



Canonchet

Forest Legacy Tract, Rhode Island

June 2003

Between New York City and Boston lies a relatively unfragmented forested landscape of about 136,000 acres. Exemplary of a once vast central hardwood forest type that stretched throughout New England at the time of Colonial America, it has become significantly threatened with development and fragmentation. The area is unique in that it is the largest forested landscape in New England within 10 miles of the Atlantic coast. The land supports forests of oak-hickory and oak-pine, with a dominant heath understory.

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Kevin Essington, The Nature Conservancy

These forests provide habitat for locally rare species of wildlife such as wide ranging mammals like black bear, bobcat, and fisher. This forest block also supports forest-interior breeding birds such as the pileated woodpecker, Louisiana waterthrush, and worm-eating warbler—species in decline due to loss of habit and forest fragmentation. These forest lands were once planned to be part of the National Forest System. When that plan failed, ownership of the tracts were transferred to the States in the mid-1930s and have remained conserved and undeveloped since then.

The Connecticut and Rhode Island chapters of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), recognizing the regional significance of the area, have partnered with State and Federal government units and nonprofit organizations to protect this forest in order to promote enduring ecological sustainability. The Arcadia Ponds Matrix Forest is an 18,000-acre project area within that forest landscape in which TNC has focused its conservation efforts. “This acquisition represents the best aspects of the ongoing partnership here in Rhode Island between private nonprofit groups,

the State, and now the Forest Service, to further our mutual conservation goals,” said Kevin Essington of TNC.

It was with great delight that on July 27, 2003, the State of Rhode Island recorded an easement over lands once owned by nine individuals, and paid The Nature Conservancy \$550,000 for the conservation easement valued at over \$1,000,000. The remaining value is the cost-share portion of the project, well exceeding the required 25 percent.

The acquisition of the Canonchet Brook easement adds a link to a chain of protected lands—to the north and to the east are three tracts that comprise the State of Rhode Island’s Rockville Management Area and to the west is Connecticut’s Pachaug State Forest.

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.



Forest habitats, cultural values, and water resources are all important values that are protected on the Canonchet Forest Legacy Project in Rhode Island.

Photo by Kevin Essington

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