

**Plain Grove Fen Natural Area  
Agricultural Lease  
Request for Proposals**



Western Pennsylvania  
Conservancy



water, land, life.

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**PLAIN GROVE FEN NATURAL AREA – AGRICULTURAL LEASE**

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, with central offices located at 800 Waterfront Drive, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is accepting proposals for agricultural leases at the Plain Grove Fen Natural Area, in Plain Grove Township, Lawrence County, PA.

This process is an open call for qualified farmers.

Proposals must be received by 3:00 PM, January 31, 2013. Proposals may be sent by email or in a sealed envelope to:

Bryan Ritti  
Land Steward  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
800 Waterfront Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Phone: (412) 586-2327  
Fax: 412-231-1414  
[britti@paconserve.org](mailto:britti@paconserve.org)

**WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY  
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS  
PLAIN GROVE FEN NATURAL AREA – AGRICULTURAL LEASE**

**Proposals due January 31, 2013**

**Introduction**

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), a non-profit organization, requests proposals from qualified farmers to lease and manage portions of its 380-acre Plain Grove Fen Natural Area, beginning in the spring of 2013. Plain Grove Fen Natural Area is located in Plain Grove Township, Lawrence County, PA.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. The Conservancy creates green spaces and gardens, contributing to the vitality of our cities and towns, and preserves Fallingwater, a symbol of people living in harmony with nature. Since it was established in 1932, WPC has protected more than 230,000 acres of natural land; contributed to the development of 7 state parks, 9 state forests, and 13 state game lands; and completed numerous watershed conservation plans and restoration projects. Of the total land protected by land trust organizations in Pennsylvania, nearly 50% has been conserved by WPC.

**Background and Property Description**

Plain Grove Fen Natural Area was acquired by WPC in 1987 for the purpose of preserving a rare wetland type, an associated population of a rare plant, and an outstanding mixed-oak forest. Other natural features on the property include a slow, meandering stream (Taylor Run), a variety of wetlands, and stands of mature cherry and sugar maple trees. The property also contains approximately 100 acres of active agricultural fields. Existing structures include two houses, three garages, two barns, and an open-sided shed.

The property is almost entirely bordered by a mix of forest and farmland, with a few residences. To the north is an active sand and gravel mine. The property is in close proximity to a number of colleges and universities, as well as potential farm-to-market destinations such as Slippery Rock and Pittsburgh, PA.

**Recent Management**

From 1991 to May 2012, the structures and agricultural fields on the property were leased to a local farmer for organic cattle, hay, and crop production. During this period, water lines and extensive high-tensile wire fencing were installed. The fencing was removed at the end of the lease period, while the water lines remain for future agricultural use. However, the exact location of the water lines is unknown.

From May 2012 to the present, there have been no additions, or amendments, to the soil. All agricultural activities prior to May 2012 followed Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)

standards; therefore, the organic certification continues to apply to the entire 100 acres of arable fields on the Plain Grove Fen property.

In October 2012, WPC leased the fields for a single hay/mulch harvest; therefore, the fields are currently mowed. Still, there may be a need to enhance soil health in order to restore the soil to desired levels of productivity.

Outside of the agricultural and residential areas, the remainder of the property is managed as a natural area, open to the public for low-impact recreation. Hunting and hiking are permitted, though there are no designated trails. Motorized vehicle use, with the exception of approved agricultural activities, is prohibited.

### **Project Description**

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is addressed to persons interested in leasing up to 100 cultivatable acres of organic certified agricultural fields located within WPC's Plain Grove Fen Natural Area, beginning on or around March 1, 2013. These 100 acres, sectioned into about 9 well-defined fields of varying size, are suitable for culturally intensive fruit and vegetable production, medium-sized intensive grazing operations, or integrated crop-livestock enterprises. Certified organic production systems are encouraged, though individual farmer certification is not a requirement as long as all agricultural activities on the property follow organic guidelines.

In addition to the delineated fields, the 2 barns and related utilities (water and power) also are available for lease. Please refer to Figure 2 for details. The barns are described as follows:

Barn No. 1: A 50 x 88-ft (4,400 sq. ft.) pole frame structure with metal roof and siding, concrete floor, and a large sliding door in the east end. Open on the north end.

Barn No. 2: A 74 x 79-ft (5,486 sq. ft.) pole frame structure with metal siding and asphalt roof, and concrete floor. Open on the north end.

One of the barns may be shared with WPC. Further, a large 2-story house and garage may be available as a residence for the farmer, pending necessary repairs. All areas of the property outside the lease areas will be reserved solely for use by Western Pennsylvania Conservancy as a natural area open to the public for low-impact recreation. The WPC and the public shall also have the right to access the lease areas, so long as it does not interfere with the agricultural activities.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will accept proposals from one farmer for the entire 100 acres and structures, or from a number of farmers for smaller sections of the property. However, the lessees shall not have the right to sublease. Each farming enterprise will reflect the characteristics and capabilities of the particular farm site and the particular knowledge, skills, and preferences of the farm lessees. Marketing methods may take such forms as: pick-your-own, community-supported agriculture (CSA), roadside stands, local farmers markets, and/or direct sales to individuals and restaurants.

The lessee(s) will be expected to provide all necessary tools, equipment, labor, and materials to complete the tasks defined within their proposal. If lessee(s) are interested in erecting temporary structures (such as fencing, high tunnels, etc.), a plan must be submitted by the lessee(s) and must be approved by WPC before any construction begins. Unless specified otherwise, ownership and maintenance responsibilities of temporary structures will fall to the lessee(s).

As an additional condition of the lease, the farmer(s) shall be required to host, in collaboration with WPC, at least 1 educational program/tour per year. The purpose of these events will be to showcase the agricultural activities and surrounding natural area.

This RFP is open to all interested parties on a competitive basis. The farmer who submits the proposal that is judged to be the most likely to achieve Plain Grove Fen Natural Area's best use within the context and purposes of WPC's management goals for the property – and demonstrates the capacity to successfully implement the proposal – will be awarded the opportunity to sign a lease agreeable to both parties. The initial term of the lease shall be 5 years, with the potential to renew for additional 5-year terms.

The Plain Gove Fen property is an ideal location for a variety of farmers, including those who are interested in welcoming collaborative partnerships, modeling best management practices for organic production and environmental stewardship, and hosting public outreach/agricultural education events. Western Pennsylvania Conservancy encourages all qualified farmers, including individual farmers or farm-cooperatives, to submit a proposal for the management of a portion, or the entire, 100 acres. It is WPC's aim to balance agricultural productivity with environmental stewardship, while educating the public and supporting the local food system. The Conservancy is excited to be part of this truly innovative and significant project. The farmer(s) on Plain Grove Fen Natural Area will have the potential to create and maintain aesthetically pleasing and ecologically healthy landscapes while simultaneously strengthening the local food system and educating regional residents.

### **Housing**

Housing is currently not available on the Plain Grove Fen Natural Area property. However, as described, there is a large house on the property that may become available, given some necessary repairs. In addition, housing is readily available to rent or own in Slippery Rock, PA (7 miles from Plain Grove Fen Natural Area) as well as a number of surrounding towns. Further, WPC may consider alternative housing options, including camping or temporary structures (e.g., a 'yurt') if proposed by a potential farmer.

### **Rental Rates/Fair Market Value Rent**

The fair market value rent for the Plain Grove Fen fields is based on Lawrence County and Pennsylvania State averages for non-irrigated, certified organic pastureland and cropland. Each monthly per acre rental rate will vary, depending on the size of the field, the quality of the soil, and its proposed use (see figure 2 for more details).

The barns and (if available) house shall be leased based on flat rates of \$1,000/year for the barns and \$950/month for the house.

## **Proposal Development**

This RFP is open to all interested parties on a competitive basis. As noted earlier, the proposals judged most likely to achieve the best use of the fields and/or structures on Plain Grove Fen Natural Area will be selected for implementation. Western Pennsylvania Conservancy encourages all interested parties to prepare a creative and strong proposal. Superior ideas may well be proposed by persons having limited experience or resources.

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP should follow the simple format suggested below. Honest, accurate responses are essential to determining the best matches for the Plain Grove Fen property. False statements are a basis for disqualifying any proposal, or for voiding a lease if discovered at a later date.

Winning proposals will be awarded a contract for a 5 year lease on WPC's Plain Grove Fen Natural Area, with the potential to renew for additional 5-year terms. Each contract must be reviewed and approved by WPC's Board of Directors before the winning lessee is permitted to begin their agricultural operations.

### **Each proposal must include the following:**

- **Proposer Information**  
Each proposal must include the full identification of the person or persons accountable for the proposal that is submitted, including any managers of the proposed farming enterprise. Please include name(s), address(es), telephone number(s), fax number(s), and/or email address(es).  
Please include at least two professional references.
- **Proposed Fields/Structures**  
Please describe which field(s) and structure(s), as described in Figure 2, your farming enterprise will include. Are you interested in the barn(s), the residential house, and/or the fields? Explain the function, and plan, for each.  
If you are not selected for your first choice, would you consider an alternative operation on the property? If so, please elaborate.
- **Proposed Farming Operation/Enterprise**  
Please describe your proposed farming enterprise. Explain the proposed locations desired, the type of operation, and the amount of acres.  
Provide a timeline and narrative of your operation for the first two years of your farming enterprise. Also, feel free to describe what you may accomplish by year 5 as well as year ten (if you are approved for an additional five-year lease).  
Describe in detail how you are going to market your products.
- **WPC Compatibility**  
Describe how your farm will encourage interaction with WPC property visitors, and residents from surrounding farms/communities (educational programming, tours, farm stand, etc.). Include the types of interaction, type and number of people targeted, and frequency of events.
- **Prior Farming Experience**  
Please describe your prior farming experience. You are encouraged to provide a description of the type of farming, number of years, and farms/businesses that

you've worked for. Additionally, please list any relevant farm, non-farm and/or business skills that may apply to your farming enterprise.

- Proposer Resources  
Provide a description of the physical resources (such as tractors, tools, etc.) that you have available in order to successfully carry out your farming enterprise.  
Describe any human resources that may be involved in your proposed operations.
- Proposer Financial Competency  
Please provide a one-year (or more) budget, including annual income, living expenses, farm operating expenses (include the rental of the fields, barns, and house if applicable), etc.  
Provide a description of your financial resources for carrying out your proposal.  
Describe your funding sources, amounts, and accessibility of funds. You may be asked to provide proof of these sources at a later date.

### **Additional Requirements**

If awarded an agricultural lease on WPC's Plain Grove Fen Natural Area, each lessee will be required to submit the following, as appropriate, within a month of signing a contract:

- Conservation plan
- Nutrient management plan
- Organic plan
- Grazing plan (if applicable)

### **Insurance Requirements**

**INSURANCE:** Contractor shall furnish proof of coverage of Commercial General Liability Insurance. Unless otherwise specified in the Request for Proposals, the minimum amount of insurance coverage required is \$1,000,000.

**PROOF OF INSURANCE:** Contractor must attach a certificate of insurance to the final executed copy of this contract.

**COMPREHENSIVE AUTOMOBILE LIABILITY INSURANCE:** Contractor shall furnish proof of Comprehensive Automobile Liability Insurance covering all owned, non-owned, and hired automobiles used in connection with the services agreed upon this contract. The minimum amount of coverage required is \$1,000,000.

**WORKMAN'S COMPENSATION INSURANCE:** per Pennsylvania statutory limits.

**Before the issuance of a contract, and before commencing any Work, the Contractor shall furnish a certificate, satisfactory to Western Pennsylvania Conservancy from each insurance company showing that the above insurance is in force, stating policy numbers, dates of expiration, and limits of liability thereunder, and further providing that the insurance will not be canceled or changed until the expiration of at least thirty (30) days after written notice of such cancellation. Western Pennsylvania Conservancy must be listed as an "Additional Insured" on all policies.**

Discussions and interviews may be held with farmers under final consideration prior to making a selection for award; however, proposals may be accepted without such discussions or interviews. In addition, proposers are welcome to visit the property at any time, as it remains open to the public. In the event that mutually acceptable terms cannot be reached within a reasonable period of time, WPC reserves the right to undertake negotiations with the next most advantageous farmer without undertaking a new procurement process. **SELECTION OF A CONTRACTOR OR FARMER IS IN THE SOLE DISCRETION OF WPC AND WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE THE HIGHEST PRICED PROPOSAL. WPC RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ACCEPT ANY PROPOSAL OR NONE AT ALL.**

Any inquiry desired by a proposer regarding the meaning or interpretation of the RFP should be directed to:

Bryan Ritti  
Land Steward  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
800 Waterfront Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Phone: (412) 586-2327  
Fax: 412-231-1414  
[britti@paconserve.org](mailto:britti@paconserve.org)

### **Project Schedule**

Request for Proposals (RFP): November 30, 2012  
Proposal Deadline: January 31, 2013  
Awarding of Contract/Lease(s): March 1, 2013

Access to and use of the lease areas can begin as soon as the contract is finalized by all parties.

If awarded a contract/lease, each lessee will be required to submit the items from 'Additional Requirements' above (nutrient management plan, organic plan, etc.) within one month of the contract start date.

### **Submittal of Proposal**

***Proposals will be received until 3:00 PM, January 31, 2013. Proposals may be sent by email or in a sealed envelope to:***

Bryan Ritti  
Land Steward  
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy  
800 Waterfront Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Phone: (412) 586-2327  
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Proposals will become the property of WPC. They will not be returned.



# Plain Grove Fen Natural Area

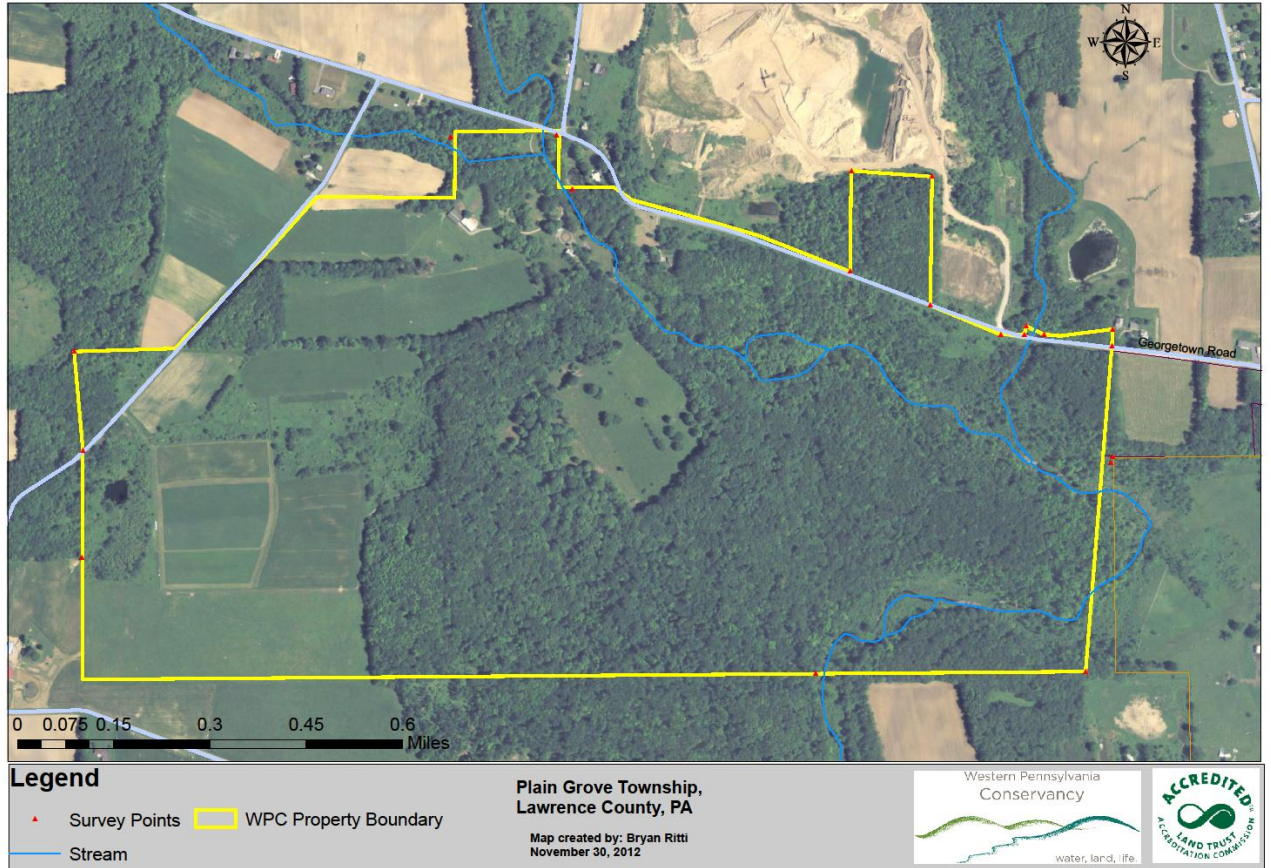


Figure 1: Plain Grove Fen Natural Area Map

# Plain Grove Fen Natural Area - Agricultural Lease

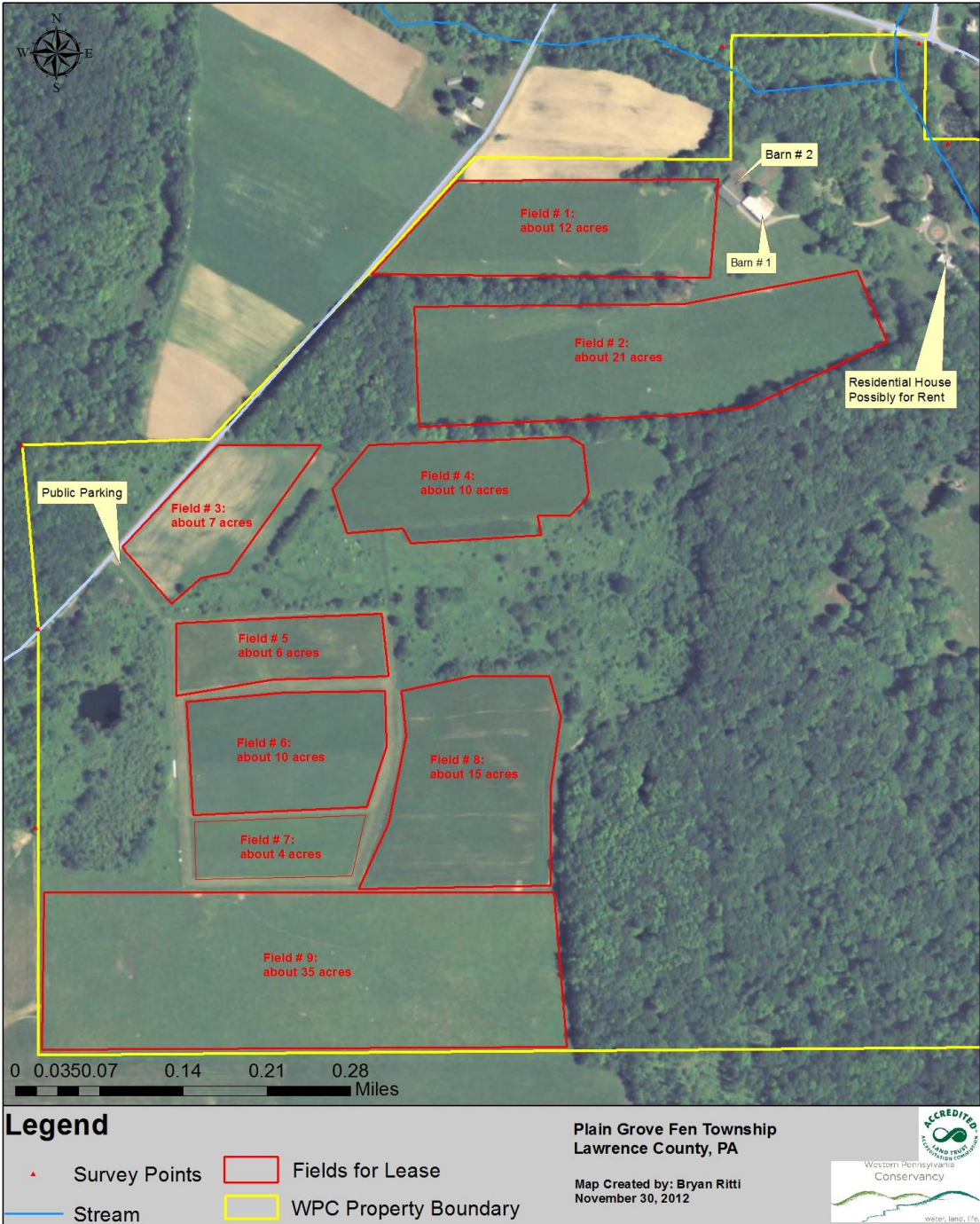


Figure 2: Plain Grove Fen Natural Area Map  
Fields & Structures for Rent/Lease