

# SAVE GOVERNOR DICK PARK

*A community treasure if we can keep it*

*A natural treasure exists within Lebanon County—The Clarence Schock Memorial Park at Governor Dick. The Lebanon County Commissioners, as trustees, are entrusted to preserve it for future generations. However, current park management is failing. This document is an attempt by the Friends of Governor Dick to bring park management shortcomings to the attention of the commissioners so that they can make the necessary adjustments to fulfill this important responsibility.*

Submitted by Ryan Fretz on behalf of



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Photo Credit Sean Heisey, Midland Media

*Views of Governor Dick Tower before the 2022 clear-cutting*

The mission of the Friends of Governor Dick is to protect the natural environment, ecological diversity, and historical heritage of Clarence Schock Memorial Park at Governor Dick through sound ecological forest stewardship, and responsive, representative leadership. It is our belief that changes to the stewardship of the park and reforms to its board of trustees are necessary. The forest stewardship plan undertaken by the current trustees mandates large timber harvests with a stated goal of regenerating the forest for future generations to enjoy. While their plan may look good in print or in presentation, in practice it is a failure. The objectives of the plan are not being met and its consequences are negatively impacting the health of the forest and watersheds fed by the park, visitors to the park, and the Mount Gretna community.

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The following outlines some of the negative impacts of the park's stewardship plan, problems at the park, and suggestions of how to improve the situation.

### Negative impacts of board actions

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#### **Creative interpretation of Clarence and Evetta Schocks' deed establishing the park**

The actions taken by the trustees in enacting their stewardship plan run counter to the wishes of Clarence and Evetta Schock as expressed in the park deed (See Appendix A). The park's deed pre-dates modern conservation easements, however, by the way it is written, preservation was the intent. The trustees claim that their stewardship plan is for the good of the health of the forest and provides them the legal justification to proceed. However, the actual outcomes are detrimental to the health of the forest, and it should not be allowed to continue.

#### **Negative impact on visitors to the park**

The Schocks' goal of preserving the park was to provide a playground for future generations to enjoy being in unspoiled nature. However, the failures of the current stewardship plan are having a negative impact on visitors. Instead of being a happy playground, people are sad and angry about the destruction they see when visiting and some say they will not come back because it's too upsetting—opposite of the Schocks' intent.



*Strolling through the trees of Mount Gretna*

#### **Negative impact on the town of Mount Gretna**

The historic town of Mount Gretna is a unique and special place cherished in the hearts of many. The town's forest setting is one of its defining characteristics and the loss of its surrounding mature forest is devastating to its residents and a threat to its very identity. The next planned timber harvest site is on the slope rising above the Mount Gretna Heights neighborhood and after its completion most of the trees between the tower and the town will be gone, leaving only small corridors of mature forest along the trails. *"What would Mount Gretna be without the trees?"* asked famed Mount Gretna historian Jack Bitner years ago at the public meeting held by the parks trustees to debut their stewardship plan.



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### Timbered acres left unfenced

Sixty-three (63) acres were logged in the last large timber harvest (2021/2022) but only 40 of those acres were fenced to exclude deer and regenerate the forest. If the purpose of the stewardship plan is regenerating the forest, what is the reasoning for leaving over a third of the harvested area, approximately 23 acres, unprotected?

### Ineffective deer exclusion fencing is a failure of the stewardship plan

The deer exclusion fencing installed after timber harvests is not maintained adequately enough to keep the deer from within the fenced area. Most regular park visitors can say they've seen deer inside the fencing. The success of the stewardship plan hinges on successfully keeping the deer out of timbered areas for a 10-year time span, the regular presence of hungry deer inside the fencing negates all efforts to regenerate the forest from seedlings.



*Broken down fencing out-of-sight of park visitors*



*Deer inside fence intended to keep them out*

## Environmental destruction – detrimental impacts of the stewardship plan in action

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### The deep forest ecosystem: fragile and threatened

The forest is more than the trees; within Governor Dick Park, an interconnected web of life exists between the plants, animals, and fungi that call it home. The stewardship plan is doing irreversible harm to this sensitive ecosystem by altering the habitat that supports life within the park. Although still technically a “woodland” after logging; the ecology of the site becomes simplified, lacking the resources needed to support species that used to live there.



*Amphibians are among the sensitive species threatened by environmental changes*

### Forest fragmentation's impact on the health of the forest

Forest fragmentation is the breaking up of large contiguous forest areas into smaller pieces. Breeding populations become isolated from one another and openings in the forest are pathways for the introduction of invasive plants and animals. Opening the forest canopy results in increased light levels, higher daytime temperatures, higher wind speeds, and decreased humidity; these negative edge effects can extend 200 to 300 feet into the interior of the forest.



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### **Invasive plants pose an existential threat to our native forest**

Invasive plants pose an equal, if not greater, threat to the regeneration of our native forest than the over population of deer. These foreign invaders thrive in direct sunlight and disturbed soil and are quickly replacing our native forest where there has been timbering. Numerous species of invasive plants are flourishing in the timber harvest sites of 2013 and 2014 including stands of Ailanthus, the tree of heaven, that are actively breeding millions of spotted lantern flies. Invasives are already carpeting the 63 acres logged in 2020/2021, outcompeting and smothering natives planted naturally by seed or manually by the forester. Invasive plants aren't recognized or consumed by native wildlife and where they dominate the landscape the ecosystem is in collapse.



*Recent timber harvest site carpeted in invasives; canopy of invasives in timber harvest areas—princess tree, devil's walking stick, lantern fly breeding grounds direct result of stewardship activities.*

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### Increased drought stress on remaining trees

Drought stress is intensified for the mature trees left behind to regenerate the forest from seed due to the increased heat, light, and wind of the now open canopy. Under a full canopy a moist micro-climate exists that would normally protect the forest's trees in times of drought. The detrimental impact of drought stress was evident last summer as it was obviously visible which mature trees had leafed out in spring but had perished during the dry spell later in the season.

### Increased risk of windthrow (uprooting) of remaining trees

The risk to trees of being blown down by high winds is greatly increased by opening the canopy. Mature trees that grew tall together in the forest and moved together as one in the face of storms are ill-prepared to stand against the winds alone.



*Wood Thrush is included on the Yellow Watch List for birds most at risk of extinction without significant conservation actions to reverse declines and reduce threats. (Photo credit: Wiki-Commons)*

### Migratory songbirds threatened by habitat loss

Neotropical migrant songbirds, like the wood thrush, spend winter months in the tropics and return to the same eastern forests to reproduce, generation after generation. Some species can only successfully raise their young in large unbroken tracts of native forests. One reason for this is the sheer biomass of caterpillars required to raise a single brood of chicks, as many as 30,000. Opening the forest also invites invasive predators like cow birds and feral cats. The argument has been made by the trustees that the edge habitat created by logging will support other bird species less seen in the park, but edge habitat is plentiful in Lebanon County and beyond while the deep forest habitat needed by these threatened songbirds is becoming scarce.



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**Degradation of forest soils thru compaction and erosion**

Extensive use of heavy logging equipment degrades the forest soil by compacting the ground and significantly disturbing the soil, making it subject to erosion. Compacted soil inhibits root growth and cuts off the flow of water and nutrients underground. Erosion carries away precious topsoil removing it from the forest and creating sediment pollution downstream.



*Muddy ruts left by heavy logging equipment compacting the soil and priming the site for erosion*



*Erosion, soil flowing out of timber harvest site and into the watershed*



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**Heavy herbicide use is a real cause for concern**

The forester sprays industrial grade herbicides, round-up pro concentrate and oust XP, to kill all vegetation from ground level up to 20 feet in the air in areas being logged. Although herbicide use is still common practice, it's controversial

as it's negative impacts to human health and the environment come to light. This issue is of particular concern to the residents of Mount Gretna.



*June 24, 2020, New York Times article informing public of a settlement reached in one of the lawsuits relating to the dangers of the herbicide Roundup*



*Over drift of herbicide killing vegetation outside of area to be logged*

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### Natural forest regeneration interrupted by removing a generation of immature trees

The forester uses a skid loader attachment to mow down thousands of immature trees to allow the maximum amount of sunlight to hit the forest floor to encourage the growth of new saplings. These trees were the next generation waiting their turn to fill in any openings in the forest canopy.



*A small oak lay over a beech tree, life cut short many years before their time*

## **Problems at Clarence Schock Memorial Park at Governor Dick other than its forest stewardship plan**

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### **Composition of the parks board of trustees**

The membership of the parks board of trustees does not represent the user groups of the park or the community at large. Without binding term limits and the board's ability to select its own membership, the park has essentially been run by the same group of people since the 1990's. There has been an unwillingness on the part of this board to listen to outside opinions that differ from their own. Some 20 years ago, original members of the Friends of Governor Dick formed an environmental advisory committee at the park to influence more ecologically sound forest management. Their efforts were to no avail as they were disrespected, their advice dismissed, and eventually discouraged—the committee was disbanded. Therefore, our efforts for change today do not focus on swaying the board of trustees.

### **Questionable relationship between the board and their forester**

The trustees maintain a questionable no-bid relationship with their forester, Barry Rose. Barry, of Forest Regeneration Services, was the author of the parks forest stewardship plan, and he has also profited handsomely overseeing its enactment for all these years raising conflict-of-interest questions.

### **The park ranger**

The park's ranger, Dave Eichler, has a reputation of being overly aggressive in asserting his authority. It is questionable whether he would be in the position of ranger, on the park's board, or in control of the park trust funds had his father not been Schock's personal assistant in his youth. This is a possible show of nepotism and not within the best interests of the park.



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### Problems with staffing and administration

Although efforts of current employees and volunteers at the park are commendable, the park is suffering from poor administration and has been unable to recruit a new Executive Director. Compensation and benefits offered for the executive director's position are not commensurate with the necessary qualifications and the demands of the job. Additionally, the park has been unable to effectively maintain a social media presence or a modern website.



*Twitter post of members of Cedar Crest Key Club, proud of their work at Governor Dick*

In a recent example of poor administration, the Cedar Crest Key Club, of which my son is a member, was led to the site of the tower clear-cut for a tree planting event; this was a waste of the students' time and of sapling trees as this whole site is to be treated with herbicides next spring prior to being planted as meadow and low growing bushes and trees.



*Newly planted sapling by the Cedar Crest Key Club will be killed by herbicides*

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### Poor treatment of the mountain biking community

There is an unhealthy relationship between the park's board and the mountain biking community. Mountain biking is a popular and growing sport and represents one of the largest user groups of the park and one of its largest sources of volunteer labor; yet their place in the park is tenuous. They have been threatened with loss of access and so they work hard to meet the requests of the board providing volunteer labor and their leadership doesn't speak out about their ill treatment to stay in the board's good graces. Their efforts have often been disrespected or been undone wasting many man hours given to the park.



*The board had an excavator block 30-year-old biking trail features along trail five by haphazardly placing logs and boulders in an unnatural fashion*





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*Hazardous placement of a boulder to stop bikes from riding on a slope posed a safety risk to park users*

### Criminalized use of fence maintenance trails



*Sign criminalizing even walking on a trail in the park*

The fence maintenance trail around the new 40-acre deer exclusion fence has been posted with signs stating anyone using the trail is guilty of criminal trespass. This posting came in response to the public outcry caused by the closing of other older maintenance trails, with logs and boulders, after fencing had been removed. Those maintenance trails had run parallel to some of the park's main trails and were popular among park users, especially during the pandemic when park usership surged and these parallel trails allowed for social distancing and made it easy for hikers, bikers, and equestrians to pass each other safely. To avoid a repeat of this public outcry 10 years from now, with the scheduled removal of fencing and trail, the board has criminalized even using it in the first place (this is antithetical to the Schocks' intent for the park).



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### Disruption of a bald eagle's nest during nesting season

There is an active bald eagle's nest in the park that isn't publicized because widespread knowledge of its location could lead to park visitors disturbing the eagles. However, the 2020/2021 timber harvest was carried out during the eagles' late winter nesting season and near, or within, the federally mandated activity set-back protecting bald eagles' nests.

### Clear cutting around the tower

Nearly seven (7) acres were clear-cut to open the view from the observation tower. While opening the view from the tower may be a worthy justification for cutting down some trees, significantly more land was cleared than necessary to achieve this objective. Several mature trees left standing near the tower effectively block the view that would have been opened by the several acres of clear-cut beyond, rendering that cutting useless. This clear cutting was carried out during spring nesting season in a callous disregard for nature.



*Bald eagles are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act  
(Photo credit: Wiki-Commons)*



*View of mature trees left to block part of the view, making clear-cutting of the trees beyond moot*



*Significantly more trees cut than needed to open view*

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### The tower security project is a boondoggle



*One of the newly placed utility poles for lights and cameras around the tower*

At great expense, power and communications lines are being run to the tower for lighting and security cameras. The intention is to deter vandalism, drug overdoses, and teens partying after hours. Cameras are unlikely to end drug use or dissuade most vandalism and partying teens can set up elsewhere. Graffiti on the tower could be painted over thousands of times for the price of this project. Beyond its level of effectiveness, the presence of surveillance and lighting will negatively impact how people feel about being in the space and the light pollution at night will negatively impact wildlife. The lights on top of the tower will soon be visible from the town of Mount Gretna.

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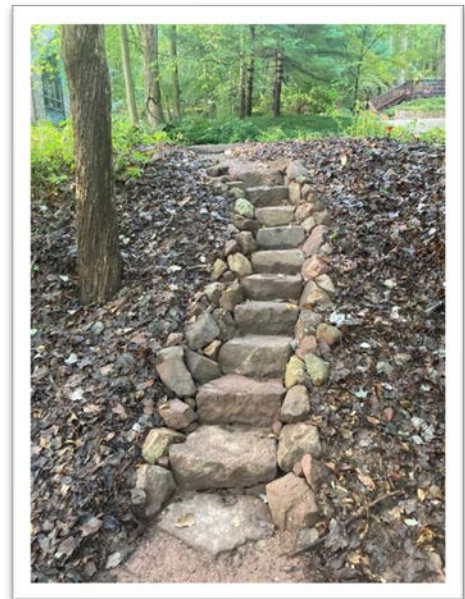
### The presentation of work within the park should be more artfully done

With some notable exceptions like new trails built by the mountain biking community and the handicapped access boardwalk, work done within the park tends to be heavy handed and clumsy. I am acutely aware of this because in my own career as a landscape artist my focus is attending to the aesthetic needs of the Mount Gretna community. My family visits many parks including an annual hike of Ricketts Glen and I see what level of care and craftsmanship can go into trail work but



*Bluestone riprap to stabilize an embankment may be utilitarian and effective but in a natural forest setting looks out of place and ugly*

looking to our own park there is so much potential for beauty being squandered. The board of trustees prioritizes expensive and arguably unnecessary projects while trail work that would enhance the safety and aesthetic value of the park is ignored.



*In my work I use native materials that belong in Mount Gretna and fit the forest aesthetic. Natural aesthetics should be part of the park experience.*



## **Suggestions of actions and alternatives to improve the situation at the park**

- Place a moratorium on logging
- Hire a conservation organization unaffiliated with the forest product industry to evaluate the objectives of the stewardship plan versus its outcomes
- Hire a consultant to investigate the board of trustees for any possible ethics violations and the no-bid relationship they maintain with their forester
- Make reforms to the parks board of trustees: establish term limits, add members representing the diversity of park users and the community at large
- Turn over control of the park to the Lebanon Valley Conservancy
- Develop a countywide department of Parks and Recreation for professional management of parks providing full-time employment and benefits to employees. [Grants are available for municipalities from DCNR.](#)
- Place the Clarence Schock Memorial Park at Governor Dick under conservation easement and work to enroll it in the Old-Growth Forest Network. The mission of the Old-Growth Forest Network is to identify and help protect at least one forest (old growth or future old growth) in each county of the United States—Governor Dick is a prime candidate to represent Lebanon County within this national network.
- Enroll in carbon sequestration program—alternate revenue stream as opposed to timber sales
- Manage the deer herd—deal directly with the root cause of forest regeneration problem. There are alternatives to the public hunting Clarence Schock didn't want in the park such as private firms that cull overpopulations of deer

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- Plant evergreen trees into the understory of the mature forest to slowly grow and wait for an opportunity to fill the canopy. These are the trees that the stewardship activities have had success growing, not because of fences but because the deer don't want to eat them.



*White pines behind fence*

- Plant and protect individual and small groupings of trees into the mature forest. Multiple tree tubes and small areas of fencing likely have greater odds of successfully keeping out deer than vast areas of fencing that are invariably brought down by falling branches and trees

In summary, the Friends of Governor Dick wish to bring attention to the failures of the current Governor Dick board of trustees by not living up to the responsibility entrusted to them to maintain the treasure left to the community by a mid-twentieth century, forward-thinking entrepreneur. Clarence Schock Memorial Park at Governor Dick is a jewel of the Lebanon County Park System; but it is losing value as nature is degraded and its reputation tarnished. There is a wealth of people ready to step up and volunteer to support a professionally run and ecologically focused Governor Dick Park who are not helping currently as that would lend tacit endorsement to the way things are now. It is within your power and responsibility as the Lebanon County Commissioners to make the changes needed to realize the vision that Clarence Schock had for the park.

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### **Appendix A: Terms and conditions excerpt from the Governor Dick Park Deed**

*“To HAVE AND TO HOLD the tract of land above described with appurtenances IN TRUST forever as a playground and public park, upon the following terms and conditions:*

*The portion thereof which is now forest or woodland shall be maintained and preserved forever as forest and woodland and where possible additional portions shall be planted as forest and woodland; Hunting and shooting and the smoking of cigars, cigarettes, pipes and tobacco shall be prohibited all times upon the land hereby conveyed; the land shall be posted with notices at least once each year forbidding hunting and shooting, and appropriate notices shall be maintained forbidding the smoking of cigars, cigarettes, pipes and tobacco upon the land;*

*The trust shall be for the enjoyment of persons traveling on foot; and no automobile, vehicle or mobile machinery shall be allowed to move or travel upon roads on the land hereby conveyed except upon the business of the trust or with the written permission of the trustee or upon such public roads as may hereafter be built by state or local authority;*

*The present Tower House and other portions of the land may be used and occupied without rent or charge by a caretaker or caretakers of the land; The trustee shall have the right to make, amend, [alter] and repeal regulations for the administration control and public use of the trust property;*

*The trustee shall not be required to use public or school funds to maintain the trust property but shall have the power to receive and apply funds entrusted to it for the purpose of this grant; and*

*In the event The School District of The Borough of Mt. Joy, resigns or is unable or unwilling to serve as trustee of this trust, preference shall be given in the appointment of a successor or successors to other school districts or similar public authorities located near the lands hereby conveyed.”*