

Date: Mon, 6 Jan 2003 20:29:44 -0400
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Subject: PABIODIV: discussion topic: plants of special concern
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Greetings ~

The news about x-congressman Hansen wanting to remove all plants from the Endangered Species Act protocol got me thinking of an idea I had several years ago. I was considering a masters program in forestry here at Penn State, I wanted to do a botanical survey of the 8000-acre grounds of the Rockview State Prison, which is just a few miles down the road from here. The grounds include areas that represent probably any micro-ecosystem one would find here in central PA. The idea was to first identify and map the location of any PA plants of special concern extant on the prison property, to then identify areas that would likely support other threatened, endangered, or rare plant species, and to write up a proposal and management plan for a "botanical sanctuary" on the prison grounds, as my thesis.

As the setting of a purely academic exercise, the prison seemed perfect. Tax payers are paying for upkeep, management, etc. on the property, while the protection of our natural heritage is a public service; there is potentially a good deal of available laborers to work at a nursery (could even be therapuetic...) which could produce seeds and plants for other state lands and/or for private property owners; and with public access so severely limited on the prison grounds, the plants could conceivably thrive there undisturbed for decades.

Well, the idea did not get far. Although one prison authority commented that my idea would "disrupt the logging schedule" on the prison grounds, the main reason they were opposed to the idea was that I am a woman and Rockview is an all-male facility. It represented a major breach of security, and they did not relish the idea of assigning escorts for my field work. I did not want my work to become just writing about the political challenges, I wanted to do actual field work. I ended up not pursuing it. But, it still seems like a viable suggestion to me. Any comments?

Jennifer Chesworth

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