

## A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

In Pennsylvania we have one of those rare opportunities to actually promote environmental stewardship when we file our personal income tax returns. To quote from my 1996 instruction booklet: "You have a chance to 'Do Something Wild' and help protect Pennsylvania's non-game wildlife and native wild plants by making a contribution of your state refund on line 19c of your PA-40 or 12c of your PA-40EZ. This special nonprofit fund [the Wild Resource Conservation Fund] is designed to help the state's resource agencies protect and restore these unique state treasures...." Yes, in 1982 the Pennsylvania legislature passed the Wild Resource Conservation Act which set up a fund to help our various state agencies focus on their "unfunded mandates" - that is those parts of their jurisdictions that had been ignored because they did not directly pertain to game animals, forestry, etc.

The beauty of this fund (hereafter referred to as WRCF) is that all of its money comes voluntarily from the citizens of the state. In addition to the check off box on the tax forms, money is also generated through sales of "Conserve Wild Resources" license plates and through direct contributions or the sale of various memorabilia such as hats or T-shirts.

Last year almost one million dollars was funneled through WRCF into a wide variety of projects designed to help us un-

## One good thing about tax time in Pennsylvania

derstand and conserve our "unique state treasures." Approximately 50 projects are funded each year. Some are large and have immediate results such as the publication in 1995 of the book *Endangered and Threatened Species of Pennsylvania*. Others are small and results will not be noticed for many years such as several curricula being developed and circulated to teachers throughout the commonwealth. Most are scientific in nature. There are studies of bats, birds, small mammals, and insects. There are surveys of plants, reptiles and amphibians, and forest community types.

Some projects are designed to study the current status of the animal and plant populations within the state. For instance, we know that 3400 different plants occur in Pennsylvania. But, we know very little about the habitat requirements of most of the non-tree species. There is an effort underway now with WRCF funding simply to map the occurrence of these species and to study the historical collections to see what changes might have taken place over the past century. Also, the last thorough census of freshwater mussels (a type of bivalve similar to a clam) was completed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Arnold Ortmann of the Carnegie Museum found 65 different species. The recent survey which is almost complete indicates that 22 of those species have disappeared from the state in that short length of time.

Other projects are efforts to restore or protect species that are endangered. One of the most popular of these restoration projects is the reintroduction of the river otter. It is interesting

that this reintroduction was only possible because the water quality in our streams and rivers has improved so much during the past two or three decades. The Allegheny River in southern Venango County was the site of the latest release of animals procured from New York state. At one point the only viable population of otters in our state was in the Poconos. Now, through the efforts of University students and private individuals with some WRCF funding, the river otter is again breeding in several watersheds throughout the state. It is quite possible that the next WRCF license plate design will feature the river otter.

Some restoration projects do not involve expensive reintroduction campaigns. They simply protect the places where the particular species live. The best example of this is the effort to protect the bat populations that are so critical to insect control. Special doors are constructed across old mine entrances so that the bats can fly in and out but people cannot enter. Old mines are ideal habitat for bats, especially when they hibernate in the wintertime, because they are able to maintain very low body temperatures with no disturbance by humans. Isn't it odd that sometimes our most destructive activities give rise to unique conservation opportunities?

So, if you want to get personally involved in the protection of our state's biological resources - to promote the conservation of mushrooms, mayflies, orchids, flying squirrels, and owls - just check that box on your PA income tax return. And, if someone will explain to me how one manages to overpay one's state income tax so that you are due a refund, I will be glad to join you!

## Chorus

(continued from page 1)

some may have a tutorial scheduled for one day, and maybe nothing the next."

Griffiths is quick to point out that the format does have some bugs to be ironed out. "It does need some fine tuning," he said.

The administration is currently compiling an interim report which touches on the subject, to be reviewed on March 3. "It's too early to make certain judgements, because we'll have a better grasp on the situation later in the year," said Griffiths.

## Business association will meet Feb. 13

Margaret Burgerhoff, who helped organize the successful Luzerne Merchants' Association, will be the featured speaker at the Feb. 13 meeting of the Back Mountain Business and Professional Association. Members will also discuss the upcoming Easter egg hunt, and the new Economic Development Committee will make a first report. The meeting will begin at 11:45 a.m. in Merrick Hall on the campus of College Misericordia. Visitors are welcome.



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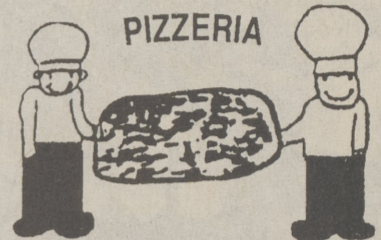
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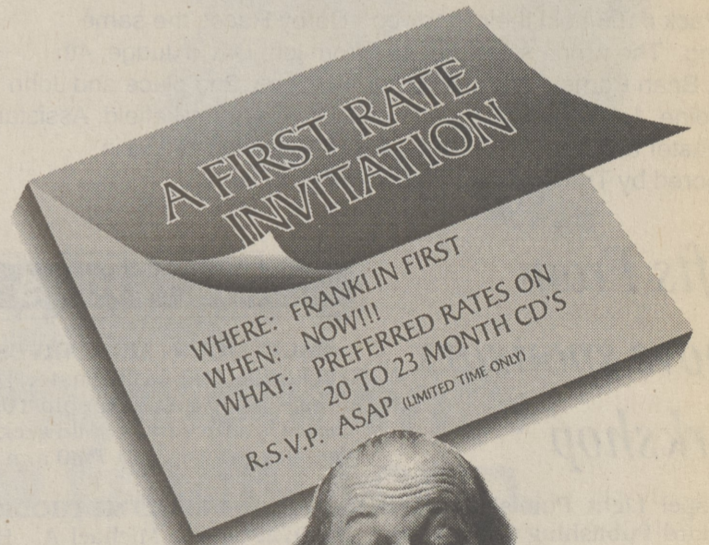
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