



Hunterdon Land Trust

PROTECTING THE PLACES YOU LOVE

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Hunterdon Land Trust Preservation Effort Adds 50 Acres to Musconetcong Gorge

HOLLAND TOWNSHIP -- Mary Smith is a bona fide country girl at heart.

She milked cows for 38 years and loved working on her family's dairy farm. When the time came to decide the future of her 50 acres in Holland Township, she was determined to see it preserved.

"My late husband was a farmer, and he didn't want to see houses on the property," she said. "It's just a great place – beautiful and very scenic."

The Hunterdon Land Trust spearheaded efforts to preserve Smith's property, recognizing it as an ideal target for preservation because of its numerous benefits. The land is contiguous to the Musconetcong Gorge Preserve and would add acreage to the county-owned park, which already totaled 523 acres. Contiguous properties offer the advantage of creating greenway corridors which help protect wildlife habitats, improve water quality and provide recreational opportunities for longer hiking trails.

Another important feature is the tributary to the Musconetcong River – an important source for drinking water – that cuts across the property west of County Route 519. The forested wetlands along this stream enhance the aquatic habitat because the trees help keep the water temperature down. A cooler stream means the water has more oxygen which makes it more suitable for trout production.



And the views are magnificent.

“This is a quintessential Holland Township property with its scenic and diverse natural landscapes and diverse natural lands,” said Patricia Ruby, HLT’s executive director.

HLT Land Acquisition Director Jacqueline Middleton walked the property several times and was amazed. “This is a terrific piece of land to preserve; the land is really beautiful and you can see all the way into Warren County and past the river; the views are absolutely stunning,” Middleton said.

Bill Millette, Hunterdon County’s open space coordinator, said the Student Conservation Association will create a trail on the newly preserved land to hook up with the Highlands Trail. A parking area will be added to provide easy access to that section of the preserve.

The preservation was a true collaboration of several organizations working together to not only facilitate the deal with the landowner but also to bring sufficient funding to the table. Working with HLT were the Heritage Conservancy, the Musconetcong Watershed Association, the Victoria Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, Hunterdon County (who now owns the property) and the New Jersey Green Acres Program.

“It’s so key that we all worked together on this,” Middleton said. “I don’t think this property would have been preserved without all this collaboration.”

Efforts to protect this property, and others like it, also serve to forward the goals of the Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic Program, which aims to protect the remarkable natural, historic and recreational resources that earned this stretch of the river the federal Wild and Scenic designation.

Smith’s father-in-law purchased the property in the 1940s, and it had been with the family ever since. Smith said she learned to milk cows before she married, and loved her many years on the farm, where she and her husband, Russell, also grew corn, wheat, hay, soybeans and other crops. Mary’s husband passed away in 1994, and seven years later, Mary decided to give up the dairy cows.

The Smiths were longtime proponents of land preservation and even sought to have property they owned in Warren County preserved back in 1988. Although developers approached her multiple times about selling this parcel, Mary was determined to see it remain in its natural state. She believes others will appreciate it too.

“I think the neighbors will like seeing the cornfields much more than seeing houses,” she said.

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