

Center for Wildlife to Purchase Water District Land



The York Water District is in the process of selling land to the Center for Wildlife so it will be able to expand its operations and be able to stay put instead of having to relocate. From left, center staff, Emily Calhoun, Erin Burns, Diana Dumas, Kristen Lamb, and Don Neumann and Gary Stevens from the water district. Photo by Deb Cram/Seacoastonline

- **By Deborah McDermott**
dmcdermott@seacoastonline.com

Posted Jan. 19, 2016 at 3:02 PM

YORK – The Center for Wildlife has found a new home in York that will allow it to expand its services and help more injured wildlife. And the good news is, it’s just moving next door to its current Mountain Road home. The York Water District, which leases land where the center is now located, is entering into an agreement that will allow the center to purchase eight acres of the land. The purchase is part of a larger capital campaign the center intends to launch within a year to secure funding for an expanded operation.



Kristen Lamb, executive director of the Center for Wildlife in York, holds a 12-year-old falcon named Freyja while Don Neumann of the York Water District looks on. The district is in the process of selling land to the center so it will be able to expand operations and stay put. Photo by Deb Cram/Seacoastonline

“The Center for Wildlife wants to stay on this property,” said Director Kristen Lamb. “This will allow us to expand our operations, including our environmental education work. And it’s such a peaceful place for wildlife to recover. We’re very excited at the prospect.”

Water District Superintendent Don Neumann said the district has been leasing a 14-acre parcel to the center for a number of years. The center’s lease expires in several years, and the staff and board wanted to own land outright. In recent years, they had been looking at land throughout the Seacoast.

The center hired an engineering firm to determine if any of the parcel fell outside of the district’s watershed, as Neumann suspected, and found eight acres did. “So the suggestion came up, would we consider selling it to the center to own free and clear,” he said. “That way they can build buildings of their own choosing with no impact on the watershed.”

The district and center staff are just at the beginning stages of preparing a purchase and sale agreement that will outline not only the cost but timelines for specific commitments by both parties. For instance, said Neumann, some of the current center buildings are in the watershed. The center will have to agree to demolish or move those buildings and “put everything back to its natural state.” On the other hand, he said, the district is willing to work with the center on a generous timeline for that work.

Also contingent on the sale, the center needs to get approval for its plans from state and local permitting agencies. This will require the center to undertake some engineering studies, particularly for septic and well.

“I really see this as a positive thing, and the board has supported us moving forward,” he said of the district board of trustees, which has supported the idea of selling the parcel but has not yet taken official action. “Everyone gets a little bit of what they want.”

Lamb and Neumann both agree it could take at least six months or longer before the purchase takes place. Lamb said the center has several lead donors who have agreed to contribute toward the purchase price. A crowdfunding campaign is expected to launch sometime in February to match the donors’ gift for the land acquisition, she said.

"We're excited to continue to update the community as this project moves forward," she said.

In the past five years, there has been a "huge spike" in the number of animals the center is treating. The center currently offers internships to 30 students, and that number is growing. The center's board has been working with Opus Advisors on the larger capital campaign to establish a "strategic agenda" for the center's expansion, she said.

"There is such a need for our work," she said. "To be able to match the land and facilities appropriately with the quality and quantity of work we're doing, it's very exciting," she said.

"As far as we're concerned it's making a good situation better," Neumann said. "We want to help them in any way we can, and this is a natural next step."

Seacoastonline Link: <http://www.seacoastonline.com/article/20160119/NEWS/160119153>