

## Celebrating Pennsylvania's First

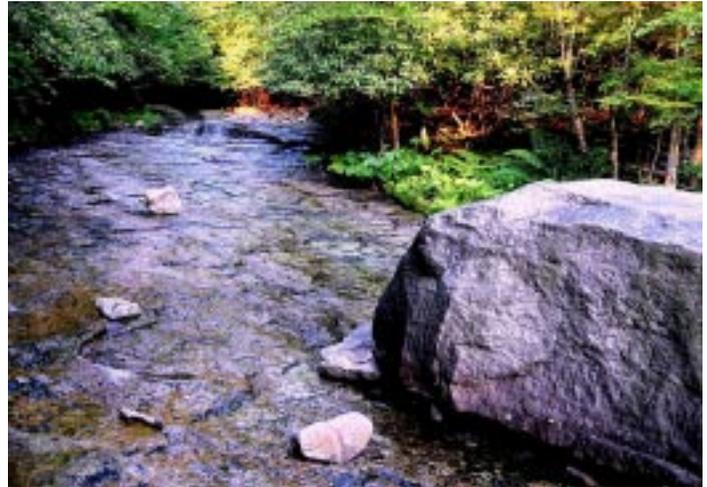


To implement the law, DCNR adopted regulations that established a plant classification system; created permit and license procedures; established restrictions regarding threatened, endangered and vulnerable plants; and provided for the designation of sites as wild plant sanctuaries.

In 1995, DCNR's Bureau of Forestry published "a blueprint for the management of our forest resources" called "Penn's Woods: Sustaining Our Forests." In the document, the agency committed to, among other things, establishing a system of publicly and privately owned wild plant sanctuaries. Since then, more than 50 public wild plant sanctuaries have been established in State Forests.

To establish the Private Wild Plant Sanctuary Program,

Photo by Barbara Grace



*View upstream from the lower part of Panther Creek. The valley, its waterfalls, woods and wildflowers are accessible to the public from the O&W Rail-Trail, about 1 mile north of Simpson.*

Barbara and Mike Yavorosky's 7.6-acre property, along Panther Creek on the border of Lackawanna and Wayne counties, is special, but not just to them. Earlier this year, the property became Pennsylvania's first officially designated Private Wild Plant Sanctuary and that makes it special to everyone.

The designation was announced on June 17 by John Quigley, Acting Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and a dedication ceremony was held at the site on June 19. It was the culmination of three years of work and interest in having the site designated says Mike Yavorosky, which began when he became aware of Pennsylvania's Private Wild Plant Sanctuary Program and applied to DCNR.

Photo by Greg Czamecki



*A pink lady's-slipper blooms in the Panther Creek Valley.*

The foundation for the program was laid in 1983, when the Wild Resource Conservation Act was passed. This established not only the Wild Resource Conservation Program, but also provided the authority for the conservation of Pennsylvania's native wild plants.

DCNR's Office of Conservation Science, under the leadership of Pat Pingel, organized a team of botanists to develop criteria for the sanctuaries. The Yavoroskys heard about the program and were the first to apply and have their land designated as a sanctuary.

The valley and stream on the Yavorosky property have been traditionally open to the public to enjoy, says Mike, and he plans to keep it that way. "The people of the community use it, for picking berries and swimming and all that," he explains. People also hike in to the series of waterfalls, one of which, says Mike, is "at least 80 feet high." The stream's headwaters are on Moosic Mountain and the elevation changes quickly and dramatically.

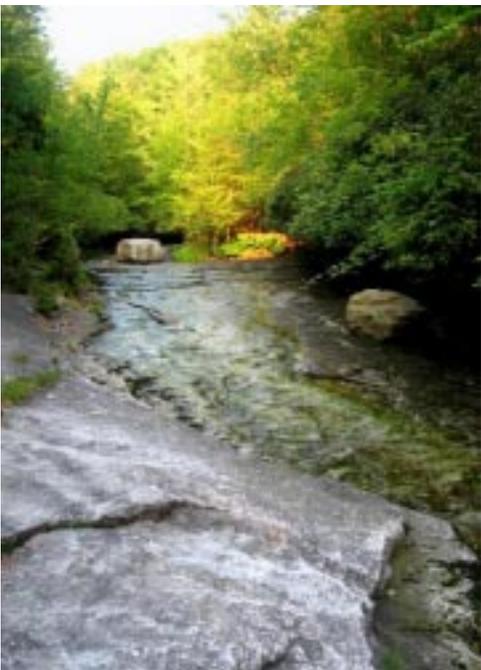
But it's not waterfalls that have led to this property, which extends 50 feet from either side of the stream for more than a mile up mountain, receiving the sanctuary designation; it's the unique and undisturbed plant community. The scenic stream gorge and surroundings contain a rhododendron-hemlock plant community and heath-birch barrens. The property has rocky outcrops with seeps and small, scattered wetlands. Some of the notable plant species include trilliums

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*Wild Plant Sanctuary, from page 7*



Above and right, photos by Barbara Grace; below, photo by Greg Czarniecki.



*Above, mountain laurel blooms at the Panther Creek Private Wild Plant Sanctuary; and a stream view looking up from the big pool. Botanists have documented a healthy and diverse native plant community on the property, and the sanctuary has been noted with the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program as a site of local conservation significance.*

and lady's-slippers. There are no invasive species, which makes this an intact native plant ecosystem.

Why protect wild plants that are not on public property? Most of Pennsylvania's threatened and endangered plants (and animals) occur on private lands. If those lands remain unprotected, they may be at risk of being developed, impacted by pollution or climate change, or even disappearing entirely as viable habitat.

The Private Wild Plant Sanctuary Program formally commends private landowners for conserving such native plant species and/or native plant communities. By encouraging the conservation of natural areas and native plants on private lands, DCNR can expand its role as stewards of the Commonwealth's natural resources and raise awareness about Pennsylvania's special places and plants.

Chris Firestone, DCNR's Wild Plant Program Manager, says, "By bringing



*At the Private Wild Plant Sanctuary dedication ceremony, June 19, 2009, the owners' daughter, Barbara Grace, snapped this photo of family and attendees. From left to right, Lynn Conrad (NEPA Rail-Trail Council); Luke Yavorosky (owners' grandson); S. Robert Powell (Carbondale Museum and Historical Society); Michael Grace (owners' grandson); Barbara Yavorosky (owner); Scott Linde (Linde Corp.); Michael Yavorosky (owner); Pat Pingel (DCNR); Sally Just (DNCR); Jessica Sprajcar (DCNR); Ellen Shultzabarger (DCNR); and Greg Podniesinski (DCNR).*



information on plant species of special concern to the landowner and helping them manage the property, we're helping to sustain our biodiversity. This is part of engaging property owners and making them aware of Pennsylvania's biodiversity and the importance of biodiversity. These plants are part of the larger ecosystem."

Landowners are recognized for their interest in native plants and plant communities with a plaque they can display. Enrolling in the program does not impact the landowner's private property rights. They do not have to allow public access, and can withdraw from the program at any time.

Would Mike Yavorosky encourage other landowners of special properties to enroll? "I'm very happy my property has been accepted into the Private Wild Plant Sanctuary Program," says Mike Yavorosky. "I think it gives recognition to people

(continued on page 9)

*Wild Plant Sanctuary, from page 8*



who are preserv-  
ing something.”

Next steps  
for the program,  
according to Ellen  
Shultzabarger,  
Chief of DCNR’s  
Ecological  
Services Section,  
are to get a web  
site up and  
running and  
choose the next  
few Private Wild  
Plant Sanctuaries.  
Six sites, in  
locations across  
the state,



*Scenes from the Panther Creek  
Wild Plant Sanctuary (clockwise  
from above): Galax leaves (the  
plant will produce a tall spire of  
small white flowers in June);  
painted trillium in bloom;  
the owners’ grandson playing in  
the big pool near the bottom of  
the gorge; and flower buds of the  
rosebay rhododendron.*

are the goal for the upcoming year.

“We want the sites to be ecologically  
diverse,” says Shultzabarger. “The first  
was a stream and woods. Maybe the next  
will be an open, grassy field with butter-  
fly activity or a barrens community or  
something else. We don’t want all of the  
sites to be the same type of plant commu-  
nity, but be a diverse sample of plant  
communities across the state.”

“We established the Private Wild Plant  
Sanctuary program to encourage and  
recognize good stewardship practices,  
including scientifically-sound ecological  
restoration, for native habitats and wild  
plant species,” says Sally Just, Director of  
DCNR’s Office of Conservation Science.”  
“The Yavoroskys are the first of what we  
hope are many enlightened landowners  
interested in conserving and managing  
their special places for future generations  
to enjoy.”

Details about Pennsylvania’s Private  
Wild Plant Sanctuary Program, including  
an application and site criteria, are on the  
web site [www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/  
wildplant/](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildplant/). You can also e-mail [RA-  
PAPlantSanctuary@state.pa.us](mailto:RA-PAPlantSanctuary@state.pa.us) for more  
information.



Visit these web sites for  
more on Pennsylvania’s  
wild plants and wildflowers:

[www.iconservpa.org](http://www.iconservpa.org)

[www.bhwp.org](http://www.bhwp.org)

[www.pawildflower.org](http://www.pawildflower.org)

[www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildplant/native.aspx](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildplant/native.aspx)

Painted trillium photo by Greg Czarnicki; other photos by Barbara Grace

