

WINSTED

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Land trust gets \$1.65M grant from state to protect 500 acres

Winchester Land Trust has received a \$1,650,000 state grant to protect 500 acres overlooking Highland Lake.

Trust President Jennifer Perga said the grant allows the trust to acquire the land directly from a willing seller.

"This acquisition will safeguard the water quality of Highland Lake for generations to come, preserve vital wildlife habitat and provide new opportunities for outdoor recreation," she stated.

The grant was awarded through the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program, and administered by the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Highland Lake Watershed Association supported the trust with the application process.

The property, to be known as Laurel Ridge, is core forest with varied terrain, abundant wildlife and plants. Streams of pure water flow from Laurel Ridge west to Highland Lake and east to the Still River. Preserving Laurel Ridge helps protect the waters of Highland Lake and the water that flows from the lake to the Mad River, then to the Still River, which flows along the Sue Grossman Greenway, and then into the National Wild and Scenic Farmington River.

The trust will preserve Laurel Ridge in perpetuity and make it available for public use. Laurel Ridge is an ideal spot for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, nature study, bird watching, picnicking, photography, and painting.

With the support of HLWA, the trust will apply for additional grants and seek private donations to secure full funding for the project and cover stewardship expenses. The trust plans to close on the property in 2025.