



Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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Work at Saeger Preserve Honored With County Award

RARITAN, TOWNSHIP -- Hungry deer, mile-a-minute weed and a hurricane couldn't keep the Hunterdon Land Trust from safeguarding the Tom Saeger Preserve in Holland Highlands.

The Land Trust's efforts at the preserve were honored last week with the Hermia Lechner Award, given by the Hunterdon County Planning Board and the Cultural and Heritage Commission, for a project that promotes the conservation of natural resources or protects the environment.

The Land Trust acquired the Saeger Preserve, located at 150 Shire Road, in early 2010, largely through funding from the New Jersey Green Acres Program. The property is 42 acres of farm fields, forested areas, slopes and stunning scenic vistas that is open to the public for hiking, birding, cross-country skiing and mountain biking.

"Thanks to the state's Green Acres funding, we can all continue to enjoy the beautiful and protected Saeger Preserve for hiking, biking and other pursuits, with the added bonus of knowing that by preserving the land, we're also helping protect the quality of our drinking water," said Patricia Ruby, executive director of the Hunterdon Land Trust. "We hope voters will remember the importance of Green Acres funding and vote yes on Nov. 4 on public question #2 which will dedicate existing revenues to programs for open space, farmland and historic preservation."

After taking title to the property, the Land Trust began overseeing the property to promote a better wildlife habitat and increase its biological diversity. A forest stewardship plan was created, and volunteer groups – including members of the Jersey Off Road Bicycle Association (JORBA) – were solicited for help. A contractor roared through a swath of the property to clear the bulk of the invasives, and later, volunteers from Janssen Pharmaceuticals ripped out invasive plants from the property’s periphery.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Sandy knocked out some of the valuable tree canopy. Ailanthus, an incredibly fast-growing invasive tree, took advantage of the additional sun and lack of native trees and spread like wildfire, forcing Land Steward Tom Thorsen and a volunteer to return and combat it. Volunteers also wiped out a sprouting mile-a-minute weed that enveloped a portion of the land with a six-inch blanket.

Fencing was installed to protect 150 Shagbark Hickory and 100 Blackhawk Viburnum trees from hungry deer. These trees will provide shelter and food for birds and other wildlife.

Efforts to steward the Tom Saeger Preserve also support the goals of the National Park Service’s Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic Program, which aims to protect the natural, historic and recreational resources that earned this stretch of the river the Wild & Scenic designation. Funding from Wild & Scenic supports the Hunterdon Land Trust to protect Saeger and other preserves.

The county Planning Board and Cultural and Heritage Commission handed out 14 other awards at last week’s event, honoring achievements in the arts, history and the environment.

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