

A Sprawling Public Paradise

[By Land Management Group Supervisor Scott Bills](#)

Here's a riddle for you. What is twenty-seven and a half miles long, five miles wide, green on top, brown on the bottom and has two thin blue stripes for most of its length? If you guessed State Game Land 211 you'd be right. Extending from a point atop Second Mountain overlooking the Susquehanna River just south of the town of Dauphin and stretching eastward into Schuylkill County this huge game land encompasses three mountaintops and two valleys, nudging its northern and southern boundaries against two others. Its primary coverage in oak, hickory, maple and birch forest explains the green top. In totality, the game land encompasses 44,437 acres as of this writing and is the second largest game land in the commonwealth. Just 20 miles from the state capital, it is a remarkable tract of public land bought and paid for by hunter's dollars.



A bald eagle headed south during the fall migration over SGL 211. Photo taken from the fire tower atop Stony Mountain.

The two thin blues stripes? They are Clark's Creek and Stony Creek. Clark's Creek, with its headwaters on private land at a site between SGL's 210 and 211, flows west to the Susquehanna, first through Harrisburg Authority property, onto SGL 211, and then off again onto private lands before it dumps into the river. Along its journey to the river, it becomes the impressive DeHart Reservoir, a five and half-mile-long lake that supplies the city of Harrisburg with its drinking water. With mature forest on its entire shoreline and no sign of manmade structures, DeHart Reservoir looks more like a lake in upstate New York or Quebec than one within 25 miles of Harrisburg. No boating, fishing, or recreation of any kind is allowed on the lake adding to its pristine appearance. The Harrisburg Authority owns more than 8,200 acres encompassing the lake and generously has



Harrisburg Authority's DeHart Reservoir, lies within an 8000 acre tract, nestled between State Game Land 211 and State Game Land 210.

it enrolled in the Game Commission's Cooperative Forest-Game Program, allowing for public hunting on all but a small piece of the tract. About one and a half miles downstream of the dam, the creek enters game lands and remains almost entirely on game commission land for six and a half miles. The only interruption occurs at a corporation-owned interior holding and an indentation of private land at the west end. This valley is appropriately named Clark's Valley and State Route 325 bisects this long valley from Goldmine Road in the east to State Route 225 at the west end. There are numerous parking lots along Route 325 allowing easy access for hunting and fishing. Clark's Creek is a haven for trout fishermen and almost two miles of its length is designated as fly fishing only by the Fish and Boat Commission. Early in my career as the assigned Wildlife Conservation Officer in upper Dauphin County, I happened to field check two fly fishermen who told me that they were from Colorado and when they came east on business, they always made it a point to fish the "fly stretch" in this beautiful creek. The rifle range that I wrote about in an earlier blog that is maintained by our Food and Cover Corps also is located in this valley.

Stony Creek, on the other side of Third Mountain, in the next valley to the south, runs through the extensive Stony Valley and is designated a Wild and Scenic River. Whereas Clark's Creek spends much of its time on private land, Stony Creek, from the headwaters in the east to a point where it leaves the game land for good in the west, travels exclusively in State Game Land 211 for 16 miles or more. When it finally does leave SGL 211, it



A very full Clark's Creek flows under the service road bridge at the west end of Clark's Valley.



Students from the Millersburg High School Conservation Club apply paint to a shooting bench at the rifle range in Clarks Valley.



Reparation of the bridge over Stony Creek at Cold Springs. The original bridge was damaged by Hurricane Ivan rain storms.

courses for an additional six miles reaching the Susquehanna River at the town of Dauphin. Access to Stony Creek is not as easy as it is to Clark's Creek because 15 miles of it is behind locked gates, much to the delight of practically everyone who uses it. An old abandoned railroad bed is the artery used by those that want to recreate in the relatively narrow valley, bounded by Third Mountain, Stony Mountain and Sharp Mountain in the north and Second Mountain to the south. This abandoned railroad bed is all that is left of a railway line that carried workers and vacationers into the valley to stops at communities and iron works known as Water Tank, Rattling Run, Yellow Springs Station, Cold Springs Station (site of a bustling hotel, spa, and lake for swimming and paddling), Rausch Gap, and finally Goldmine. The railway actually ran all the way into Pine Grove and beyond. The abandoned railroad bed crosses Goldmine Road, south of Tower City, and terminates at the Lebanon Reservoir, the city of Lebanon's water supply. One day a year, usually the third Sunday of October, the gates are opened to enable the public to drive through the seventeen-mile section, from the west gate, seven miles east of the town of Dauphin, in an easterly direction through the heart of Stony Valley to the east gate at Goldmine Road. The other 364 days of the year the railroad bed is closed to vehicular travel, but open to foot traffic. The RR bed is open to biking and horseback riding for most of the year excepting the periods from the last Saturday in September until the third Saturday in January, and before 1p.m. from the second Saturday of April through the last Saturday in May inclusive, except on Sundays or while lawfully engaged in hunting, trapping, or fishing.



The Lebanon Reservoir at the east end of Stony Valley.



Members of the Kabob Hiking Club ham it up for the camera behind their 76 year old monument.

There are many trails to be enjoyed on State Game Land 211, including the world famous Appalachian Trail and the locally famous and equally historic Horseshoe Trail. In addition, the game lands is home to, starting in the east, the Middle Patch trail, Old Stage trail, Cold Spring trail, Sand Springs trail, Stone Tower trail, Yellow Springs trail, Rattling Run trail, Water Tank trail, Shikellimy Trail, and a piece of the Victoria trail. The Rattling Run trail parallels a retained service road known as Stagecoach Road, for obvious reasons, which leads first to the Kabob Hiking Club monument

erected on October 21, 1934. The monument reads in part that “people interested in God’s Great Out of Doors return to this spot” and I must say that I have witnessed this annual trek to the monument by senior citizens who have more get up and go than many a person 30 years younger. If you continue past the monument and turn west you will find yourself between Stony Mountain and Sharp Mountain in a plateau and if you walk just a short distance north you will come upon acres and acres of huge sun-baked boulders. Coursing under the rocks you can hear the gurgling of



The boulder field above the Devil’s Race Course, Stony Valley.

the aptly named Devils Race Course, a small tributary that runs into Rattling Creek that plunges south for a distance before it runs into Stony Creek. The road you are on is actually part of the Horseshoe Trail and it continues west for some seven miles before it comes back down to the valley floor. Along the way, you travel past some of our herbaeous openings, clear up on top of the mountain on this plateau, making up some of the almost 100 acres of openings on this game lands that we have planted in grasses, legumes, forbs, and grains for wildlife.

Another notable landmark on State Game Land 211 is a rock formation called the Boxcar Rocks, basically the spine of Sharp Mountain, found east of Goldmine Road in the portion of the game land that lies in Schuylkill County. The east end of the game lands is hilly and full of draws drained by Gold Mine Run and the Evening Branch, which eventually find their way into the Lebanon Reservoir.

Game Land 211 has land in Dauphin, Lebanon and Schuylkill counties. In a nutshell, it is huge. But the expanse of contiguous public land and open private land doesn’t end there. I already told you that the north neighboring Harrisburg Authority



Family members and friends attend the dedication of a food plot in honor of the late Jerry Zimmerman, NWTF regional Field Supervisor in Fishing Creek Valley.

land that is enrolled in our cooperative Forest Game Program is 8,200 acres. Their land butts up against State Game Land 210, an 11,124-acre tract entirely in Dauphin County. SGL 210 in turn is adjacent to two tracts of the Haldeman State Forest, the Greenland tract numbering 2,977 acres and the larger Haldeman tract encompassing 5,355 acres. Situated between the Haldeman tract and SGL 210, which is locally called Greenland, is the Lykens Borough Water Authority watershed. This wooded tract is 7,000 acres in size and also is enrolled in the Forest Game Program and thusly open to public hunting. In addition, at the far east end of SGL 211 is SGL 229, a 2,890-acre game lands that shares its border with SGL 211, but is considered a different game lands, but contiguous all the same. In total, SGL 211 is the centerpiece in a chunk of land open to hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation that is 81,983 acres in size. That's pretty impressive, so close to urban Pennsylvania.

I have formerly been the Wildlife Conservation Officer and am presently the Land Manager in this neck of the woods for 28 years and counting and I haven't seen it all but I've tried. Come on out and experience it. Maybe I'll see you out there, in God's Great Out of Doors.