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When I began work with Morris Parks and Land Conservancy 25 years ago, I had no way of knowing the enormous changes that lay ahead. I was the first (and only!) staff person and was borrowing a single computer with 256kb of memory. Today we have 13 staff members, a dozen volunteers, another dozen interns, and 23 computers—each of which has 8,000 times more memory than that first PC. Our first office was in Morristown and had three rooms; we have since moved three times, changed our name twice, and expanded the area we work from Morris County to the entire state.

It took three years to hire our first intern; 110 have followed since. That intern’s first suggestion was to create a website. I was opposed, but fortunately I lost that argument. Just a few months later an Australian intern, who found us through our new website, created our computer-based mapping system that is still the basis for all of the land preservation and planning work that we do today.

Preserving land was always my goal, and while our Board of Trustees supported that concept, initially we had absolutely no resources to make that happen. When I outlined what we would need, one of our trustees donated $100 to start our Land Preservation Fund; today that fund totals $1.8 million. It took four years to preserve our first property; today we preserve one or more properties each month and have completed 455 transactions preserving 27,800 acres of magnificent land.

When I began, Green Acres was funded with bond referendums that were only renewed after the state ran out of money, sometimes going years without funds. Today, there is a permanent stream of state funds for open space, farmland, and historic preservation thanks to the 2014 referendum dedicating a portion of the corporate business tax. The Land Conservancy of New Jersey was a leader in that effort, raising $1.5 million to educate the public about the importance of approving this referendum. These state funds are now matched by Open Space Trust funds in all 21 counties and more than 200 local towns—something that was virtually nonexistent in 1994.

I have enjoyed my time with The Land Conservancy immensely because, through all of these remarkable changes, one thing has remained the same—my unwavering focus to preserve more of the beautiful land that makes New Jersey such a great place to live.
2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

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NEW TRUSTEE SPOTLIGHT

Berkley Harmon III is a Certified Business Performance Advisor with Insperity, where he helps businesses, schools, and nonprofit organizations provide cost-effective benefits, human resource services, and technology to help their organizations compete and grow. Prior to his role with Insperity, Berkley was a licensed insurance agent and business owner serving small businesses in NJ and PA. Berkley joined The Land Conservancy’s Board in 2019.
This year, we completed our first project that will become part of the National Park system by preserving 129 acres in Vernon Township. This beautiful and heavily forested property abuts Wawayanda State Park and sits less than half a mile from the Appalachian Trail. It provides important wildlife habitats for a number of endangered species, and the preserved tract will protect water quality and drinking water in the New Jersey Highlands, with 30% of the property given an “A” ranking for its groundwater recharge capabilities.

**YARDS CREEK PRESERVE**

We have identified 1,090 acres of particularly vulnerable and richly diverse land in northwest New Jersey, and in 2019 we acquired the first 150 acres in Blairstown. As part of the William Penn Foundation’s Delaware River Watershed Initiative, these are the first pieces in our new Yards Creek Preserve. These forested properties have streams that flow into the Delaware River, providing clean drinking water for millions of residents. The newly acquired land is also a buffer for the nearby Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

**APPALACHIAN TRAIL BUFFER**

This year we completed our first project that will become part of the National Park system by preserving 129 acres in Vernon Township that will act as a buffer to protect the view from this part of the Appalachian Trail. This beautiful and heavily forested property abuts Wawayanda State Park and sits less than half a mile from the Appalachian Trail. It provides important wildlife habitats for a number of endangered species, and the preserved tract will protect water quality and drinking water in the New Jersey Highlands, with 30% of the property given an “A” ranking for its groundwater recharge capabilities.
The Land Conservancy helped lead a lobbying effort to pass legislation increasing the corporate business tax for Green Acres by 70%, and Green Acres funding for nonprofits by 150%.

As part of the state’s initiative to buy and restore flood-prone residential properties, in 2019 we assisted Oakland in acquiring four flood-prone homes, bringing our total purchases to 12 homes in this town over the past four years. We also assisted the NJDEP and the town of Woodbridge in buying three homes, bringing the Blue Acres flood buyout total to 163 homes purchased in Woodbridge over six years.

Pictured here is the Tjalma family farm in Harmony, an active farming operation we preserved this year that will be able to continue growing corn and soybeans on rotation and possibly expand operations. In 2019 we acquired a total of five farmland preservation easements, saving 232 acres of farmland in White, Harmony, and Frelinghuysen townships in Warren County.

The Land Conservancy was awarded $933,000 by the State Agriculture Development Committee through its nonprofit farmland preservation cost-share grant program.
Seven years in, the South Branch Community Garden remains a bustling hub of 145 plots. This year we installed a pergola for shade, a Little Free Library, and our gardeners donated more fresh food than ever—a total of 2,696 pounds over the past five years.

Antinanco Earth Arts School from Holmdel planted 40 American Chestnut trees at the South Branch Preserve. Once the most prominent tree in the Eastern forest, they were decimated by a blight and are now approaching functional extinction—only a handful of trees remain that still produce seeds.

Our partner City Green completed an amazing first year at South Branch, growing more than 27,000 pounds of organic vegetables. Much of the harvest was distributed to New Jersey families in need, and 3,000 pounds of vegetables were donated to Mt. Olive area food pantries.
This year we honored the memory of former Board of Trustees Chair Nancy Conger by adding her name to the West Brook Preserve and establishing a fund in her name, raising nearly $50,000 to construct a parking area, kiosk, and trail to welcome visitors.

REI volunteers developed a 1.5-mile hiking trail on the Preserve, and we produced a map to be displayed on site with two-foot topographic contours to guide visitors.

We are proud to announce that nearly all funding necessary to undertake the ambitious West Brook restoration project has been raised. We are now awaiting a NJDEP wetlands permit to restore the stream to its original pristine state, improving water quality and flow and also helping to bring back the Eastern brook trout.

Stream monitors were installed this year to measure the water temperature, velocity, and flow in the West Brook—before, during, and after our restoration project. This will allow us to measure the impact of the project once it is completed.

This year we completed a second successful year with ten goats and sheep clearing away almost all the invasive plants on four acres at South Branch Preserve. The state entomologist also released beneficial Chinese weevils to eat the fast-growing mile-a-minute weed. Additional native species were planted to supplement the surviving ones, and in 3–5 years we hope to have these weeds under control.

The second phase of our 31-acre wildflower meadow restoration project was completed, bringing the invasive mugwort under control and planting native wildflowers. Spring blooms will attract butterflies and other pollinators.
The Land Conservancy lost a remarkable leader with the passing of our Board Chair Nancy Conger in July after a brief but remarkably brave battle. She had a big personality; she was smart, outspoken, and had an endless streak of compassion.

In 2013 we convinced Nancy to join The Land Conservancy’s Board of Trustees, and in 2017 we collectively asked Nancy to become Board Chair. In late May, The Land Conservancy named its West Brook Preserve for Nancy, who characteristically played a key role in preserving this magnificent property. Her work as a leader, mentor, and role model inspired the deep allegiance of each and every one of our Trustees and staff. She succeeded in making The Land Conservancy a more successful organization and making every person around her better. Nancy was our hero; she left all of us simply in awe. She is deeply missed by everyone who was fortunate enough to know her.

The Land Conservancy would like to recognize and thank those who have donated in Nancy’s honor. With these gifts, The Land Conservancy will be developing a parking area, sign, and kiosk to welcome visitors at the Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford, New Jersey. Our plan is to complete the parking area and sign installation in early fall of 2020 and host a grand opening and hike in October 2020.
Due to the foresight of our Trustees and members, The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has been able to offer two college scholarships each year for almost as long as we have existed as an organization, for a grand total of $285,000. Our scholarship program, well into its fourth decade, has been working to build a greener future for New Jersey by supporting young conservationists planning environmental careers in their home state.

Our 2019 recipients of the Russell W. Myers Scholarship and the Rogers Family Scholarship are not only outstanding scholars, but young environmentalists passionate about protecting New Jersey’s natural resources. They share our dedication to protecting drinking water throughout our state.

Here Xena Itzkowitz conducts tree assessments for a carbon-capture capacity study. She is pursuing two master’s degrees with American University and The United Nations University for Peace. She is deeply concerned about plastic pollution, particularly the rising concentrations of microplastics in our water.

“There is surprisingly little financial support for students pursuing educations meant to benefit the environment,” Xena told us. “I will do my absolute best now and in my future to honor this generous award supported by the Rogers family and The Land Conservancy.”

Michael Allers, pictured here taking discharge measurements on the Musconetcong River, is a Rutgers University and Raritan Valley Community College student. He established himself as a small business owner after high school designing rain catchment systems to conserve water and build healthy soils.

“I am looking to tackle larger bodies of water to have a greater impact on the health of New Jersey’s ecosystems,” explained Michael. “As a restoration ecologist my goal will be to return wetlands, estuaries, and coastal systems to a healthy equilibrium to sustain our native organisms and provide ecological benefits to residents of and visitors to our state.”
On Saturday, April 27, we invited everyone to South Branch Preserve for an Earth Day celebration featuring a guided hike, scavenger hunt, seed planting, arts and crafts, and educational demonstrations about composting and gardening. One of the highlights was a meet-and-greet with the Chew Crew goats of Antler Ridge Animal Sanctuary, who are working to clear invasive plant species from the preserve.

We believe it’s essential to show our gratitude to the members of our community who quietly help us accomplish our mission. This year our Rosalie Lavinthal Volunteer of the Year Award was given to Christie Whitehouse, who started out as a donor to The Land Conservancy in 1997. Since then she has devoted an impressive amount of time to helping out with everything from events like the golf outing, mailings, and organizational projects—even gardening at our headquarters. Her cheerful demeanor and willingness to help out with any task—no matter how small—make her an ideal choice.

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey’s Team Preservation rode a combined 400 miles in the Garden State Fondo on September 8, 2019 and raised a total of $8,000 in support of the organization. Team Preservation enjoyed the majestic beauty of New Jersey and its many preserved natural habitats.
WORLD SERIES OF BIRDING DONORS

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We are proud of the trail mapping we did this year, working with a number of municipalities to blaze trails and help bring them to the attention of the public with brochures, marketing, and signage.

In Andover Township, we designed a detailed map of all the trails in the municipality. This map will become the centerpiece in a new visitors guide to promote tourism and locally owned businesses.

We completed a similar project in Livingston Township to promote the use of trails in East Hill Park and encourage the public to use them.

Over in Madison Borough, we designed a loop trail in Summerhill Park to highlight its beautiful natural features and historic past. We worked closely with the borough engineer, council, administrator, and volunteers on the design of the trails and grant application. The trail was opened with a ribbon cutting ceremony in time for National Trails Day in June.

“We are excited to have opened the Summerhill Park trails within a beautiful wooded park in Madison, which was acquired to protect open space preservation and natural resource preservation.”

—Madison Mayor Robert H. Conley
RICHARD M. SARGENT INTERNSHIP

Chase Palmer is a graduate student studying city and regional planning at Rutgers University. During his internship, Chase worked on Open Space and Recreation Plans and Environmental Resource Inventory updates. His major projects have been working with Logan Township down south in Gloucester County and Madison Borough in Morris County. Chase researched the towns using a combination of local, state, and federal data sources, and he communicated with local officials.

In August, Chase had the opportunity to spend some time with Richard Sargent’s daughter Louisa Sargent and learn more about her father’s legacy as a dedicated conservationist. His energetic devotion to the outdoors was embodied in his work for the Conservancy—utilizing his corporate background to support the organization’s land preservation efforts.

Chase says, “My time at The Land Conservancy of New Jersey was invaluable and allowed me to see the importance of land conservation throughout New Jersey. I was able to see projects from beginning through completion and help municipalities develop plans that will help current and future generations enjoy the benefits of open space and recreation. The experience opened me up to new ideas and concepts that will help me with my future endeavors.”
Join the dedicated individuals and families who have already taken steps to ensure open space and clean drinking water will continue for future generations. By directing your legacy gift to The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, you will continue to be an advocate for land preservation for years to come.

For every person that informs The Land Conservancy of their planned gift commitment, The Land Conservancy will receive $1,000 today. This campaign was started to encourage and inspire supporters to make gifts for the future and, in return, help us immediately raise funds as well. Join today!

MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY AND TOMORROW!

- Name The Land Conservancy in your will or living trust. New commitments and previously established bequest plans qualify. Additionally, you can name The Land Conservancy as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), or other qualified plan.
- Visit tlc-nj.org/planned_giving to fill out a form and let us know your plans, or contact Danielle at dwolfrum@tlc-nj.org to receive the form by mail or email.
- After your form is filled out and processed, The Land Conservancy will receive $1,000 today!
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—NANCY LEVY, 20 YEARS

“I HAVE ALWAYS FELT STRONGLY ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, AND I’M GLAD THERE’S AN ORGANIZATION LIKE THE LAND CONSERVANCY TO HELP TOWNS AND FARMERS PRESERVE THEIR LAND.”

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"AS A LONGTIME RESIDENT OF NORTH JERSEY, I’VE ALWAYS ENJOYED THE DIVERSITY OF NATURE HERE. WHEN I READ ABOUT WHAT THE LAND CONSERVANCY WAS DOING TO MAINTAIN THE NATURAL BEAUTY IN THE STATE, I WANTED TO SUPPORT THEM.” —TONY STELLATO, 21 YEARS
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