



Open Space Chronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Summer 2015

Carter Road Preservation Celebrated!

Friends and advocates for the preservation of the sprawling former corporate campus on Carter Road gathered to celebrate the victory on April 22, Earth Day 2015. The celebration caps off more than five years of hard work to keep the land from high-density commercial and housing development.

The purchase of 230 acres spread across both sides of Carter Road from Equus Capital Partners, formerly known as Berwind Property Group, was finalized on April 17. The acquisition may set a record for both its complexity and the number of partners who participated in the effort. Eleven governing and nonprofit partners, under the leadership of New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) and the Hopewell Township Citizens' Group, contributed to the \$7.5 million purchase price. In addition to NJCF and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, partners include Mercer County, Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough, Pennington Borough, Princeton, Lawrence Township, D&R Greenway Land Trust, Friends of Princeton Open Space, and the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. The NJ Green Acres Program and Mercer County matching funds played a major role in the acquisition, as did generous contributions by private funders.

The property was tied up in litigation for several years. The developer had received general development plan and site plan approval for 800,000 square feet of office space, which would have brought about 4,000 cars a day to the rural roads of the Mount Rose section of Hopewell Township, which serves as a historic gateway between the Princeton-Lawrence area and the northeastern part of the Hopewell Valley. The office development was successfully challenged by the Citizens' Group, which was joined by NJCF in the lawsuit. The developer also sued to terminate a conservation easement and to regain ownership of 65 acres that the developer had deeded in fee to Hopewell Township on the

west side of Carter Road, where the developer more recently had proposed to build high-density housing. Equus retains approximately 80 acres on the east side of the road, which is limited to an additional 20,000 square feet of development. Mercer County will purchase an additional 11 acres on the east side. The transaction requires demolition of the abandoned conference center on the west side by Equus within one year.

Added together, the preserved lands straddling Carter Road total 320 acres. The site contains woodlands, early successional growth, scrub-shrub habitat and some open areas. It is crossed by two Category 1 tributaries of the Stony Brook. The varied habitat offers countless opportunities for habitat improvement and restoration. There are old, neglected trails on the property that await the hands of eager volunteers. A new segment of the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail will be built. We at FoHVOS look forward to our role in habitat improvements at the site, as well as plans for public access and opportunities for enjoyment of nature in this new addition to Hopewell Valley's roster of wonderful public open spaces.

We are in awe of the hard-earned success of this preservation project. We are grateful for all of the partners who pooled their resources to bring it about. We especially thank Mercer County for providing \$3.5 million, Hopewell Township for its \$2 million commitment and private donors who together contributed more than \$1.4 million. Green Acres funding provided \$1.33 million in grants to several partners, including FoHVOS. We especially celebrate the enduring commitment and unsurpassed skill of attorney Katherine Dresdner, who worked so hard over these past five years to save this land, and Michele Byers, executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation who was determined to make it happen. Many thanks to our open space champions!



Save the Date!
Celebrate Open Space with us on
Sunday, September 20
at Strawberry Hill on Baldpate Mountain





President's Note

We have a lot to celebrate with the April closing on 230 acres of the former AT&T tract on both the east and west sides of Carter Road. This acquisition, which together with adjacent preserved land totals 320 acres, accomplishes so much – preservation of the viewscape along this significant corridor into the Hopewell Valley, elimination of potentially thousands of car trips per day had the land been developed to its full potential for office/commercial use, and exciting opportunities for public access including both hiking trails and the completion of a major missing link in the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail.

Such a major victory is especially sweet in this era of greatly diminished Green Acres funding and is a testament to what can be accomplished with determination, teamwork, and grassroots citizen involvement. We salute all of our partners in this acquisi-

tion, with special thanks and recognition due to Katherine Dresdner, who conceived this project and led the grassroots Hopewell Township Citizens Group, and Michelle Byers and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation who provided the organizational backdrop and fundraising skills that brought this very ambitious project to fruition.

With great sadness I also note the passing of our friend and loyal supporter, Jim Vinson. Jim and his wife Rhonda have helped us in so many ways over the years. They were with us in the very early days, making a key land donation of five acres in what is now the Curlis Lake Woods preserve. This donation made possible the eventual preservation of the entire 242-acre tract by effectively blocking the construction of a proposed county road that would have bisected the Woods.

More recently, Jim and Rhonda underwrote our first Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley, the first comprehensive printed guide for Valley trails published in 2011. And last year, just a few months before Jim's death, the Vinsons generously agreed to support publication of a second edition of the Guide which will incorporate several new trails, including the new Fiddler's Creek Preserve and Alliger Park trails. The updated guide will debut this fall. Learn more about the new guide at our fall event on September 20 at Baldpate. It will be a happy event but tinged undoubtedly with sadness that Jim will not be there with us to celebrate open space and to see the fruits of his generosity.

John Jackson

John Jackson, President



In Memoriam: Jim Vinson

FoHVOS and the Hopewell Valley community lost a dedicated benefactor when Jim Vinson died unexpectedly on December 12. We can't remember a time when Jim and his wife Rhonda were not supporters of our organization, going back to our fledgling days. Jim couldn't bear to see the beautiful woods around Curlis Lake destroyed to make way for a proposed road. He became an advocate for preservation of the preserve now known as Curlis Lake Woods and a voice for creation of an organization that would work toward the preservation of Hopewell Valley's rural character.

But Jim's vision went beyond preservation. He also believed it was important that people be encouraged to enjoy and appreciate the many miles of trails in our area. He approached FoHVOS in late 2010 with the suggestion that we publish a guide to trails in the Hopewell Valley. Jim was determined to see the guide become reality and he and Rhonda underwrote the production of our Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley which was published in June 2011. They were placed in local libraries and other public places and many were mailed free of charge. Demand was great and, of the 3,000 copies printed, only a handful is left. We are now working on a second edition of the Guide, which will contain a few additions and updates. Jim and Rhonda provided funds for printing of the new edition, which we expect to make available later this year. Their generosity and commitment to getting people outdoors has made this



From left, FoHVOS president John Jackson, Rhonda Vinson, Jim Vinson celebrate the release of our Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley in 2011.

possible.

In spring of 2012, we presented the Jack Gleeson Environmental Award to Jim and Rhonda in recognition of their inspiration and generous funding for the Guide. We miss Jim and will always be grateful for having had the honor of working on this landmark project with him.



FoHVOS Voices Opposition to PennEast Pipeline

Along with dozens of other nonprofit organizations, municipalities and counties, as well as hundreds of individuals, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space has spoken out in opposition to the proposed PennEast pipeline. The 108-mile long 36-inch diameter pipeline would stretch from Luzerne County in Pennsylvania, cross the Delaware in northern Bucks County and enter New Jersey at Milford in Hunterdon County, cut through several rural townships in Hunterdon, enter Mercer County in the northwestern quarter of Hopewell Township and finally link up with a Transco line near Pennington. The pipeline would transport natural gas extracted from Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania by hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.”

The route as originally proposed in August of last year cut across the corner of one of our preserves. We denied permission to access the property in response to a letter from the company’s surveyor. PennEast’s map showed the route crossing many other preserved farms and open spaces, creating a cut where none existed before. In January of this year, PennEast released a map showing a new preferred route in which they propose collocating part of the pipeline route in an existing right-of-way (ROW), which happens to be the JCP&L powerline ROW that transects Baldpate Mountain, including the Ted Stiles Preserve which is owned in part by FoHVOS. Furthermore, this new “preferred route” does not resolve direct impacts to other preserved lands, wet-

lands and streams.

Digging, blasting and, very likely, clearing more of the ROW would be needed to accommodate the pipe. Years have been spent collecting data on Baldpate’s exceptional biodiversity and we do not want it to be compromised. We felt compelled to weigh in at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) scoping hearing held in West Trenton on February 25. Here are some of the points we asked FERC to address in their Environmental Impact Study.

- Baldpate Mountain hosts New Jersey’s highest concentration of neotropical migratory birds. Construction and maintenance work could result in critical disruption of the birds’ essential activities.
- A number of plants that are listed in NJ as endangered, or as species of concern, have been documented on Baldpate. We asked that a report specific to the proposed route be requested from the NJ Natural Heritage Program.
- Given the depth of soil to bedrock is, in places, no more than two feet blasting will be needed to bury the pipe to a suitable depth. The blasting could be especially disruptive to birds and other wildlife.
- Blasting can disrupt the fragile aquifer that is contained in the fractures and joints of the underlying rock.
- The route is close to the Hopewell Fault and an active rock quarry.
- A number of tributaries on Baldpate flow to either Fiddler’s Creek or

Moore’s Creek, both of which are classified as trout protection waters. Vegetation around these tributaries acts as a natural filter and should not be disturbed.

- Baldpate’s streams flow into the Delaware River, which is migratory and breeding habitat for two state and federally endangered fish species, Atlantic Sturgeon and Shortnose Sturgeon. Degradation of their habitat, such as siltation or toxic spills, may be a violation of the Endangered Species Act.
- The pipeline would be an intrusion on the historic significance of the area, which is within the Pleasant Valley Historic District.

The route also touches on a corner of the Curlis Lake Woods preserve, whose mature beech woods are noted in a study commissioned by FoHVOS in 1990. Protection of the beech woods was a major factor in the preservation of the site. Also, Bald Eagles have been observed in the area near the pipeline’s terminus, including a pair engaged in courtship behavior. The Bald Eagle is listed as endangered by the State of New Jersey.

We urged FERC to weigh the cumulative impacts of existing and proposed natural gas pipelines and proposed the use of existing gas infrastructure to get the product to its destination.

The full text of our testimony can be found on our website www.fohvoss.org.



Generous Gifts Support our Stewardship Work

We are very grateful for generous gifts received in the past few months that will help ensure the continued success of our stewardship program and enable us to explore new ways to protect the land entrusted to our care.

A \$20,000 gift from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company for our Stewardship Fund will be used to support several of our ongoing programs including habitat management and restoration; community deer management; invasive species

management; rare species management; and our Private Lands Stewardship Program. It will also help us foster community support for stewardship, build our Citizen Science Program which includes species counts, and maintain public access to our preserved lands. This type of general support enables us to maintain the highest standard in our stewardship work.

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Generous Gifts Support our Stewardship Work, continued

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A pledge of more than \$20,000 by an anonymous donor is funding the restoration of a meadow at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. Invasive plants have been cleared from the 7-acre field that slopes up from the driveway to the tree line and seeding with native grasses and wildflowers is scheduled for this spring. This very generous gift enables us to carry out several of our stewardship objec-

tives: habitat restoration, invasive species management, education and public access.

We have also received a \$300 gift from the Rush Holt & Margaret Lancefield Fund of the Princeton Area Community Foundation for general support.

We thank all of these thoughtful donors for their very generous support.



Two Ways of Giving “Outside the Box”

When Bert Blumenthal and Kate Saporetti planned their January wedding they decided that, rather than buy party favors for their guests, they would donate the money they would have spent to a charity. They chose Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space as the lucky recipients of their \$400 gift. The Titusville residents are frequent visitors to the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. Bert often rides his mountain bike there and both have been to our fall event at Strawberry Hill. And here’s the best part: on one of their hikes on the mountain Bert proposed to Katie as they shared the spectacular view over the Delaware River and surrounding landscape. Now that’s romantic! Guests learned about this sweet gesture...and our work...from a display posted at the wedding.



FoHVOS display at Bert and Kate's wedding

Troop 28 Scout Garret Monfre chose to build a 10-foot bridge over a swale at Curlis Lake Woods for his community service project to qualify for the rank of Eagle Scout. He was very good at fundraising as well as bridge building. When his project was completed, Garret found he had money left over and he donated the \$241.56 in excess funds to Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space. We give him extra points for that!

Bert, Kate and Garret—we thank you for your creative giving!



Garret Monfre, center, and his crew on their bridge

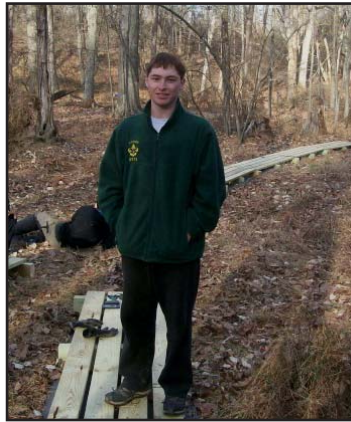


Volunteer Spotlight

Eagle Scout Trail Projects in the Hopewell Valley

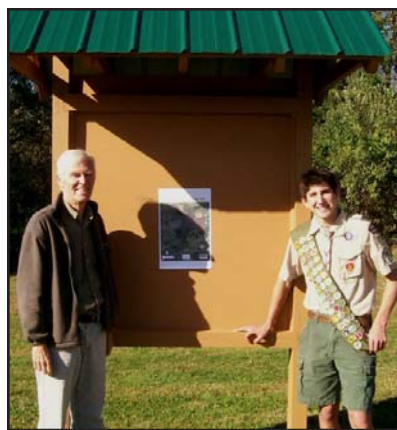
Eagle Scout candidates were busy last year and earlier this year making the Hopewell Valley a better place to hike. Five Boy Scouts completed trail related “community service” projects as a final requirement to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in scouting. Under the guidance of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space board member Tom Ogren, the high school age scouts with help from younger scouts created one new trail and improved existing trails at three sites.

On the Jacobs Creek Trail, Aaron Rabin of Troop 1776 constructed a new 64 foot long, 24 inch wide boardwalk to replace a 12 inch wide boardwalk which, due to its narrow width, was sometimes overgrown and hard to follow. The boardwalk is located at the northern end of the trail. The Jacobs Creek Trail, which was created by Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) volunteers, extends from Pennington-Titusville Road to Pennington-Harbourton Road.



Aaron Rabin of Troop 1776

At Curlis Lake Woods, a County owned preserve whose trails are maintained by FoHVOS, two scouts, Donald Allen of Troop 41 and Garret Monfre of Troop 28, undertook much needed improvements to the popular Woodland Trail. Donald constructed 32 feet of boardwalk over muddy trail sections and Garret constructed a 10 foot bridge over a swale. Their projects complemented two previous Eagle Scout projects undertaken at Curlis Lake Woods in 2010 and 2011, the construction of three bridges over swales and a trail entrance sign by Jeremy Thong and Kennan Myer, both of Troop 44. On tap for this year is another bridge project proposed by Ethan Jeffs of Troup



Andrew Lauricella of Troop 1776 with mentor FoHVOS Vice President Tom Ogren

44. Curlis Lake Woods is located just south of Pennington Borough.

At Hopewell Township’s Alliger Park on Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, Andrew Lauricella of Troop 1776 created a one mile long trail, known as the Woolsey Brook Trail, and constructed a kiosk at the trailhead. Andrew’s trail project included steps down to the Woolsey Brook, trail blazes, and side hilling to level the trail grade on slopes. Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space created a trail map for the kiosk and provided information on the new trail for the New Jersey Trails Association website (www.njtrails.org).

Another Eagle Scout trail project at Alliger Park was completed just this spring by Tommy Vite of Troop 1776. His project made improvements to a newly created second trail known as the Osage Ridge Trail. (This trail was partially completed this spring by volunteers led by local trail builder Alan Hershey.) Included in Tommy Vite’s project were steps down to a stream, trail blazes, directional posts, and two benches. One bench was installed on the abandoned track bed of a 19th railroad line which ran through the park. The bench overlooks the Woolsey Brook from a 15 foot high embankment created in the 1870’s for a wooden trestle to span the Woolsey Brook.



Tommy Vite of Troop 1776 (4th from right) and crew



On The Trail

“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” John Muir

There is something about a walk in natural surroundings that refreshes the mind and body, relieves tension and fosters a feeling of contentment. It's more than the exercise. The sounds, sights and smells of nature draw our minds away from our everyday tensions and shift our focus on the beauty around us. Teachers of guided meditation encourage practitioners to absorb this sensory input without judgment and to just let it flow. Yoga instructors encourage their students to practice “walking yoga”.

Preserving places for nature is only part of our mission; we encourage people to explore nature and to reap the benefits of a walk in the woods. We maintain walking trails on seven of our own preserves. Our Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley, a second edition of which is scheduled for release this year, describes 70 miles of trails at 19 locations – some quite hidden and seldom visited. There are several resources for seeking out these quiet gems, each harboring its

own special ecological treasures and places to rest and restore your peace of mind. Here are a few:

- Online version of our Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley at www.fohvos.org
- New Jersey Trails Association website www.njtrails.org. 70 trail descriptions, searchable by location.
- <http://hiddentrenton.com/smartphone-trail-maps> - Maps of several trails and a free app that you can download.

Hopewell Valley's Newest Trails:

The new trails at Hopewell Township's 167 acre Alliger Park offer hikers a varied trail experience as they pass through mature spruce and hardwood forests, cross streams, and follow rows of Osage orange trees designed to “fence in” livestock many years ago. Views from the top of steep ravines add to the hiking experience. A walk on the Woolsey Brook/Osage Ridge trails is about 1.7 miles round trip. There are a few moderately steep but short climbs but the terrain is mostly

level. Note: High water soon after heavy rains may prevent crossing the Woolsey Brook on stepping stones. Alliger Park is located on Washington Crossing – Pennington Road just west of the Hopewell Township Public Works garage.

COMING SOON: Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space will be printing a second edition of its popular Guide to Walking Trails in the Hopewell Valley. New trails at Fiddler's Creek Preserve, Alliger Park and Mercer Meadows will be included in this new edition. Watch for it at local libraries this Fall.



Crossing Woolsey Brook at Alliger Park



Stewardship Corner

Church & Dwight Grant Funds Summer Triangles

We are very grateful for a \$3,000 grant from the Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund that will enable us to install Summer Triangles at three new locations. The Triangles provide a focus for pollinator activity and invite people to learn about bees and how native plants help them to thrive. Our first three installations were designed, constructed and planted last year under the direction of local artist and FoHVOS board member Ruth Jourjine, whose concept blends art and ecology as a tool for drawing public attention to the role of bees in pollination and the threats to their wellbeing. This funding enables us to continue the work we began last year, which was supported by a grant from Washington Crossing Audubon Society.

Each Summer Triangle is a fenced habitat patch of native plants and nest structures, as well as artistic elements. As the growing season progresses we will monitor last year's plantings for plant growth and bee activity. The 2014 triangles are located at Nayfield Preserve, Kulak Preserve and Mercer Meadows. This year's installations will be located at Hopewell Township's Alliger Park, the Pennington Senior Center, and the Hopewell Borough Train Station.

Watch for an announcement this summer for a celebration of Summer Triangles, the pollinators and the plants that support them. Meanwhile, please contact us if you would like to learn how you can create a pollinator patch on your own property and read more about the project on our website.



Cedar posts in the center of each Summer Triangle hold ceramic forms and nesting areas for native bees.





Stewardship Corner

Baldpate Meadow Restoration Update

The 7-acre field that slopes upward to Baldpate Mountain's high point has been cleared of invasive plants. Seeding with a mix of native grasses and wildflowers was set for May. This summer, mowing will control the most vigorous growth so that a wide range of plants will flourish. This ambitious project has been made possible by a pledge of more than \$20,000 by an anonymous donor. In time, the rich meadow will welcome a host of pollinators as well as hikers, photographers and naturalists. Because of its easily accessible location, the meadow can also serve as an outdoor classroom for budding naturalists as well. Photographers and artists are likely to find inspiration in views of the Delaware River over a lush field of wildflowers. Butterflies, dragonflies and native bees will populate the meadow and winter birds will forage among the dried seed-bearing stalks.



Baldpate Forest Stewardship Plan in the Works

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) has entered into an agreement to collaborate with New Jersey Audubon (NJ A) to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan for 1,500 acres on Baldpate Mountain through a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Approvals have been received from Mercer County and the NJ State Park Service, who co-manage the property with FoHVOS, to create the plan. Both FoHVOS and NJ A will have a role in collection of data and writing the plan. Among the topics to be included in the plan are forest inventory, soils, rare and endangered species and other wildlife considerations, deer management and other forest health topics, wetlands, vernal pools and water resources, historic, archaeological and cultural resources and recreation and aesthetics. A management schedule will be drafted and, finally, the plan will be sent to the NJ Forest Service for approval.



Cardinal flower is especially attractive to hummingbirds.

The Forest Stewardship Plan will provide guidance for managing the largest contiguous forest in Mercer County by providing information on the distribution, size and age of canopy trees, along with other important forest characteristics, that have never been compiled at Baldpate Mountain. Once the plan is complete, FoHVOS will be eligible to receive additional grant funding from NRCS to implement the plan.



Private Lands Stewardship Program Passes Milestone

We now have over 100 participants enrolled in our Private Lands Stewardship Program (PLSP). Together they have placed over 10,000 plants in their yards and restored almost 10 acres to native meadow habitat, providing outstanding benefits for pollinators and birds. Many participants have removed invasive species from their yards, still others have allowed hunting to occur on their lands as we strive together to balance the deer herd in the Hopewell Valley.

Have you been thinking about converting part of your yard to a meadow or native plant garden? We can help with consultation and guidance on plant selection, along with providing access to inexpensive plants from wholesale native plant nurseries. Click on "Private Lands Stewardship Program" on the left side of our main page at www.fohvos.org to read about the program. And you can register online as well. We will place another bulk native plant order in August, so now would be a good time to start planning. And watch for news of a special workshop on converting part of your lawn to a meadow area, hosted at the home of a PLSP participant on August 1.





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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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