



April 5, 2007

Dave Breon
Chair, Benner Township Board of Supervisors
Benner Township
1224 Buffalo Run Road
Bellefonte, PA 16823

The Spring Creek Watershed Community, a volunteer grass roots organization, is pleased to learn that Benner Township is planning to move ahead with a DCNR-funded master plan/management plan for the Spring Creek Canyon and its associated uplands before the transfer of any lands out of state ownership.

The Spring Creek Watershed Community does not back any particular entity for ownership or management of this property. It does, however, advocate that the ultimate land owners/managers have the funding, the expertise, and the explicit charge to adequately manage this land as documented in the master plan/management plan and that they promote ecologically sound land use practices on any adjacent lands that could impact the Canyon.

In response to the Benner Township Supervisors' request for input from community stakeholders regarding the upcoming RFQ/RFP for this master plan/management plan, the Spring Creek Watershed Community would like to offer the following ideas.

Benner Township and its other community partners have before them an opportunity for a lasting legacy. We believe that the master planning and management planning efforts must begin with an understanding of what the community would like to create in this unique natural area. A structured visioning process engaging a broad cross-section of community stakeholders should be used to gather community and citizen input, define areas of consensus, and note areas of particular concern or disagreement.

This visioning process should be professionally facilitated in a public setting to allow the full depth and breadth of issues concerning this project to be realized and incorporated into the land-divestment decision making process. Most importantly, this process should be permitted to run its course so that the proper management of this important natural resource will not be compromised by decisions hastened by the political process.

The master plan/management plan should build upon the findings previously documented in the *Spring Creek Valley Ecological Assessment*, the *Centre County Natural Heritage Inventory*, and the *Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan*. The plan's analysis should address issues regarding, but not limited to:

- a careful inventory of the biological, historical, cultural, and archeological resources of the area before any increased public access is granted,
- what will be needed to maintain the security of publicly accessible lands,
- what will be needed to protect rare and threatened species found within the area and at what cost,
- ideas for how public access could be managed (permits, guides, etc.),
- is there a limit/threshold for public access in this area?,
- potential educational or demonstration opportunities that may arise from opening the land to public use
- potential research opportunities on the site, and
- what are appropriate and inappropriate land uses and/or land management techniques for the upland areas adjacent to the Canyon (farming practices, ecological ramifications of building affordable housing at this site, how much forest is appropriate, forest regeneration vs. planting, management of invasive species, impervious surface limitations, etc.).

In addressing these issues, it is our hope that the decisions made regarding the Spring Creek Canyon will become a demonstration of ecologically-responsible decision making while allowing appropriate public use. We recognize that this will be a delicate balancing act for all parties involved.

The Spring Creek Watershed Community believes that a structured community visioning process as part of a comprehensive master plan/management plan for the land area impacting the Spring Creek Canyon will give the public a genuine opportunity for input. The master plan/management plan will also allow the entities that are considering ownership of the land to fully understand the implications of their management responsibilities and requirements. The natural resources of the Spring Creek Canyon and the public benefit of their continued protection by the community are too important to waste.

Sincerely,

Bob Donaldson, Chair
Spring Creek Watershed Community

The Honorable Edward Rendell, Governor
Honorable Jake Corman, State Senator
Honorable Mike Hanna, State Representative
Honorable Kerry Benninghoff, State Representative
Honorable Scott Conklin, State Representative
Secretary James Creedon, Department of General Services
Secretary Jeffrey Beard, Department of Corrections
Secretary Dennis Wolff, Department of Agriculture
Secretary Michael DeBerardinis, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Douglas Austen, Executive Director, PA Fish & Boat Commission
Carl Roe, Executive Director, PA Game Commission
David Densmore, Field Supervisor, US Fish & Wildlife Service
Steve Dershem, Centre County Commissioner
Chris Exarchos, Centre County Commissioner
John Saylor, Centre County Commissioner
Gary Schultz, Senior Vice President for Finance and Business, Pennsylvania State University
Robert Steel, Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State University
Franklin Tennis, Superintendent, State Correctional Institution at Rockview
Bob Jacobs, Director, Centre County Planning Office
John Elnitski, Chair, Benner Township Supervisors
Jacquelyn Bonomo, Vice President, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Dennis Hameister, Chair, Spring Creek Watershed Commission
Rob Fugate, Chair, Nittany Valley Joint Planning Commission; Benner Township Planning Commission
Robert Crum, Director, Centre Regional Planning Agency
Robert Donaldson, Chairman, Spring Creek Watershed Community
Bill Brusse, President, Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Robert Anderson, Centre County Farmland Trust
Ann Donovan, Watershed Specialist, Centre County Conservation District
Genie Robine, Centre County Chapter of PA Senior Environmental Corps
Pat Farrell, Mount Nittany Conservancy
John Coleman, Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County
Chris Magent, Heritage One Committee of the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County