



# Open Space Chronicles

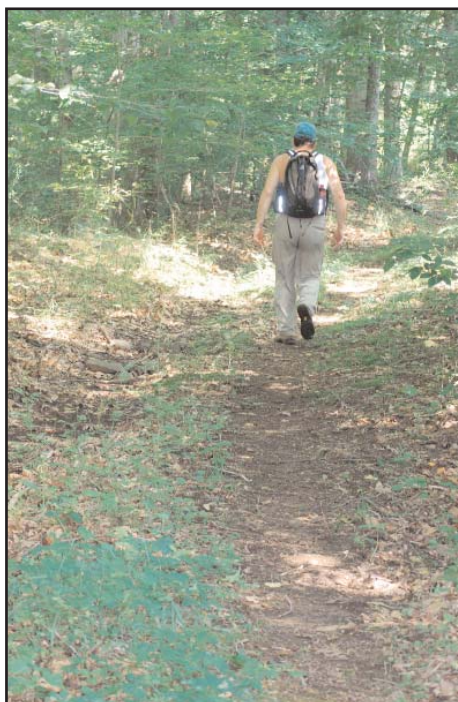
Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Spring 2009

## TAKE A HIKE! CONNECT WITH NATURE

In the midst of a busy lifestyle that keeps us on the go, now may be the perfect time to connect with the natural community that surrounds us. These economic times have shortened the tether that connects us to our homes. Whether as a substitute for or a supplement to more exotic vacation dreams, exploring the world within a 10-mile radius can bring unexpected rewards. Of course, it will mean walking—or hiking, if you prefer—and that is what this article is all about. There is an abundance of trails and paths in the Hopewell Valley. You could make it your personal goal to walk all of them. Better yet, choose a few and really walk them, with your eyes and ears open to the many surprises and secrets that nature holds for those who will take the time to appreciate them.

**W**alking outdoors in a natural setting is good for both body and mind. Referring to the work of the famous Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson, in a recent article New York Times Magazine writer Paul Bloom states, “We thrive in the presence of nature and suffer in its absence.” The physical benefits are clear: it burns off calories, improves circulation, lowers blood pressure, builds strength and endurance, relaxes tense muscles, builds support for thinning bones and weakening joints, works out back pain. Walking releases endorphins which improve mood and help to ease depression. It can help get a good night’s sleep and increase daytime energy. Many people report a surge in creativity—some writers do their best thinking while walking in the woods. Challenging walks can elevate self esteem and self confidence. Chance encounters and an exchange



*A solitary hiker on Baldpate Mountain.*

of greetings can lead to new like-minded acquaintances.

There are trails suitable for every age and ability in the Hopewell Valley. We have seen a family lugging a red wagon containing a toddler and the fixings for a picnic up the mile-long road to the top of Baldpate Mountain, and a woman in her 70’s hiking the steep Summit Trail at that same location. But there are plenty of relatively flat trails of stunning natural beauty as well as those that are challenging enough to satisfy more ambitious hikers.

The best source for information on nearby trails is [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org), the website of the New Jersey Trails Association of which FoHVOS is a member organization. The site also has a page of tips for hikers and links to sites where you can find guided

walks.

To get the most out of your walk, stop from time to time and savor the sights and sounds around you. Hike at different times of the day. Notice how the woods are full of bird song on spring and summer mornings and silent in the early afternoon. See how the light changes the look of the woods and fields as the sun moves across the sky. Use your camera to play with the light. Take a good look at the various layers of the forest. In the uppermost layer—the forest canopy—small birds are flitting among the branches looking for caterpillars. They most likely will be warblers, tiny songbirds that migrate each year from the tropics to nest in our region. Other birds prefer to forage among the smaller trees, where they also may have their nests. Some, like the thrushes, forage on the ground. While you are looking at the ground, keep an eye out for frogs, snakes and salamanders that may be basking or crossing the trail. In open areas, look to the sky for soaring hawks. Or simply stop to rest and enjoy the silence.

You can nurture a new appreciation for the diversity of plant life in our area if you slow down and look carefully at the plants growing at trailside. Some wildflowers are quite inconspicuous but nevertheless quite enchanting. Lush ferns and even fungi add color and texture to the composition. Think about how it all fits together. Who is visiting the flowers...bees, butterflies or both? How do the plant species in a break in the forest differ from those under dense canopy? Why do birds who forage in a field constantly return to the hedgerow or forest edge?

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## TAKE A HIKE! CONNECT WITH NATURE

*Continued from page 1.*

If you really want to enhance your hiking experience, there are a few things you should take with you: binoculars, one or two plant or animal identification guides and a notebook with pen or pencil. The binoculars will help you

see things you might otherwise miss, like those tiny warblers; the guidebooks will tell you who they are; and the notebook will become a journal of your growing connection with nature. Walk a favorite trail in every season. Put all of your senses to work; even the smell of a forest changes as we go

from spring, to summer, to fall. Look for animal tracks when there is snow or frozen mud on the ground. The possibilities for small but rewarding discoveries are endless!



### Be a responsible hiker...observe the rules of trail etiquette

**Right of way.** Trails on FoHVOS-owned preserves are for hiking only. However, there are many multi-use trails in our area including the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail and most of the trails on Baldpate Mountain. It is essential, both for safety and enjoyment, that all users observe this common-sense rule:

- **Hikers yield to horses**
- **Bikers yield to hikers and horses**

Horses always get the right of way because they are big and heavy and can be unpredictable. They should *never* have to step off trail since they can damage vegetation, fall or lead to injury of the rider. Mountain bikes present a potential danger to hikers (not to mention their riders) when they encounter other trail users. Stop and dismount if the trail is narrow, to let others pass.

**Stay on the trail.** This applies to all users. If you absolutely must step aside, do it as gently as you can. Try not to damage the vegetation. Never go exploring off trail. Besides damaging tender plants, you could harm small animals that inhabit the forest floor. There are even some bird species that nest on the ground.

**Always keep your dog(s) on leash.** Always! Even the most obedient dog can yield to its instinct to chase, or inadvertently step on a nest and crush the eggs or hatchlings.

**Group walks.** When with a group, hike single file or, at least, string out to single file to let others pass.

**Pack in, pack out.** Almost too obvious to mention but...do not litter, even things like an apple you've been munching, even though you think it will eventually become compost. No one wants to see that.

**Do not pick the flowers, fruits or leaves.** Not only should they be left for other hikers to appreciate, they are also a necessary resource for the wildlife.

**Be quiet!** For many people, a walk in the woods is a vital escape from the noise of everyday life. The sounds of birds, the breeze or flowing water rejuvenate the psyche. Do yourself and everyone else a favor and turn off the cell phone and keep your conversation to a murmur.

**More hiking etiquette** can be found at [www.hikingdude.com/hiking-etiquette.shtml](http://www.hikingdude.com/hiking-etiquette.shtml)



### More Trails on FoHVOS Preserves

With the help of a dedicated crew of volunteers, we have gotten a great start on our project to construct walking trails on seven FoHVOS preserves by the end of 2010. These trails will add recreational value to our preserves beyond simply preserving open space, and will bring opportunities for passive recreation to residents throughout the Hopewell Valley.

In the Spring 2008 issue of *Open Space Chronicles* we featured the first, a new 1.2-mile trail on our Elks Preserve on Crusher Road. Since that time, FoHVOS has added two new trails to our inventory.

A 1.5-mile loop trail meanders through

the 56.9-acre Nayfield Preserve on the north side of Lambertville-Hopewell Road (Route 518) about 1.2 mile west of Route 31. This preserve—a dairy farm until the early 1960s—is a mix of meadow and early successional forest. Built mostly on National Trails Day in June 2008, the winding trail offers several scenic views of a tributary of the Stony Brook. There is room for 2 or 3 cars to park outside the gated entrance to the trail.

Directions, trail maps and descriptions for the Elks and Nayfield preserves can be found at [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org).

The newest trail, scheduled for completion this spring, is a 1.5 mile loop

through our recently-acquired 65.7-acre Heritage Preserve. This brings a beautiful hiking trail within easy reach of residents of the southern portion of Hopewell Township and our neighbors in Ewing Township. A team of volunteers worked one day a week for eight weeks building the trail, including the four bridges that afford easy crossings of a small creek and old farm ditches. We are grateful to Home Depot for their generous donation of pressure-treated wood for the bridges. The property includes a meadow, young forests of red maple and sweet gum and a mature beech/oak/hickory woods, the signature tree species of central New Jersey's upland forests.

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# President's Note

As the new Friends' president, I want to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing President Jessica Wilkinson, who relocated with her family to the Amherst, Massachusetts area late last year. Jessica served as a FoHVOS trustee for nearly ten years and took over as Board President in April of 2007 following the death of Ted Stiles. Jessica's service to FoHVOS is but one chapter of a personal and professional life devoted to environmental causes and I know I speak for all the trustees in thanking her for the knowledgeable, committed, and energetic leadership she has provided us over the past year and a half.

Despite two changes in leadership in the past two years, we will continue to carry out the mission that meant so much to these two good people. In March we received the welcome news that the Friends will receive a \$350,000 Green Acres grant, the maximum amount allotted to local land trusts in the latest round of funding. These funds will be put to good use and we are, in fact, close to finalizing our participation in an important new acquisition.

So the glass is full (or nearly so) at the moment, but all Garden State Preservation Trust (Green Aces) funds approved in the 2007 bond issue have now been allotted and there will be no additional state grants until a new bond issue or some other funding mechanism is approved. The Green Acres program has, over the years, been the largest source of land acquisition funds for FoHVOS and I hope you will contact the governor and your state senators and assemblypersons and urge that they take action on this issue.

So we will soon enter a period (hopefully short!) in which the pace of our land acquisition activities slows, and we are now focusing our efforts on stewardship of our preserves. Stewardship initiatives include our deer

management program, our Invasive Species Strike Team, and an ambitious program to provide trails on our preserves so that all residents of the Hopewell Valley can enjoy the fruits of their investment in open space.

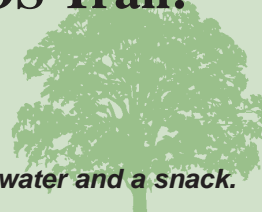
Acquiring a property is expensive but it only needs to be done once. In contrast, yearly stewardship costs on an individual preserve may be modest but our charge is to steward our properties in perpetuity. We are very fortunate to have energetic and knowledgeable staff and volunteers to carry out this work and will be reaching out to you, our Friends, to support our stewardship program well into the future.

*John Jackson*

## Celebrate National Trails Day

### Help Build Another FoHVOS Trail!

**When:** Saturday, June 6 – 9:00 am – noon  
**Where:** Eames Preserve – Harbourton area  
**What:** A new loop trail  
**Contact:** Rachel@fohvos.org or 609-730-1560  
*Volunteers should bring work gloves, water and a snack.*



## More Trails on FoHVOS Preserves

*Continued from page 2.*

Shrubs include native plants such as spicebush, blackhaw and maple leaf viburnum and a remarkable stand of muscledwood trees, also known as ironwood or American hornbeam. In early spring, the forest floor is carpeted with native wildflowers including spring

beauty, trout lily and wood anemone. There is parking for 4 cars at the entrance on Reed Road.

The Heritage trail is the first to be built using the federal Recreational Trails Program grant we received last fall. Plans for the seven preserves include installation of signs, informational

kiosks and trail guides along with parking areas off-road, with all costs to be covered by the grant and all the work done by volunteers. These efforts will bring us closer to realizing our goal of having a walking trail within easy reach of every resident of the Hopewell Valley.



## Yes, I want to preserve open space throughout the Valley!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes, I prefer to receive your newsletter via email.
- Friend.....\$40
- Advocate.....\$70
- Partner.....\$100
- Student/Senior.....\$25
- Steward.....\$250
- Corporate Sponsor.....\$500
- Other - \$ \_\_\_\_\_



## News & Events

### New Grants Support Our Stewardship Work

FoHVOS is moving full-steam ahead with our stewardship mission thanks to funding received from several sources since our last newsletter. In late September, we were awarded a federal Recreational Trails Program grant for \$18,975, which will be used to develop trails, install signs and kiosks and provide parking improvements where needed on seven of our preserves. The work will be completed, as required by the grant, by the end of 2010.

In January of this year, we received a \$3,160 Holden Grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society to support the work of our Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team project. The money will be used to purchase tools and supplies, including safety gear, to be used in the eradication of invasive species. Many of these items have already been purchased and put to work. And we received another \$2,500 for the project from Conservation Resources, Inc. to support staff

salaries and project costs.

In early April, we learned that we will receive \$5,000 as one of nine partners in a project funded by a major grant by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) to Conservation Resources, Inc., which will enable expansion of the Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership, a collaboration that is working on implementation of the New Jersey Wildlife Action Plan. FoHVOS' role will be to participate in the development of Forest and Wetland/Riparian Conservation Plans; provide technical assistance to local governments and conservation organizations on how to implement stewardship of forest and wetland/riparian areas; and provide outreach to local landowners.

Our most recent grant funding comes from the Living Lands Program, which is administered by Defenders of Wildlife and the Land Trust Alliance. This nationally competitive grant in the

amount of \$10,000 is for the Invasive Species Strike Team project and will go mainly toward supporting internships for the program.

FoHVOS has embarked on a very ambitious stewardship program to not only provide opportunities for passive recreation on our preserves but also to manage those properties in a way that fosters their ecological well-being. And we are now developing a community stewardship plan, which will engage government entities, other nonprofits and private landowners alike in efforts to control invasive species and other threats to the health of our forests and other habitats. All of these efforts require many hours of staff time. We have established a Protect Hopewell Valley Fund that we hope will enable us to continue this work far into the future. The Fund has been launched with very generous contributions from Bristol Myers-Squibb and from a private foundation.



### Mike Aucott Receives Gleeson Award

At the Friends' annual meeting on March 31, the 2009 Jack Gleeson Environmental Award went to Michael Aucott, Ph.D. of Hopewell Township for his work in preserving the area's environmental quality, especially his efforts in monitoring and protecting Hopewell Valley's

water resources. The evening's program featured a presentation on our native wildlife with live animals from the Mercer County Wildlife Center in Titusville.



*Friends' President John Jackson presents the Jack Gleeson Environmental Award to Mike Aucott.*



*Nancy Derrico of the Mercer County Wildlife Center shows a red-shouldered hawk, one of several animals she brought to the annual meeting.*

## Two New Preserves Added

FoHVOS signed the deeds on two more properties in late 2008, adding another 124 acres to our inventory of preserved land. This brings the total of parcels owned by our land trust, either in whole or in partnership, to 28 and the total area to over 1800 acres.

The 65.7-acre **Heritage Preserve** closed in October, 2008. Using FoHVOS Green Acres funds, the land was acquired from the Heritage Conservancy in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to whom it had been donated by the former owners. It is part of the Atchley tract, a former farm located in Hopewell and Ewing Townships that was bisected by I-95. Most of the section south of the inter-

state is now an office park. Our preserved section in Hopewell Township's southern tier is largely forest, both upland and wetland, and contains remnant patches of larger trees on land that apparently was not farmed in recent history. These patches contain a diverse mix of mature trees and native shrubs, vital habitat for birds and other wildlife. A newly-built trail on the Heritage Preserve is accessible from Reed Road.

In a partnership arrangement with Hopewell Township, we closed on the **Gomez Preserve** this past December using FoHVOS Green Acres and Township open space funding. The 58.6-acre property, located on

Lambertville-Hopewell Road near the intersection of Harbourton-Rocktown Road, will be managed jointly with Hopewell Township. The land consists of forest, fields, and hedgerows, as well as a former grassy landing strip. While there are no immediate plans for the property, it passively supports groundwater recharge, provides habitat and preserves an important viewshed. And it is serving the residents of the Hopewell Valley in an unusual way. One of the wells on the land is being used for monitoring groundwater under the auspices of the Hopewell Township Environmental Commission and the U.S. Geological Survey.



## People



### Staff

FoHVOS welcomed Rachel Mackow in the new position of Land Steward in January. Rachel worked with us as a Stewardship Intern under the supervision of our Stewardship Director Mike Van Clef from June to December and, during that time, she did an outstanding job

helping to develop the Invasive Species Strike Team project, creating instructional material, running the fall Cleanup Day, recruiting volunteers and coordinating trail work. She has proven to be a tremendous asset to FoHVOS since she joined us and will continue to work on these projects and new ventures as they come up. Rachel is also a photographer whose work has been internationally exhibited and published.



### Board of Trustees

Our newest board member is Chris Berry, who was elected to the Board of Trustees at the annual meeting on March 31. Chris has been an energetic FoHVOS volunteer for the past two years and, in addition to his academic background in both Forestry and Environmental Engineering, he brings to us his professional expertise in worker health and safety as well as his trail design and construction skills. He works closely with Rachel training and organizing volunteers, both for trail work and for the Invasive Species Strike Team. He also helps to produce the trail guides. We are very pleased to have Chris on board.



## A Favorite Hike: The White Trail at Rosedale Park

### This issue's contributor:

Kay Widmer, Pennington resident and hike enthusiast

The approach to this 1.5 mile trail is on top of the dam for Rosedale Lake, past the fishermen, cormorants, swallows and geese to the opening in the woods marked with a white square. As the trail swings down towards Stony Brook it traverses the beautiful beech woods. On the floor there are trout lilies and spring beauties in spring. At Stony Brook the path turns to follow the brook downstream through a forest of hicko-

ry, ash and red maple. There are good views across the brook to the other bank and to islands in the stream. Beside the trail look for the mature ash tree that has been split and is resting on two beech trees. A close examination reveals carpenter ant tunnels in the heart of the tree.

There are several vernal pools in the bottom land of the woods. These are good places for mating wood frogs and salamanders. The trail turns uphill and emerges by the second pond at the park. Follow the mowed lane back to

the dam and the parking lot.

**Distance:** This trail takes approximately 40 minutes to walk. Follow the white squares on the trees.

**Caution:** Due to the large number of seeps, the trail will be muddy after the rains.

### Directions, Parking and Trail Map:

Can be found at [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org). Use the park entrance on Federal City Road.





# Volunteer Spotlight

by Rachel Mackow

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space wishes to thank our stewardship and trails volunteers for their support during the 2008 field season.

Our volunteers logged 275 hours of service with Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team and trail building efforts. We are pleased to have volunteers with diverse skills and knowledge, including native and invasive plant identification, trail building, GPS operation, GIS mapping, computer networking, data entry, illustration and carpentry. Many of these skills were learned "in the field" while working with FoHVOS stewardship staff.

Our 2009 stewardship and trail building season is underway. Volunteer assistance is essential to our success. Here's how you can help:

Protect our native plants and the wildlife that depend on them. Join the **Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team!** Would you like to hit the trail AND support the Strike Team? Become part of a survey team that uses GPS to track invasive species. We also need volunteers who can assist in invasive species eradication

efforts on preserves throughout the township. Training in plant identification and GPS is provided.

Help FoHVOS build five new trails by 2011. Join our **Trail Building crew!** The trail building season is off to an exciting start with a Recreational Trails Program Grant from NJDEP to build trails with informational kiosks, trail guides and benches. See our plans for National Trails Day on page 3.

Interested in supporting FoHVOS' stewardship and trail building efforts?

Groups, individuals, and families are welcome. Training is provided! Please contact: Rachel Mackow, Land Steward, Tel: (609) 730-1560 or Rachel@fohvos.org



*CJISST invasive species identification workshop at Curlis Woods.*

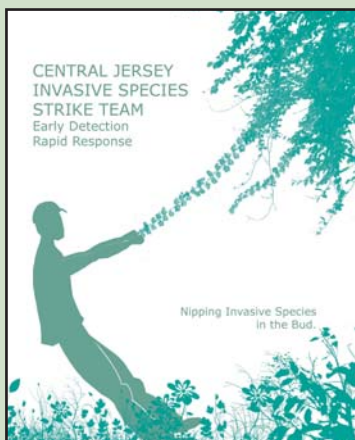


## Thank you to our growing list of volunteers:

Mike Bellaus, Nina Burghardt, Cindy Butler, Remy Donahey, Brad, Sophie & Théo Evans, Jim Gambino, Jim Goodman, Shawn Greenbaum, Denise Hansson, Cindy Jaworsky, Lauren Kovacs, Matt Lager, Mike LaNutti, Heidi Mass, Doug Meckel, Sue Michniewski, Tom Miller, Kem Phillips, Nancy Putnam, Toni Robbi, Simcha Rudolph, Jennifer Saltman, Khan Tran, Mary Wagner, Elena Williams, Karen Wylie and board members Chris Berry and Tom Ogren.



*Tom Ogren, Chris Berry and Jim Gambino building a walkway at the Heritage Preserve.*



Thanks to our hunters who have assisted in maintaining meadow habitats, posting preserve boundaries, monitoring and building trails, and removing trash.

Thanks to Lauren Kovacs, Environmental Designer with Princeton Hydro, whose illustration work will be featured on our Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team t-shirts. See more of her work at: [www.flickr.com/photos/sonoknotty/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/sonoknotty/).

*Lauren Kovacs' design for CJISST t-shirts.*





## Strike Team Update – Rapidly Responding to New Invasive Species

In our autumn newsletter, we reported on the initiation of the Central Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team. FoHVOS and the Upper Raritan Watershed Association are leading a group of 26 partners toward eradicating new invasive species that are beginning to gain a toe-hold in New Jersey. We have searched 70 sites totaling over 7,500 acres and detected 381 populations of emerging invasive plants. Although surveys were our primary focus, we also eradicated 14 of these populations. In 2009, our goal is to eradicate over 200 populations with the help of our volunteers and project partners. Thankfully, Rachel Mackow (FoHVOS Land Steward) has assembled a growing cadre of volunteers to help us meet this goal. [Please consider volunteering so that we can expand our goals!]

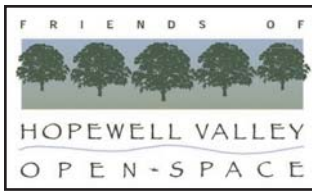
The cooperative nature of this project is already bearing fruit. In 2008, FoHVOS and Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association staff and volunteers removed 10 individual plants of Japanese aralia. However, we also found over 1,000 individuals on FoHVOS' Albahary Preserve (this is likely to be the source population within Hopewell Township and is the stewardship equivalent of finding out that you had spinach stuck in your teeth during a job interview...very embarrassing...). We plan on redeeming ourselves by removing this large population over the sum-

mer. The Strike Team also found a very large group of Oriental photinia on a D&R Greenway preserve – D&R has committed a large corporate work day to beginning the removal and FoHVOS and other project partners will assist the Greenway with removals in 2009.

Together, the Strike Team can protect our natural areas from new infestations of invasive species, but we will need the support of Hopewell Valley residents. There are a number of common landscape plants that are beginning to show up in natural areas – replacing these threatening species with non-invasive landscape plants will significantly reduce the Strike Team's work load. Common landscape plants that are invasive species include Chinese silver grass, Japanese wisteria, butterfly bush, Callery pear, and Japanese clematis. Even some long-standing landscape plants that had been considered non-harmful to natural areas, including English ivy and wintercreeper, are beginning to spread. Ideally, private residents and landscape professionals would remove these plants, but at the very least, we hope that Hopewell Valley residents consider purchasing native or non-invasive plants in the future. Please visit our website to view species fact sheets with photos of these and other plants (<http://www.fohvos.org/speciesFactSheet.html>).



The commonly planted Chinese silvergrass and Callery pear are both spreading rapidly into Hopewell Valley natural areas.

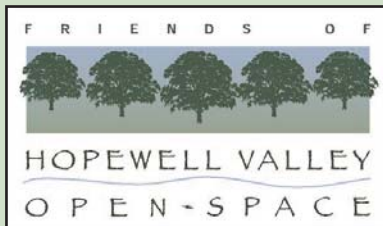


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*The purpose of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is to promote conservation in the Hopewell Valley region through open space preservation, wise stewardship, education and outreach.*

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Rachel Mackow – Land Steward

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

*[info@fohvos.org](mailto:info@fohvos.org)*