

New Game Lands Located In McKean

By Howard Gustafson

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has announced its formal acquisition of the Stanley Gittelman property, located three miles south of Port Allegany near the village of Wrights. This parcel of land is more familiar to local residents as the Charles Seyler farm. It is also known as Tramroad Hollow by those who follow contour maps.

Since 1968 this property has been owned by Dr. and Mrs. Gittelman of Philadelphia. It is one of the largest farms left in Liberty Township, covering 900 acres. It was assembled over the last 100 years by adding smaller tracts, with William Sawyer, Lester Eastman, and Charles Seyler being among those who built it to its present size.

Roughly 750 acres of the tract are wooded with the remainder pasture land. As a part of the Game Lands system, it will be managed with a good wildlife environment as the primary goal. Much of the present pasture land will be planted with various grains that will be left unharvested for wildlife food. The woodlands will also be managed to provide the best food and cover for wildlife, with timber harvesting a secondary consideration.

As with all Pa. Game Lands, camping is prohibited, as is the use of motorized vehicles. However, hiking is permitted at all seasons, and good access to the property is available along the one mile of road frontage.

Working through the Seneca Highlands Conservancy, options covering an additional 72.5 acres have been acquired from two nearby landowners, bringing the total size of the project to nearly 1000 acres.

The Seneca Highlands Conservancy was formed by four men for the purpose of preserving available land for public use. John Young, Minard Run; Jeff Duke, Duke Center; Philip Schuler, Bradford, and Bill Franklin, Coudersport, are the founders. In addition to the Gittelman property, they have been instrumental in acquiring a large tract of important wildlife habitat near Larabee.

Known to most area residents as the Larabee flats, this apparently useless property is now State Game Lands No. 301. Ultimately, this project will put some 2000 acres under

the jurisdiction of the Pa. Game Commission, although at the present time it is only about 54 percent complete.

About 400 acres of the planned acquisition are in the area bounded by Potato Creek and the Allegheny River on the east side and by the Conrail tracks north of Rt. 446. Generally the balance of the property now owned by the game commission lies between the river and the tracks north to a point just past Canfield Hollow. Not all of the property in this section has been purchased yet; in fact, there are at least five privately-owned pieces of property that separate the pieces owned by the commission. Until boundaries are clearly defined, users are cautioned to be sure they are not trespassing on private lands.

This area of McKean County contains some of the most valuable wildlife habitat available. By the same token, it is of little use for any other purpose. Most of it is wetlands, containing little or no valuable timber, and in order to put it into farm use, it would have to be drained, which is illegal, if not impossible. The Conservancy recognizes the value as wildlife habitat and was able to bring about the sale to the commission.

The Seneca Highlands Conservancy has no connection with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, or any other groups for advice and assistance. The purpose of the Conservancy is to locate desirable property that can be purchased for the price the game commission or other conservation agencies are allowed to pay. It owns no property, although the founders have purchased land on their own with an eye towards inclusion in the conservation effort.

A third project is under way in the Wrights district, but to date only 125 acres of a proposed total of 1200 have been committed. One of the difficult problems affecting purchase is the limited amount the game commission is allowed to pay per acre. This figure is often less than the market price for timber or farmlands. A willingness on the part of the owner to sell to the conservancy is necessary, which limits the possibilities. According to Mr. Young, the conservancy is not knocking on doors to acquire purchase options, but if someone is looking for a way to donate land, the group contains enough legal expertise to help the process.

