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Independent



Public Land Trust Formed

Page A-1

Citizen Initiative Here Is First in State

by Sande Kimball
Staff Writer

In an attempt to preserve rapidly disappearing undeveloped land in the Washington D.C. environs, a Calvert County citizen conservation group has formed a public land trust to purchase a 440-acre parcel near Scientists' Cliffs Road. The property, which includes the largest known living American Chestnut in the state, will be used for scientific study and natural resources education programs.

One million dollars is the goal set by the American Chestnut Land Trust (ACLT) to acquire the land that contains the watersheds of Parker's Creek, Governor's Run and Battle Creek.

Thus far in the campaign about 900 letters soliciting support have been mailed and more are planned.

ACLT Secretary Dr. Edward Hascaylo, a plant physiologist, said

this is the first such citizen conservation initiative in Maryland. There are about 450 land trusts in the United States and most of these are in California and the Northeast.

Since 1985 an ad hoc environmental preservation committee has been looking at the possibility of acquiring the land which was owned in part by Mrs. Annie R. Gravatt and Mrs. Margaret Miles. Gravatt died in May and since that time the committee has been actively surveying funding methods and in the interest of nearby residents in purchasing the land for a preservation.

According to information from the ACLT, the executor of the estate has agreed to look at an offer from the citizens group but stipulated a serious offer must be made by February 1987.

Hascaylo said that although people in the Scientists' Cliffs area had taken the initiative, the trust is made

up of many others with an interest in land preservation.

There are three parcels in the package—290 acres and 50 acres located northwest of Scientists' Cliffs' Road and a 100-acre parcel southeast of the road. A botanical survey documents this area with 345 species of plants, several rare and on the endangered species list. The environs is also haven for a large variety of birds and wildlife.

Committee members have spoken with county and state officials as well as with representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Maryland Environmental Trust and the Nature Conservancy, which owns and leases the Battle Creek Cypress Swamp to the county. The Bay Foundation and Nature Conservancy have indicated a willingness to assist with financing.

About 70 supporters have pledged amounts ranging from \$2,500 to

\$15,000 each. The non-profit ACLT has made application to the Internal Revenue Service to be approved as a tax-exempt organization. Donations deductible upon this approval.

The \$1 million goal was based on undeveloped, but developable land in Calvert County selling at \$2,500 an acre.

Once the land is acquired, operation funds will be gathered through contributions, annual membership dues and sale of timber.

The ACLT claims preservation of this land would not only provide security to the residents living in the area but would be an economic enhancement increasing the value of property adjacent to it, similar to park land.

Other officers and directors of the

ACLT are Ralph H. Dwan Jr., president; Peter Vogt, vice president; Gary A. Loew, treasurer; Frank R. Caldwell Jr., Austin F. Canfield Jr., Elaine V. Cochran, Donald C. Dahmann;

Oliver S. Flint Jr., John R. Jones, Don Kollmorgen, Daniel Priest, Norman E. Prince, Joseph Steller Jr., John Mark Switzer and Caroline E. Van Mason.

Persons interested in making contributions or desiring additional information should direct inquiries to: American Chestnut Land Trust Inc., P.O. Box 204, Port Republic, Md. 20676.