



PRESS RELEASE, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, 8 JULY 2019



The Rancocas Conservancy is pleased to announce that a long abandoned blueberry farm in Pemberton Township, Burlington County has been permanently preserved as open space. The Conservancy is a nonprofit, tax exempt corporation whose mission is to protect environmentally important areas in the Rancocas Creek Watershed and to advocate for responsible stewardship of the watershed. The new preserve will be named Bucks Cove Nature Preserve.

The 202-acre property is located between disconnected portions of the 33,647 acre Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, not far from Whitesbog Village. Importantly, the property contains extensive wetlands and the pristine water of Bucks Cove Run that feeds the North Branch of the Rancocas Creek. The Rancocas provides clean drinking water to millions of users in downstream communities which draw water from the Delaware River, notably Philadelphia, which has a major water intake just downstream of the mouth of the Rancocas.

Major financial assistance was provided by the Pinelands Commission, the Open Space Institute and the New Jersey Green Acres Program.

The Pinelands Commission's Pinelands Conservation Fund supported acquisition of this property based on its significant ecological value and based on the need for active stewardship to prevent continuing damage from off-road vehicle use which has caused compacted soils, stream erosion and increased sedimentation. The Conservancy will enforce a ban on all motor vehicle activity within the preserve.

"Successful partnerships like this are so important. Not only are we cooperating to ensure that this important land is preserved but we are also working to minimize the impact of illegal off road use," said Nancy Wittenberg, the Commission's Executive Director.

The conservancy's partner, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, obtained financial support for the project through 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.

"This land is an inspiring model for protecting the forested source water of the greater Delaware River, and for safeguarding the drinking water of millions of local residents along the river," said Peter Howell, Executive Vice President of OSI. "We applaud the conservation ethos of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Rancocas Conservancy to bring this effort to fruition."

In addition to its financial support, the Green Acres Program provided invaluable guidance and support to the Rancocas Conservancy in bringing this acquisition to a conclusion.

Additional funding was made possible by an award from New Jersey Conservation Foundation's Franklin Parker Conservation Excellence Grant and from the Pinelands Preservation Alliance through grant money it received from the William Penn Foundation.

Without the support of the many volunteers from the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, who turned out on several weekends, the clean-up of this property would not have been possible. In addition to picking up bottles, cans and other debris, the undertaking required the removal of three power boats and the burned-out hulk of a house trailer. Taking the materials from the property required five roll offs. In addition to the clean-up, volunteers have begun restoration of the property by planting Atlantic White Cedars along stream and wetland corridors.

As with its other ten nature preserves, the Conservancy invites the public to enjoy passive recreational activities on this preserve. In the future, marked trails will provide ample opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, birding, photography, and botanizing. Among the threatened species calling this habitat home are Scarlet Bluets, Pine Barrens Bluets, Arogos Skipper, Pickering's Morning-glory, Barred Owl, Pine Barren Treefrog, Northern Pine Snake, and Corn Snake. An interesting feature to explore is the periglacial dune, designated the Whitesbog Village Sandhill Natural Priority Site, that runs from the property into Brendan Byrne State Forest.