



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DCNR Designates Beckets Run Woodlands as Wild Plant Sanctuary

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources today announced the designation of a new Wild Plant Sanctuary in Forward Township, Allegheny County.

Beckets Run Woodlands (BRW), a property characterized by steep wooded ravines, cool headwaters, and ephemeral spring wildflowers, becomes the 16th tract to be accepted into the DCNR Wild Plant Sanctuary Program. The distinction recognizes commitment of owners Raul Chiesa and Janet Sredy to restore their land through conservation-based forest stewardship practices.

“Since its inception in 2009, the Wild Plant Sanctuary Program has promoted conservation of natural areas and native plants, while recognizing private landowners who serve as models of good conservation and stewardship of these special resources,” said DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn. “These properties serve as models for other landowners, offering strategies to conserve rare plants as part of their management plans.”

Like many landowners in Pennsylvania, Chiesa and Sredy inherited a property with a troubled past. BRW remained in agricultural use until 1948 when the property was abandoned amid the Donora smog disaster. Natural gas exploitation soon followed, fragmenting the recovering forest with gas wells and pipeline right-of-ways that drew trespassers and encouraged off-road vehicle recreation, vandalism and illegal dumping. A long history of disturbance and pollution resulted in loss of native vegetation, soil destabilization and invasive plant infestations.

Chiesa and Sredy consolidated fragmented ownership among family members, working to heal the land, often by reaching out to surrounding landowners and the community. They collaborated with local law enforcement to establish a no-trespassing enforcement program; provided recreational hunting to minimize deer pressure; and cooperated with adjacent property owners to implement invasive species controls.

Recognized for their efforts, BRW was honored nationally as the 2015 National Outstanding Tree Farm of the Year by the American Tree Farm System for exceptional forest management and promotion of sustainable forestry.

BRW lies within Beckets Run Biodiversity Area (BDA), a precarious sanctuary for two state-listed plant species. The owners strategically purchased the last remaining snow trillium (*Trillium nivale*; a proposed PA Threatened species) population within the BDA, thus securing ownership of the plant colony and a 100-year lease of its location. Threatened by erosion from off-road traffic and vandalism, the colony currently is monitored by California University of Pennsylvania through a research partnership with BRW.

White trout-lily (*Erythronium albidum*), a proposed Pennsylvania Rare species, also was historically documented within the BDA, but has not yet been successfully relocated.

BRW serves as a model for other landowners in southwestern Pennsylvania facing similar property issues, and its designation ensures it will remain a sanctuary for biodiversity well into the future.

The Wild Plant Sanctuary Program was established through the Wild Resource Conservation Act of 1982 to establish a voluntary statewide network of native plant sanctuaries. Landowners agree to protect the area and educate others about the importance of native and wild plants and habitats. In return, they receive any needed assistance with developing a management plan and have access to technical assistance and ecological checkups.

For more information on the Wild Plant Sanctuary Program, contact DCNR's Bureau of Forestry at (717) 787-3444, or email RA-PAPlantSanctuary@state.pa.us. Details also are available at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/plants/plantsanctuaries/index.htm>

More information on Beckets Run Woodlands can be found at <https://www.treefarmssystem.org/regional-tree-farmers-of-the-year--raul-chiesa-and-janet-sredy-of-beckets-run-woodlands-pa>.

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