

## **Hunterdon Ends 2019 As It Began, Preserving Hundreds Of County Acres**

Closing out 2019 as they started the year, at the final Freeholder meeting on December 17<sup>th</sup>, the Hunterdon County Freeholders approved the preservation of hundreds of additional acres of land in the County.

“Throughout 2019 the Freeholder Board’s continuing goal was to preserve our farms, scenic vistas, forests, and unspoiled open space, in order to maintain Hunterdon County’s unique, rural appeal for those who live here and those who visit,” Freeholder Matt Holt stated.

In January 2019, the Freeholders started the year off by approving farmland preservation projects totaling 175 acres. The Board closed out 2019 with the approval, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, of the preservation of over 300 open space acres in Bethlehem, Raritan Township, and Kingwood, bringing the total of the amount of land approved for preservation to 733 acres for the year.

Holt noted, “All of these projects have been reviewed and approved by the County’s Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee (POSAC) and, as always, the Freeholders greatly appreciate the volunteer efforts by the members of that Committee.”

The Freeholders approved \$335,000 from the Open Space fund for Kingwood Township’s acquisition of 105 acres of the Maritan property, which is adjacent to the already preserved 55 acres Idell Preserve, owned by the Hunterdon Land Trust.

“A trail network has been planned that will expand the existing trails on the Idell property. Trail connections are an important component of the County’s Open Space Preservation strategy,” Holt said.

The state’s Green Acres program is providing 50% of the funding towards the total preservation cost of \$670,000.

The Board also approved \$135,925 from the Open Space fund for Raritan Township’s preservation of 32.6 acres at the Brownstein property, located along the Plum Brook.

“Preservation of land that borders and protects our waterways is another key part of the County’s strategic plan,” Holt continued, “The Plum Brook drains into the Wickecheoke, which continues to be a focus area for water quality for the County, Raritan Township, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.”

Green Acres is also providing 50% of the \$271,850 cost of purchase of the property.

Included on the December 17<sup>th</sup> Freeholder agenda was approval of a \$600,000 grant from the Open Space fund to the Hunterdon Land Trust for the preservation of the 178 acre Culbertson property in Bethlehem Township.

Holt pointed out, “The property is located along the Musconetcong Mountains and is adjacent to the non-profit NJ Audubon’s Deerpath Sanctuary. That group will be the eventual owner of the property and have management responsibility, as part of their Sanctuary.”

The remaining funding for \$1.2 million cost of the Culbertson preservation is being provided by Green Acres, Bethlehem Township, the Open Space Institute, Victoria Foundation, and a donation from the landowner.

Holt concluded, “Once again the County’s Planning staff deserves great credit for not only shepherding these important preservation projects through the process, but also developing funding partners that help stretch Hunterdon County’s open space dollars.

The Freeholders look forward to more farmland and open space preservation opportunities in 2020 to add to the County’s 33,500 acres of preserved farmland and over 8000 acres of preserved open space.”