

A Landmark Legacy & A New Chapter Begins



After more than three decades of extraordinary and dedicated service, our President, David Epstein, has announced his decision to retire in December. This transition marks the end of a transformative era and the exciting beginning of a new chapter for The Land Conservancy of New Jersey.

David's tenure has been defined by his unwavering dedication and a profound passion for New Jersey's natural resources and the community we serve. When David became our first professional staff member in 1994, The Land Conservancy was an all-volunteer organization. Under his visionary leadership, our growth has been truly dramatic. Three decades later, we:

- Have permanently protected 30,000 acres of land, in over 500 separate transactions.
- Own and manage over 2,000 acres of natural areas and farmland.
- Established a partnership with City Green at our premier South Branch Preserve and have donated nearly 9,000 pounds of produce annually to local food pantries.

- Helped towns and counties receive \$270 million in grant funds to purchase and preserve land all over the state through our highly successful Partners for Greener Communities Program.
- Are a staff of 16 with a \$2 million operating budget.
- Have completed 220 open space and farmland preservation plans in New Jersey.
- Have grown our scholarship program from one \$2,500 scholarship per year to awarding ten \$10,000 awards to future environmental leaders this year.

This remarkable work culminated in The Land Conservancy receiving the 2024 National Land Trust Excellence Award, the most prestigious honor in our field. The Land Trust Alliance recognizes only one land trust (out of 1,281 land trust organizations!) each year with this award.

Over his 32 years of service, David has demonstrated a rare ability to organize, advocate, and inspire. His

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THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY
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A Warm Welcome for Lucy Hughes

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey warmly welcomes Lucy Hughes as our newest trustee. Lucy has had a 20+ year career as a human resources executive and is currently Global Head of HR Operations & Services at Mars Inc., where she leads a team around the world dedicated to transforming performance and unleashing the full potential of every associate. Previously, Lucy was Senior Vice President of HR Transformation at PepsiCo and held senior positions at Novartis Pharmaceuticals and in consulting. She holds a degree in Politics & Psychology from Aston University in the UK and a Master of Public Administration specializing in public policy from Seton Hall University. When not at work, Lucy can be found indulging her passions for photography and travel or supporting the environmental causes and arts organizations close to her heart. She lives in Basking Ridge with her husband Sean, and two children, Myles and Kate.



The Land Conservancy of New Jersey's trustees at the most recent board retreat in 2025.

Farewell & Thank You

Sadly, farewells are also part of the natural order of things. To that end, Grant Parr and Teresa Finlay both recently ended long, fruitful tenures as trustees for The Land Conservancy. The entire staff and board are grateful for their hard work and contributions over the years and we wish them the best of luck in their endeavors.

From My Perspective



I've only been working for The Land Conservancy for a few months, but I'm already impressed. I live in one of New Jersey's denser areas where open space is hard to come by, so it's heartening to learn about the efforts of The Land Conservancy and our partners to protect land and waterways in other parts of the state. Having felt the loss of my spouse's family farm in western New Jersey's beautiful rolling hills, I know how important it is that we have expert staff who can guide landowners in the preservation process.

The Land Conservancy also looks at the big picture when it comes to land preservation. That's what our new Campaign to Preserve the Next 30,000 Acres is about: making improvements to state legislation and regulations that will help landowners and groups all over New Jersey save more land in the coming years.

We are also good stewards of that land. I've heard about rewilding efforts, from planting trees and pollinator meadows to turning former roads back into nature. I got to see this firsthand in the fall, when we partnered with the Wild Woods Restoration Project at the Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford. Together with volunteers, I tucked baby native plants into the soil next to last year's thriving ones. Collectively, over many volunteer events, we have planted thousands of native plants to restore areas where deer have eaten away the understory.

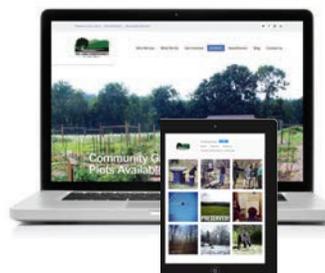
While most of my work as Membership Manager happens behind the scenes to keep our administration running smoothly, it's special to have these chances to get outside in nature with coworkers, volunteers, and members.

Many of our donors have been loyal supporters for years, or even decades. This dedication is a testament to The Land Conservancy's impact, as well as to the wonderful community that cares about protecting New Jersey's wild places for generations to come. As Membership Manager, I'm always happy to hear your feedback. You can reach me at jflath@tlcnj.org or (973) 957-1005.

Julia Flath
Membership Manager

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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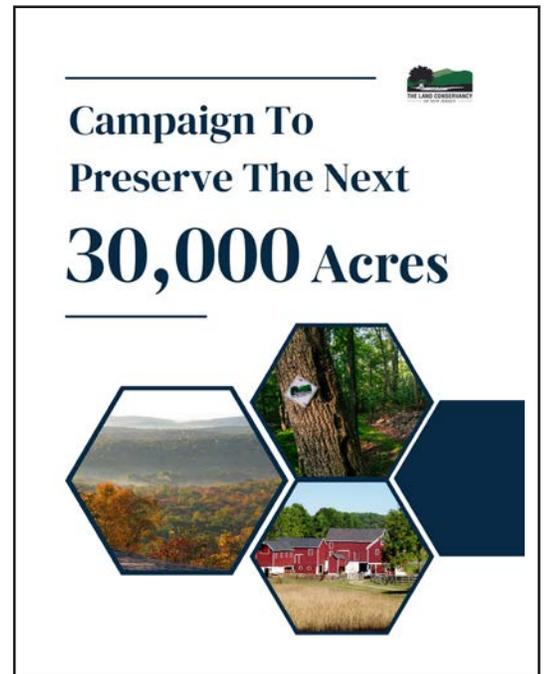
The Next 30,000 Acres

In 2002, TLCNJ (then the Morris Land Conservancy) developed a vision to preserve 30,000 acres. The vision identified broad opportunities and highlighted the impediments and the resources needed to achieve this goal. We called this effort the Preserve Now–Protect Forever campaign and engaged hundreds of supporters to join us in realizing this goal by contributing \$3.3 million to the campaign. In September 2025, we achieved this by preserving our 30,000th acre.

We have now set a new goal, along with our conservation partners, for New Jersey to preserve an additional 500,000 acres by 2050. Only 1.4 million acres of privately owned, undeveloped land remains to be preserved—or developed—within the state. To help us accomplish this, The Land Conservancy is committing to preserve another 30,000 acres by 2050.

Achieving this ambitious statewide goal will require preserving an average of 20,000 acres of land per year over the next 25 years—a significant increase from the 5,600 acres preserved on average over the past five years. The good news is that the financial resources from local, county, state, and federal governments already exist to make this possible. The bad news is that a variety of regulatory hurdles are inhibiting this vision from being realized.

We're running out of time to save the precious natural resources New Jersey has left. But we can get there by implementing a powerful combination of tools: forest easements, increased state funding matches, expanded tax incentives for landowners, and more staff at the state level and in our organization.



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leadership has been characterized by his unique talent for understanding and addressing the needs of both the land and the people dedicated to its preservation. He once said, "I love the land. I love helping to preserve it, restoring it where possible, and working with people who share those goals." His passion has created a strong, cohesive team dedicated to our mission and has benefited countless individuals who enjoy and cherish New Jersey's natural landscapes.

We acknowledge the exciting challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. David's legacy provides a solid foundation for The Land Conservancy of New Jersey as we move forward, particularly with the ambitious goal

he has helped set: a new campaign to preserve the next 30,000 acres.

The Land Conservancy has begun implementing our succession plan. Our Board has begun a thorough and thoughtful search for our next president. Our goal is to ensure we find a leader who can not only carry forward David's vision and dedication but also propel our organization into its next phase of growth. We will continue to keep you updated on our progress.

Please join us in celebrating David's immense achievements. We encourage you to reach out to him personally at dje@tlc-nj.org. Together, we will continue to protect and preserve the natural beauty of New Jersey for generations to come.

From Seed to Soil: A Full-Circle Partnership at West Brook

Since 2022, Wild Woods Restoration Project has worked to protect our region's biological diversity by engaging community volunteers in the entire lifecycle of native plants. From collecting and sowing local seeds to nurturing seedlings in their own homes, these volunteers help restore our forests with species that reflect the unique genetic heritage of our wild populations.

In 2024, TLCNJ began our partnership with Wild Woods Restoration Project to restore the forest understory of Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford. Last year, 43 dedicated volunteers undertook these efforts. During two "potting days" in June, 931 seedlings were tucked into flats by 21 volunteers and sent home with "forest foster parents" to be cared for over the summer months. Then in autumn, West Brook Preserve received a significant habitat boost as 22 volunteers spent two days installing 1,103 native plants along the trail corridor. Wild Woods President Linda Rohleder, PhD., and her team carefully selected 16 species—including white wood aster, citronella horse balm, and swan's sedge—for their ability to thrive in the rugged NJ Highlands.

With an estimated value of \$3 per plant, this represents a \$3,309 investment into the preserve's ecology, made



2025 TLCNJ scholarship winner and Montclair State PhD student Odera Umeh (right) came out to help pot plants with Wild Woods.

possible entirely by Wild Woods and our incredible volunteers.

We look forward to continuing this understory restoration with more potting and planting events in 2026. Stay tuned for details this spring at tlc-nj.org/our-events. Learn more about Wild Woods Restoration Project at wildwoodsproject.org.

Your Legacy, Our Shared Future



We invite you to take the next step in helping to build a greater, greener tomorrow by becoming a member of our Legacy Giving Circle. These extraordinary supporters have named TLCNJ in their estate plans, knowing that their generosity and forethought will help protect natural resources in the Garden State long into the future. Legacy Giving Circle members are the game-changers who solidify a strong financial future and ensure our vital work will continue.

Thanks to the visionary generosity of two dedicated couples, we have launched a special challenge to grow our Circle and accelerate our work. For a limited time, The Land Conservancy will receive \$1,000 for every Legacy Giving Circle pledge sent to us—even if you've already pledged in the past! Whether you are adding a simple codicil to an existing will or naming us as a beneficiary of an IRA or DAF, your legacy can start today. If you are interested in learning more about the Legacy Giving Circle or have any questions regarding the process, please feel free to reach out to Vice President of Development Amber Ray at (973) 957-7195 or aray@tlc-nj.org.

Students Vie for Ten TLCNJ Scholarships

TEN \$10,000 SCHOLARSHIPS!

For New Jersey residents studying environmental science, natural resource management, conservation, park administration, & related fields.

DEADLINE APRIL 1

Application and additional info can be found online at tlc-nj.org/scholarships

THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

Since 1983, TLCNJ has been awarding scholarships to support future environmental leaders who are training for careers to protect our natural resources. Today, our scholarship program has grown to become one of the largest of its kind in the US. In 2026, we are proud to be awarding ten scholarships of \$10,000 each!

At The Land Conservancy, we're tremendously proud that our scholars go on to achieve great things. For example, 2022 scholarship recipient Oluwafemi Soetan proceeded to graduate with a PhD from Montclair State University in environmental science, examining ecological and human health risks associated with pollution in the Passaic River. He moved on to NOAA as an Environmental & Climate Policy Fellow working on aquaculture policy, and now he's an environmental scientist solving complex problems involving natural resources and infrastructure.

TLCNJ supports scholars pursuing degrees in environmental science, natural resource management, conservation, park administration, and related fields. In 2025, we awarded seven scholarships, thanks to generous supporters of our education initiatives. In 2026, one student will be chosen for each of ten \$10,000 scholarships—more than ever before! Interested candidates must be New Jersey residents and full-time students with at least 45 undergraduate credits completed at a college or university (though not necessarily a New Jersey university), with an academic average equivalent to a 3.3 or higher. The deadline to apply is April 1.

Keeping the Bar High with Accreditation

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of its accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission for the third time since 2009. The Commission recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting land for open space, recreation, watershed protection, and farmland.

TLCNJ is renewing its accreditation to continue to show our members, partners, supporters, and landowners that as a nonprofit land trust organization we act in a transparent manner with the highest ethical and professional standards.

“As an accredited land trust, The Land Conservancy upholds the highest professional standards for acquiring and preserving land,” says President David Epstein. “We are part of a nationwide effort by nonprofit land trusts to leave a legacy of clean water, clean air, and healthy places to work, live, and play.”

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission is an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance and conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs to ensure that they operate in an ethical, legal, and technically sound manner, and helps to ensure the long-term protection of land in the public interest.

123 Acres Preserved Near Wildcat Ridge

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has preserved 123 acres of land in Rockaway Township that is adjacent to the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area, a premier Morris County destination for outdoor enthusiasts, biologists, and people who enjoy an array of resource-based recreation.

This is a big conservation win for New Jersey. The property consists of rolling hills and mature upland deciduous forest, with a two-acre pond that drains to Burnt Meadow Brook. It also contains freshwater wetlands and a number of endangered and threatened species of plants and animals such as bats, hawks, owls, and bobcats. The New Jersey Highlands Council identifies the entire property as critical wildlife habitat, with over 64 acres of prime groundwater recharge area. Preservation of this tract is critical to maintain connectivity of previously preserved land, protect the intact forest canopy, avoid excessive intrusion of invasive species, and buffer the county's adjoining West Morris Greenway.

"This is a wonderful property to explore in late spring when the orioles are zooming around the pond," says VP of Land Preservation Sandy Urgo.

TLCNJ has been at work in this area for over 30 years, first lobbying for the state to establish Wildcat Ridge



Wildlife Management Area in 1994. Since then, we have acquired and transferred 10 parcels totaling 1,171 acres to expand this remarkable spot.

The new acquisition will expand an existing network of protected lands, provide additional wildlife habitat, and reinforce long-term conservation efforts in the region's mountainous terrain. The purchase of these 123 acres was made possible in large part due to the Morris County commissioners appropriating \$1.04M in Open Space funding to the project, as well as additional generous support from our wonderful partners at The Nature Conservancy and many individual supporters of TLCNJ.



The Accreditation Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending renewal applications. Comments must relate to how The Land Conservancy of New Jersey complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments; 518-587-3183 (fax) or 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. Comments on The Land Conservancy's application are due by March 22, 2026.



THE LAND CONSERVANCY
OF NEW JERSEY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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Come Outside with Us!

As winter wanes, the TLCNJ team is revving up to spend more time outdoors, and we hope that you'll join us!

We're working on a slate of exciting spring programming. First up is an amphibian hike with wetlands scientist Linda Glosinski on March 21, when we'll explore the vernal pools at Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford.

Also in the works we have some volunteer events with Wild Woods Restoration Project: potting and planting natives to restore a forest, and removing native plants from our preserves. We'll be doing some educational programming with them as well, such as plant walks to identify native and invasive species. Keep an eye on Facebook and Instagram or visit our website at tlc-nj.org to see what's coming up, and register for these community events, most of which are offered for free!



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