

Thompson Woods Preserve Management Plan

Prepared for:

**College Township
State College Borough**

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Adopted November 17, 2003 by State College Borough
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Prepared by:

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In cooperation with:

**Millbrook Marsh Nature Center Advisory Committee
Thompson Woods Preserve Subcommittee**

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INTRODUCTION

This Thompson Woods Preserve Management Plan (Plan) is designed to provide guidance for the management of Thompson Woods Preserve and shall be carried out by Centre Region Parks and Recreation (CRPR), an agency of the Centre Region Council of Governments, on behalf of the owners of Thompson Woods Preserve, College Township and State College Borough. It was prepared by ClearWater Conservancy to honor the obligations incumbent upon accepting the Land Trust Acquisition grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to help to purchase the property. Additional refinements to this Plan were made by the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee of the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center Advisory Committee, the official oversight committee for the Preserve.

Changes over time to this Plan should reflect the changes in the property itself, while continuing to honor the original intent of preserving and protecting the conservation values of Thompson Woods Preserve. The management strategies defined in this Plan are in addition to and complement the regulations outlined in the Municipal Park Codes prepared and approved by CRPR. The owners of Thompson Woods Preserve – College Township and State College Borough – retain the right to be more restrictive in their uses of the land; however, all owners must universally agree upon the additional restrictions and permitted uses. If there is no universal agreement, this Plan shall remain as the default document for guidance of the Preserve’s management.

No change of use and no transfer of ownership, control, or interest in Thompson Woods Preserve may occur without the written consent of DCNR. In considering changes of use such as trail or parking lot development, timber harvesting, utility line corridors, grading or paving, building of structures, etc., the landowner must obtain written approval from DCNR. Influencing DCNR’s decision in such considerations will be the protection of the current natural characteristics and condition of the Preserve for which the grant funds were provided.

BACKGROUND

Thompson Woods consists of 43.36 acres of undeveloped, forested land located in College Township. ClearWater Conservancy, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, College Township, State College Borough, and the local community provided funds for the purchase of this land for use as a public preserve. Thompson Woods Preserve is one of the few remaining areas of forested green space left within the developed area of the Centre Region. In addition, Thompson Woods Preserve is uniquely situated to connect existing parks and historic properties, protecting and creating a corridor of open space in the urban core of Centre County.

Thompson Woods Preserve also protects Thompson Meadow Spring, which harbors a rare community of plants and animals. The Preserve buffers Thompson Meadow Spring from existing development higher in its subwatershed, filtering urban nonpoint source

pollutants such as lawn herbicides and pesticides, parking lot and roadway chemicals, heated stormwater, and construction sediment.

Thompson Run and Walnut Run border the property and are tributaries of both Slab Cabin Run and Spring Creek. Acquiring the property as a public preserve has protected these waterways and buffered downstream areas such as Millbrook Marsh from the effects of sedimentation and stormwater runoff.

The primary appeal of this public preserve is its natural setting and the unique natural features that it contains in an area within walking distance of downtown State College and The Pennsylvania State University. Because of its location in this urban setting, however, this natural parcel of land is extremely vulnerable to perturbation and further disturbance. Therefore, the Preserve shall be used only for passive outdoor recreation. The term passive use implies that activities conducted in the Preserve will be limited to those that minimize disturbance of natural plant and wildlife communities. In addition, activities conducted within the Preserve shall not entail the removal or alteration of existing vegetation other than the minimum required for maintaining or improving existing trails, ensuring public safety, or controlling exotic species.

DESCRIPTION OF PRESERVE

The Preserve consists of two forest parcels (eastern and western parcels) separated by Allegheny Power's utility right-of-way (see Fig. 1). The eastern parcel consists of an intact 80 - 100 year old woodlot that is dominated by black cherry, maple, oak, and hickory. In addition, the eastern parcel contains a stand of mature Norway spruce and Scotch pine located adjacent to the intact woodlot. The western parcel consists of steeply sloped forested land that extends to the edge of Walnut Run. Black walnut, scattered hemlocks, and a dense understory of tartarian and Japanese honeysuckle dominate the forest on the western parcel.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

1. Trails

An informal trail system currently exists in Thompson Woods Preserve. Because limiting activities to designated trails as much as practical is critical to maintaining the natural plant and wildlife communities of the Preserve, this existing trail network shall be improved and enhanced to provide easier access to Thompson Woods Preserve for the public. A reasonable use of resources shall be used to foster and encourage use of designated trails. Control of off-trail activities shall be accomplished through the use of friendly signs, gates, and other physical barriers when necessary. Restriction of use to designated trails will be enforced when repetitive, habitual off-trail use has a serious negative impact on the natural resources that are protected by the Preserve's Conservation Easement.

Specifically, two trails that currently exist in the Preserve shall be improved and enhanced: a) the Woodlot Trail and b) the Streamside Trail (referred to as the “old township road” in the Conservation Easement).

The trails of Thompson Woods Preserve are primarily for the use of pedestrians. Biking is permitted only on the Streamside Trail connecting Walnut Springs Park to East College Avenue.

Barricades (such as gates, fences, or removable posts) shall be erected at the entrance to all trails to prohibit motorized vehicles from using the trails. Motorized vehicles may be permitted on trails only for emergency access, maintenance of the Preserve, special handicapped services, or maintenance of utilities, utility rights-of-way, or easements.

No additional clearing for other trails, either on ones that currently exist informally or on new ones, shall be permitted, other than as further described. Trail maintenance may include removal of overhanging trees and limbs that create a public hazard.

a. Woodlot Trail

The Woodlot Trail extends from the Preserve’s primary parking area near the right-angle bend of Walnut Spring Lane, follows the power line right-of-way, and loops through the intact woodlot (see Fig. 1). This trail shall be upgraded to comply with the guidelines of the American Disabilities Act (ADA). All parties involved in the management of the Preserve, or their agents, shall meet with officials from Allegheny Power to discuss construction and maintenance of this trail using its right-of-way.

Additional access to the Woodlot Trail shall be provided by a walkway from the cul-de-sac at the end of Walnut Spring Lane and by a walkway easement to Woods Road. In keeping with ADA recommendations, this Woodlot Trail should be no more than 10 feet in width and be covered with limestone dust or other permeable material that meets ADA requirements. Bench seating may be placed at two or three locations along the Woodlot trail. In addition, interpretive signage may be placed along the trail for educational purposes.

b. Streamside Trail

Improvements shall also be made to the existing trail located along the Walnut Run edge of the property (see Fig. 1), which is called the Streamside Trail. It is also referred to as the “old township road” in the Conservation Easement and is the only trail permitting biking in the Preserve.

Slope stabilizing structures shall be placed on this trail. Due to the extreme slope in this parcel, this trail will not be upgraded to meet ADA specifications. This trail should be no more than 10 feet in width and covered with woodchips or other permeable materials. Wood removed from the Preserve in the course of on-site maintenance may be used to provide woodchips for this trail.

In the past, a bridge over Walnut Run connected the Streamside Trail to East College Avenue at the Preserve entrance between Clark Motor Company and Your Building Centers. This bridge shall be replaced to enable this important trail connection.

2. Exotic Species Control

Exotic species are invading Thompson Woods Preserve. For example, honeysuckle (*Lonicera spp.*) is encroaching from the edges of the intact woodlot and along Walnut Run. Exotic and invasive species should be managed in the Preserve, though not at the expense of losing significant structural diversity. Therefore, exotic species removal shall be done where appropriate and in a demonstration-type setting with a 1:1 replacement of native for exotic stems. Exotic species removal techniques could include, but not be limited to, removal of stumps and root systems, herbicide application, and cutting. Although overstory trees should be preserved, select overstory trees may be removed only with the intention of establishing native species in the Preserve and to assist in the management of exotics.

Exotic species management as a demonstration project should include interpretive signs to communicate to the public the justification for such removals and control. Thus, the management of exotic species within the Preserve will serve the dual purpose of regaining habitat for our native species and educating the public about invasive exotic species in urban settings.

3. Permitted uses

Thompson Woods Preserve is intended to be used for the purposes of nature appreciation, contemplation, and education. Permitted uses include:

- Pedestrian activities on designated trails
- Biking ONLY on the Streamside Trail
- Walking of restrained pets on designated trails

In addition, nature study and observation, including periodic, temporary community public educational events may be performed in the Preserve with permits, if required. If CRPR determines that a planned event or activity presents the possibility of having a negative impact on the conservation values of the Preserve (such as volume of visitors), the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee will discuss the issue and determine the event's appropriateness so as to minimize or eliminate any potential adverse consequences to the Preserve.

Non-disturbing research may be conducted in the Preserve with the appropriate permits, if required, and with the permission of the owners in consultation with the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee.

Interpretive, educational signage may be constructed along trails in the Preserve. Furthermore, a sign to indicate the Preserve was made possible through a DCNR grant must be erected as a grant requirement; that same sign may recognize other contributors and donors to the Preserve. Signs may also designate memorial plantings and other permitted structures (e.g., benches), mark and encourage use of the trails, and list rules or

prohibited uses. Recognition signs are subject to the regional policy as operated by CRPR.

Police serving College Township shall have police jurisdiction in Thompson Woods Preserve.

4. Prohibited uses and actions

Any activity on or use of the Preserve that is inconsistent with the purpose of the Conservation Easement is prohibited. The purpose of the Conservation Easement is to assure that the Preserve will be retained forever in its natural, scenic, historical, forested, and open space condition and to prevent any use of the Preserve that will impair or interfere with the conservation values of the property.

The following activities and uses are expressly prohibited:

- Operation of motorized vehicles in the Preserve, except for emergency access, maintenance of the Preserve, special handicapped services, or maintenance of utilities, utility rights-of-way, or easements
- Biking, except on the Streamside Trail
- Disturbing the peace via loud talking or music
- Possession or use of firearms, weapons, explosives, arrows, or other missiles
- Possession, consumption, or depositing of alcoholic beverages
- Depositing human or domestic animal excretion
- Hunting, capturing, or killing of wildlife, except by authorized personnel with all applicable permits to control nuisance wildlife
- Harassment of wildlife
- Camping
- Use after sunset unless permission has been obtained for the activity
- Defacing, breaking, or injuring trees, plants, benches, etc.
- Removal of part or whole of any shrub, bush, plant, or flower, except those removed as part of exotic species management as described in section 2 or for trail maintenance
- Setting fires or smoking
- Discharging any item into any water body
- Activities which are detrimental to water resources (quality or quantity)
- Pumping of ground water from the property, except as permitted by the owners in consultation with the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee
- Manipulation of watercourses without express permission by the owners
- Walking of domestic animals, except for household pets that are restrained by a leash that does not exceed 6 feet in length
- Littering
- Dumping, including leaves, grass clippings, brush, or other yard waste
- Mining activities
- Advertising signs or billboards
- Disturbing the soil or surface of the property, except in the maintenance and construction of trails and the general maintenance of the Preserve
- Installation of artificial or invasive lighting

- Construction or placement of any recreational facility such as a court, pool, field, or playground
- Additional utility rights-of-way, easements of ingress or egress, driveways, or roads in the Preserve

No buildings, structures, or fences shall be erected in the Preserve except to meet conditions of the Conservation Easement, for protection of sensitive resources, for wildlife enhancement activities (e.g., bird blinds, nesting boxes), to prohibit entrance to the Preserve trails by motorized vehicles, footbridges when needed to protect watercourses, and possibly a small pavilion near the primary parking lot area. The purpose of any such pavilion shall be to provide a resting and gathering place for people to meet before or after using the Preserve. No buildings shall be permitted in the woodlot.

5. Parking Area

The Preserve's primary parking area shall be placed at the entrance to the Woodlot Trail system, near the right-angle bend of Walnut Spring Lane. The parking area shall be constructed of material that ensures natural infiltration of stormwater and be large enough to permit parking of 10-15 vehicles. In addition, a walking trail, no more than 10 feet in width and covered with pervious materials, shall be constructed from this parking area to connect with existing trails in Walnut Spring Park.

A secondary parking area may be developed based upon future need for parking.

6. Sanitary facilities

Sufficient portable toilets may be located at the main entrance to the Preserve adjacent to the parking area. In addition, a trash receptacle may be placed at the main entrance to the Preserve in the parking area.

7. Wildlife Enhancement Activities

Wildlife enhancement projects that may be conducted at the Preserve could include, but not be limited to, installation of habitat boxes for screech owls, bats, flying squirrels, chickadees, and butterflies. However, the most important wildlife enhancement activities shall be to maintain existing vegetation and to limit the removal of vegetation to the minimum required for public safety, trail maintenance, and exotic species management. CRPR shall be requested to develop a list of appropriate projects for approval by the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee.

8. Wildlife Management

In general, wildlife in the Preserve should be protected in compliance with the prohibited uses listed above. However, nuisance wildlife control activities may be carried out by authorized personnel with all applicable permits. Lethal wildlife control techniques are appropriate and will be permitted as necessary when wildlife activity causes harm to the Preserve.

9. Utilities and Utility Rights-of-Way

This Plan does not apply to activities that are conducted in the process of maintaining utilities or utility rights-of-way that are located on or adjacent to the Preserve.

10. Protection and enhancement of plant communities and related natural features

All plants and trees shall be protected as outlined in the prohibited uses listed above. In addition, standing dead trees, branches, slash, scrap trees, understory material, and detritus shall be retained in the Preserve for use as wildlife shelters, dens, refuges and/or sanctuaries, and to replenish soil nutrients and organic matter, unless such trees and/or material are dangerous to the public or other species. Dangerous trees and plants may be removed, following the guidance of a certified arborist. In addition, any future plantings in the Preserve shall be limited to vegetation that is native to central Pennsylvania.

ADMINISTRATION

1. Updating this Thompson Woods Preserve Management Plan

This Plan has been crafted following the guidelines of DCNR, which include public involvement in its development. The owners of the property should review this Plan yearly.

2. Communications

CRPR is the main point of contact for issues concerning the management of Thompson Woods Preserve. CRPR has agreed to disseminate all information, requests, and other communications to the other members of the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee (representatives of CRPR, College Township, State College Borough, and ClearWater Conservancy) for their input, as appropriate. If other subcommittee members receive communications, they will be funneled through CRPR to the rest of the subcommittee.

ClearWater Conservancy shall conduct, at a minimum, annual monitoring of Thompson Woods Preserve to document and ensure compliance with the recorded Conservation Easement. Monitoring reports shall be communicated to all members of the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee. Violations of the Conservation Easement will also be directed to the appropriate enforcement agent of College Township or State College Borough.

MAP

The owners shall create an updated map of Thompson Woods Preserve and its features in coordination with the Thompson Woods Preserve subcommittee.

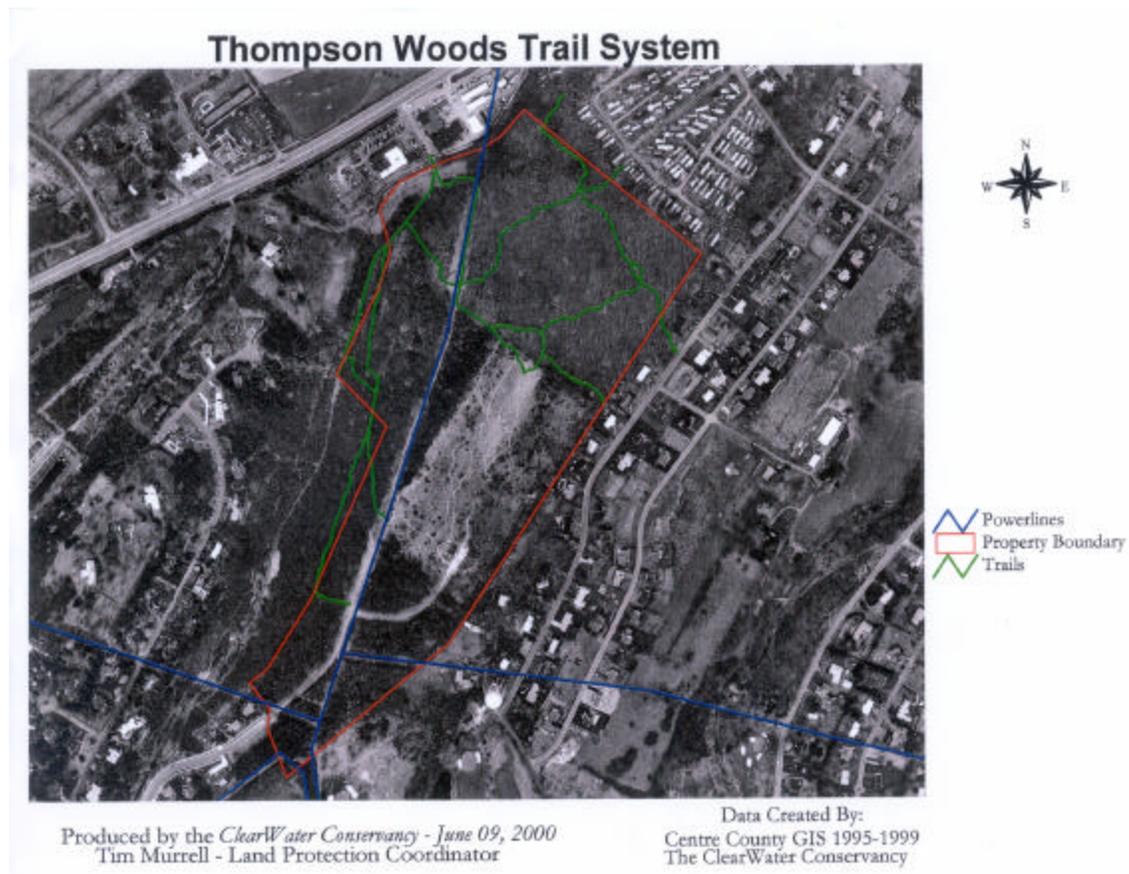


Figure 1: Location of the existing trails in Thompson Woods Preserve
The Woodlot Trail loops through the intact woodlot on the eastern parcel of the property, connecting it with the primary parking area via the Allegheny Power right-of-way. The Streamside Trail follows the Walnut Run edge of the property on the western parcel. Additional trail spurs currently exist, but should not be maintained, encouraged, or improved, except as discussed in the Thompson Woods Preserve Management Plan.