



Campaign To Preserve The Next 30,000 Acres







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Introduction

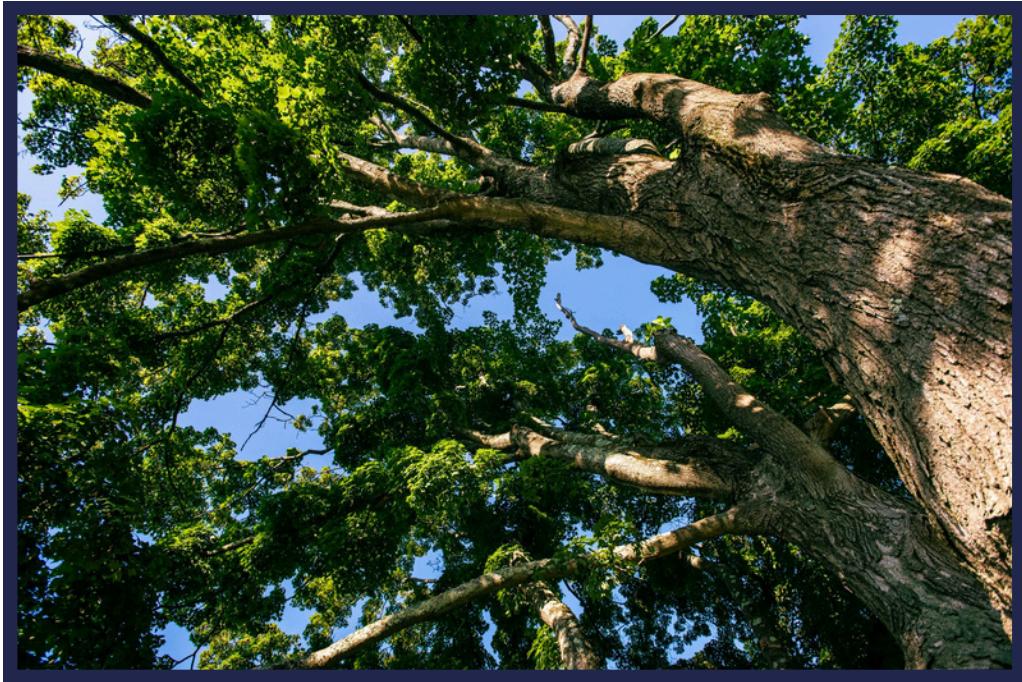
In 2002, The Land Conservancy of New Jersey (then the Morris Land Conservancy) developed a vision to preserve 30,000 acres. The vision identified broad opportunities and highlighted the impediments and the resources needed to achieve this goal. We called this effort the Preserve Now-Protect Forever campaign and engaged hundreds of supporters to join us in realizing this goal by contributing \$3.3 million to the campaign. In September 2025, we achieved this vision by preserving our 30,000th acre.





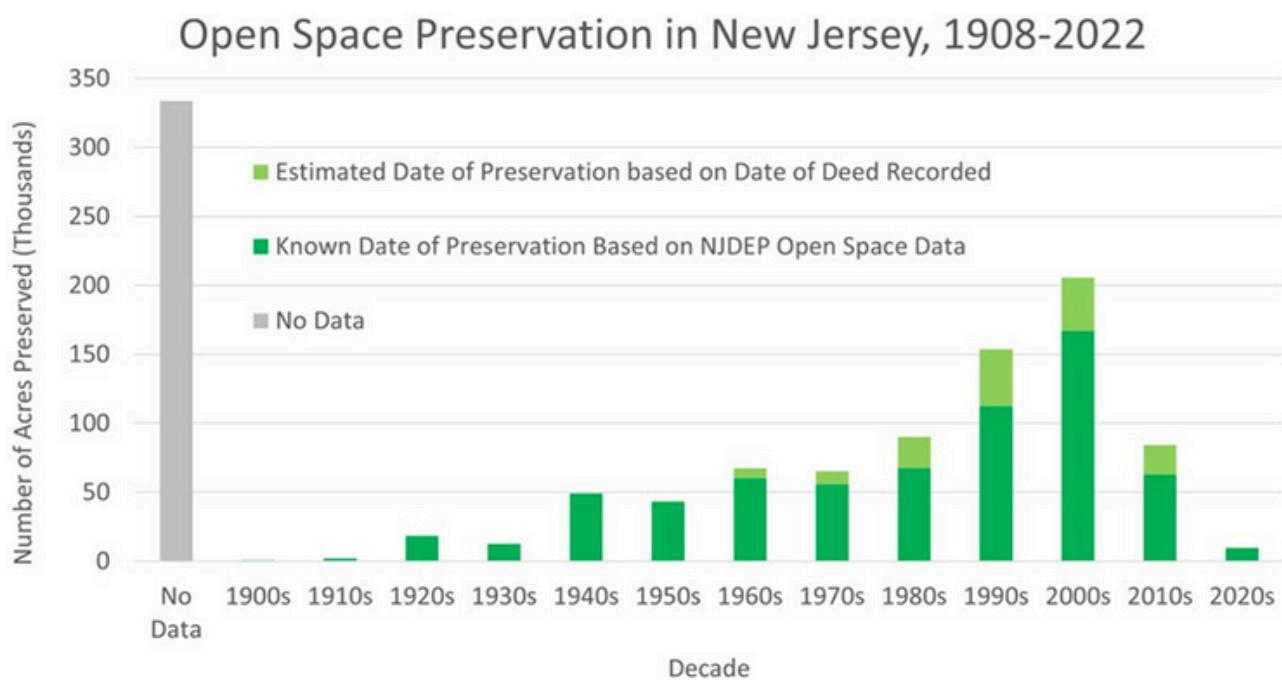
The New Vision

In 2025, The Land Conservancy joined our land conservation partners in setting a goal for New Jersey to preserve an additional 500,000 acres by 2050. Only 1.4 million acres of privately owned, undeveloped land remains to be preserved—or developed—with the state. To help us achieve this aggressive goal, The Land Conservancy is committing to preserve another 30,000 acres by 2050.

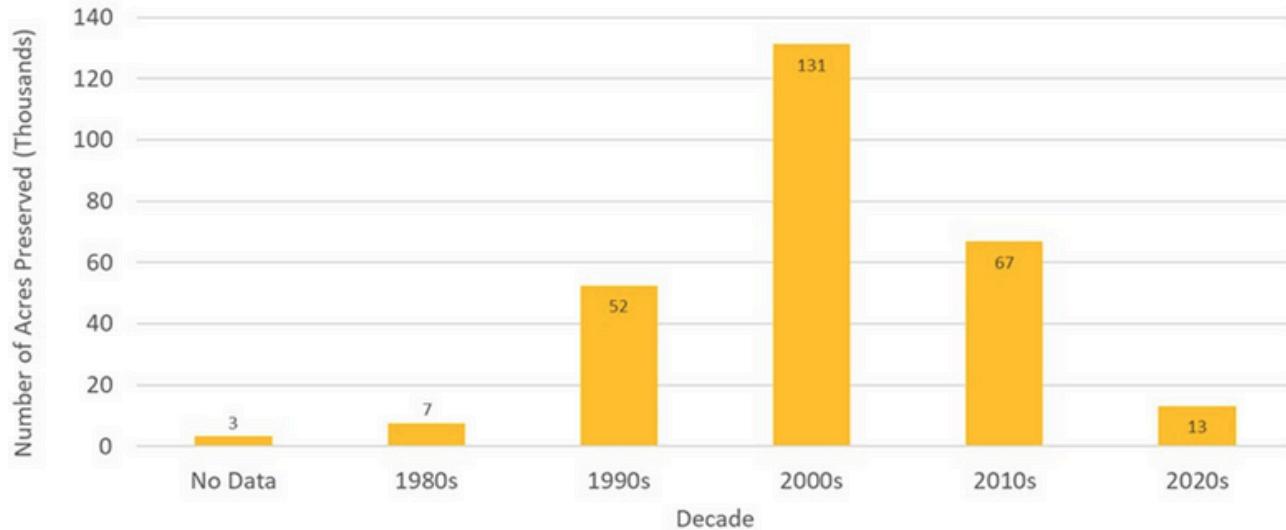


The Challenges

Achieving this ambitious statewide goal will require preserving an average of 20,000 acres of land per year over the next 25 years—a significant increase from the 5,600 acres preserved on average over the past five years. The good news is that the financial resources from local, county, state, and federal governments already exist to make this possible. The bad news is that a variety of regulatory hurdles are inhibiting this vision from being realized. Consequently, the pace of statewide land conservation has declined dramatically.



Farmland Preservation in New Jersey, 1985-2023



In 2016, The Land Conservancy completed 21 acquisition projects totaling 2,000 acres. By stark contrast, in 2025, we preserved 357 acres in five projects—a fraction of what we could achieve.

The most significant issue impeding The Land Conservancy's ability to preserve the next 30,000 acres of land is the current funding imbalance as legislated by the state's open space program administered by Green Acres, and the farmland program managed by the State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC).

Graphics are from “One Million Acres or Bust: A Quarter Century of Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation in New Jersey,” Harris et al., 2023, New Jersey Stat Policy Lab: <https://policylab.rutgers.edu/publication/one-million-acres-or-bust-initial-findings/>.

While SADC rules provide grants covering 80% of the final purchase price for farmland easements secured by counties and municipalities, the grants available to nonprofit organizations are strictly limited to 50%. This lower limit for non-governmental organizations makes it far harder for The Land Conservancy and other nonprofit organizations to secure the matching funds needed, particularly in rural areas. Although local governments are eligible for the larger 80% grants, most lack the resources or expertise to apply for SADC funding on their own, underscoring the vital yet currently constrained role of expert land trusts.

KEY STATE CONSERVATION PARTNERS

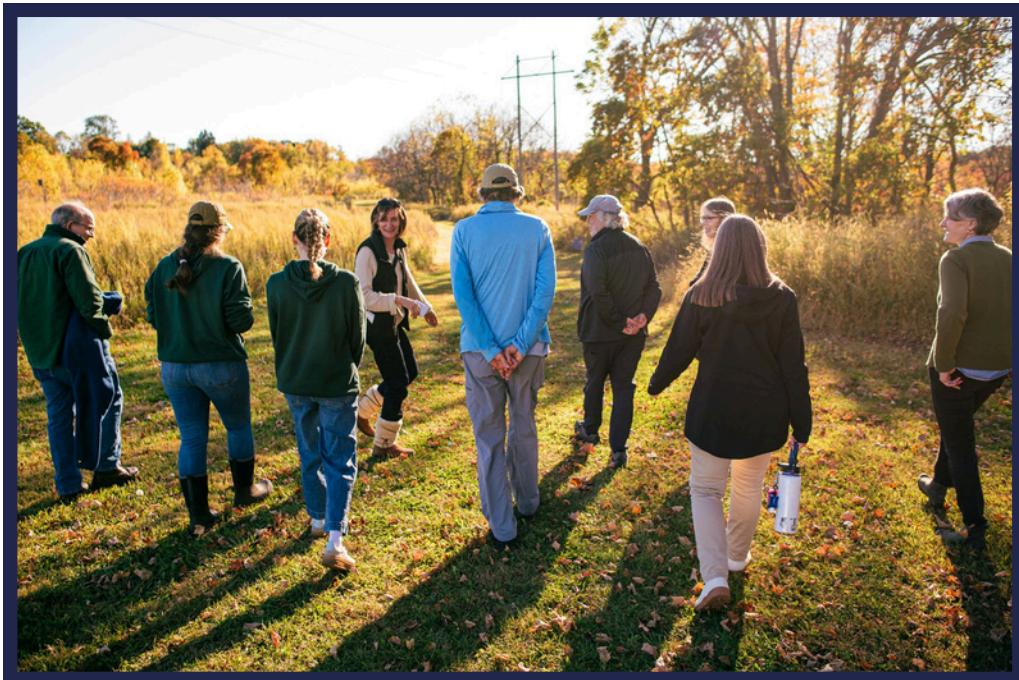
The Land Conservancy works closely with two state programs that are critical to New Jersey's preservation efforts:

State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)	
Established	1981
Primary function	Administers the Farmland Preservation Program.
Funding	Provides grants to counties, municipalities, and nonprofits for the purchase of development easements to protect farmland.
Impact	Has helped to permanently preserve more than 250,000 acres of farmland statewide.

NJDEP Green Acres Program	
Established	1961
Primary function	To preserve open space across New Jersey.
Funding	Provides grants for state, local, and nonprofit acquisitions, funding open space and park development.
Impact	Has helped preserve more than 610,000 acres of land across NJ.

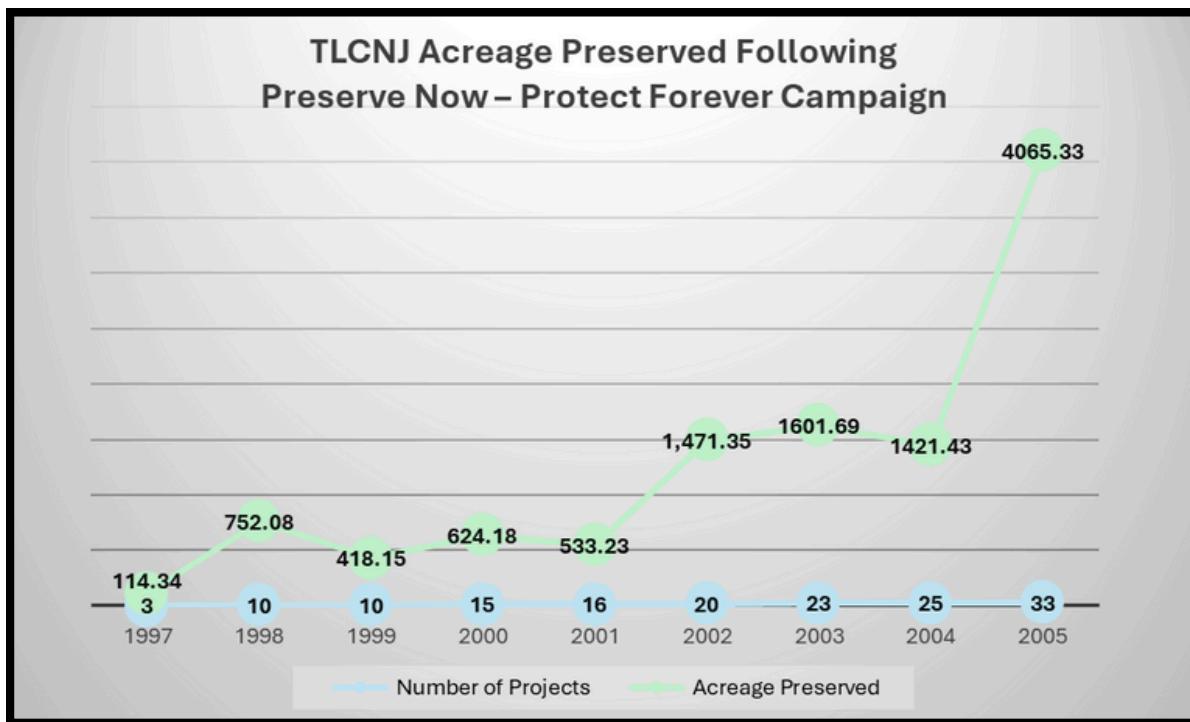
Similarly, the Green Acres rule limits grants to acquire open space to 50% of the final purchase price. Green Acres faces a significant backlog of due diligence reports—including appraisals, surveys, and environmental assessments—due to current staffing shortages. At the same time, regulations for appraisals in particular create a lack of third-party professionals willing to undertake the hurdles necessary to complete a Green Acres-certified appraisal. This shortfall dramatically slows down the pace and number of land preservation projects completed. Meanwhile, developers have the resources to act quickly, putting more land at risk of being sold for development.

The net result of the existing 50% rules, challenging appraisal process, and lack of Green Acres staff limits the amount of state open space preservation funds spent on preserving land. The backlog of unspent state land preservation funds remaining in the Green Acres and SADC programs now totals more than \$1 billion.



Record of Success

Before The Land Conservancy's Preserve Now-Protect Forever campaign in 2002, the organization had the resources to preserve only a modest amount of land each year. As a result of that successful campaign, we quickly hired additional staff, made down payments on land, and paid the due diligence expenses for preservation projects completed in 2002. This made an immediate difference the amount of land we were able to preserve, and it has continued to do so since that campaign. These results can be seen visually in the graph below:





Our Plan

To achieve the new 30,000 acre goal, The Land Conservancy will need additional resources to expedite our work.

Specifically, our organization will need to take a leadership role in facilitating four important changes to existing state programs that, if successful, will dramatically accelerate the pace of land conservation in New Jersey:

- **Allow Forest Easements:** On January 12, 2026 the legislature approved new legislation to allow for SADC funding to be used for the preservation of conservation easements on forests. We need to work with the SADC to help them expeditiously establish rules that ensure that this new program will be successful.
- **Increase State Funding Matches:** Convince the legislature to increase the funding matches available for nonprofit farmland preservation (SADC) grants and open space preservation (Green Acres) grants to 80%.
- **Increase State Staffing and Reduce Regulatory Hurdles:** Work with the Governor's office and the legislature to advocate for additional staff for Green Acres and ease regulatory hurdles to preservation. This includes addressing and resolving the issues with the Green Acres appraisal process.
- **Expand Tax Incentives:** Work with the Governor's office and the legislature to establish new tax laws to encourage landowners to conserve their properties.



FOREST EASEMENT LEGISLATION

ISSUE: There are a significant number of large, forested properties throughout New Jersey that can be permanently preserved but do not fit the state's criteria for in-fee preservation. Most often, these woodlands do not qualify for farmland funding, and in most instances, the owners are not interested in selling the properties for open space preservation (which would mandate public access to their property). In an effort to expand our land preservation opportunities, The Land Conservancy is committed to acquiring easements on these forest properties as a major component of our land preservation work.

ACTION: For the past 18 months, The Land Conservancy has worked closely with a leading New Jersey lobbying firm to advocate for legislation to fund the preservation of forest easements in the state. Under the newly approve forest easement legislation, the SADC is designated as the agency responsible for overseeing the program. They will establish rules to guide the program, provide grants to counties, towns, and nonprofit organizations to purchase forest easements, and hold some of these easements.



Approval of this legislation has opened up an exciting new avenue of preservation opportunities for The Land Conservancy. We will work with the SADC, which holds and manages many of the state's farmland easements, to develop rules to expedite implementation of the new program.

CONSERVATION TOOLS: EASEMENTS VS. FEE SIMPLE

Land trusts use two distinct legal methods to protect vital resources. Understanding this difference is key to understanding how land preservation works.

Conservation Easement (Deed Restriction)

A voluntary legal restriction placed on a property's deed by a private landowner to permanently protect specific conservation values (e.g., farmland, habitat, water quality).

- Ownership: The landowner retains full ownership of the land.
- Purpose: The easement limits development and destructive activities (e.g., building, timber harvesting, or altering watercourses) in perpetuity, even if the property is sold.
- Management: The Land Conservancy or another easement holder (like SADC or Green Acres) has the legal right and obligation to monitor the property annually to ensure the terms are followed. Farmland easements specifically mandate agricultural use.

Fee Simple Acquisition (Fee-Owned Property)

When a land trust purchases a property "in fee," it acquires all of the land rights and becomes the outright owner.

- Ownership: The property is completely owned and managed by The Land Conservancy or a partner entity.
- Purpose: These properties are preserved in perpetuity. They become TLCNJ preserves or, more often, are transferred to government agencies or other nonprofits as additions to public parks, frequently used by the public for recreation.
- Management: Staff and volunteers manage the land according to a tailored management plan (e.g., managing invasive species, creating trails, maintaining habitat).



FARMLAND & OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION LEGISLATION

ISSUE: The substantial difference in grant funding received to preserve farmland—80% for government entities versus 50% for nonprofits—is the primary obstacle preventing timely and efficient farmland preservation in areas with large amounts of unpreserved land and limited government funds. The Land Conservancy is forced to raise significantly more capital to complete these conservation projects. Unfortunately, this specific SADC rule is codified in state law, meaning the only way to allow The Land Conservancy and other nonprofits to receive equivalent 80% grants for preservation work is to introduce and pass new state legislation.

Similarly, the most significant issue hindering The Land Conservancy’s ability to preserve more open space is the 50% cap on Green Acres grants. The 50% cap applies to nonprofit organizations and to county and municipal governments, which results in a tremendous amount of staff time spent seeking matching grants from a variety of overburdened and underfunded agencies, foundations, and nonprofit partners. This slowdown is the main reason why \$700 million in funds that Green Acres has collected has not yet been spent.

ACTION: Working with a leading New Jersey lobbying firm, our team will advocate for changes to state legislation to increase funding earmarked for nonprofit preservation projects.



GREEN ACRES STAFFING & REGULATORY CHANGES

ISSUE: The Land Conservancy has access to Green Acres funds but is hindered from putting much of this money to use for land preservation. Green Acres has significant staffing deficiencies and new internal rules that dramatically slow down their ability to review the appraisals, surveys, and environmental assessments we prepare. This has dramatically slowed down our acquisition projects and puts us at a significant disadvantage compared to developers who do not need to wait for this regulatory process.

ACTION: The Land Conservancy will advocate for the Green Acres program to adopt new rules that allow licensed professional appraisers, surveyors, and environmental experts to certify their work. The state has already adopted this practice for the cleanup of contaminated sites where the reports can now be approved by privately certified Licensed Site Remediation Professionals, alleviating the need for staff review.

The Conservancy has been working to help the agency address these problems and will work with the new governor to accelerate this ponderous process.



EXPANDING TAX INCENTIVES

ISSUE: Government agencies are exempt from the realty transfer fees on properties we acquire and preserve. Exempting nonprofits from this tax will be another item in our toolbox that we can share with landowners to demonstrate that selling for conservation is advantageous. In addition, pending legislation would allow landowners to deduct the proceeds from a full value sale or bargain sale on a conservation transaction as a deduction on their state income and capital gains taxes would greatly accelerate the pace of preservation in New Jersey.

ACTION: We have joined our conservation partners in advocating for changes in legislation related to the donations of the sale of property for conservation. We will continue this effort, with our partners, in advocating to exempt landowners from paying realty transfer fees on property that land trusts preserve.

The Tools We Need

To make these legislative changes and implement the work once they are made, The Land Conservancy will hire a top-flight lobbying firm to help with the campaign to develop legislation to increase the nonprofit eligibility for SADC farmland preservation grants and Green Acres open space grants to 80%.

Now that the forest easement legislation has passed, The Land Conservancy will begin acquiring and holding forest easements. This will require:

- Hiring another land preservation staff member. This will allow us to increase our landowner outreach to find more farms, open spaces, and forest easements to acquire and preserve.
- Hiring another land stewardship staff member to monitor the easements.
- Increasing our Easement Defense Fund to be ready to defend the forest easements in the future.





LOBBYING FIRM

To advance our legislative goals, The Land Conservancy will hire a leading government affairs firm to secure an 80% eligibility rate for nonprofits seeking SADC and Green Acres grants. Their fee is \$5,000 per month per campaign. They estimate that each campaign could take 24 months.

Total needed over 24 months: \$180,000
(\$60,000 has already been raised)





LAND PRESERVATION STAFFING NEEDS

Once forest easement rules are developed by the SADC to guide the program, The Land Conservancy will begin reaching out to forest landowners to acquire forest easements. Because our existing land staff is already working at capacity, we will need to hire an additional full-time land preservation staff member to accelerate the organization's ability to identify important properties, conduct outreach to landowners, meet and negotiate with landowners, and develop contracts and funding proposals. The new land acquisition staff member will also develop partnerships to preserve lands outside of our historical focus area of northwestern New Jersey.

Total needed over 4 years: \$280,000





STEWARDSHIP STAFFING NEEDS

The Land Conservancy owns and manages only 7% of the lands we have preserved. We have been successful in donating the vast majority of land that we have acquired to government agencies that own other nearby conservation lands and have the resources to manage them. This has helped us avoid the ongoing costs of land ownership. Finding entities that want to hold conservation easements has become increasingly difficult. Government agencies and nonprofits are concerned about the long-term commitment to monitor easements on privately owned land, which makes it unlikely that we will be able to place many newly acquired easements with other willing owners in the future.

To accelerate our land preservation efforts and take advantage of the upcoming forest easement opportunity, The Land Conservancy will have to dramatically increase our capacity to hold easements. The Conservancy's current stewardship staff consists of one full-time Stewardship Manager and three seasonal interns. The Stewardship Manager is responsible for managing and protecting 2,245 acres in our 6 preserves and 5 conservation easements, and is unable to take on the added responsibilities of managing new easements. To manage the new forest easements that we will hold, The Land Conservancy will need to hire an additional stewardship staff member.



This Easement Manager will be responsible for developing baseline reports to document the important natural features of each forest easement. The Easement Manager will also monitor each easement annually to ensure that the forest is managed in compliance with the terms of the easements and will work with landowners to ensure that terms of the easements are not violated.

We will hold forest easements that are adjacent to Conservancy preserves or public parkland or contain important natural resources such as endangered species habitat, buffers to drinking water reservoirs, or water supply watersheds. We will also require that forest easement sellers manage their properties under forest stewardship plans, which focus on natural resource and wildlife habitat conservation, instead of woodland management plans, which focus on forest cutting. To accomplish this, landowners will be required to develop and follow formal forest stewardship plans prepared by a professional forester. These plans will identify endangered species present as well as important wildlife habitat. Ideally the new Easement Manager will be licensed as a forester or willing to be trained to become a forester to develop stewardship plans for our forest easements.

Total needed over 4 years: \$240,000



EASEMENT DEFENSE FUND

The Land Conservancy maintains an Easement Defense Fund within our endowment, currently valued at approximately \$750,000. While these funds, supplemented by our conservation easement insurance, adequately protect our existing portfolio, an ambitious expansion into forest easement acquisition requires greater fiscal security. To ensure we can defend a significantly larger acreage in perpetuity—and cover the \$100,000 insurance deductible for potential violations—we aim to increase this fund to \$1.5 million.

Total needed over 4 years: \$750,000





Timeline

2026

- Work with the SADC to help develop rules to establish a user-friendly Forest Easement grant program
- Hire a lobbying firm to develop new SADC legislation to increase the nonprofit grant share to 80% of farmland easement purchases.
- Hire a new land acquisition staff member to begin outreach for forest easements
- Hire a lobbying firm to develop new legislation to increase the nonprofit grant share of Green Acres grants to 80%



2027

- Hire a new Easement Manager to manage the forest easements that The Land Conservancy will hold.
- Train new Easement Manager to become a forester to develop conservation plans for the forest easements that we acquire.
- Complete effort for new SADC legislation to increase the nonprofit grant share to 80% of farmland easement purchases.
- Complete effort for new legislation to increase the nonprofit, municipal and county grant share to 80% of Green Acres purchases.
- Develop initial forest easement acquisition contracts and easement documents.

2028

- Apply for new Forest Easement grants.
- Apply for new SADC 80% nonprofit grants.
- Apply for new Green Acres 80% grants.
- Train new staff in forestry and easement defense.
- Preserve and have under new contracts at least 1,000 acres of open space and farmland.

2029

- Apply for new Forest Easement grants.
- Apply for new SADC 80% nonprofit grants.
- Apply for new Green Acres 80% grants.





Budget

PHASE I: 2026

SADC Lobbyist (<i>funds already secured</i>)	\$60,000
Green Acres Lobbyist	\$60,000
Land Preservation Staff	\$40,000
Phase I Total	\$100,000

PHASE II: 2027

SADC Lobbyist	\$60,000
Green Acres Lobbyist	\$60,000
Easement Defense Fund	\$250,000
Land Preservation Staff	\$80,000
Easement Manager	\$80,000
Phase II Total	\$530,000

PHASE III: 2028

Land Preservation Staff	\$80,000
Easement Manager	\$80,000
Forester Training	\$20,000
Easement Defense Fund	\$250,000
Phase III Total	\$430,000

PHASE IV: 2029

Land Preservation Staff	\$80,000
Easement Manager	\$80,000
Easement Defense Fund	\$250,000
Phase IV Total	\$410,000

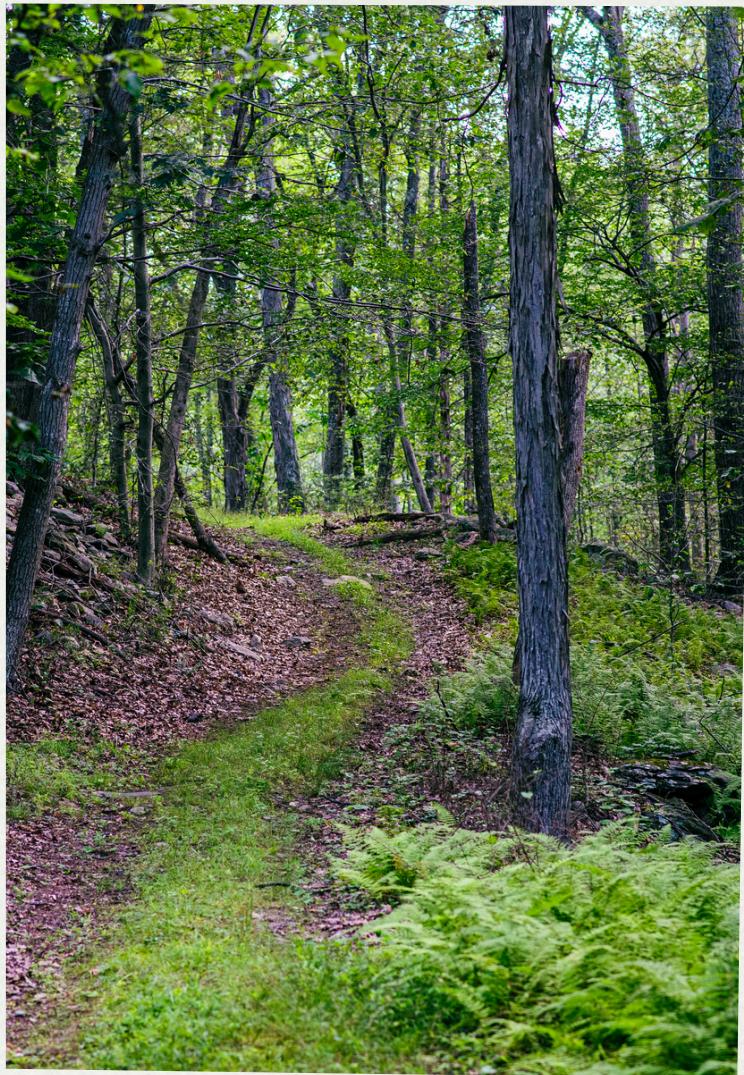
OVERALL CAMPAIGN TOTAL **\$1,470,000**

Measuring Success

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey will kick off this campaign in early 2026. We will develop a dashboard that will illustrate our progress on each component of the campaign so that our supporters can track our progress. We will measure our success by the increase in the number of acres we are able to preserve annually, with a goal of reaching an average of 1,500 acres per year by 2028 and 30,000 acres in total by 2050.







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