



Kurmes Paradise Creek Nature Preserve

With land trust's help, family saves 400 acres for all

By Carol Hillestad
For Pocono Heritage Land Trust

Heading up Route 940 from Paradise Valley to Mount Pocono, have you ever noticed the woods that stretch away on either side?

No McMansions, no big box stores, no parking lots or congestion. For two miles, nothing but the land, cloaked in native forest, changing day by day with the seasons — peaceful and beautiful in every light, a gift of pure, natural pleasure.

It's Kurmes Paradise Creek Nature Preserve: 400 acres of undisturbed Pocono forest, preserved and open to the public.

In the early 2000s, Pocono Heritage Land Trust (phlt.org) began conversations with the owner, Deborah van Dam. Her parents had loved the place. Now that they were gone and the land was hers, she wanted to honor their memory by protecting it — and making sure that it would always remain in its natural state.

She also liked the idea of opening it to the public — hikers, anglers, photographers, dreamers — anyone who valued the natural world.

Wanting to name the preserve after her parents, van Dam and her family donated part of the value of the property. In 2005, with grants and donations from the van Dams and others, PHLT closed on the deal, and Kurmes Preserve was born.

Thanks to them, these natural woodlands remain unchanged — sloping uphill on one side of the road, and falling away downhill toward the creek valley on the other.



Louise Troutman photo



Pocono Heritage Land Trust hike leader Don Miller (in white baseball hat) points out interesting things about Kurmes Nature Preserve during an April outing.

(Louise Troutman photo)



Native rhododendron blooms in late June into early July. (Carol Hillestad photo)

Now, in early spring, the woods are running with water, protected and filtered by the forest. On the north side of the preserve, seeps, wetlands, snowmelt and rain form runs and rills that converge, creating the fast-rushing waters of Tank Creek and Yankee Run, the headwaters of Paradise Creek. On sunny afternoons, the light itself

Continued on reverse

You probably never knew Alex and Lillian Kurmes, after whom the preserve is named, nor their daughter, who made this place possible. But knowing that the world still holds generous-hearted people like them, lovers and guardians of the natural world, can still fill you with gratitude — and hope.

IF YOU GO

Information on visiting Kurmes, including a map of trails and parking areas, is at phlt.org under the tab Explore Outdoors. Trailheads are off Devil's Hole Road and Phoebe Snow Road.

About 2.75 miles of trails (including both sides of the preserve) are moderately difficult, with roots, rocks, and some wet crossings. There are no facilities at trailheads. Please pack out what you pack in. Leashed dogs of considerate owners are welcome. Tank Creek is designated an Exceptional Value coldwater fishery, and Yankee Run is a High Quality coldwater fishery — catch-and-release fishing permitted in season, with proper licenses.

Note: A legacy private club hunts here in season. Hikers should wear fluorescent orange.



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Continuing from front

seems to sparkle among the healthy hemlock and rhododendron thickets along the creeks.

Just steps from the Devil's Hole trailhead, a vernal pool is alive with salamanders, wood frogs and spring peepers — nature's spring choir, singing the ancient song of new life. On the south side, the woods are mixed hardwoods, mostly oaks, with a rich understory of our native mountain laurel.

Soon, early wildflowers such as jack-in-the-pulpit and trout lily will raise their heads. The fresh, green leaves of skunk cabbage and false hellebore will unfold, seemingly overnight, in wet places. And later, toward the end of May, the delicate pink and white of mountain laurel will spangle the hillsides along Route 940.

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A spring walk around the Kurmes Preserve can get you a glimpse of these beauties of nature:



Trailing arbutus, otherwise known as mayflower plant (Epigaea repens), grows at Kurmes. (Contributed photo)



The common dog violet (Viola riviniana) decorates the forest floor at Kurmes. (Contributed photo)



A bird's nest waiting for a new tenant. (Louise Troutman photo)



Wood frogs can be identified by their small size and the dark "mask" on their faces. (Carol Hillestad photo)



POCONO HERITAGE LAND TRUST

ABOUT CONSERVING LAND

Founded in 1984, Pocono Heritage Land Trust is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the natural and cultural heritage of the Pocono region by conserving land and inspiring people to care for, enjoy and explore their natural world. PHLT works cooperatively with landowners to preserve their property and leave a legacy of protected natural habitats, healthy forest, clean waterways and open space for future generations.

You can help Pocono Heritage Land Trust protect land for the future. Learn about membership and volunteer opportunities at **www.phlt.org**.

PLEASE DONATE to preserve important lands and natural resources in the Poconos, for generations to come.

- \$25** provides supplies for one trash cleanup day, or one planting of wildflower seeds for meadow habitat restoration.
- \$50** buys tools for managing invasive plants on volunteer days.
- \$150** prints 500 trail brochures to guide visitors on preserves.
- \$500** builds a streamcrossing bridge to improve trail access.
- \$1,500** covers the cost of an appraisal, the first step in acquiring new land for preservation.
- \$3,000** funds construction of a sign kiosk on a new preserve.
- \$5,000** enables development of a new nature trail network, including trail marking, clearing, signage and maps.

Donate online at phlt.org/donate.html

or clip this form and send it with your check made out to Pocono Heritage Land Trust to:

PHLT, 1539 Cherry Lane Road, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301

Name: _____

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