

## Property Once Slated for Development Becomes Nature Preserve

**Media, Pa. (July 24, 2012)** – Natural Lands Trust today announced that it has preserved 168 acres in Robeson Township, Berks County. The property, now known as Green Hills Preserve, provides crucial habitat for wildlife including a species considered to be critically endangered, the highest risk category assigned for wild species.



*Photo by Jim Moffett, Force of Nature volunteer*

The property, originally slated for a high-density development, went into foreclosure in 2009. Prudential Fox & Roach’s Land Development Division, under the guidance of Vice President and Associate Broker Edward Ritti, took the unusual step of seeking a conservation solution. After more than two years working to piece together critical funding, Natural Lands Trust was able to purchase the property from the lender.

“Thanks to Ed Ritti’s out-of-the-box thinking and the support of many funders and partners, this beautiful property will be protected forever,” said Molly Morrison, president of Natural Lands Trust. “We are thrilled to now have a presence in Berks County and to add Green Hills to our network of 41 nature preserves.”

The property features gently rolling agricultural fields, woodlands, and wetlands. Allegheny Creek, a PA Department of Environmental Protection-designated “Cold Water Fishery” stream, bisects the newly established preserve.

Green Hills Preserve is situated within the Schuylkill Highlands, a region at the nexus of two landscapes that have been prioritized for protection: the Highlands (as defined by the US Congress) and the Schuylkill River watershed (a focus of much planning work by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Philadelphia Water Department). The area’s importance

derives from the need for water quality protection, habitat conservation, and recreational development in a region set for considerable growth over the next 20 years.

Since its founding in 1953, Natural Lands Trust has protected more than 100,000 acres of land, including 41 nature preserves that it owns and manages in 13 counties. Green Hills is the organization's first preserve in Berks County.

“Natural Lands Trust and DCNR have enjoyed a long, successful history of working together in the conservation of deserving land tracts such as Green Hills Preserve,” said Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Richard Allan. “DCNR is proud to assist in funding this invaluable investment that will pay rich dividends for generations to come.”

“The Wyomissing Foundation is very pleased and proud to be a part of this wonderful endeavor,” said Karen Rightmire, president of the Wyomissing Foundation. “We have partnered with Natural Lands Trust in the past, and are delighted that they now have a nature preserve in Berks County.”

Like many of Natural Lands Trust's other nature preserves throughout the region, Green Hills Preserve eventually will be open—free-of-charge—to visitors for passive recreation once a hiking trail system has been established and a parking area is built. Funds to construct those amenities—as well as ongoing habitat restoration and stewardship work—still need to be raised.

Funders and partners for this project include Berks County Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Open Space Institute, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area, Southern Berks Land Company, Susquehanna Bank, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Cretella Mars Foundation, and the Wyomissing Foundation.

About Natural Lands Trust Natural Lands Trust is dedicated to protecting the forests, fields, streams, and wetlands that are essential to the sustainability of life in eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. Since its founding in 1953, the organization has protected more than 100,000 acres of land, including 41 nature preserves that it owns and manages in 13 counties. Their comprehensive approach to conservation includes saving land, stewarding natural resources, and providing opportunities for the region's residents to connect to nature.

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