



Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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Hunterdon Land Trust Passes 9,500 Preserved Acres Milestone with Latest Effort in Bethlehem Twp.

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP (Jan. 23, 2019) – Ninety-eight acres of mostly pristine, verdant forest untouched by churning plow or digging backhoe, and undisturbed by hungry deer . . . in New Jersey?

A rare occurrence indeed. And, what’s best of all, these acres off Ludlow Station Road in Bethlehem Township will remain unspoiled for generations to come thanks to Hunterdon Land Trust.

“We target land for preservation based on the impact that landscape will have,” said HLT Executive Director Patricia Ruby. “This particular property was a priority because its unusually healthy forest provides clean water and resilient native wildlife habitat.”

HLT Land Steward Stefani Spence knew the moment she stepped onto the property that it was special.

“It’s very rare in Hunterdon County these days to see such a healthy forest – heavy deer browse usually paves the way for a carpet of invasive species, but this preserve has an abundance of native plants in the understory and we saw very few invasives,” Spence said. “The fact that these woods were never cleared for agriculture and have remained essentially untouched plays a big part in how healthy they still are today.”



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The land offers an ideal setting for passive recreation; an existing trail slopes uphill through a charming deciduous forest, rewarding hikers with stunning views of surrounding mountains and open fields. The property is also near the Tower Hill and Charlestown reserves – both owned by Hunterdon County -- creating the possibility of someday linking several trails.

Another compelling reason to preserve the land is its adjacency to a tributary of the Musconetcong River, which feeds into the Delaware. Protecting the watershed of the Musconetcong – one of only five federally-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in New Jersey -- also furthers the efforts of the Delaware River Watershed Initiative (DRWI), primarily funded by the William Penn Foundation.

The DRWI is among the nation’s largest non-regulatory conservation efforts, involving 65 non-governmental organizations -- including Hunterdon Land Trust – working together to protect and restore clean drinking water in the Delaware River watershed, the source of drinking water for 15 million people in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

HLT purchased the land from Princeton resident Peter Eisenberger, who had owned it for more than 25 years. In this preservation, patience paid off. HLT’s initial inquiries into preserving the land date back to January of 2001 but efforts to secure funding for the purchase proved difficult.

“Finding the funding is often the biggest challenge,” said HLT Director of Acquisitions Jacqueline Middleton.

HLT and Bethlehem Township kicked in New Jersey State Green Acres money, Hunterdon County awarded the project a grant, the William Penn Foundation provided key support, and The Nature Conservancy contributed funds for closing costs and technical reports.

“All these organizations played an important role in making this preservation possible – we can’t thank them enough,” Middleton said. “We also appreciate the property owner’s patience as we worked to raise the funds for this purchase.”

HLT, in turn, transferred the property to Hunterdon County who will own and manage it.

The Eisenberger Preservation brings the total amount of acreage preserved by Hunterdon Land Trust to 9,526 and closer to its goal of protecting 10,000 by the end of 2020.

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