



# Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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## Preserved Properties Increase Size of Horseshoe Bend Park

KINGWOOD – It all began with a plan.

Hunterdon Land Trust Land Acquisitions Director Jacqueline Middleton and Kingwood Deputy Mayor Richard Dodds met with representatives of Green Acres to study a map showing the part of Kingwood that is in the Delaware Scenic Byway. On this day in 2016, they were searching for properties ripe for preservation in this environmentally important section of Hunterdon County.

Their task had a slight sense of urgency because money to preserve properties along the Delaware River was available through Green Acres thanks to a federal Delaware Scenic Byways fund.

Middleton and Dodds targeted three properties during that meeting. The first, the 15-acre Hudson Grant Group tract, was protected in 2017. The other two properties –Pine Brook Farm Associates and Dixon/Fleming – were protected this fall, just two days apart.

These two recent acquisitions add 110 acres to Kingwood’s beautiful Horseshoe Bend Park, bringing its total acreage to 796.45.



“We are excited to be able to expand that open space corridor in the Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic area,” Middleton said. “These properties are close to the river, and you have the most amazing views from up there. It’s truly stunning.

“Horseshoe Bend Park is such an incredible resource to the community, and having such a beautiful place is so important during times like this when we all need places to get away,” Middleton added.

Dodds said plans are underway to establish a one-mile addition to Horseshoe Bend’s Flagg-Kirkland trail, a 3.5-mile path that swings south across Fairview Road before looping back onto the Orange Trail. Trail plans are currently under review by the state because a portion of the proposed trail will cross state-owned land.

“There will be some work to be done before we can get the trails completed because there are a lot of invasives,” Dodds said. He hopes this project can begin late winter or early spring of 2021, so the trails will be available to the public later that fall.

Dodds noted the latest park additions offered future hikers a variety of interesting views. These include old stone walls built by farmers many years ago, and the only vernal pond in the area, which can be found on the Pine Brook property. The Pine Brook portion features the edge of a beech forest, increasing the variety of trees found at Horseshoe Bend, which includes maples, cedars and old oaks.

The Dixon/Flemington property adds 50 acres to the park, with the owners keeping 58. Green Acres acquired the Dixon/Fleming preservation; with help identifying the property from Kingwood and HLT.

Middleton recalled how the Dixon/Fleming property seemed unattainable at one time. A previous landowner had the property on the market, but a potential preservation deal fell through, and the property was sold.

“One day, I’m at the office and Katie Dixon walks in,” Middleton said. “She was familiar with us through our Farmers’ Market and said she was interested in exploring preservation options for her property. When she told me the lot and block number -- I couldn’t believe it. I told her we had been interested in her property for so long.”

It turned out to be one of the three properties Middleton and Dodds had targeted in 2016.

“We love wild places, and while looking for a historic house in the area we were overjoyed to discover what is now our home, sitting in the middle of heavily wooded lands,” noted Dixon and Fleming. “At the same time, the amount of acreage far exceeded our original criteria and probably capacity, so from the moment we bought it we wanted to explore what possibilities there might be simultaneously to preserve its wild character and to reduce the territory directly under our stewardship.”



The Pine Brook property totaled about 81 acres with 60 becoming part of Horseshoe Bend, and the other 21 acres being kept by Pine Brook. Partners in this preservation were Green Acres, Hunterdon County, Hunterdon Land Trust and Kingwood Township.

This acquisition too stalled for a while. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Dodds grew increasingly concerned that the opportunity to use the funds provided by Green Acres might slip away. Somehow, a renewed and vigorous effort pushed this preservation across the finish line. A contract was signed in June, and the closing occurred in late September.

"One of the things that is most important to me is to be a custodianship of the environment," said Glen Axelrod, owner of Pine Brook. "It's not ours; it belongs to the future."

Axelrod also credited his wife, Jennifer, as the driving force behind the preservation. " My wife is the real conservationist, and she was the impetus for us to go ahead and do this," Axelrod said. "It's an opportunity to contribute to the greater good of everyone."

"Hunterdon Land Trust is honored to have played a role in this preservation effort," said HLT Executive Director Patricia Ruby. "By overcoming the numerous challenges that occurred in this process, HLT has demonstrated how it is steadfast in its commitment to protecting our fields, forests and waterways in this critical Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic area."

The National Park Service's Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic Program, aims to protect the natural, cultural and historic value of the Delaware River.

"I am so thrilled about these preservations," Middleton added. "Going back to that first meeting in 2016, we targeted these three properties, and we were able to preserve all three of them. And we're not done, we want to keep going."

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