



Hunterdon County Democrat

Officials tour 150-acre preserved tract in Frenchtown

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By John Monteith

Frenchtown Mayor Ron Sworen and Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance Executive Director Margaret Waldock led a walking tour on Monday of 150 acres of recently preserved farmland, grassland and forest lying between routes 12 and 29 in the borough.

"It was quiet," said Sworen, who also serves as a Hunterdon County freeholder. "There were lots of birds, big ravines in the back, and pine forests."

The group walked from the former HLTA headquarters building on Route 29 to the property and spent about an hour traversing a mile over snow and ice. They spotted ospreys in a cell tower on the property, and saw other migratory and native birds.

The county will be considering a request from the Audubon Society to investigate possible sites for inclusion in a birding and wildlife trails project, said Sworen, and the newly preserved area might one day become a candidate for the project.

There are 30 to 40 acres of farmland at the front of the property, Sworen said. The property then transitions to grassland and finally old-growth forest.

The property contains a "major ravine between it and Horseshoe Bend Road, hundreds of feet across. Feeder streams of the Nishisakawick Creek go through there."

The HLTA is working with the state to establish a management plan for the property, said Sworen.

The property could become a significant tourist draw, with bike paths and walking trails, he said. The borough may conduct another public walking tour through the preserve in more agreeable weather, and perhaps conduct hayrides through it during borough festivals.

Sworen said that he spoke at a county Chamber of Commerce breakfast this week and recommended the preservation effort as a model for other towns to use to save lands along Route 29 and other byways.

"There's a lot of funding available to make it work," he said. "Partnerships were the key."

He lauded the efforts of the HLTA to put together a funding package to buy the land.

The property was recently purchased for \$4.1 million. The borough's share of the package would have been more than \$700,000, he said, but Frenchtown received "two hits of Green Acres money on the thing," which reduced the borough's cost to \$200,000.

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