



Meriden Forest Legacy Tract, New Jersey

June 2000

Not many people think of standing among nature when viewing the skyscrapers of New York City, but it is possible in the New Jersey Highlands. In recent years a variety of agencies have protected many different tracts of land in the New Jersey Highlands area to create larger contiguous protected areas of undeveloped forest.

Overall more than 30,000 acres in the New Jersey Highlands have been protected through conservation easements and full fee purchases of lands to protect important ecological areas from development. The most recent addition is the outright purchase of the 295-acre Meriden tract in Rockaway Township on June 22, 2000.

Money from the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program (\$350,000), Morris County Open Space Trust Fund (\$1,000,000), Rockaway Township Open Space Fund (\$500,000), Green Trust grant (\$1,000,000), Green Trust loan (\$1,000,000), Green Acres State acquisition (\$650,000), Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund (\$1,000,000), and the Trust for Public Land (\$1,500,000) all contributed to the purchase. The Meriden tract is adjacent to New Jersey's 2,662-acre Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area, which itself was created in 1994 from similar conservation efforts.

"There are lands that just leap out to be protected, and this is one of them."

New Jersey Environmental Commissioner
Robert Shinn, Jr.

The Meriden tract adds to the overall goals of the area by protecting wildlife habitat, stream and aquifer water quality, a wilderness trail system, and the spectacular views from Wildcat Ridge. On the ridge overlooking the

Meriden tract one can see the New York skyline and Interstates 287 and 80, yet be surrounded by trees in a pristine landscape.

Once the leading iron mining area of the country, the area is now home to a wide variety of wildlife. Black bears, bobcats, otters, timber rattlesnakes, northern copperheads, wood turtles, wood rats, and porcupines inhabit the area.



Observers overlooking the Meriden tract absorb the incredible views of trees, birds, and the New York City skyline. In addition to spectacular views, water and wildlife resources are protected.

Photo by Michael McCann

well as many others, acknowledged that due to the high cost of land in the area, financial contributions from a large coalition of private, municipal, county, State, and Federal agencies were necessary to protect the Meriden tract.

The Meriden tract is certainly a welcome addition to the land protection efforts that have been occurring in recent years and is an example of multiple agencies working together for a common goal.

The Forest Legacy Program protects important forests from conversion to nonforest uses. These forests provide essential wildlife habitat, protect water quality, offer outstanding recreation opportunities, afford outstanding scenic views, are home to historic sites, and/or provide the opportunity to continue traditional forest uses. A Federal-State partnership allows landowners to keep their land private while ensuring it remains forest forever through the use of conservation easements.

The Meriden tract had been identified as the largest and most developable tract in the area, and had even received preliminary approval for a single-family residential subdivision containing 108 building lots.

At the dedication ceremony overlooking the Meriden tract, New Jersey's Environmental Commissioner Robert Shinn, Jr. commented, "There are lands that just leap out to be protected and this is one of them." He, as