

Preserving the Next 30,000 Acres Starts Now



Swallowtail butterfly at our future preserve in Hardwick.

In the midst of exciting change for our organization—including saying goodbye to longtime staff and welcoming new faces (see pages 3,5)—The Land Conservancy of New Jersey continues doing what we do best: preserving land. Since only 1.4 million acres of privately owned, undeveloped land remains in New Jersey, this work is more urgent and important than ever.

Due to a number of regulatory hurdles, the amount of land being preserved in New Jersey has dropped from an average of 20,000 acres to less than 6,000 acres per year. This is not enough to meet the challenges of protecting watersheds, greenways, wildlife habitat, and farms in the face of the relentless development pressure. Which is why The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has embarked on a new effort to save another 30,000 acres by the year 2050.

Our organization is taking a leadership role in facilitating important changes to existing state programs so that nonprofits can keep up with land preservation goals and property owners can receive tax incentives

for preserving their land. Amid it all, TLCNJ remains focused on our own land acquisitions, like the 95 acres in Hardwick we acquired in May. This property is part of the Hardwick Limestone Greenway, sitting atop porous limestone geology that readily absorbs rainfall and recharges groundwater. This makes the area especially important for water quality protection and highly sensitive to pollution and land disturbance. It also lies near a headwater tributary of the Paulins Kill River within a landscape associated with rare forest communities, sinkholes, vernal pools, and high biodiversity.

This acquisition advances long-term conservation goals in the Paulins Kill watershed and safeguards sensitive limestone habitat, groundwater resources, and is central to hundreds of acres of preserved land: Hardwick's Spring Valley Preserve and Slabtown Creek Park, the New Jersey Natural Land Trust's Hardwick Meadows Preserve, Warren County's White Lake Natural Area, and several preserved farms. The property has not been well cared for in recent decades, and we hope to assist its recovery and create some outstanding habitat in the years to come.

(Continued on page 2)



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(Continued from page 1)

This property, slated to eventually become a TLCNJ preserve, is set amid the rapidly growing wildlife corridor in the Ridge and Valley Region and complements other recent TLCNJ acquisitions in this area. More than 73 percent of this important conservation area is forested or wetland habitat, while the acreage in former farm fields will be reforested as part of TLCNJ's long-term stewardship plans, if grant funding can be obtained. While the amount of stewardship effort is daunting, there are glimpses of how beautiful this land can be once it has been restored. There are amazing rare species to be found among the invasive plants, including unique plants that are required for many varieties of butterflies—including the plant that supports the Globally Rare and State Endangered northern metal-mark butterfly.

TLCNJ continues to help farmers secure farmland preservation easements as well, like the 355-acre Jones farm in Blairstown. We have wanted to see this property preserved since we first laid eyes on it, and we were not the first land trust to try. There were definitely challenges and setbacks along the way. But thanks to our work with the SADC and to the dedication and cooperation of property owner Kris Jones, this beautiful landscape under the Kittatinny Ridge will remain undeveloped forever.



Jones farm seen from the Appalachian Trail, and Young's Pond at Jones Farm (top).

From My Perspective



In January of 1999, I joined the Morris Land Conservancy as its fifth employee in a 3-room office to lead a workshop series to promote land preservation and to set up a Friends group for the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. That Friends Group has now won several national awards (just like us!), and the workshops empowered towns to protect land.

As I retire from The Land Conservancy, I have looked back at the accomplishments we have achieved together. The Partners for Greener Communities Program has completed 226 land conservation plans, with close to another 20 underway. We have helped towns receive more than \$275 million in federal, state, and local grants to preserve land in their community. We have worked in 122 towns in 11 counties across the

State of New Jersey. Our impact is real, and it is felt everywhere.

As my role grew at The Land Conservancy, I was fortunate to begin working on open space plans. From the get-go, I loved it. Open space planning combines art, science, economics, and sociology. It isn't like other planning disciplines—there are no ordinances, no zoning recommendation—but simply good ideas on where and how best to protect the landscapes that mean the most to the environment and to the people who live there. Best job ever.

It has been a privilege to work at The Land Conservancy. I have been continually impressed and awed by the intelligence and passion of our staff, Trustees, and partners. Ideas are openly shared and implemented. I have learned here, excelled here, and I come away with a tremendous amount of pride in what we have done together.

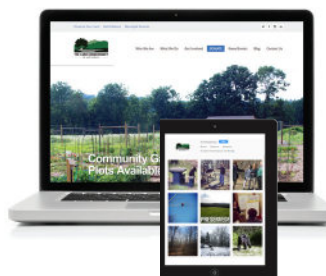
I cannot wait to see you at the next Conservancy event to catch up and, of course, join you in recognizing David.

Thank you and all the best to each of you always,

Barbara Heskins Davis
Vice President, Programs (retired)

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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30 Years of Partners for Greener Communities

In 1995, a New Jersey town made a call for help to a local land trust. They had a property they wanted to preserve, but no knowledge or resources about how to go about doing it. This was not unusual; if a landowner came into a municipal building and said they wanted to develop a property, there was an existing network of people who could help them do it. But if that same landowner said they wanted to preserve their land, no one knew how to fund it and how to close on it. However, a land trust knows exactly how to do these things. Thus was born TLCNJ's Partners for Greener Communities (PGC) program.

It all started in 1995 when we helped Randolph Township apply for grant funding to secure the land for one of the town's busiest parks: Freedom Park on Millbrook Avenue. We went on to complete our first open space and recreation plan for Morris Township in 1997. By the following year we had preserved 6 properties totaling 423 acres in Morris, Mt. Olive and Randolph townships.

We are proud of our partnerships with towns and counties all over the state, from Bergen County to Salem, from the Jersey Shore to the Jersey Highlands, and how together we are ensuring the Garden remains in the Garden State. We are ready for the next 30 years!

Partners for Greener Communities

has assisted...

10 counties

11 nonprofit organizations

97 towns in 14 counties

41 towns in the Highlands

226 plans completed

115 plans in the Highlands

110 open space and recreation plans

44 farmland preservation plans

\$275M in grants for towns & counties

\$113M from Green Acres

\$114M from open space trust funds

\$43M from state farmland grants



Outdoor Ambassadors Explore Water Quality



The Boys & Girls Clubhouse of Passaic brought their students out to South Branch Preserve again this year for an Outdoor Ambassadors field trip!

This one was focused on water quality, so the kids learned about the importance of keeping our New Jersey waters safe and healthy. They tested the salinity of the South Branch river water and caught some critters, including tadpoles and diving beetles. Afterwards everyone enjoyed a tour of City Green Farms, where they taste tested fresh-picked melons, and then saw the wide variety of flowers and veggies our gardeners were growing in the community garden.

Honoring Barbara Heskins Davis

In January of 1999, Barbara Heskins Davis joined a tiny organization which was known then as the Morris Land Conservancy. Her directive was to promote land preservation and establish the Friends of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. That group has now won several national awards (just like us!), and over the years her workshops have empowered dozens of towns throughout the state to protect their natural resources.

Now our beloved Barbara is retiring, and we're reflecting on her truly staggering accomplishments. The Partners for Greener Communities program, which helps municipalities find green spaces in their communities, has had a profound impact on the quality of life for so many New Jersey residents. And that impact is amplified by the dozens of young environmental professionals Barbara took under her wing as interns and fellows.

"How incredibly fortunate The Land Conservancy has been to have Barbara's expertise and unwavering dedication on our side for nearly three decades," said TLCNJ President David Epstein. "She has set a remarkable standard for environmental planning. And by training over 100 young people how to play an active role in preserving the environment, she has left a wonderful legacy that will be felt for many decades to come."

We're not the only ones who notice. Barbara has been honored by a number of organizational partners: the Borough of Madison, Hanover Township, and the State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC) have all recognized her with well-deserved awards and proclamations and she transitions to retirement.

During Madison's May town council meeting, Barbara was presented with an award that named her a "champion of open space, parks, trails, and the environment," saying, "Through her work with The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, Barbara played an instrumental role in projects that have helped shape Madison's landscape—including the preservation of Giralda Farms, the acquisition of the MRC property, the development of trails, and ongoing efforts to protect the Drew Forest. Her passion, expertise, and unwavering commitment to conservation have left a lasting impact on our community."



Barbara and David celebrate her retirement.

In a similar vein, Hanover Township recognized Barbara with a Distinguished Community Service Award for the many years she served as the township's Open Space Technical Advisor, protecting and preserving the township's open space and environmental resources.

At the state level, the members and staff of the SADC expressed deep appreciation for Barbara's contribution to the preservation of farmland in New Jersey, writing, "You have been a true leader in the state's conservation community. The knowledge you passed on to county agriculture development boards, municipal agriculture advisory committees, and the public will continue to benefit New Jersey's farmland preservation efforts long into the future."

We will miss Barbara as a colleague, but we're happy that she will have time to rest on her laurels. It's safe to say we all echo the sentiments of Hanover Township's statement: "We thank Barbara for her years of partnership and service, and wish her a joyful retirement filled with time spent with family and grandchildren."

\$100,000 in Environmental Scholarships Awarded

Since 1984, TLCNJ has been awarding scholarships to support future environmental leaders who are training for careers to protect our natural resources. This program has come a long way, starting with the Russell W. Myers Scholarship, followed by the Rogers Family Scholarship in 2005. Since then, our scholarship program has grown to become one of the largest of its kind in the US. In 2026, we awarded ten scholarships of \$10,000 each!

The young environmentalists we chose this year are all accomplished, hard-working, and engaged in many different facets of research and policy that are critical to our future. We were lucky enough to talk to many of them at this year's Gray Cup dinner in June, and now you can get to know them, too!

Talia Barry is a third-year oceanography PhD student at Rutgers University. Her research explores the predator-prey relationships on oyster reef systems, and her goal is better oyster restoration, coastal ecology, and coastal protection.

Jessica Beskind is a second-year master's student in environmental planning at Rutgers University. She has worked on federal remediation projects across the country, currently examining the energy, water, waste, and land use impacts of hyperscale data centers on local communities. She hopes to use her expertise to advocate for healthy ecosystems and the communities they sustain.

Kyra Hall is pursuing a joint degree between Yale School of the Environment and Yale School of Management and will graduate with both a Master of Environmental Management (MEM) and Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2028. She is developing both the technical and business skills to make informed decisions to do right by both business and climate, with an eye on creating realistic decarbonization plans for the private sector.

Kathryn Marshall is pursuing a master's degree in biology at Florida Atlantic University. Her research focuses on diamondback terrapin habitat and behavior in the Outer Banks, driven by a passion for wildlife research and management. Kathryn hopes to pursue a PhD and build a career training the next generation of environmental scientists while contributing to the protection of coastal ecosystems.

Samuel Grant Quansah's work focuses on protecting water and energy systems from cyber-physical threats. Before pursuing an MS in cybersecurity at Montclair State University, Samuel spent more than 15 years managing major infrastructure and energy projects across Africa and the United Kingdom. His experience includes supporting water treatment systems serving rural communities in Ghana and contributing to off-shore energy operations in environmentally sensitive marine environments. Samuel plans to continue on to doctoral studies focused on securing critical energy and environmental infrastructure.

Jesse Rachelle will start at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment in fall 2026 to pursue her Master of Environmental Management. She graduated from NYU in 2021, then led a variety of sustainability projects in corporate communications. After graduate school, Jesse hopes to work in federal government to help craft policies that more effectively regulate the private sector's impact on the environment.



TLCNJ scholarship recipients at the 2026 Gray Cup Golf Invitational dinner.

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey 2026 Scholarships



Talia Barry



Jessica Beskind



Kyra Hall



Kathryn Marshall



Samuel Quansah



Jesse Rachelle



Kripa Shrestha



Odera Umeh



Sophie-Elizabeth
Villacampa



Nat Yermack

Kripa Shrestha is a PhD candidate in environmental science and management at Montclair State University and a researcher at the Clean Energy and Sustainability Analytics Center (CESAC). Using climate models and machine learning, she studies how climate and land use contribute to losses and damage from increasing hazards such as floods, droughts, landslides, and wildfires. She hopes to help communities reduce climate-related loss and damage while protecting the natural systems they depend upon.

Odera Richard Umeh is a doctoral researcher in environmental science and management at Montclair State University and a second-year recipient of a TLCNJ scholarship. His work confronts PFAS, the “forever chemicals” contaminating New Jersey’s water. Odera has mapped where these compounds occur and assessed the health risks they pose in order to shape stronger remediation strategies and policy. As an intern with New Jersey DEP’s Water Resource Management Program, he helps protect the state’s drinking water systems through compliance projects, regulatory work, and internal and external guidance. He has also rolled up his sleeves to volunteer with TLCNJ, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, and Wild Woods Restoration Project. Odera aims to become a leading voice at the intersection of environmental science, policy, and stewardship.

Sophie-Elizabeth (Lizzie) Villacampa is a rising senior at Rutgers University’s School of Environmental & Biological Sciences, majoring in ecology, evolution, & natural resources with a certificate in environmental geomatics. Lizzie researches the impact of highway median barriers on wildlife mortality, and in the future would like to forge a career in migratory seabird research. Ultimately, Lizzie hopes that their life’s work may increase and maintain healthy habitat connectivity for wildlife across our rapidly changing planet.

Nat Yermack is a master’s candidate in earth and planetary sciences at Johns Hopkins University, investigating recent climate change-driven wildfire risk increases in the Black Forest of Germany (Schwarzwald). Inspired by a globetrotting childhood full of museum trips and nature documentaries, they’ve studied how Earth’s systems worked and intertwined for as long as they can remember. Nat hopes that their current and future research will not only create a more resilient Schwarzwald, but also save more of Earth’s critical environments and maintain a positive outlook in the face of anthropogenic climate change.

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Pedaling for Preservation



The weather for this year's Land Conservancy Fondo on September 12 was perfect—bright, sunny, and crisp. We had 15 riders of all levels join us on a 30-mile ride through the historic village of Hope and the beautiful farms and hills of Frelinghuysen and help us raise \$12,659 for land preservation projects. We are thankful for the generosity of our supporters and grateful that this will help preserve more of the beautiful lands that make New Jersey such a special place.