

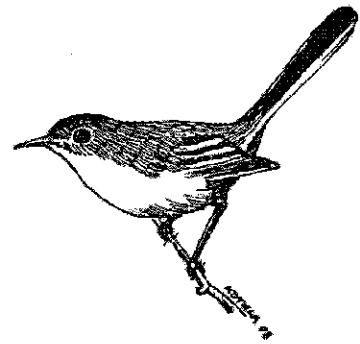
The Gnatcatcher

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

Volume 42 No. 1

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www.jvas.org



JVAS Chapter-only Memberships due

Juniata Valley Audubon has about 450 members. Close to 100 of you have opted to be chapter-only members, that is, members only of the JVAS and not the National Audubon Society. Chapter-only membership costs only \$15 per year for individuals, and family as well as other levels of membership are considerably less than National membership. Switching to a JVAS chapter-only membership offers a considerable savings in these difficult economic times.

Chapter-only membership in the JVAS confers all the benefits of National Audubon membership with the exception of Audubon magazine. However, all chapter-only dues stay with the JVAS and are used locally here in the Juniata Valley for conservation education and advocacy in Blair, Huntingdon, Centre, Bedford, and Mifflin Counties.

Chapter-only membership is on a calendar-year basis, thus chapter-only members' dues for 2010 are due now.

Become a chapter-only member: _____ Individual: \$15 _____ Family: \$20 _____ Supporting: \$35
_____ Friend of JVAS: \$50 _____ Corporate: \$100

_____ Life Membership: \$500— JVAS Life Membership provides you with all the benefits listed above for a once-in-a-lifetime fee of \$500.

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Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail (optional) _____

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Juniata Valley Audubon

P.O. Box 148

Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

*"Each moment of the year has its own beauty . . .
a picture which was never before and shall never be seen again."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

JVAS Mid State Trail Hike, November 22, 2009



A dozen hikers joined us for our November Mid State trail hike from the Colerain Road to the Little Juniata River along the top of Tussey Mountain.

The rocky spine of Tussey Mountain makes a challenging hike. In many areas the ridgetop forms a knife edge, with steep drop-offs to the right and left. Large outcroppings of sandstone occur all along the trail—many covered by rock tripe, a lichen that only lives in areas free of air pollution. Hike leader Stan Kotala demonstrated the edibility of rock tripe by eating it raw. He said that it tastes best shortly after a rain, because the alga/fungus combination has soaked up the most moisture and makes the rock tripe tender. Explorers such as Captain Sir John Franklin subsisted on rock tripe for months during their expeditions. Stan claims that it tastes like chicken.

Pennsylvania ridgetops are unique ecosystems, very different from the valleys and even from the sides of the mountains. Dry, windy, and cold conditions create a floral and faunal system that supports species such as rock tripe, mountain ash, and Allegheny woodrats. In southcentral Pennsylvania these ridges are the only large

unfragmented forests that are left. All of our valleys have been converted to agricultural, residential, and industrial uses. The small fragmented woodlots present in those valleys cannot support species requiring large forested tracts.

Areas where these outcroppings of sandstone are large afford great views of nearby hills and valleys as well as of distant mountains. Early on during our hike we enjoyed a view over McLain Run's valley, between Tussey Mountain and Roundtop to the east. Other outcrops gave us views of the beginnings of the Juniata River, formed where the Frankstown Branch and the Little Juniata merge near Petersburg.

At the largest sandstone outcrop, which faces west, near the border of the Little Juniata Natural Area, we stopped for a bite to eat and a rest. From here we could see Spruce Creek to the west and the valley of the Little Juniata River stretching to Birmingham and Tyrone. In the valley below us was the southern terminus of the Great Barrens (of which Scotia Barrens, SGL 176 is a part) which extend from Bellefonte to Birmingham. To the southwest was Cane Mountain (SGL 166) and to the south we could see Tussey Mountain, adjoining the Frankstown Branch and the Lower Trail winding its way southward to the Maryland border.

Finally, we descended Tussey Mountain and gradually hiked down to the Little Juniata River. The wild gorge is always a special place and the river flowing quietly by gives the Little Juniata Natural Area a unique charm.

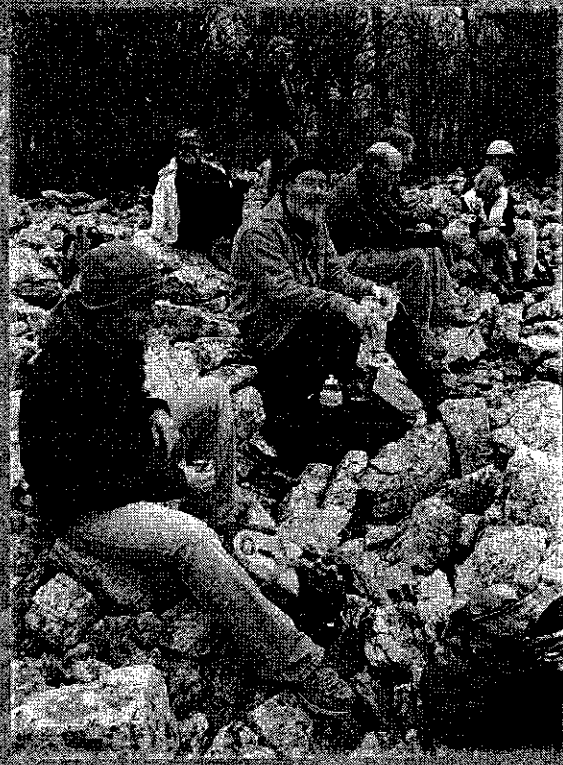
Most of the hikers finished the day with dinner at the Main Street Café in Alexandria, where we relived the trip's adventures and planned future outings in Penn's Woods.

After the hike, JVAS members enjoyed dinner at the Main Street Café in Alexandria.



Enjoying lunch in the large talus slope on Tussey Mountain overlooking Spruce Creek.

Kotela, Kotala and JVAS vice president Dave Bonta in the foreground.



Through the Branches

The Nature-Lover's Secret

By JVAS member Deb Tencer

I find solace and peace in my ability to focus and connect with nature even through the worst of times. I would hide as a child in the woods behind my home. I would wonder if I stayed there would my family miss me and come looking for me? Over time I began to draw. I would see and express my connection through my words. I found my need for acceptance fulfilled in the woods. I loved spending my day following a nearby creek, imagining following it till it became a river and then further along emptying into the ocean. The woods is where I belonged. I didn't understand this till many years later as an adult.

People call us nerds or tree huggers. We are not materialistic. We find pleasure in hiking for days. A tick bite and blisters are our prideful badges of honor. Great fitting hiking boots, a camera, a journal and a well-loved worn-out backpack are our most important possessions. We beam at the sound of birds, the warmth of a sunny day passed by on a rocky ledge, the taste of a wild blueberry. We all have a special something in common. Nature-lovers carry a secret, a key to happiness that most people can not conceive of and understand. We are different. We accept each other with no questions asked of our past or future. We only need to have that love and special connection with our earth to make life-long friends. Hiking together on a difficult trail needs no words to enjoy each others company. We see the world through the same eyes. A moment's rest to admire an unusual mushroom, a pause to listen for wildlife can be shared without words.

Many people in our society seek happiness through relationships and material objects. Depending on others to make oneself feel happy and content can be short-lived. The thrill of obtaining something new can also wear thin, always wanting something bigger or better. Nature-lovers are very lucky. We can find a rush of happiness upon entering the woods. A smile and a feeling of being home never fail to enter my being when I step into the woods! The plants and wildlife are my friends. Sea glass, feathers, a colored stone are my treasures.

I love to watch our seasons changing. If I pay attention to the details there are many signs daily. Spring brings a wonderful

feeling of renewal. The first signs of green bring me a sense of excitement. Energy within me multiplies. I could spend hours lying in the grass watching the green shoots break through the brown and colorless earth. The sound of birds returning from a winter down south thrill me right down to my soul. Spring brings a new start to us all, a new beginning after a challenging and colorless winter. Of course there are many things I enjoy about winter but it's the gray days that seem to go on for ever. I bundle up and spend time outdoors no matter the weather. It's the most peaceful in the woods after a wet heavy snowfall. The trees hang

their limbs low, creating a feeling of caves and safety. The soft sound of snowflakes falling to the ground muffle all other sounds and I smile. After an ice storm a layer of ice covers everything. The sun sparkles creating little colorful rainbows and sparkling diamonds everywhere. The tracks of little creatures scurry around the trees every which way often making no sense at all. It never fails to make me giggle. Of course the colors of fall take my breath away. But knowing the freedom I cherish in the warm months is coming to a close can be saddening. Every season everyday is special when you can really see nature and all its little details.

One summer I was very lucky to be able to spend most of my time outdoors. I was excited about watching the life cycle of the cicadas. I was hiking on a hot and humid morning in June. The noise was deafening! All around me I could see tiny drilled holes in the dirt surrounding the challenging trail I was hiking. In all the low grasses and plants I could see outer shells of transforming cicadas. Some cicadas live under the ground for 17 years just waiting for this perfect moment to emerge. They were in the trees everywhere, singing away to attract a mate. After a short romance and a few weeks later the song sounded sad, a reminder that we all are here for such a short time. I hiked in the forest for many miles with a sadness in me I could not put into words. They were falling from the trees onto the trail. With a last few notes their lives were over. The experience was such an intense reminder that we must grasp every moment because before we know it life will be over. Our bodies will hopefully be allowed to return to the earth as the cicadas did, a life cycle we should not take for granted.



Murder in the Woods

By Heidi Mullendore

Arthritic branches held paralyzed poses under a thick blanket of snow. The woods were muffled and darkened as though at twilight with an oppressive winter storm. As I stood under an ancient white oak, not a sound could I hear. The flakes were piling up on branches, underlined by bruises of murky blues and purples.

This was my favorite part of winter – not the slushy, brown drippy days or the picture postcard light flakes that call for sledding and cocoa, but the rare cataclysm of white which buries the world in silence; the kind that stops traffic and our daily schedule, providing a welcome release from the mundane - a free pass to head for the woods. The copse of beech and oak was strangely quiet – the animals had gone into hiding to wait out the deluge. Just the whispers of snow on my coat were all that my straining ears could hear.

A sudden cacophony of raucous and agonizing shrieks cracked the stillness. My heart thundered as I craned my neck around to find the cause of the murderous uproar. Black shapes exploded through the grasping fingers of branches, surging and weaving around a lone barred owl trying to escape the barrage.

Many species of birds mob larger species, smaller shapes harassing the larger birds, chasing off the bully. But crows exhibit a wild raucous joy as they scream thunderously in pursuit of owl or hawk. Corvids resonate in their mad glee - murder on the wing – midnight arrows plunging again and again through branches to harass the predator in its desperate escape. The phrase 'a murder of crows' is an accurate depiction of the black bedlam of the screaming crows, worthy of Hitchcock and Poe.

Many terms are used to describe species of birds, a few reflecting the true character of the bird. Among my favorites are: a piteousness of doves; a convocation of eagles, a trembling of finches and a wedge of geese. I've not found many sources to reveal the origins of these terms; they seem to have sprung from the pages of dusty ornithological references, some as dull as the faded prints themselves, others creatively hatched with the birds in mind.

Here are a few curious descriptors for the flock:

A siege, sedge of bitterns
A chain of bobolinks
A wake, kettle of buzzards
A cover, raft of coots
A flight of cormorants
A sedge, siege of cranes
A herd of curlews
A fling of dunlin
A cast of falcons
A flamboyance of flamingos
A charm of goldfinches

A flight of goshawks
A brace, covey of grouse
A bazaar of guillemots
A colony of gulls
A cast, kettle of hawks
A siege of herons
A charm, troubling, hover of hummingbirds
A band, party, scold of jays
A concentration of kingfishers
A deceit of lapwings
An ascension, exaltation of larks
A raft of loons
A tiding of magpies
A sord, flush, puddling of mallards
A watch of nightingales
A company of parrots
A covey of partridges
An ostentation, muster of peacocks
A squadron of pelicans
A colony, crèche, huddle, parcel, rookery, pride of penguins
A bouquet, covey, nest of pheasants
A flight, flock of pigeons
A congregation, wing, leash of plovers
A bevy, covey of quail
A conspiracy, unkindness, constable, storytelling of ravens
A walk, wisp of snipes
A host, quarrel of sparrows
A murmuration of starlings
A mustering of storks
A flight of swallows
A ballet, bevy, herd, whiteness of swans
A spring of teal
A rafter, muster of turkeys
A plump of waterfowls
A fall of woodcock
A descent of woodpeckers

Hiking at Bear Meadows Natural Area

By Helena Kotala

Bear Meadows Natural Area, located 7 miles southeast of State College, is a gem in Central Pennsylvania. It is a "high altitude boreal sphagnum bog," containing unique plants that are only found in regions that were glaciated thousands of years ago. The glaciers did not actually reach this far south, but the Bear Meadows area was so cold that it formed its own ecosystem. A late-summer attraction in the area is the multitude of highbush blueberries.

There is a 3-mile loop trail that takes hikers all the way around the bog, and is relatively flat, easy hike, although it is rocky in some portions. The trail also tends to get muddy in some spots, so be sure to wear appropriate footwear. It also is a good choice for cross-country skiers in the winter, as long as there is more than about 5 inches of snow. Once you reach the Natural Area, park near the stone monument, walk across the bridge and you will see the trail sign to your right. As you walk, keep the bog to your

after the blue blazes end, there is a spring named "Sand Spring," or as some Germans called it, "Tuempel" (little puddle). Continuing on, you will come to an open area, which was once home to a cabin over 30 years ago. There is a fire ring and some logs to sit on, which make a nice place to rest and have lunch. However, please note that there is no camping allowed in State Forest Natural Areas. This meadow is the halfway point.

When you are ready to continue on, pick up the trail again. The trail is a little hard to find again from the meadow, so just make sure that you are heading in the same direction that you had been going, and you'll see the trail. After almost another mile, you will emerge on a narrow gravel road. Turn right and follow this road almost to Bear Meadows Road. Just before reaching the road, you will see another trail off to



the right. This is Jean Aron Trail, a short blue-blazed trail that offers a more scenic route back to the parking area through hemlocks and rhododendrons. Shortly before reaching the parking area, there is a slight clearing to your right, which offers a nice view of the bog, as well as featuring a very large hemlock tree. Hug the hemlock, and see how many people it takes to encircle the tree. When you are ready to end your hike, follow the trail back to the parking area.

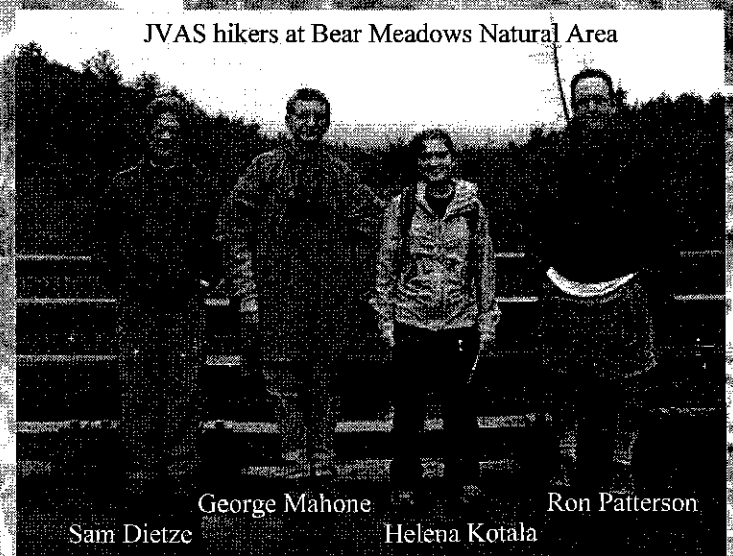
If You Go: Follow 322 East from State College. Turn right onto Bear Meadows Road, heading towards Tussey Mountain Ski Area. Pass the ski area on the left, Galbraith Gap Parking Area on the left, and Laurel Run Road on the right. Continue on Bear Meadows Road as it turns to gravel. Shortly after you pass Treaster Kentle Road on the left, park in the small parking area just before the bridge over Sinking Creek. There is a stone monument with a plaque on it at the parking area.



Through a tunnel of rhododendron on the Bear Meadows Trail

right. Soon, you will come to a forest of rhododendrons that surround the trail, almost creating a tunnel. In the winter, these rhododendrons look beautiful covered in snow.

After about a mile, you will pass the blue-blazed Gettis Trail on your left. This is a side trail of the Mid State Trail, and the blazes will follow the Bear Meadows Trail for about a quarter mile before veering off to the left again. Ignore these blazes and continue straight ahead, always keeping the bog to your right. Soon



Sam Dietze

George Mahone

Helena Kotala

Ron Patterson

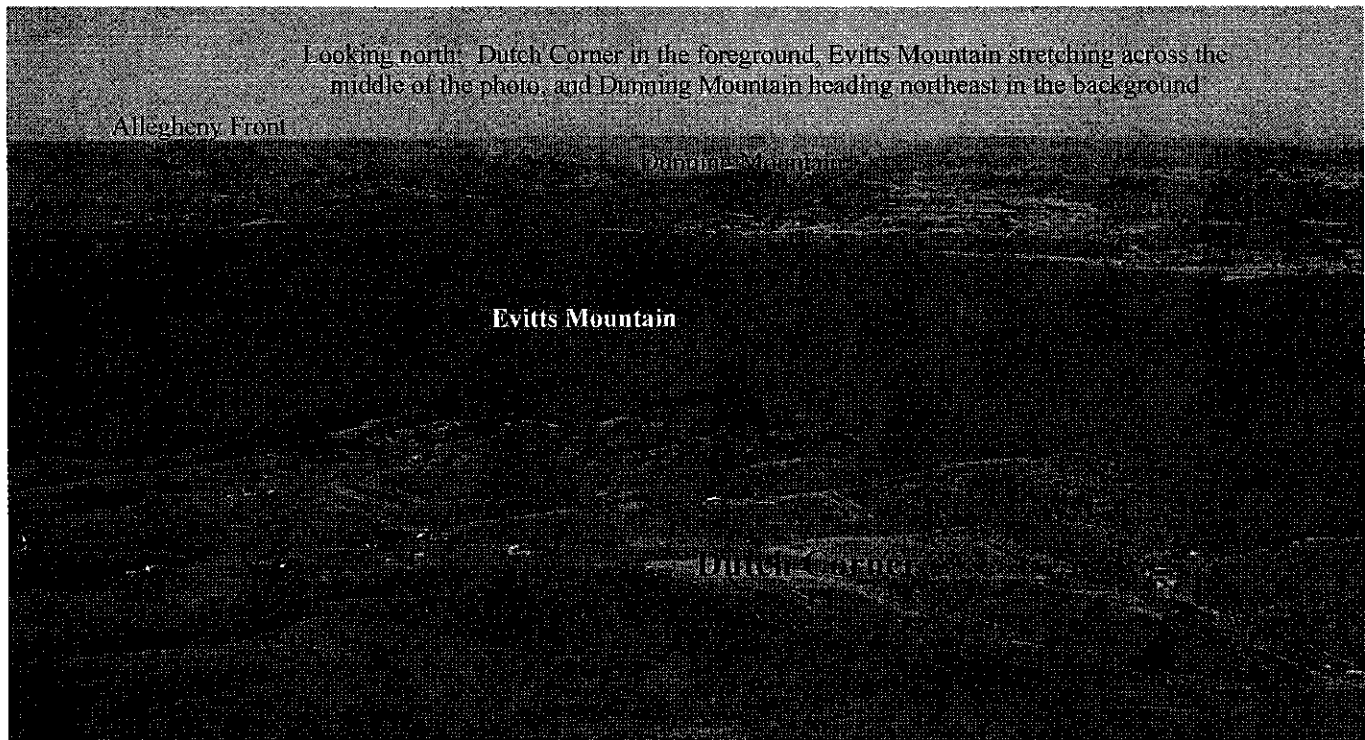
The Dunning Mountain Wind Project

By Laura Jackson, Chair of Save Our Allegheny Ridges

www.saveouralleghenyridges.org

The proposed Dunning Mountain wind project is actually planned for Evitt's Mountain in Bedford County, not Dunning Mountain. Evitt's Mountain, with its impressive curves and uncluttered skyline, forms the backdrop for historic Dutch Corner, eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places. Its double curves wrap the hollow on the north, east, and south sides. The distinctive double curve of Evitt's Mountain is recognized locally as a prominent and unique landmark. In 1906, a local historian, William P. Schell, described the mountain as sweeping down from the northwest with a majestic curve to the beautiful canyon of the Juniata. The Pennsylvania turnpike and Rt. 30 both traverse that canyon and form the southern border of Dutch Corner. Evitt's Mountain is the most western ridge in the ridge and valley province of Pennsylvania. It runs from Maryland into south central Pennsylvania.

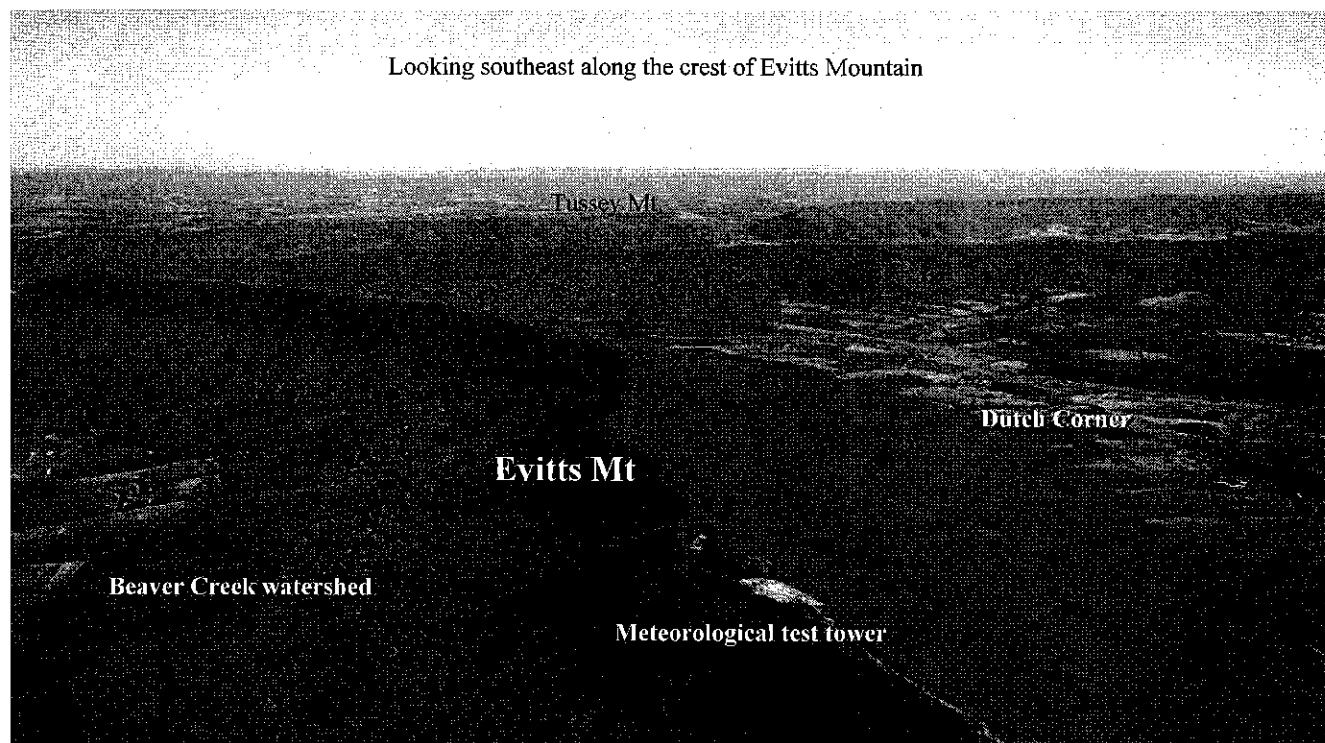
North of Dutch Corner, where Rt. 869 crosses the mountain, locals call it Brumbaugh Mountain. Just to the north in Blair County, Evitt's is called Dunning, then Loop, Lock, Brush, and finally it runs for quite a few miles as Bald Eagle Mountain, ending just east of Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Evitt's Mountain, with its steep talus slopes and hardwood forest, is an important habitat for many species of native wildlife. Mountain lion tracks were found a few years ago, but never officially confirmed. There is a healthy timber rattlesnake population on the mountain. There is evidence that the threatened Allegheny wood rat lives there. Many bats use Evitt's Mountain – the threatened small footed myotis was found roosting under large rocks. Quite likely the federally endangered Indiana bat frequents Evitt's Mountain, as these bats are known to follow ridgelines when they migrate each spring and fall. Evitt's Mountain is the same bat flyway as the ridge in Blair County that overlooks Canoe Creek State Park, famous for its Indiana bat maternity colony. Evitt's Mountain is also a flyway for many migrating species of raptors. The National Aviary data show that golden eagles pass through the proposed wind project area during their spring and fall migrations, and we know that Bedford County is an important wintering area for golden eagles.



is Evitt's Mountain an important habitat for wildlife, its springs and tributaries are important water sources for residents in the valleys below. The communities of Salemville and New Enterprise depend on water that flows down the eastern side of Evitt's Mountain to dilute their well water, which is contaminated from nitrates. The clean water is used to dilute the nitrate, thus making it safe to drink. A number of farms and families depend directly on this clean resource as their sole source of water. The eastern slopes of Evitt's Mountain nourish Beaver Creek, a high quality, coldwater stream that flows into Yellow Creek, a popular trout stream.

Not
only

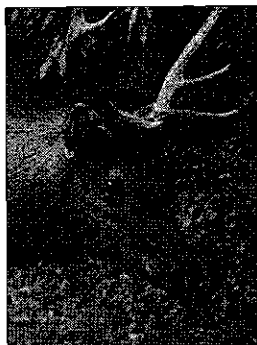
Drastic changes are proposed for the mountaintop and the rural historic district of Dutch Corner. Iberdrola Renewables has formed a subsidiary called Atlantic Wind, LLC to develop **24 turbines** in a chain of destruction along the top of Evitt's Mountain. These 24 turbines will stand 40 stories tall and will be linked to a substation adjacent to the current one near the Osterburg exit by an overhead **transmission line** that will run from the top of the mountain down its northeastern face. Iberdrola plans to **dynamite the top of Evitt's Mountain and to grade it** to change the flow of storm water. Most of the storm water flow from the turbine project will flow down the western side of Evitt's. **Blasting and bulldozing the mountaintop to flatten it for turbine pads** will redirect the storm water runoff, most likely changing the groundwater recharge system. The **forested summit and rocky outcroppings will be transformed into wide clearings to allow travel of the huge crane, and heavy equipment hauling cement, transmission cables, and turbines.** A 3 foot trench will be blasted for the underground cable to connect the turbines. The blasted rock will be pulverized for fill to create level turbine pads and roads. Most of the construction will be on the side of the mountain above the rural historic district of Dutch Corner, degrading its historic integrity.



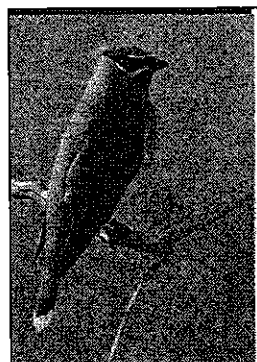
The wind industry must conform to water quality controls in its road construction, but the destruction to wildlife habitat will be extensive. It is well documented that **turbines on forested ridges kill thousands of bats**, so it is reasonable to predict that this wind project will become a killing field for wildlife. Golden eagles will either be killed by the turbines, or forced to detour over the valley, where they will have to fly harder due to less lift over the valley, consequently using more fuel reserves. Loss of body fat will be a stressor and an insidious cause of weakened birds. The timber rattlesnake habitat will be destroyed, and snakes will be killed during construction.

Residents on both sides of Evitt's are concerned about the many negative impacts of this project. They have asked for a DEP hearing to address water quality concerns. They will also implore the Bedford Township supervisors to uphold the 2,000 foot setback to historic areas that is in the township's wind ordinance. Upholding the setback will kill the project. The fate of this majestic mountain is in their hands, but Iberdrola is one of the largest energy corporations in the world. This is truly an example of David versus Goliath. Which will prevail – right or might?

For more information about the proposed Dunning Mountain (Evitts Mt) industrial windplant,
contact Laura Jackson at mljackson@hughes.net 652-9268



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Featured 2010 Field Trip — Pine Creek Gorge March 19-21

Rafting, Hiking and Optional Camping

On Saturday, March 20, join us for a guided raft trip on Pine Creek, led by **Pine Creek Outfitters**. On Sunday, March 21, we will hike in the gorge. Overnight camping will be available for both Friday and Saturday nights. There are also a few hotels in the area for people who don't want to camp.

The cost for anyone going on the guided raft trip is \$20. This covers the trip itself, wetsuit rental, and a catered lunch provided by PCO. This is half of what the trip normally costs.

If anyone wants to bring their own canoes/kayaks, they can tag along with the rafts, but will *not* be provided with lunch or the shuttle service. Pine Creek Outfitters does offer shuttles.

Reservations are required for the guided raft trip.

Please RSVP by March 7.

For more information contact Helena Kotala h_kotala@yahoo.com 814-502-7967.

join JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON!

Juniata Valley Audubon membership provides you with the following benefits:

- Notification of Juniata Valley Audubon's exciting activities including nature programs, field trips and other events
- Subscription to the bimonthly chapter newsletter, *The Gnatcatcher*
- Opportunities to participate in conservation projects and environmental advocacy, and **have fun!**

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hmullendor@state.pa.us

SOAR Representative....Laura Jackson 652-9268

mjlackson@hughes.net

JANUARY/FEBRUARY PROGRAMS

January 19 — JVAS members' night

Bring nature-related photos and videos, poems, arts, or crafts to share. Contact JVAS Programs Chair Dave Bonta if you need to borrow a digital projector.

February 16 — "How Will Global Climate Change Impact Pennsylvania?"

James Shortle, director of Penn State's Environment and Natural Resources Institute, was the lead author of a study mandated by the Pennsylvania Climate Change Act 70 of 2008, which presents climate projections for Pennsylvania at mid-century and at the end of the century.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS

January 23 Saturday — MOORE'S HILL TRAIL AT CANOE CREEK STATE PARK: Four-mile hike, moderate difficulty. Meet at the Canoe Creek Environmental Education Center at 1 p.m.

Dr. Stan Kotala 946-8840 ccwiba@keyconn.net

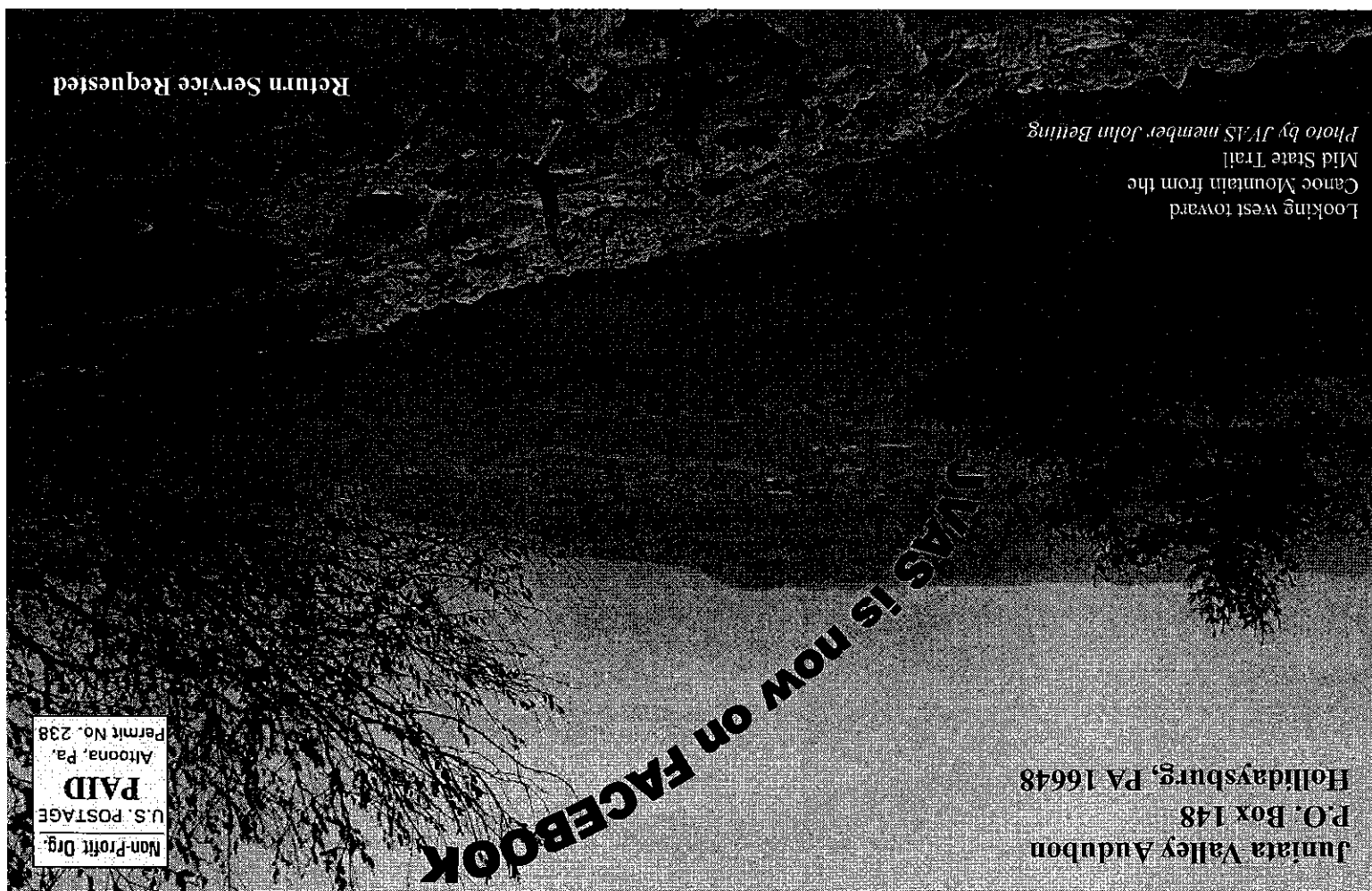
February 21 Sunday—BELL'S GAP RAIL TRAIL: 5-mile hike, snowshoe, or cross-country ski, depending on snow conditions. Meet at the Bell's Gap Trail Root's Crossing Trailhead at noon.

See <http://barts.homestead.com/TrailMapDirections.html>

Helena Kotala h_kotala@yahoo.com 814-502-7967

ABOUT JVAS PROGRAMS: Programs are presented on the *third Tuesday of each month, September through May (except December)*. They begin at 7 PM in the **BELLWOOD-ANTIS PUBLIC LIBRARY**. Take the Bellwood Exit off I-99, go straight thru the traffic light at the Sheetz intersection, proceed about 4 blocks and turn right just before crossing the railroad overpass. Turn left at the next intersection, another 2 blocks and the library is on the right.

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Looking west toward
Canoe Mountain from the
Mid State Trail
Photo by JVAS member John Belling

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