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

A Message from the President

Since it first enacted an open space tax, Hopewell Township has been a valuable partner in working with the Friends to tackle the challenge of conserving open space in the Valley. Together with the state’s Green Acres Program and Farmland Preservation Program, and the open space tax programs in Hopewell and Pennington Boroughs and Mercer County, virtually every successful land conservation project that has occurred in the region has been a collaborative effort among these groups, the Friends, and other land trust partners. The Friends believe that Hopewell Township can best maximize the open space tax monies by adopting a policy that caps its contributions to both open space and farmland acquisitions to ten percent of a property’s fair market value.

The history of land acquisitions that have used the Hopewell Township Open Space Trust Fund was reported in the Fall 2004 Township of Hopewell Report. Of the $19,527,969 spent to acquire open space and farmland throughout the Valley, the Township has contributed $1,479,705. This is approximately 7.6 percent of the total purchase prices. The Township’s contribution in many of these projects has actually been below 7 percent of the property value, as many of the parcels were bargain sales (purchased for below Certified Fair Market Value) that were negotiated in part by either the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space or the D & R Greenway Land Trust.

Because of the diversity of funding sources available to purchase open space, there is very little reason for Hopewell Township to spend more than the 10 percent of Township funds to acquire easements on farm- land, as the Township’s Agricultural Advisory Committee has encouraged the Township to do. The state’s Green Acres Program or the State Agricultural Development Committee can provide 50 percent of the matching grants for Township acquisitions. Mercer County can provide an additional 15 percent in grants for open space or farmland purchases under their municipal assistance program.

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Thank you for Your Years of Support!

Each year, the Pennington Market generously donates doughnuts, coffee, soda and other treats to help keep our Clean-Up Day volunteers going. The Friends would like to thank them for their continued commitment to making a difference in the community.

Preserved Land - Bellando

To document the historic elements of the home, the Friends hired Dennis Bertland Associates to prepare a Historical Assessment Report on the Brown/Bellando Farmstead. The Farmstead was dated to the middle of the 18th century bearing both Georgian and traditional construction. The interior is less altered than the exterior and retains much of its early character. The main block of the house has kept its original three-room plan with a corner fireplace and newel-turned staircase. The retained, raised paneling on the wall of the large, front room is the dwelling’s most notable original feature.

The Historical Assessment Report became the primary element of a Historic Preservation Easement that, along with a Conservation Easement restricting the subsequent development of the property, became part of the deed when the Friends sold the property to a private buyer.

The historic home is bounded on two sides by the 32 acres of land preserved under the Green Acres Program. This beautiful field connects to the Washington Crossing State Park and may, at some point in the future, serve as a gateway to Baldpate Mountain.
Undeterred by the day’s ice storm, dozens of Friends’ members attended the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space’s annual meeting on March 8 at the Pennington School.

Friends’ President, Ted Stiles, greeted attendees and gave a summary of the organization’s efforts in 2004. Stiles announced that the Friends preserved three new properties in 2004, resulting in 44 additional acres of protected open space in the Valley! With several additional properties under contract, the Friends anticipate preserving even more land in 2005. The contracted parcels represent the organization’s on-going commitment to linking preserved open space between the Valley and surrounding municipalities.

One of the evening’s highlights was the presentation of the annual Jack Gleeson Environmental Award to George Hawkins, the former Executive Director of the Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association. Hawkins was honored for his commitment to improving water quality, open space preservation and environmental regulations throughout the Township. During his seven years at the Watershed, the organization became the largest watershed association in the nation.

The evening’s keynote speaker, Jennifer Bryson, is President of the Sourlands Planning Council. Bryson detailed how the “fate of the Sourlands will be determined in the next three to five years.” The 90-square-mile, forested, mountain region, which provides the Valley with a significant portion of its drinking water, is facing increased pressure from developers. Bryson urged audience members to take an active role in protecting this unique ecosystem. For more information on the Sourlands Planning Council, visit www.sourland.org.

The Friends’ next annual membership meeting is scheduled for May of 2006. We hope to see you there.
Looking for a Way to Get Outside and Enjoy the Sunshine?

Whether you have thirty minutes, or a whole Sunday afternoon, Curlis Lake Woods Nature Preserve will delight the avid hiker or the novice explorer with its untouched natural beauty.

Considered by many to be the crown jewel of the Mercer County Park system, Curlis Lake Woods Nature Preserve has 88 acres of hiking trails. Purchased in 1993, along with what is now the Mercer County Equestrian Center, this property was once owned by Howe’s Nursery in Pennington. Curlis Lake was created by the State of New Jersey in the late 1950’s as one of a series of erosion control lakes along the Stony Brook.

The preservation of this beautiful forest was the prime motivation for the formation of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space under the guiding eye of the late Jack Gleeson. A survey at the time claimed that this property contained one of the largest stands of mature American Beech trees east of the Mississippi River. Many of the trees are several hundred years old. Faced with the possible development of the ill-fated Pennington By-pass, this property was the subject of much debate. In the end, the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space negotiated the deal and Mercer County acquired the land.

Now preserved as permanent open space, this park affords a wonderful outdoor experience that is within walking distance of Pennington Borough. The visitor may enter the nature preserve from three locations. A small grass lane appears on South Main Street in Pennington, just below Vannoy Avenue. A Green Acres sign is the only visible marker. A short walk in leads the hiker to a large sign with a map of all the trails in the park. Hikers can also access the trails from the south end of Oak Street, which is adjacent to Pennington Borough. The third access is from the Mercer County Equestrian Center on Federal City Road, just east of Pennington. Parking is available to the public there and hikers may enter the woods by walking along the edge of the fields to the right. A series of loop trails have been created from old logging roads, nursery lanes and deer trails. The recent addition of color-coded trail markers has made exploring the area a little bit easier.