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DEP, Westchester Land Trust and Lewisboro Team Up To Preserve 386 Acres

Commissioner Emily Lloyd of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that New York City has joined with the Town of Lewisboro to protect 383 acres of land in Westchester County. Almost 200 acres of the property, which is owned by the Bell and Reifenhaiser families, is within New York City's Croton watershed. The deal was brokered by the Westchester Land Trust.

Under the deal, the DEP will pay the Town of Lewisboro approximately \$1 million for a conservation easement on roughly 90 acres of the property that is inside the watershed. The amount was determined to be the fair market value of the easement, under terms established by the 1997 Watershed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). As part of the conservation easement, the DEP will pay in perpetuity full taxes on the easement portion of the property, including school taxes, which equal about half of the property taxes for the unencumbered 90 acres.

Lewisboro expects to acquire the property later this year from the current owners, and the City expects to acquire the conservation easement from the town in late-2005, as outlined in the purchase contract. The entire property will be managed as a protected park by the Town under conservation easements owned by New York City and the Westchester Land Trust. Hiking trails and passive recreation will be principal uses.

"It doesn't take long to see that although the term 'win-win' may be overused, it clearly applies to this project," said Commissioner Lloyd. "About 190 acres drain into the Cross River Reservoir, one of the most important in the Croton system, and shielding that is important to our watershed protection efforts.

"The fact that DEP will be paying a portion of property taxes should make local residents happy. And the fact that the public will be able to access and enjoy all 393 acres as a protected Town park will hopefully be beneficial for everyone," said Lloyd.

Lewisboro Town Supervisor James Nordgren said, "With the support of the DEP, the Westchester Land Trust and private

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citizens, we have been able to leverage Lewisboro's open space fund and protect this most important property. We are not only protecting Lewisboro residents' drinking water, but the water of millions of other New Yorkers as well. We also hope that by working together we have helped the DEP protect more of the watershed than they could have done working alone."

Eric A. Goldstein, urban program co-director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "This critical property, which includes 200 acres of land in the highest priority for watershed protection, will now be rescued from potential development and protected for future generations thanks to the efforts of Lewisboro elected officials, the Westchester Land Trust and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. We are especially grateful to the Bloomberg Administration for committing 25 million new dollars to watershed land protection in the Croton system and for devoting one million dollars from that fund specifically for the Bell property acquisition. By lending financial support to this acquisition, the City has demonstrated long-term vision and recognized the benefits of partnerships between watershed communities and the City of New York when it comes to advancing smart land use decisions."

Westchester Land Trust Executive Director Paul Gallay said, "Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the DEP are proving to be proactive and dynamic partners in the campaign to preserve key Croton watershed lands like the Bell property. We really couldn't preserve Bell without them and we're very grateful for their help."

The City's Land Acquisition Program has been working since 1997 to purchase or acquire conservation easements or buy lands in fee simple or under easement, and to date has secured over 53,000 acres throughout Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties and in five counties in the Catskills. Additional acres have been secured with City funds through the Watershed Agricultural Council. Landowners of significant watershed properties who may be interested in selling land or easements to the City are encouraged to contact (800) 575-LAND.

The Westchester Land Trust is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving land and community character throughout Westchester. Since November 2000, the Land Trust has helped 15 municipalities, including the town of Lewisboro, establish over \$34 million in land acquisition funding reserves. WLT has protected 2,900 acres in 23 different local cities, towns and villages, since its founding in 1988.