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SHIRLEY HEINZE LAND TRUST ADDS 100 ACRES TO AMBLER FLATWOODS NATURE PRESERVE

Shirley Heinze Land Trust added more than 100 acres to Ambler Flatwoods Nature Preserve in two transactions conducted before the end of last year. The new additions increase the total amount of protected land at the property to 310 acres. Ambler Flatwoods is a dedicated Indiana state nature preserve located in LaPorte County near Michigan City.

The Trust purchased 90 acres from the Gordon Robison Family Trust on December 29, 2009. Acquisition partners were the Indiana Heritage Trust, the Division of Nature Preserves of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and the National Resource Damage Fund, all of whom contributed funds toward the purchase.

Most of the property is bottomland forest exhibiting the characteristics of boreal flatwoods, one of the rarest natural communities in Indiana. Running through the forest is the Lubke Arm of White Ditch, a tributary of Lake Michigan. The remainder of the property is a well-established pine-and-oak tree farm and abandoned farmland that provides a high-quality buffer for the existing nature preserve and holds potential for restoration to a more natural state.

In a separate transaction completed in October 2009, the Trust accepted a donation of 13 acres from Theodore Werre, a New Albany attorney, who grew up on the property when

it was part of his grandparents' farm. Werre, who died on January 3, wanted to ensure that the property would be protected, and he made the donation one of his final acts.

“We are delighted with these new additions to Ambler Flatwoods,” says Kris Krouse, executive director of Shirley Heinze Land Trust. “An intensive boreal flatwoods conservation planning project, which we launched in 2008, helped us identify high-quality parcels and educate the public on the importance of preservation. These two acquisitions are direct results of that effort. The Robison property, at 90 acres, represents the largest single acquisition in our history.”

“Both these properties were long-held family estates,” continues Krouse. “It was the children who grew up on them who were the most determined to see them preserved. I was very moved to hear their tales of youthful adventures in these woods, and I’m pleased that Shirley Heinze Land Trust has been able to fulfill their dreams of protecting this land so that their descendants and the general public will have the opportunity to continue to enjoy them, now and in the future.”

Paul Quinlan, the Trust’s stewardship chief, looks forward to managing the new properties. “These new parcels,” he says, “provide both high-quality natural land and important buffer. We have numerous restoration tasks underway at Ambler, including reforestation and invasive control projects, and we rely heavily on volunteers to assist us. We will incorporate this new land into those efforts.

“This amazing flatwoods ecosystem harbors relict populations of plant species typical of more northern forests, and it provides habitat for at least 15 state-listed plants and 40 considered rare in the Chicago Region,” he says. “There is also a diverse variety of reptiles and amphibians, and it is a haven for mammals and birdlife. I am confident these new parcels will provide additions to our species lists.”

Ambler Flatwoods is open to the public year round for hiking and other passive outdoor activities. Small parking lots exist at the northern trailhead on C.R. 900N (Freyer Road)

and the southern trailhead on C.R. 600W (Meer Road). Parking is available at both trailheads. A short loop trail exists at the northern end, and a longer hiking trail connects the two trailheads. Motorized vehicles and mountain bikes are not permitted. Directions to the preserve can be found on the Heinze Trust website, www.heinzetrust.org.

Shirley Heinze Land Trust has been protecting natural land in the southern Lake Michigan watershed since 1981. It manages nearly 1,200 acres in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. Included in the Heinze Trust's holdings are examples of the entire spectrum of natural communities in this area: tallgrass prairie, high dune, oak savanna, boreal flatwoods, dune-and-swale, woodlands, marshes, swamps, ponds, fens, and riparian habitat. Five Heinze Trust properties are dedicated Indiana State Nature Preserves.

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PHOTO CAPTION: Winter woods at Ambler Flatwoods Nature Preserve.