



# Open Space Chronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Summer 2012

## 25 Years Preserving Open Space!

**I**t was grassroots organizing in the true sense of the word. In early 1987, an article in the Hopewell Valley News announced an open meeting being held to discuss what was happening as the building boom of the 1980's threatened the rural character of the Hopewell Valley. The meeting was called by a group of residents led by John W. Gleeson of Pennington. The urgency for action was underscored by plans to build a "Pennington By-pass" through the beautiful wooded tract just south of the borough that contains one of the Valley's most stately beech stands, and the 17-acre Curlis Lake. The 116-acre tract also had been the site of Howe Nurseries, which was established at the site in the early 1900's.



Watershed Association headquarters—some sat on the floor—and listened while the organizers laid out the facts. Lawrence Norris Kerr, a founder of neighboring Friends of Princeton Open Space, spoke to the group about forming a nonprofit land conservancy and offered encouragement and mentoring support. One week later, an organizing committee consisting of five open space advocates met and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space was launched. The Certificate of Incorporation as a New Jersey nonprofit corporation is dated May 12, 1987. At Pennington Day on May 8 of that year, nearly 200 people signed a petition supporting the preserva-

A group of about 35 concerned residents from all corners of the Valley crowded into a room at Stony Brook-Millstone

tion of Curlis Lake Woods and other open space in the Pennington area.

And here we are 25 years later with 4,000 acres saved, ownership of 30 preserves and 14 easements, and more than ten miles of trails among our accomplishments. Curlis Lake Woods was preserved in late 1993 by Mercer County, in a milestone acquisition that included the purchase of the Had-A-Farm Equestrian Center, creating a 242-acre preserve. The transaction was FoHVOS' initial effort as a facilitator which, together with our acquisition of a donated 214-acre conservation easement in the northern tier of Hopewell Township in 1990, marked the beginning of FoHVOS long record as one of the most successful small land trusts in the State of New Jersey. We reflect on Jack Gleeson's vision for land preservation and regret that he did not live to see his dream materialize. Jack died in 1989, and we celebrate his memory every year with the Jack Gleeson Memorial Environmental Award at our annual meeting.



Curlis Lake and the surrounding woodlands.

Photo by Jack Koepfel

*Continued on page 2.*

# 25 Years Preserving Open Space!

*Continued from page 1.*

Between 1998 and 2007, FoHVOS became owner of 21 preserves totaling 1664 acres, either solely or with our preservation partners. We were able to tap into the Garden State Preservation Trust for Green Acres funding that voters had approved in 1998. Edmund W. (Ted) Stiles, who came on board as FoHVOS president in 1989, was a tireless and skilled negotiator who brought both landowners and funding partners to the table. We lost Ted to cancer in 2007. In his eighteen years with FoHVOS, he shepherded the preservation of more than 3500 acres in the Hopewell Valley. Preservation Trust money has dwindled but, together with our funding partners and the structuring of complex funding scenarios, we are still preserving land including the 109-acre Hollystone Preserve in 2010 and the 89-acre Olcott Preserve this year.

Caring for the land through principles of sound stewardship is an important part of our mission. In 2006 we hired Mike Van Clef, a professional ecologist, as our stewardship director. He and our two part-time land stewards, Rachel Mackow and Beth Craighead, run a top-notch program of managing forest health, controlling invasive plants, restoring

habitat, building and maintaining trails, administering community cleanup days, monitoring our preserves and supervising our deer management program, enrolling landowners in our Private Lands Stewardship Program, fostering citizen science...and much more. They also supervise our dedicated volunteers who provide essential assistance with most of these programs.

We have grown from an all-volunteer organization operating from home computers to one with five part-time staff, including an executive director and a development director, plus seasonal interns, with a physical location in the historic Blackwell farmhouse in Washington Crossing State Park. Needless to say, our ambitious agenda keeps everyone—including our cherished volunteers—very, very busy.

As we step into the next quarter century, we look forward to engaging in many more land preservation projects, expanding our stewardship and outreach programs, and providing more opportunities for people to experience nature on our preserves. We are happy to have you as our partners in preserving and caring for the land in our beautiful Hopewell Valley.



## News & Events

### Gleeson Environmental Award Goes to the Vinsons

Jim and Rhonda Vinson were honored with the 2012 Jack Gleeson Environmental Award at the FoHVOS annual meeting on April 29, in recognition of their inspiration and generous funding for our publication, *Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley*. The Vinsons are hiking enthusiasts and have been dedicated supporters of open space preservation in

the Valley since FoHVOS' inception. It was their idea that a trail guide would help encourage people to get outside and enjoy the many trails available right here in our area. Since its publication, hundreds of the guidebook have been distributed at community events or mailed on request.

John Jackson, on the right in the photo, presented the award. The meeting was held at the visitor center atop Baldpate Mountain, whose 12 miles of trails are included in the guidebook.

The award was established in memory of the late Jack Gleeson, founder of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, and honors those whose efforts mirror the goals of our organization.



*State Street Global Advisors after a day of building the Jacobs Creek trail.  
Photo by Tom Ogren*





## President's Note

We are now more than halfway into our 25th anniversary year. I'm sure most of you have heard the numbers before – since our founding in 1987 to save the Curlis Lake Woods, we've gone on the preserve or brokered the preservation of 4000 acres of open space in Hopewell Township and we now own or share in the ownership of 30 preserves and 14 easements.

Although we remain fully dedicated to the preservation of additional land, over the past half dozen or so years our mission has broadened to include a myriad of stewardship activities for our lands. The goal of our stewardship activities is to maintain the natural values of our land – most importantly forest health and habitat protection for

native plant and animal species.

Ensuring the ecological health of our own preserves is an ongoing process, but over the next several years we will also be devoting much of our resources to extending the stewardship strategies we have instituted for our own preserves to as much of the land in Hopewell Township as we can. In particular, we will work actively with Hopewell Township, Mercer County and private landowners through our Community Stewardship program to apply sound forest health, deer management, invasive plant species control, and habitat protection techniques throughout the Hopewell Valley.

So, as we find ourselves extending our

reach beyond our own preserves to the entire Hopewell Valley, we have never been more in need of your support. A fun and enjoyable way to show your support is to join us at our Fall Gala, to be held this year at Hopewell Valley Vineyards on Saturday, October 6. Please come for wine, appetizers and dinner as we celebrate our accomplishments over the past quarter century and re-dedicate ourselves to preserving the fields, streams, and woodlands we all cherish here in the Hopewell Valley.

*John Jackson, President*



## News & Events

### 86 Acres Preserved Along Stony Brook

Summer began with the preservation of a beautiful blend of forest and open fields facing on Route 518 near Hopewell Borough—the 86-acre Olcott Preserve. FoHVOS joined with funding partners D&R Greenway Land Trust, Hopewell Borough, Hopewell Township and Mercer County in this significant acquisition, which is now part of the Stony Brook Greenway and provides a link to D&R Greenway's Cedar Ridge Preserve across the road. Owners Townsend Olcott and his wife Jodie worked with the partners to preserve the ecologically and historically important piece of the Hopewell Valley landscape.

D&R Greenway Land Trust will manage the Olcott Preserve and plans to restore the fields to native grasses to improve their habitat value for grassland birds. We at FoHVOS are very pleased to be a partner in the preservation of this key piece of land adjacent to the Sourlands region.



*The Olcott Preserve, on the left, is bounded on one side by scenic Stony Brook Road.  
Photo by Tom Ogren*





## News & Events

### County Open Space Funding Question on November Ballot

Mercer County is seeking voter approval of an open space funding question in November. The question does not ask for an increase in the open space tax levy, but rather for a change in how the money is allocated.

Mercer County residents currently pay two cents for every \$100 of assessed property value into the County open space preservation fund. The fund has enabled the County to preserve nearly 11,000 acres of open space and farmland in the past 20 years and provides a critical match to Green Acres funding for most of our open space acquisitions.

As currently structured, 70% of the fund goes toward land purchases, 15% toward recreational development and 15% toward historic preservation. The ballot question only asks

for a change in the way the money is allocated. 70% would still go for acquisitions but recreational development and historic preservation would share 20% and the remaining 10% would be allocated to a new category—stewardship. Stewardship funds would pay for equipment, personnel and materials to maintain and protect property while fostering habitat protection, restoration and educational programs.

Mercer County has been a partner with FoHVOS on several important habitat restoration projects, including forest restoration on the Ted Stiles Preserve and Baldpate Mountain and on the Hollystone Preserve, and grassland restoration at Mercer Meadows. Passage of this referendum will enable us to engage in further habitat protection and restoration projects with the County.



## On the Trail



Shown on the longer of the two bridges are, left to right, Galen Meyer (Kennan's dad), Kennan Meyer, Conor Hassett, John Hassett (Troop 44 Scoutmaster) and Lane Meyer (Kennan's brother.) Photo by Tom Ogren

**Curlis Lake Woods** is a beautiful mature woodland within easy reach of most Hopewell Valley residents. Some trail sections have been a bit challenging, but the Woodland Trail is now much easier to walk thanks to Kennan Meyer of Boy Scout Troop 44 in Pennington. Kennan and his crew, with the approval of the Mercer County Park Commission, successfully planned and built two fine bridges over a gully late last year as an Eagle Scout qualifying project. FoHVOS Vice President Tom Ogren oversaw the work. Kennan's work is part of FoHVOS' continuing efforts to improve public access and foster appreciation for Curlis Lake Woods, one of the Hopewell Valley's premier natural areas. The main entrance to the park is on South Main Street, just south of Pennington Borough.



Our **Thompson Preserve** meadow restoration site is a wildflower spectacular! One visitor remarked in an e-mail, "We went to Thompson park yesterday. You must go. It is fantastic. The wildflower meadow they planted is 6 feet tall and filled with flowers. There is a lot of bergamot, milkweed, black-eyed Susans, coneflower, another yellow very tall flower, and more."

These wildflowers are a magnet for butterflies, bees and dragonflies, who in turn pollinate crops on the adjacent organic farm. As the season slips into fall, goldfinches, field sparrows, chickadees and other birds will find a bounty of nutritious seeds on the 8-acre meadow. Juncos and white-throated sparrows will enjoy a banquet there in winter.

Come out and enjoy this four-season refuge. The Thompson trail consists of two loops which both traverse the restored meadow. One is flat and only 1.1 miles in length. The other is 1.6 miles, has some slopes, and requires the crossing of a steep gully that can be slippery when wet—so use caution. Parking is adjacent to the former Marshall's Corner Schoolhouse on Pennington-Hopewell Road (Rt. 654).



The Thompson Preserve wildflower meadow in mid-summer. Photo by Tom Ogren

Continued on page 5.



# On the Trail

Continued from page 4.

The north branch of the **Jacobs Creek Trail** now extends completely between Pennington-Titusville Road and Pennington-Harbourton Road, including a stepping-stone crossing of the creek. There is also an extension running south from the trail parking area on Pennington-Titusville Road. The trail provides access to one of the most scenic watercourses in the Hopewell Valley. Interpretive signs along the mile-long north branch enhance hikers' enjoyment of the walk.

Maps and directions for these and sixteen other trails can be found in our Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley, which can be downloaded from our website [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org). To request a hard copy, send an e-mail to [execdir@fohvos.org](mailto:execdir@fohvos.org), with "trail guide" in the subject line.



FoHVOS Land Steward Beth Craighead crosses Jacobs Creek on the trail's stepping stones. Photo by Tom Ogren



# Volunteer Spotlight

## Thank You, Volunteers

We value all of our volunteers who help with so many aspects of our work. Whether helping maintain trails, install signs, plant trees, monitor our preserves or work on events—all provide essential services that we could not perform without them.



Stewardship Director Mike Van Clef points out native shrubs to a group of volunteers. Photo by Pat Sziber

We celebrated our volunteers with a "Volunteer Appreciation Outing" at Washington Crossing State Park on July 21. A nature walk along an abandoned path that led to a streamside trail was led by stewardship staff members Mike Van Clef and Beth Craighead. At barbecue picnic, which included venison, burgers, hot dogs and delicious homemade sides, followed at Greene Grove. Good food, good company, a beautiful setting and beautiful weather—it doesn't get much better.



Jim Golis waits for Chris Berry to serve up a burger at Green Grove. Photo by Pat Sziber



## Special Volunteer Opportunity – Forest Restoration at Hollystone

Forty acres of abandoned field at the Hollystone Preserve have been prepared for planting trees and shrubs and it's going to take a lot of volunteer help to accomplish this ambitious forest restoration project. Plantings are scheduled for the following dates and times. Please sign up for your preferred date and time with the person indicated.

Tuesdays, November 6, 13, 20 and 27 – 9:00 a.m. to noon.  
Contact Beth Craighead at [beth@fohvos.org](mailto:beth@fohvos.org) or call 609-730-1560.

Thursday, November 8 and Friday, November 9 – 9:00 a.m. to noon or 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.  
Contact Jenn Rogers at [jrogers@mercercounty.org](mailto:jrogers@mercercounty.org) or call 609-303-0706.

### Save the Date!

- October 6 – Fall Gala at Hopewell Valley Vineyards. Register online.
- October 7 – Fall Hike at Skyview Preserve, 1:00 p.m.
- October 27 – Ted Stiles Memorial Hike at Baldpate Mountain, 10:00 a.m.
- November 11 – Clean Communities Cleanup Day. Starts at 8:00 a.m.

Check our website [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org) for more information. Sign up to receive ConstantContact e-mail notices for upcoming events by e-mailing [execdir@fohvos.org](mailto:execdir@fohvos.org)

**Corporate volunteer** groups have been an important part of some of our major projects, such as trail building and tree planting. If your business offers team-building volunteer work days, we invite you to inquire about our outdoor projects. A few hours of fresh air work in a natural setting can be very rewarding. Contact Land Steward Beth Craighead at 609-730-1560 or e-mail [Beth@fohvos.org](mailto:Beth@fohvos.org) to learn more.



## Stewardship Corner

### Major Habitat Restoration Projects Underway

With funding provided by very generous matching grants from Conservation Resources, Inc. and the cooperation of the Mercer County Park Commission, FoHVOS has begun work on two major habitat restoration projects in the Hopewell Valley area. In February of this year, we received a **\$68,100 Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership (RPWHP) grant** for a 40-acre soil and forest restoration project at Hollystone Preserve, adjacent to Baldpate Mountain. In July, we received a **\$252,952 RPWHP** grant for grassland habitat restoration at Mercer Meadows. The latter is the largest RPWHP grant ever awarded.

The Hollystone restoration, directly across Fiddlers Creek Road from the Ted Stiles Preserve, will extend the forest cover of the Baldpate Mountain ecosystem. Work began early this summer with analysis of soil samples to determine requirements for optimization of conditions for success of the plantings. In early August, the abandoned 40-acre field was mowed and contractor Shane Doyle loosened the compacted soil using a relatively new technique called "sub-soiling." After deer fencing is installed, trees and shrubs will be planted this fall. Baldpate Mountain is recognized as an Important Bird Area for its unique assemblage of neotropical migratory songbirds. The new forest patch will provide additional habitat for the birds and will connect with the beautiful streamside woodland along Fiddlers Creek, which forms a boundary of the Hollystone Preserve. The RPWHP grant is matched by \$15,000 from Partners for Wildlife, a \$5,000 grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society and \$48,100 in-kind match by Mercer County and FoHVOS in materials and staff time. Hollystone Preserve is jointly owned by FoHVOS, Mercer County, Hopewell Township and the State of New Jersey.



*Contractor Shane Doyle explains the sub-soiler to Mike Van Clef at the Hollystone restoration site. Photo by Pat Sziber*

FoHVOS has formed a unique partnership with Mercer County for the restoration of 435 acres of grassland habitat at the section of Mercer Meadows known as "the Pole Farm," an 842-acre preserve owned by the County in Hopewell and Lawrence Townships. The extensive fields provide some of the best grassland bird habitat in central New Jersey. Several birds listed by the State as endangered, threatened or species of concern have been documented at the site. In recent years the condition of the meadows has become degraded and the existing configuration of hedgerows is compromising habitat value. The Pole Farm is recognized as an Important Bird Area and restoration of the site is a critical action identified in the recently completed RPWHP Comprehensive Conservation Plan. It has also been identified as a high priority landscape-scale conservation area in our Hopewell Valley Community Stewardship Plan. The RPWHP grant will be matched by Mercer County, Partners for Wildlife and an in-kind match from FoHVOS for materials and staff. Mercer County is making a significant contribution to project implementation along with working with FoHVOS on project planning and oversight.

### More Funding for Stewardship Work

In 2011, FoHVOS received a **\$7,000 RPWHP conservation planning grant** to participate in technical advisory meeting and help develop the comprehensive conservation plan. This work was fulfilled by our Stewardship Director, Dr. Michael Van Clef.

A **\$3,500 grant from the Conserve Wildlife Foundation** and a **\$4,800 grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society** enabled us to erect deer fencing around an 8-acre abandoned field at the Kulak Preserve in the Sourlands, which FoHVOS co-owns with D&R Greenway Land Trust. Invasive plants were removed from the plot, which we filled in with native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants to close a gap in the forest.

*Continued on page 7.*



## Stewardship Corner

*Continued from page 6.*

This year, we received a **\$10,500 contract from the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team** to act as the organization's Central Region Coordinator, a position held by FoHVOS Land Steward Rachel Mackow.

In August we learned that we will receive a **\$1,500 grant from the Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund** to cover printing of two brochures, one promoting our Private Lands Stewardship Program and the other for fostering awareness and conservation of a globally rare and federally listed endangered species, the Shortnose Sturgeon which is endemic to our area of the Delaware River.

We are very grateful to these organizations for supporting our efforts to protect habitat and improve outcomes for our native flora and fauna.



### Private Lands Stewardship Program Gaining Momentum

One of the landmarks of FoHVOS' 25th anniversary year is completion this spring of our Hopewell Valley Community Stewardship Plan. The Plan, which can be viewed on our website, provides guidance to our stewardship efforts over the next ten years. A critical element of the Plan is the Private Lands Stewardship Program (PLSP), which seeks to engage Hopewell Valley private landowners in creation of backyard habitat, use of native plants in landscaping, removing invasive species from their yards and habitat restoration on larger properties. FoHVOS staff and trained volunteers will assist with planning and implementation. Our goal is to enroll a minimum of 800 Hopewell Valley households in the Program over the next ten years.

We encourage property owners to start getting involved by completing and mailing in the PLSP pledge, which can be printed out from our website. Profiles of the efforts of property owners who have already taken significant steps in the program are also on the website. To view the profiles, the Community Stewardship Plan, the Private Lands Stewardship Program flier and download the Landscape Planting Pledge go to our website [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org) and click on the yellow button "Private Lands Stewardship Program."



### Interns Complete 2012 Field Season

In late August New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team (NJISST) Field Stewards, Mike Bellaus and Jade Greene, completed the 2012 field season. They surveyed 7,500 acres and completed over 300 eradications of emerging invasive species across central New Jersey. Their activities were funded by a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to NJISST.

FoHVOS was a founder of NJISST and now acts as the Central Region Coordinator. To find out more about NJISST, please visit [www.fohvos.org/stewardship.html](http://www.fohvos.org/stewardship.html)



*Interns Mike Bellaus and Jade Greene with the NJISST truck.  
Photo by Pat Sziber*

*Fall Gala* ~ October 6, 2012 ~ Register now at [www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org)



PO Box 395  
Pennington, NJ 08534

## *Fall Gala*

October 6, 2012

Register now at  
[www.fohvos.org](http://www.fohvos.org)



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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](mailto:info@fohvos.org)*