



# Open Space Chronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space

Winter 2010-11

## A Trail Near You: Federal Grant Brings Us Closer to Our Goal

**W**ouldn't it be wonderful to have a walking trail within easy reach of every neighborhood in the Hopewell Valley? This is one of the goals of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space. A National Recreation Trails Program grant that we were awarded in September 2008 is helping us bring this vision to reality. Two years into the grant, we have completed 7 ½ miles of trails on five of our preserves and have installed a number of enhancements to welcome you, our neighbors, onto these natural open spaces. Trail building will resume in the spring and by the end of the grant period next summer, we will have pleasant, accessible trails on seven FoHVOS preserves.

The \$18,975 grant, which is funded by the Federal Highway Administration and is administered in New Jersey by the Office of Natural Lands Management in the Division of Parks and Forestry, is designed to help organizations like ours to build trails and make them more user-friendly. The money comes from federal gas taxes attributed to off-highway vehicle use.

One thing that we have heard repeatedly from residents is that our preserves are hard to find. Indeed, they tend to blend in with the landscape around them and the trailheads are inconspicuous. To overcome this problem, we have worked with Mercer County and Hopewell Township to get permission to put preserve signs within easy view of the road. Six preserves now have "Nature Preserve" signs displaying the FoHVOS logo.

We realized that, given the distances between residential areas and the trails, we needed to make some improvements to existing pull-offs to allow for parking for two or three cars. We have cut back brush in some cases and have put down crushed stone.

The trails meander through a variety of natural habitats and, to encourage quiet reflection, we have built and installed benches on all seven preserves that have, or will have, trails. Kiosks at trailheads will display the map and highlights for each trail.

Education is part of our mission. To encourage visitors to slow down and savor the species and habitats along the trails we plan to mark selected trees with small identification tags planted on posts. Thanks to a \$4,200 grant from the

Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund, we will install interpretive signs to highlight special features, such as a pollinator meadow, wetland or riparian habitat.

All of these tasks, with the exception of the interpretive signs, are funded by the Recreation Trails Program grant. And we are stretching the dollars with donations of supplies from Home Depot, who have been very generous in their support.

It goes without saying that trail work is physically demanding and time-consuming. We could not do it with staff alone. We are very much indebted to a core group of volunteers who, with the help of corporate groups, Scouts and others, are creating special places for people of all ages for passive enjoyment of the outdoors close to home. Through mid-October, more than 800 volunteer hours had augmented the 180 or so staff hours that went into the effort.

*Continued on page 2.*



*Clearing fallen trees at the Eames Preserve. Photo by Jim Gambino*

## A Trail Near You

*Continued from page 1.*

As trail maps and descriptions are completed, they are posted at [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org). The Elks Preserve on Crusher Road, Nayfield Preserve on Lambertville-Hopewell Road, Eames Preserve on Harbourton-Woodville

Road and Heritage Preserve on Reed Road are currently posted. The Skyview Preserve trail beginning at Marshall's Corner-Woodville Road is complete and is next in line for posting. Trail work is underway at the Thompson Preserve on Pennington-Hopewell Road. With the help of a

generous donor, we plan to publish a guide to trails in the Hopewell Valley next spring.

If you would like to join our convivial volunteer trail crew, please e-mail us at [info@fohvos.org](mailto:info@fohvos.org) or call 609-730-1560.



*Corporate volunteers did some heavy lifting at the Skyview Preserve. Photo by Rachel Mackow*



*Trail regulars Tom Ogren and Chris Berry after bridging a ditch at Heritage Preserve. Photo by Rachel Mackow*

## Winter Walks

Open views. Frozen streams. Holly berries on a snow-laden branch. Hiking in winter is less a test of endurance than a treat for the eyes and ears. The same path that we walked in summer has become a different world. The near-silence is striking. Birds call but do not sing. Wind rustles through dry goldenrod in the meadow. Water gurgles beneath a thin layer of ice. Snow crunches and squeaks beneath our boots. A brittle branch cracks in the wind.



*Winter at Hollystone Preserve. Photo by Pat Sziber*

There is something about the dormant landscape that sweeps away the clutter in our minds and reminds us of our place in nature. Maybe it's because nature is stripped to its own bare bones. Naked trees and shrubs reveal nests cleverly hidden amongst greenery in spring. A hammering sound, no longer muffled by dense canopy, leads to the discovery of the oval excavations of a pileated woodpecker. Solitary in-line tracks in the snow suggest the presence of a coyote, evidence that a top predator may have been scouting here. The "handprint" of a raccoon, the tiny toe prints of a mouse, the unmistakable cloven impression of deer hooves: Hibernation is the privilege of very few.

Dried flower heads nodding under a cloak of ice are a photographer's treasure trove. The golden wash cast by the low-angled sun enriches the neutral colors of the sleeping landscape. Even the long shadows are photogenic. You just can't take a bad picture in winter.

So grab a warm fleece, dress in layers and head out to enjoy some local trails. Check [www.njtrails.org](http://www.njtrails.org) for directions and trail descriptions. Most FoHVOS trails are on moderate terrain and about a mile and a half in length—an easy winter walk. The trails are also suitable for cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing. BUT, do check the signs at entrances for hunting dates, which can vary among the preserves but never include Sundays. Only the hunters are permitted on hunting days. If the more challenging trails at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain are your favorites, you can find the hunting days posted at entrances and also on the Hopewell Township website, [www.hopewelltpw.org](http://www.hopewelltpw.org), and the Mercer County website, [www.mercercounty.org](http://www.mercercounty.org). Note: The newly acquired Hollystone Farm is included in the Baldpate deer management program.





## President's Note

We couldn't do it without you. That's an old cliché, but this issue of Open Space Chronicles is a perfect illustration of how much we rely on you, our members, for so much of what we do. In a given year our activities rely on the active participation of hundreds of volunteers from the Hopewell Valley.

I'm sure many people think of FoHVOS primarily as a closely-knit organization that structures and facilitates open space land purchases, and it's undeniably true that this task is necessarily done by a relative handful of skilled and experienced people. But we've broadened our mission in recent years beyond our traditional land acquisition role and we now devote major resources to opening up our preserves to provided access to the public, and also serving as caretakers, maintaining and even enhancing the natural values of the lands we are entrusted with. And these new activities require lots of woman/manpower.

If you'd like further evidence about how many people are involved in our activities, make sure you read this month's article on the progress we have made with our federal trails grant, progress which has come almost entirely from the efforts of a dedicated corps of volunteers. Also read about the Baldpate reforestation project involving the effort of more than a hundred volunteers. Not featured in this issue, but also very volunteer-intensive, is the Invasive Species Strike Team. And don't forget about the Spring and Fall Cleanup Days which the Friends have administered for Hopewell Township for nearly twenty years. Each Cleanup Day involves the efforts of well over a hundred volunteers.

This brings me to a related point and that concerns our current yearly membership drive which is underway now. Because we rely so heavily on volunteers, every dollar invested in FoHVOS is leveraged many times over and provides a very high return to the resi-

dents of Hopewell Valley. We have a small staff consisting of three part-time people to manage our day-to-day operations and to effectively make use of our volunteers. We continue to operate on the proverbial shoestring but, while the grants we receive go a long way to fund program operations, we rely on you, our supporters, to help maintain the high quality of the service that we provide.

We have been good stewards not only of our lands but also of our finances and we stretch every dollar that we receive. So, if you have not yet responded to the membership renewal request you received a few weeks ago, I hope you will realize that we really can't do it without you. Please renew soon and consider an increase in your support. We are counting on you as we continue to preserve and care for land in the Hopewell Valley in 2011.

*John Jackson, President*

## The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Do you have a significant birthday or other milestone coming up? Are you already thinking, "Gee, I don't really need another set of highball glasses or one of those 'Improving with Age' t-shirts?" Here's an idea that will get both you and your friends and family off the hook. Have them make a donation to FoHVOS in your name instead.

Pennington resident David Garber did just that. As his 50th birthday approached, he suggested to friends and family that they consider a donation to FoHVOS in lieu of a gift. Brilliant! It's more imaginative than the ubiquitous gift card and doesn't take up precious space in the cupboard or in the shirt drawer. And think of the shopping time that people saved! Everybody wins. David can bask in the satisfaction of knowing he is helping care for the land in Hopewell Valley, and FoHVOS wins more friends to help us carry out our mission.

Many thanks to David and his friends for their generosity. If you feel inspired to do the same, be sure to tell your friends and family to include a note stating that the gift is in your honor. Checks should be made out to "FoHVOS" and mailed to us at P.O. Box 395, Pennington, NJ 08534.



*Best Wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year  
From the Trustees and Staff of  
Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space*



# News & Events

## Mountain and Valley Fest 2010

Scenes from the weekend celebration hosted by Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space and The Friends of Howell Living History Farm. Many thanks to our sponsors who helped make the event a success: Capitol Copy Service, Hopewell Valley Community Bank and an anonymous donor. Kudos to event co-chairs Beth Caylor (FoHVOS) and Martin Rapp (FoHLHF) and committee volunteers Evann Gleeson, Ruth Jourjine and Ray Sziber. Photos by Kelly Caylor.



Howell Farm Director Pete Watson (2nd from right) with guests at the Summit Celebration.



The silent auction in the greenhouse at Strawberry Hill mansion.



The bluegrass sounds of Mountain View Band were perfect for the mountaintop setting.



Jane Rakos-Yates of the Mercer County Wildlife Center with a great horned owl.



Tomato tasting courtesy of Gravity Hill Farm.



Walk-and-sketch artists at the Howell Farm.

## Hopewell Valley Cleanup Day Makes a Difference!

Legions of cleaner-uppers hit the roads again on November 13, which turned out to be as perfect an autumn day as one could hope for. About 150 volunteers, both groups and individuals, lugged bags of trash and recyclables to the dumpster in front of the Hopewell Township Public Works building. Many of these volunteers are Scouts, Brownies, athletic teams and school groups. We are indebted to the parents, coaches and adult leaders who organize and supervise the groups. It is great to see the enthusiasm the kids have for keeping our Valley clean. Many thanks to Pennington Quality Market for supplying refreshments to keep energy levels up. Project manager this time was FoHVOS Land Steward Beth Craighead, who was assisted at the sign-in table by volunteers Chris Berry and Jim Gambino.

Volunteer Lynn Reed, who has been cleaning up litter in Titusville with her friend Janice Kerns for several years, sent the following comments:



Before and after cleanup on River Drive. Photos by Janice Kerns

"The following pictures show before and after shots taken at the north end of Titusville along the Delaware River. This is a favorite spot to "hang out" for teenagers and local fisherman. Unfortunately, the ones who enjoy the river do not always leave it with its pristine beauty. Thanks to the cleanup each spring and fall the bottles, cans and other trash are picked up and taken to the township municipal building for recycling and disposal. Please do not litter!! Think about volunteering and cleaning up an area near you."

Cleanup Day is funded by a NJDEP Clean Communities grant to Hopewell Township. The program is administered by Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space as part of our conservation and stewardship mission.





## Stewardship Corner

### Closing the Gap: Baldpate Reforestation Project

In mid-November, 116 volunteers worked a total of 295 hours over 5 days planting 1,660 native trees and shrubs in 8.3 acres of abandoned fields at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. The planting, a joint project of the Mercer County Park Commission and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, will eventually fill in a significant gap in the forest and improve habitat for a number of species that rely upon large, unbroken woodlands. On December 9th, the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders presented Certificates of Honor to FoHVOS and other participants in the project.

The locations for the reforestation, one large field and one small one, were carefully chosen with sensitivity to the

habitat needs of birds that have been documented on the mountain. Birds that live and breed only in deep forest areas will benefit from the increase in forest cover and reduction in forest "edge." Among those species are hooded warbler, worm-eating warbler and Kentucky warbler, whose only known breeding location in Mercer County is on Baldpate Mountain. Other fields on the mountain will remain open.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provided the trees and shrubs to Mercer County. FoHVOS received a \$17,500 grant from Conservation Resources, Inc. to cover the cost of deer fencing and its installation as part of CRI's Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership Forest Conservation Plan

Implementation grants program. The sturdy 8-foot high fence will protect the plants until they grow above the reach of browsing deer.

Volunteers included groups from Educational Testing Service, Rosetta, Merck, Inc., the Girl Scouts, Master Gardeners of Mercer County and Hopewell Valley Central High School. Participants in the Baldpate hunting program and other individuals helped as well.

The Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain is part of the Sourland Mountain Region and contains the largest contiguous forest in Mercer County. This project, which expedites natural forest succession, will make a good thing even better.



Volunteers planted over 1,600 trees and shrubs on Baldpate. Photo by Anne Heasley

### Smaller Grants Fund Pieces of Our Projects

A \$4,200 grant from the **Church & Dwight Giving Fund** will get us started on the design and installation of interpretive signage on FoHVOS trails. The 11" x 17" signs will describe various elements of the flora and fauna, along with descriptions of broader ecological principles. Each sign will include color photos and easy-to-read text. It is our goal to enhance the outdoor experience for adults and children alike as they walk the trails and explore the natural world around them. Design and production will take place over the winter months and installation will begin in the spring. Many thanks to Church and Dwight, and to Mary-Beth Boyle, our employee sponsor.

An additional \$2,500 **Franklin Parker Grant from Conservation Resources, Inc.** will help with the eradication of emerging invasive plants in central New Jersey. We are very grateful to CRI for their continuing support, which now totals \$12,000, for this ecologically important program.





## Volunteer Spotlight

FoHVOS launched a Site Steward Program in 2009 to engage volunteers in monitoring the condition of our preserves on a regular basis. One of the first recruits into the program was **Chuck Hansen** who, with his wife Sherry Campbell, monitors the 76-acre Eames Preserve on Harbourton-Woodsville Road. They learned about the program from Stewardship Committee leader Chris Berry while helping to blaze the Eames trail with him on the preserve and signed up on the spot.

The program requires that Site Stewards visit their adopted preserve at least once each season to keep tabs on trail conditions, report problems, perform light trail maintenance and make note of unique sightings. Chuck has gone far beyond these basic requirements and has developed a passion for the Preserve and the critters that live and visit there. For example, he has been honing his skills as a birder and now regularly reports his sightings on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology site, <http://ebird.org>, a unique data tracking and sharing site for birders worldwide.

Chuck has been sending reports to Site Steward leader Chris Berry about every three months. Some of his natural history observations at Eames include Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Flying Squirrel, Red Fox, Coyote, Box Turtle and, of course, Whitetail Deer. Birds of interest that are nesting at Eames include Common Yellowthroat, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Eastern Wood Pewee. He birds other preserves as well but reports that the Eames Preserve is the most reliable place in our area to observe the rather uncommon Pileated Woodpecker.

Chris Berry reports that Chuck called attention to erosion on the Eames trail where it followed an old farm road; the trail crew rerouted the trail last sum-



Chuck Hansen. Photo by Sherry Campbell

mer. Chuck states, "Chris and the FoHVOS volunteer trail maintenance team are extremely responsive, quickly correcting any issues that I report. They are out there every week working hard to keep all the trails in great shape."

He adds, "I love the outdoors and value my time spent hiking and birding. Living in the Hopewell Valley gives us more opportunity for outdoor recreation because there is so much open space close to home. I volunteer because I want to help take care of and protect these resources, just as if they were part of my own backyard."

When not walking and taking notes along our many beautiful trails, often with his wife Sherry, Chuck works in his home office for Lenaro Paper Company, a certified member of the Forest Stewardship Council ([www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)). Regarding our Site Steward Program, he states, "Participants in the program and all FoHVOS volunteers are doing great work in helping to preserve and restore

our woodlands and open spaces to their more natural condition, as well as gathering information that helps us better understand them. This work goes a long way in improving habitat for many birds and animal species while providing access to outdoor recreational resources for humans."

Many thanks to Chuck Hansen, Sherry Campbell and all of our Site Stewards for their participation in the Site Steward Program. As a group, Site Stewards contribute in countless ways. They maintain trails by pruning, lopping, sawing and pulling plants that are encroaching on the trail and they help to control invasive plants. Some have started inventories of plants and animals at their preserve, which will help in developing a management plan for each preserve. All of them report that they greatly enjoy their time on the preserves. If you would like to become a Site Steward, contact us at [info@fohv.org](mailto:info@fohv.org). A handbook and training are provided for those who join the program.





## People

### Beth Craighead Joins Staff

Summer intern Beth Craighead joined the FoHVOS staff as a part-time Land Steward in mid-September to help fill in for Rachel Mackow, who welcomed a new baby boy in early December. Beth is an experienced naturalist who came to us with excellent credentials in stewardship work, including invasive species control and managing volunteers. Her cheerfulness, energy and willingness to take on new projects are proving to be valued assets. Beth lives in Langhorne, PA with her husband and young son.



*Land Steward Beth Craighead.  
Photo by Pat Sziber*

### Scout Improves Trail Access at Curlis Lake Woods

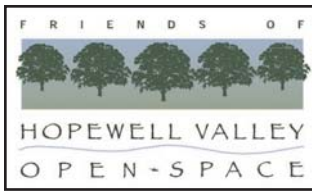
Jeremy Thong of Pennington fulfilled his Eagle Scout Leadership Service with a project that involved improving the entrance to Curlis Lake Woods and building a bridge on one of the trails.

With help from Pennington Councilman and FoHVOS Vice President Tom Ogren, Jeremy coordinated his work with the Mercer County Park Commission, consulting them on bridge and sign design. He researched his project, estimated costs, recruited volunteers and supervised the project. The result of his efforts is a new sign to be installed at the Oak Street entrance to the preserve and a 12-foot long bridge over a deep gully on the Redwood Trail. These are improvements we have long wanted to see and we congratulate Jeremy on his accomplishment.

Curlis Lake Woods was purchased by Mercer County in 1993 with money provided by the County Open Space Fund. FoHVOS worked for seven years helping to facilitate and garner public support for the acquisition and we have maintained a connection with the preserve ever since.



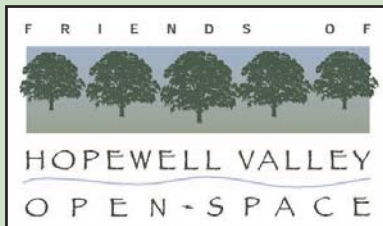
*Eagle Scout Jeremy Thong and volunteers Sarah Thong, Thomas Webster and Chris Bunsu proudly took the first steps on the Redwood Trail bridge.  
Photo by Tom Ogren.*



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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.*

## Board and Staff List

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

***info@fohvos.org***