

# Erie County home to plant never before recorded in Pa.

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Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) scientists have discovered a plant in Erie County that has never been recorded in Pennsylvania.

The plant, dwarf scouring rush, was identified with the aid of a Mercyhurst College professor on the college's Mercyhurst West property in Girard.

Dwarf scouring rush is known to exist in northern U.S. states and in Canada, but the plant had not been identified in Pennsylvania until this discovery. WPC scientists found a small population of this low, wiry plant within a fen, a rare type of wetland, on the college property.

Specimens will be stored at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, the Tom Ridge Environmental Center at Presque Isle State Park and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

"This discovery of the dwarf scouring rush in Pennsylvania demonstrates that our natural areas still can yield surprises, even in the twenty-first century," said Shaun Fenlon, WPC's vice president of [conservation](#) programs. "Erie County is home to many unique ecosystems, such as the fen that sustains this unusual plant. In addition to making this discovery, we also identified six plant species that are classified as rare, threatened or endangered at this location."

WPC Ecologists Christopher Tracey and Peter Woods identified the dwarf scouring rush after being led to the site by Mercyhurst Professor

of Biology John J. Michael Campbell. Tracey and Woods were conducting field research for the Erie County Natural Heritage Inventory, an extensive catalogue of [plants](#), animals and ecosystems, when they made the discovery.

"Finding this species and its associated habitat on land owned by the college is exciting, since it adds a whole new dimension to the educational potential of the property," said Campbell.

Members of the Horsetail family, scouring rushes are so named because the high silica content of these plants once made them useful for scrubbing pots. As "fern allies," they are closely related to the ancient fern family and reproduces through spores. The scientific name of the dwarf scouring rush is *Equisetum scirpoides*.

"This find highlights one of the important functions of our work, to collect information about the natural world in Pennsylvania," said Tracey.

Source: Mercyhurst College

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