

Land Trust receives donation towards local environmental preservation

MILLY MULLINS Review Staff

With a focus on supporting lasting conservation, one of Hampshire's land easement owners provided a donation to the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust for efforts in environmental preservation.

"I'm coming up on my 70th year of life and I want to try and pass something on to future generations," said John Gavitt, the owner of North River Retreat.

"That's why I put a conservation easement on my property in Hampshire County and I want to make sure I can contribute during my lifetime to the land trust because it's so important to protect these important lands in the 3-county area."

Gavitt donated \$7,500 by the end of 2017 and he said he's looking forward to donating another \$2,500 this year. "It's a lot of money for me too, but I'm happy to do it," he said.

After spending 25 years in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gavitt eventually retired and started North River Retreat, a public access hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and outdoor haven, in 2006.

"The whole purpose of the North River Retreat is to show how important land preservation is for preserving the environment for things like hunting and other things that are important to people in Hampshire County and all over West Virginia," said the land trust executive director Ethan Strickler.



JOHN GAVITT North River Retreat

A view from North River Retreat in early autumn.

"It's also about preserving those traditions for families for people who are local in the area and those who visit. North River Retreat has been a huge supporter of the trust over the years."

Now having 28 years of service, the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust has been working to preserve forests, rural heritage, and maintain healthy rivers throughout the area's watersheds.

The trust started from efforts from the former Cacapon River Committee, but has become the first local West Virginia based land-trust accredited by the

Accreditation Commission of the Land Trust Alliance.

Currently protecting around 14,000 acres of land throughout the regional watershed, the trust works towards environmental preservation in Hampshire, Hardy, and Morgan counties.

Through 51 conservation easements, they have also been able to secure millions of dollars back to local landowners. Additionally, the Cacapon and Lost Rivers watershed, which runs through the aforementioned counties, has been identified as a significant area to protect.

Being a landscape that is

about 85 percent forested and preserved, the land contains diverse topography ideal for wildlife, water quality, air quality, and ecological diversity.

Due to this, The Chesapeake Bay Program's Resource Lands Assessment has marked the Cacapon watershed as one of the areas with the highest ecological value within the whole Bay watershed.

"From my perspective, our human population is increasing dramatically in the U.S. and if we don't plan to protect our really precious lands from development, then they're going to be developed," said Gavitt.

"Along with development comes habitat destruction for wildlife and negative things particularly in our watersheds. It's really important to have good, clean water not only for wildlife, but for us too."

Both Gavitt and Strickler with the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust emphasized the importance of conservation and their plans to continue working towards protecting the environment.

"I hope we never lose this beautiful view-shed," Gavitt concluded. "It's a balance."

For more information on North River Retreat, visit www.northriverretreat.com. For more info on the land trust, call staff at 304-856-1188 or visit the website at www.cacapon.org. □