

Conservationists preserve 702 acres at Legacy Ridge

BY CHRIS MCKENNA
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WOODBURY – A land-conservation group has bought a 702-acre tract once targeted for development as part of its campaign to connect vast areas of protected wilderness in eastern Orange County.

The Open Space Institute recently paid \$2.2 million for the property, which straddles Trout Brook Road and stretches between Route 32 and Smith Clove Road in northern Woodbury. The seller, Hiromi Shinya, had put the land up for sale again after a developer, who had an option to buy it, dropped plans

to build 287 upscale homes on a 300-acre section of the site.

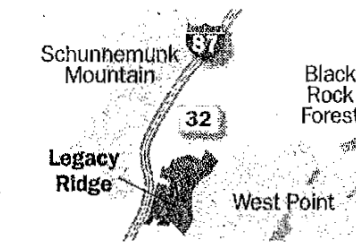
That project, known as Legacy Ridge, originated in 2004 and stirred controversy in Woodbury and neighboring Cornwall, partly because Woodbury made zoning changes that increased the number of houses that could be built. School and municipal boards in Cornwall, along with the Black Rock Fish and Game Club, sued in opposition in 2008, but the case was dismissed two years later.

The opportunity to buy so large a tract excited conservationists, who hope to stave off development of privately

owned land separating preserved woodlands in the towns of Woodbury, Cornwall and Highlands. In two purchases in 2010, the Open Space Institute preserved 185 acres in the same corridor between Schunemunk State Park to the west and Black Rock Forest and the U.S. Military Academy to the east.

“We immediately saw it as an important opportunity,” Terrence Nolan, vice president of conservation transactions, said Monday of the Legacy Ridge purchase.

Nolan said the institute plans to create a network of hik-



ing trails on the Legacy Ridge property by improving existing paths that all-terrain vehicle riders have been using. The organization will prohibit ATV use and intends to create a parking pulloff and information kiosk for hikers on Smith Clove Road, Nolan said.

Conservation groups are celebrating the expansion of unbroken wilderness in the Hudson Highlands, both for the sake of wildlife inhabitants and recreational visitors.

“Forest-interior birds like the cerulean warbler and wood thrush, mammals like otter and mink, and New York’s state fish, the brook trout, all have better chances of survival when properties like this, bordering other undeveloped lands, are conserved,” said William Schuster, executive director of the Black Rock Forest Consortium.

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