



News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freeholders, New Jersey Conservation Foundation & Hillsborough Township Announce Key Addition to Sourland Mountain Preserve

A Dec. 19 closing was held on 295 acres of land being deeded to the Somerset County Open Space program by real estate investor Bryce Thompson. The acquisition was completed through a partnership with New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Hillsborough Township, with additional grant funding provided from Conservation Resources Inc. and the State Green Acres Program.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation secured an option agreement to purchase 350 acres from Mr. Thompson that was transferred to the county. The county closed on the additional 55 acres in August 2013.

The property will remain largely in its natural state. Somerset County and New Jersey Conservation Foundation will work together to develop a management plan that will outline planning and management activities most appropriate for the health and public enjoyment of the land.

The 350 acres, which are made up of several tracts in Hillsborough Township near the intersection of Wertsville and Montgomery roads, are contiguous to other open-space lands acquired by Somerset County in recent years and will encourage the expansion of the Sourland Mountain Preserve to the Hunterdon County border, where many local, county and nonprofit preservation initiatives are currently underway.



Pictured seated, left to right, are Somerset County Freeholder Director Peter S. Palmer and Bryce Thompson. Standing, left to right, are Hillsborough Township Administrator Anthony Ferrera; New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) Assistant Director/Director of Statewide Land Acquisition Greg Romano; Catherine Bacon Winslow of Bedminster, second vice president of NJCF's Board of Trustees; Hillsborough Township Committeeman Greg Burchette; Duke Farms Executive Director Michael Catania; Thomas Boccino, Principal Planner, Land Acquisition, Somerset County Engineering Division; and Somerset County Park Commissioner Helen Haines, who also represents both the Hillsborough and Somerset County open space advisory committees.

"We are pleased to have worked with New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Hillsborough Township toward the common goal of preserving this property," said Freeholder Director Peter S. Palmer. "The acquisition adds significant acreage to the county's growing Sourland Mountain Preserve, providing opportunities for connections with preserved lands in Hunterdon County. The ongoing partnership with New Jersey Conservation Foundation to maintain the property will ensure that this significant environmental resource is protected for future generations."

"Land preservation remains a top priority in Hillsborough Township," said Deputy Mayor Doug Tomson, liaison to the township's Open Space Advisory Committee. "The acquisition of this tract of land is a fine example of how the joint forces of Somerset County, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and municipalities, specifically Hillsborough, can continue to realize that initiative."

"The New Jersey Conservation Foundation would like to extend its thanks to Bryce Thompson for preserving this critical property, which will serve as a cornerstone of the Sourlands Mountain Preserve," said Greg Romano, assistant director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

"On behalf of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, we are delighted to provide grant funds for the preservation of this key tract, which was identified as a priority in the recent

Raritan Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership comprehensive conservation plan," said Michael Catania, president of Conservation Resources Inc.

The Sourland Mountain region is an expansive green swath of intact forest and farmland spanning parts of three largely developed central New Jersey 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 that protect the water supply to the headwaters of several significant streams flowing to the D&R Canal, Millstone, Raritan and Delaware rivers. The Sourlands support many rare plant and animal species and provide nesting and migratory stopover habitat for over 100 species of migratory birds.

Somerset County began the preservation of the Sourland Mountain in Hillsborough and Montgomery townships in the early 1970s. With the addition of the Thompson property, the preserve will exceed 5,900 acres, making it the largest park in Somerset County's 14,000-acre park system.

Hillsborough Township has been very active with preservation efforts in the Sourlands. The township and the county have worked together on several open-space acquisitions in the Sourland region, creating linkages between county and local preserved lands.

The Far Hills-based New Jersey Conservation Foundation, which preserves open space and farmland throughout the state, is working to protect additional acreage in the Sourland Mountains.

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**Peter S. Palmer, Freeholder Director • Patrick Scaglione, Freeholder Deputy Director
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