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NEWS RELEASE

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Central PA Conservancy Acquires Former Watercress Farm at Letort Spring Run Headwaters *The purchase establishes a new nature preserve*

Carlisle, PA (March 9, 2018) – On February 28th, Central Pennsylvania Conservancy (CPC) purchased the historic watercress farm at the bend on South Spring Garden Street just before its intersection with Bonnybrook Road in South Middleton Township. Bisected by the Letort Nature Trail and serving as its southern trailhead, the former farm will be CPC's core preserve and the setting for ecological restoration, passive recreation, historic interpretation, and conservation education.

"CPC is proud to announce our acquisition of the Letort's Spring Garden headwaters. The history, the landscape, and the extraordinary conservation value of this property will now be preserved in perpetuity for the benefit of the citizens of our community," said CPC president, Ken Waidelich, "We heartily thank our county, state and local leaders for helping to make this a reality that all may enjoy." The property was first settled around 1720 by James Le Tort, a French-Swiss fur trader, near a Shawnee village and the intersection of major Native American trading routes.

"Last week, we closed on the first 30 acres, and we'll close on the last 4 acres in May/June of this year. This was a major fundraising effort that took nearly 3 years to complete—it's a special property that the organization sought to protect since 2007. Now that deeds commit the property to permanent protection and the public trust, we're excited to welcome public access and work toward restoration," reported Anna Yelk, CPC's executive director. "The total project cost was \$415,000, raised through county and state grants and generous contributions from the Township, organizations, families, and businesses."

Over a century ago, this east branch of the Letort was venerated as 'Bonny Brook' for its natural beauty. Ben Mummert, CPC's director of land protection and stewardship explained, "how we value spring-fed systems like these has been ever-evolving. In 1891, entrepreneurs saw that watercress, a leafy mustard green, thrived in settings flooded with cold, mineral-rich, spring water. The farm carved 10 acres of wetland into watercress beds and moved the stream into an unstable ditch. Alteration, silt, fertilizer, and pesticide reshaped the Letort here and downstream." CPC and partners are working on testing and research for a restoration design. "This project marks a new chapter. The preserve will ameliorate stormwater, provide aesthetic and recreational amenities to benefit property values and public health, and strengthen a renowned trout fishery and associated angling and tourism industries."

"The land acquisition is a major achievement for the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy and the County was pleased to support this effort," said the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners in a joint

statement. "Through the work of the Conservancy and many partners, including a more than \$116,000 grant from the County's Land Partnerships Program, this land along the Letort Spring Run will be preserved for many future generations."

Tom Faley, a supervisor of 22 years in South Middleton Township, described the project as, "a wonderful initiative to help preserve critical wetlands adjacent to the Letort" and noted that the board budgeted \$28,000 "to assist in that most noteworthy effort."

Major grants were awarded by Cumberland County's Land Partnerships Program (\$116,000) and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Community Conservation Partnerships Program (\$207,000). Closing on the acquisition was made possible by South Middleton Township, the Coldwater Heritage Partnership, Cumberland Valley Trout Unlimited, LeTort Trust, the David Masland Memorial Fund, Drew and Kathy Stoken, The Stabler Foundation, Blue Mountain Chapter of Safari Club International, Doc Fritchey Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Molly Pitcher Brewing Company, Union Quarries, and countless other community members. CPC is grateful for such broad-based community support.

"CPC worked closely with the local community in preserving a very important piece of land that will go a long way in maintaining the water quality in the Letort Spring Run for future generations." remarks Carl Goshorn, manager of the Cumberland County Conservation District. To celebrate this acquisition, CPC intends to hold a public dedication ceremony in early fall.

The organization has established the Letort Working Group consisting of experts and partners to help guide the restoration process, including wetland scientists, engineers, hydrologists, biologists, state agency officials, attorneys, and representatives of partner organizations." Key partners with overlapping interests in the protection and restoration of the site include South Middleton Township, Letort Regional Authority, Cumberland Valley Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, PA Fish and Boat Commission, and Cumberland County Historical Society."

CPC must continue raising funds required to steward the property and realize restoration goals. It has published a book entitled, *The Letort: A Limestone Legacy*, a compilation of personal essays by renowned fly fishermen and local residents who have a shared appreciation for this beloved stream. The book covers efforts to restore the watershed as well as a timeline of events on the Letort Spring Run. Interested individuals are invited to purchase this \$30 publication to support the project, by visiting our website, www.centralpaconservancy.org. For more information or to support the project with a charitable donation, please contact the office at 717-241-4360 or its executive director, Anna Yelk, via email at ayelk@centralpaconservancy.org.