



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Erie National Wildlife Refuge

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INSIDE *Erie*



Courtesy of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy recently protected an additional 77 acres including 2,700 feet beside French Creek through a life estate arrangement with the land owners.

Landowners Partner with Land Trusts to Protect the French Creek Watershed

For Karlin Marsh, the old-growth forest of hemlock, white pine and beach trees on her family land in Crawford County is a spiritual retreat. “It’s almost cathedral-like, with tall trees and a very open understory,” she says. “It is a place where I come to meditate and, in my own way, to worship.”

“I have always wanted to preserve this area,” Marsh says, adding that she didn’t know how to do that until she

learned about conservation easements through the French Creek Valley Conservancy, a local, nonprofit land trust. A land trust can buy or accept and hold a donated conservation easement. A conservation easement is a permanent legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that limits the way land can be used in order to protect its natural or agricultural resources.

The conservation easement Marsh donated to the Conservancy designates that no building or timbering (except for forest health and safety reasons) will occur on her land’s most pristine forests. Another section of land under the easement will not be developed, but can be used for sustainable timber or farming operations. Other portions of her East Mead Township property allow future owners the choice to

(story continued on page 3)

Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Refuge Update

Another summer has come to an end for all of us. On the refuge, it is particularly noticeable in the number of staff working. This summer, in addition to the permanent staff, the refuge benefitted from the efforts of an office clerk, a maintenance helper, two youth group leaders, eight youth employees, a biological intern, and four Maplewood High School students completing their senior projects. With the close of summer, so also goes the temporary staff.

With the added staff, and volunteers, accomplishments included:

- Summer Fest
- One government residence painted
- Invasive plants (garlic mustard, multi-flora rose, purple loosestrife) treated
- A new kiosk with educational information built
- Another mile of the refuge boundary remarked
- Safety pillars painted
- Many miles of trail remulched and cut back
- Crawford County Fair booth, and contest
- Several beaver deceivers rehabilitated
- One service road, and one parking lot rehabilitated
- and so much more....



The 2012 Youth Conservation Corps members are the proud builders of a new interpretive kiosk on the refuge. Row 1: Nate Albert, Mariah Snyder, Megan Butler, Maddie O'Neill, Harry Zurasky. Row 2: Chad Taylor, Cliff Cornman, Cameron DeMaison, Kameron Propher. Missing: Karyn Holden

Perhaps most exciting this summer was the addition of a new wildlife biologist to the permanent staff at Erie. Lelaina Marin joined the staff in early July. She has worked on refuges within our region previously, but most recently comes to Pennsylvania from Colorado where she worked for the National Park Service. She is a welcome addition!

Get Involved!

Join the Friends of Erie NWR in supporting the 20th Annual French Creek Clean Up! The clean up, sponsored by the French Creek Valley Conservancy, will be held on **Saturday, September 8th**. Our Friends are organizing a group to clean up creeks and streams on the refuge that are a part of the French Creek watershed. After the clean-up effort, the Friends will join in the celebration picnic at Sprague Farm. There will be prizes for trash weight, uniqueness, and number of participants.

For more information, call 814-789-3585, or visit www.FrenchCreekConservancy.org.



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...French Creek Watershed (cont.)

continue forest management or perhaps to build a house.

“We will own the land and our children’s children will still own the land, but the land will be protected,” Marsh explains.

Tim Hecei, program manager for the Conservancy, emphasizes that conservation easements are tailored to the qualities of the land and the landowner’s needs. “Every conservation easement and agreement is site-specific,” he says. “Owners will continue to own, use and enjoy their land. If it’s a working forest, our goal is for it to produce sustained, quality forest products for years and years. It’s the same thing with cropland. We want to design the easement for economic viability so working lands can stay working lands.”

The Conservancy has partnered with landowners to place conservation easements on 867 acres in the French Creek watershed. It also has purchased or accepted donations on 356 acres of land for nature preserves. The French Creek Valley Conservancy often partners with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), a regional land trust. WPC has protected 3,900 acres in the 1,250-square-mile watershed.

The French Creek watershed spans much of Crawford and Erie counties and parts of Mercer, Venango and Chautauqua County, NY. “The French Creek is documented as having the highest level of aquatic biodiversity of any stream of its size in Pennsylvania and to the northeast of Pennsylvania. It includes four species of federally endangered freshwater mussels, 26 other mussel species and numerous fish species,” says WPC Land Protection Specialist Ann Sand.

The watershed contains critically important wetlands and many rare plants, the best remaining natural glacial lake in Pennsylvania and four Audubon Society Important Bird Areas, including Erie National Wildlife Refuge, she adds. Voluntary private land conservation efforts in the French Creek watershed are important to Erie’s birds, fish and other wildlife species because most rely on habitat beyond the refuge’s boundaries.

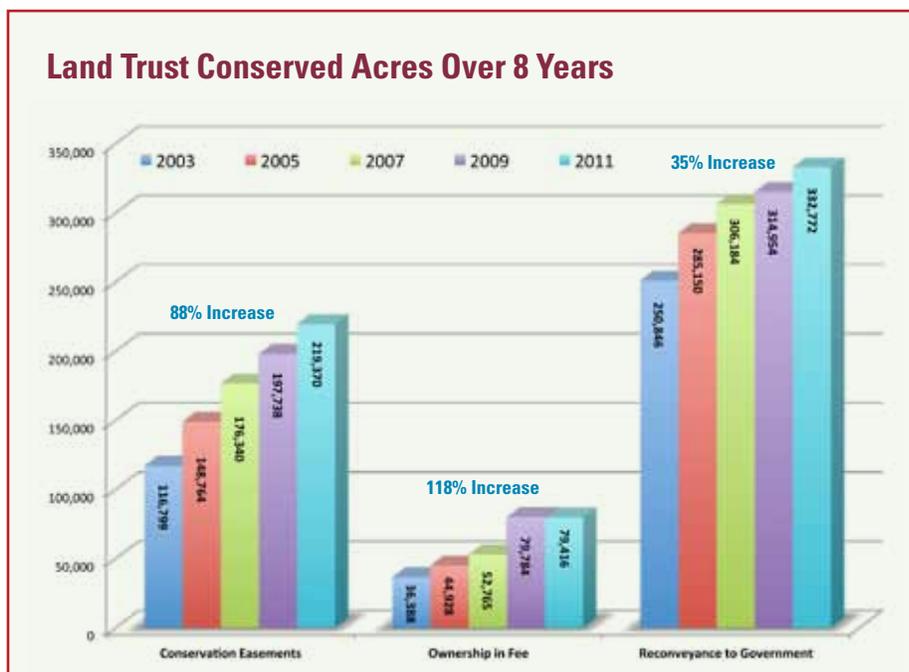


Courtesy of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Lowville Fen Natural Area at the West Branch French Creek Conservation Area.

Land trusts have partnered with National Wildlife Refuges in other parts of the country to acquire land or conservation easements to expand refuge habitat. As private organizations, these nonprofits have the flexibility to negotiate and purchase land or easements quickly, whereas federal government purchases take at least a year to go through the budgeting and appropriations process.

Most land in the French Creek watershed is privately owned, so landowners will determine much of the future of the region’s natural and agricultural lands. Like Karlin Marsh, many landowners care about preserving the area’s rural heritage and natural resources, says Sand. “Landscapes can change quickly. Working with a land trust is a good way to ensure that your land remains as you want it to be in the future.”



Over the last eight years, land trusts in Pennsylvania have increased the number of easements by 88%, the number of acres purchased by 118%, and the number of acres sold to, or donated to, government agencies for protection by 35%.



Hunt permits/brochures are now available on-line at www.fws.gov/northeast/erie. Printed copies are available at any of the information kiosks around the refuge (Headquarters; Rte. 27 & Boland Road; Rte. 173; and Swamp Road & Rte. 408).

During hunting seasons, we recommend all visitors wear hunter orange while walking on refuge trails.