

To save native wildflower

DER buys 293 acres for nature reserve

HARRISBURG — The Jennings Blazing Star Nature Reserve in Butler County, home of the Blazing Star prairie and the secretive Massassaqua, has been acquired by the Department of Environmental Resources from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

DER Secretary Clifford L. Jones said the price of the 293-acre property was \$220,000, of which 50 percent will be reimbursed by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

"The nature reserve is well known for its conservation and environmental

education program and just a few miles away is Moraine State Park which attracts thousands of visitors annually for swimming, boating and to use the day-use facilities that Park has to offer," Jones said.

"Also nearby is the Old Stone House, once a wayside

tavern, a historic property owned and operated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission."

Located 12 miles north of Butler, off U.S. Rt. 8, the nature reserve was established to preserve a three-acre area of native prairie sustaining the Blazing Star, a wildflower first observed by the late O. E. Jennings, a well known botanist.

After the property was acquired by the Conservancy in the 1960's, approximately 20 acres of forested land surrounding the plant site were cleared to create conditions most favorable to the growth of the Blazing Star.

Paul Wiegman, director of the Conservancy's Natural Area Program said the plant, a member of the sunflower family, is not particularly rare.

It can be found elsewhere in the Commonwealth but not in the same abundance as at the reserve, which attracts thousands of

visitors each August to view the thick cluster of rose-purple flowers.

"What is unique is the manner of managing the area so the plant can survive and spread," Wiegman said. "This involves alternate burning off and mowing each year."

"The Blazing Star is adapted to fire which stimulates growth and better blooms. Therefore two sections of the area are burned off in the Spring, and the other two areas are mowed the following Fall."

"We have found that the burned off areas produce a greater abundance of flowers."

For the last six years, students from Slippery Rock State College, who maintain a year round environmental education program at the reserve, have been handling the burning.

Two students set the fire with blowtorches while the others stand by with fire extinguishers to prevent it from spreading.

While thousands of people visit the reserve each year, to see the flowers or take advantage of the college's program, few have seen the Massassaqua, a small rattlesnake.

This peaceful, non-aggressive reptile, which averages about 24 inches in length, is extremely secretive. In fact, the spring burning is not even detrimental to the snake.

It is an endangered species in Pennsylvania and while it has been reported in 18 to 20 places in western Pennsylvania, there are only seven sites where the reptile can definitely be found.

The reptile's habitat in many of the other places have long since been ruined by development and construction of new roads.

Unlike the timber rattler which prefers mountainous and rocky terrain, the Massassaqua prefers the lower elevations and a typical habitat would be an alder swamp surrounded by wet meadow lands.

Valley Grange to host home energy workshop

LEWISBERRY — A home energy workshop will be held at Valley Grange, in Lewisberry, York County, February 13, at 7 p.m. The meeting is open to the public.

The featured speakers for the event will be Joseph McCurdy, Penn State Agricultural Engineer, and Walter Johnson, Penn State Forest Specialist.

The program will be directed toward the average homeowner, with an emphasis on energy-saving devices that pay for themselves quickly.

McCurdy's presentation is entitled "Insulation and How to Save Energy Within the Home."

His presentation includes a discussion on the five steps necessary to winterize a home.

"The most important," McCurdy says, "is controlling your indoor temperature. There are

programmable temperature control devices available on the market for as little as \$35, that anyone can install in their home."

Another major cost to the homeowner is heat loss, McCurdy states. "Controlling air leakage through cracks and windows with weatherstripping is an easy way to save fuel dollars."

"The third step," according to McCurdy, "is to install storm windows." Storm windows are a good way to decrease heat loss through windows."

Many people lose countless fuel dollars because of a faulty heating system. McCurdy hopes to point out that with a few simple checks, a homeowner can insure that his heating system is performing efficiently.

"Finally, by adding insulation, first in the ceiling, and then in the walls, heat

loss can be kept to an absolute minimum," McCurdy said.

This portion of the program will take about a half hour, and there will be a question and answer period immediately following the presentation.

Johnson's presentation, the second portion of the program, is entitled, "Woodstoves for Use as an Alternative Energy Source."

The program is being sponsored by the Valley Grange, of Lewisberry, in cooperation with the Penn State Co-operative Extension Service.

For more information, or directions to the Valley Grange Hall, contact Timothy Markovits at the York County Extension Office, at 717-757-9657.

Refreshments will be served by the Valley Grange during and after the workshop.

Alumni plan dinner-dance

NORRISTOWN — The Montgomery County 4-H Cabinet Advisory Board is planning a special dinner-dance for 4-H Alumni, leaders and parents. The event will be held on Saturday evening, March 29th at Birchwood near Graterford.


The 4-H Cabinet is seeking all Montgomery County 4-H alumni, former members as well as leaders who are now in the Montgomery County area. Current leaders and parents of 4-H'ers in the county are also encouraged to attend.

The evening will feature roast beef buffet, social hour and welcome, plus door prizes "The Journeymen", a well-known band in the area, will provide music for dancing. Recognition of leaders and alumni will also be a special portion of the program.

According to Nancy Kadwill, county agent, the evening is planned to provide recognition and enjoyment for leaders and parents, without whom the 4-H program would not function. It's also an effort to renew friendships and locate 4-H alumni.

Chairperson for the dinner-dance is Chris Jones, Schwenksville, who also serves as Chairman of the Cabinet Expansion and Review Committee.

Advance reservations are required. Tickets, which are \$10.00 per person, can be obtained from 4-H Cabinet members or by contacting the 4-H office at 277-0574.



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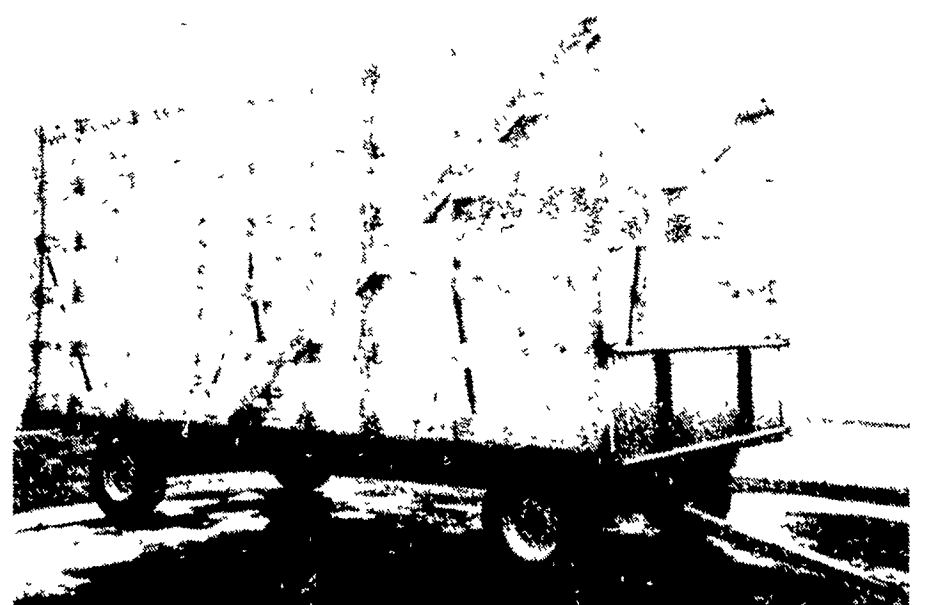
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