



Central PA Conservancy
401 E. Louthier St., Suite 308
Carlisle, PA 17013
www.centralpaconservancy.org

NEWS RELEASE

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For more information contact:
Central PA Conservancy
Anna Yelk, Executive Director
Phone: [717-241-4360](tel:717-241-4360)
Email: ayelk@centralpaconservancy.org

Central Pennsylvania Conservancy Protects Rare Plant Community in Franklin County

The Central Pennsylvania Conservancy (CPC) recently recorded a 233-acre conservation easement just east of Mercersburg in Franklin County. This easement surrounds a 1760's farmhouse which predates the establishment of Mercersburg by twenty years and boasts frontage along two waterways: Johnston Run, a coldwater spring run, and the West Branch Conococheague Creek, the northernmost tributary of the Potomac River.

The second of two easements donated to CPC by the landowner in this region, additional support for this project provided by WeConservePA ensured the perpetual protection of this property's mosaic of wet meadows, forested bluffs, no-till farm land, as well as its panoramic view of Parnell Knob. Perhaps most noteworthy, however, is its exceptional natural community along the Conococheague floodplain.

Beaver, mink, muskrat and bald eagles enjoy the forested refugium provided by the shellbark hickory and bur oak that line the creek. Beakgrass, a charismatic grass at the northern limits of its range in southcentral Pennsylvania, blankets portions of the floodplain. Seasonally inundated wetlands scattered about the floodplain support at least five plant species of special concern, one of which was not known to occur in Franklin County until CPC staff initiated data collection for the easement's Baseline Document Report. This unique combination of floristic elements collectively comprises a natural community that occurs at very few localities in the state.

Long regarded by the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program as a site of statewide significance for the protection of biological diversity in Franklin County, its protection and stewardship by CPC will ensure the persistence and proliferation of these plants within this wild, historic, and rural landscape for generations to come.