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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

John Hallas  
Director of Pennsylvania State Parks  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

November 14, 2023

Dear Director Hallas –

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday. As a follow-up to our meeting, I would like to emphasize several of the points we discussed.

Since 1984, DCNR and its predecessor agencies have managed the White Clay Creek Preserve with community input, leading to a unique resource that is greatly esteemed both locally and nationally. While the term “preserve” is not found anywhere in state law, the local community trusted DCNR to manage the Preserve in accordance with the precepts established by the 1984 Bi-State Commission.

DCNR acquired the Strawbridge parcels in 2009 and 2019. Both parcels were incorporated as part of the White Clay Creek Preserve at the time of acquisition and subsequently for a period of years. The parcels were identified as part of the Preserve on state maps, DCNR resources, county resources, township resources, and in the press.

DCNR’s staff reinforced this designation on multiple occasions, telling the Philadelphia Inquirer in 2020 that the Strawbridge parcels would remain as a “non-developed park for those wishing to explore nature without the development typically associated with a day-use or overnight park.” Contrary to suggestions otherwise, there was never discussion that one part of the Preserve would be treated differently than another part of the Preserve. In essence, everyone trusted DCNR to maintain the Preserve as the Preserve. In light of recent events, it is clear to me that this trust was misplaced.

Now that part of the White Clay Creek Preserve has been unilaterally redesignated as a state park, with the ensuing development that comes with being a state park, I fail to see how the law would prevent DCNR from doing the same thing with the rest of the Preserve. You assured me in our meeting that this would not occur, but there is nothing in statute that would prevent it from happening, and as already demonstrated, DCNR has the appetite to convert a preserve to a state park.

As we discussed, there is only one Preserve in the DCNR system – the White Clay Creek Preserve. And while the terms “state park” and “state forest” are defined terms in state law, “preserve” is not defined or even referenced in state law. It is clear to me that the failure to enshrine the definition of a “preserve” in state law, and to place specific restrictions on what DCNR can and cannot do with a “preserve” was a gross oversight.

As I noted in my letter to you last week, DCNR’s proposal to develop this property is completely out of step with the desires of the community – and the clear intent of many who fought to preserve it. DCNR must immediately abandon these plans, and instead publicly commit that the Big Elk Creek State Park will be managed in the same manner as the White Clay Creek Preserve.

I have already introduced legislation on this issue. But a great deal of controversy, angst, and turmoil can be avoided if DCNR simply announces that they have heard the will of the community, and will revert to maintaining the property as a Preserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Lawrence", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Lawrence  
State Representative  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania