

## **Conservancy buys 6,000 acres of forest land**

Purchases commemorate organization's 75 years of protecting wild, scenic lands

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By Don Hopey, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has purchased 1,600 acres along the Clarion River south of Cooksburg in Clarion County and the timber rights on another 1,700 acres in the same area.

The conservancy said yesterday it had also finalized the purchase of a 2,300-acre tract of mature forest land along Laurel Hill Creek in Somerset County, plus additional smaller parcels totaling 450 acres in Jefferson and Forest counties.

All of the larger parcels and timber rights have been transferred to the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry for permanent protection.

The Somerset County property has been added to Forbes State Forest, and the Clarion County property becomes part of Clear Creek State Forest. The forestry bureau will permit recreational uses such as camping, fishing and hiking on the lands.

The purchases, which the conservancy is billing as its "75th Anniversary Acquisitions," to commemorate the organization's 75 years of protecting the state's "most valuable wild and scenic lands," were made with an \$8 million grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation and \$4.5 million from DCNR.

"These properties are magnificent, and I am glad that, with the help of our partners, we are able to protect them and share them with the public," said Tom Sanders, the conservancy's president and chief operating officer.

To date, the state's oldest conservancy has protected through land purchases about 225,000 acres -- nearly half of all the land protected by land trusts in Pennsylvania.

The conservancy's interest in the forested land fronting almost three miles of Laurel Hill Creek in Upper and Lower Turkeyfoot townships, Somerset County, was reported in December. At that time, the conservancy was negotiating the purchase of all the other parcels with the New Hampshire-based Lyme Timber Co. and its subsidiary, the Clarion Timber Co.

DCNR Secretary Michael DiBerardinis said when large tracts go on the market, it's important for the state to add those lands to the state forest system to prevent the breakup of forested land and the habitat disruption that causes for wildlife. He said it also creates a better outdoor experience for hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

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