



PRESS RELEASE

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SARATOGA COUNTY ANNOUNCES OPENING OF NEW TRAIL

Graphite Range Community Forest Offers a Variety of Recreational Opportunities in a Historic Setting

WILTON, NY – Saratoga County officials today announced the opening of the Graphite Range Community Forest (GRCF), the newest addition to Saratoga County’s more than 300 miles of trails.

The community-managed forest is owned by the County and maintained by local land trust Saratoga PLAN (Preserving Land and Nature). Stretching across 200+ acres and containing over five miles of multi-use trails, this forest will be a recreational hub for the surrounding communities offering a space for environmental education and economic benefits for the region – all while helping to permanently protect the ecological value and resilience of the southern foothills of the Adirondacks, an area vital for regional natural resource connectivity.

Nestled amid the picturesque landscapes of the Palmertown Range and within the Towns of Wilton and Greenfield, GRCF is designed to cater to outdoor enthusiasts, offering various activities such as hiking, mountain biking, trail running, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, birdwatching, nature photography, and more. This accessible trail system is located just a few miles from downtown Saratoga Springs.

“We’re thrilled to introduce the Graphite Range Community Forest to our community and visitors alike,” said Theodore T. Kusnierz, Jr., Chairman of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors (Moreau). “The trail is a welcome addition to Saratoga County’s already robust trail system. Our goal is to promote an appreciation for the natural beauty in our region while fostering a sense of camaraderie among outdoor enthusiasts. We believe this trail will become a beloved destination for years to come. We thank the Winter family, Saratoga PLAN, GRCF advisory committee, and the many community members who made this project possible.”

Key features of the Graphite Range Community Forest include:

1. **Scenic Beauty:** The trail winds through lush forest, a meadow, and along babbling streams, offering breathtaking views of the local flora and fauna.
2. **Historic Features:** Visitors will enjoy first-hand this historic, geological treasure. Between 1908-1922, part of the property was used for mining graphite. Traces of the operation are still visible, including mine shaft openings.

3. **Diverse Terrain:** With a mix of gently sloping paths and challenging ascents, this trail offers terrain to suit every level of hiker and mountain biker.
4. **Accessibility:** Designed with inclusivity in mind, GRCF boasts well-maintained paths for visitors with varying physical abilities.
5. **Safety First:** Safety is a top priority at the GRCF, with clearly marked routes and well-designed trails to ensure a secure and enjoyable outdoor experience.

Supervisor Joe Grasso (Charlton), Chair of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors Trails and Open Space Committee said, "The opening of the Graphite Range Community Forest is a fine example of Saratoga County's long-standing commitment to preserving our county's open space and creating outdoor recreational opportunities for our residents and visitors of all ages. I thank all our partners for their collaboration and steadfast work in developing a unique trail system our community members will enjoy for generations."

Supervisor John Lant (Wilton) said, "The opening of the Graphite Range Community Forest brings an exciting opportunity for Wilton residents to experience nature and history close to home. Its convenient trailhead located off Route 9 offers a gateway to nature while providing trail users access to nearby restaurants and businesses."

Supervisor Kevin Veitch (Greenfield) said, "Greenfield residents will have additional opportunities to get outdoors this winter with the opening of the Graphite Range Community Forest. Whether hiking, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, the new trail offers ample recreational opportunities for families and residents of all ages."

Robert K. Davies, Executive Director of Saratoga PLAN said, "We're happy to have been a part of such a unique and collaborative conservation project. Conservation is a team sport, and this project is no exception. GRCF is the culmination of many years and multiple partners coming together. We congratulate and thank the vision of the Winter Family and Saratoga County's willingness to acquire and own such a unique forest project. We also thank Saratoga County for trusting PLAN to manage this valuable asset for the benefit of the entire region. GRCF will serve as a gateway to the Adirondack Foothills and is an important piece of the puzzle in realizing the Sarah B. Foulke Friendship Trails network envisioned by the Palmertown Partners to connect Saratoga Springs to Moreau State Park. Saratoga PLAN, along with all the Graphite Range partners, is excited to see this Community Forest become a premier outdoor recreation destination and a forest for the entire community."

Molly Kalil, member of the GRCF Advisory Committee said, "Over the past two years, members of the GRCF Advisory Committee have worked together to develop a management plan supporting a variety of community groups, local organizations, conservation efforts and outdoor activities this 200+ acre property will soon serve. It's very exciting to watch it unfold and to know that soon these trails will be open for so many people to enjoy. The GRCF Advisory Committee represents a diverse demographic from youth organizations like Open Air Sports and Saratoga Shredders to environmental educators, geologists, historians, and local outdoor enthusiasts. We've had the privilege of working with neighboring property owners, including Skidmore College and the DEC, to create a recreational hub for

the surrounding area. We sincerely appreciate the vision of the Winter Family and the work of Saratoga PLAN, OSI and Saratoga County to bring this property to life."

"GRCF will remain forested forever because of the Community Forest Program (CFP) and the dedicated efforts of our conservation partners," said Neal Bungard, Eastern Region Community Forest and Open Space Program Manager with the USDA Forest Service. "Not only is the land now protected from conversion to non-forest uses, but it will be managed by a community involved and supported CFP, which will ensure that any activity on the property is conducted in furtherance of the CFP while continuing to provide the many public benefits this forest provides to the local community."

Tatum Justice, Northeast Land Project Manager at the Open Space Institute (OSI) said, "The Open Space Institute celebrates the Winter family for their vision and commitment to this project, and our partners at Saratoga PLAN and Saratoga County. We also thank the U.S. Forest Service's Community Forest Program for making it possible to utilize federal resources to improve communities. Finally, we thank the GRCF Advisory Committee, which filled a critical need in defining what this forest could mean to the community. Stepping onto the land of the Graphite Range Community Forest allows us to see the efforts of these diverse groups and people coalescing into a landmark moment for this region, one that will provide multifaceted benefits to visitors of all interest areas and abilities. We at the Open Space Institute hope the creation of this community forest brings a new relevance to the act of conservation and the impact people can have when we work together toward a shared and worthy goal."

GRCF stands on land that the Winter family generously sold to Saratoga County through what's known as a "bargain sale." This unique method combines the sale of land at a decreased price with a charitable donation (the value between the fair market price and sale price). The project was then funded using a mix of grants and private donations, including a \$120,000 grant from the Saratoga County Farmland and Open Space Program, a \$391,000 grant from the U.S. Forestry Service, and over \$215,000 from private donors. Alongside this, OSI, Saratoga PLAN, and the GRCF Advisory Committee provided considerable support. The project's cost of nearly \$1 million was significantly offset by these grants and private donations.

Former landowners Ethan and Anne Winter said, "This project has been a labor of love, inspired by tremendous community support and generous contributions from nearly 200 families and local businesses. We thank Saratoga County, Open Space Institute, Saratoga PLAN and the USDA Community Forest Program for sharing the vision and making public access possible. Our family also wishes to recognize the trail volunteers, gracious neighbors, and many skilled hands who helped to install the new trails, bridges, fences, boardwalks, markers, interpretive signage, and parking area. We hope Graphite Range Community Forest can be a catalyst for more multi-use trails that get people outside in nature and build support for strategic land conservation in our area. It all about Community building trails, and Trails building community."

For more information about Saratoga County trails, please visit www.SaratogaCountyNY.gov/trails.

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