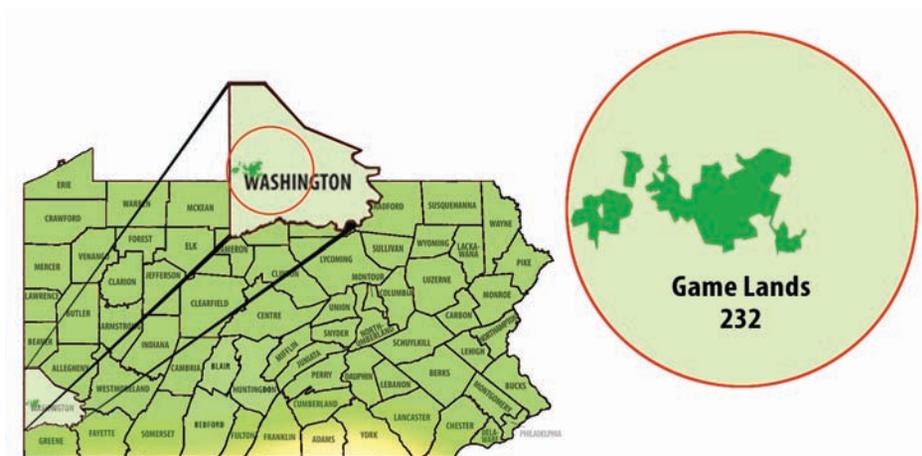


State Game Lands 232

Great hunting, great habitat in Washington County



STATE GAME LANDS 232 is located in Washington County's Blaine, Donegal, Hopewell and Independence townships. This very diverse property is 5,265 acres of gently rolling hills that give way to flat bottomland. The game lands, in Wildlife Management Unit 2A, is easily accessed from state and local roads. In addition, the game lands has 17 miles of maintained administrative roads, utility rights of way, herbaceous openings and old farmstead roads. Collectively, they all improve access for hunters, trappers and others who enjoy outdoor recreation.

White-tailed deer, wild turkeys, squirrels and rabbits are hunted regularly by visitors to this game lands. The upland farming habitat that occurs throughout this game lands also makes it a favorite for ringed-necked pheasant hunters. With the creation and restoration of wetland areas on SGL 232, woodcock and waterfowl hunting are becoming more popular. In

By LMO Doug Dunkerley

addition, SGL 232 offers good trapping and furbearer hunting. The most commonly pursued furbearers are beavers, raccoons, mink, muskrats and red and gray foxes.

In addition to its abundance of game species, SGL 232 is part of Pennsylvania Important Bird Area 80, the Lower Buffalo Creek Watershed. This area is known for its forested riparian areas, and is an important breeding site for many neotropical migrant birds. Seasonal denizens include the cerulean warbler, Louisiana waterthrush, Acadian flycatcher, yellow-throated warbler, blue-winged warbler, yellow-breasted chat, bobolink, Eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow and Savannah sparrow. There are two great blue heron rookeries in this area; part of this game lands is in the buffer zone of one of these rookeries.

There are several sites on SGL 232 of historic interest; most dating back

into the late 1700s. Foundations of a fort, storage building and grain mill are found along Buffalo Creek and are frequented by several historical groups and geocachers. This was the western outpost fort that supported Fort Pitt in controlling Native American conflicts in outlying areas.

SGL 232 also has two ancient Native American sites dating back 6,000 to 8,000 years.

Relics found on these sites include tools made using eastern elk antlers. Both of these sites were identified and documented when archeological checks were undertaken prior to wetlands construction.

The largest of the two is a mound site at the confluence of Buffalo Creek, Brush Run and Buck Run. "Mound Builders," is a name given to prehistoric societies that built mounds apparently for spiritual, burial and/or ceremonial purposes. The mounds were central in their culture. Other such mounds have been found in western Pennsylvania. This area of SGL 232 consequently receives extra patrols to discourage the unlawful taking of artifacts.

The initial property purchase for SGL 232 occurred in May 1960 with the acquisition of 182 acres. Several other small tracts were acquired over the next 30 years. In 2003 and 2004, the PGC brokered a land exchange with the Washington County Economic Development Council that added 3,754 acres. An additional 413 acres was acquired through a partner-

ship with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy bringing the total deeded acres for SGL 232 to 5,265 acres.

After acquiring the property, it was mapped and 5 percent of all open areas were planted with warm-season grasses. Most of time, these fields have been maintained with prescribed fire. Forested areas have been and will continue to be managed through sustainable

forest harvesting.

Up until about 1950, the land was worked as a large corporate farm, totaling about 2,000 acres. Then it was subdivided and sold as smaller farm sites. Most of land was acquired by West Penn

Power for a proposed hydroelectric dam on Buffalo Creek. Permitting problems would lead to the proposal being scrapped and the land again went up for sale.

The first Marcellus gas well in Pennsylvania was drilled on SGL 232, generating the need for numerous rights of ways for gas, water and electric. Partnering with the National Wild Turkey Federation's "Energy for Wildlife" initiative has led to rights of ways rich in habitat diversity that have become popular with deer, turkeys and hunters.

Since the PGC has taken ownership of the land, it has restored several wetland areas that provide valuable wildlife habitat and unique habitat-management opportunities. Five restoration wetlands totaling 22 acres have been completed in partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

SGL 232 is actively managed to create a diverse mix of invaluable habitat that benefits a variety of wildlife species.



ENERGY rights of ways provide habitat diversity on SGL 232.

Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited. This has prompted a sizeable increase in waterfowl numbers, as well as countless wetland species.

An additional 5.4-acre wetland project began in June 2013, with Mark West (a Marcellus Midstream Company) sponsoring construction as part of mitigation for disturbances off of state property. Because of the very diverse habitats found here, several local sportsmen's clubs have sponsored projects on the property. Their contributions are recognized on signs posted throughout the game lands.

The many high-quality streams and creeks that flow through this game lands provide unique flood-plain habitat and, again, unique habitat-management opportunities. Specific attention is paid to the lowland transitional habitat that benefits American woodcock, and enhancing local habitat for all wetland species. Riverine forest habitat on this game lands is a state stronghold for the Louisiana water thrush.

The goal for future habitat management on SGL 232 is to maintain mixed successional conditions with an emphasis on enhancing and protect-

ing valuable flood plain habitat. Mixed successional habitat favors white-tailed deer and American woodcock. In addition to practices geared toward game species, all management activities on SGL 232 consider avian species of concern and habitat

improvements that can be made here to bolster their populations. On SGL 232, man-made wetlands provide valuable wildlife habitat and provide unique habitat management opportunities. The many streams and creeks that flow through this game lands provide unique flood-plain and lowland transitional habitats and management opportunities. It's primary beneficiaries are the American woodcock and birds that use the 100-year age-class forest for brooding and foraging.

Future plans for SGL 232 include adding to the land's wetlands diversity and implementing more habitat projects. Work also will continue to manage the few invasive plant species found here, mainly ailanthus and multiflora rose. State Route 331 runs to the north and through a portion of the game lands. State Route 221 runs through the game lands from the northwest to the southeast through Taylorstown and connects with U.S. Route 40 and Interstate 70. Numerous other township roads provide access to and through the game lands. The Game Commission currently maintains 18 public parking areas on SGL 232.

