

Forked River Mountain Views

Newsletter of the Forked River Mountain Coalition

Vol. 5 No. 1

More Wilderness Preserved!

The new year has started off on a positive note. Committed to preserving the Forked River Mountain's and the vast wilderness that surrounds them, the New Jersey Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has accepted a donation of 3,578 acres to form its 22nd nature sanctuary: Forked River Mountain Preserve.

The chapter will begin management of this property on December 31, 1997 when 531 of the 3,578 acres will be transferred to Conservancy ownership. The remaining property will be passed to the Conservancy incrementally over 10 years.

The land is a gift from the Leone family which has owned the property in the Pinelands for more than four decades. Not only does the transaction protect a vast amount of habitat, it ensures an economic return for the Leone family.

As a result of negotiations, the Leone family, who had mined a portion of this land for construction-grade sand, will limit such activities to less than 250 acres. This land deal helps demonstrate that environmental and economic interests can be balanced and do not have to be either/or situations.

Such an expansive area will call for increased stewardship, according to the chapter. Public access trails, fire history research with the New Jersey Natural Heritage Program and, most immediately, an expanded biological inventory are planned.

In addition to patches of unique dwarf pines, plants species such as Pine Barren gentian, curly grass fern and the globally rare kniesekern's beaked rush have been recorded on the property. Endangered Pine Barrens treefrogs and pine snakes have also been sighted on the property.

The entire donation which lies along the Factory Branch of the Cedar Creek is west of the Forked River Mountains. The area helps link two state landholdings: Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area and Double Trouble State Park.

This is the second major deal to preserve land in the Forked River Mountain area. About two years ago, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation purchased nearly 3,000 acres to form the first section of the Forked River Mountain Preserve.

Save the date

NJCF Field Day...

March 14, 1998

*Forked River
Mountain Cleanup...*

April 19, 1998

*Barnegat Bay
Festival...*

May 16, 1998

*more details in the
next newsletter!*

A Look Back . . . A Look Ahead . . .

For the past year, the Forked River Mountain Coalition has been busy working to permanently protect this vast wilderness. Below are just some of our accomplishments for 1997 and some of our future goals for 1998, and beyond.

Accomplishments

- ❁ Assisted the New Jersey Conservation Foundation in posting the boundary of the first permanently protected parcel in the Forked River Mountain area. This 3,000 acre parcel contains the headwaters to the North Branch and Middle Branch of the Forked River and is home to several threatened and endangered plant and animal species.
- ❁ Conducted our fourth Spring Cleanup for Earth Day. Almost 29 tons of trash were removed from the forest. To date, a total of 95 tons of trash have been removed from the woods around the Forked River Mountains.
- ❁ Participated in the first ever Barnegat Bay Festival. Open space conservation in the Pinelands compliments efforts to protect Barnegat Bay because many of the streams and rivers that flow into the bay originate in the Pinelands. The Forked River Mountain area contains the headwaters to three major tributaries of Barnegat Bay, including the Cedar Creek, Forked River and Oyster Creek.
- ❁ Sponsored our third canoe trip down Cedar Creek and our third treefrog hike near Webbs Mill. These educational events were fun for young and old alike.

Goals

- ❁ As this newsletter goes to print, we are finalizing our application to the IRS to be recognized as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Once this status is secured we will . . .
- ❁ Seek additional funding to acquire more land. Millions of dollars will be needed to protect the entire forest...
- ❁ Seek funding to conduct endangered species/wildlife inventories necessary to prepare a future management plan for the area...
- ❁ Conduct a direct mail membership drive to increase support for our grass-roots initiative to permanently protect the Forked River Mountains and the rich wilderness that surround them.

We also have some more modest goals for the coming year, these include:

- ❁ Continued assistance to the New Jersey Conservation

Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy, with conservation and stewardship activities on protected parcels within the Forked River Mountain Area.

- ❁ Conducting the fifth annual spring cleanup, our annual canoe trip and treefrog hike and participating in the second annual Barnegat Bay Festival and other educational events to promote greater awareness about the importance and significance of the Forked River Mountain area.
- ❁ Working with the Jersey Shore Council of the Boy Scouts of America, and others, to establish, monitor, and maintain a Bluebird nestbox trail in the Forked River Mountain Area.
- ❁ Improving the Forked River Mountain map on display at Wells Mills County Park, the Coalition's flier and slide program and our newsletter, "Forked River Mountain Views."

But we can only realize our goals with your help. If you are not currently a member of the Coalition and would like to join, or if you are a member and have not yet renewed your membership, simply complete the registration form in this newsletter. Be sure to mark the appropriate box and return the form along with your \$15 membership dues for 1998. Please help support the grass-roots initiative to permanently protect the Forked River Mountains and the vast wilderness that surrounds them.

Forked River Mountain Coalition Officers and Trustees

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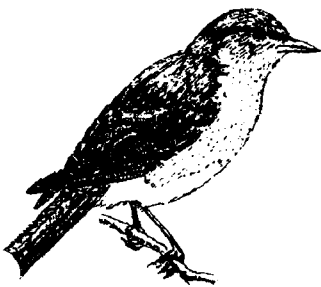
Trust Fund Approved

On November 4, 1997, the citizens of Ocean County voted to establish a Natural Lands Trust Fund for the purposes of preserving and protecting environmentally sensitive lands, natural areas, and open space. The Ocean County Freeholders must now establish an "Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund" to be used for the acquisition and maintenance of land for conservation purposes and the acquisition of farmland for farmland preservation purposes.

Voters agreed to levy a maximum tax of 1.2 cents per \$100 of total County equalized real property valuation. The Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund could provide as much as \$3.8 million dollars annually for natural lands conservation throughout the County. The trust fund would represent an investment of \$12 each year for a family whose house had an equalized assessed value of \$100,000.

A citizens advisory committee will make recommendations to the Freeholders regarding what natural lands should be purchased for conservation purposes. The Forked River Mountain Coalition has offered our assistance to the county regarding this matter.

Over the last 50 years Ocean County has experienced the highest rate of growth of any county in New Jersey and among the highest in the nation. The Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund will help maintain a high quality of life for present and future generations so that they may enjoy the natural beauty of the land, a high quality of drinking water, protected natural areas for animals and plants, and clean water in our bays, creeks and rivers.



Bluebird Monitors Wanted

Why the concern for bluebirds? The bluebird--one of the most attractive of North American birds because of its color and beautiful song--has been steadily declining. The coordinated efforts of individuals and groups, however, can help guarantee the bluebird's survival.

The decline of the bluebird is primarily a result of the loss of suitable habitat for food and nesting sites due to urbanization. Bluebirds will not nest in cities or towns but can be found in outlying suburbs and rural areas along the edge of woods and clearings. Bluebirds prefer to nest in open areas with scattered trees and low or sparse undergrowth. Open fields, parks, golf courses, cemeteries and pastures make good bluebird nesting locations.

Bluebirds will utilize nest boxes when located in suitable habitat and when properly mounted. The best height for bluebird boxes is three to five feet above the ground. At this height, it is easy to observe the birds and to clean out the boxes. Higher mounting will increase competition from other birds. Lower mounting will increase possible predation from such animals as the raccoon. It is recommended that the nesting box face a tree with low branches, or a shrub within fifty feet of the box. If possible mount the box away from the direction of prevailing winds and out of the most intense heat of the sun. Bluebird boxes should be kept at least 100 yards apart. Boxes should be cleaned and inspected once the birds have left the nest and again before the Spring breeding season begins.

Bluebirds often have two broods a year, laying from three to six eggs per clutch. Generally, bluebirds will return to breeding areas in early March and will shortly begin to seek suitable nesting sites. Bluebirds will begin to build a nest for the second brood in late May or early June. After the female lays the eggs, she incubates them for a period of about two weeks. The young usually hatch the same day and normally leave the nest in about 16 to 20 days.

For our part, the Coalition is working with the Jersey Shore Council of the Boy Scouts of America, and others, to establish and maintain a Bluebird nestbox trail in the Forked River Mountain area. We are in need of a few dedicated individuals to help monitor the nestboxes from March until August. If you believe you can help and would like to volunteer as a bluebird nestbox monitor, please call the Coalition at 609-971-1635 no later than February 15, 1998.

* Bluebird illustration from A Field Guide to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, by Howard Boyd, Plexus Publishing Inc, Medford, NJ