



Open Space Chronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Spring 2013

Private Lands Stewardship Program

We've started a new program to strengthen stewardship efforts across the Valley! In preparing our 2012 Community Stewardship Plan, we realized that private lands - which make up 70% of the Valley - were absolutely critical to reaching our stewardship goals. The Private Lands Stewardship Program (PLSP) was initiated in 2012 and we have big plans for 2013! Our goal, over the next ten years, is to enroll 800 Hopewell Valley households, or 10% of the total. With more than 30 participants thus far, we are already learning about the inspiring efforts of our residents and have begun to amplify their work by providing technical advice and on-the-ground project assistance.

We've established five participation categories – one or more can apply to all residents, regardless of the size of their property. Categories include: 1) Native Plant Gardens, 2) Meadow and Forest Habitat Conservation, 3) Wildlife Conservation, 4) Deer Management and 5) Invasive Species Management.

Native plant gardens have the potential to create hundreds of acres of additional habitat for bees, butterflies and birds across the Valley. Taking inspiration from books such as Doug Tallamy's "Bringing Nature Home", we will visit resi-

dents and provide advice on selecting plants best suited for their homes. Even better than advice is discounts from participating nurseries! We've teamed with Toadshade Wildflower Farm and Wild Ridge Plants who will provide discounted plants to PLSP members – savings will also be available through FoHVOS-coordinated wholesale plant orders with several nurseries every spring and fall.

Some private land stewards are creating meadows by converting portions of their lawns that they do not use (except to mow every week throughout the summer!). FoHVOS is also working with larger landowners to spice up existing fields by installing native wildflowers and grasses.

Overabundant deer and invasive species are recognized as serious threats that must be addressed through thoughtful stewardship. PLSP members have allowed their properties to be searched for newly emerging invasive species so that we can stop their spread to neighboring lands. FoHVOS has also introduced effective and conscientious hunters to residents to help reduce the deer population – this applies to properties ranging in size from a few acres to a few hundred acres.

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Native asters attract many species of butterflies and pollinators.
Photo by Rachel Mackow



Swallowtail butterflies nectar on many native plants.
Photo by Pat Sziber

Private Lands Stewardship Program

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The American Kestrel has been declining in the Valley and across New Jersey, so we've partnered with New Jersey's Endangered and Nongame Species Program. So far, we've installed five nesting boxes on private lands thought to offer the best chances of encouraging their recovery. We hope to install at least 10 more boxes in 2013. FoHVOS staff is ready to help private landowners with conservation of any wildlife species on their lands.

Please visit our website to learn more about the program and how to become a participant. We hope you will contact us soon so that we can begin working together to support the Valley's natural heritage!



*Trumpet vine flowers are a favorite of hummingbirds.
Photo by Pat Sziber*

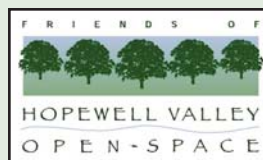
Preservation Funding: A Sustainable Source is Needed

Early this year, Governor Christie signed bills allocating \$123 million in Green Acres and Blue Acres funding and \$79.5 million in farmland preservation money for projects throughout the state. This was the last of the \$400 million in open space, farmland and historic preservation money provided by the bond referendum approved by New Jersey voters in 2009. Now we must roll up our sleeves and find a way to continue funding open space, farmland and historic preservation in New Jersey.

About 1 million acres of land in New Jersey—20 percent of the state—is still unprotected from development. In order for agriculture to remain viable in the state, an additional 350,000 acres of farmland need to be preserved. A critical need that has come to light because of recent severe storms is creation of vegetated buffers along waterways. And the legacy of our rich historic past is in danger of decay. Here in the Hopewell Valley, thousands of acres remain unpreserved, precious woodland habitat as well as productive farmland, and a long list of historic preservation projects await funding.

Clearly, a sustainable source of preservation money is needed. We urge our members and friends to support the efforts of the NJ Keep It Green Campaign to secure a long-term dedicated source of funding for the preservation and stewardship of New Jersey's natural, recreational, agricultural and historic treasures for generations to come. The goal: At least \$200 million per year for a minimum of 30 years. Two steps lie before us to achieve this goal. First, we must convince our legislators by the end of June to put a referendum on the November ballot and, second, we must convince the voters to approve it.

What can you do now to help? Weigh in by signing the Sustainable Funding Statement of Support at www.NJKeepItGreen.org. FoHVOS is one of more than 175 local, regional and statewide member organizations in the Keep It Green Coalition. "Like" the Campaign on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NJKeepItGreen. Consider making a contribution to the Campaign on their website. Your efforts will help to reach this critical goal.



Many thanks to all who supported The Fall Gala

A Tribute to 25 Years of Preserving the Rural Character of Hopewell Valley. See page 4.



President's Note

It's impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the Keep It Green Campaign for open space preservation not only here in the Hopewell Valley but also for the whole state. Over the years, funds from the NJ Green Acres program have been the very lifeblood of our land preservation work. Had it not been for these funds, very few of the acquisitions that FoHVOS has spearheaded over the past 25 years would have actually reached fruition and the story would be much the same all over the state.

While the voters have approved every Green Acres bond issue presented to them, the resulting funding flow is uneven - money is typically available for a couple of years followed by a year or two when open space funds are scarce or non-existent while pressure

builds for a new referendum.

We are in one of these lean periods now - funds over this past year have been extremely tight and it is unlikely that new funds will start to flow for another year or two. In these conditions, it is difficult for us to credibly engage in negotiations for new properties while our future funding stream is so uncertain. And it is doubly hard for us to find ourselves largely "out of the game" when land prices are still depressed in the aftermath of the housing recession.

So please, in addition to weighing in at www.NJKeepItGreen.org, contact your legislators and tell them that now is the time for New Jersey to put Green Acres funding on a continuous and sustainable footing.

Meanwhile, whether your property is large or small, I'd like to encourage you to think about what you can do to "Keep It Green" by signing up for our Private Land Stewardship Program. There are many times more private land in the Hopewell Valley than preserved public land and if we are to have any success in mitigating the impacts of overabundant deer, invasive species, and vanishing habitat for native plants and animals, we need you to become our partners. Please take time to read the cover story for details on how you can get involved in this unique and innovative program.

John Jackson, President



News & Events

Join Us for Springtime on the Mountain

Annual Meeting, Program and Guided Walks

Sunday, April 28 at 1:30 p.m.

Baldpate Mountain Visitor Center

Author Richard Preston will present a program on "A Climb in the Redwoods" at this annual event. Catch up on our latest accomplishments, learn about our Private Lands Stewardship Program, meet Joann Held, recipient of this year's Jack Gleeson Environmental Award, enjoy the view over the Delaware from the top of Baldpate Mountain, stroll through the native plant garden, take a wildflower walk. The event is free and light refreshments will be served.

Park in the lot on Fiddler's Creek Road and hike up or take the shuttle. Limited parking near the top, plus 4 handicapped spaces near the Visitor Center. For directions, click on "Trails" at www.fohv.org.



*The terrace atop Baldpate is the perfect spot to enjoy the Delaware River vista.
Photo by Pat Sziber*



*Virginia bluebells in bloom on Baldpate Mountain.
Photo by Pat Sziber*

Other Upcoming Events

Spring Clean Communities Cleanup Day – Saturday, April 13

Heritage Preserve Guided Hike – Sunday, April 21

Skyview Preserve Guided Hike – Sunday, May 26

To learn more about these and future events sign up for ConstantContact notices by sending an e-mail to execdir@fohv.org or visit our website or Facebook page.





News & Events

The Fall Gala: A Tribute to 25 Years of Preserving the Rural Character of Hopewell Valley

The Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space celebrated its 25th anniversary in style at the Fall Gala on a beautiful fall evening in October under the tent at the Hopewell Valley Vineyards. The festive event brought together supporters of FoHVOS and open space for a fun, relaxing evening of good food, wine and conversation. In addition to savoring locally grown and produced wines and delicious food, guests enjoyed the music of locally grown singer/songwriter, Sara Lewis as a slide show ran reflecting the many contributions of FoHVOS towards open space preservation, stewardship and public access over the past 25 years.

The Gala boasted the attendance of long-time and founding members of FoHVOS, current and newer FoHVOS supporters, corporate supporters, pub-

lic office holders both former and current, and some folks who were brand new to the organization. Guests were treated to an impromptu speech from U.S Rep. Rush Holt who shared how he was inspired to seek public office by the issue of open space and the words of founding member and former presi-

dent of FoHVOS, Ted Stiles. The live and silent auctions elicited lively bidding augmenting the net revenue generated by the event to more than \$15,000. We thank everyone who joined us in celebrating our quarter century milestone.



*The tent at Hopewell Valley Vineyard was decked out in its fall finery for the Gala..
Photo by Pat Sziber*



*Board member David Glogoff and Stewardship Director Mike Van Clef and his wife Paula.
Photo by Pat Sziber*



On the Trail

If a tree falls in the forest.....

Trees fell like matchsticks as Superstorm Sandy lashed them with 80 mph gusts. While those that brought down utility poles and wires, blocked roads or toppled onto structures have mostly been cleared, thousands still are strewn helter-skelter throughout the Hopewell Valley like a giant's game of Pick-Up Sticks. Most were uprooted, only trees weakened by disease snapped.

Ecological wisdom tells us to just leave them where they lay. It is in nature's grand plan that trees will fall to the ground, their architecture will be invaded by the agents of decomposition and they will eventually decay and enrich the earth. Meanwhile, they are a metropolis of activity for an amazing array of invertebrates, amphibians and countless members of the plant kingdom...and the birds and other animals who prey upon them.

Six of the seven trails on FoHVOS preserves had trees of varying sizes fall across them, creating a hazard to hikers. Though, like the forest, our trail work is usually dormant during the winter months the urgency of securing the safety of our trails brought out our hardy volunteers with chainsaws and clippers. By mid-February, all but one trail was cleared.

Continued on the next page.



*The Jacobs Creek trail was completely blocked.
Photo by Beth Craighead*



On the Trail

Continued from the last page.

There, four large trees including a magnificent oak with a 2-foot diameter blocked the north branch of our Jacobs Creek Trail. This turned out to be a task for professionals.

We are very grateful to the volunteers who braved the chill and the hazardous conditions to clear the trails. FoHVOS land steward Beth Craighead and board members Tom Ogren and Chris Berry spearheaded the operation. Among the many who helped were Greg Imbroglia, Chuck Noona, Jim Seliga, Michael Pimer, Wayne Topley, Frank Modaffare, Calvin Downs and other hunters in our deer management program. Other stalwart helpers were Jim Golis, Pat Witkowski, Richard Cann, Jim Gambino, Denise Hansen and Ted Borer and his son. We thank them and for their time and hard work keeping our trails open for all to enjoy.



*Chris Berry tackles one of Sandy's windfalls.
Photo by Beth Craighead*



Volunteer Spotlight



Bloomberg volunteers spent a November afternoon planting trees at Hollystone.

How many volunteers does it take to plant over 6,000 trees and shrubs on a 40-acre abandoned field at Hollystone Preserve? Scores! Make that scores of generous, energetic, congenial folks from just about every age group who got the plants in the ground for the reforestation project over the course of six or seven work days this past fall. The trees varied in size from mere 16-inch whips to 5-foot tall saplings. The soil was in good shape—our contractor Shane Doyle had loosened it with his John Deere subsoiler and soil amendments were added where needed to prepare for the planting blitz.

Among the many volunteers who helped get this brand new forest patch off to a good start were groups from Bloomberg, Withum Smith and Brown, P.C., The Pennington School, Raritan Valley Community College and several hunters from our deer management program.

Many thanks to all who volunteered their time and muscle-power to create this important extension of the Baldpate Mountain Ecosystem forest. We hope they will return again and again to watch their forest grow over the years and enjoy the wildlife that will thrive there.

To volunteer for future projects, contact Beth@fohvos.org.

There's always more work to do!

Trail maintenance. Invasive species control. Caring for the Baldpate Garden. Restoration projects. Monitoring our preserves as a "Site Steward." If you love working outdoors and would like to help us care for the land, please e-mail Land Steward Beth Craighead at beth@fohvos.org or phone us at 609-730-1560.





Stewardship Corner

Plant a tree or cut a tree? The logic of restoration ecology in the Hopewell Valley

FoHVOS, along with our conservation partners, has restored or are currently working on restoring nearly 500 acres of forest and meadow in the Valley. But how do we select restoration sites and formulate strategies? The answer is fairly simple – ‘accentuate the positive’. The Raritan Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership (RPWHP) completed a comprehensive planning project to identify and support conservation of large forest and grassland habitat patches in central New Jersey (see map). Due to their large size and relative health compared to other remaining natural areas, these priority sites are considered the most worthy of conservation efforts. As a RPWHP partner, FoHVOS has adopted these priority sites for our stewardship work in the Valley.

Two of our forest restoration sites are within the Baldpate Forest Ecosystem – an area with over 1,000 acres of contiguous forest. Baldpate is known to harbor unique birds that require large forest habitats such as Kentucky, Hooded and Worm-eating Warblers. Restorations included an 8-acre abandoned field on the summit of the mountain and our recent 40-acre project at the Hollystone Preserve. We’ve also partnered on an 8-acre restoration at the Kulak Preserve, which increases forest buffer for the Sourland Mountain Ecosystem. With our partners and many volunteers, we have planted over 8,000 trees!

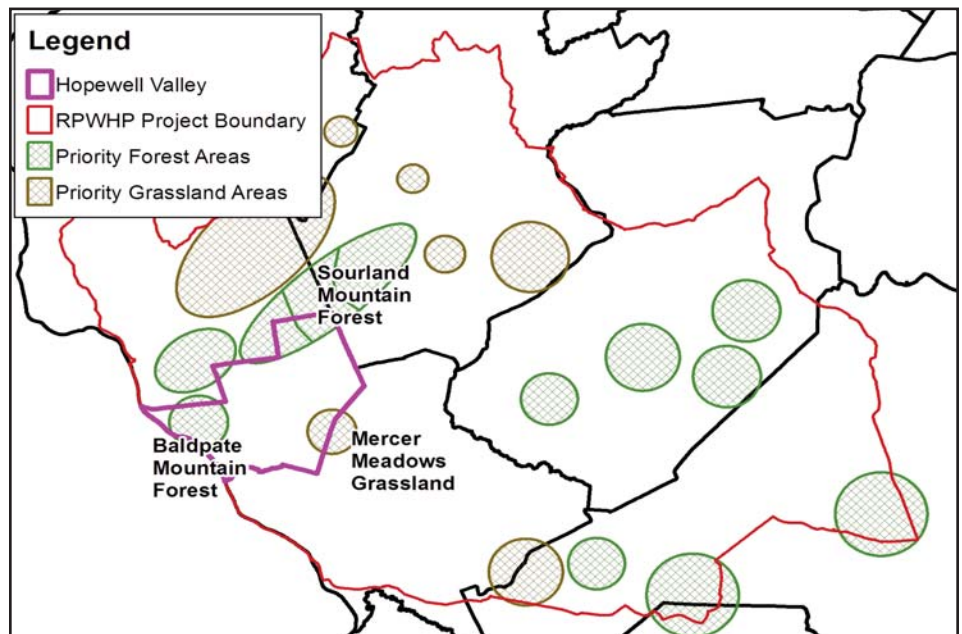
Several years ago, FoHVOS restored an 8-acre field at our Thompson Preserve. In this case, we converted a huge infestation of invasive multiflora rose to a diverse meadow by planting native wildflowers and grasses. So why no trees? The Thompson Preserve is not located in a RPWHP forest priority site and adding trees would not have a significant benefit

toward attracting species that require large forest areas. This restoration, in addition to providing high quality meadow habitat, increases populations of insects that pollinate organic crops located on the Preserve.

This year, we are again partnering with the Mercer County Park Commission to restore meadows & grasslands at Mercer Meadows, located in Hopewell and Lawrence Townships. As with the Baldpate and Sourland sites, this area was recognized by RPWHP as regionally significant, but as habitat for grassland birds rather than forest habitat. The priority area, both inside and outside of Mercer Meadows, consists of over 1,800 acres of open fields – over 450 acres are located at the site. The fields have been known to support species such as Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks. However, some fields have begun to be infested with invasive shrubs such as Autumn Olive, threatening to oust grassland birds. In addition, small patches of trees break up the fields -- If you were a grassland

bird, you’d see these trees as hiding places for predators and avoid all the field areas near them.

Our restoration effort at Mercer Meadows will include over 425 acres – the majority of this work includes eliminating existing invasive vegetation and seeding with native wildflowers and grasses. Clearing trees is essential for maintaining and improving grassland bird habitat. So while initially appearing somewhat ironic, tree removal at Mercer Meadows represents the best conservation strategy – with regional implications for fostering grassland birds that have very few large habitat patches in New Jersey (and throughout their former range extending toward the mid-west where cropland has eliminated their habitat). When complete, the restoration at Mercer Meadows will provide optimal habitat to grow populations of grassland birds as well as hundreds of acres of beautiful native grasses and wildflowers for other wildlife – and people too!



RPWHP priority sites are based upon their potential to provide large, high-quality habitat.



Stewardship Corner

Grants Support Unique Projects

FoHVOS joined hands last year with the Sourland Planning Council (SPC) to help launch a **Sourlands Comprehensive Deer Management Plan** to address deer overpopulation in the Sourlands region. Modeled on the program we helped establish together with Hopewell Township, the project received a **\$22,580 Raritan Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership (RPWHP) grant from Conservation Resources, Inc.** SPC is primarily responsible for project management, outreach and conducting a survey of landowners. FoHVOS is providing technical expertise through monitoring of forest health, performing a deer population survey, GIS analyses and drafting of the Plan. \$4,000 of the grant money will go toward providing venison donations to food banks. If you live in the Sourland region and have not already done so, you may complete the Deer Impact Survey at www.sourland.org.

The garden next to the Visitor Center at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain is ready to bloom this year, thanks to a **\$3,500 grant from the Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund.** We received the grant in 2011 but clearing the garden of invasive weeds, removal of non-native trees that were damaging the stone wall, and repair of several sections of the wall needed to be completed before planting could start. Volunteers spread woodchips and helped to plant a variety of flowering plants and shrubs in the fall; plant labels and deer protection are being installed this spring.

We received a **\$2,500 grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society** to hire a contractor with specialized equipment to remove a very dense infestation of Winged Burning Bush at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. FoHVOS and Mercer County will focus on hand-control of this species where it grows less densely on the mountain.

Baldpate Garden Restoration Project



Before the work began.



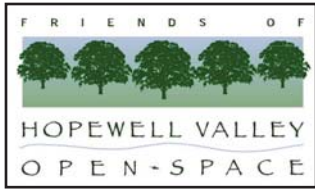
HVCHS LaCrosse Team members cleared much of the weedy growth.



Staff and volunteers prepared the plots and planted native plants in September. The wall was still undergoing repair.

Photos by Pat Sziber





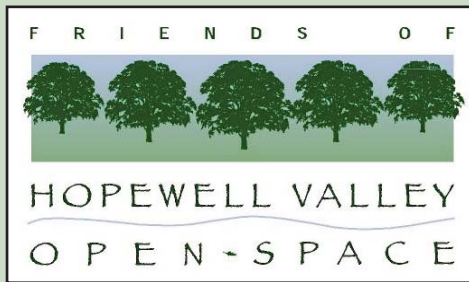
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The purpose of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is to promote conservation in the Hopewell Valley region through open space preservation, wise stewardship, education and outreach.

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For more information on how you can become involved, please contact us at info@fohvos.org