



# Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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## **HLT Celebrates a Quarter Century of Protecting the Places You Love**

FLEMINGTON – Twenty-five years ago, Hunterdon County was undergoing a seismic shift, transforming from a landscape of family farms, open fields and woodlands to one threatened by increasing sprawl. Fear grew that this increased development would lead to clogged roadways, air and water pollution, and an overall drop in quality of life.

All this spurred several local residents to pool their talents and energies to fight back.

The all-volunteer effort morphed into Hunterdon Land Trust, now a nationally accredited professional organization that since its inception has preserved more than 10,280 acres in Hunterdon County. This year Hunterdon Land Trust marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and will celebrate by hosting a number of special events and – naturally -- by doing what it does best: Continuing to work hard to protect the places you love.



“We are pausing to reflect and celebrate our past achievements and thank the many supporters who worked during this past quarter-century to protect what’s truly special about Hunterdon County,” said Patricia Ruby, executive director of Hunterdon Land Trust.

“But by no means are we resting on our laurels. Though we have accomplished a great deal, there’s so much more work that remains to be done.”

HLT currently has 21 preservation projects in the works in several townships including Readington, Kingwood, Bethlehem, Franklin, Raritan, Lambertville and Holland. Most recently it helped facilitate the preservation of 28.7 acres of open space at the Fitzgerald tract and 106 acres of farmland and open space at the Saums property, both in Readington; the 135-acre Silva Farm in Holland Township; and 104 acres of open space at the Maritan property in Kingwood.

Besides seeking promising new preservation projects, HLT is working toward the future restoration of the Dvoor Farm, which serves as its headquarters. Plans call for a sensitive rehabilitation of the barns allowing for them to be utilized for children’s camps, corporate retreats, weddings and other life celebrations, and educational programming; infrastructure improvements to provide public restrooms, improved traffic flow and parking; and natural resource restorations to benefit pollinator meadows and wetlands, streams and stormwater management.

“As Hunterdon Land Trust celebrates our anniversary, no project has been more vital to linking the past, present and future for all we serve than the transformation of Dvoor Farm,” Ruby noted. “This effort will ensure the farm remains a place for families and friends to gather to remember the past and forge new memories; allow more people to enjoy an array of educational and recreational opportunities that honors Hunterdon County’s agricultural, cultural and natural heritage all while boosting the local economy.”

HLT has raised more than \$2 million toward this project. Anyone wishing to learn more about this project can contact Catherine Suttle, HLT’s director of cultural resources, at [catherine@hunterdonlandtrust.org](mailto:catherine@hunterdonlandtrust.org).

HLT also continues to grow its producers’-only Farmers’ Market, which operates every Sunday at the Dvoor Farm from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The market, which started in 2007, now welcomes about 25 local farmers and vendors to the Dvoor Farm every week. Even the COVID-19 pandemic hasn’t stopped HLT’s efforts to meet the needs of its customers.

“When the pandemic struck, former Assistant Market Manager Devin Cornia and I knew we had to adapt and make sure our customers felt safe and welcome,” Reid said. “The response from friends and supporters has been gratifying. Our volunteers, farmers and vendors have helped us flourish without missing a beat.”



Reid added that the market's ability to adapt to the challenges of 2020 demonstrated both the organization's resiliency and dedication to its mission.

## **A History of Preservation**

The nonprofit, originally known as the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, was formed in 1996. Spearheaded by Delaware Township resident Roger Harris, this group researched land trusts and contacted environmental organizations for advice. A phone call to the New Jersey Conservation Foundation helped Harris connect with residents from Kingwood, Readington and East Amwell. Among those involved early on were: Bill Rawlyk, John Mathieu, Tom McMillan, Alison Mitchell, Pam Thier, Barbara Wolfe, Ruth and Lloyd Gang, Sandra Madon, Julia Allen and Howard Parker.

After further research and countless meetings, the group formed the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance (the "Alliance" was later dropped from the name). Bylaws were drafted and the nonprofit was incorporated in October 1996. Harris became the land trust's first president.

HLT's efforts to fulfill its mission "to preserve the integrity of the rural landscapes in the Hunterdon County region" received its first boost with the preservation of the Dondero farm in West Amwell. The farm, dating back to the 1750s, seemed the quintessential Hunterdon County property with its rolling hayfield, forest populated with ash, oak, sycamore, maple and hickory trees, a stone farmhouse and barn. Working with D&R Greenway Land Trust and the New Jersey Green Acres Program, the property was successfully preserved.

The adage success breeds success proved true with HLT as it racked up a string of preservation victories at the Quakertown Preserve in Franklin Township, Zega-Lockatong in Delaware Township, the Holland Highlands in Holland Township, the Idell Preserve in Kingwood and other places. It played a major role in the preservation of Horseshoe Bend Park in Kingwood, which through several contiguous acquisitions, has grown to more than 795 acres.

HLT helped preserve these lands and others by partnering with municipal, county and state governments and other nonprofit organizations. It works diligently with landowners who wish to permanently protect the ecological, agricultural, scenic, historic or recreational qualities of their land.

The organization also works to help landowners identify the best options to meet their conservation goals and financial needs, assisting them every step of the way through the preservation process.

## **Celebrating 25 Years**

Though HLT's official anniversary falls in October, the organization will celebrate by hosting several events before and after that month.



Later this year, HLT will host a barn and house tour at the Dvoor Farm. It will also conduct several virtual programs, including a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Virtual Celebration and Fundraiser on Sept. 19. For more information on all these events, visit [www.hunterdonlandtrust.org](http://www.hunterdonlandtrust.org).

