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Black Creek site's historic status affirmed

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A New Jersey appeals court on Friday rejected Vernon Township's challenge to the historic designation of a Native American site that has been at the center of a development battle.

The ruling by a three-judge panel affirms a decision in April 2002 by the Department of Environmental Protection to give historic status to the 40-acre Black Creek site to protect it from development.

Vernon officials had hoped to turn the land into sports fields, but the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Indians wanted to preserve the area.

The panel upheld the DEP, saying Commissioner Bradley Campbell complied with state law when he designated Black Creek as a historic site.

"The tribe is extremely pleased with this decision, and, at the same time, grateful to Commissioner Campbell, as well as to the hundreds of supporters who have stood by the tribe during this long battle," said **Greg Werkheiser**, the tribe's lawyer. "Ten thousand years of human history are now saved, not just for Native Americans, but for all citizens who respect history and want to preserve it for future generations."

Vernon bought the 40-acre Black Creek plot in 2000 as part of a \$1.1 million purchase of 180 acres. The township wanted to develop sports fields and hiking trails on the land, but a local archaeologist, Richard Patterson, led a drive to save the property, which was found to hold thousands of Native American artifacts.

The U.S. Interior Department gave Black Creek historic landmark status in 2002.

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