



THE GNATCATCHER

Newsletter of Juniata Valley Audubon

VOL. XLV, NO. 4 — SEPT / OCT 2013

Lawmakers Take Aim at Pennsylvania's Threatened and Endangered Species

**BREAKING NEWS CALL FOR ACTION BREAKING NEWS CALL FOR ACTION
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Anti-conservation lawmakers are taking aim at Pennsylvania's endangered and threatened species.

Pennsylvania HB 1576 and SB 1047 would diminish the Pennsylvania Game Commission's and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's ability to protect endangered and threatened species in our state.

The commonwealth has a long and proud tradition of independent fish and game agencies. Politicians shouldn't mess with it.

These bills would send the Commission's endangered and threatened species lists to the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC), an agency dominated by the legislature, for additional scrutiny.

The IRRC does not have scientific expertise or standards to evaluate

species listing proposals. Proponents of the bill claim that this is just like asking for a second opinion on a medical diagnosis. That claim is absurd. Second opinions on a diagnosis are rendered by another physician, not by political appointees with no science background.

These agencies' biologists are better judges of the threats to wildlife than political appointees would be. The agencies make decisions regarding proposals for protecting rare, threatened, or endangered species in an open, transparent manner.

As if we needed more reasons to oppose these bills, their passage would likely mean the loss in up to \$27 million in federal wildlife restoration funds, representing up to a third of the budgets of the Game Commission and the Fish and Boat Commission.

These federal funds would be lost

because managing threatened and endangered species in the fashion proposed by this bill would demonstrate our state's incompetence in wildlife management.

In addition, these bills could encourage more federal involvement in species protection. One of the criteria utilized by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in determining whether to pursue listing of a species is the sufficiency of state resource protection laws. By curtailing the authority of the Commissions, this proposed legislation could prompt a more active federal role in species protection.

Juniata Valley Audubon asks that conservationists oppose Pennsylvania HB 1576 and SB 1047.

~~~ by Dr. Stan Kotala ~~~

*More information on  
these bills on page 4.*



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JUNIATA VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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The Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) is a chapter of the National Audubon Society and is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity. Juniata Valley Audubon accomplishes its mission through advocacy, science, land stewardship, and education — working directly with Audubon Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania state office of the National Audubon Society.

The JVAS is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit, educational organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes (Tax ID # 25-1533496).

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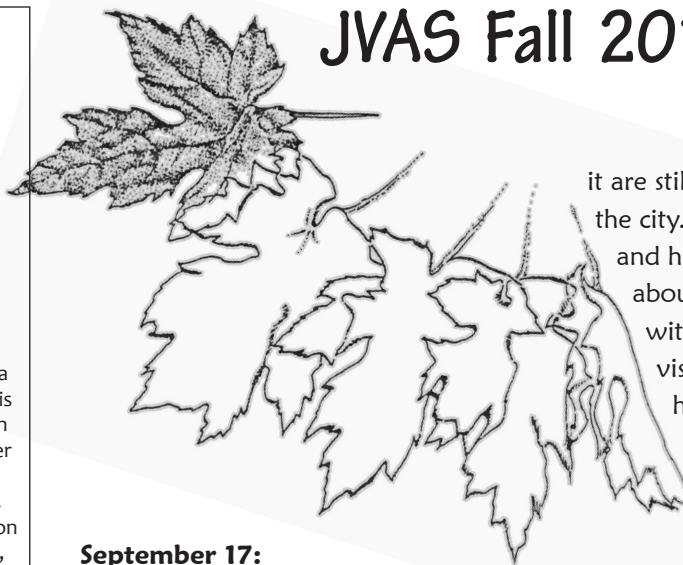
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# JVAS Fall 2013 Programs

it are still surprisingly wild -- even in the city. And the rich archaeological and historical record is full of hints about a once deeper relationship with nature. During a two-month visit in summer 2013, Dave did his best to understand that relationship, now and in the past, with stops at a butterfly meadow in a London cemetery, a seabird

colony on the North Sea coast, the largest remnant of the ancient Caledonian forest, a cave by the Irish Sea with 1500-year-old graffiti of strange beasts, and much more.

## September 17: Pennsylvania's Majestic Bald Eagle

The majestic bald eagle, one of America's most iconic wildlife species, will be the topic of a program given by Northern Blair County Wildlife Conservation Officer William Brehun. The rising numbers of known adult nesting pairs and their successful reproduction rate bring a large amount of excitement and increased interest in the bald eagle. WCO Brehun will also show the Pennsylvania Game Commission's recently released video highlighting the bald eagle's success story in Pennsylvania.

## October 15: Wild Britain

JVAS President Dave Bonta will share his summer experiences visiting the UK. Great Britain is a crowded island with a landscape that has been profoundly reshaped by human beings since the Paleolithic. Top carnivores were eliminated centuries ago and forests are few and far between, but parts of

## November 19: State of the Frogs (and how you can help)

David Miller, assistant professor of wildlife population ecology at Penn State University, contributed to the research which showed that amphibian populations across the country are declining at an alarming rate. His presentation will highlight the current extinction crisis occurring for amphibians and some of the potential causes being documented by scientists. In addition, he will discuss opportunities for citizen scientists to become involved in monitoring amphibians, and some of the habitats and species that can be found in Pennsylvania.

Leaf Illustration by Ruby J Becker

Program meetings begin at 7 P.M. in the meeting room of the Bellwood-Antis  
Public Library, 526 Main St., Bellwood.



“Like” Juniata Valley Audubon Society on Facebook!



# Study confirms U.S. amphibian populations declining at rapid rate

Story: Jeff Mulhollem, Penn State News

**The first-ever estimate** of how fast frogs, toads and salamanders in the United States are disappearing from their habitats reveals they are vanishing at an alarming and rapid rate.

The landmark study indicates that the amphibian declines first recognized by researchers in the 1990s are ongoing and that things have not stabilized, noted David Miller, assistant professor of wildlife population ecology in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, who contributed to the research.

"The paper points to some startling declines," Miller said. "What is most disconcerting is that these declines are occurring for not only the species that we already knew were threatened or endangered but also for the species that were considered low concern."

According to the study, published May 22 in the scientific journal *PLOS ONE*, even the species of amphibians presumed to be relatively stable and widespread are declining. And these declines are occurring in amphibian populations everywhere, from the swamps in Florida to the high mountains of the Rockies to the Appalachian Plateau in Pennsylvania.

The study, conducted over the last decade by U.S. Geological Survey scientists and collaborators, concluded that U.S. amphibian declines may be more widespread and severe than previously realized, and that significant declines notably are occurring even in protected national parks and wildlife refuges.

Amphibians have been a constant presence in our planet's ponds,

streams, lakes and rivers for 350 million years or so, surviving countless changes that caused many other groups of animals to go extinct, pointed out USGS Director Suzette Kimball.

"This is why the findings of this study are so noteworthy," she said. "They demonstrate that the pressures amphibians now face exceed the ability of many of these survivors to cope."

On average, populations of all amphibians examined vanished from habitats at a rate of 3.7 percent each year. If the rate observed is representative and remains unchanged, these species would disappear from half of the habitats they currently occupy in about 20 years.



The more threatened species, included on the Red List of Threatened Species maintained by the International

Union for Conservation of Nature, disappeared from their studied habitats at a rate of 11.6 percent each year. If the rate observed is representative and remains unchanged, these "red-listed" species would disappear from half of the habitats they currently occupy in about six years.

"Even though these declines seem small on the surface, they are not," said USGS ecologist Michael Adams, the lead author of the study. "Small numbers build up to dramatic declines with time. We knew there was a big problem with amphibians, but these numbers are both surprising and of significant concern."

For nine years, researchers looked at the rate of change in the number of ponds, lakes and other habitat features that amphibians occupied. In lay terms, this means that scientists documented how fast clusters of amphibians are disappearing across the landscape.

In all, scientists analyzed data from 34 sites spanning 48 species. The analysis did not evaluate causes of declines.

The research was done under the auspices of the USGS Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative, which studies amphibian trends and causes of decline. This unique program, known as ARMI, conducts research to address local information needs in a way that can be compared across studies to provide analyses of regional and national trends.

Penn State's Miller spent three years working as a post-doctoral researcher

..continued next page..

## Amphibians, continued:

for USGS's Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative after he finished his doctoral degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Iowa State University in 2009. An applied population ecologist, he was hired to provide the program quantitative support in analyzing data sets collected over the past decade.

"We summarized the results of more than 100 studies to make inferences about what was happening across the different monitoring regions," he said. "There is very little organized large-scale monitoring of amphibians. Much of the historic information pointing to large declines is based on small-scale studies and expert opinion.

"The evidence has been pretty strong that declines have occurred, but it has been hard to make systematic inferences," Miller added. "This paper quantifies population patterns across the United States, providing a representative picture of what is occurring with amphibians."

Brian Gratwicke, amphibian conservation biologist with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, said, "This is the culmination of an incredible sampling effort and cutting-edge analysis pioneered by the USGS, but it is very bad news for amphibians. Now, more than ever, we need to confront amphibian declines in the U.S. and take actions to conserve our incredible frog and salamander biodiversity."

The study offered other surprising insights. For example, declines occurred even in lands managed for conservation of natural resources, such as national parks and national wildlife refuges.

"The declines of amphibians in these protected areas are particularly worrisome because they suggest that some stressors -- such as diseases, contaminants, and drought -- transcend all landscapes," Adams said. "The fact

that amphibian declines are occurring in our most protected areas adds weight to the hypothesis that this is a global phenomenon with implications for managers of all kinds of landscapes, even protected ones."

Amphibians seem to be experiencing the worst declines documented among vertebrates, but all major groups of animals associated with freshwater are having problems, Adams explained. While habitat loss is a factor in some areas, other research suggests that things like disease, invasive species,

contaminants and perhaps other unknown factors are related to declines in protected areas.

"This study gives us a point of reference that will enable us to track what's happening in a way that wasn't possible before," said Adams.

Read the publication, "The Rate of Decline in Amphibian Occupancy in the United States."  
<http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0064347>

## Bills Fundamentally Change Endangered Species Protection In PA, Eliminates Others

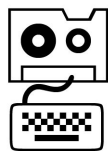


news release from PAenvironmentDigest.com

**Bills now pending** in the House and Senate would fundamentally change the way threatened and endangered species are protected in Pennsylvania putting at risk 73 existing state-designated threatened or endangered species because they would all have to be re-evaluated and put through the new adoption process outlined in the bill using new listing criteria.

The bill applies to the Game Commission, Fish and Boat Commissions and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources which now have the statutory authority to list threatened or endangered species.

In addition, the bill would immediately eliminate hundreds of species of special concern from environmental permit reviews entirely. These species were found by the agencies to be rare in Pennsylvania and are tracked for conservation purposes in order to prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered.



During environmental permit reviews, the Department of Environmental Protection determines whether applicants must take further action to protect or avoid these species under an updated technical guidance it adopted in June. Applicants are not required by law to do surveys or protect or avoid these species just on the recommendation of

the Game and Fish and Boat Commissions or DCNR alone.

House Bill 1576 (Pyle-R-Armstrong) will be the subject of a joint hearing by the House Game and Fisheries and Environmental Resources and Energy Committee on August 26 in Pottsville. The Senate companion-- Senate Bill 1047 (Scarnati-R-Jefferson)-- was introduced July 3, but no committee actions have been scheduled.

The Game Commission, Fish and Boat Commission and the PA Council of Trout Unlimited have already provided the House Committees with comments raising significant concerns with the bills.

### Game Commission

In a letter to the House Game and Fisheries Committee on August 14, Carl Roe, Executive Director of the Game Commission, said the legislation attempts to fix a problem that does not exist and threatens millions of dollars in federal funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The bill would require all threatened and endangered species designations made by the Game and Fish and Boat Commissions to go through the regulation adoption process and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission. (Listings by DCNR already go through the regulatory process.)

This extra layer of procedure and



process, Roe said, ignores the fact that both Commissions now routinely provide two public notices and opportunities to comment on proposed listings and delisting of threatened and endangered species as well as two separate votes by the boards of the respective Commissions.

The present process can take up to six months, while the regulatory process can take 18 months or longer. The bill also makes a fundamental change in the way agencies evaluate species for listing as threatened or endangered. Instead of looking at a species range or habitat within Pennsylvania for which the agencies are responsible, it requires them to look at the entire range of habitat for a species even if it occurs across several states or in large regional areas across the United States.

In a simplified example, if there are 10 of the species in New York and only 2 in Pennsylvania, the bill would seem to direct the agencies to not protect the species in Pennsylvania because more exist outside the state.

[Update: At the August 26 hearing on this bill by the House Game and Fisheries and Environmental Resources and Energy Committees, Rep. Jeff Pyle (R-Armstrong) prime sponsor of the bill said this section should not have changed the range of species definition and the words "in Pennsylvania" should have been included in the bill language.]

In addition, the bill requires all species now listed to be re-listed through the regulatory process within two years of enactment of the bill. This means the Commissions would have to re-evaluate and send 73 state-designated threatened and endangered species through the two year window to protect their existing status.

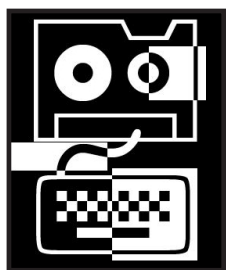
The Commissions will also have to evaluate the existing listed species under the new, expanded range of habitat criteria created in the bill, draft a regulation and move it through the regulatory process in two years-- an all but impossible task with the resources the Commissions now have.

Effectively, this means the protection of 73 existing threatened and endangered species are put at risk by this bill because of the process outlined in the bill.

Roe said in his letter the Game Commission will be forced to hire new employees at substantial cost to implement the provisions of this bill, diverting existing licensing fees from their intended purposes.

Roe points out the bill may also have an effect opposite of the one intended by the sponsors of the bill. The lack of state action to protect species may prompt the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list more species as federally threatened or endangered.

Over the past 10 years only three species have been added to the threatened or endangered species list by the Game Commission.



### Fish & Boat Commission

Talking points circulated by the Fish and Boat Commission take a similar position opposing the bills as unnecessary and harmful to existing protections offered to threatened or endangered species in Pennsylvania.

"Because these bills appear to provide protection only to federally listed T&E species, species that are rare within Pennsylvania, but not globally rare will not be protected. Effectively conserving species at the state level prevents regional and range-wide declines that require federal listings."

The Fish and Boat Commission points out there is already a definition of "acceptable data" used by the Commission to consider listing of species by scientifically valid and defensible data. The Commission also said the bill requires a new database to be created when there is already a database-- the PA Natural Diversity Inventory-- used for environmental reviews that is considered "one of the most advanced, and arguably the best, environmental review systems in the country."

The Commission is also critical of the bills for opening access to specific location information for rare, threatened or endangered species which could allow anyone to pinpoint their location facilitating the potential for harm to those species.

In the last five years, the Fish and Boat Commission has added 13 species and delisted 11 species from the state threatened, endangered and candidate species list.



### PA Council of Trout Unlimited

Testimony prepared for delivery on behalf of Brian Wagner, President of the PA Council of Trout Unlimited during the August 26 Committee hearing concludes, "We believe that the provisions of House Bill 1576 are directly contrary to the wishes of the anglers of Pennsylvania."

PA Trout Unlimited says the designation of wild trout streams, also covered by the bills requiring the designations to be done by regulation, is already subject to public review and must be scientifically justified.

"The current process for designating wild trout streams is rigorous and transparent and considers public input. It is rigorous in that data are obtained via well established, scientific sampling methods, and designations are based on stringent technical criteria, including numbers of trout, biomass, and size classes represented. This rigorous, scientific process results in yes or no answers -- either a stream meets the criteria for designation as one of the classes of wild trout waters, or it does not. Although designation as a wild trout stream may ultimately have regulatory consequences, it is not itself a regulatory action. It is simply a technical decision.

"The Fish & Boat Commission does not make these decisions in a vacuum. It posts on its web site results from surveys indicating that streams may be eligible for designation as wild trout streams. Proposed stream designations are listed in the Pennsylvania Bulletin at least sixty days prior to any formal action, giving ample opportunity for public comment. Anglers pay attention to these listings. If you don't believe that, simply mention Cross Fork Creek anywhere in the northern half of the State. Proposed wild trout stream listings are then acted on by the Commission's Board of Commissioners at its quarterly meetings, at which the public has an opportunity to provide comment on any Fish & Boat Commission business, including the proposed designation of wild trout streams."

In closing, the testimony says, "In summary, I am reminded of sage advice given to me by my boss early in my career, when I assumed my first managerial position. He said, "Hire good, well educated and trained people, give them

the tools they need to get the job done, and then get the heck out of their way." The Fish and Boat Commission is staffed by good, well qualified people, who are using sound science to make decisions about the Commonwealth's aquatic resources. We are well advised to stay out of their way and allow them get the job done."



## Western Pennsylvania Conservancy launches Our Shared Legacy conservation campaign

by JVAS Conservation Chair  
Dr. Stan Kotala

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) has helped to establish ten state parks, conserved more than 233,000 acres of natural lands and protected or restored more than 1,500 miles of rivers and streams in our region.

Now, the Conservancy is seeking help to build on its past successes and to tackle the most ambitious goals it has ever attempted in its 81-year history. WPC aims to increase its ability to conserve the region's most exceptional places and to leave a natural legacy for future generations. A visible, local presence through a Hollidaysburg office will support continued success in the JVAS region. The Conservancy's goals include:

► Protecting valuable forestland, focusing on large tracts adjacent to Buchanan, Rothrock and Bald Eagle state forests, and Blue Knob State Park.

► Conserving high-value natural areas in the Sideling Hill Creek watershed, around Canoe Creek State Park, and in the Nittany Valley.

► Protecting 200 miles of streams and restore wildlife habitat by promoting and implementing better agricultural

## JVAS Field Trips

### *Jacks Mountain Hawkwatch* *SUNDAY, September 15, all day*

Join the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) and Chad Kauffman at this hawkwatch, located in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania at the summit of Jacks Mountain Road. (See their website for exact location description and more. Visit [pabirds.org](http://pabirds.org)) They tell us: "Anyone is welcome, it is free to join us. You can stay all day or come and go as you please. This is an easy one to get to, and you can sit in your car, near your car in lawn chairs or on the hill if you wish. Beautiful views of both sides of the mountain with Mifflin County on both sides. No facilities available at this hawkwatch, but you can be in Belleville within a few minutes. Sometimes you can see hang gliders taking off from this location as well. It has been known to have kettles of broad wings lifting on the same thermals as the gliders. Binoculars are really all that is needed, but feel free to bring your scope. Some scopes are usually there from the hawk watchers. We highly recommend protection from the sun as well."

### *Nature Walk through Hartley Wood* *SATURDAY, September 28, 1 to 5 PM*

Join Sarah Chamberlain, botanist at Penn State University, for a walk through Hartley Wood at the Penn State Arboretum to look for trees, shrubs, ferns and late-blooming wildflowers. Optional trip to Otto's for refreshments after the walk. Meet at the Sunset Park parking lot (850 McKee Street) in State College at 1:00 PM.

### *Woods Trail Hike in Stone Valley* *SUNDAY, October 6, 1 to 5 PM*

Gerneylee Carter and Dr. Stan Kotala will be leading this moderate hike of about 5 to 5 1/2 miles. Meet at 1:00 at Charter Oak Road and Route 26. This hike will go through Stone Valley forest where we will see the American chestnut tree nursery, along with various habitats including beautiful streams. See Stan's write-up of the hike on the Sierra Club Moshannon Group website. <http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org/moshannon/OTT/OTT11-03StoneValley>

### *Mushroom Hike on the Lower Trail* *SATURDAY, October 12, 1 to 5 PM*

Meet at 1:00 at the Water Street entrance of the Lower Trail to hunt for fall mushrooms with local mushroom expert Karen Croyle. We will hike approximately five easy miles.

*Winkelblech Mountain Hike**SUNDAY, October 13, 10 AM to 4 PM*

JVAS Conservation Chair Dr. Stan Kotala will lead a 3-mile strenuous hike on Winkelblech Mountain in northern Centre County. Meet in the parking lot of the Military Museum in Boalsburg at 10:00 AM. Bring snacks and drinks. We will have a lunch break on the mountaintop. For more information, call Stan at 946-8840 or email him: ccwiba@keyconn.net.

*Hike Up (and Down) the Thousand Steps**SATURDAY, October 19, 11 AM to 2 PM*

Step into history as we trek up (and back down) Jack's Mountain on over 1000 steps used by workers to mine rock used for the brickyard industry. Meet at 11:00 at the bottom, along Rt. 22. Bring a snack with you for when we arrive at the locomotive house at the top of the mountain. If you wish, join us for lunch afterwards at Top's Diner in Mill Creek, a smoke-free restaurant that has offered home style cookin' since 1959. Hike Leader: Kristin Joivell, kristinjean@hotmail.com, (814)386-6267.

*6 to 10 Rail Trail**SUNDAY, October 20, 9:30 AM to 1 PM*

Meet at the parking lot on Dry Run Road (near Foot of Ten Elementary School) at 9:30 AM to set up a short shuttle. We will explore a spur trail that follows a steam, two of the Allegheny Portage Railroad inclines, and a bike path for a short distance of about three miles. Some parts may be wet and muddy, and a little rocky. Bring water and a snack for along the trail. Trip leader: Larry Broadbent, broadbent.lr@verizon.net.

*Francis Campion Memorial Hike on the Bell's Gap Trail**SATURDAY, October 26, 1 to 5 PM*

JVAS Secretary Dr. Alice Kotala will lead this moderate 6-mile downhill hike honoring past JVAS member Staff Sgt. Francis Campion, who died in a military training accident in 2011, and who had hiked with us on this trail many times. Meet at 1:00 PM at the Bell's Gap or Roots Trail Head of the Bell's Gap Trail, just off Rt. 865 north of Bellwood on Igou Road. Contact Alice at 946-8840 or ccwiba@keyconn.net.

*Bear Meadows Hike**SUNDAY, October 27, 9 AM to 1 PM*

Ian Gardner, a master's student at Penn State University, will lead a moderate, three-mile loop hike. We will be discussing birds, trees and any interesting flora and fauna along the way. Meet at the parking lot on Bear Meadows Rd. at 9:00 AM. For more information, contact Ian by email: gardnie07@gmail.com.

conservation practices, enhanced management of dirt and gravel roads and improved on-lot wastewater disposal systems.

"We are all so fortunate to live in an extraordinary region with great natural resources, ecological significance and opportunities for recreation. And the Conservancy is fortunate to have the support of generous donors, volunteers and members," said Thomas D. Saunders, WPC's president and chief executive officer. "We have the opportunity to work together and save our most exceptional places – rivers, streams, forests, mountain ridges and farmland valleys – while we still can."

Of the total land protected by land trust organizations in Pennsylvania, nearly 50 percent has been conserved by WPC.

*Released October 8, 2012 by the Center for Biological Diversity.*

Visit us online at  
**JVAS.org**



# 285 ACRES TO BE ADDED TO



# NEAR HUNTINGDON

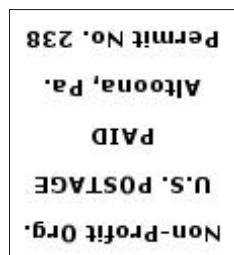
**T**WO TRACTS TOTALING MORE THAN 285 ACRES have been purchased by the Pennsylvania Game Commission to be added to State Game Lands 322 in Oneida Township, Huntingdon County. The tracts were purchased at public auction May 4 after the Board of Game Commissioners in April authorized the bidding. The \$1,013,454 purchase is to be paid with escrowed funds from

a prior land exchange on State Game Lands 176 in Centre County. The new properties would provide critical access to State Game Lands 322 from Cold Springs Road. The property also includes portions of Standing Stone Creek, a trout-stocked fishery and a diverse wetlands complex.

There's a historically significant warm spring on the property that maintains a temperature of about 63 degrees. The parcel is mostly forested with mixed oaks, hickory and white pine.



Buckeye on Joe Pye Weed  
Photo: Ruby J. Becker



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*Return Service Requested*