

# OpenSpaceChronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Autumn 2007

## Farmland Preservation & Open Space – Working towards common goals...

In an effort to bridge communication between groups with an interest in Hopewell Valley's preservation, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) highlights an upcoming ballot question that has important implications for the farming and open space preservation communities and explores ways in which these two groups can work together.

New Jersey loses more than 40 acres of open space to development every day. According to Rutgers University, within just 25 years, all the state's remaining green spaces not preserved will be lost to development.

On November 6, 2007, New Jersey voters will be asked to approve the Green Acres, Farmland, Blue Acres and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2007. By authorizing the state to issue \$200 million in general bonds, the act would provide much-needed funds to temporarily continue New Jersey's open space, farmland and historic preservation programs and to support the Blue Acres program to purchase flood-prone properties.

A coalition of over 90 organizations including land trusts and agricultural groups from across the state have united to form the "New Jersey – Keep It Green Campaign." The coalition is advocating for the renewal and strengthening of the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) in 2007, a financing authority that manages funds for Green Acres, farmland and historic preservation programs.

In the meantime, The Bond Act of 2007 (ballot question #3) will temporarily provide funding for these programs

while the Governor and State Legislature identify and adopt a long-term funding source for the GSPT. The \$200 million bond issue on the November ballot would be divided as follows:

- \$109 million to open space preservation.
- \$73 million for farmland preservation.
- \$6 million for historic preservation.
- \$12 million for Blue Acres, a new program to acquire property in flood-prone areas.



Batcha Farm - a FoHVOS Preserve.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is adding its voice to the chorus of environmental groups calling for approval of Question No. 3, pointing out that farmland is an important form of preservation, and that benefits include economic investment as well as environmental.

### Farmland and Open Space Defined

Farms or development easements that are acquired through the Farmland Preservation Program will forever be protected for agricultural use. For residents, farmland preservation is an important part of keeping Hopewell Valley green and prosperous. Preserved farmland limits urban sprawl, protects

our water and soils, provides us with an abundance of locally grown farm products and maintains our connection to the land and the longstanding agricultural traditions that have always been a part of this area.

Open space, on the other hand, is the protection of natural resources, and ecologically sensitive land, such as wetlands, wildlife habitat, waterways, slopes, mature woodlands, large stands of forests and ridge lines in their natural state. The land trust movement is growing in the United States. There are over 1,500 land trusts across the nation and it is estimated that a new land trust is started every week. Land trusts, as in the case with FoHVOS, are not-for-profit conservation organizations that work to preserve land for its natural, scenic, historical and productive values.

### Steps to Preservation

Another aspect of preservation is how it is done. People often ask, how is open space acquired and is there any difference in methods used by the different groups acquiring the land?

Landowners who want to continue farming their land can sell a development easement. When landowners sell development easements, they still own their land but sell the rights to develop it for anything other than agriculture. Those deed restrictions remain in force for any future owners. Landowners can sell the development rights on their land to the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), County Agriculture Development Boards, municipalities or nonprofit organizations such as FoHVOS. The sale price is based on the

*Continued on Page 2*

# Farmland Preservation & Open Space

*Continued from Page 1*

difference between what a developer would pay for the land and what it is worth for agriculture. This is the most typical – with most farms entering the Farmland Preservation Program through the sale of development rights.

Some farmers and landowners may want to donate the development rights for all or a portion of the land they own. In certain cases, this can provide significant income and estate tax benefits. The sale of development rights does not, however, make farmland public property. The public has no right to access or use a deed-restricted farm without the landowner's consent.

If a landowner wants to sell a farm outright, the SADC can purchase it at fair-market value under its fee simple program. The SADC then auctions the farm to a private owner with agricultural deed restrictions in place that ensure its permanent preservation. This option also provides other farmers with opportunities to purchase land at reasonable prices that reflect only farmland values, not development potential.

In comparison, open space conservation projects often involve many partners. FoHVOS often partners with the State of New Jersey, Mercer County, Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough, Pennington Borough and other nonprofits, to purchase critical pieces of land. Other times, land or easements are donated by landowners committed to preserving the natural beauty of their land. Landowners may choose to donate or sell all or a portion of their property outright, or a conservation easement on the land. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement that limits the uses of land in order to protect its conservation and/or historical value. When landowners sell or donate conservation easements, they retain private ownership of their land.

Once a land trust holds a conservation easement on a property, the terms of the easement will apply to all of the future owners of the land. Once the land is preserved, the real work of the land

trust begins – stewardship. Stewardship essentially means management; it is how a land trust takes care of its land. FoHVOS is currently working towards implementing a stewardship management plan for its 22 preserves held.

## Equally Challenged

In many ways, agricultural preservation and conservation groups face similar challenges. Both open space and farmland preservation in NJ is impacted by many issues including government funding, regulation and development pressures.

The farming community deals with the added pressure of the declining economics of farming. Many small to medium sized farmers face significant hurdles to marketing and selling their products. This is due to area food stores and institutions such as schools dealing mainly with large scale produce wholesalers and brokers. This loss of market and reduced profit has resulted in dramatic loss of farmland forcing many farmers to sell their land. In addition, sky high real estate prices and limited acreage has created a serious decline in start up farmers and has forced existing farmers to take on additional means of income and switch to a part-time pursuit of farming.

Perhaps, one of the largest issues facing land trusts such as FoHVOS is finding the funds and manpower needed to continually monitor and steward their respective open space “in perpetuity” – a requirement and core part of its mission.

## Communication and Education...just the beginning

Earlier this year, the Friends hosted a panel discussion titled, “Sustainable Farming in the Hopewell Valley: Past, Present & Future” at their annual meeting. The panel included three local farmers: Lucia Huebner, who with her husband Charlie have owned Beechtree Farm on Crusher Road since 1986 and a smaller farm on Marshall's Corner-Woodsville Road since 2003; George

Kerr who, together with his wife Lynn, has been farming the current Bristol Myers-Squibb site on Pennington-Rocky Hill Road since 1978; and Jim Kinsel, of Honey Brook farm.

Discussion that evening confirmed that many residents were interested in understanding what role Hopewell Township, NJ Farmland Preservation and non-profit groups such as FoHVOS play in keeping local agriculture viable. Of major concern is the decrease in availability and retention of fertile land in the Valley as well as support of existing farms and attracting new ones to the area in light of rising operational costs.

Jim Kinsel and Sherry Dudas of Honey Brook Organic Farm cultivate land that they currently rent from the StonyBrook-MillstoneWatershed Association. They understand first hand the specific challenges faced by NJ farmers, “Jim and I feel there is a lack of access to affordable land for purchase or rent. You may be surprised to know that many farmers who practice sustainable agriculture in the Garden State have extremely insecure land tenure. This includes farms that some of our most experienced growers are on. Not having long-term lease for the land creates a level of “background insecurity” that is stressful on farm families.”

Despite these obstacles, Honey Brook Organic Farm has become one the country's largest Community Supported Agriculture farms. Sherry explains, “The bottom line is you cannot have a local, sustainable agriculture food system on an insecure land base. In New Jersey, we have one of the most successful Farmland Preservation Programs in the nation but our Farmland Preservation Program does not require that farming even occur on preserved farms! This contributes to the problem of working lands being converted to publicly subsidized country estates owned by non-farmers. When some of these farms are sold, their preserved values can be as high as \$100,000 per acre!”

*Continued on Page 3*



# President's Note

This fall afforded several opportunities for FoHVOS's family of supporters to come together in celebration of open space. On Sunday, September 16th, over 75 people gathered at the top of Baldpate Mountain to dedicate the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. The event also marked the first annual Ted Stiles Memorial Hike. If you were not able to join us this year, please don't wait until the 2008 hike to visit the mountain! Baldpate is a true treasure and will inspire you to join us in seeking new opportunities to preserve our scenic vistas and farmland, drinking water, and native wildlife.

And on September 28th we celebrated our 20th anniversary with over 150 friends and supporters at the Prallsville Mill. Joining us were

Representative Rush Holt, State Senator Leonard Lance, Mercer County Executive "Brian Hughes and Freeholder Liz Muoio. It was our first ever event and by all measures a tremendous success.

However, the most significant way you can support FoHVOS and open space protection is by turning out to vote on November 6th. By voting YES on public question #3, you will be helping to provide \$200 million in much-needed funding to keep New Jersey's preservation programs afloat over the next year. Without these critical funds, FoHVOS and our conservation partners won't have the resources we need to protect open space and farmland. If you'd like to do more to support the ballot initiative, go to [www.njkeepitgreen.org](http://www.njkeepitgreen.org), talk to your friends, and write letters

to the editor. We just can't afford to let a year go by without protecting critical lands in the Valley.

Last, but certainly not least, in late September FoHOVS signed a 15-year lease on our Thompson Preserve with Jim Kinsel together with his wife Sherry Dudas of Honey Brook Organic Farm in Pennington. Jim will be farming our 17 acres farmland on the 57-acre preserve on the Pennington-Hopewell Road. Jim Kinsel and Honey Brook Farm have demonstrated the viability of organic agriculture and residents' commitment to eating locally. FoHVOS couldn't be more pleased to support their vision and agriculture in the Valley.

Best,

## Farmland Preservation & Open Space

*Continued from Page 2*

FoHVOS encourages a coordinated strategic approach to open space planning and presentation. President, Jessica Wilkinson explains, "In many cases, working together and sharing resources will significantly strengthen local and regional preservation efforts. Although our primary concern is preserving natural habitat, we can also consider ways in which to link parks, farmland, trails, and historic lands together to form an interconnected system of preserved lands."

"Environmentalists and farmers must come together for a day of dialogue," Sherry suggests. "I think a forum is needed on an annual basis". FoHVOS agrees that protecting the land, and its resources, is one of the best ways to ensure that our families and future generations are shielded from overdevelopment, pollution and the decay of our fragile ecosystem.



**Invest in New Jersey's Future... Today!**

**A "Yes" Vote Will:**

- Protect Our Drinking Water
- Save Our Threatened Open Spaces
- Help Prevent Overdevelopment & Increased Traffic Congestion
- Create Playgrounds, Green Spaces & Urban Parks for Our Children
- Preserve Working Farms & Forests
- Safeguard Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Protect Natural Areas in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Communities
- Prevent Future Flood Damages
- Save Our Historic Sites & Buildings
- Protect the Water Quality of Our Rivers and Streams

*On November 6, 2007...*

**VOTE YES**

**On Public Question # 3**


For the Green Acres, Farmland, Blue Acres, and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2007



## News & Events

### The Friends Complete Acquisition of Two Properties

Good things do come in small packages, or parcels. Even on a smaller scale, these properties have an important role in linking greenways or providing protection of natural habitat areas. The first acquisition was made possible from a donation from brothers, John and Salvador Guastella. Their 1/2 acre gift is located west of

Hopewell Borough – on Van Dyke Road. The second property forms an extension of FoHVOS's Skyview Partners parcel. The 4.5 acre parcel is located near the intersection of Routes 518 & 31, and was a bargain sale made possible by the Garfi family. The Woodsville stream meanders through this beautiful woodland area. 

### Ted Stiles 1st Annual Memorial Hike

Over 75 people gathered at the top of Baldpate Mountain under a beautiful September sky on Sunday the 16th to dedicate the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. The event also marked the first annual Ted Stiles Memorial Hike.

FoHVOS President, Jessica Wilkinson and Pat Sziber, the organization's Vice-President, gave opening remarks and thanked the partners who made preservation of the 1,100 acre preserve possible – the State of New Jersey, Mercer County, and Hopewell Township. Several experienced naturalists led attendees up the trail to the summit, where the dedication ceremony was held. Hike guides included Lou Beck, Emile DeVito, Alan Hershey, Jeff Hoagland, Tim Morris,

Pat Sziber, Mark Witmer, and Michael VanClef. Other speakers included Michele Byers and Bill Stiles, Hopewell Township Mayor Vanessa Sandom, and Executive Director of Mercer County Park Commission, Kevin Bannon. Congressman Rush Holt read the plaque that will be attached to a rock monument commemorating the park in Ted Stiles's name. The attendees were also joined by the Hopewell Valley Trailriding Association.

Baldpate Mountain was formally preserved in April 1998. Ted Stiles, the late President of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, steered and championed the 9-year effort that led to its preservation. The Friends will continue to sponsor this hike every year in the fall. 



LEFT – Members of the Stiles Family, with Michele Byers pictured in the center.



ABOVE - Several FoHVOS Trustees (l to r): John Jackson, Jessica Wilkinson, Carol Kleis, Peggy Synder, Pat Sziber, and Tom Ogren.

Join FoHVOS on  
Saturday, November 3rd  
for our semi annual  
Clean Up Day

**Sponsored by:** FoHVOS,  
Hopewell Township & Hopewell  
Borough

**WHEN:**

Saturday, November 3rd –  
starting at 8:00 am – last drop  
off @ 1:00 pm.


**WHO:**

Any youth, religious or civic  
organization may participate.

**WHAT:**

Up to 10 designated Clean Up  
areas. Work for two hours and  
receive a free T-shirt, plus earn  
money for the nonprofit of your  
choice! For more information or  
to register, please visit our web-  
site at: [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org)

### FoHVOS provides a long term leasing option to Honey Brook Organic Farm *A Commitment to Agriculture*

Honey Brook Organic Farm and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space have penned a fifteen-year lease allowing them to farm organically on a seventeen-acre farm owned by FoHVOS and preserved with Green Acres funds in Hopewell Township. Honey Brook will assume management of what is known locally as the Thompson farm, which was preserved by FoHVOS in 2002. It had been farmed conventionally for many years, the primary crops being corn and soybeans. The farm is a mix of fields, woodland and wetland and borders the Stony Brook. In the future, FoHVOS plans to blaze a public walking trail through the property. The lease not only provides for the production of organic vegetables, herbs and berries, but also allows farm operator Jim Kinsel, along with his wife Sherry Dudas, to provide educational opportunities. 



## When Green Isn't Good...Invasive Species Threaten Biodiversity

To the casual observer, viewing a dense carpet of lush green grass growing under a canopy of forest trees might signify natural beauty. In many cases, however, this lush green carpet consists of a monoculture of an invasive plant known as Japanese stiltgrass. Like other invasive plants, it is defined by the fact that it is not native to our area and crowds out native species in natural habitats. Native orchids, trilliums and a wide variety of other flowering woodland herbs cannot grow through the stiltgrass. The loss of a diverse group of native plants has compounding effects on native animals that depend upon them. Another serious invasive species is Japanese barberry. This shrub often replaces the native spicebush that makes very nutritious fruits that fuel long-distance bird migrations. Unfortunately, barberry makes fruits that have very little value to birds. The analogy would be like replacing a Thanksgiving dinner with a pack of rice cakes!

One of the central hypotheses of ecologists is that invasive plants have "escaped" their insect pests and diseases from their native habitats, which allows unhampered growth. Invasive plants may be called "weeds" of natural areas and are most abundant where human activities are most common. Our worst invasive species are also relatively unattractive to browsing deer, which lends to their success and the lack of native species that are more palatable.

Once you become familiar with the invasive plants of the area, it begins to seem that they have completely taken over. In many places this is true, but there are numerous 'pockets of resistance' where native plants are still

plowed for agriculture, 2) trees have not been harvested for several decades and 3) active deer management has reduced herd size. One emerging and very hopeful example can be seen at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain where native spicebush is overtopping multiflora rose in response to lowered deer numbers.

So what can we do about this enormous problem? The first step is to prevent the purposeful planting of invasive species. Home gardeners have a large selection of native plants and non-native plants that are not invasive to replace commonly used invasives such as Japanese barberry and butterfly bush. We also encourage you to contact New Jersey's Invasive Species Council to urge them to support a statewide ban on the sale of invasive species. The second step is to volunteer your time to help local land managers control existing invasions. For example, the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space has just begun to identify areas on our preserves where notorious invasive species have just begun to establish. With concerted effort, we can eliminate these newly forming infestations before they cause serious harm. Finally, please encourage private and government land managers to work together to solve the problem of deer overabundance – this would have an enormous positive impact by allowing native plants to compete with invasive plants on a level playing field.

### Some Widespread Invasive Species

Autumn olive  
Common reed  
Japanese barberry  
Japanese knotweed  
Norway maple  
Purple loosestrife  
Tree-of-heaven  
Winged burning bush

### Just Starting to Become Invasive

Butterfly bush  
Callery pear  
Chinese silvergrass  
Japanese Corktree  
Jetbead  
Linden Viburnum  
Siebold's Viburnum  
Water chestnut

### Learn more about invasive species at:

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov>

If you would like to volunteer in our local invasive species program or have any additional questions, please "Ask Dr. Mike" at: 609-730-1560 or michael@fohvos.org



Japanese stiltgrass infestation that coats the forest floor.

flourishing. These remaining places usually occur where three important factors hold true: 1) land was never





## The Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space Would Like to Extend Our Heartfelt Appreciation to Those Who Contributed to the Success of Our 20th Anniversary Celebration, Held on September 28, 2007

BARONE'S TUSCANY BAR & GRILL  
Pennington

BLUE BOTTLE RESTAURANT  
Hopewell

SUZANNE CAMMERANO  
Lambertville

CEDAR HILL FARM  
Lambertville

CHAMBERS WALK CATERING  
Lawrenceville

CHEZ ALICE CATERING  
Princeton

EASTERN MOUNTAIN SPORTS  
Princeton

ETCETERA  
Pennington

HONEY BROOK ORGANIC FARM  
Pennington

HOPEWELL VALLEY  
COUNTRY CLUB  
Hopewell

LAURA PEDRICK PHOTOGRAPHY  
Titusville

PENN-EWING ATHLETIC CENTER  
Pennington

PENNINGTON MARKET  
Pennington

RED OAK BALLET ACADEMY  
Flemington

RUTH MORPATH GALLERY  
Hopewell

ROSEDALE MILLS  
Pennington

SERENDIPITY  
Pennington

SHOP-RITE  
Pennington

QUEENSTOWN GALLERY  
Pennington

TERRA MOMO  
RESTAURANT GROUP  
Hopewell

WHITE SANDS COVE RESORTS  
Belize

ZA RESTAURANT  
Pennington

### PERSONAL AUCTION DONATIONS

KATHY BIRD

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ROY AND ISABELLE GOLDMAN

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### Our Sponsors

Bristol-Meyers Squibb, Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, Pepper Hamilton LLP, Long Motor Company, Capital Health System, Billie Moore of N.T. Callaway, Hopewell Valley Community Bank, Clarke Caton Hintz, The Nature Conservancy, Crossroads of the American Revolution, D & R Greenway Land Trust, New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

### Extra Special touches were also made possible by:

Mountain View Band - Scott Stoner, guitar & vocals; Jim Rigel, bass, mandolin, guitar & vocals; Karen Kessler, fiddle; Jeff Griesemer, mandolin, guitar & vocals; Mike Aucott, banjo, guitar & vocals.

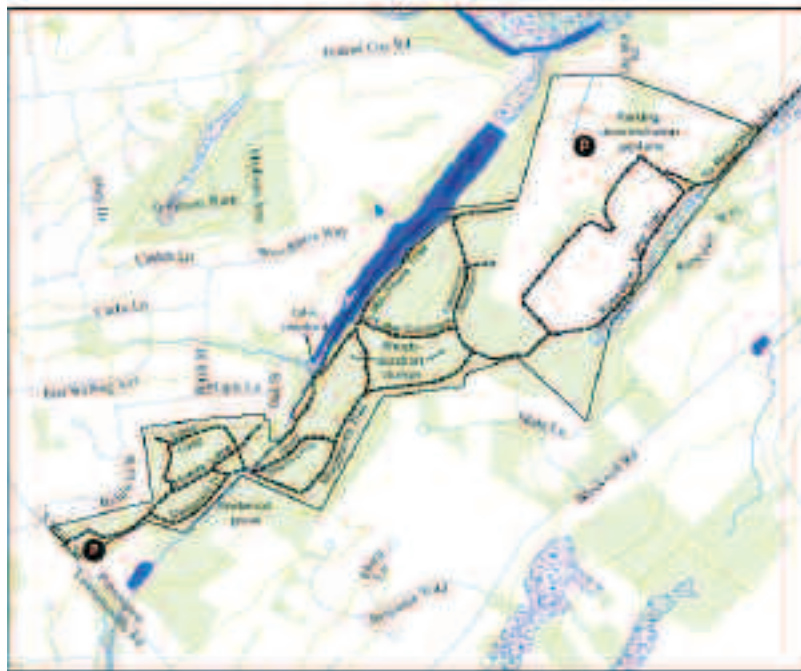


Thank you for providing us with a wonderful menu for the evening!



# My Favorite Hike: Curlis Lake Woods

## Curlis Lake Woods Pennington, NJ



**This issue's contributor:** Pennington resident, Kay Widmer

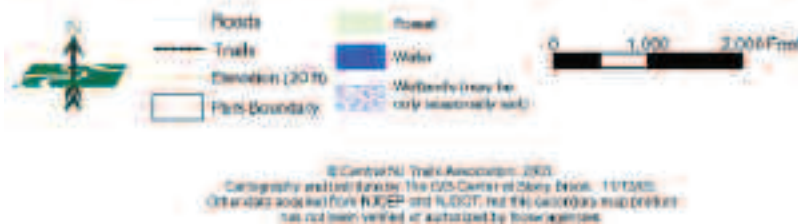
"This walk is particularly beautiful in the autumn. From the parking area on Main Street in Pennington, stroll through the thickets of cherry trees and autumn olive on Howe's Lane. The large diversity of plants makes this an excellent area for finding a variety of birds. Take a right on the Woodland Trail (orange marker) to cross the little stream and enter mature woods of hickory, ash and oak. Take a left on the Lake Shore Trail (blue) to walk along the lake under the park-like young climax forest of beech trees. (Look for osprey around the lake.) This trail winds around a large group of rhododendron left by Howe Nurseries. This is a good area to look for animal tracks in the winter. Circle back to the stream on the Equestrian Woodland Trail."

**Distance:** Lake Shore Trail is 2.2 miles round trip; Main Trail to Rosedale is 1.7 miles.

**Parking:** : From Pennington: space for 5 cars on the road shoulder at South Main St entrance.

**FYI:** Take the family to see the Equestrian Center to see horses and great views of open woodlands and fields. (Restrooms are available inside main building at Equestrian Center during daylight hours)

**Join Us!:** The Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space offer a guided hike through Curlis Lake Woods each spring. Check our website, [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org), for details for our annual fall and spring guided hikes.



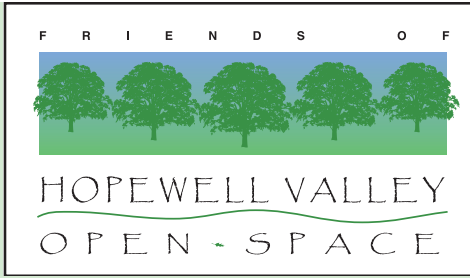
## Get Outside!

Early autumn seems a perfect time to celebrate summer's bounty. This is also true for birds and other animals. The pastel blossoms of spring that nourished the pollinators are now presenting their ripened fruits in colors ranging from white to deepest purple. Crabapples, dogwoods, spicebush, wild grapes and viburnums tempt migrating songbirds to take a break from their south-bound journey. Resident birds relish the juicy treats after a summer of devouring insects. Dried grasses and wildflowers bend under the weight of seeds for finches, spar-

rows, white-footed mice and voles. It is a time to banquet, to stash and to put on fat. Why not get out there and see what these busy creatures are up to? Whether your walk takes you through a forest or along an overgrown field or hedgerow, try to find some trees or vines brimming with fruits and alive with the chattering of small birds. Stop to watch the hustle and bustle and see what they are eating. But don't be tempted to follow suit. Many of the fruits that birds love to eat are quite unpalatable to us and, in fact, may be harmful or even poisonous to humans.

Case in point: they love poison ivy berries! A field guide will help you sort out nature's smorgasbord. Berry Finder, an easy-to-use pocket guide, may be available in local nature shops or can be ordered at [www.naturestudy.com](http://www.naturestudy.com). Most nature shops and large bookstores carry a selection of tree and shrub identification guides such as The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees or The Shrub Identification Book and The Tree Identification Book, all of which are suitable for any skill level.





***The purpose of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is to promote conservation in the Hopewell Valley region through open space preservation, wise stewardship, education and outreach.***

## **Board and Staff List**

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*For more information on how you can become involved, please contact us at*

[development@fohvos.org](mailto:development@fohvos.org)



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