



## NEWS

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## **244-acre park preserved in Lebanon Township**

**LEBANON TWP.** – Hunterdon County’s newest park – 244 acres connecting the Point Mountain Reservation and Teetertown/Crystal Springs Preserve – has just been preserved by a public-private partnership spearheaded by New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Hunterdon County.

On July 19, Hunterdon County purchased the Pelio property for \$2 million with the help of NJ Conservation and eight other entities, including the New Jersey Green Acres Program, Lebanon Township, Hunterdon Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Victoria Foundation, 1772 Foundation, Leavens Foundation and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority.

The new park links existing preserved lands to create a greenway of nearly 2,600 acres in northern Hunterdon County.

“The addition of this property to the County Park System is crucial to connecting the county’s Teetertown and Point Mountain parks, a long sought-after linkage in the northern part of the county,” said Matt Holt, Hunterdon County freeholder director. “Connections between already preserved parcels enhance the park experience for residents and visitors and add to the value of the park system, which is a critical part of investment in our tourism industry.”

The property, which features rolling farm fields, forests and wetlands along Mount Lebanon, Sharrer and Turkey Top roads, has been eyed for preservation for 15 years. It will be open to the public for passive recreation like hiking, bird watching, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and nature observation.

“From a local perspective, this acquisition significantly adds to the rural vistas, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities in Lebanon Township, while also maintaining its agricultural character,” said Lebanon Township Mayor Mike Schmidt. “From a statewide perspective, the preserved lands are the source of some of the most pristine drinking water to be found anywhere.”

The property is within in a sub-watershed ranked the highest quality by the New Jersey Water Supply Authority, indicating that its preservation will have a positive impact on water quality. The property is crossed by streams flowing into the Spruce Run Reservoir, a water supply source for central New Jersey. It also protects the watershed of the Musconetcong River, one of only three federally-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in New Jersey.

The land is home to several endangered species, including wood turtles and great blue herons.

“We are thrilled to help secure the preservation of the Pelio property, and we thank all our partners,” said Michele S. Byers, executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation. “Preservation of these lands reaffirms the importance of public-private partnerships in achieving land preservation goals.”

Hunterdon County provided the bulk of the funding through grants to Lebanon Township and New Jersey Conservation Foundation. Green Acres was also a significant funding partner, providing grants to Lebanon Township and Hunterdon Land Trust. The Nature Conservancy, Victoria Foundation, 1772 Foundation and Leavens Foundation also chipped in, and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority helped with closing costs.

“The DEP Green Acres Program is pleased to have played a role in preserving this regionally significant property,” said Martha Sullivan Sapp, Director of the Green Acres Program. “We commend our partners for preserving this 244-acre property that will provide a link to other public open spaces.”

"For many years, Hunterdon Land Trust has held a deep interest in seeing this important property preserved," said Patricia Ruby, executive director of Hunterdon Land Trust. "Now, thanks to the persistence and dedication of the many partners working together, we have added significant parkland to a greenway protecting clean water, air, and wildlife for all to enjoy. It is always exciting when a long-awaited preservation project come to fruition."

“We have limited time to protect New Jersey’s most critical lands as the state approaches build-out, said Barbara Brummer, State Director for The Nature Conservancy in NJ. The Nature Conservancy is pleased to have collaborated on this project, which provides critical linkage to other protected lands that will allow species to persist in the face of climate change.”

"One of Victoria Foundation's missions is to protect New Jersey's environment, so we are pleased to help preserve the Pelio property," said Irene Cooper-Basch, executive director of the Newark-based foundation. "Not only does the Pelio property provide valuable open space and passive recreation to the public, it also protects water in the Spruce Run and the Musconetcong River."

“ The 1772 Foundation is delighted to have partnered with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and others to preserve this important farm property, said Dan Ely, the foundation’s president. “The fact that the Pelio Farm property adjoins other preserved farms was an important factor in our decision

'The Pelio land has long been a keystone property, linking the Musconetcong and Raritan watersheds,” said Bill Leavens of the Leavens Foundation. “We are very proud to have played a small part in preserving an important link for wildlife in the region. Hats off to New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Hunterdon County, the many partners and the Lebanon Township Environmental Commission for their incredible persistence in bringing this project to a successful conclusion.”