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Game land rancor

New state property in Spring Creek draws ire from some in community

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A 2,195-acre property transfer that went through last month sets the stage for the creation of new state game lands in western Warren County.

The Times Observer reported in October the transfer was part of a 2,195 acre land-for-oil deal between the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania General Energy.

Terms of the transfer saw the Spring Creek Tract, referred to as the “Glen Dorn Property” by a PGC Facebook post, transferred to the PGC along with 943 acres in Cambria County in exchange for PGE’s

ability to extract oil and gas from beneath a state game land in Lycoming County.

The Game Commission said in a statement that the Spring Creek Tract “is considered one of the most prized in the area because of its biological diversity” and “will become an entirely new game lands, State Game Lands 337.”

Warren County Planning Director Michael Lyon said the property formally transferred last month and includes the historic Clough farm.

He said that the property is actually made up of several parcels.

“Whenever we can leverage nat-

ural-resource development on game lands into preserving significant acreage for wildlife, and at the same time provide public hunting and trapping opportunities, it’s a win-win,” Game Commission President Kristen Schnepf-Giger said at the time.

See GAME/ A3

Times Observer photo by Josh Cotton

County officials say the Clough Farm, the remnants of which are shown here, is included as part of a new state game land in Spring Creek Township that drew discussion at Wednesday’s county commissioners meeting.



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Not everyone would agree.

The transfer was the subject of a discussion at this week's Warren County Commissioners meeting.

"Is there a need for more public lands in Warren County?" Keith Klingler, who said he lives across the line in Venango County but owns 3,000 acres of timber land in Warren County, asked the commissioners.

He pointed out there are sizable game lands in Columbus and another in Pittsfield.

"I've been working on land use issues for 40 years," he said. "I've seen the erosion of private property in the northern tier ... just accelerate."

He outlined the "ramifications" that come when land is moved into non-profit or governmental hands, citing property taxes.

But, he said, "that's miniscule to the transfer tax loss."

He estimated the value of these 2,195 acres in the area of \$6 million.

"That's a huge loss," he said. "Typically land turns over every 20 years. Those transfer taxes continue to roll in."

Another challenge Klingler outlined is there will be "no new construction on these lands forever. An even larger loss that no one talked about is the income loss to the state and federal governments."

He was especially critical of the transfer process when, he alleged, the PGC has over half a billion to

buy the land.

"This has been going on for 30 to 40 years," he said. "These are some of the issues CCAP (County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania) should be addressing, that PSATS (the Pennsylvania Association of Township Supervisors should be addressing) and they're not.

"They're (the PGC) acting like a private resource company."

"Private property is the financial lifeblood of municipalities and school districts," he added, alleging that it is "being eliminated at an alarming rate."

Commissioner Tricia Durbin pointed out that the PGC is an independent body and asked Klingler whether he has appealed to them.

Klingler responded that the PGC is "really not accountable to anybody. ... I wanted to make you aware."

Local elected officials sought a meeting with the Game Commission, detailed in a letter that the commissioners presented during Wednesday's meeting.

The letter from the Spring Creek Township supervisors dated Dec. 15 claims the PGC did not see a need for a meeting.

"As a board of supervisors we were astonished by this decision," the supervisors wrote, in the letter which was also sent to Rep. Kathy Rapp, Sen. Scott Hutchinson, the Pa. Landowners Association and the county commissioners.

"Spring Creek Township is a small community that has both concerns and interests in this transfer," the supervisors wrote. "Concerns include the historical integrities of the property, real estate and transfer taxes and the agricultural aspects.

The PGC responded in a letter dated Dec. 21 and said they would "work to address" concerns that the township has but said discussion would not be detailed as the PGC didn't own the property yet.

"The Pennsylvania Game Commission is committed to working with other public entities regarding our management of State Game Lands," PGC Executive Director Bryan Burhans wrote, telling the supervisors that a meeting would be scheduled with the township.

Sen. Scott Hutchinson followed up with a letter the following day asking the PGC to meet with the township.

"I believe it would be a move toward better public policy if the Pennsylvania Game Commission adopted a practice of accepting meetings with local government officials during the acquisition process," Hutchinson wrote, "and not just after the fact.

"These land deals have major implications for Pennsylvania local governments and the Pennsylvania residents they serve."

As of Thursday, there's no map for SGL 337 on the Game Commission's website.