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DEP Donates Piece of World's Oldest Fossilized Forest to the Gilboa-Conesville Central School

At 385 million years old, Gilboa fossils among greatest paleontological discoveries in the world

Fossil will be used to educate local children about the " first forest" in their backyard

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on Friday was joined by children, faculty and staff from the Gilboa-Conesville Central School to celebrate the donation of a fossil from the oldest fossilized forest in the world. The tree fossils were first discovered more than a century ago in the Schoharie Valley, and New York City later discovered many dozens of them in the 1920s while quarrying stone for the construction of Schoharie Reservoir. The City donated one of the massive fossils on Friday to the school, which will use it to educate local children about the ancient forest that once occupied their town.

"DEP is thrilled to donate one of the Gilboa fossils so that local children in the Schoharie Valley can learn about the history and science behind their discovery," **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza** said. "Whether the subject is water or paleontology, we all know that our children have a special learning experience when they can see and touch the items that bring their classroom lessons to life."

"On behalf of our entire school community I would like to thank the New York City DEP for its donation of the tree fossil," **Gilboa-Conesville Central School Superintendent Ruth Reeve** said. "As a young Gilboa student, I never really understood the unique fossils that we have here in Gilboa. We learned about them, but reading about them and actually being up close to one are different things. I hope that by having a fossil here on school grounds our students will make the connection between what they learn in the classroom and seeing the

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fossil up close. I am also happy to share this piece of history with visitors to our school. Some of our students have seen a Gilboa fossil at the Smithsonian. How exciting that they can see one every day right here at the school! I would also like to thank the American Legion for donating a bronze plaque which reads as follows: 'Eospermatopteris —This fossil was found in 2010 during the Gilboa Dam reconstruction project. It is a sandstone cast of a tree stump from the famous Gilboa fossil forest dating from middle Devonian period (380 million years ago) Donated by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.'"

"The School Board would like to thank DEP for donating the fossil to our school," Gilboa-Conesville School Board President Michael Fleischman said. " We cannot think of a better place to display this 385-million-year-old piece of history than at the front doors of our educational building. Gilboa-Conesville is a small school with a big place in history. The fossil will bring to life some of the history that is in our back yard for students and the community. Our students are very fortunate live in a region that includes pre-historic fossils, artifacts from the Revolutionary War and Civil War, and portions of the New York City water supply system. History is an important part of our kids' public education, helping them appreciate the past and teaching them not to repeat its mistakes."

The donated fossil, which weighs several hundred pounds, was moved into place on Friday morning. It will be kept outside the entrance to the school in a special fossil garden, including ferns and other plants, that was built by the school's custodial staff. The fossil was set in place by workers from Southland Contracting, Inc., the company that is currently working with DEP to upgrade infrastructure at the nearby Schoharie Reservoir.

The 385-million-year-old fossil is among the oldest tree fossils discovered in the history of the world. When they lived, the trees were several dozen feet high and resembled spiky paintbrushes. They rose from the coastal plains that surrounded an ancient sea, long before the continental drift fully formed the land masses that exist as continents of the world today.

The remnants of those trees—celebrated as the world's oldest fossilized forest—were first discovered by Samuel Lockwood, a local Reformed Church minister and naturalist. He found a batch of the fossilized stumps in 1869, when a flood washed away roads, bridges and soil to expose the stumps. In 1921, workers in a nearby quarry were harvesting stones for Gilboa Dam, which impounded the water for Schoharie Reservoir, when they found more stumps from the ancient trees. Several hundred sections of fossilized trees were found at three sites around the old village of Gilboa. Their size ranged from 12 inches to more than 3 feet in diameter.

Dr. Winifred Goldring, who would become the nation's first female state paleontologist when she took the position in New York, named the *Eospermatoperis*. The New York State Museum recreated the "First Forest" with 15 of the fossils in a diorama that depicted the shores of the Devonian Sea where they once lived. Researchers from around the world came to New York to study the fossils, and some of the artifacts were sent abroad for museum displays in other countries. Many of them were shipped at the expense of Hugh Nawn, a contractor on the original Gilboa Dam project who took great interest and price in the unique discovery.

One of the quarries was excavated again in 2010, this time to prepare for the $138 million rehabilitation of Gilboa Dam. The work gave paleontologists a new opportunity to study the forest floor from millions of years ago. As they examined the area, scientists discovered additional species and determined this prehistoric forest was a complex system of trees, smaller fern-like plants and climbing vines. Research on the Gilboa fossils and similar finds around the world continues to reveal new information about some of Earth's earliest plant communities.

Those who want to learn more about the Gilboa fossils can visit www.gilboafossils.org or visit the Gilboa Historical Society Museum at 122 Stryker Road in Gilboa.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of high-quality water each day to more than 9.5 million New Yorkers. This includes more than 70 upstate communities and institutions in Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties who consume an average of 110 million total gallons of drinking water daily from New York City's water supply system. This water comes from the Catskill, Delaware, and Croton watersheds that extend more than 125 miles from the City, and the system comprises 19 reservoirs, three controlled lakes, and numerous tunnels and aqueducts. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 scientists, engineers, surveyors, watershed maintainers and other professionals in the watershed. In addition to its $70 million payroll and $166 million in annual taxes paid in upstate counties, DEP has invested more than $1.7 billion in watershed protection programs—including partnership organizations such as the Catskill Watershed Corporation and the Watershed Agricultural Council—that support sustainable farming practices, environmentally sensitive economic development, and local economic opportunity. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit http://nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.

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