preserve. A Preserve will protect the land’s natural beauty for current and future generations of our residents.

In 2016, the Conservation Fund purchased 978 acres of land that would become the Big Elk Creek section of the White Clay Creek Preserve. Six years later, then-Governor Tom Wolf announced that this property, plus several hundred additional acres, would become the Big Elk Creek State Park. We understood that the land would remain a low-intensity recreational day use activity. Yet, in late 2023, DCNR shared preliminary design ideas for the new state park, including a campground. We are concerned that a plan could reinstate camping, which our Board and community do not want.

We thank DCNR for allowing Chester County to designate two members to participate on the Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force. It is important to our Board that DCNR listens to the wishes of those who originally transferred this property, with the promise it would be preserved, as well as the residents of Chester County, who love this beautiful land.

This nearly 2,000-acre undeveloped area is unique in the high-density southeastern corner of the Commonwealth. White Clay Creek Preserve can, and should, serve as a model for retaining land as open space. Reverting Big Elk Creek State Park into a Preserve will benefit the citizens of Chester County and the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Josh Maxwell  
Chair

Marian D. Moskowitz  
Vice-Chair

Eric M. Roe  
Commissioner

cc: Gary Schroeder and Henrietta Bellman, Chester County Public Designees, Big Elk Creek Master Planning Advisory Task Force

# APPENDIX C



**Jim Marks**  
President  
Chester County Association of Township Officials  
P.O. Box 125  
Nottingham, PA 19362



December 14, 2024

Governor Josh Shapiro  
Office of the Governor  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn  
Department of Conservation and  
Natural Resources  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

**RE: Big Elk Creek State Park**

Dear Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn,

On behalf of the Chester County Association of Township Officials (CCATO), I am writing to express our full support for the Chester County Commissioners' letter dated December 10, 2024, regarding the future of Big Elk Creek State Park.

We strongly endorse the Commissioners' request to convert Big Elk Creek State Park into a Preserve. This designation will ensure the long-term protection of the land's natural beauty for current and future generations of Chester County residents and the broader community.

The Conservation Fund's original 2016 purchase of the 978 acres, now part of Big Elk Creek State Park, was based on the promise that this land would be preserved and serve low-intensity recreational purposes. In 2022, when former Governor Wolf announced its transition into a state park, it was with the understanding that its use would remain aligned with conservation principles. However, recent preliminary design concepts presented by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), including plans for a campground, raise significant concerns among our members and the community.

CCATO appreciates DCNR's inclusion of Chester County representatives in the Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force. However, it is imperative that the final decision honors the intent of the land transfer, the wishes of our community, and the conservation goals that originally guided this acquisition.

The nearly 2,000-acre undeveloped area is a rare and invaluable natural asset, especially in southeastern Pennsylvania, where open spaces are increasingly scarce. Transforming the state park into a Preserve will set a precedent for protecting undeveloped land and ensuring that it remains a low-intensity, recreational space that benefits the environment and our residents.

We urge your offices to prioritize preservation and listen to the voices of Chester County residents who cherish this unique landscape. CCATO stands ready to collaborate with DCNR and other stakeholders to ensure the land remains a conservation and natural beauty legacy.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Marks".

Jim Marks  
President  
Chester County Association of Township Officials  
[jimmarks3@ccato.org](mailto:jimmarks3@ccato.org)

# APPENDIX D



# **ORPC** *Oxford Region Planning Committee*

Chair: Albert Jezyk, Jr. Vice-Chair: Charles Fleischmann Treasurer: Robert Ketcham

December 13, 2024

Honorable Josh Shapiro  
Governor of Pennsylvania  
501 North 3rd Street  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Honorable Cindy Dunn, Secretary  
Pennsylvania DCNR  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

## **RE: Big Elk Creek State Park**

Dear Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn:

At its December 5, 2024 meeting, the Oxford Region Planning Committee (ORPC) authorized a letter urging you to convert Big Elk Creek State Park into the preserve status that characterized this property long before DCNR's acquisition of the property – a status consistent with the principles governing White Clay Creek Preserve (under which it had been purchased and managed), consistent with our Comprehensive Plan and consistent with the expectations of the residents of our Region.

In 2012, Oxford Borough and five surrounding municipalities (East Nottingham, Elk, Lower Oxford, Upper Oxford and West Nottingham Townships) adopted a Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan and created ORPC to encourage information sharing and facilitate the goals and objectives of the Plan, which include both natural resource protection and the promotion of recreational uses consistent with the administrative capabilities of our municipalities.

In 2016, the Conservation Fund purchased 978 acres of land eventually designated the Big Elk Creek section of the White Clay Creek Preserve, managed for low-intensity recreational day use activities throughout the year. Six years later, then-Governor Tom Wolf announced that this property, plus several hundred additional acres, would become the Big Elk Creek State Park. In late 2023, DCNR shared preliminary design ideas for the new state park, envisioning an intensity of use far above the history of the property and inconsistent with the infrastructure and managerial capabilities of our rural region.

Both Elk Township and Franklin Township, the municipalities containing the Park, are on record opposing publicly circulated plans to develop campgrounds, impervious roadways, RV facilities, and other buildings and facilities associated with overnight stays on the site.

This nearly 2,000-acre undeveloped area is unique in the high-density southeastern corner of the Commonwealth. White Clay Creek Preserve can, and should, serve as a model for retaining land as open space. Reverting Big Elk Creek State Park into a preserve will benefit the citizens of our Region, Chester County and the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

  
Al Jezyk, Jr., Chair  
Oxford Region Planning Committee

# APPENDIX E

ELK TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
P.O. BOX 153  
LEWISVILLE, PA 19351

TELEPHONE: 610-255-0634

FAX: 610-255-0492

November 4, 2024

7th Floor,  
RCSOB, 400  
Market Street  
PO Box 8767,  
Harrisburg 17105-8767

To: Josh Shapiro & Cindy Adams Dunn

Elk Township's Board of Supervisors opposes any plans to equip the Big Elk Creek State Park with a campground, RV facilities, any overnight occupancy buildings or facilities, or entertainment facilities that have been included in previous presentations from DCNR. While requisite public toilets and maintenance and office structures such as currently at the White Clay Creek Preserve are acceptable, extensive construction is not.

It is obvious to all who have seen and heard DCNR presentations that increased traffic; noise; light pollution; road damage; litter and demands on fire, police, and ambulance services will result from transforming this low impact Preserve into a State Park. Elk Township is not alone in these concerns. Each local Township touched by this proposed State Park has realized the damage and demands DCNR's plans will cause. Those concerns have been very clearly communicated to DCNR so there can be no doubt of our commitment to stop the damage to our communities.

Our small township (1760 residents, many of them Amish) has a small operating budget that cannot accommodate the increased demands on our roads and public services that the proposed State Park would create. Many of our residents already struggle to meet their tax obligations. Every public service our township utilizes - especially the requisite Fire Departments and Ambulance Services - is already requesting (in some cases, demanding) increased funding from us. The Board of Supervisors constantly tries to contain costs to avoid tax increases that would cause hardship to many of our residents. The strain on our community from the proposed State Park would make it impossible for us to prevent increased costs from increasing our budget and taxes. The State Police have also warned of the need for increased coverage and resulting costs due to increased traffic from more cars and recreation vehicles.

At this point, DCNR should be asking what it is we want. The answer is that we want what was intended to be a Preserve to be just that, a Preserve. Not a State Park. The requisite public toilets, trail maintenance, riparian repair, and a maintenance/office structure may be necessary; overnight accommodations and accompanying extensive infrastructure are not and would cause irreparable harm to our communities.

To conclude, for the sake of our community and its residents, the Elk Township Board of Supervisors strongly advocates for the return of a Preserve designation. We ask that DCNR reconsider its intentions for this valuable resource and publicly announce a plan to retain it as a Preserve.

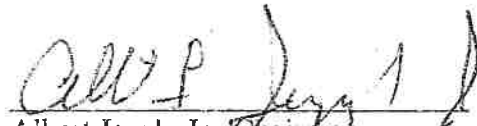
With concern,


Elk Township Board of Supervisors

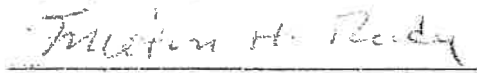
Attest

  
Secretary

ELK TOWNSHIP

  
Albert Jezyk, Jr., Chairman

  
Estace Walters, Vice-Chairman

  
Milton Rudy, Member

# APPENDIX F



November 20, 2024

Cindy Dunn,  
Secretary DCNR  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Dear Ms. Dunn,

Franklin Township's Board of Supervisors oppose any plans to equip Big Elk Creek State Park with a campground, R.V. facilities, overnight occupancy buildings or facilities, visitors / education center, or entertainment facilities that have been proposed by DCNR. While public toilets, a maintenance and office structure, such as those currently at the White Clay Creek Preserve, are acceptable the extensive construction proposed by DCNR is not.

The increased traffic, noise and light pollution, road damage, litter, and increased demands on fire, police, and ambulance services that will result from transforming Big Elk Creek from an untouched, lightly developed preserve into a full service State Park will put an undue burden on our township.

Franklin Township is not alone in these concerns. Each local Township touched by this proposed State Park realizes the damage and financial demands DCNR's plans will cause. Those concerns have been very clearly communicated to DCNR, so there should be no doubt that we are committed to stopping the negative impact these plans will have on our communities.

Our Township has a small operating budget that cannot accommodate the increased demands on our roads, stormwater management infrastructure, and public services that the proposed State Park would create. Every public service our Township utilizes - particularly the requisite Fire and Ambulance services - are already requesting increased funding. Many of our resident struggle to meet their current tax obligations, and the Board of Supervisors works yearly to contain costs and to avoid tax increases that would cause further hardship. The strain on our community from the proposed State Park would make it impossible for us to contain these costs.

Further, the Pennsylvania State Police have also warned us of the need for increased coverage due to traffic from cars and recreational vehicles the park would create.





We understand that public toilets, trail maintenance, riparian repair, and a maintenance/office structure may be necessary. Overnight accommodations and accompanying extensive infrastructure to support those accommodations are not.

Any such development would cause irreparable harm to our communities and the natural balance within the preserve. DCNR should consider, not only how their development plans will negatively impact the community, but what this land was intended to be, a largely untouched nature preserve.


To conclude, for the sake of our community and its residents, the Franklin Township Board of Supervisors strongly requests the redesignation of Big Elk Creek State Park to a State Preserve with the understand of what that word means: the preservation of Big Elk Creek as a natural and lightly developed refuge for all.

We ask that DCNR reconsider its planning for this valuable resource and publicly announce a plan to redesignate this land as a Preserve.

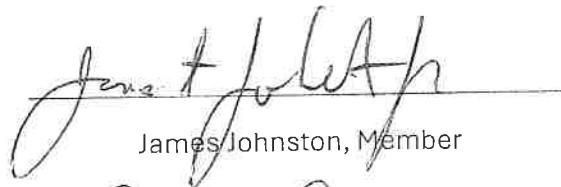
With concern,



David A. Gerstenhaber, Chairperson



Donna Dea, Vice Chairperson



James Johnston, Member



Dawn Dowling, Member



Betsy Odgers, Member

CC: Governor Josh Shaprio

# APPENDIX G



**East Nottingham Township**  
**Chester County, Pennsylvania**

December 10, 2024

To: The Honorable Joshua Shapiro, Governor  
Cynthia Dunn, Secretary of the Dept. Of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
RCSOB, 400  
Market Street  
PO Box 8767  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8767

RE: Big Elk Creek State Park

The East Nottingham Township Board of Supervisors joins the Townships of London Britain, Elk, and Franklin to express our opposition to DCNR's plan to locate campgrounds, RV facilities, and any buildings and facilities associated with overnight stays. We strongly urge DCNR to limit development of this area to that which is similar to White Clay Creek Preserve: public restrooms, maintenance and office structures.

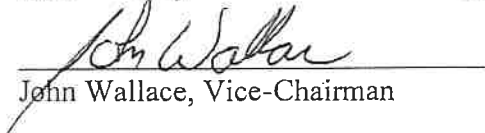
Even though East Nottingham Township does not touch Big Elk Creek State Park, the Township does border those townships that do. Increased traffic, litter, crime, road damage, and general demands on East Nottingham Township roads, as well as the increased burden on the fire and EMS services is certain to result from such development. We are already experiencing rising costs associated with fire and EMS services. These costs will only continue to increase as all townships bear the burden for these services associated with the development DCNR is pursuing.

As you are well aware, the public was told by DCNR that this property would only offer low impact recreation, such as fishing and hiking. That is why it was originally part of the White Clay Creek Preserve. Although DCNR has taken deliberate steps to divorce these two properties, the East Nottingham Township Board of Supervisors strongly urges DCNR heed the desires of London Britain, Elk, and Franklin Townships; redesignate the Strawbridge property as a Preserve, limit development to those structures that are compatible to a Preserve, and develop a master plan that reflects that commitment.

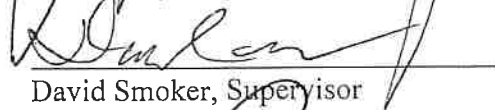
With concern,

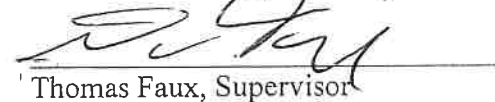
EAST NOTTINGHAM TOWNSHIP

  
Sam Goodley, Jr., Chairman

  
John Wallace, Vice-Chairman

  
Joe Herlihy, Supervisor

  
David Smoker, Supervisor

  
Thomas Faux, Supervisor

# London Britain Township

Chester County, Pennsylvania

Established 1725

Mailing address: PO Box 215, Kemblesville PA 19347-0215  
Office and Garage: 81 Good Hope Rd., Landenberg PA 19350

Phone: 610 255-0388 Fax: 610 255-3542  
Email: carolyn.londonbritaintwp@comcast.net

10/08/2024

To: Cynthia Dunn, PA Secretary of Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources

The London Britain Township Board of Supervisors is going on record to express our opposition to the Big Elk Creek State Park campground, cottages, yurts, shower house, pavilions and amphitheater recently presented to the community and local municipalities. The Board of Supervisors are however in support of bathrooms and a small maintenance/office building like the current facilities of the White Clay Creek Preserve.

In recent LBT meetings, The Board and several township residents have expressed serious concerns regarding increased traffic, crime, road usage, litter and increased strain on local fire, police and emergency services which will be caused by the proposed infrastructure "improvements" at the Big Elk Creek State Park. Local communities, such as ours, have struggled finding adequate funding for road improvements in recent years. With increased out-of-state traffic, more cars on the roads and larger recreational vehicle usage, local townships may have to consider increasing budgets and raising taxes to cover additional road improvements and repairs. High inflation over the last few years has made it difficult for many people to afford their current taxes and basic expenses.

The West Grove Fire Department, Avondale Fire Department, Pennsylvania State Police and local Medic 94 have all expressed to the township increased costs, increased calls and lack of new job applicants. The loss of Jennersville Hospital has further exacerbated the situation for emergency responders in our area due to longer transport times and increased costs. More people visiting the area, additional recreational activities and more drivers on the road will only further strain these services and number of calls. London Britain Township budgets these services as a separate line item known as the Emergency Services Fund. If our emergency responders see the need to request an increase in their funding requests, the Township will need to seriously consider raising taxes for this fund to cover these additional fees.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) is tasked with maintaining Pennsylvania's 124 state parks and 20 state forests. At a recent meeting, DCNR stated the enormous backlog in much needed updates, repairs and improvements to the state's existing park facilities. It does not seem prudent to take on additional costs for the Big Elk Creek State Park when these funds could be allocated to areas of higher need.

In summary, the London Britain Township Board of Supervisors does NOT support the proposed infrastructure "improvements" at the Big Elk Creek State Park as noted above. The additional burden is too much for our residents who already enjoy the quiet trails, babbling creek and singing of songbirds at no additional costs to our community and to our already stretched thin emergency responders. The Board feels that the Big Elk Creek State Park should remain a passive recreational facility similar to the White Clay Creek Preserve, as was originally proposed and intended during the initial purchase from the Strawbridge family.

With concern,

London Britain Township Board of Supervisors

Brian Sachs, Chairman

Aileen Parrish, Vice Chairman

Bruce Yost, Member

cc : Robert Campion, Asst. Park Mgr. PA DCNR

Elk Township Board of Supervisors

Franklin Township Board of Supervisors



*Lower Oxford Township*

## LOWER OXFORD TOWNSHIP

220 Township Road, Oxford, PA 19363 ■ 610-932-8150

E-Mail: [loweroxfordtp@zoominternet.net](mailto:loweroxfordtp@zoominternet.net)

[www.loweroxfordtownship.com](http://www.loweroxfordtownship.com)

*Kevin R. Martin, Chairman  
Noël A. Roy, Vice-Chairman  
Robert McMahon, Member*

December 9, 2024

The Honorable Joshua Shapiro, Governor  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor, RCSOB 400  
Market Street  
PO Box 8767  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8767

RE: BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK

Dear Governor Shapiro,

Lower Oxford Township's Board of Supervisors would like to make it known that we have very reasonable and practical concerns regarding the plans by DCNR to transform the Big Elk Creek State Park into a campground and RV facilities that will support overnight occupancy. This transformation will include construction of additional buildings and/or facilities such as a visitor/education center and entertainment facilities. While we realize that public toilets, maintenance and office structure, such as those that are currently being utilized at the White Clay Creek Preserve are acceptable, the extensive and excessive construction that is proposed by DCNR is not.

Furthermore, campgrounds tend to attract visitors both within and outside the community, leading to a significant increase in traffic, noise and light pollution. The proposed infrastructure will create extra wear on roadways causing road damage burdening the residents of the Township with the costs of additional maintenance and repair. With the proposed increase in traffic comes an abundance of campers who will utilize emergency service crews (fire, ambulance, police, etc.) that are already overburdened, and in light of the local hospital closure in West Grove, Pennsylvania, Chester County, will make their efforts for medical care even more challenging.


Altering this quiet and quaint Preserve by adding a campground and RV facilities would be a great disservice to the residents of this community and would create a greater financial burden upon them. Therefore, the Lower Oxford Township Board of Supervisors would like to express their support for the Townships of Elk, Franklin, and London Britian in their efforts to redesignate Big Elk Creek State Park back to a Reserve and not support this drastic endeavor by the DCNR.

Sincerely,

**LOWER OXFORD TOWNSHIP  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kevin R. Martin, Chairman

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Noël A. Roy, Vice-Chairman

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert J. McMahon, Member

cc: Cindy Dunn, Secretary, DCNR, 400 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17105



# BOROUGH OF OXFORD

December 16, 2024

Honorable Josh Shapiro  
Governor of Pennsylvania  
501 North 3rd Street  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Honorable Cindy Dunn  
PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

**RE: Big Elk Creek State Park, Chester County**

Dear Governor Shapiro and Secretary Dunn:

On behalf of the Oxford Borough Council, I submit this letter in support of converting the Big Elk Creek State Park into a preserve and to forgo considerations of reinstating camping and high-intensity recreational uses of the land.

The Conservation Fund purchased the land that would become the Big Elk Creek section of the White Clay Creek Preserve in 2016. A few years later Governor Tom Wolf combined the original 978 acres with additional land to become the Big Elk Creek State Park. Many in the area anticipated that the park would remain limited to low-impact recreational uses and that the land's natural features would be preserved. However, more recent preliminary designs released by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) indicate that campgrounds are being considered, raising concerns for residents of the area about negative impacts to the park's natural resources and characteristics, and to quality of life for area residents.

The Borough, working alongside the member municipalities of the Oxford Regional Planning Committee, is working to prepare for growth in our corner of the Commonwealth. While we welcome the opportunities strategic growth can have on downtown revitalization and quality of life in the Borough, we are also working to prepare for its challenges and potential negative impacts. We already have concerns about increased traffic congestion and the degradation of natural resources, and we fear a campground in this area will exacerbate these problems.

As the Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force continues their work, we ask that you and they listen to the concerns of residents in our part of the county. Thank you for your consideration and for all you do to support communities across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Cloyd  
Borough Council President

cc: Big Elk Creek Master Planning Advisory Task Force  
Oxford Regional Planning Committee



**260 Lewis Road  
West Grove, PA 19390  
(610) 869-9620 · [www.penntownship.us](http://www.penntownship.us)**

January 9, 2025

To: Cynthia Dunn, PA Secretary of Department of Conservation of Natural Resources

RE: Big Elk State Park

Please accept this letter of support for the position of the Elk Township Board of Supervisors and their opposition to the Big Elk Creek State Park campground, cottages, yurts, shower house, and other amenities presented to the community and local municipalities in 2024. The establishment of such a facility would be in opposition to the rural character of the region and constitute a burden to the southern Chester County community at large placing extra demand on roads, municipal services, and emergency and police services. We are, collectively, simply not set up to manage this type of venue.

The Penn Township Board of Supervisors does support the Elk Board of Supervisors in their position to maintain the area as a passive recreational facility, like the White Clay Creek Preserve, as was originally intended with the purchase of the property. This would be financially feasible, while creating an idyllic space in which to enjoy a walk in a natural setting for countless people from the tri-state area to enjoy. This would be a credit to the Commonwealth, DCNR, and the southern Chester County region.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office by phone or email with any questions.

Sincerely,

The Penn Township Supervisors --  
Victor Mantegna, Chair  
William "Radar" O'Connell, Vice Chair  
Jay R. Ennis, Member  
Carlton R. Snow, Member  
John Baker, Member

Victor Mantegna, Board Chair · William "Radar" O'Connell, Vice Chair · Jay Ennis, Supervisor ·  
John Baker, Supervisor · Carlton Snow, Supervisor



# APPENDIX H

GEORGE STRAWBRIDGE, JR.

January 25, 2024

[REDACTED]

RE: Big Elk Creek Lands

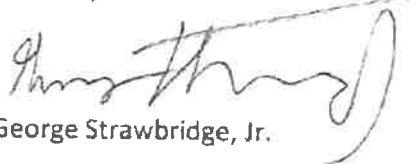
Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for reaching out regarding the astonishing plans that the state has proposed for the Big Elk Creek area. You are correct that I find their plans a complete abandonment of the reason I maintained these lands in my possession for over 30 years. In fact, while I was approached to sell this property many times over the years, I waited until I was able to broker a deal with The Conservation Fund whose purpose in securing the land was in line with my own ideals--to preserve open space. We structured a purchase in phases that allowed them to raise the funds in stages. I was not in a hurry to sell; but in fact, wanted to sell to a like-minded buyer even if that slowed down the process.

While I now winter in Florida, you can imagine the many emails I have received regarding this subject since the state revealed its plans to create a recreational destination site with overnight camping facilities. I applaud the efforts of the area residents to make their wishes known by attending the meetings and writing letters to elected officials.

It is my hope that these efforts will successfully change the course of the state and allow these lands to remain preserved in their most natural state possible which is in line with other lands in the immediate area in both Maryland and Delaware.

Sincerely,



George Strawbridge, Jr.

GS,JR:dss

[REDACTED]

# APPENDIX I

JOHN A. LAWRENCE  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**HARRISBURG OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 202013  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6117

**JENNERVILLE OFFICE**  
1 COMMERCE BLVD., SUITE 200  
WEST GROVE, PA 19390  
(610) 869-1602

Secretary Cindy Dunn  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

November 7, 2023

Dear Secretary Dunn and Director Hallas –

As you know, DCNR organized a public meeting on November 6, 2023 to gather feedback on proposals for the newly created Big Elk Creek State Park. I appreciate each of you personally attending this meeting. However, I do not appreciate the meeting's content – seeing for the first time a development plan that is completely contrary to the will of the community and out-of-step with the surrounding area. I also do not appreciate how the meeting was conducted, with zero opportunity for live question-and-answers from the large audience who had gathered for that very purpose.

As a lifelong resident of Southern Chester County, and one who lived within walking distance of the park for over twenty years, I am very familiar with the unique history of this small corner of the world. A hundred years of preservation-minded actions by nature lovers, fox-hunters, and forward thinking individuals who foresaw the value of open land directly led to the precious resource that has come into DCNR's stewardship.


The property in Elk and Franklin townships was acquired as an addition to the White Clay Creek Preserve. Everyone involved at every step of the acquisition process (including DCNR) understood the property would be managed as part of the Preserve – a semi-wilderness area with limited, low-impact use. As of today, DCNR's website still lists the property as part of the Preserve on the official White Clay Creek Preserve map (*see attached map*).

DCNR's proposal to develop this property into what amounts to a major tourist attraction is completely out of step with the desires of the community – and the clear intent of many who fought to preserve it. DCNR must immediately abandon these plans, and instead publicly commit that the Big Elk Creek State Park will be managed in the same manner as the White Clay Creek Preserve.

I have already introduced legislation on this issue and will be in further contact in the days ahead. But a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community, and will revert to maintaining the property as a Preserve.

I look forward to your response on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

  
John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

**JOHN A. LAWRENCE**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**HARRISBURG OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 202013  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6117

**JENNERVILLE OFFICE**  
1 COMMERCE BLVD., SUITE 200  
WEST GROVE, PA 19390  
(610) 869-1602

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

November 14, 2023

Dear Director Hallas –

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday. As a follow-up to our meeting, I would like to emphasize several of the points we discussed.

Since 1984, DCNR and its predecessor agencies have managed the White Clay Creek Preserve with community input, leading to a unique resource that is greatly esteemed both locally and nationally. While the term “preserve” is not found anywhere in state law, the local community trusted DCNR to manage the Preserve in accordance with the precepts established by the 1984 Bi-State Commission.

DCNR acquired the Strawbridge parcels in 2009 and 2019. Both parcels were incorporated as part of the White Clay Creek Preserve at the time of acquisition and subsequently for a period of years. The parcels were identified as part of the Preserve on state maps, DCNR resources, county resources, township resources, and in the press.

DCNR’s staff reinforced this designation on multiple occasions, telling the Philadelphia Inquirer in 2020 that the Strawbridge parcels would remain as a “non-developed park for those wishing to explore nature without the development typically associated with a day-use or overnight park.” Contrary to suggestions otherwise, there was never discussion that one part of the Preserve would be treated differently than another part of the Preserve. In essence, everyone trusted DCNR to maintain the Preserve as the Preserve. In light of recent events, it is clear to me that this trust was misplaced.

Now that part of the White Clay Creek Preserve has been unilaterally redesignated as a state park, with the ensuing development that comes with being a state park, I fail to see how the law would prevent DCNR from doing the same thing with the rest of the Preserve. You assured me in our meeting that this would not occur, but there is nothing in statute that would prevent it from happening, and as already demonstrated, DCNR has the appetite to convert a preserve to a state park.

As we discussed, there is only one Preserve in the DCNR system – the White Clay Creek Preserve. And while the terms “state park” and “state forest” are defined terms in state law, “preserve” is not defined or even referenced in state law. It is clear to me that the failure to enshrine the definition of a “preserve” in state law, and to place specific restrictions on what DCNR can and cannot do with a “preserve” was a gross oversight.

As I noted in my letter to you last week, DCNR’s proposal to develop this property is completely out of step with the desires of the community – and the clear intent of many who fought to preserve it. DCNR must immediately abandon these plans, and instead publicly commit that the Big Elk Creek State Park will be managed in the same manner as the White Clay Creek Preserve.

I have already introduced legislation on this issue. But a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community, and will revert to maintaining the property as a Preserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lawrence", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

**JOHN A. LAWRENCE**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**HARRISBURG OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 202013  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6117

**JENNERVILLE OFFICE**  
1 COMMERCE BLVD., SUITE 200  
WEST GROVE, PA 19390  
(610) 869-1602

Secretary Cindy Dunn  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

January 16, 2024

Dear Secretary Dunn and Director Hallas –

Thank you for attending the January 10, 2024 Town Hall meeting organized by Franklin and Elk Townships at Avon Grove Charter School in Kemblesville. An estimated 600 people attended this meeting, with nearly every speaker sharing serious concerns about DCNR's proposals for Big Elk Creek State Park.

DCNR committed to at least three initiatives at the Town Hall:

- Suspend the current Big Elk Creek project timeline to gather additional feedback and address concerns.
- Establish an advisory group with membership from the local community.
- Partner with the advisory group to develop a new plan, a new project timeline, and a new planning process for the conservation and management of Big Elk Creek State Park.


A week after these commitments were announced at the Town Hall meeting, I have heard nothing from DCNR about actually implementing them. This is very discouraging, and calls into question DCNR's commitment to listen to community stakeholders. My office has received a number of inquiries from highly qualified individuals who are looking to serve on the advisory group. So far, I have had to tell them – I've heard nothing from DCNR.

Separately, earlier today I sent Governor Shapiro a letter asking him to take immediate action to redesignate Big Elk Creek State Park as part of the White Clay Creek Preserve. As was repeatedly stated at the Town Hall meeting, everyone involved in the acquisition of the Strawbridge parcels (including DCNR) was working towards the expansion of the White Clay Creek Preserve, and connecting the Preserve with Fair Hill Natural Resources Area in Maryland.

As I am sure you could see at the Town Hall meeting, this is an issue that has broad support in the community. The energized stakeholders are not going away. As I mentioned in my letter to you dated November 7, 2023 – a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community, and will revert to maintaining the Strawbridge parcels as a Preserve.

I look forward to your response on these critical issues.

Sincerely,

  
John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

**JOHN A. LAWRENCE**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**HARRISBURG OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 202013  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6117

**JENNERVILLE OFFICE**  
1 COMMERCE BLVD., SUITE 200  
WEST GROVE, PA 19390  
(610) 869-1602

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

April 1, 2024

Dear John –

I write regarding several concerns surrounding last week's meeting of the Big Elk Creek Advisory Committee.

There was an excessive display of force at the meeting. There were nearly as many DCNR employees as committee members. Positioning armed rangers at the door of the Baptist Meeting House was excessive.

A sitting Chester County Commissioner was denied entry to the meeting, while another sitting Chester County Commissioner was permitted entry.

You repeatedly referred to the "opposition" and alluded that individuals serving on the committee were part of the "opposition." Frankly, I found this appalling. No committee member appointed by a local stakeholder has any desire other than the best long-term interests of Big Elk Creek.

The topics for the committee's consideration were largely preordained by DCNR. I and others serving on the committee raised other valid concerns for consideration. These additional concerns must be included in future discussions.

As I stated at the meeting, the knowledge and experience brought to this committee by the individuals appointed by local stakeholders is remarkable. DCNR has lost significant credibility with the local community as a direct result of its repeated missteps with the Big Elk property over the past two years. This committee is an opportunity to turn that tide, but only if DCNR actually listens to what it says on behalf of the local community.

As I noted in my letters to you dated November 7, 2023, and January 16, 2024, a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community, and will revert to maintaining the Strawbridge parcels as a Preserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lawrence", written over a horizontal line.

John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



**JOHN A. LAWRENCE**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
13<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

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**JENNERVILLE OFFICE**  
1 COMMERCE BLVD., SUITE 200  
WEST GROVE, PA 19390  
(610) 869-1602

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

July 10, 2024

Dear John –

Thank you for testifying before the Policy Committee yesterday at the hearing in West Grove. Thank you also for staying through the entire hearing to listen to the other testifiers.

You heard the testimony of leaders from across the community. Eight months after DCNR's presentation at Lincoln University, and six months after the town hall meeting in Kemblesville, interest in this issue has not faded. If anything, it is stronger and more resolute.

The testifiers each brought unique perspectives from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints, but all were united in the view that Big Elk must be preserved. This is not a partisan issue, it is not a local issue, it is simply a matter of doing the right thing for the land and living up to the commitments made by DCNR for over a decade.

As I noted in my letters to you dated November 7, 2023, January 16, 2024, and April 1, 2024, a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community and will revert to maintaining the Strawbridge parcels as a Preserve. As I said yesterday, I beg you and Secretary Dunn to reconsider DCNR's current position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Lawrence', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

# APPENDIX J

**REDESIGNATING BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK AS BIG ELK CREEK PRESERVE  
AND  
MANAGING BIG ELK CREEK AS A PRESERVE IN COORDINATION WITH WCCP**

Summary: Redesignating and managing Big Elk Creek as a preserve honors DCNR's longstanding commitments to the community and other stakeholders, and provides clear direction and assurance for Big Elk Creek both now and in the future.

**DCNR's ORIGINAL POSITION ON BIG ELK CREEK WAS CLEARLY COMMUNICATED AND UNIVERSALLY UNDERSTOOD**

- DCNR's sole entry to the Pennsylvania Bulletin on this property (January 19, 2019) states that the property "will provide passive recreation such as hiking, hunting, and wildlife watching...no recreational facilities are proposed to be developed at this time."
- These sentiments were affirmed in press reports and public statements by various DCNR officials prior to and immediately after acquisition of the Big Elk properties.
- These sentiments were affirmed publicly and privately to elected officials prior to and immediately after the acquisition of the Big Elk properties.
- These sentiments were affirmed to various stakeholders involved in the acquisition of the property, including the prior landowner.
- These sentiments were affirmed to the federal government.
- These sentiments were in keeping with the traditional management of the adjacent White Clay Creek Preserve.

**DCNR's REVISED PLANS FOR BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK REFLECT NEW STATEWIDE DCNR PRIORITIES, NOT SITE-SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS**

- DCNR is dealing with serious capacity issues for activities and services offered at certain state parks around the state, with some parks reaching maximum capacity and lacking personnel to deal with existing facilities.
- DCNR has publicly stated in multiple recent public forums that they are looking to expand capacity for the types of activities proposed in the Master Plan for Susquehanna Riverlands and Big Elk Creek.
- DCNR (at the behest of Governor Wolf) removed Big Elk Creek from the White Clay Creek Preserve and unilaterally redesignated the property as a state park, paving the way for revised alternate and additional uses at the property.

DCNR'S PROPOSED ALTERNATE AND ADDITIONAL USES FOR BIG ELK CREEK ARE NOT IN KEEPING WITH DCNR'S PUBLICLY STATED COMMITMENTS PRIOR TO AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER ACQUISITION OF THE PROPERTY.

- DCNR proposed significant development of Big Elk Creek is outside the scope of that contemplated in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and the prior public statements of DCNR.
- The recently proposed Master Plan released for Susquehanna Riverlands contains similarities and in some cases identical proposals to those presented by DCNR in November 2023 for Big Elk. (Great gathering, etc.) This indicates DCNR changed their view of Big Elk Creek away from the site-specific prior commitment outlined in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and towards that of the cookie-cutter approach seen in other state parks.
- These alternate and additional uses (RV hookups, rental cabins, visitor's center) are not inherently incompatible with a state park. However, they are inherently incompatible with *this* state park/preserve in keeping with the commitments made prior and subsequent to the acquisition of the property.

#### REDESIGNATION OF BIG ELK CREEK STATE PARK AS BIG ELK CREEK STATE PRESERVE

- DCNR has long recognized White Clay Creek Preserve as a unique asset, recognizing the status as a 'preserve' is separate and distinct from other state park assets.
- Redesignating Big Elk as a preserve proclaims Big Elk Creek is not open to the full gamut of possibilities associated with a state park, but instead should be managed in keeping with the practices of White Clay Creek Preserve.
- Redesignating Big Elk as a preserve will reassure the general public that DCNR is committed to managing the property as originally outlined both to the community and in the sole Pennsylvania Bulletin entry for this property.

#### MANAGING BIG ELK CREEK AS A PRESERVE IN COORDINATION WITH WHITE CLAY CREEK PRESERVE

- A coordinated plan for WCCP and what is now BECSP was initially instituted by DCNR when both properties were part of the White Clay Creek Preserve.
- White Clay Creek Preserve is less than 5 miles from Big Elk Creek.
- DCNR currently manages both properties from the facilities maintained at WCCP.
- Duplicative facilities and services are a waste of DCNR resources and taxpayer money.
- Coordinated management of both properties in keeping with the traditional management of WCCP is in keeping with commitments made by DCNR and public expectations before and after the acquisition of the property

# APPENDIX K

# **Standing united against DCNR's 'bait and switch' in plans for Big Elk Creek Preserve**

**Chester County Press, January 15, 2025**

**By Andrew Dinniman**

The Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources (DCNR) has succeeded - that is, in uniting the community against their plans for the Big Elk Creek Preserve.

Municipalities, including Elk, Franklin, London Britain, East Nottingham, Oxford, Penn Township, Lower Oxford, and Upper Oxford have issued official statements against the DCNR plan and stated their support of the original state commitment for a preserve. Organizations such as the Chester County Association of Township Officials, the Oxford Regional Planning Committee, and S.A.V.E. have done the same. The Chester County Commissioners have joined them in opposition by sending letters to Governor Shapiro and DCNR Secretary Cindy Dunn. It appears many more statements are being drafted.

A bit of history is always of value. In the early 1980s, DuPont donated several thousand acres along the Pennsylvania-Delaware border to these two states with the clear goal of it being a wilderness preserve. In 1984, the Pennsylvania Legislature on a motion from the Chester County delegation voted to accept the land as a state preserve. Its protection was further strengthened when a young senator from Delaware named Joe Biden and our Chester County congressman, Joe Pitts, introduced and got passed in 2000 a bill designating the area as a Federal Wild and Scenic River. Chester County residents were jubilant. Many also believed that a large preserve would reduce our area's impact on global warming.

So, starting in 2007, there was a joint effort of the State, county, and others to purchase the 1,700-acre Strawbridge tract. The understanding always was that the tract would be added to the White Clay Creek Preserve. By combining these areas with the adjacent Natural Resources Area in Maryland and land in Delaware, we would be creating the largest land preserve between Washington, D.C. and New York City.

## **Early promises**

During this period (2006-2020), I was State Senator and DCNR directly communicated their commitment for the preserve concept to State Rep. John Lawrence and me. In fact, Drew Gilchrist of DCNR wrote to me in July 2018 that once the Strawbridge purchase is completed "the property in its entirety will be transferred to the Commonwealth as an addition to the White Clay Creek Preserve." DCNR's Gilchrist also says of the first phase of the Strawbridge purchase in 2009, "it is known as the Elk Creek section along the Maryland/Pennsylvania border. The White Clay Creek preserve is currently 2,136 acres. The addition makes it a total of 3,118 acres."

Let me also note that DCNR made the case for the Strawbridge Tract as a preserve, when it pointed out that there are 690 plant species on the property, 15 of which are endangered or rare as well as threatened animal species such as Big Turtles, Short-Eared Owls and Regal Fritillary Butterflies.

Remember all that I mentioned is from DCNR and makes the case for a preserve. Both Rep. Lawrence and I were so confident that DCNR was working for a larger preserve, that in a December 4, 2018 news release after additional funds arrived, I wrote that Christmas has come early with funds “critical to acquire and permanently protect 1,718 acres owned by George Strawbridge by adding them to the White Clay Creek Preserve.”

Let me add that in 2015 and 2019 when Cindy Dunn came to see me as part of her Senate confirmation, she stated support for the Strawbridge tract being added to the White Clay Creek Preserve. I believed her and voted for confirmation. This support was reiterated in an April 25, 2019 letter from Secretary Dunn, noting the Big Elk section trails and thanking me for my “interest and commitment to the White Clay Creek Preserve.” Also in 2019, DCNR entered into the Pennsylvania Bulletin that the Strawbridge purchase would provide passive recreation and no recreational facilities were proposed.

So all of us in Chester County were elated that DCNR was committed to our dream of an enlarged preserve becoming a reality.

Then came the bombshell.

In the waning days of the Wolf Administration, with the backing of DCNR Secretary Dunn, Governor Wolf designated the Elk Creek land as a state park, not as part of the White Clay Creek Preserve. There is only one preserve in the state park system and that's White Clay Creek. Making it a regular State Park means that they could put in any amenities and infrastructure for overnight camping on the purchased Strawbridge land.

About a year after the action, Secretary Dunn finally came to Chester County to announce the park overnight camping plan at a November 6, 2023 and January 10, 2024 meeting with residents. At the meetings, verbal outrage was expressed by residents and well it should be, since DCNR broke its promise and the commitment it had repeated since 2007 that the Strawbridge purchase would be added to the White Clay Creek Preserve.

### **Nefarious bait and switch**

For those attending the meeting it became apparent that DCNR did a bait and switch and a nefarious one at that. I feel the same way. What else can you call a broken promise made over several decades and not using the 8 million in County funding for the promised preserve.

To counter the citizen resistance, DCNR decided to form a task force and offered another DCNR BAIT and SWITCH by promising (DCNR must like unfulfilled promises) that they

would take camping, cabins, and RV parking off the table “indefinitely.” Does DCNR think we are all stupid? We realize that the word “indefinitely” means DCNR can, whenever it wants, put the camping, cabins, and RV’s back into what it now calls Big Elk Creek Park.

This took on an even greater backlash when John Hallas, the DCNR official assigned to the task force, recently told a *USA Today* reporter, “We are continuing to assess and study the overnight opportunities in the future.” In essence, he defined the word “indefinitely.”

I have been on dozens of task forces, but I have never been on or seen one with guards at the door to keep the public and press from entering or a task force that won’t release the names of its members to the public. It even gives each member a number, so when it put its minutes online, the public won’t know the names of who made the comment. It says it did this because of the strong and vociferous views of those at the November and January meetings. There wasn’t ever a hint of violence, and aren’t public meetings supposed to be the place where the public can express what’s on their mind, even with emotions? How a government agency gets away with such a lack of public transparency is beyond my understanding.

The lack of transparency and controlled public input actually sets the stage for a third potential bait and switch. DCNR can now say we gave citizens the opportunity to express their views, but we don’t agree, so we will do what we want. Believe me, in my years as a State Senator, I have seen public input ignored by state agencies again and again.

Local and county officials are quickly learning about another problem with the DCNR plan. DCNR has the power to ignore local zoning and ordinance as well as the County’s Open Space Plan. However, while ignoring these locally enacted rules, they can stick the community with the increased cost of police, fire, ambulance, and road repairs resulting from their plan. As a result, local taxes can rise. Isn’t state government wonderful?

There are 123 state parks and only White Clay is a preserve with policies to protect that status. If they want to put overnight camping in the other 122 parks fine but leave us alone and keep your commitment to add the Big Elk land to White Clay Creek and enlarge the only state park preserve.

**‘The task is clear, the cause is just’**

So how can our community respond to a state agency that thinks it has all the answers and doesn’t keep its promises? I can tell you from decades of experience the only thing that works is public pressure and protest. I was glad to hear that conversations are already taking place to attend DCNR appropriation hearings, a rally in the capitol rotunda, increased press contacts and use of social media, as well as reaching out to allies. This brings the unfairness of BAIT and SWITCH and the justice of our cause to the public, legislature, and most importantly to the governor. We are fortunate that our Governor Josh Shapiro listens and cares about what citizens say and hope.

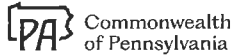


We all need to thank those who have spoken out, including State Rep. John Lawrence, the County Commissioners, local officials, and non-profits. We also thank State Sen. John Kane for his willingness to meet on this matter with his constituents in Franklin and London Britain. United we will prevail.

So the task is clear, the cause is just, and it's up to us to make sure our dream of an expanded preserve now and in perpetuity becomes a reality.

*Andrew Dinniman, D.Ed., served as Chester County Commissioner from 1992 to 2005, and as Pennsylvania State Senator from 2006-2020.*

# APPENDIX L



Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Agencies > Department of Conservation and Natural Resources > Recreation > Where to Go > State Parks > Find a State Park > White Clay Creek Preserve >

History of White Clay Creek Preserve

WHITE CLAY CREEK PRESERVE

# History

White Clay Creek Preserve, including the Big Elk Creek Section, is part of a larger tract of land sold to William Penn in 1683 by the Lenape chief of this territory. It is thought that this chief, variously identified as Chief Kekkelopen or Machaloha, lived in a settlement within what is now the White Clay Creek Section of the Preserve. The settlement/village is identified by early colonial settlers as Opasiskunk or Minguannan. Historical documentation indicates the Lenape village survived into the early 18th century, although its exact location is unknown.

Built during 1729, the London Tract Baptist Meetinghouse is at the intersection of Sharpless and London Tract roads. In its stone-walled cemetery rest many of the area's earliest settlers including Dr. David Eaton, whose home across the street in the preserve, is a classic example of a double door Pennsylvania stone farmhouse.

Two further points of interest are the tri-state Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Arc Corner monuments marking historical points along the Mason-Dixon Line.

During 1984, the DuPont Company donated land to Pennsylvania and Delaware for the purpose of preserving the diverse and unique plant and animal species, and the rich cultural heritage of the area.

Today, these lands form the bi-state White Clay Creek Preserve -- the only land designated as a preserve in DCNR's Bureau of State Parks

Because White Clay Creek possesses outstanding scenic, wildlife, recreational, and cultural value, it has been designated by Congress as a National Wild and Scenic River, and shall be preserved in free-flowing condition for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

## Geologic Guide

Detailed information about the geology of the area is available from the:

[Trail of Geology 20 -- White Clay Creek Preserve Guide \(PDF\)](#)

Was this page helpful?

Yes No

[Return to Top](#) ↑



Proudly founded in 1681 as a place of tolerance and freedom.



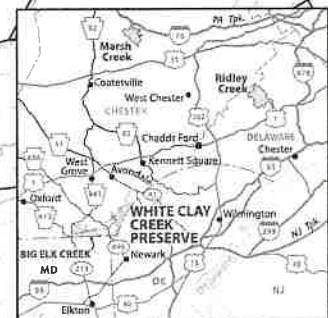
# APPENDIX M

# WHITE CLAY CREEK PRESERVE

CHESTER COUNTY



To Eastern Terminus of Mason-Dixon Trail or Chadds Ford, approx. 15.2 MI.



- Preserve Office (Open Intermittently)
- Blue Symbols Mean ADA Accessible
- Hiking Trail
- Multi-use Trail: Hiking, Bicycling, Horseback Riding
- Mason-Dixon Trail Hiking Only
- Mason-Dixon Trail Multi Use
- Bicycling
- Horseback Riding
- Unpaved Road
- Gate
- Parking
- State Park No Hunting
- State Park Hunting
- White Clay Creek State Park (Delaware)

CONTOURS ARE ON 40 FT. INTERVAL

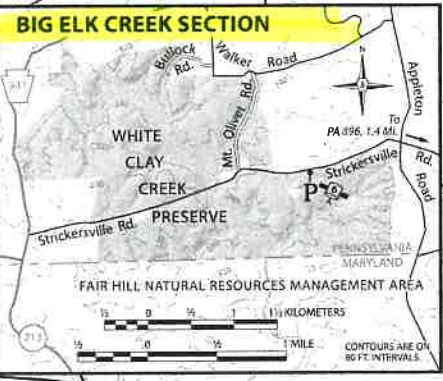
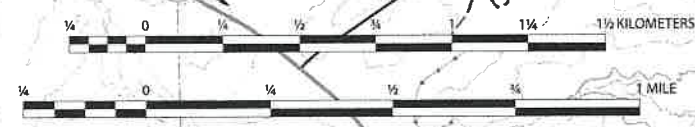
- GPS Coordinates**  
Decimal Degree Lat. Long.
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Preserve Office<br>39.746823, -75.774176           | 4. Arc Corner Monument<br>39.722250, -75.773520       |
| 2. Parking Lot #1<br>39.766751, -75.766938            | 5. Tri-State Marker<br>39.723306, -75.788498          |
| 3. Arc Corner Road Trailhead<br>39.727595, -75.775034 | 6. Big Elk Creek Parking Lot<br>39.730960, -75.835722 |

To PA 41, 2.9 Mi.  
Avondale, 4.0 Mi.

To PA 896, 1.3 Mi.

To US 1, 9.3 Mi.

To Big Elk Creek Section, 2.2 Mi.



# APPENDIX N

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name and Location of Applicant</i>	<i>Location of Branch</i>	<i>Action</i>
01-07-2019	Luzerne Bank Luzerne Luzerne County	285 South Main Street Pittston Luzerne County	Opened

**CREDIT UNIONS****Consolidations, Mergers and Absorptions**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name and Location of Applicant</i>	<i>Action</i>
12-27-2018	CONSOL Employees Credit Union McMurray Allegheny County  Application for approval to merge CONSOL Employees Credit Union, McMurray, with and into Heritage Federal Credit Union, Pittsburgh.	Approved
12-31-2018	TruMark Financial Credit Union Fort Washington Montgomery County  Merger of Ward Federal Credit Union, Philadelphia, with and into TruMark Financial Credit Union, Fort Washington.	Effective

The Department's web site at [www.dobs.pa.gov](http://www.dobs.pa.gov) includes public notices for more recently filed applications.

ROBIN L. WIESSMANN,  
*Secretary*

[Pa.B. Doc. No. 19-68. Filed for public inspection January 18, 2019, 9:00 a.m.]

## DEPARTMENT OF BANKING AND SECURITIES

### Maximum Lawful Rate of Interest for Residential Mortgages for the Month of February 2019

The Department of Banking and Securities (Department), under the authority contained in section 301 of the act of January 30, 1974 (P.L. 13, No. 6) (41 P.S. § 301), determines that the maximum lawful rate of interest for residential mortgages for the month of February 2019, is 5 1/2%.

The interest rate limitations under the Commonwealth's usury statute were pre-empted to a great extent by Federal law, the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act of 1980 (Pub.L. No. 96-221). Further pre-emption was instituted with the signing of Pub.L. No. 96-399, which overrode State interest rate limitations on any individual who finances the sale or exchange of residential real property which the individual owns and which the individual occupies or has occupied as his principal residence.

Each month the Department is required by State law to compute and announce the ceiling rate on residential mortgages in this Commonwealth. This maximum rate is determined by adding 2.50 percentage points to the yield rate on long-term government bonds as published by the Federal Reserve Board or the United States Treasury, or both. The latest yield rate on long-term government securities is 2.97 to which was added 2.50 percentage points for a total of 5.47 that by law is rounded off to the nearest quarter at 5 1/2%.

ROBIN L. WIESSMANN,  
*Secretary*

[Pa.B. Doc. No. 19-69. Filed for public inspection January 18, 2019, 9:00 a.m.]

## DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

### Acquisition of Land to be Acquired by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for the Purpose of Resolving Multiple Land and Water Conservation Fund Conversions

#### Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Department) Acquisition of Strawbridge Property

In partnership with the Conservation Fund, the Department is planning to acquire a 987-acre property, referred to as the Strawbridge Property (Property), situated in Elk, Franklin and New London Townships, Chester County. The Strawbridge Property is comprised of seven parcels (Chester County Tax Parcel Nos. 70-5-6, 70-5-7, 70-5-8, 71-4-32.3, 72-6-1, 72-6-4 and 72-6-10). A majority of the Property is currently utilized for farming with the remainder consisting of undeveloped woodland.

The Property is bounded by Lewisville/Strickersville Road to the south, Chesterville Road to the west, residential properties and a portion of Walker Road to the north, and agricultural land and residential properties to the east. The Property is adjacent to the Department's White Clay Creek Preserve and will provide passive recreation such as hiking, hunting and wildlife watching. The Property will be maintained by the Department's Bureau of State Parks. No recreational facilities are proposed to be developed at this time.

Goals in acquiring the Property include the conservation of extensive and diverse critical natural resources and the resolution of multiple Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) conversions. The Property includes more than 7 miles of Big Elk Creek and its tributaries, important forested riparian buffers along them, over 353 acres of mature and young woodlands, over 145 acres of floodplain, 668 acres of prime farmland soils and soils of

Statewide importance, and moderate and steep slopes. The Property also contains habitat for various threatened and endangered plant and animal species. The Property represents a critical resource in a rapidly developing area of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Department owns and oversees lands encumbered, in part, by the National Park Service LWCF program. In accordance with the restrictions and requirements set forth in section 200301 of the LWCF (54 U.S.C.A. § 200301(f)(3)), the Department is required to provide replacement lands for portions of formerly funded LWCF sites that are converted from recreational to nonrecreational use. The replacement land must meet or exceed both the acreage and appraised value of the land being converted.

The National Park Service has determined that the Property is eligible for acquisition and for the potential resolution of multiple LWCF conversions throughout this Commonwealth. The Department will work with the National Park Service after the Property is acquired to complete the conversion process for the individual property conversions identified in the Environmental Assessment document which is being published for public review.

The Department will acquire the Property from the Conservation Fund and place the LWCF restrictive covenant in the Property deed, to read as follows:

This property, or interest in property, was acquired by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources ("Department") to comply with the conversion provisions under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, 54 U.S.C. §§ 200301 et seq. ("Act"), provided through the National Park Service. This property, or any portion of it, may not be converted to purposes other than those authorized under the Act. No change of use and no transfer of ownership, control, or interest in this property may occur, and no encumbrance may be placed on this property, without the written consent of the Department or its successor. The restriction in this paragraph applies to both the surface and subsurface of the property. This restriction has the effect of a covenant running in perpetuity with the land and is binding upon the owner(s) of the property and upon all subsequent owners, successors, and assigns. This restriction is enforceable by the Department and its successors.

The DCNR will have five (5) consecutive years to resolve conversions with the excess value and recreational usefulness established as part of the Property acquisition.

*Review and Comment:*

As part of the National Park Service requirements, an Environmental Assessment of the Property has been completed and is available for review and comment.

The Environmental Assessment will be available for review from January 19, 2019, until March 4, 2019, at the Department's web site at [http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/DCNR\\_20033787.pdf](http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/DCNR_20033787.pdf).

Questions or comments on this proposal should be forwarded to Thomas Ford, Director, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, 400 Market Street, Rachel Carson State Office Building, 5th Floor, Harrisburg, PA

17101-2301 or RA-NRBRC\_CONVERSIONS@pa.gov. Comments must be received within 45 days following publication of this notice.

CINDY ADAMS DUNN,  
Secretary

[Pa.B. Doc. No. 19-70. Filed for public inspection January 18, 2019, 9:00 a.m.]

## DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

### Community Conservation Partnerships Program Grants Available

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Department) announces the 2019 open application period for the Community Conservation Partnerships Program Grants administered by the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (Bureau). The open application period opens January 22, 2019, and will end at 4 p.m. on April 10, 2019. Depending on the funding source, eligible applicants include municipalities and appropriate non-profit organizations in this Commonwealth.

Applications must be submitted electronically through the Department's Grants portal. No paper, faxed or e-mailed applications will be accepted. Grant information, project guidance documents, program policies, applications and instructions are available online at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants>. For assistance with the Department's Grants portal, contact the Department's Grants Customer Service Center, at (800) 326-7734, DCNR-Grants@pa.gov.

Grant assistance from the Department helps communities and organizations in this Commonwealth plan, acquire and develop recreation, park and trail facilities, and conserve open space.

The Bureau administers the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, which combines several State and Federal funding sources including the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, Environmental Stewardship Fund, Snowmobile Restricted Account, All-Terrain Vehicle Restricted Account, Pennsylvania Recreation Trails Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014—2019 at [www.paoutdoorrecreplan.com](http://www.paoutdoorrecreplan.com) identifies the Commonwealth's outdoor recreation priorities. Projects will be selected, in part, on how well they align to these priorities. These priorities include:

*Community parks and recreation:* Planning and development projects that focus on rehabilitation of existing parks.

*Land conservation:* Land conservation projects that protect critical habitat, forested watersheds, wetlands and riparian corridors, or create critical connections between public or conservation lands.

*Watershed restoration/rivers implementation:* Projects that enhance public access to this Commonwealth's waterways or projects that improve this Commonwealth's watersheds and waterways including the planting of riparian forest buffers.

*Trails:* Projects that close priority trail gaps as well as projects that rehabilitate or upgrade existing trails.



## APPENDIX O

# 1,000 acres once owned by Campbell's Soup scion are now a Pa. preserve

It took 10 years, but Pennsylvania, with the help of conservation groups, acquired nearly 1,000 acres that will be protected open space as part of the White Clay Creek Preserve. But, just as it was about to make its public debut, it was shut because of COVID-19.

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER By [Frank Kummer](#) Jul. 21, 2020, 5:00 a.m. ET

Nearly 1,000 acres of rolling farmland, meadows, and forests spill around a meandering creek in southern Chester County near the Maryland line.

The land was part of a complex real estate transaction that took more than 10 years to acquire the 978-acre parcel from George Strawbridge Jr., an octogenarian scion of the Dorrance family of Campbell's Soup fame and a top horse breeder. It is situated in Elk and Franklin Townships off Strickersville Road.

The Conservation Fund finalized the sale of the property for \$32.25 million through a series of grants from the Mount Cuba Center, Chester County, and Pennsylvania. Then it deeded the property to the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources as a preserve. The transaction was completed in March.

Now, state officials have to decide what to do with it all — a task they say they are happy to have in a rare chance to preserve such a large tract in a rapidly growing area. “To get 1,000 acres donated to a state park is pretty amazing,” Lexi Rose, a park manager for the DCNR, said on a recent tour of the property. She said they’re starting with a “blank slate.”

“We’re assessing what we want to do with the property. Do we want to keep some of the history? What do we want to change?” Rose said. “It has a trail on it, but does it make sense to keep that open, or create others? We’re just in the very beginning stages of getting a master plan started.”

The DCNR will manage the land as part of the Big Elk Creek section of White Clay Creek Preserve. The property is contiguous with about 8,000 acres of preserved open space in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and provides a corridor for an array of wildlife species, some threatened.

Rose said that since the property is part of a preserve, its use will be more restricted than a typical state park. “People can still fish and hike,” she said, “but you’re not going to see too many overcrowded picnic areas or a swimming pool. A preserve is much more low-impact.”

Rose said a master plan would include input from the National Park Service, local governments, and groups such as Friends of White Clay Creek Preserve, a volunteer organization. The plan could take three to five years.

The existing 2.1-mile Springlawn trail runs through the property along Big Elk Creek, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. It borders a forest of oak, maple, birch, and beech trees, and flora such as ferns, wineberry, yellow archangel, and lion's foot.

"We have to ask, what's going to be good for the land? How can we preserve it while keeping in mind recreation? That's the balance we have to strike," Rose said.

White Clay Creek Preserve is split in two. The titular main preserve is to the east, adjacent to Delaware. The Big Elk Creek section lies to the west on the Maryland line. The new addition to the Big Elk Creek section is the second large property purchased from Strawbridge.

In 2009, the Conservation Fund acquired 735 acres from Strawbridge and transferred ownership to the DCNR. The property became known as the Big Elk Creek section of White Clay Creek Preserve. It contains 2.1 miles of the Mason-Dixon line along the Pennsylvania-Maryland border and adjoins the 5,300-acre Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area in Maryland.

More than 690 plant species have been identified on the Strawbridge properties, 15 of which are considered endangered or rare in Pennsylvania. The land provides habitat for deer, rabbits, birds, and other wildlife, such as the regal fritillary butterfly and the short-eared owl.

"This part of Chester County is like the land that time forgot — rolling farmland, quiet country roads, forest," said Blaine Phillips, who led the recent acquisition for the Conservation Fund.

"From the beginning, we realized how important this project was," Phillips said. "We realized the huge upside of doing this, and consequently the downside of not doing it. We had a knee-jerk reaction that this land needed to be protected."

Phillips said it was a "once-in-a-lifetime shot" to be able to purchase land connected to so many other thousands of acres of already protected land.

Jeff Downing, executive director of the Mount Cuba Center, a private foundation based in Hockessin, Del., said the organization offered a grant toward the purchase price because the land checked off so many important boxes: size, connections with surrounding open space, and large biodiversity.

Though the foundation is based in Delaware, Downing said it was important that the land be preserved forever by Pennsylvania.

"It's just in a special place," Downing said. "It fills a piece in a much larger puzzle."

<https://www.inquirer.com/science/climate/pennsylvania-white-clay-creek-elk-20200721.html>

# APPENDIX P

# Land deal grows Pennsylvania preserve to 3,000 acres

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More than 3,000 acres are now included in an “undeveloped” state park in highly developed southern Chester County. White Clay Preserve climbed from its former 2,072 acres in one quick action 11 years in the making earlier this month.

The Conservation Fund, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Mt. Cuba Center, and Chester County completed an 11-year conservation effort along Pennsylvania’s southern border with the purchase of about 978 acres of undeveloped land.

Featuring rolling farmlands, open grasslands, wooded terrain and stream corridor, the 978-acre Strawbridge property was officially transferred from The Conservation Fund to DCNR for permanent protection and management. The preservation of that tract secures a contiguous block of open recreation space of nearly 8,000 acres, one of the largest in the region.

The deal came 11 years after the protection of an adjacent 735-acre Strawbridge property, which was purchased by the Fund and transferred to DCNR in 2009. That property, now known as the Big Elk Creek section of the White Clay Creek Preserve, contains 2.1 miles of the Mason-Dixon line along the Pennsylvania/Maryland state border, joining the 5,300-acre Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area in Maryland. Together, the three areas make up one of the largest central open spaces in the Mid-Atlantic.

“Large tracts of open space like this are extremely rare and valuable, especially in such a highly developed and populated area,” said Blaine Phillips, Mid-Atlantic regional director for The Conservation Fund. “The result is one of the largest blocks of open space in our region and an opportunity to maintain a bucolic landscape that is quickly vanishing.”

“As pressure from development, climate change and other threats pose unprecedented risks for biodiversity, one of the most important things we can do to support flora and fauna is to conserve open space and the habitats it comprises,” said Ann Rose, president of Mt. Cuba Center. “The Strawbridge property extends an important wildlife corridor and provides refuge for a wide array of rare and threatened species.

More than 690 plant species have been identified on the Strawbridge properties, 15 of which are considered state-endangered or rare in Pennsylvania. That diversity includes three varieties of orchids and a species of trillium. The land’s diverse terrain provides habitat for native wildlife species including deer, rabbits and birds, but rare species such as the regal fritillary butterfly and the short-eared owl are also known to reside here. Strawbridge supports roughly 3.5 miles of the Big Elk Creek, a tributary of the Elk River and Chesapeake Bay, which preserves critical land within the Chesapeake watershed. The land encompasses roughly 190 acres of floodplains, 600 acres of woodlands, 100 acres of native grass meadows and 800 acres of farmland.

Under DCNR’s ownership, the Strawbridge properties will be managed within the White Clay Preserve Elk Creek Unit as part of the Pennsylvania state park system, and open for public recreation.

“The park will remain largely undeveloped for some time to come. And, it will always remain a place designated for low-impact recreation, said K. Mike Redding, statewide manager for land projects and acquisitions for DCNR.

“We plan to work with local partners to develop a plan for the land and how it fits in to the landscape and adjoining open space in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland.”

He explained, “The benefits of protecting these historic lands are multi-faceted. For those who will enjoy the park, they will be treated to passive, low-impact type of recreational activities, including hiking, biking, fishing, boating, birdwatching, hunting and exploring. For those who won’t use the park directly, the benefits are clean air and clean water that these amazing open spaces provide. There’s also the benefit to the wildlife and plant species that call this area home.

“The main attraction is the low impact recreational component itself. The quietness that a non-developed park brings has benefits for those wishing to explore nature without the development typically associated with a day-use or overnight park.”

Redding suggested, “The Springlawn Trail is a good way to get a glimpse of the park. Springlawn was once a small community that used the waters of the Big Elk Creek to turn a mill wheel. The land became part of a DuPont country estate, and trails were built under the road so that horses and riders did not have to cross the roadway. The land changed ownership when the State of Maryland created Fair Hill Natural Resources Area from the DuPont Maryland holdings, and George Strawbridge purchased his Pennsylvania lands. The ruins of Springlawn are still there and the total length of the trail is 2.5 miles. You’ll find some spurs trails that lead to Big Elk Creek from the trail.”

He stressed “The preservation of this property secures a contiguous block of open recreation space of nearly 8,000 acres, one of the largest in the region, especially in a highly developed and populated area, all less than 5 miles from Newark, Delaware, 15 miles from Wilmington, Delaware, and 34 miles from Philadelphia.”

The Conservation Fund has worked in all 50 states since 1985, protecting more than 8 million acres of land, including more than 144,000 acres of natural lands across Pennsylvania.

With paths welcoming guests from the formal gardens of a du Pont mansion through stunning vistas, intimate woodlands and lush meadows, Mt. Cuba Center in Hockessin, Delaware, is a botanical garden that puts the beauty of native landscapes on display to inspire conservation. What began in the 1930s as the private estate of Mr. and Mrs. Lammot du Pont Copeland is now a public garden that centers on the beauty and value of native plants.

<https://www.pennlive.com/life/2020/03/land-deal-grows-pennsylvania-preserve-to-3000-acres.html>