

• December 31, 2022

## LETTER: Right to be in nature should not be restricted



The Pennsylvania Land Acquisition and Borrowing Act (Project 70) was in part driven by the conviction that regular people — the public — should have access to natural spaces for enjoyment, recreation, and learning. The right to be in nature should not be restricted only to those who have the means to purchase large swaths of land.

This 1964 Act specifically directed tax-payer dollars to counties, including Indiana County, in which little public land was, at that time, available. Yellow Creek State Park and the White's Woods Nature Center were two of the largest Project 70 properties in Indiana County set aside for public use.

Part of the wisdom of the Project 70 act was the recognition that population centers would be expanding over time and, unless taxpayers took precautions, many Pennsylvania urban areas could, in the future, be left without any natural area and green space to which the public would have open access.

Just a few years after Project 70 was approved, on May 18, 1971, Pennsylvania's voters, by a 4-to-1 margin, ratified what is now Article I, Section 27 of our state constitution — the Environmental Rights Amendment:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural

resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.

After over a century of tremendous degradation of Pennsylvania's natural resources, whose costs were often born by unlucky communities located near unregulated resource extraction or refining projects, individual citizens of Pennsylvania collectively declared a commitment to the preservation of clean air, pure drinking water, and access to the beauty of nature for all of us.

This new year, one of the things we can celebrate is our success at protecting our natural resources. Maybe we can also resolve to have the foresight and success enjoyed by the Pennsylvania citizens who came before us.

Gail Berlin

Indiana

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