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SARA M. BLUHM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



2025 Annual Newsletter

This year has been both exciting and prosperous for the Sussex County Land Trust. We have successfully secured new opportunities, built meaningful partnerships, and significantly raised public awareness about our efforts to protect natural, cultural, agricultural, and recreational resources of Sussex County. With the increasing development pressures in the region, we remain unwavering in our commitment to preserving open spaces, with a particular focus on ensuring these spaces remain accessible to the public for recreation, education, and enjoyment.

Founded in 2001, the Sussex County Land Trust has always been driven by a deep-rooted partnership with the Sussex County Council. This collaborative relationship has proven to be instrumental in achieving our mission, enabling us to secure several critical property acquisitions over the years. These acquisitions not only protect important natural areas but also provide new opportunities for public access and recreational activities that enhance the well-being of the community. As we continue to expand our reach and impact, we are mindful of the growing responsibilities that come with managing these resources, and we remain dedicated to working closely with our partners to ensure their long-term sustainability.

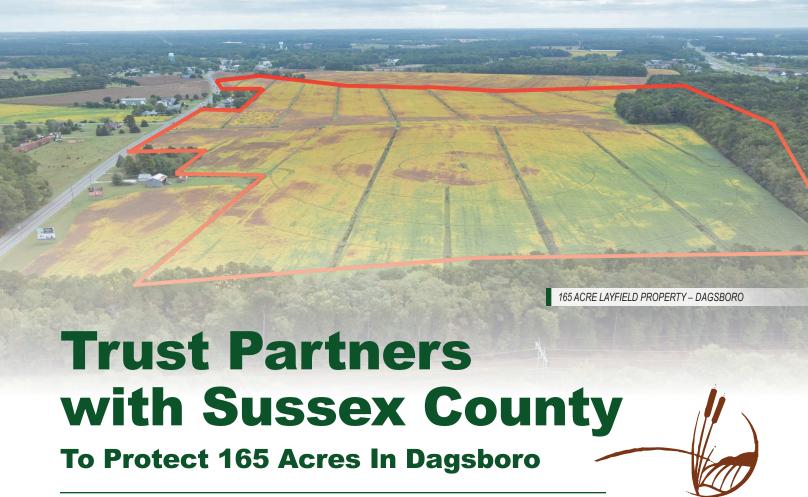
In 2024, public engagement took center stage. Through a variety of special events and

educational programs, we have connected with the community in meaningful ways, fostering a deeper appreciation for the land and its many values. Our efforts to educate the public about the importance of conservation and stewardship have strengthened our community network, creating more advocates for the protection of the region's resources. These programs have not only raised awareness, but have also served to unite people around a shared vision for a sustainable and vibrant Sussex County.

Looking ahead to 2025, the future is incredibly bright. The Board of Trustees is filled with anticipation for the opportunities that lie on the horizon, and we are eager to continue building on the momentum of this past year. We remain committed to advancing our mission of preserving open spaces, promoting sustainable land use, and fostering community involvement. With ongoing support from our partners and the public, we are confident that the Sussex County Land Trust will continue to thrive and make a lasting impact for generations to come. Thank you for being part of this important journey!

-Ring W. Lardner, Board Chair





Development pressure in eastern Sussex County continues to encroach around the inland bay areas as new residents discover the beauty and tranquility of coastal Delaware. In early October, the Trust achieved another milestone in its continued efforts to identify and facilitate the acquisition of properties for open space preservation through strategic partnerships.

The "Layfield Property" is a 165-acre tract of land located on Dagsboro Road (Rt. 20) just north and contiguous to the town limits of Dagsboro. The acquisition of the property was funded through Sussex County's Land Conservation program based on a recommendation by the Sussex County Land Trust.

The partnership between Sussex County and the Trust dates back more than two decades and has led to the acquisition of numerous properties in Sussex County featuring public access such as the Delaware Botanic Gardens (Dagsboro), Stephen P. Hudson Park (Milton), Nanticoke

Crossing (Woodland), Hopkins Preserve (Lewes) and the Forest of the Broadkill (Milton).

The "Layfield Property" was identified by the Trust earlier this year as a potential acquisition for open space protection, and the recommendation for purchase was made to County officials. The property, owned by local businessmen Rupert Smith and the late Kenneth Simpler, was originally slated for high density development. A lifelong outdoorsman and philanthropist, Mr. Simpler's keen interest in preserving the property for the benefit of future generations was a driving force in the acquisition. The final purchase price of \$2,650,000 was made possible by a \$550,000 donation via reduction in appraised value by the owners.

The Trust will manage the property on behalf of the Sussex County Conservation Program and will begin to develop a future masterplan concept for the property while exploring potential reforestation efforts. The property will continue to remain in agricultural production for the foreseeable future.

Trust Enters New Phase of Growth

- Full Time Staff Added

Since its inception in 2002, SCLT has operated with a part time contractual Executive Director and an active Board. Properties within the SCLT portfolio, until the last few years, have been managed for resource protection with limited or no public access.

All this began to change shortly after the Trust acquired Hudson Park in December of 2018. That acquisition kicked off a long planned, and exciting, new phase of growth. Six new properties were acquired; all purchased with the intent of providing public access. At the same time, other longstanding properties such as Ickford Park near Seaford saw the start of building restoration and plans for public use. The end result – a countywide network of parks and preserves acquired and master planned for sensitive development supporting a variety of passive recreational and educational opportunities.

These significant, and long anticipated actions by SCLT, advances its mission of resource protection and public access to open space across Sussex County. However, to implement a fully functioning Park and Preserve system, the Board realized that full time staff would be required. That staff would need to develop operational capacity supporting public use and ecological health of the Trust holdings, along with the formation of friends groups, new public programming, and fundraising events.

The first step in meeting these new challenges was to launch an extensive search for the first full time Executive Director. As of January 2025, the Board is pleased to announce the



hiring of Sara Bluhm. A 2004 graduate of Milford High School and a 2023 Leadership Delaware graduate, Sara brings a wealth of experience to her new role with the Trust.

Sara was the first Economic Development & Community Engagement Administrator for the City of Milford and managed five international beer, wine, and food conferences as Conference Operations Manager at Zephyr Conferences. Her leadership resumé includes roles such as Publisher of *MilfordLIVE*, Executive Director

of the Delaware Diabetes Coalition, and Director of Leadership Central Delaware, the latter two she continues to hold today. Additionally, she served as Promotional Marketing and Communications Manager at GROWMARK FS, LLC, was President of Downtown Milford, Inc. (DMI), and dedicated four and a half years to Milford's Planning Commission.

Sara's accolades include the 2019 Governor's Outstanding Volunteer Award, the 2018 Milford Citizen of the Year honor, recognition as a 2017 Delaware Business Times 40 Under 40, and the 2017 Immaculata University Alumni Medal. She holds a bachelor's degree from Immaculata University (2008) and a master's degree in Marketing Management from Wilmington University (2016). Sara resides in Magnolia with her husband, Jake, and daughter, Joey, and enjoys quality time with their Weimaraner, Barley, shopping local, and exploring craft breweries.

Outgoing Executive Director Mark Chura will continue with the Trust in a consulting capacity with a new title of Director of Conservation. Mark, who has led the Trust since 2016, will focus his efforts on completing master planning and development projects for the existing SCLT

portfolio of properties, and continue to lead efforts for acquisition of new properties.

"It's gratifying to have been a part of the growth of the Trust and its evolution as a provider of public recreation and ecological protection across the County," said Mark. "Just as we've done with the Executive Director position, the goal now will be to develop my new position to the point where it too will ultimately become a full time staff position."

"I've been fortunate to be a part of a strong and dedicated Board of Trustees that has pushed our organization to fulfill its vast potential," said Ring Lardner, SCLT Board Chair. "Now, more than ever, Sussex County needs a strong network of government and non-profits to secure permanent protection of our County's precious natural, agricultural and cultural resources. Our long-term success is dependent on the generosity of our government, business partners and the public at large. Operating a first-class Park and Preserve system in Sussex County requires resources which we are focused on raising. We ask everyone to please consider helping the Trust as a volunteer and donating in support of this important cause."



SCLT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Stephen P. Hudson Park

Progress Report

This 30-acre park is located at the intersection of Rt. 9 and Coolspring Road southeast of Milton and was acquired by the Trust in partnership with Sussex County Council, the State of Delaware (Division of Parks), Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Delaware Open Space Program. The property is ideally located on the Lewes to Georgetown Trail, an extremely popular 17-mile bike and pedestrian trail, which replaced the former Delaware Coast Line Railroad.

A grand opening was held in 2023 to celebrate the completion of the initial phase of the project, which included a small parking area accessed from Coolspring Road, a trail connection and newly installed landscaping. Since then, the Trust has moved into the second phase of construction of the property and recently installed a new interpretive kiosk, a new wooden pergola, picnic tables, additional landscaping and tree plantings along the trail connection, bike racks and a bike fixit station.

Phase 3 of the project will include restroom facilities, additional trail enhancements and a Can-Do Playground. The Lewes-Rehoboth Rotary Club had been searching for a suitable location to build a Can-Do Playground in Sussex County for several years and had worked directly with members of the Trust's Board of Trustees to secure the location at Stephen P. Hudson Park. The Can-Do Playground will be the first of its kind in Sussex County and will be an attractive recreational amenity for public benefit.

The Trust recently applied for grant funding for future construction needs through the Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Program (ORPT) through the Delaware Department of Natural Resources (DNREC) and continues to leverage its partner relationships and volunteer network for both construction and management responsibilities. Stephen P. Hudson Park is currently open to the public and is a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts using the bike trail.



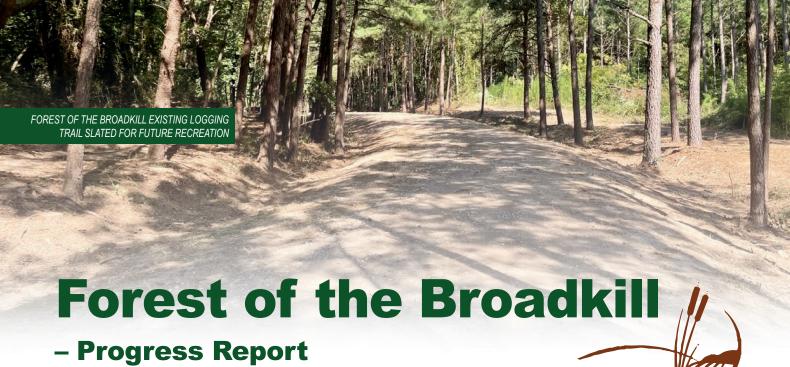
STEPHEN P. HUDSON PARK BIKE RACKS, FIXIT STATION AND PERGOLA



STEPHEN P. HUDSON PARK TRAIL CONNECTION, KIOSK AND TREE PLANTINGS



AERIAL LOOKING WEST, NEW ASPHALT PARKING AREA AND TRAIL CONNECTION TO LEWES TO GEORGETOWN BIKE TRAIL



In May 2023, another significant step was taken by the Trust toward preserving and enhancing public outdoor spaces in Sussex County, Delaware. The 292-acre property was acquired through a partnership between the Trust and Sussex County Council as part of the County's ongoing conservation initiative. The Trust identified this property as a valuable asset due to its strategic location in a rapidly growing area near Milton, Delaware. This prime piece of land offers the potential to not only conserve natural resources, but also provide the public with an accessible location for outdoor recreation.

The acquisition was made possible through Sussex County's Conservation Program, with the County assuming ownership of the property. As part of the arrangement, the County has entered into a management agreement with the Trust, granting them responsibility for maintaining, operating and managing the property. This collaboration ensures that the land will be properly cared for and developed into a recreational asset for the local community.

Before the acquisition, the property had been used primarily for timber harvesting, which resulted in a network of logging roads spread throughout the area. These existing roads will be expanded and repurposed into walking trails, providing visitors with easy access to the diverse landscapes of the property. The Trust and its partners have already begun improving the site by performing minor clearing to enhance existing trails, remove underbrush and create a small parking area for visitors.



PARTNERS FROM DOGFISH HEAD ON BENEVOLENCE DAY FOCUS ON TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS AT THE FOREST OF THE BROADKILL

The property features a mix of open fields and mature hardwood forests, with scenic views and abundant wildlife. It also borders Ingram Branch and the headwaters of the Broadkill River, which adds both ecological and aesthetic value to the land. These natural features make the property ideal for a variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, birdwatching and nature exploration.

With these initial steps already underway, the Trust and its partners are excited about the future of the property. Their vision is to transform it into a well-maintained and accessible public space where residents and visitors can enjoy nature, participate in recreational activities, and learn about local ecosystems. The property is slated to officially open to the public in 2025, with a grand opening event planned to celebrate this exciting new addition to Sussex County's outdoor recreation offerings.



It has been four years since the Sussex County Land Trust acquired the 41-acre site located on the Nanticoke River near the historic Woodland Ferry Terminal southwest of Seaford, Delaware. The property features a mix of woods, open space and more than 2,000' of undisturbed pristine shoreline along the Nanticoke River.

Nanticoke Crossing Park was acquired by the Trust in partnership with the Chesapeake Conservancy, Mt. Cuba Center, Sussex County Council, Delaware Open Space Council, the U.S. Navy and the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, a true public private partnership to protect and preserve an ecologically important property that will be utilized for recreation and public access.

The Trust and its partners have been focused on improving the natural features of the property, improving the existing trail network and instituting the appropriate security measures in preparation for opening the site to the public. A Forest Stewardship Management Plan was prepared by the Delaware Forest Service for the purpose of maintaining and improving the naturally occurring trees in the wooded area, retaining soil and water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat and providing recreational opportunities.

NANTICOKE CROSSING PARK GROUNDBREAKING – L TO R –
TODD LAWSON – COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR, MARK CHURA – SCLT,
COUNCILMAN JOHN RIELEY, COUNCILMAN MIKE VINCENT,
SEAFORD MAYOR MATT MACCOY, REP. DANNY SHORT, REP. TIM DUKES,
RING LARDNER – SCLT, MATT PROVOST – CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY

The Trust and its partners hosted a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the commencement and construction of the initial phase of the project. During the event, members of the Trust shared a conceptual masterplan of the property and a phasing plan for construction. Future amenities include perimeter walking trails, a frisbee golf course, a parking area, picnic and pavilion areas and, ultimately, a kayak and canoe launch on the Nanticoke River.

The project was also recently awarded \$90,000 through the State of Delaware's Community Reinvestment Fund, a capital grant program designed for redevelopment, revitalization and investment in capital projects. The funding will be used for ongoing construction and development of the property.



SCLT BOARD, LEFT TO RIGHT – COUNCILMAN JOHN RIELEY, KELLY STEVENSON, MIKE DICKINSON, RING LARDNER, HEIDI GILMORE, CASEY KENTON, JUDY SCHWARTZ, RUSS MCCABE, MARK CHURA

Cannon-Maston House

Groundbreaking and Ickford Park Update

This 59-acre property is located northwest of Seaford on Atlanta Road and was acquired by the Trust in partnership with Sussex County Council to protect the property from development and to preserve and restore one of the most historic buildings in Sussex County, the Cannon-Maston House built in 1727. In addition to the Cannon-Maston House, the property was also improved by a home constructed in 1912 known as the Williams-Litchford House and was situated directly in front of the historic Cannon-Maston House, obstructing the viewshed of the historic structure.

The Trust recently relocated the Williams Litchford House to a more desirable location on the western side of the property and are in the process of completing a full renovation to the century-old farmhouse with upgraded, but period-appropriate, features indicative of an early 20th century home.

In 2024, the Trust and its partners held a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the anticipated start

of renovation and restoration of the historic Cannon-Maston
House. Construction began this last spring with the repair of the foundation and exterior walls of the home, followed by the restoration of the interior finishes and reconstruction of the fireplace. Overseeing the project is renowned architecture firm Barton Ross & Partners, LLC, an industry leader for historic preservation who has completed the restoration of many national historic landmark projects throughout the Mid-Atlantic Region.

The Trust and its partners are currently working on a revised masterplan to include a perimeter walking trail, an orchard and an interpretive center for future programming. The Trust Board is excited to showcase this property to the public, as it will be one of our most ambitious projects to date, offering both public recreation and historical preservation and interpretation!



WILLIAMS-LITCHFORD HOUSE RELOCATED TO THE WEST SIDE OF ICKFORD PARK, CANNON-MASTON HOUSE IN THE BACKGROUND



CANNON-MASTON CONSTRUCTION IN PROGRESS



CANNON-MASTON INTERIOR RENOVATIONS



CANNON-MASTON GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY, MAY 2024



It has been two years since the Trust partnered with Sussex County Council to purchase the 52-acre property located along Sweetbriar Road in Lewes, Delaware. This land, which is contiguous to the well-known Lewes to Georgetown Bicycle Trail, was previously owned by the Hopkins family, a respected long-time landowner and dairy farm operator in the Lewes area. The Hopkins family had a deep interest in preserving the land for the benefit of the community, with the intent to ensure it would remain available for public use in perpetuity.

The property's location is both strategic and highly desirable. Situated in an area that is increasingly surrounded by development, it offers a rare opportunity for open space preservation amidst the growth of Lewes. Not only does this acquisition provide environmental benefits, but it also contributes to maintaining the rural and natural character of the region. The land's proximity to Stephen P. Hudson Park, another Trustmanaged property less than two miles to the east, further enhances its value. Stephen P. Hudson Park, which is also being developed for recreational purposes, will complement this new property and help support the Lewes to Georgetown Bicycle Trail — one of Delaware's most popular bike and walking trails.

The first phase of development for the site is already in the planning stages and is poised to transform the land into a vibrant and welcoming space for the community. This phase will include the creation of a site entrance, a parking area, stormwater management features and the construction of walking trails that will encourage visitors to explore the property's natural beauty. Additionally, landscaping improvements will enhance the overall aesthetics of the site, making it an inviting location for visitors to relax and enjoy outdoor activities.

A masterplan for the property has already been designed by Vernacular Design, an architecture and design firm that specializes in creating spaces that blend with their natural surroundings. The plan, which was unveiled during a well-attended fall festival held at the property in 2023, gives the public an early look at the future vision for the site. During the event, visitors were invited to take a tour of the land and learn more about the Trust's plans for the site. The festival provided an opportunity to engage the community and generate excitement about the upcoming changes.

With the first phase of construction expected to begin in early 2025, the Trust and its partners are excited about the prospect of opening the Preserve to the public in the near future. This new property will provide a vital recreational resource for residents and visitors alike, offering a peaceful natural retreat close to the town of Lewes and the bustling bicycle trail. The Trust looks forward to welcoming the public to this beautiful new preserve, where they can enjoy nature, outdoor exercise and the tranquility of the Delaware landscape.

Trust Named as Beneficiary at Dogfish Dash



The Dogfish Dash is an annual charity event organized by Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, a popular craft brewery based in Milton, Delaware. The event typically features a 5K race through historic Milton, where participants run or walk to raise money for a local non-profit organization and, this year the Trust was honored to be named the primary beneficiary of the race. The generous support from Dogfish Head has been instrumental to the Trust's efforts, and the partnership continues to thrive through various projects throughout the year.

Roughly 1,800 race participants attended the race followed by post-race festivities featuring a variety of Dogfish's tasty beverages, all brewed in Milton. The brewery is great fun and a must-see!

As the primary beneficiary of the race, the Trust and its Board were tasked with engaging the local business community for sponsorships in advance of the race and providing volunteers for the event, all to educate members of the public about the mission of the Trust. It was a great day of public engagement, "building our brand" and leveraging a valuable partnership through Dogfish Head.

Following the race, Mariah Calagione, Dogfish Head co-founder, presented the Trust with a \$100K check as a donation from the race proceeds. The Trust and its Board also raised an additional \$50K in partnership sponsorships from the race. The Trust is so grateful to partner with an organization like Dogfish Head that recognizes its efforts in protecting valuable resources in Sussex County.



SAM CALAGIONE (CO-FOUNDER) GIVING HIGH FIVES AT RACE START



RACE PARTICIPANTS FOR BEST COSTUMES



\$100K CHECK DONATION – DOGFISH DASH 2024 – L TO R – SCLT BOARD MEMBERS: JUDY SCHWARTZ, KELLY STEVENSON, JASON KING, CASEY KENTON; MARIAH CALAGIONE, CO-FOUNDER DOGFISH HEAD



DOGFISH DASH RACE START

The Trust Welcomes New Board Member

- Mackenzie Peet

In 2024, the Trust announced the appointment of Mackenzie Peet as a new board member. Mackenzie is an attorney with the law firm of Saul Ewing LLP, with a focus on land use and real estate law primarily in Sussex County. With an undergraduate degree from the University of Delaware in environmental studies, Mackenzie went on to earn her law degree and a certificate of environmental law from Pace Law School in White Plains, N.Y. She was admitted to the Delaware Bar in 2019.

Originally from Rehoboth Beach, Mackenzie has a strong connection to her community. She actively volunteers as a member of the Village Improvement Association, an organization dedicated to charitable and civic work in the Rehoboth Beach region. In her free time, she enjoys the company of her friends, family and pets, particularly outdoors and at the beach. Mackenzie is currently serving on both the Property Management and Land Acquisition Committees, and she has been a great addition to the Board!

New Website _ Has Launched!



In early 2024, the Trust launched a new and improved website! The new site features a user-friendly map highlighting properties under management, updated bios on all Trustees, current information on upcoming events, media coverage and an easy way to donate! Please visit www.sclandtrust.org



NEW WEBSITE DESIGN

Ard Ne Greine Update

The Trust and its partners are making significant progress on an ambitious fundraising initiative aimed at acquiring and protecting a highly valuable 89-acre parcel of land known as "Ard Ne Greine," located on the outskirts of historic downtown Lewes, Delaware, within the environmentally sensitive coastal region. This pristine piece of land has been actively farmed for many years, and it holds immense ecological value. It is strategically positioned, contiguous to Canary Creek and the Lewes to Georgetown Bicycle Trail, both of which are key environmental and recreational assets in the area. The acquisition of Ard Ne Greine would preserve a vital area of open space that contributes to the overall health and beauty of the region.

The initiative to protect this land began two years ago, when the Trust identified Ard Ne Greine as one of the last remaining large tracts of land near downtown Lewes that was suitable for high-density development. At the time, there was a growing concern that such development could lead to significant environmental degradation, disrupting the delicate balance of the area's natural ecosystems. Recognizing the unique opportunity to preserve this land for future generations, the Trust made the decision to pursue its acquisition. Given the property's location within a rapidly developing region, securing its protection represents an essential step in maintaining the area's environmental integrity and supporting sustainable development in Sussex County.

Since the Trust first identified the land, progress has been made in securing funding commitments from a variety of sources. To date, the Trust has successfully secured several critical funding sources, which together will contribute to the \$8.5 million needed for the acquisition. Key funding partners include the Delaware Open Space Council and the Sussex County Council, both of which have pledged support for the preservation of this significant property. In addition, several private donors have also committed funding to help bring this initiative to fruition, demonstrating broad community support for the project.

One of the most significant steps in the funding process is the application for federal funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that provides financial assistance to conserve natural resources. The Trust has already submitted the application, and the expected approval and disbursement of these funds is anticipated in early 2025, which will be a pivotal moment in the initiative's timeline. There is still work to be done, however, to fully secure the funding necessary to complete the acquisition.

ARD NE GREINE AERIAL LOOKING EAST



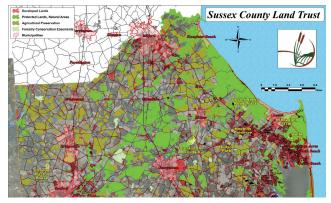
The Trust and its partners are actively seeking additional donors and funding sources to ensure that the project reaches its financial goal. With 2025 earmarked as the target year for completing the acquisition, the Trust is focused on closing the remaining funding gap. The successful preservation of Ard Ne Greine will mark a milestone achievement for the Trust and its partners, representing a significant victory for environmental conservation in Sussex County.

The protection of this property is not just about securing open space; it is about safeguarding the region's environmental health, preserving wildlife habitats and ensuring future generations will be able to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. The land's proximity to Canary Creek and its location within the coastal zone make it an essential part of the larger ecological landscape that supports local wildlife and contributes to the area's biodiversity. Additionally, its connection to the Lewes to Georgetown Bicycle Trail enhances the recreational value of the property, providing a link between natural spaces and outdoor activities.

The Trust is calling on the community to get involved in this important conservation effort. There are several ways to contribute, whether through donations, fundraising efforts or by spreading the word about the initiative. Every contribution, no matter the size, will help to ensure the success of this campaign and contribute to the long-term protection of this vital piece of land. Those interested in learning more about the project or who wish to make a donation can contact Mark Chura at mark@chura-assc.com for additional information on ways to get involved.

Public Engagement and Outreach

The Trust hosted its Annual Board Meeting in April at Baywood Greens, inviting members of the public to attend the meeting and learn more about recent Trust initiatives. The benefit to a public forum board meeting is to encourage additional community engagement, welcome new ideas and build relationships with members of the public, who support the mission of the Trust. The Trust will host its annual meeting in April 2025 and all members of the public are invited to attend.



MAP OF SUSSEX COUNTY SHOWING DEVELOPED AREAS (RED), PROTECTED LANDS (GREEN) AND SCLT PROPERTIES (YELLOW OUTLINE)



MARK CHURA LEADS A PPRESENTATION AT THE ANNUAL BOARD MEETING (APRIL 2024)

Be a Friend of the Sussex County Land Trust!

The Trust is always looking for new partners who can help further our mission.

PLEASE CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WAYS YOU CAN HELP MAKE SUSSEX COUNTY A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE FOR EVERYONE!

The Sussex County Land Trust is a non-profit 501(c)3 conservation organization dedicated to protecting natural, cultural, agricultural, and recreational resources in Sussex County. Since the organization was founded in 2001, the Trust has been involved with the protection of more than 6,000 acres. Public and private partnerships are the key ingredient to leveraging our resources and goal of making Sussex County a better place to live for everyone.

Donations are an excellent way to support the Trust and make a contribution to benefit the greater good of Sussex County. The Trust is currently involved in several projects featuring public access and recreation and we need your help. SUSSEX COUNTY LAND TRUST, EIN 04-3611220, IS RECOGNIZED BY THE IRS AS A TAX-EXEMPT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION.

All or part of your gift may be deductible as a charitable contribution. Please check with your tax advisor. We appreciate your generous donation.



DONATIONS CAN BE MADE BY SCANNING THE QR CODE.

Our Board of Trustees are all committed volunteers. We sincerely appreciate your generous support of our mission!