

Acton. Three Rivers Land Trust (3RLT) Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), and the Town of Acton collaborated to protect 243 acres of fields, apple orchards and forestland on Goat Hill in Acton. The orchards have produced apples for the wholesale market for 80 years, and the hilltop has long been a cherished destination for year-round and seasonal residents of the region.

“This complicated project has been three years in the making, but it is hard to imagine a better outcome,” said Adam Bishop, Farmland Protection Program Director at Maine Farmland Trust.

When the former owners of the property decided to sell, many local residents worried that the property, with its expansive views, would be subdivided for residential development. Goat Hill is one of the highest elevations in Acton, and offers stunning 360-degree views of nearby lakes, the Presidential Range and Mt. Washington to the west, and to the ocean to the east. 3RLT, MFT and the Town worked together to ensure that the property would remain in agriculture and remain an important scenic site for the local community.

The majority of the fields and orchards have been divided between two new farm owners. One buyer from the local community will restore the former pick-your-own apple orchard that he worked in every summer as a teenager growing up in the area. The second buyer will expand the orchards to produce apples for a hard cider operation. Both farm parcels are now protected by conservation easements, which will ensure this productive land remains available for farming and forestry into the future.

“We are absolutely thrilled to have finally completed the purchase phase of this project,” said Jean Noon, President of 3RLT. “Goat Hill is one of those truly spectacular places that take your breath away. Thank you Acton and Maine Farmland Trust for being such great partners!”

However, the protection of the orchard parcel was dependent on Three Rivers Land Trust, in cooperation with the Town, acquiring the summit of Goat Hill which will become a local park. The successful purchase of the scenic summit parcel was made possible, in large part by the Town of Acton (pop. 6,000) passing its first-ever bond issue for conservation, and contributing \$25,000 from earnings of the Town Forest. Many generous donations from local year round and seasonal residents supported the Land Trust’s contribution. In addition, the Town expects to receive a federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to assist with the purchase and the construction of a parking area and universally accessible trail to the hilltop.

"The town of Acton is very fortunate that Three Rivers Land Trust (3RLT) has a passion and foresight to preserve special land when the opportunity arises," said Elise Miller, first select person for the Town of Acton. "When the taxpayers of Acton voted in June of 2016 to approve the purchase of Goat Hill, partnered with 3RLT, it was a win/win result. A spectacular piece of land is now protected and open to the public for mountain and lake views while recreating with family and friends."

Both MFT and 3RLT look forward to the restoration of the pick your own orchard, a cider tasting room, and the development of the public park and trail, all of which will ensure that, in the future, Goat Hill will remain a popular and agricultural destination in western York County.

About Three Rivers Land Trust: 3RLT covers Acton, Alfred, Lebanon, Shapleigh, and Sanford/Springvale. Building Stronger, Healthier Communities through the conservation of natural and working landscapes. 3rlt.org

About Maine Farmland Trust: Maine Farmland Trust is a statewide, member-powered nonprofit organization working to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance farming. Since its founding in 1999, the Trust has helped to protect over 54,000 acres of Maine's precious farmland and provided over 550 farm families with critical services. More information at mainefarmlandtrust.org.