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### **Restoration Effort Moving Forward with Land Acquisitions as Part of \$21 Million Palmerton Zinc Natural Resource Damages Settlement**

Palmerton, PA - State and federal environmental officials announced today that two land purchases have been made to benefit the wildlife, people and landscape of the Kittatinny Ridge.

The two purchases are the Moreton and Alpine Motorsports tracts east of Palmerton in the Aquashicola Creek watershed. Funds for these purchases came from the Palmerton Zinc natural resource damages settlement, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Monroe County Open Space Program, Audubon PA, Blue Mountain Preservation Association, Lehigh Gap Nature Center and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary with the land acquisition expertise of the Wildlands Conservancy.

The 90-acre Moreton property is in the upper Aquashicola Creek and on the north slope of the Kittatinny Ridge. This acquisition will become part of the Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge to protect migratory bird and coldwater fish habitat in compensation for habitat injured at the Superfund site.

“The acquisition of the former Moreton property is a crucial step in our land protection and habitat restoration efforts at the fledgling Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge - one that would not have been realized without the support of the settlement funds,” according to Michael Horne, refuge manager.

The property includes a segment of Aquashicola Creek bounded by more than 15 acres of floodplain wetlands, a tributary to the creek, forested upland and former pasture. The property is home to the federally endangered bog turtle. It will also provide recreational opportunities including bird watching, nature walking, fishing and hunting.

The Alpine Motorsport tract is 354 acres with upland, streams and wetlands within the Aquashicola Creek watershed. The former owner planned to develop the property as an auto sport driving facility with hotel and restaurant facilities, but the property is now under PA Game Commission ownership as part of State Game Lands 168.

“It will be managed to protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat damaged at Palmerton Zinc, while providing recreational opportunities such as bird watching, nature photography, hiking, hunting and fishing,” said William A. Capouillez, director of the PA Game Commission’s Bureau of Wildlife Habitat Management.

Christopher Kocher, President of Wildlands Conservancy, considers the Alpine acquisition “one of the most significant conservation deals in our land trust’s history.” [more]

“This is a seminal project which not only conserved critical bird migratory and nesting habitat, but also eliminated a dire threat which would have destroyed the Kittatinny Ridge Important Bird Area,” said Phil Wallis of Audubon PA.

"Protection of this property advances Blue Mountain Preservation Association's mission to preserve and protect the unique forest ecosystem of the Blue Mountain and the Aquashicola high quality trout stream which were threatened by the planned development," according to Frank O'Donnell, association president.

"The Kittatinny Ridge is very important ecologically and this was a great day for conservation in Pennsylvania," added Dan Kunkle of the Lehigh Gap Nature Center.

“The acquisition of the Alpine Property brought together numerous agencies with the same goal and it is these partnerships that have been key to the success of our award winning Open Space Program," said Christine Dettore on behalf of the Monroe County Commissioners.

Protecting these properties meshes well with other wider conservation initiatives within the area surrounding Palmerton. They are located near the National Park Service Appalachian Trail and other parts of Pennsylvania Game Commission SGL 168, and they are adjacent to several permanent easements under the Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetland Reserve Program in the Aquashicola Creek drainage. Collectively, these public lands protect the outstanding natural resources of the Kittatinny Ridge while providing abundant recreational opportunities.

“The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is extremely pleased that the Palmerton trustees and conservation partners joined in a unique coalition to acquire the Alpine and Moreton properties, which have high resource and public use values for the area surrounding Palmerton,” said John Arway, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

The Palmerton Zinc Natural Resource Damages Trustee Council includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. In 2009, the trustees received a \$21 million settlement from the responsible parties for damages to natural resources at the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site.

The trustees worked with citizen, community and environmental groups, local and regional officials, and state and federal agencies to identify restoration project ideas and finalized the restoration plan in April 2011. A copy of the final restoration plan and environmental assessment is available at the Palmerton Area Library at 402 Delaware Avenue Palmerton, PA and online at <http://www.fws.gov/contaminants/restorationplans/Palmerton/Palmerton.cfm>.

Projects that have already been funded include a feasibility study for increasing fish passage on the Lehigh River, boating access improvements at Walnutport and Treichler’s Bridge, and enhanced website and signage for the Lehigh River Water Trail. Additional projects, including other land acquisitions and fish passage projects, are under consideration.