

Portsmouth forest gets national recognition

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The Aquidneck Land Trust's Oakland Forest in Portsmouth late last month was inducted into the national Old-Growth Forest Network.

Sarah Robb Grieco, northeast regional manager for the Old-Growth Forest Network, presented a plaque to ALT Executive Director Chuck Allott to celebrate the dedication of the forest.

Oakland Forest includes a regionally ecologically unique old-growth American beech forest, with trees estimated to be between 200 and 300 years old based on tree coring completed in 2000. It was conserved by ALT with the support of the community that same year.

In addition to beech, the forest includes old-growth tree forms of other species, including white oak and red maple. The property was once part of a "gentleman's farm" owned by the Vanderbilt family in the 1800 and 1900s.

There is a row of 100-year-old rhododendrons running through the forested part of the old estate. The property includes a short 0.6-mile loop trail that traverses a 10-acre meadow and 20 acres of the old-growth beech forest. More information on the trail rules and other ALT trails can be found at ait.org.

"The story of Oakland Forest is a true grassroots conservation success story and one of the first properties ALT worked to save over 20 years ago," ALT Conservation Director Alex Chuman said. "Once slated for development into condominiums, ALT worked



Oakland Forest in Portsmouth, preserved by the Aquidneck Land Trust, will become the first Rhode Island forest to join the Old-Growth Forest Network.

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with the community to purchase the land to forever protect this unique resource. It is a truly special thing to have an old-growth forest here on Aquidneck Island, one that is now recognized to be part of a national network."

The mission of the Old-Growth Forest Network is to connect people with nature by creating a national network of protected, mature, publicly accessible, native forests. The organization's goal is to preserve at least one forest in

every county in the United States that can sustain a forest, estimated to be 2,370 out of a total of 3,140 counties.

OGFN's program works to identify forests for the network, ensure their protection from logging and connect people to these properties to experience. OGFN also educates about the extraordinary ecological and human wellness benefits of old-growth forests and speaks out regarding immediate threats to specific ancient forests.

Founded in 2012, OGFN has more than 145 forests in 27 states currently in the network. Oakland Forest will be the first Rhode Island forest included.

It will join other northeast forests such as Mohawk Trail State Forest in Franklin County, Massachusetts; Belden Forest in Hartford County, Connecticut; and Zoar Valley Unique Area in Cattaraugus County, New York. The full list of forests in the Network may be viewed at oldgrowthforest.net.

"We are thrilled to be welcoming this beautiful and important forest to the network as the forest representative for Newport County and our first Rhode Island forest," Robb Grieco said. "We applaud Aquidneck Land Trust for their work in preserving this special forest for generations to come."

OGFN depends on a volunteer in each county to help identify and induct forests into the network. Nathan Cornell of Warwick and Rachel Briggs of Chepachet are volunteer supporters of the Old Growth Forest Network and are county coordinators for Newport County. Interested volunteers are welcome to contact OGFN through oldgrowthforest.net.