

Thursday, January 2, 2014

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# Hampshire Review

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## Conservation effort protects 918 acres

**NICK GAUDIO** Review Staff

**CAPON BRIDGE** — With a newly brokered easement, a big tract of Hampshire County land is now protected from the harmful prospects of development.

The 918 acres that adjoins Cacapon Resort State Park is now protected “in perpetuity,” said Nancy Ailes, executive director of Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust. “It’s basically a restrictive deed that

prohibits subdivision and development.”

To purchase the easement from a hunt club, which has owned the property for 50-some years, a total of \$300,000 was donated to the land trust.

“The EPA granted \$60,000 and the West Virginia Land Trust, which has interest across the state, granted \$30,000,” Ailes said.

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Next week’s Hampshire Review will return to our normal Wednesday publication date.

# Acres

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Open Space Institute, headquartered in New York City, donated the lion's share — \$210,000.

You may be asking yourself why a New York City-based group has any interest in Hampshire County.

The answer, simply, is global warming.

The swathe of land is the first beneficiary of OSI's \$6 million initiative meant to protect diverse landscapes in the eastern United States given the perils of impending climate change.

OSI started the initiative — called Resilient Landscapes — about 6 months ago when they commissioned a study meant to find areas of the country that are particularly well-suited to help wildlife adapt to a shifting climate.

One of the 4 areas of interest the report eventually found included the Potomac headwaters.

What led to the Eastern Panhandle's inclusion in that small group was the diversity of the landscape here, said Peter Howell, OSI's executive vice president.

"This tract really stood out among other properties we've looked at in the east," Howell told the Charleston Gazette. "There's a lot of variation in el-

evation, soil types and topography. It has a lot of cliffs and ravines that will provide temperature and sunlight variations, making for different climates if it gets wetter and hotter."

Simply put: With greater landscape diversity comes a greater ability for flora and fauna to adapt to coming changes.

Ailes seemed most excited about the location of the newly protected property, especially considering its contiguity to other protected lands.

"What's wonderful about these 900 acres is that not only does it adjoin Cacapon State Park, but another 2 areas of protected land," she said. And by essentially pushing those borders farther, the efficiency of protection is that better.

"I think of it as connectivity," said Ailes. "If you protect 900 acres and that land gets eventually surrounded by development than the plants and animals don't really have a long-term home. A turtle gets run over on the highway and so on. But if you connect it to another protected habitat, it makes these connections for wildlife, it protects habitats so that these animals can move."

The land trust and the hunt club essentially agreed to a deal — known as a 1031 exchange — that provided the hunters with another 168 acres with the \$300,000, instead of money changing hands.

"It's a win for resiliency for

plants and animals as the planet warms," said Ailes, "and the hunt club wins by adding 168 acres at no cost."

Ailes said that, ultimately, she isn't interested in convincing people to protect their lands, but rather, to facilitate a desire that already exists.

"It's often that people come to our table, the heartstrings are already there," she said. "They've grown up on that land. They've hunted on it. They've walked through it. They've raised their kids on it. They want the property to stay the same. So the desire is already there to protect it, we just make sure everybody follows the guidelines."

"If it weren't for the landowners who cared," Ailes said, "we wouldn't be in business."

The Resilient Landscapes Initiative was made possible with a lead grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, OSI's website states.

According to the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust's website, the group "works throughout the Lost/Cacapon River watershed to assist landowners and communities in maintaining healthy rivers, protecting forests and farmland, and in preserving rural heritage for the enjoyment and well being of present and future generations."

Currently, the trust protects about 13,000 acres.

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