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NEWS FROM THE PEQUANNOCK RIVER COALITION

To all:

Some news on open space in West Milford below.

Also, an update on our Saturday planting. Appelt Park received just a bit of snow. With any luck it will melt off over the next couple of days and the planting will go off as scheduled. We will make a final decision tomorrow.

Thanks!

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West Milford closes on Nosenzo Pond Park

Sunday, March 20, 2011

BY DAVID M. ZIMMER

Suburban Trends

STAFF WRITER

The township has completed the \$756,000 acquisition of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson's Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) day camp property off Nosenzo Pond Road.

The purchase of the 26.5-acre former campsite utilized \$500,000 in open space funding from Passaic County, \$81,000 from West Milford's open space tax, and \$175,000 that was allocated to the township by the state's Green Acres land conservation program. It was finalized on Friday, March 11, according to Township Attorney Fred Semrau.

Members of the Township Council, which approved the purchase in December 2009, highlighted the recreational features of the property when deliberating over the purchase among themselves and with the public. Once the home of Camp Alexander, a summertime haven for disabled children and their families, the CYO property is already fitted with a basketball court, a pavilion, and two existing ball fields.

Local officials said the existence of the amenities was vital given the strict restrictions on development in the Highlands Preservation Area that encompasses the entirety of West Milford. Mayor Bettina Bieri, for one, has

called for the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Highlands Council to coordinate to develop some construction allowances for municipal government that could be pitched to the state Legislature.

The site, referred to by some as Nosenzo Pond Park, also features a playground and its trademark 6-acre pond, which recently had its containment structure renovated in a quarter-million-dollar project. West Milford required the execution and certification of DEP-mandated repairs to the 265-foot-long, earth and concrete dam before the transfer to avoid liability issues and additional expenditures. The state department's Bureau of Dam Safety and Flood Control classified the dam as a significant hazard in September 2007.

In addition to its athletics capabilities, the CYO property includes 14 acres of forest, which will provide opportunities for resource-based recreation and critical conserved habitat for at-risk species like barred owl, bobcat, and great blue heron. Surrounded by several township properties, school board lands, and the West Milford High and Macopin Middle schools, the site also allows for convenient usage by the school district, creating the potential to be used as a satellite location for sporting tournaments.

The town's newest park, which is located in a critical, Tier-3 wellhead protection area for drinking water, was last assessed a valuation of \$260,100. However, it paid no taxes under the ownership of the diocese, meaning the land transfer will have no adverse impact on taxation rates in the municipality.

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