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DEP, PARTNER AGENCIES PRESERVE MORE THAN 2,200 FOREST ACRES ACROSS 3 SUSSEX COUNTY COMMUNITIES

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Highlands Council and nonprofit partners today announced a \$5.1 million agreement preserving more than 2,200 acres of picturesque woodlands in Sussex County.

The acquisition of the conservation easements for the Hudson Farm properties is funded by \$2.2 million from the DEP's Green Acres Program, \$2 million from the Highlands Council, and \$885,000 from The Land Conservancy of New Jersey and the William Penn Foundation through the Open Space Institute, with matching grants from Green Acres.



“This is one of the largest state-coordinated preservation efforts in New Jersey in years,” Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources Ray Bukowski said. “The acquisition of the conservation easements for this beautiful property will enhance the public’s quality of life by creating passive recreational opportunities, preserving wildlife habitats, protecting water quality and preventing future development.”

The 2,218-acre property in the Highlands region of Sussex County spans Byram Township, Hopatcong Borough and Sparta Township. The DEP and its partners purchased the easements from IAT Reinsurance Company Inc., Cardia Company Inc. and E.G. Anderson Inc. The transaction adds to a 973-acre easement acquisition in Andover Township and Hopatcong Borough from the same property owners in 2016, resulting in a total of 3,191 acres preserved.

The land deal is the largest state preservation effort in New Jersey since 2012.

“I am proud to work with our many partners to preserve a property that has so many important environmental attributes associated with it and a property owner who recognizes the value of long-term preservation efforts,” said Rich Osborn, the Northwest Team Leader for the Green Acres Program who has worked on the land deal since 2004.

“The sale of the development rights to the DEP ensures that the Hudson Farm property will remain undeveloped permanently,” said John Ursin, the attorney representing the landowners. “The public hiking

trails will allow residents of the area to enjoy the scenic beauty of the land. This is the final chapter of a vision that had a goal of balancing the preservation of land, recreation and social opportunities, and economic activity and benefits to the larger community. This preservation success simply would not have been possible without the multi-year efforts of the Green Acres Program and its partners.”



“The Hudson Farm property contains some of the last remaining high-quality, core forests in the New Jersey Highlands,” explained Highlands Council Executive Director Lisa Plevin. “We were very happy to partner with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection on this acquisition. Preserving these lands from future development ensures habitat protection for several rare, threatened and endangered species, and the preservation of vital watershed lands. This project also provides access to the Highlands Trail, allowing for increased recreational use of these natural resources.”

The Highlands Council is a 15-member appointed body that works to implement the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act.

The DEP’s Division of Parks and Forestry will manage the property in accordance with several Forest Stewardship Plans and work with local volunteer and nonprogram groups to maintain existing trails on the property that link to local trail systems.

The DEP has identified the property as habitat for species including the state-endangered bobcat, barred owl, red-shouldered hawk and bald eagle, as well as the state-threatened red-headed woodpecker.

The public will be able to access part of the property for a variety of recreational pursuits such as hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, fishing, bird watching, nature study and other non-motorized recreational activities.

“This is a historic easement acquisition in the State of New Jersey, and The Land Conservancy is thrilled to have worked closely with the New Jersey Green Acres program for the past eight years to secure it,” said David Epstein, President of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey. “By acquiring this easement, we have helped protect water quality for millions of residents in two states who rely on the Delaware watershed.”

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey’s Hudson Farm project is supported through a \$450,000 grant from the Open Space Institute’s Delaware River Watershed Protection Fund, made possible with funding from the William Penn Foundation for its Delaware River Watershed Initiative which seeks to protect water quality in the Delaware River Basin.

"It's a rare day when you can protect 8 percent of a watershed with one single transaction," Open Space Institute Executive Vice President Peter Howell said of the Musconetcong Watershed. "Protecting the unspoiled forests surrounding the Delaware River headwaters is critical if we want to preserve the drinking water of the Delaware River watershed's 15 million residents. We applaud the vision and determination of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey and the State of New Jersey in protecting one of the true natural gems of the New Jersey Highlands."

Through public and private partnerships, the Green Acres Program has directly protected more than 650,000 acres of open space and provided hundreds of recreational opportunities for a wide range of activities, including natural areas, hiking and fishing areas, city parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, boat ramps, docks, fishing piers and environmental education.

