



Harding Township Environmental Commission



Resolution Re: Drew Forest Conservation

Feb 2, 2022

The Harding Township Environmental Commission supports a conservation purchase of the 53-acre Drew Forest, which is notable for its deep dells, glacial ponds and public walking trails. We recognize that preserving this rare, intact forest will support Drew University financially while providing numerous community benefits. The Forest is an educational resource with its labeled trees and pollinator plants. And its restored ecosystem supports wildlife in neighboring parks, including the Giralda Farms Preserve, Loantaka Brook Reservation and the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Of special interest to Harding residents, the Forest is a critical recharge area for the Buried Valley Aquifer. This aquifer is the source of water for wells in Harding Township

Furthermore the Environmental Commission recommends that the Harding Township Committee adopts a resolution to support conservation of the entire 53 acres of the Drew Forest.



About the Drew Forest Preserve

- Comprised of 53 acres, the preserve is an intact area of an estate once called the Forest. In 1867, Daniel Drew purchased the land, including its historically significant homestead (now [Mead Hall](#)). The Forest has been a hallmark of Drew University ever since.
- The Forest includes two glacial ponds, deep dells and important vernal pools. Its unique topography mitigates flooding, as documented after [Hurricane Ida](#).
- Since 2012, 22 acres have been fenced from deer and restored thanks to the muscle, funding and expertise provided by students, professors, community volunteers and groups such as the Garden Club of Madison and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The Forest now showcases a rare understory of native trees and native plants (many of them labeled). Migrating warblers, herons, egrets, turtles, raptors, fox and other wildlife can be seen along [walking trails](#). To find a similar healthy understory, you'd need to travel to preserved areas of the Catskills.
- The Forest is a wildlife corridor that connects to Giralda Farms Preserve (purchased with the support of county, municipal and other funds), Loantaka Brook Reservation and the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Migrating birds depend on it as a stopover.
- The Forest captures and purifies approximately 71.5 million gallons of rainfall each year (based on 48" average). This "ecosystem service" directly benefits the Buried Valley Aquifer where 13 towns get their drinking water. According to a 2007 report by the NJDEP, the price tag on this ecosystem service is [\\$19,803 PER ACRE, PER YEAR](#) (today's dollars: \$28,912). Multiplied by 53 acres: **\$1,532,336 in value per year.**

Why a conservation sale is a regional benefit

- Drew University is struggling financially. Its campus, including the Forest, is zoned “university.” In order to sell land, it needs zoning relief from the town.
- 11,000 people have signed a [petition](#) to support a conservation sale.
- This win-win solution will provide open space for Morris County and stabilize a university whose students, professors and approximately 500 employees support area restaurants, shops, businesses (home improvement/tax payments, gyms, theaters, etc.), doctors, medical services, Morristown Medical Center and more.

What is happening now

- Appraisals of the Forest are currently underway. The matter will soon move to the County decision-makers, who will have a once in a lifetime chance to preserve an intact Forest with some of the oldest trees in northern New Jersey.
- Given the shared ecosystem benefits for wildlife, water, clean air and public enjoyment, we welcome the support of our neighboring ECs and Town Councils.