

## **PRESS RELEASE FROM NEW JERSEY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION**

### **151 acres of spectacular forests and fields preserved in Sourland Mountains of East Amwell**

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE/ 03/06/17*

EAST AMWELL TWP. - A longstanding effort to preserve land in the Sourland Mountains region of central New Jersey was boosted last week with the conservation purchase of 151 acres in East Amwell Township, Hunterdon County.

The land was acquired on Feb. 28 for \$2.3 million by New Jersey Conservation Foundation with the assistance of several partners: East Amwell Township, Hunterdon County, New Jersey Green Acres Program, Raritan Headwaters, 1772 Foundation and Hunterdon Land Trust.

Located off North Hill Road, the gently sloping property contains farm fields and woodlands, with panoramic views of the Sourlands region. The land will now be open to the public for activities including, hiking, horseback riding, birding and nature observation.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation plans to create a trail system on the property while continuing to lease the fields to a local farmer.

"We're thrilled to permanently preserve this beautiful property in the Sourlands for the public's enjoyment and for wildlife habitat," said Michele S. Byers, executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation. "We're very grateful to all partners, and to landowner John Higgins for choosing to sell his land for preservation."

New Jersey Conservation Foundation has been working with Mr. Higgins for many years to preserve land in East Amwell and Hillsborough townships. In 2015 and 2016, New Jersey Conservation Foundation helped Somerset County preserve 78 acres of Mr. Higgins' land in neighboring Hillsborough Township.

The East Amwell and Hillsborough properties will now be managed as a single preserve.

The East Amwell land purchase was funded with Hunterdon County grants to New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Raritan Headwaters and East Amwell Township; and Green Acres funding to New Jersey Conservation Foundation and East Amwell Township. A grant from the 1772 Foundation to the Hunterdon Land Trust assisted with expenses.

"Hunterdon County is proud to help facilitate preservation efforts in the Sourland Mountain region," said Hunterdon County Freeholder Director John Lanza. "The preservation of these 151

acres will not only help protect the unique wildlife habitat of the area, but will allow the public to enjoy it as well."

"The Green Acres Program is excited to be part of this important public-private partnership to acquire this ecologically significant property in the Sourland Mountains," said Division of Natural and Historic Resources Assistant Commissioner Rich Boornazian. "We are pleased to have provided grant funds to both East Amwell Township and New Jersey Conservation Foundation, demonstrating our mutual, ongoing commitment to preserve these important spaces."

"By combining our resources, we were able to preserve this spacious open space while maintaining the quality of our natural environment for all residents to enjoy, along with the many species of plant and animal wildlife," said East Amwell Mayor Charles Van Horn. "East Amwell thanks the many contributors that made this acquisition possible."

Dart Sageser, East Amwell's deputy mayor, added: "This is truly a fantastic acquisition. The Higgins' properties will give us access to the woodland heart of the Sourlands and reminds us of the arboreal wonder of the Appalachian Trail. This treasure is a genuine testimony to the teamwork and commitment of all involved."

"This project preserves some of Hunterdon County's most spectacular open spaces while making a significant impact on the protection of an important aquifer recharge area," said Cindy Ehrenclou, executive director of Raritan Headwaters. "We are delighted to be a contributing partner."

"The 1772 Foundation partnered with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation in preserving in perpetuity this important farmland property in East Amwell Township, and the public will get to enjoy this open space for years to come," said Dan Ely, president of the 1772 Foundation in Newport, R.I.

The newly-preserved land is near Somerset County's Sourland Mountain Preserve, as well as extensive preserved farmland in East Amwell.

The Sourland Mountain region is an expansive green swath of intact forest and farmland spanning parts of Hunterdon, Somerset and Mercer counties. It extends from the central part of Hillsborough Township southwest to the Delaware River in West Amwell, Hunterdon County, and Hopewell Township, Mercer County.

The Sourlands contain over 20,000 contiguous forested acres, which protect the headwaters of streams flowing to the Delaware & Raritan Canal and the Millstone, Raritan and Delaware Rivers.

The Sourlands region's forests and wetlands provide habitat to threatened and endangered animal species including the barred owl, bobcat, Cooper's hawk, grasshopper sparrow, savannah sparrow, upland sandpiper and wood turtle.

In addition, the Sourlands serves as a stopover for migratory birds that travel between South America and the boreal forests of Canada, and for those that travel from Central America to New Jersey to breed. The area also supports a large population of forest interior birds such as scarlet tanagers, Kentucky warblers and red-shouldered hawks.