



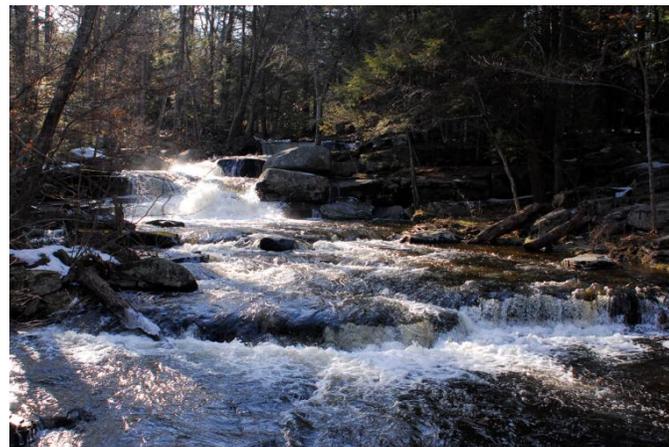
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# The Forest Reserve at Smallwood

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Conserving and protecting a unique natural resource for future generations.

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*Photos © Jonathan Hyman*



# THE FOREST RESERVE AT SMALLWOOD

Conserving and protecting a unique natural resource for future generations

## BACKGROUND

The former Smallwood Golf Course lies in the heart of Sullivan County, in the Town of Bethel; a community historically known for agriculture and tourism. It is physically located in the hamlet of Smallwood, an area that has traditionally been comprised of small cabins, many seasonal and some year-round.

In an effort to promote and ensure a best practices approach to the land use and design of this very special parcel, the Town of Bethel worked with the Sullivan County Legislature to create a plan that would maximize the quality of the built environment and uses of the property while minimizing or eliminating negative impacts to the natural environment. The goal was to develop a model for best practices for appropriate sustainable residential development of low-impact design and construction; preserve vital natural and ecologically sensitive areas through a conservation easement with permanent legal protection and a mechanism in place for long

term stewardship and monitoring and assure public access.

**THE BETHEL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (BLDC)** was formed in 1998 as a not-for-profit corporation to assist the Town of Bethel in promoting economic activity and job creation. It is governed by a board consisting of the Town Board members and community representatives. The activities are coordinated by a Manager. The BLDC seeks grants to advance its work and also serves as an administrator of funds for local organizations who are in need of such services. The BLDC itself is funded primarily through grants.

**THE DELAWARE HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY** is an accredited land trust dedicated to conserving the natural heritage and quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region in partnership with the region's landowners and communities - More than 50 landowners and communities from diverse backgrounds have conservation easements held by the Conservancy on their property. These lands include working farms and woodlands, boggy wetlands, hunting clubs, small fruit orchards, experimental forests, streams and riverbanks

The property is currently owned by the Bethel Local Development Corporation (BLDC) and consists of just less than 200 Acres. The BLDC, working with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy has placed a **conservation easement** on approximately 120 acres rich with water from White Lake Brook (part of which is Mountain Lake, aka Smallwood Lake), Lybolt Brook, and numerous other unnamed small streams. Through this effort, the Town Park "Mini Falls" also now has an easement on it; bringing the total easement to 133 acres. The Delaware Highlands Conservancy secured funding from the Common Waters Fund to support the easement transaction on behalf of the BLDC.

**The Forest Reserve at Smallwood** will allow light recreational use. The conservation easement ensures that the scale and the types of uses permitted are appropriate to its surroundings. Initially this includes hiking trails to be used for walking, jogging, cross

country skiing, snowshoeing and the like. Hunting, trapping and camping are not permitted by rule of the Bethel Local Development Corporation. The entire **Forest Reserve at Smallwood** is located in the Town of Bethel Forest Conservation Zoning District which has a five acre minimum development requirement. The balance of the property outside the easement area (approximately 60+ acres) is currently listed for sale and can be developed in accordance with Town zoning with the potential to yield low density housing that would be sustainable and of market value. This developable portion may also be used for a town purpose such as sand.



*Photo above: Town of Bethel Supervisor Daniel Sturm and DHC Land Protection Coordinator Melinda Meddaugh review the Forest Reserve conservation easement boundaries.*

A **conservation easement** is a legal agreement between a willing landowner and a land trust to permanently conserve farm and forest land from subdivision and development; to conserve the character of the land as it is. The land trust (in this case the Delaware Highlands Conservancy) works with the landowner (in this case the Bethel Local Development Corporation) to craft a flexible agreement that will protect the core conservation values of the property, yet be adaptable to future needs. This legacy is recorded in the property deed and the land trust agrees to work in partnership with the landowner and future landowners to ensure the terms of the agreement are met, forever.

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**The Forest Reserve at Smallwood** is a model for public / private partnerships and civic engagement. What began with a grassroots effort to protect an environmentally sensitive area of the Town of Bethel, evolved to include many stakeholders, policymakers and community organizations. The entire process took several years with committees and collaborations along the way. The following individuals from government, organizations and the community at large played important roles in planning for the former Smallwood Golf Course to become **the Forest Reserve at Smallwood**; and with the creation of the conservation easement that will protect it into the future.

Luiz Aragon, Former SC Planning Commissioner | Bernie Cohen, Bethel Councilman and BLDC Board Member | Ira Cohen, Sullivan County Treasurer | Peter Conroy, Smallwood resident | Richard Conroy, Smallwood resident | Sue Currier, Executive Director, Delaware Highlands Conservancy | Denise Frangipane, Bethel Councilwoman and BLDC Board Member | Jennifer Grossman, Open Space Institute | Lillian Hendrickson, Bethel Councilwoman and BLDC Board Member | Jonathan Hyman, Director, Preserve Smallwood Country Life and Smallwood resident | Heather Jacksy, SC Planning | Carol Malek, Smallwood resident | Melinda Meddaugh, Land Protection Coordinator, Delaware Highlands Conservancy | Fred Michel, BLDC Board Member | Joseph Rossiter, Bethel resident | Jonathan Rouis, Sullivan County Legislator | Harold Saltzman, Preserve Smallwood Country Life and Smallwood resident | Vicky Simpson, Bethel Councilwoman and BLDC Board Member | Leon Smith, BLDC Manager | Daniel Sturm, Bethel Supervisor and BLDC Chairman | Jill Weyer, Acting Commissioner, SC Planning

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