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Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies,
Saturday, November 10, 1973 by Dr. William R.
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Remarks for the Dedication of
The Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies
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by
Dr. William R. Overlease, Professor of Biology
Administrator of The Natural Area, West Chester State College

Over many years West Chester State College has provided many fine learning experiences related to man and his environment. The Conservation Workshop sponsored by the Geography Department and the Brandywine Valley Association is well known. The Departments of Biology and Earth and Space Science offer many fine courses on specific field studies and ecology. The School of Health and Physical Education offers courses related to camping and other outdoor related skills. Recently the School of Education has developed a new certification program for Elementary and Secondary teachers in Environmental Education. To my knowledge West Chester State College was one of the first if not the first college or university to require ecology for its prospective biology teachers back in 1965, several years before it became the normal part in some form of most curricula.

I point these facts out as we have had a good record on trying to anticipate and to meet the needs of society on the problems of the environment. However, no matter what we have done in the past, the environmental needs of today, locally, nationally, and in our world, and the problems of our future indicate that we still are not doing enough.

The dedication of 67 acres of the West Chester State College south campus today as The Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies is an indication of the interest and concern for the environment and for relevant education by West Chester State College, its Board of Trustees, its faculty, and its students.

The establishment of this natural area hasn't been easy. The original efforts to preserve portions of the wooded slopes were begun back in 1964. Over the years these efforts have been encouraged and supported by many of our departments, their chairmen, our deans, by both our recent College Presidents, Dr. Sykes, and Dr. Rossey, and especially in recent years by our student body. Some of you may remember when the issue came to a head two years ago the fine support we received from our whole local community and the fine coverage in the Daily Local News of the problems.

We hear so much today of conflict, of differences, and confrontation. I think the dedication of today is an example of how differences can be resolved, opinions modified, and decisions made that promote the welfare of the college and the community. All future classes, teachers, citizens, and local school groups that use the area will be grateful for the efforts over the years of these many dedicated people.

In addition to the many classes who at present use this outdoor classroom, it may be useful to point out several new programs we are planning to develop in the near future.

This coming July, 1974, there will be seven mini-courses offered for local teachers and interested citizens. The courses will be of one week duration and will offer one credit. They are as follows:

- Summer Birds of Chester County
- Summer Wild Flowers of Chester County
- Common Trees of Chester County
- The Living Forest - An Introduction to the Forest
as an Ecosystem
- Rocks and Minerals of Chester County
- Geologic Processes of Chester County
- Historical Geology of Chester County

Early next year we also plan to offer several public field trips and nature walks for interested young people and adults. These will be announced in the local papers.

One last point before concluding these few remarks. The college has shown its concern for the problems of open space through our recent Symposium on local open space problems and their solution. As we are becoming more and more an urbanized community, it is of considerable importance that our roots to the land be preserved whenever possible. These small preserved areas of our natural world are the symbols of our appreciation and concern for the heritage of Chester County, one of the truly beautiful areas in Eastern North America. It is also significant that our practical needs for an outdoor classroom and study area can be combined with an aesthetic and physiological need for space in a natural world.