

TLCNJ Helps Hanover Turn Planned Highway into Nature Trail



Fifty years ago, the New Jersey Department of Transportation made plans to install a Route 24 access ramp through Hanover Township into Morris Plains. Due to pushback from residents, the project was never completed. When the expansion was eventually abandoned, The Land Conservancy recommended that Hanover acquire this property for a hiking and biking path. Together, we persuaded legislators to have the Department of Transportation declare the property surplus, and in 2014 Governor Christie de-legislated the land. Seven years later, the land has finally been acquired.

At 75 acres, this property is the single largest undeveloped parcel remaining in Hanover. Preserving it provides a critical buffer between neighborhoods and the growing shopping district along Hanover Avenue and

Horsehill Road. While houses are just yards away, this wooded land remains largely wild and undisturbed—and will now remain that way forever.

The Land Conservancy was involved every step along the way, helping the township set up meetings with legislators, raise funds for the acquisition, and overseeing all of the due diligence work, from completing surveys and environmental assessments to removing encroachments to handling the real estate closing. Now that's been taken care of, Hanover will design a nature trail with the Morris County Park Commission. The objective is to extend the County's Pigeon Hill Trail—which is part of Patriots' Path—through Hanover into Morris Plains. In a densely populated

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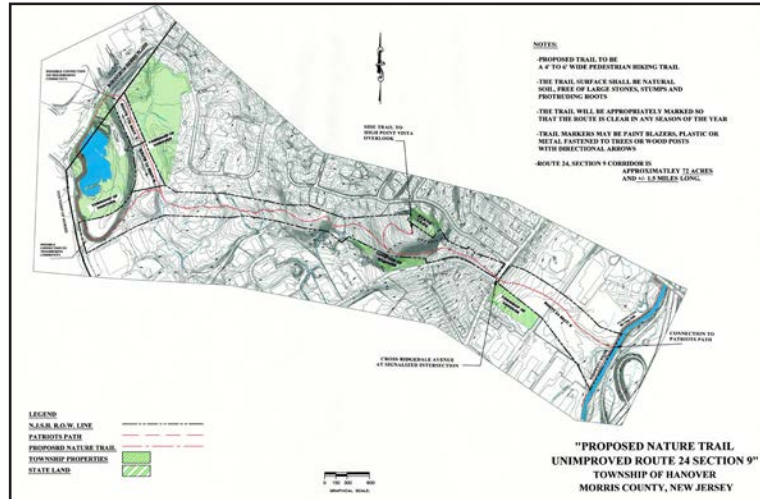
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suburb like Hanover, this new green space will be a great benefit to the community.

Our own Barbara Heskins Davis is grateful to all of the individuals and entities that worked together to accomplish this. "This property would not have been protected without the dedication and commitment of the mayor, governing body, Business Administrator Joe Giorgio, and Township Engineer Gerry Maceira. It was an innovative project that required the partnership of the town, two state agencies [NJDOT and NJDEP], state legislators, and the governor. The Land Conservancy is proud and excited to have been a part of this endeavor and congratulates Hanover on preserving such an exceptional open space property."

We can't wait until the new trail is finished so we can hike it!

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



Vice President of Planning Barbara Heskins Davis

Interns come to work for The Land Conservancy from across the country, with a passion and drive for making a difference in our world. They have played in heavy metal rock bands (and this intern had a strong aversion to spiders, no way would they go out and do field work!), been bilingual (one helped translate our social media posts into Hindi for the Edison Township open space ballot question), and college athletes (including a Division One disc golf player). They are enthusiastic about conservation, bring a unique perspective on environmental issues, and raise the bar of our work. For example, one intern made a complex spreadsheet linking endangered species, habitat, and conservation strategies that has become the model statewide for habitat conservation planning.

The Land Conservancy started its internship program in 1995. At first our interns provided general office assistance; now they are central to our programs. Some work side by side with gardeners at the community

garden to maintain the plots and paths that frame South Branch Preserve. Others are creating new educational programming with students at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Paterson and Passaic. Our interns shine, by the numbers and by any other metric:

- We have hired 150 interns, including 27 interns between 2019 and 2020—our largest cohort ever!
- Our interns have studied at 60 different colleges and universities.
- 23 interns completed their graduate work at the Rutgers Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.
- Last year we hired our first two Planning Fellows—a new opportunity for graduate students.
- Some of our interns work remotely, from as far away as Phoenix, Arizona.

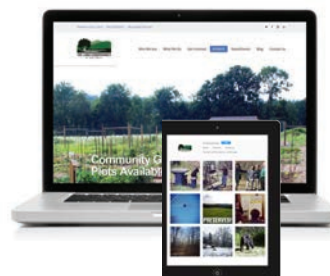
Our interns learn transferable skills that have led them to many prestigious organizations, including the Land Trust Alliance, Natural Resource Conservation Service, New York-New Jersey Port Authority, Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Harvard Business School, and Teach for America, among others. They have worked in the legal profession, as teachers, and as foresters (both in urban settings and at the White Mountain National Forest!).

Preservation, stewardship, and education are the benchmarks of success for The Land Conservancy. Educating our future leaders—whether they work directly in the environmental field or take the skills they have learned into another profession—carries us forward into the future. Turn to page 7 for a celebration of our interns, past and present.

Sincerely,

GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can also visit tlc-nj.org to read our blog.



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Growing Yards Creek Preserve

Yards Creek Preserve was established in 2019 as an ambitious conservation project to protect drinking water for millions of the region's inhabitants and curb encroaching development. The Land Conservancy has identified over 1,000 acres of particularly vulnerable and richly diverse land to preserve in the Delaware River Basin, one of the most important watersheds on the East Coast.

Near the Appalachian Trail and adjacent to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Yards Creek Preserve acts as a carbon sink using native vegetation, mature forests of oak and hickory, and healthy soils. Conservation of this ecologically sensitive land is creating a resilient ecosystem that will better adapt to climate change while supporting diverse populations of native plants and animals.

The preserve benefits local people, too, by providing resource-based recreation opportunities, especially for people who live nearby and can now walk off-road through a forest in their leisure time.

Slowly but surely, The Land Conservancy's efforts are connecting significant amounts of green forested habitat along the slopes of the Kittatinny Ridge to enable the movement of wildlife without interference by human activity. In 2021 we acquired three new properties in Blirstown, each with its own charms. One features

a marsh backed by a stunning view of the Kittatinny Ridge and full of native plants and shrubs. The other is 21 forested acres likely headed for development, with water running beneath the stony surface that makes the spot an important one for the watershed.

For the past three years, we have remained busy putting the pieces in place to improve the land at Yards Creek. In early 2020 a dilapidated house was demolished, and then in the fall we planted 575 trees with the help of 59 volunteers to reduce erosion and rehabilitate the wetlands. Next up is a stream restoration project to remove manmade features and improve the way the wetlands function.

We hope you'll come along for the ride as we revive Yards Creek Preserve. Consider making a donation so you can be a part of this success story.



Red spotted newts at Yards Creek Preserve

Landowners Leave a Legacy of Natural Beauty

December 2021 marked our most recent addition to Yards Creek Preserve, further protecting the Delaware River watershed's forest and water resources. This beautiful new parcel of land with a scenic overlook brings the organization's newest nature preserve to a grand total of 286 acres.

We love working with landowners who are as passionate as we are about preserving New Jersey's natural beauty. Wes Jones, the landowner who deeded us the most recent piece of land, is a prime example of this. His family has lived in the area for many generations, and they are creating a legacy of conservation by making sure their family land is left undisturbed.

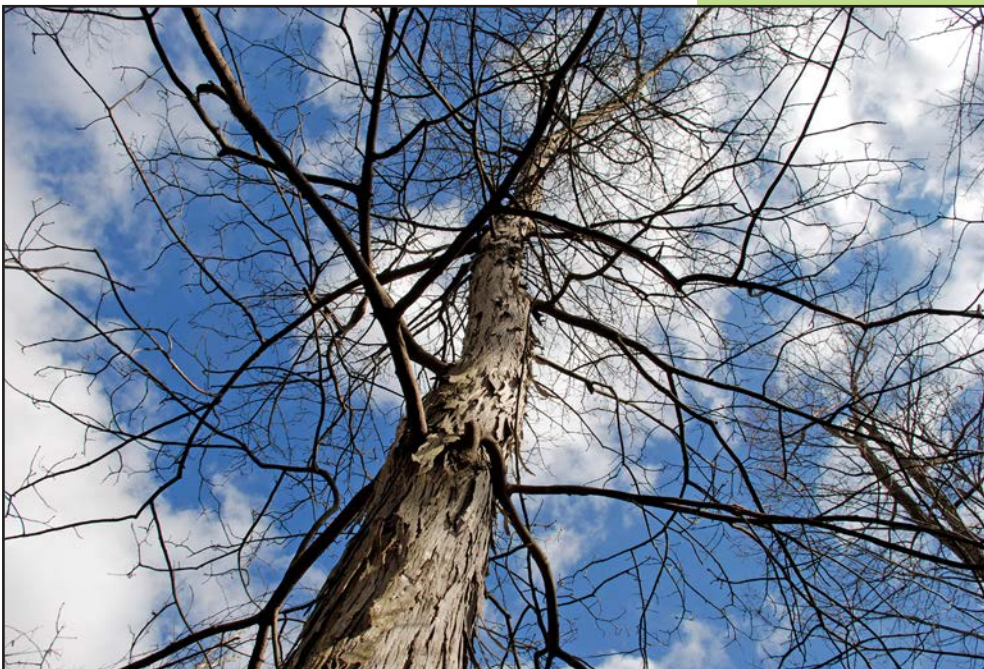
Jones says, "I am glad my land on Four Corners Road will always be available for all to enjoy. It was a pleasure working with Sandy from Land Conservancy of New Jersey to preserve my property. Just as my parents, John and Stella, and Uncle Walter Jones sold their Lambert Road parcel to become Sycamore Park to be enjoyed for future generations. Let's all work together to keep Blairstown and surrounding communities green. And support your local farmer."

Our own Sandy Urgo says it's not just individuals, but the entire community that wants to maintain their region's pastoral history. She noted the progress being made, saying, "It is a pleasure to work on land preservation in Blairstown, where residents, leaders and landowners all seem to have a conservation ethic. Since its inception, Yards Creek Preserve has been warmly welcomed by our many neighbors. We especially appreciate Wes Jones working with us to preserve his land and add it to the preserve, as well as the generous contributions from all of our funders."



ABOVE: Planning intern Hiyabu Habtemichael checks on trees planted at Yards Creek Preserve in fall 2020. One year later we discovered a remarkable survival rate.

BELOW: A venerable shagbark hickory tree on the property TLCNJ recently acquired from Wes Jones to add to Yards Creek Preserve.



Gratitude and Growth in 2021

We had all hoped that 2021 might be easier than 2020, but then . . . it wasn't.

Just because it wasn't easy doesn't mean it wasn't a successful year, or a worthy one. In fact, The Land Conservancy accomplished quite a bit, which is extra satisfying considering the challenges we were up against. Our organization's support remains strong. We are grateful, and we are putting that support to good use.

We completed 14 acquisition projects, preserving a total of 584 acres. Finished 10 open space, farmland preservation, and resource inventory plans for different New Jersey municipalities. Helped establish the Ramapough Munsee Land Alliance so they can eventually own and manage Split Rock Mountain once we acquire it. Brought in almost 100 new members (like you!).

We pulled off a terrific Gray Cup Golf Invitational on a sweltering day in June. Sold out all 145 plots

at the Community Garden at South Branch. Hosted a slate of successful community outdoor education programs, which we are looking forward to continuing in 2022.

We also consistently leverage our resources to help others. For example, we helped Edison's campaign to educate the public about an open space measure that was overwhelmingly approved by voters. Our partner City Green, which farms at South Branch Preserve, completed an amazing third year, harvesting 52,789 pounds of produce and donated 3,912 pounds of it to local food pantries.

Maybe it's because we're all struggling that so many showed their generosity last year. We brought in \$750,000 from our members, triple what was raised just a few years ago. The Janet Ross Bequest Challenge (which is still open!) gained us 12 new planned giving members. Don't forget that it's your support that keeps us going, and keeps us growing.

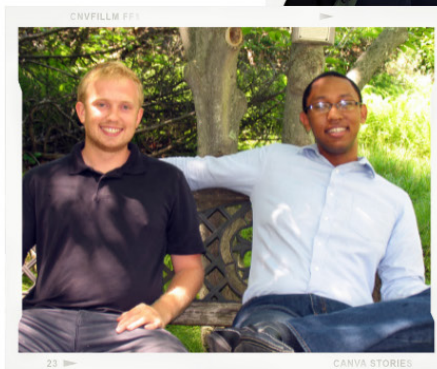
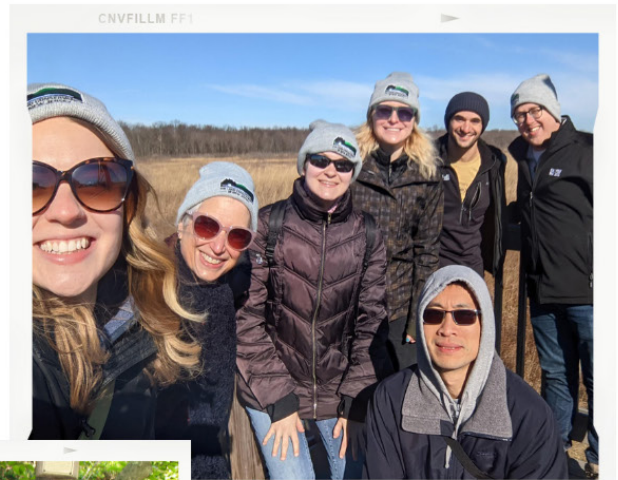


President David Epstein accepts a gift from District Manager Daniel Sharabba of Investors Bank, a longtime supporter of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey.

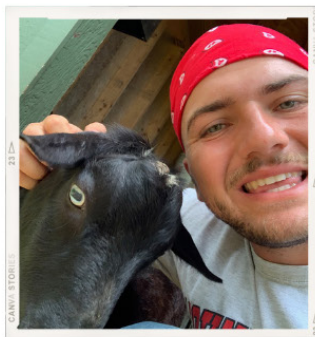
HOORAY FOR INTERNS!



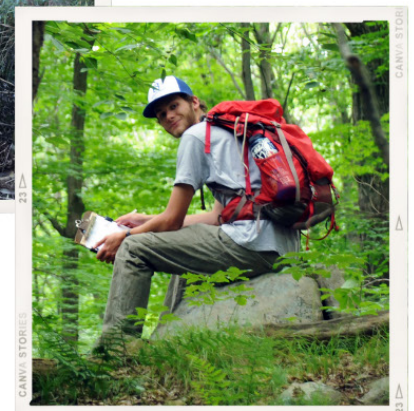
**WE'VE HIRED
150 INTERNS
IN 21 YEARS**



**MANY GO ON
TO WORK AT
PRESTIGIOUS NJ
ORGANIZATIONS**



**THEY BRING
PASSION AND
LEAVE WITH
VALUABLE
EXPERIENCE**





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Five Scholarships Available

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey is offering five scholarships of \$7,500 each to support future environmental leaders pursuing degrees in environmental science, natural resource management, conservation, park administration, and related fields. In the 38 years this program has awarded \$330,000 to New Jersey scholars who plan to pursue careers protecting the natural resources of their home state.

This year we will be increasing the number of scholarships awarded to five, thanks to a generous gift from the Rochkind-Wagner Foundation. Applications are being accepted until April 1. Visit tlc-nj.org or call (973) 541-1010 x14 to find more information and obtain an application.

