

MORRIS COUNTY OPEN SPACE ELEMENT 2024



Prepared by the Morris County Planning Board





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- Monarch Butterfly at the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center (Photo by Morris County Park Commission)



- Snow covered bench and trees at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum (Photo by Morris County Park Commission)



- Gardner Field Playground, Denville Township (Photo by Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation)





Morris County Master Plan Open Space Element



Prepared By:

Morris County Planning Board

and

Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation



I hereby certify that this document is a true copy of the Open Space Element adopted by the Morris County Planning Board at its regular meeting on September 19, 2024.



Joseph Barilla, PP/AICP, Planning Director





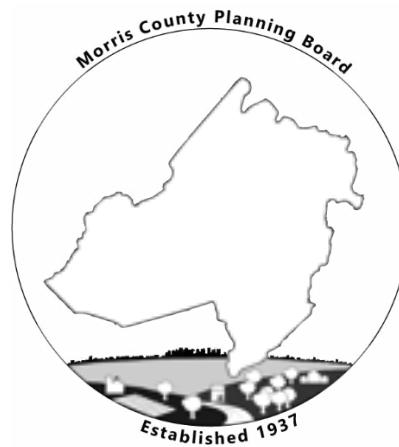
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1. INTRODUCTION

Morris County can be defined in no small part by its abundance of parks and open spaces, including widely varied parks and recreational opportunities, natural features and environmentally sensitive areas, lakes, waterways, forests, mountains, trails and greenways, scenic vistas, historic and cultural resources; all complimented by hundreds of farms and thousands of acres dedicated to a thriving agricultural economy. This Plan recognizes that open space (and its associated environmental, cultural, and historic characteristics) is a major component supporting Morris County's environmental and economic health and plays a key role in defining and maintaining Morris County's overall quality of life.

Recognizing the value that open space brings to the entire County, the County of Morris and local municipal governments have long been active leaders in open space preservation, initiating open space funding programs and aggressively pursuing open space acquisition. County, municipal, federal, state and nonprofit owned open space totals nearly 94,600 acres and makes up approximately 30.7% of the overall area within Morris County. The importance the County's open spaces have on the overall character and quality of life in Morris County is undeniable.

The County of Morris first began its open space planning process in 1956 when the Board of Chosen Freeholders (now Board of County Commissioners) created the Morris County Park Commission (MCPC), which one year later prepared a report entitled "Master

Plan and Program for a County Park System." Collaboration between the Morris County Park Commission and the Morris County Planning Board resulted in creation of Morris County Open Space Elements produced in 1966, 1972 and 1988. Subsequent reports concerning Morris County Parks and Open Space were produced in 2005 (Morris County Park Commission (Pathways to Excellence: The Citizen Driven Direction for the Future of the Morris County Park System) and in 2014 (Morris County Preservation Trust Analysis and Strategic Report).

Intent

The overall intent of the Morris County Master Plan Open Space Element is to provide 1) an updated framework for enhanced coordination for open space preservation among all levels of government, non-profit land conservation entities and others involved in the preservation of open space throughout the County and 2) to communicate the vision of the County Planning Board and the Morris County Park Commission via defined goals, objectives, and recommendations as pertains to open space.

Adoption of this Open Space Element also meets the requirements of New Jersey Open Space Trust Fund legislation N.J.S.A 40:12-15.2d(1)a and the NJDEP Green Acres program, which requires an Open Space Plan to be adopted by the County Planning Board so that it may qualify for state funding to support land acquisition for recreation and conservation purposes.



Open Space

The 1988 Morris County Open Space Element describes open space as "undeveloped land that serves a variety of functions and that provides essential character to a particular region."¹ As noted in 1988, open space is subject to a variety of definitions since it usually performs more than one function. While typically recognized for providing active and passive recreation opportunities for all residents, open space lands often include important natural features and environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, corridors, lakes, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, ridge tops, steep slopes, forested areas, and grasslands. Preserving such areas within parks or through the preservation of other open space areas helps protect these natural features and environmentally sensitive areas, the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater, cultural and historic areas, scenic viewsheds and the natural beauty of Morris County.



*Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, Chester Township -
Source: Morris County Park Commission*

For the purposes of this Plan, open space is defined to include lands preserved and/or managed for the primary purpose of providing for public parks and recreation and/or the conservation of natural/environmental resources for public benefit. Such open space is typically owned and/or managed by federal, state, county or local government entities, although private lands protected through lease or easement may also be included in certain instances. In the context of this Plan, open space also includes lands preserved by nonprofit land trusts and associated nonprofit entities. Lands owned by regional water authorities maintained for the protection of water supply are also reported in this Plan.²

¹ 1988 Morris County Farmland Preservation Plan Element, pg. iii.

² Public access is not required for inclusion in this analysis. Private open space (e.g., homeowners association common property,

private commercial recreation facilities/clubs (e.g., private golf courses) and other private recreation/open space uses are not included within the inventory of "open space" within the context



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Other lands, while not considered open space in the context of this Plan, also contribute to the general open space character of the county. These include farmlands, commercial recreation uses, some public school property and certain other private lands. These uses are discussed briefly in this Plan.

The Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-5) defines open space as: "Any parcel or area of land or water essentially unimproved and set aside, dedicated, designated or reserved for public or private use or enjoyment or for the use and enjoyment of owners and occupants of land adjoining or neighboring such open space, provided that such areas may be improved with only those buildings, structures, streets, and off-street parking and other improvements that are designed to be incidental to the natural openness of the land."

of this Plan. Not all lands identified herein as open space may be deed restricted.



2. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Goals

1. Advance the protection and stewardship of Morris County’s parks and open space, environmental resources, and natural features to realize the associated ecological, economic, and quality of life benefits that help define Morris County.
2. Maintain existing park and open space resources and increase access to new active and passive recreational opportunities throughout Morris County to meet the diverse and evolving needs of all existing and future County residents.
3. Conserve, restore and protect natural resources, ecosystems, and environmentally sensitive areas to ensure a resilient environment and healthy communities.³
4. Support local government and qualifying nonprofit conservation organization efforts to meet open space, recreation and environmental resource/conservation goals and objectives.
5. Enhance the County’s investment in open space and natural resource protection by improving linkages between parks and open space, adding buffers and trails, increasing resource

stewardship, maintaining facilities, and making other improvements.

Objectives

1. To increase the availability of open space and recreational opportunities throughout Morris County, especially near areas of higher residential density and increasing residential growth.
2. To ensure that investments in open space and recreational facilities are protected, continue to meet changing needs, and are not degraded by lack of maintenance.
3. To prioritize efforts to protect natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, biodiversity, and ecosystem services,⁴ with particular emphasis on water quality and supply.
4. To expand and improve the countywide network of protected open space by increasing greenway connections between parks, environmentally sensitive areas, natural/conservation areas, trails, and farmlands to create significant areas of unfragmented open space, natural resource buffers and natural area concentrations where possible.
5. To promote greater awareness of county-wide open space resources,

³ Ecosystem: A biological system composed of all the organisms found in a particular physical environment, interacting with it and with each other.

⁴ Ecosystem services are process or material benefits that people derive from nature, e.g., water purification, improved air quality, flood mitigation, pollination, and climate resiliency/adaptation that are derived from ecosystems.



the positive impacts of open space, natural resource protection and conservation.

- 6. To maintain and enhance partnerships with federal, state, and municipal governments and nonprofit open space preservation entities to achieve greater cooperation, attain mutual goals, and identify opportunities for parks, open space, and natural resource preservation, while promoting greater inter-municipal and inter-governmental agency collaboration.

Preservation Trust Program grant opportunities.

- 3. Work with the Morris County Tourism Bureau, the Morris County Economic Development Corporation, and the Morris County Park Commission to promote the County’s parks, open space, recreation, historic/cultural sites and agritourism opportunities.



Recommendations

Information and Outreach

- 1. Maintain a current and ongoing inventory of parks, open space, trails and pedestrian/bicycle routes in Morris County and schedule regular updates with municipalities and other open space providers to ensure that adequate and appropriate open space planning and preservation efforts may continue effectively and efficiently.
- 2. Promote greater public awareness of County open space resources and the activities of the Morris County Park Commission and Morris County Preservation Trust.⁵ Identify opportunities for enhanced outreach and raise awareness of Morris County Park Commission activities and

- 4. Enhance web-based information on county park and open space resources.
- 5. Pursue increased opportunities for partnerships with municipal, nonprofit conservation organizations and the private sector to achieve greater open space and natural resource preservation.
- 6. Compile and update public, private and nonprofit conservation/trail easements data.
- 7. Work with municipal, state, nonprofit and other open space partners to create a database of all existing and proposed greenways and trails within Morris County; identify opportunities for connections between all open space and trail systems.

⁵ Morris County Preservation Trust Fund programs are administered by the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation.



Preservation/Conservation

1. Continue to protect and encourage the preservation of open space suitable for recreation and natural/environmental resource protection throughout Morris County.
2. Continue to protect and encourage the preservation of critical natural resources as part of open space protection wherever possible, including but not limited to forested lands, significant wetlands, floodplains, agricultural soils/farmland, wildlife habitat, unique natural features and ecosystems that support healthy communities. Emphasize protection of groundwater recharge areas and surface waters, (lakes, rivers, and streams,) and riparian corridors. Avoid fragmentation of natural areas/isolation of plant and wildlife communities and natural ecosystems; support habitat/ecosystem connectivity.
3. Identify gaps between preserved open space, regional greenway corridors, trail systems, protected natural resources, recreation resources and population centers to determine potential preservation, linkage, and multi-modal trail opportunities.
4. When possible, prioritize the acquisition of properties or easements along streams and rivers to establish greenways and linear parks. The acquisition of properties along streams and rivers can provide public recreational opportunities and will

prevent development that may intensify local and downstream flooding.

5. Promote and facilitate local efforts to advance the Morris Canal Greenway in Morris County and facilitate cooperation with adjacent counties to achieve realization of its completion.
6. Continue to support the preservation and restoration of flood hazard areas to advance greater climate resiliency and public safety through the Morris County Preservation Trust Flood Mitigation Program.

Municipalities

1. Continue to support municipal efforts to address present and future recreation needs and protect natural resources.
2. Support the continued use of state, county, municipal, and nonprofit open space preservation grants, loans and other financial assistance for acquisition, stewardship and improvement of parks, open space, and conservation e.g., New Jersey Green Acres Programs, Morris County Preservation Trust, Highlands Open Space Partnership Program. Pursue opportunities to leverage local and County Preservation Trust dollars with other funding sources.
3. Keep municipalities informed on County, State, Federal and other open space funding and support opportunities.
4. Support local efforts to expand trails on or connecting to public parks and open



space and encourage municipalities to develop and/or regularly update their open space plans, including trail and greenway plans where appropriate.

5. Encourage municipalities to create and/or update natural resource/environmental resource inventories.
6. Encourage municipalities to establish or maintain local open space trust funds to help with the acquisition, development and maintenance of local parks, recreation, conservation, and other open space areas.
7. Support the use of alternate open space preservation methods to reduce the need for direct funding and/or to augment preservation efforts, e.g., use of conservation easements, lease agreements, license agreements, land dedications, estate donations and developer agreements.
8. Support the identification of locations suitable for future conservation efforts using all available tools, including, but not limited to the use of online resources. Examples of online resources that facilitate the identification of important environmental and critical resource areas and help identify areas suitable for recreation, conservation and preservation include the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) GIS⁶ resource, [NJ-GeoWeb](#), the [New Jersey Conservation](#)

[Blueprint GIS Mapping Tool](#) and the New Jersey [Highlands Region Interactive Environmental Resource Inventory](#).

9. Encourage cooperation between adjacent communities and counties to preserve contiguous park, open space and environmental resources and create intermunicipal and intercounty trail connections.
10. As part of local and county development review, 1) encourage the dedication of conservation easements to protect and/or buffer onsite and/or nearby environmentally sensitive areas, open space, active (or preserved) farms and to create and/or expand contiguous greenway and trail connections and 2) encourage the creation of onsite recreation and/or open space areas within high-density residential developments and redevelopment projects.

Stewardship

1. Promote the restoration and stewardship of preserved open space lands to protect water supply and water quality, water resources, wildlife and natural habitats, woodlands/forested areas, historic/natural landscapes, scenic vistas, recreation resources, farmland, agricultural soils, and other critical natural resources. Examples of stewardship activities include the removal of invasive species, restoration of stream banks, creation of stream

⁶ Geographic Information System.



buffers/conservation easements or planting of native species that will maintain the recreation and natural value of open space investments and maintain natural functions such as flood mitigation and groundwater recharge.



Volunteers maintaining the cottage garden at the Willowood Arboretum, Chester Township. - Source: Morris County Park Commission

2. Encourage the use of resource management conservation plans to limit and/or reverse environmental degradation. Maintain and improve the health and dynamics of plant and animal communities, the preservation of natural features and scenic vistas through planned management activities.

Preservation Trust

1. Support continued funding of the Morris County Preservation Trust Open Space, Farmland Preservation, Historic Preservation, Flood Mitigation and Trails Development grant programs.
2. Consider amending the Preservation Trust Open Space Program to permit funding specifically for land stewardship activities, i.e., activities which are

beyond routine operations and maintenance, undertaken by a local government or qualifying tax-exempt nonprofit organization to repair, restore and/or protect lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes. Stewardship activities are applicable to natural resource and conservation projects, not active recreation projects. Examples: dam repair, drainage improvements, natural resource monitoring, habitat restoration, stream corridor restoration/naturalization, stewardship plans.

3. Consider amending the Preservation Trust Open Space Program to permit funding for active and passive recreation facility development and maintenance, e.g., playground equipment, parking areas, signage, access/parking.
4. Consider amending the Preservation Trust Open Space Program to permit a 1) rolling application process or 2) permit an increase the frequency of scheduled funding rounds. Amending the program would allow timely response to open space preservation opportunities.
5. Support continued coordination between the Morris County Open Space Preservation Trust Committee, the Morris County Planning Board and Planning Board Development Review Committee, the Morris County Park Commission, the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority, the Morris County Preservation Trust Flood Mitigation Committee, the Morris County CADB, the Morris County Trails



Committee, and the Morris County Historic Preservation Committee in the evaluation of open space preservation applications.

Morris County Park Commission

1. Continue to support the mission of the Morris County Park Commission to develop and preserve a dynamic and unique system of diverse natural, cultural, and historic resources, and to provide innovative education and recreation opportunities of regional value, while exercising environmental and fiscal responsibility.
2. Strive to distribute county park facilities across the county.



Central Park of Morris County, Parsippany-Troy Hills Township – Source: Morris County Park Commission

3. Review county park facilities and their capacity to address current and anticipated future recreation needs in conjunction with other state, federal and local recreation facilities.
4. Coordinate the acquisition and development of county parks and the preservation of natural/environmental resources to complement and enhance the interrelationship with local, state,

federal and private/nonprofit parks, and conservation areas wherever possible.

5. Continue to pursue an active acquisition program for open space and recreational opportunities that will not only complement and protect existing parkland and facilities, but also protect environmentally sensitive areas and preserve remarkable natural and historic sites.
6. Identify opportunities to serve populations with limited access to local and/or regional active and passive recreation facilities.
7. Consider the density of all new development and redevelopment and its impact on park visitation and infrastructure.
8. Ensure that the Morris County Park Commission has the resources needed to maintain existing facilities, provide resource stewardship, and grow the County Park System in a manner that balances recreation, education, conservation, and historic preservation, enhancing the quality of life for current and future generations.

Open Space Preservation – Site Selection Guidelines

Sites considered for future open space preservation should be suitable to their intended function (e.g., active recreation, conservation, etc.), with the acknowledgement that preservation may serve more than one function. Where



possible and practical, new open space should help balance the identified needs of local municipalities and/or Morris County, both geographically and functionally, to serve existing and future populations. Opportunities to link and/or leverage new open space with existing preserved lands, including federal, state, and nonprofit, should be considered.

The criteria used to evaluate lands suitable for open space preservation will vary based on local and/or regional needs, priorities, and goals. Regional recreation and conservation needs must consider efforts to balance the availability of county open space resources throughout the county. Municipal open space acquisition and development must prioritize local needs. Nonprofits conservation organizations may focus their attention on a particular set of priorities based on their individual charters. While priorities may differ, opportunities for partnerships and cooperation between various levels of government and nonprofit agencies to preserve new open space and improve the value and functionality of existing open space should be pursued.

Consistent with the overall goals of this plan, the identification and assessment of potential open space properties should include a consideration of whether the preservation of a subject property achieves, in full or in part, important recreation and/or conservation criteria. Criteria and priorities may vary based on local conditions, goals, and objectives. Suggested criteria include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Provides an opportunity for the creation / augmentation of park and recreational facilities necessary to meet existing or anticipated local and or regional park and recreation needs.
2. Increases access to recreation and conservation opportunities near underserved and/or growing or high-density population centers.
3. Increases the diversity of active and passive recreation facilities to meet the needs of varied segments of the population.
4. Provides an opportunity to advance local or regional tourism.
5. Helps to complete individual or comprehensive park and recreation development plans.
6. Provides an increase in pedestrian, bicycling (multi-modal, non-motorized transportation) opportunities; improves non-vehicular transportation.
7. Protects/buffers historic, natural and/or cultural resources and/or properties wherein such resources may be located.
8. Creates or improves linkages between existing and/or planned parks and open space; fills gaps in linear open space or trails or contributes to existing or proposed greenways.



9. Protects Environmentally Sensitive and/or Natural Resource Areas including, but not limited to, steep slopes, freshwater wetlands, lakes, rivers, and streams (water bodies), C-1 waterways, associated buffer areas (lake buffers / stream-river corridors), FEMA flood hazard areas/floodplains, forested areas, plant, and wildlife habitat, including but not limited to habitat important for the protection of rare and endangered plants and animals.
10. Protects groundwater, aquifer recharge areas, watershed or wellhead protection areas or otherwise safeguards drinking water supplies.
11. Protects unique natural, historic and/or cultural features.



Tubbs House, Willowood Arboretum, Chester Township – Source: Morris County Park Commission

12. Protects community character.
13. Prevents the loss of natural resources and reduces forest, ecosystem, or habitat fragmentation.

14. Preserves Scenic Vistas or Viewsheds.
15. Contributes to climate resiliency, e.g., reduces flooding, stormwater runoff, increases groundwater infiltration, prevents flood damage, increases public safety, reduces the need for flood control infrastructure.
16. Is contiguous to existing parks, open space, or environmentally sensitive areas.
17. Buffers existing parks, open space, or environmentally sensitive areas from potentially incompatible development through the preservation of land adjacent to or near such areas.
18. Protects environmental resources within already preserved lands from impacts from adjacent development.
19. Protects agriculture and farmland preservation efforts by providing buffers to protect agricultural, horticultural, and equine operations from incompatible development and adverse environmental impacts.
20. Provides or contributes to the enhancement of green infrastructure / natural ecosystem services that reduces or eliminates reliance on manmade stormwater, water supply and/or wastewater infrastructure.
21. Provides opportunities for increased public health functions such as walking,



hiking, exercise, improved water, and air quality.

22. Promotes sustainable development by reducing impacts on municipal services and impacts on local or regional infrastructure.
23. Advances or is consistent with local, county, state or federal open space and recreation plans, including but not limited to local master plans, e.g., the Morris County Master Plan, the Morris County Park Commission Strategic Plan, New Jersey State Comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Highlands Regional Master Plan, and the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan.
24. Protects New Jersey Natural Heritage Priority Sites, i.e., sites identified by the NJDEP as critically important to conserve New Jersey's biological diversity.
25. Protects sites specifically identified in local, county, state, or federal planning documents as appropriate for parks, open space, or conservation purposes.



3. THE BENEFITS OF PRESERVING OPEN SPACE

Outdoor Recreation

The development of parks recreational facilities is the most familiar aspect of open space preservation. Providing facilities for organized sports, individual exercise, playgrounds, hiking, bicycling, boating and picnicking are common and much desired amenities found in the variety of parks within the County Park system and in municipal parks and recreation areas. Preserving Open Space to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation remains a key priority for county and local governments, which have long recognized the benefits such opportunities provide to health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life of residents.

The County of Morris and its local municipalities have successfully created a substantial network of active and passive recreation opportunities, complimented by various and significant state and federal parks, wildlife management areas and historic sites. The need to maintain and enhance public recreation in Morris County will only grow as the population increases, diversifies, and increasingly lives in higher density multifamily housing where the availability of private outdoor recreational space is limited or nonexistent.

Past assessments of open space needs, particularly on a regional level, typically focused on recreational demand reviewed

against generic national guidelines, and the estimated acreage needed to meet that demand. These “one size fits all” guidelines, some dating back to the 1960’s, considered only *minimum recreation* needs based on broad land-based or population-based guidelines. These guidelines were devised before the establishment of year-round sports, the expansion in the popularity of some sports (e.g. soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, cricket), expanding levels of female participation in organized sports and changing demographic needs (e.g. greater diversity and an aging population). In recent years, recognizing their limitations, county and local governments have increasingly abandoned these antiquated guidelines, in favor of more community based, custom assessments of park and recreational need.⁷ Subsequently, counties and municipalities are typically basing their review of lands needed for open space and recreation on *local* assessments of specific community need.



Boaters on Sunrise Lake, Lewis Morris County Park, Morris Township - Source: Morris County Park Commission

⁷ The New Jersey State Outdoor Comprehensive Recreation Plan (SCORP) a.k.a “Outside, Together!” no longer defines need based on total land area. The National Parks and Recreation Association abandoned population-based guidelines in 1996 in favor of a

“systems approach” focusing on the creation of a comprehensive and interrelated system of parks, recreation, open space and pathways that respond to *locally based needs, values and conditions*.



Recognizing that these assessments are ongoing, this plan does not establish a specific county-wide acreage target for current or future open space needs; these needs are constantly changing in response to shifting goals, objectives and conditions. Also, while the preservation of open space needed to address current and future recreational demand remains a key element for county and local open space consideration, this plan recognizes that the need for open space preservation is not limited to developability for recreation/recreation facilities. Current open space protection efforts increasingly acknowledge the wide and varied benefits of open space preservation for purposes in addition to traditional recreational facility development.

Beyond Recreation

Previous analysis of open space needs focused on acreage needed for the development of active recreation facilities, using one-size-fits-all national guidelines based on outdated data. These guidelines failed to address local or regional context or changes in open space priorities.⁸ Besides their generic nature, another shortcoming was their exclusive focus on the ability of land to be developed for active recreation; other benefits of open space were not considered.⁹

⁸ By 1995, the National Recreation and Parks Association noted a shift away from the reliance on an absolute national standard to increasing community self-direction where the number of acres for park and recreation land is based on what the citizens determine is best for themselves.

⁹ "Balanced Land Use Guidelines" did not address conservation and environmental protection needs, goals or objectives. Land

The National Recreation and Parks Association emphasizes the critical role that park and recreation programs play in conserving open space, natural resources and improving community resiliency.¹⁰



Untermeyer Lake, Kinnelon Borough -Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Providing recreational open space opportunities for residents remains a priority for county and local governments, however, open space preservation is increasingly recognized as a means to meet goals related to land conservation, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources, flood mitigation and stormwater control, growth management, protection/enhancement of property values, related economic growth, preservation of community character and improved quality of life. These concerns and similar issues are of increasing importance in open space assessments and drive much of the continued acquisition and protection of open space in Morris County. Open space preservation is also complemented by

that could not provide direct public use for recreation were not considered in the assessment of need.

¹⁰ [Our Three Pillars, Impacting Communities | National Recreation and Park Association \(nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/conservation\)](https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/conservation).



ongoing preservation efforts related to agricultural and historic/cultural resources. The benefits of preserved open space, agriculture, historic and cultural resources cannot be overstated; they provide a foundational component on which Morris County's unique character and quality of life is based.

New Jersey's open space provides a variety of environmental and economic benefits including protection of water resources, preservation of biodiversity and wildlife habitats, creation of greenways, enhancement of urban centers, and support of recreational opportunities. Open space also is a vital strategy to preserve land for agriculture, protect rural landscapes and sustain the state's \$42.9 billion tourism industry. Furthermore, open space projects and park and recreation projects are important to successful urban redevelopment initiatives. Because preserving open space plays such an important role in bolstering the state's quality of life and benefiting the environment, but incurs only minimal costs for upkeep, it is generally considered one of the most cost-effective and efficient means of environmental protection.¹¹

Protection of Environmentally Sensitive and Natural Areas: Environmental /Ecological Benefits

In addition to providing area needed for the development of active and passive recreation facilities, the preservation of open space protects environmentally sensitive areas, natural areas, natural ecosystems and ecosystem services.¹² These

environmental and ecological benefits are of major importance to the health and well-being of Morris County and all who live within its boundaries.

Examples of environmental resources protected, environmental benefits and environmental hazards mitigated by open space include but are not limited to:

Water Resource Protection

Water is arguably the most important natural resource; water supply and quality are critical to overall environmental health and human habitation. Water resources include any river, stream, lake, pond, aquifer, groundwater recharge area or other body of water which may be diverted to a water supply system. Water resources used to provide potable water must be protected to prevent contamination of drinking water supplies and aquifers. Contamination of water resources results in costly remediation efforts, including treatment of the water to return it to its previous condition and/or the provision of alternate sources of potable water for those affected by water contamination.¹³ Water supply and water quality are served by various natural subsystems, e.g., aquifers, groundwater recharge areas, wellhead protection areas and surface waters and wetlands.

Aquifers

Aquifers are geological formations that contain permeable materials sufficient to

¹¹ NJDEP Environmental Trends Report: Open Space Preservation. Nov. 2018 – [Open Space.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#).

¹² Environmentally sensitive areas are those areas of land and water, which due to their physical characteristics (i.e., hydrology, geology, soils, vegetation) are greatly impaired by their development. Natural resources, both renewable and non-

renewable, such as minerals, metals, plants, and animals are often found in conjunction with environmentally sensitive areas.

¹³ NJDEP Bureau of Release Prevention Environmentally Sensitive Areas Guidance Document, Oct. 2017, pg. 4.



yield significant amounts of water to wells and springs. While Morris County’s water supplies are derived from both surface and groundwater resources, groundwater accounts for most of the water consumed.

“Sole source aquifers” are aquifers that supply 1) at least 50% of the drinking water in areas they underlay and 2) are the only feasible drinking water source for the area they serve; should they become contaminated there is no reasonable alternative available. Morris County is entirely underlain by four major sole source aquifers.¹⁴

Groundwater Recharge Areas

Groundwater is recharged when precipitation moves downward through the soil, enters the soil’s saturation zone and becomes groundwater, thereafter entering aquifers capable of feeding wells. Groundwater recharge areas vary by rate of recharge, which is based on soil conditions. Developing groundwater recharge areas with impervious cover impedes groundwater supplies; groundwater provides water to wells and provides base flow to streams, wetlands, and other water bodies.

Wellhead Protection Areas

Wellhead Protection Areas are designated around public water supply wells. They identify the horizontal extent of groundwater captured by a public water supply well pumping at a specific rate over a specific time. Three protection area “tiers”

are designated around these wells that are defined based on the time it takes groundwater to flow to the well. Protecting these areas from development helps to ensure the safety of public community and public non-community water supply systems.¹⁵ Such areas are often protected as open space to preserve the quality of public water supplies. An example includes the preservation efforts of the Morris County Municipal Utility Authority, which has assembled large areas of open space around wellhead areas under their jurisdiction.



Alamatong Wellfield Property, Roxbury Township - Source: Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority

Surface Waters

Surface waters include all types of open water, such as rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, bays, canals and estuaries. In addition to providing recreational opportunities, water bodies/surface waters serve as a type of circulatory system, carrying water, organisms and nutrients throughout the County and beyond, metabolizing waste materials, draining rainwater, mitigating flooding, minimizing erosion, providing

¹⁴ https://www.state.nj.us/dep/njgs/geodata/dgs98-6md.htm#Identification_Information.

¹⁵ Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) delineated by the New Jersey Geological Survey.



plant, animal and aquatic habitat and shaping the landscape.

Morris County's many lakes and waterways are spread across the landscape and contribute to the County's extraordinary recreational opportunities, scenic vistas, and wildlife habitat, while also providing sources of water and flood control. These natural amenities provide the focal point for many local communities and contribute to the unique identity of Morris County. Locally recognized for their importance, some also rise to the level of state and national significance. For example:

** The Musconetcong River, flowing through Sussex, Warren, Morris, and Hunterdon Counties, was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River under the Wild and Scenic River Act in 2006.¹⁶*

** Lake Hopatcong is the largest freshwater lake in New Jersey. It is nine miles long, includes approximately 2,500 water acres, has forty-five miles of shoreline, and lies at an elevation of 926 feet above sea level.*

** Established in 1960, the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was the first federally designated wilderness area and is part of the National Wildlife Refuge Area.¹⁷ Nearly all of the Refuge is located in Morris County, with over 7,768 acres within Long Hill, Harding and Chatham Townships. Additional acreage is located in Somerset County.*

Freshwater Wetlands and Wetland Buffer/Transition areas

Freshwater wetlands are land areas usually saturated with water that have vegetation specific to wetland soils.¹⁸



Pequannock River, Butler Borough - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Wetland buffers or transition areas are areas of land adjacent to wetlands that minimize adverse impacts on the wetlands or serves as an integral component of the wetlands ecosystem.¹⁹ Freshwater wetlands and transition areas preserved as open space protect drinking water supplies and perform natural wastewater treatment by removing phosphorous, nitrogenous and other water pollutants. They provide a natural means of flood and stormwater damage protection, buffer waterways from sedimentation, provide essential habitat for wildlife, including endangered and threatened species and help to maintain base flow to

¹⁶ Designated by Public Law 109-452 signed by President G. Bush in 2006.

¹⁷ [Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](http://www.fws.gov).

¹⁸ The New Jersey Freshwater Protection Act Rules N.J.A.C. 7:7A-1.4 defines "freshwater wetland" to mean an area that is inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, a prevalence of vegetation

typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions, commonly known as hydrophytic vegetation. A wetland "transition area" is an area of upland adjacent to a freshwater wetland which minimizes adverse impacts on the wetland or serves as an integral component of the wetland ecosystem. (N.J.S.A.13:9A-1 et seq.)
¹⁹ N.J.A.C. 7:7-3.28(a). Wetlands transition area buffers typically range between 50 and 150 feet in width, depending on the resource value of the wetland as defined by the NJDEP and in accordance with N.J.A.C 7:7A.



surface waters. They also serve as fire breaks that can limit the spread of forest, brush, or grass fires. Finally, preserved wetland areas can protect scenic views and vistas and may also provide passive recreation opportunities, e.g., the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

The protection of New Jersey’s environmentally sensitive open space, vital water resources and significant natural and historic resources is critical to the quality of life enjoyed by all New Jerseyans. Preserved open space protects our water supply, protects sensitive habitats for endangered and threatened species, promotes smart growth and provides a place for public recreation and connection with community and nature.²⁰

Flood Hazard Areas

Flooding presents a significant risk to public health, safety, and welfare due to potential loss of life, injury, and property damage. Unless properly controlled, development within flood hazard areas obstructs and displaces floodwaters, which can increase the frequency, intensity, duration, and extent of flooding during severe weather events. Loss of life, injury, and property damage can also result from collapsed structures, unsecured materials and other debris carried by floodwaters. When developed with residential structures, these areas may also pose a threat to emergency service personnel responding to flood

²⁰ 2014 Morris County Preservation Trust Fund Analysis and Strategic Report, p. 69.

²¹ Flood hazard areas are areas subject to flooding from the flood hazard design flood, as defined by the NJDEP under the Flood Hazard Area Control Act Rules at N.J.A.C. 7:13. [NJDEP-Division of Land Use Regulation-Flood Hazard Area.](#)

²² [10 Reasons to Be Thankful for Forests - American Forests](#)

emergencies. Areas that are at high risk from flooding are defined as special flood hazard areas, (SFHA 100-year) by FEMA.²¹

Forested Areas

Forests provide habitat for wildlife and help protect surface and groundwater quantity and quality through the infiltration of rainwater and the filtration of nutrients and solids and through stormwater abatement. Forests absorb air pollutants and improve air quality, generate oxygen and help combat climate change by capturing and storing carbon i.e., carbon sequestration.²² Forests help to reduce flooding, stabilize soils, provide wildlife habitat, windbreaks, and energy savings by reducing temperatures.²³ Prime forestland is also of significant economic importance, and is capable of growing 85 cubic feet of timber per acre per year.²⁴

“For every 10 percent increase in forest cover in a water resource area, treatment and chemical costs decrease by approximately 20% for potable drinking water.” (Source: 2014 Morris County Preservation Trust Strategic Plan)

Steep Slope Areas

The NJDEP Model Steep Slope Ordinance defines steep slopes as “any slope equal to or greater than 20 percent as measured over any minimum run of 10 feet.” Different local jurisdictions define steep slopes differently, often defining them as having an angle of 10-

²³ Forests block solar radiation and cool the air by evaporation of moisture from their leaves and branches.

²⁴ NJDEP Environmentally Sensitive Areas Guidance Document, Revised October 2017, pg.

19. https://www.nj.gov/dep/enforcement/dp/downloads/DPCC_Environmentally_Sensitive_Areas_Guidance.pdf.



20%, with restrictions on their development based on consideration of soils, potential use and level of steep slope protection sought. Steep slope areas may include environmental features such as rock outcrops, shallow soils, bedrock features and groundwater seeps. Morris County's sloped reliefs provide a visual amenity to those traveling the region, but their protection also reduces stormwater runoff, soil erosion, sedimentation and siltation of nearby streams, water bodies and wetlands. Other benefits include a reduction in downstream flooding, increased slope stability, and decreased fragmentation of forest and habitat areas, which is critical to wildlife maintenance.²⁵



Green Pond Mountain Greenway, Rockaway Township - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Wildlife Protection / Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat

The protection of open space can help maintain natural areas, plant and animal biodiversity, ecological communities, and critical wildlife habitat, even when portions of properties are used for active recreation

purposes. Critical wildlife habitats include breeding areas for various types of wildlife, migratory stopover areas for migrating birds and wildlife wintering areas. These areas are essential for maintaining a varied and healthy wildlife population.



Cedar Waxwing, Washington Township. - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Protected open space can also provide habitat important to the protection of threatened and endangered species of plants and animals which "are of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people."²⁶ The NJDEP describes *Endangered Species* as those species whose prospects for survival in New Jersey are in immediate danger because of a loss or change in habitat, over-exploitation, predation, competition, disease, disturbance or contamination. *Threatened Species* are species that may become endangered if conditions surrounding them begin to or continue to deteriorate.²⁷ Large areas of lands preserved in its natural state

²⁵ NJDEP Rules and Guidance: <https://www.nj.gov/dep/wqmp/guidance.html>

²⁶ US Endangered Species Act 1973.

²⁷ NJDEP | Fish & Wildlife | [New Jersey's Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species.](#)



helps maintain habitat health and connectivity, allowing all wildlife to find food, reproduce and migrate.²⁸

To assist in the identification of areas suitable for rare and endangered species habitat the NJDEP Landscape Project may be consulted. The Landscape Project identifies state & federal threatened and endangered species.

Economic Benefits

The economic benefits realized by the preservation of parks and open space are numerous.

Increased Destination Traffic and Tourism

The preservation of open spaces has a positive effect on tourism and serves as an attraction to both citizens and visitors from outside the county. These attractions stimulate the local economy and help to create jobs throughout the county. Tourism and recreation related revenues from parks, open space, and trails also have significant positive economic impact. The preservation of open space, parks and natural areas, combined with farmland and historic site preservation, provides a catalyst for recreation and tourism, generating economic stimulus in communities where these amenities exist. In 2022, tourism in Morris County generated spending of \$1.95 billion and employed over 17,336 people.²⁹

²⁸ Endangered and threatened species are plants and animals which have been designated by the New Jersey Non-Game and Endangered Species Act (N.J.S.A. 23:2A-1 et seq.) or the Federal Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C.A. 1531043) to be in a jeopardized state of existence.



Fosterfields Living History Farm, Morris Township. - Source: Morris County Park Commission

Improved Business Development and Retention/Residential Attraction

The positive attributes of preserved open space often weigh into business location and relocation decisions. Morris County’s quality of life is greatly influenced by its landscape, scenic vistas, open spaces and recreational opportunities, which helps to attract and retain its numerous Fortune 500 companies and the resident workforce upon which they depend.³⁰ New residential development and potential residents are also attracted to the County by the varied and abundant open space and recreational opportunities available.

Improved Property Values

Proximity to parks and open space can increase property values. Land preservation, including open space and farmland, has a significant and positive impact on home

²⁹ Economic Impacts of Tourism in New Jersey, 2022, PowerPoint prepared by Tourism Economic for Visit NJ.org. pages 21-22.

³⁰ Morris County Preservation Trust Fund Analysis and Strategic Report, 2014, page 49.



property values. As reported in 2014 Morris County Preservation Trust Fund Strategic Analysis and Report, “a 1% increase in the number of preserved acres in a given Morris County zip code will increase home property values by \$1.50 per square foot in that zip code, on average, all else constant.”³¹ Similar studies in other counties have shown similar increases in property values related to proximity to open space.³² Homes with easy access to parks, greenways and other open space amenities are often preferred by prospective homeowners.

Positive Budget Impacts

According to the findings of an analysis included in the 2014 Preservation Trust Analysis and Strategic Report “land that is preserved rather than developed as residential property is likely to have a positive budgetary impact because residential property costs the County \$.030 more than the tax revenues it brings in, while open space brings in \$0.55 more in tax revenues than it costs the County in necessary services.³³ Unlike residential development, which makes up the bulk of County land use, preserved open space places comparatively little demand on municipal services, e.g. schools, police, emergency services, road maintenance and social services.

Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency

Green Infrastructure: Preserved open space often functions as a type of natural green infrastructure, providing unique “ecosystem

services,” the natural benefits of which, if lost, would have to be supplied or increased through man-made solutions, usually at significant cost. Preserved open space contributes to improved air quality, habitat protection, increased biodiversity, cooler air temperatures in the summer, noise reduction, sediment and erosion reduction, flood protection, increased water supply and water resource protection. Maintenance of natural features and the ecosystem services they provide helps to prevent economic loss from flooding, erosion, pollution, or other costly environmental degradation.

For example, the reduced runoff and increased water storage benefits of open space preservation can decrease the necessary size of a community’s stormwater management system and leads to significant savings in water treatment costs. Stormwater flows from impervious surfaces like roads, parking lots and buildings, picking up pollutants and carrying them either directly to waterways or to water treatment plants. During large storms, capacity at treatment plants can be exceeded, resulting in untreated rainwater and household sewage being released into waterways. Parks and open space absorb rainwater, recharge ground water supplies and allow storm runoff to be released more slowly. Associated vegetation stores water and allows some to evaporate.

Climate Resiliency: The number and destructive force of various hurricanes, tropical storms and flash flooding events in

³¹ Ibid, page 51.

³² Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Mercer County, New Jersey, ESI Econsult Solutions, Inc. Oct. 2021.

³³ Ibid. page 76.



recent years have demonstrated the continued vulnerability of many Morris County communities to extreme weather events and associated flooding. (e.g., Hurricanes Floyd, Sandy, Irene, Henri, Ida). By protecting natural areas, preserved open spaces provide an increased measure of climate resilience, i.e., the ability of social and ecological systems to absorb and adapt to shocks and stresses resulting from a changing climate, while becoming better positioned to respond in the future.³⁴ Large areas of preserved open space can mitigate the impacts of natural hazards, most notably through the mitigation of flooding.



Flooding, Pequannock Township -Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

According to FEMA, the losses avoided from flood mitigation grant projects in riverine communities far exceed the money spent, with a \$7 estimated return for every \$1 spent. Based on these findings, the Flood Mitigation Program has generated an estimated \$69.9 million in benefits from nearly \$10 million in grant funds provided by the Morris County Preservation Trust Fund.³⁵

³⁴ “Climate resilience” is broadly defined as the ability of social and ecological systems to absorb and adapt to shocks and stresses resulting from a changing climate, while becoming better positioned to respond in the future. State of New Jersey Climate Change Resilience Strategy, NJDEP, 2021, pg. 4. [nj-climate-resilience-strategy-2021.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/climate-resilience-strategy-2021.pdf).

Improved Health and Well Being

Parks, open space, active and passive recreation facilities, and trails contribute to the overall public health of residents by offering people safe and accessible places to walk, bike, hike, play and participate in casual and team games/sports.

Accessible parks and open space provide an affordable opportunity for physical exercise, which can increase both physical and mental health. With the rising trends in obesity rates, diabetes and other health issues, including the growing incidence of everyday stress, not the least of which comes from the ongoing pandemic, access to places for children and adults alike to relax, play, recreate and exercise has never been more important.

Parks decrease health costs and support productivity, both through encouraging exercise and reducing air pollution. A park’s plants absorb air pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone and some particulates, reducing the impacts they have on peoples’ cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

Increased access to parks and open space is also important to Morris County’s steadily aging population. With greater emphasis on healthy lifestyles and advances in medical science, it is anticipated that future senior citizens will be an increasingly active class of people and more physically fit than prior generations. This will translate into

³⁵ FEMA Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration Fact Sheet, June 2018. Morris County Preservation Trust Flood Mitigation Program, as of March 2023 [Mitigation Saves Fact Sheet \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov).



increased demand for recreation programs and services that incorporate design features and programs that accommodate the physical capabilities and recreation preferences of this population.

Trails and Health

Trails of different types can provide a wide variety of opportunities for physical activity to segments of the population; walking, running, hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding to name a few. Ready access to trails, whether in large regional parks or in local neighborhoods, makes it easier for people to incorporate exercise into their daily routines.

In more suburban and urban settings, trails and community pathways can provide alternative transportation infrastructure for biking or walking; they can be used to connect people to places they want to go, such as schools, transit centers, businesses, and neighborhoods.



West Morris Greenway Trail Runners - Source: Morris County Park Commission

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Morris County Park Commission collected data on some of its major trails, noting a 142% increase in trail usage over 2018; Patriot’s Path had an increase in use of 248% over this same period.³⁶ The 2021 Annual Report of the Outdoor Industry Association about outdoor participation during COVID-19 found that those who participated in an outdoor activity for the first time during the pandemic chose an activity with a low barrier to entry like walking, running, biking, or hiking, all activities suited to the hundreds of miles of trails located in Morris County.³⁷

One of the more accessible components of physical activity, particularly important to an aging population, is the availability of safe and convenient locations to walk. The CDC recommends that adults 65 and over engage in at least 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity such as brisk walking.³⁸ Trails developed in parks and other open space offer an uninterrupted and safe opportunity for this activity. Trails are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Protection of Farmland and the Agricultural Economy

The preservation of open space in areas where farmland is concentrated helps to ensure agricultural sustainability by protecting nearby groundwater recharge areas and water quality and by providing a potential buffer from nearby development, reducing potential conflicts with residential

³⁶ David Helmer, Executive Director, Morris County Park Commission

³⁷ 2021 Outdoor Industry Association Annual Report, page 18 [Outdoor-Foundation-Annual-Report-2021-1-1.pdf](https://www.outdoorindustry.org/outdoor-foundation-annual-report-2021-1-1.pdf) ([outdoorindustry.org](https://www.outdoorindustry.org)).

³⁸ [Physical Activity Recommendations for Different Age Groups | Physical Activity | DNPAO | CDC.](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/age-chart.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/age-chart.html>



and other land uses. Conversely, the preservation of farmland works in conjunction with open space conservation: preserved farmland contributes to groundwater recharge, can provide habitat for various types of wildlife and often includes wetlands, forested areas and other natural features which can combine with nearby open space to form contiguous greenway areas and sometimes contribute to passive recreation opportunities. The Morris County Farmland Preservation Program includes several examples of farmland preservation in which various portions of a preserved farm have been set-aside for conservation, trail easement or other “open space” functions as part of the farmland preservation agreement, illustrating the mutual benefits provided by both open space and farmland preservation.³⁹



Preserved Farmland/Equestrian Facility, Washington Township - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

There is active coordination between the Morris County Open Space Trust Program and the Morris County Farmland Preservation Program in the evaluation of

preservation opportunities. The County Agricultural Development Board has a representative on the Open Space Trust Fund Committee and provides input whenever a county agency or municipality is seeking to acquire open space lands that are currently farmed.

Historic and Cultural Resource Protection

The preservation of open space often serves to protect important historic and cultural resources, and this is especially true in Morris County, a pivotal location during the Revolutionary War and a key contributor to the industrial revolution of the 1800’s. As a steward for Morris County’s parkland, the Morris County Park Commission oversees many parks that include resources of historic and cultural significance such as the Fosterfields Living Historical Farm, Historic Speedwell, Mount Hope Historical County Park, Willowood Arboretum and The Frelinghuysen Arboretum.



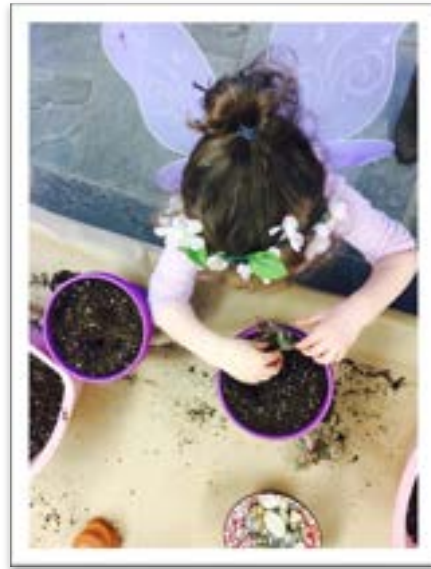
Historic Speedwell, Morristown - Source: Morris County Park Commission

³⁹ 2022 Morris County Farmland Preservation Plan Element, pg. 93-94.



Quality of Life

Morris County contains diverse scenic beauty; its mountains, valleys, waterways and lakes are indicators of a healthy environment. The preservation of open space, in conjunction with farmland, historic and cultural resources, protects the County's many scenic vistas and viewsheds, helping to define Morris County's unique character and contributing to the quality of life enjoyed by its residents.



The Frelinghuysen Arboretum – "Fairy Day" – Source: Morris County Park Commission



The Frelinghuysen Arboretum – Source: Morris County Park Commission



4. OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

The availability of open space in Morris County is a result of decades long preservation efforts by government and nongovernment entities. This chapter outlines major open space resources located in Morris County.

TABLE 1 - OPEN SPACE IN MORRIS COUNTY BY TITLE HOLDER

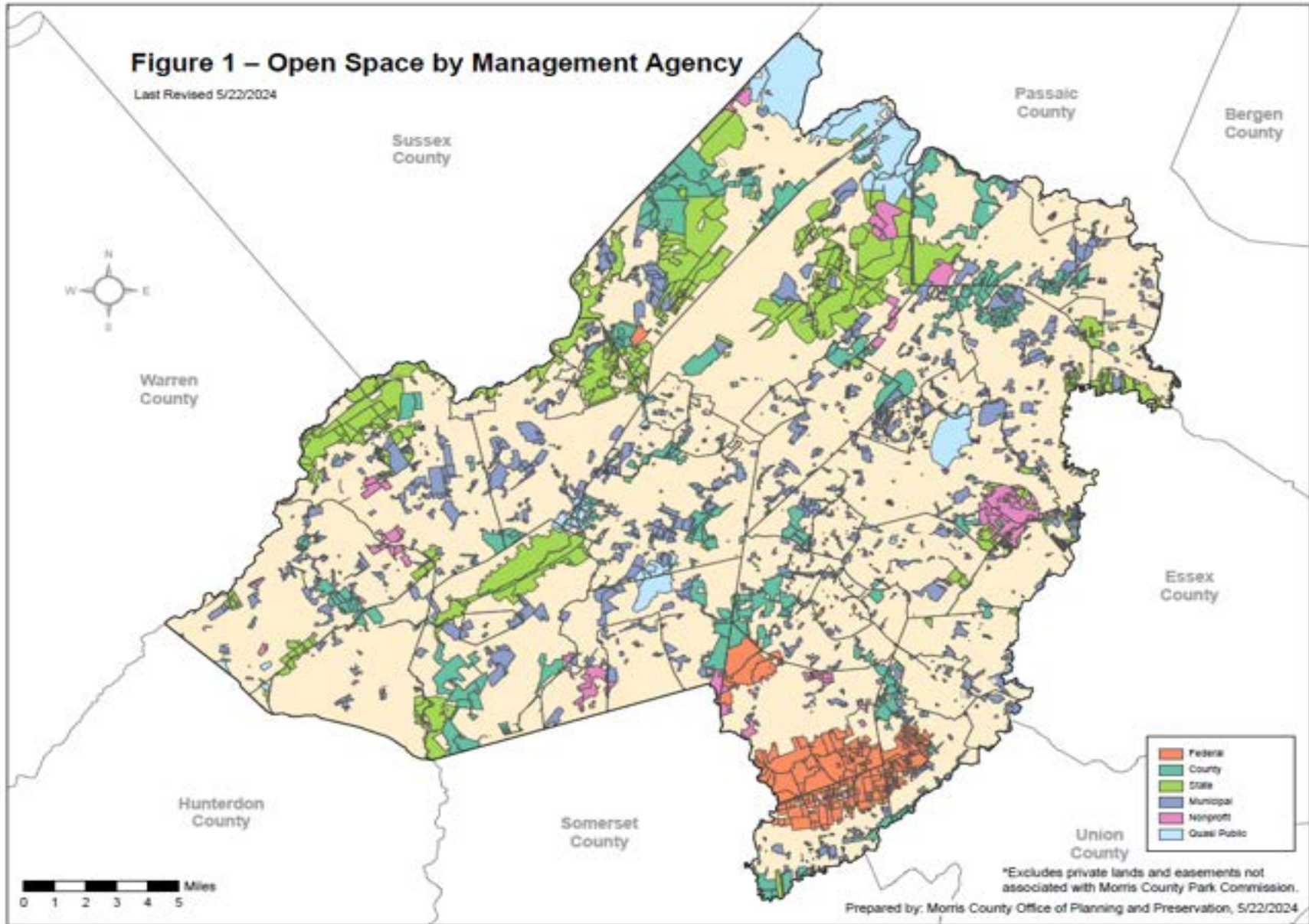
Table with 3 columns: Owner, Open Space Acres, Percentage of All Open Space. Rows include Federal, State, County of Morris, Municipal, Nonprofit, Quasi-Public, and Morris County - Total Area.

Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation. Areas and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Includes lands held in fee simple only. Private lands, easements and lease agreements are excluded from these totals.

The responsibility for the open space system in New Jersey is shared by multiple layers of government, nonprofit land conservancies, open space support agencies, and some private landowners. Although specific roles may differ, the various levels of government, nonprofit conservancies and other groups involved in open space preservation often share overlapping responsibilities, goals, and inter-agency support.



Lewis Morris County Park, Harding, Morris, and Mendham Townships - Source: Morris County Park Commission





FEDERAL OPEN SPACE

The federal government provides open space to meet the recreational needs of the nation's citizens in addition to managing thousands of acres of open space. Federal agencies supply various programs and funding in support of open space and outdoor recreation preservation and development.

The Department of the Interior acts as the principal conservation agency of the federal government. Agencies within this Department include the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which maintain areas of national significance. These agencies control the bulk of federal open space resources in Morris County.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service assists all levels of government, conservation districts, and watershed associations. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides grants, conducts soil surveys, forecasts water supplies, and publishes data useful in resource conservation and development programs, public recreation, and fish and wildlife protection. Other federal agencies that provide programs in open space preservation include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Commerce

Department, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Transportation.

Federally owned open space in Morris County comprises approximately 10% of all Morris County open space. Federal open space lands consist primarily of two major open space resources managed by the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, i.e., the Morristown National Historical Park and the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Morristown National Historic Park

Morristown National Historic Park was established in 1933 by an act of Congress and was the first national historical park in the country.⁴⁰ Located in Morristown, Harding and Morris Townships in Morris County and in Bernardsville Township in Somerset County, the park commemorates the sites of General Washington and the Continental Army's winter encampment during the winter of 1777 and 1779-80. The Park is comprised of four sites, totaling approximately 1,706 acres.⁴¹ 1,475 of those acres are located in Morris County.⁴² Washington's Headquarters, the site of the Ford Mansion and historic museum, is located in Morristown, as is Fort Nonsense, a knoll-top park once used as a lookout point. Jockey Hollow, located in both Harding and Morris Townships, was the main encampment for the Continental Army. The New Jersey Brigade site is located along the

⁴⁰ National parks serve a regional population; they protect and maintain areas of national significance.

⁴¹ Morristown National Historic Park Foundation Document, June 2018, National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior, page 3, 1,705.69 acres.

<https://www.nps.gov/morr/learn/management/upload/MORR-Foundation-Document-18.pdf>

⁴² Morris acreage per Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation calculations.



County's southern border, in Harding, and in Bernardsville in Somerset County.



Wick House, Jocky Hollow, Morristown National Historic Park, Harding Township -Source: U.S. National Park Service

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in Long Hill, Chatham and Harding Townships. It is one of more than 567 wildlife refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and its habitat.

The Great Swamp NWR was established by an act of Congress in 1960. In 1966, the National Park Service designated the refuge as a registered National Natural Landmark under the provisions of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. The entire refuge consists of about 7,800 acres or just over 12 square miles under federal ownership and includes varied habitat.⁴³ The Great Swamp is an important resting and feeding area for more than 244

species of birds.⁴⁴ A wide variety of flora and fauna can be found at the refuge. The eastern half of the refuge, comprising 3,660 acres, was designated by Congress as the first National Wilderness Area in 1968.⁴⁵ The refuge contains several trails, a visitors' center (managed by the Morris County Park Commission) and wildlife observation center.

STATE OPEN SPACE

The State preserves large tracts of environmentally sensitive and culturally significant lands and provides regional recreation areas. This involvement in open space preservation ensures that parks are available for the public and that New Jersey's wildlife habitats are preserved for the protection of the State's indigenous species. The States' parks, forests, recreational areas, and historic sites are administered by several divisions of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Relevant agencies within the NJDEP include the Division of Parks and Forestry, the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife, the Office of Green Acres, and the State Historic Preservation Office; each Division differs in its purpose and use of land it administers. In Morris County, the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Division of Parks and Forestry manage the majority of the State's parkland and other open space.

The Division of Parks and Forestry is responsible for the management and operation of New Jersey's public park system, including state parks, state forests,

⁴³ Includes acreage in Morris and Somerset County. 7,768 acres of the refuge located in Morris County.

⁴⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fws.gov/refuge/great-swamp

⁴⁵ The Great Swamp Wilderness Act of 1968 established the first wilderness area designated within the Department of the Interior.



recreation areas, historic sites, and historic districts. These areas provide a variety of active and passive recreational, and cultural facilities and activities. The Division of Fish and Wildlife administers the State's Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). WMAs are managed by the Division's Bureau of Land Management, primarily for fish and wildlife habitat, with most also offering wildlife associated recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, birding, photography, hiking, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking.

The State of New Jersey owns approximately 30% of all open space in Morris County associated with state parks and wildlife management areas, preserves, flood protection, water supply, and other conservation areas. Most state-owned open space lands in Morris County fall into two categories: State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas.

State Parks

State Parks are managed by NJDEP/Division of Parks and Forestry. These include Allamuchy Mountain, Farny, Hacklebarney, Hopatcong, Stephens and Mt. Paul at Kittatinny Valley.

Allamuchy Mountain State Park

Allamuchy Mountain State Park is approximately 10,310 acres in size, and is located in Morris, Warren and Sussex Counties.⁴⁶ The Morris County section includes approximately 2,828 acres in Mount Olive Township. The park includes the

Allamuchy Natural Area, Waterloo Village and Saxton Falls, and remnants of the Morris Canal. The Musconetcong River runs through Allamuchy Mountain State Park, separating the Morris County section from areas located in the north and west in Sussex and Warren County. Fishing, boating, canoeing and kayaking are permitted on the Musconetcong River. The Park includes lands originally obtained for the abandoned Hackettstown Reservoir. The Morris County section is located immediately north and adjacent to Stephens State Park, to which it is connected by various trails, including the regional Highlands Trail and Patriot’s Path.



Allamuchy State Park, Mount Olive Township - Source: NJDEP, Division of Parks and Forestry

Farny State Park and Buck Mountain

The state lands managed as “Farny State Park” are located in Rockaway and Kinnelon Townships. The primary area identified as Farny State Park is located in Rockaway Township, west and adjacent to the Split Rock Reservoir and totals about 1,038 acres. This section of the park is split into two noncontiguous areas situated approximately

larger since GIS records may exclude private or municipally owned lands leased by the State as part of the park.

⁴⁶ All state park acreages identify state-owned property as per review of State and County GIS records by the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation. Actual park size may be



1/3 mile apart. The northern section comprises approximately 225 acres; the southern section is about 813 acres. Except for several trails, the park is undeveloped and best characterized as a forested wilderness that connects watershed lands that surround the park. The park includes streams, mixed oak hardwood forest, wetland areas, mountainous topography, steep slopes, and rock outcroppings. The southernmost section of the park is designated as a New Jersey State Natural Area due to its undeveloped nature and significant natural features.⁴⁷ The park sections are surrounded by other conservation lands including NJDEP owned watershed protection lands,⁴⁸ Boy Scout Camp Winnebago and the New Jersey Camp for the Blind (Camp Marcella).

In addition to the Rockway section, there are other areas in the region also managed by the State in connection with Farny State Park, although they are not contiguous to the primary location in Rockway Township. Most significant is an 879-acre conservation area in Kinnelon, locally identified as Farny State Park/Buck Mountain.⁴⁹ This area is located east of the Split Rock Reservoir and south of Morris County’s Silas Condit Park in Kinnelon. While not contiguous to park parcels located in Rockway Township, this area is counted within the acreage managed by the State as part of Farny State Park and

is locally identified as “Farny State Park/Buck Mountain.”

New Jersey Natural Areas Program: The New Jersey Legislature established the Natural Areas System in 1961 (Natural Areas Act) to provide special protection for state lands that remain in a natural condition, including areas that support rare species. Additional legislation was enacted in 1975 (Natural Areas System Act) designating initial lands comprising the System and prohibiting the lease, sale, or exchange of System lands or consumption of resources without authorizing special legislation.⁵⁰ The Natural Areas System Act protects ecologically significant natural features and ecosystems of the state. The State’s Natural Areas System currently comprises 47 designated natural areas encompassing over 40,000 acres. Designated natural areas must be wholly or partially owned in fee or held as a conservation easement by the State and can be found within state parks, forests, wildlife management areas or New Jersey Preservation Trust. Each natural area is subject to a natural area management plan prepared by the NJDEP. Four designated Natural Areas are in Morris County: Black River Natural Area, Farny Natural Area, Hacklebarney Natural Area, and Troy Meadows Natural Area.

⁴⁷ "Natural area" means an area of land or water, owned in fee simple or held as a conservation easement by the Department, which has retained its natural character, although not necessarily completely undisturbed, or having rare or vanishing species of plant and animal life, or having similar features of interest, which are worthy of preservation for present and future residents of the State. N.J.S.A.7:5A-1.3 https://dep.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/rules/rules/njac7_5a.pdf.

⁴⁸ Watershed properties previously owned by Jersey City MUA transferred to NJDEP ownership in 2015

⁴⁹ Kinnelon Open Space Plan, 2012

⁵⁰ Natural Areas Act, N.J.S.A.13:1B-15.4 et seq. and Natural Areas System Act N.J.S.A. 13:1B-15.12a et seq. Natural Area System Rules N.J.A.C. 7:5A



Hacklebarney State Park

The portion of Hacklebarney State Park in Morris County comprises approximately 968 acres of state-owned land located in Chester and Washington Townships.⁵¹ It was the first state park established in Morris County and forms the southern portion of an open space corridor along the Black River at the border of Chester and Washington Townships. The northernmost portion of the park contains multiple trails, playground and picnic areas. Hunting and fishing are also permitted in the southern portion of the park. A 465-acre portion of the park is designated a New Jersey Natural Area as part of the New Jersey Natural Areas Program. Several trails provide access to this area and the Black River.⁵²



Hacklebarney State Park, Chester and Washington Townships - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Hopatcong State Park and Lake Musconetcong

Hopatcong State Park is located in both Morris and Sussex Counties, on the banks of Lake Hopatcong. The land area of the park in Morris County is approximately 77 acres in

Roxbury Township at the southwest end of Lake Hopatcong.

The park includes all of Lake Hopatcong. Water acres of Lake Hopatcong State Park in Morris County total approximately 1,532 acres located within the boundaries of Mount Arlington Borough, Roxbury and Jefferson Townships. Activities at the park include boating/canoeing, swimming, fishing, hiking, biking and picnicking. Volleyball, basketball and soccer fields and playground equipment are also available. Lake Hopatcong was originally created as part of the Morris Canal and a section of the Morris Canal Greenway runs through the park, along with a few remaining related structures. The park includes a museum located in the old Morris Canal lock tender's house.

Morris Canal – A 90-mile waterway that ran from Newark to Phillipsburg and was the chief means of transporting coal, iron and zinc across New Jersey in the 1860's. Lake Hopatcong was the canal's major source of water. The Canal was abandoned when the Morris and Essex Railroad was established.

Lake Musconetcong is administered as part of Lake Hopatcong State Park. Lake Musconetcong was created as an additional water source for the Morris Canal in the mid-1800s and was deeded to the State of New Jersey in 1924. The entirety of Lake Musconetcong contains approximately 329 water acres and is located within Sussex and Morris Counties, a few miles southwest of

⁵¹ Additional area is located at the Somerset and Hunterdon Counties.

⁵² NJDEP | Hacklebarney State Park | New Jersey State Park Service.



acreage represents more than 44% of New Jersey's state-owned public open space.⁵⁵

Morris County hosts eight Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) that include lands owned by the NJDEP and managed by the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Berkshire Valley WMA

The Berkshire Valley WMA is located in Mount Arlington, Jefferson and Roxbury, north and abutting Route I-80 and near Lake Hopatcong. With approximately 1,940 state-owned acres of wetlands and upland mixed hardwood forest, the refuge helps protect portions of the Rockaway River and its tributary, Stephen's Brook, and associated wetlands. There is a hiking trail and hunting, fishing, and wildlife related activities.⁵⁶ The WMA is otherwise undeveloped.

Black River WMA

Located in Chester Township, the Black River WMA contains about 3,078 acres. This WMA forms the beginning of an open space corridor of state and county parkland that almost completely encompasses the Black River as it flows through Chester Township. Largely undeveloped, activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, and other wildlife related opportunities. Patriot's Path follows approximately four miles of the abandoned Chester Branch of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, which closely parallels the Black

River through the WMA. The WMA also includes a designated dog training area, archery, and shotgun range.

Budd Lake WMA

Located in Mount Olive Township, the Budd Lake WMA encompasses approximately 80 acres of predominantly boggy terrain to the east of Budd Lake. It is bordered on the north and south by the Budd Lake Bog Preserve. It abuts Sand Shore Road and can be accessed for hunting and fishing.

Musconetcong River WMA

The Musconetcong River WMA encompasses about 1,650 state-owned acres and is located in Morris, Hunterdon and Warren Counties. Of this total acreage about 168 acres are located in Morris County, within separate areas in Washington and Mount Olive Townships.⁵⁷ This WMA protects water quality along the Musconetcong, which is a designated Wild and Scenic River, and an important tributary of the Delaware River.⁵⁸

Rockaway River WMA

The Rockaway River WMA in Jefferson Township comprises just over 3,700 acres of state-owned, mostly wooded lands that provides fishing access to the Rockaway River, hunting, hiking, birding, and mountain biking. The WMA is located on the eastern edge of the Mahlon Dickerson Reservation north of Lake Hopatcong. The Beaver Brook

⁵⁵ <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/conservation/the-wildlife-management-area-system/>.

⁵⁶ Acreage reported for WMAs include state-owned property as reported by state GIS and reviewed by the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation. Acreage may differ from general

reports since associated acreage owned by others may not be included.

⁵⁷ Washington Township owns approximately 130 additional acres of open space abutting state-owned Musconetcong River WMA properties.

⁵⁸ The Musconetcong River was designated as a National Partnership Wild and Scenic River in 2006 U.S. P.L.109-452.



Trail runs south from the Mahlon Dickerson Reservation into the WMA, ending near the Rockaway River.

South Branch WMA

The South Branch WMA helps protect water quality and provides fishing access along the South Branch of the Raritan River. The WMA is located in Morris, Somerset, and Hunterdon Counties, with a total area of 1,947 acres, of which 610 acres are located in Washington Township and Mount Olive Township in Morris County. The Columbia Trail runs through the South Branch WMA in Morris County and is managed by the Morris County Park Commission.

Sparta Mountain WMA

The Sparta Mountain WMA totals 3,461 acres, the majority of which is in Sussex County. Of this, only 23 acres are identified as related state-owned land in Morris County, which is located in northwestern Jefferson Township, southeast of Lake Stockholm (in Sussex County).

Wildcat Ridge WMA

Wildcat Ridge WMA includes approximately 6,080 acres of state-owned land in southern Rockaway Township located near Farny State Park and Splitrock Reservoir.⁵⁹ This WMA was once the site of several iron mines, the ruins of which can still be seen today. The area includes trails (including a segment of the regional Highlands Trail) and

an interpretive center. The area is mostly forested, and hunting is permitted.

Other Significant State Open Space

In addition to State Parks and Wildlife Management areas, there are various other state-owned properties within the County that are dedicated to open space, conservation, watershed, and environmental protection. These are included in the total acreage of state-owned open space reported herein but are not directly identified as part of state parks or wildlife management areas.⁶⁰ Examples include, but are not limited to:

Jefferson Sparta Preserve

Adjacent to the Mahlon Dickerson Reservation and the Weldon Brook Wildlife Management Area in Sussex County, the State land previously known as the Jefferson Sparta Preserve includes 145 acres of open space conservation area. Although owned by the State, this area is managed by the Morris County Park Commission and is now included as part of Mahlon Dickerson Reservation/Saffin Rock Hill County Park as per a lease agreement between the Morris County Park Commission and the NJDEP.

⁵⁹ Includes only acreage owned by NJDEP.

⁶⁰ Some state-owned properties are managed administratively as part of a state park but are not physically part of the actual park site. For example, Kittatinny Valley State Park is located in

Andover Township in Sussex County, however, over 1,000 acres of NJDEP preserved land in Jefferson are administered as part of Kittatinny State Park.



Bog and Vly Meadows

Bog and Vly Meadows is in Lincoln Park, north of Great Piece Meadows and immediately south of the Lincoln Park Airport. The NJDEP has preserved approximately 350 acres of this wetland as a conservation area. The Meadows does not have an official designation by the State. The Borough of Lincoln Park also preserved several parcels under municipal ownership within this wetland area.⁶¹

Pyramid Mountain

Located in Kinnelon, the NJDEP owns 136 acres identified as Pyramid Mountain. These acres are managed by the Morris County Park Commission and incorporated as part of Morris County's Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area located in Montville, Boonton Township and Kinnelon.

Troy Meadows

Troy Meadows is an approximately 2,600-acre area of significant freshwater wetlands located in East Hanover, Hanover and Parsippany-Troy Hills, within the Whippany River Watershed in the Passaic River Basin. Troy Meadows is identified as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, a New Jersey Natural Area, and a Natural Heritage Priority site by the NJDEP. It is classified as a Priority Wetland by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and most of the meadows are classified as "Exceptional Resource Value Wetlands" by the NJDEP. The State of New Jersey owns

approximately 753 acres of Troy Meadows, which are managed by the Division of Parks and Forestry.

The majority of Troy Meadows land held as open space is owned by the nonprofit conservation organization Wildlife Preserves, with additional parcels owned by Parsippany-Troy Hills. Wildlife Preserves manages the meadows as a wildlife preserve and as a designated Natural Area under the New Jersey Natural Areas Program for the preservation of natural diversity by the New Jersey Division of Parks and Forestry.

McEvoy Tract

The McEvoy Tract is an approximately 95-acre open space parcel situated in the flood plain of the Passaic River in the southwest corner of Long Hill Township, located between and adjacent to two sections of Morris County's Passaic River Park. Although not a larger parcel, it provides an important function as it links two separate portions of Morris County's Passaic River Park, providing an enhanced greenway connection in this area.

New Jersey Natural Lands Trust

The New Jersey Natural Lands Trust is an independent agency in but not of the Division of Parks and Forestry in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. While identified as state-owned open space, the Trust functions much like a private nonprofit land trust. The Trust preserves land in its natural state and

⁶¹ Lincoln Park Open Space and Recreation Plan 2022, pg. 18.



acquires open space primarily by donations of land and easements.

The Trust manages its properties to conserve rare plant and animal species habitat, and rare ecological communities. The Trust invites passive use by the public for recreational or educational purposes wherever such use will not adversely affect biological diversity. Currently, the Trust is responsible for over 26,000 acres of open space in New Jersey, including over 2,500 acres of conservation easements.⁶²

The Trust manages three preserves in Morris County; all land is owned by the NJDEP under the purview of the Natural Lands Trust. These are:

Black Meadows Preserve

The Black Meadows Preserve includes 178 acres located in Florham Park and Hanover. It is composed of two sites that encompass wetlands located immediately north and south of the Morristown Municipal Airport. While not part of the State-owned preserve, Hanover Township owns an additional 35 acres of open space identified as part of Black Meadows that also help protect this area.

Budd Lake Bog Preserve

Located west of and curving along the northern end of the lake, the Budd Lake Bog Preserve includes approximately 275 acres and is co-managed by the Natural Lands

Trust, Mount Olive Township, and the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife.⁶³ The Preserve includes hardwood swamp habitat which provides an important migratory and breeding habitat for birds and amphibians. This wetland supports a variety of unique herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees, and is a headwater source for the South Branch of the Raritan River. The preserve abuts the Budd Lake WMA and other lands abutting Budd Lake preserved by the Township of Mount Olive.⁶⁴ The Budd Lake Bog includes a black spruce-tamarack bog vegetation community; a floating mass of plants, roots and moss held in a sponge-like substate without solid ground. This wetland supports some unique herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees, and has been designated a NJ Natural Heritage Priority Site.

*The NJDEP Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM) has identified 343 **Natural Heritage Priority Sites** of which 19 are located in Morris County. Natural Heritage Priority Sites contain some of the best remaining habitat for and occurrences of rare species and rare ecological communities in the state. These sites should be considered top priorities for the preservation of biological diversity in New Jersey; these are considered critical areas to conserve New Jersey's biological diversity.⁶⁵*

Examples include Budd Lake Bog (Mount Olive), Green Pond Mountain (Jefferson), Lake Denmark (Rockaway Twp.), Valhalla Hemlock Glen (Montville) and Great Piece Meadows (Lincoln Park/Montville).⁶⁶

⁶² <https://www.nj.gov/dep/njlt/njlandtrust.htm>.

⁶³ The Preserve does not include the area of the lake, which is divided into various parcels owned by government and private entities.

⁶⁴ Budd Lake is itself is composed of various parcels owned by the State, Mount Olive, and private parties.

⁶⁵ Established pursuant to the Natural Heritage Act P.L.1988, c.127 supplementing title 13 (13:1B-15 et seq.).

⁶⁶ Natural Heritage Priority Sites in New Jersey | Natural Heritage Priority Sites in New Jersey | NJGIN Open Data (arcgis.com) Natural Heritage Priority Sites in New Jersey | NJGIN Open Data



Great Piece Meadows Preserve

The Great Piece Meadow Preserve is an open meadow wetland located in Morris (Montville and Lincoln Park) and Essex Counties (Fairfield). State-owned land managed by the Natural Lands Trust includes 1,841 acres, of which approximately 924 acres are located in Morris County. These properties are co-owned by the New Jersey Natural Lands Trust and the Wildlife Preserves' private nonprofit organization.⁶⁷

The Preserve is made up of multiple individual and often noncontiguous parcels and is part of the Passaic River Watershed. The Preserve provides flood storage, wildlife habitat and passive recreation opportunities, and is noted for great blue heron rookeries and habitat for salamanders, turtles, mink and muskrat. Great Piece Meadows is designated a Natural Heritage Priority Site. Hiking and fishing are permitted on the preserve. Additional areas of the Meadows are also preserved as locally owned open space.

The State-owned Preserve makes up just part of the Great Piece Meadows area located in Morris and Essex Counties, much of which is protected at the local level. An additional 1,110 acres of the Meadows are municipally owned; Lincoln Park owns about 103 acres of the Meadows and approximately 1,007 additional acres are owned by Fairfield in Essex County.⁶⁸ Wildlife Preserves also owns about 11 acres of the Meadows in Montville.

(arcgis.com) [Natural Heritage Priority Sites in New Jersey | NJGIN Open Data \(arcgis.com\)](#).

⁶⁷ New Jersey Natural Lands Trust – Acreage assigned to New Jersey Natural Lands Trust for the purpose of this review.

⁶⁸ Lincoln Park owns an additional 103 acres in the Meadows but outside the state-owned "Preserve" per State GIS records,



County of Morris - Morris County Park Commission open space

The Morris County Park Commission, on behalf of the County of Morris, acquires open space lands for public use and maintains, manages, and develops them in a manner that is consistent with its needs. The purposes of County owned open spaces is broader than municipal levels and can extend across municipal and county boundaries.

Morris County *owns* approximately 18,181 acres of open space lands.⁶⁹ The majority of County-owned open space lands are under the stewardship responsibility of the Morris County Park Commission (MCPC), but the County of Morris also owns and maintains other open space for various conservation purposes such as wetlands mitigation, water supply protection and other environmental protection purposes.

The Morris County Park System provides the most diverse recreational opportunities of all county park systems in the state. There are approximately 20,441 acres *managed* by the Morris County Park Commission, 208 miles of trails and 38 distinct facilities. The acreage figure exceeds the total open space owned by the County because these parks also include lands held through lease/use agreements or easements managed by the Morris County Park Commission.

The Morris County Park Commission oversees and manages the County Park System, integrating recreation with environmental protection, historic preservation, natural resource protection, historic and cultural assets, and educational opportunities.⁷⁰ The park system includes environmental education and passive and active recreational facilities, historic sites, golf courses, arboreta, conservation areas, a marina and an ice skating/sports arena.⁷¹ There were approximately 4.2 million annual visits to the Morris County Park system in 2023.



The Morris County Park Commission

Morris County Park Commission parks and facilities are organized into distinct

classifications based on the function and operation of the parkland. This system provides a context on which to help manage park lands and facilities and make decisions concerning staffing, operations, maintenance, and capital improvements.

General Purpose Parks are developed and available to the general public for a wide range of active recreational activities, as well as resource based, predominantly passive recreational opportunities. This

⁶⁹ Excludes properties owned by the Morris County Municipal Utility Authority which are designated as Quasi-Public Open Space in this Plan.

⁷⁰ Visitor Totals, D. Helmer, Morris County Park Commission, 9/20/23.

⁷¹ MCPC Year End Report as of 12/31/22. Include lands owned by the Morris County Park Commission and lands held through a

lease or use agreement for recreation and conservation purposes or subject to a conservation restriction (easement) but owned by others, managed by the Morris County Park Commission as part of a designated County Park facility. These lease agreement and easement properties are not included in the County Open Space acreage totals in which reflect only county-owned lands.



classification includes more traditional park experiences.

Special Purpose Parks are developed for unique uses which require special care; they are available for public use in a controlled manner. In Morris County, this category includes historic sites, golf courses, gardens/arboreta, a marina, sports complexes, and an ice-skating arena. These parks are typically single purpose facilities that serve broad community needs.

Linear Parks include greenways and regional trail systems that are located within and sometimes extend outside the County. Patriot's Path and the Columbia Trail are notable examples that allow for uninterrupted pedestrian, equestrian or bicycle use along natural and man-made corridors.

Conservation Areas are primarily kept in their natural state and are made available to the public for limited passive recreational use. These areas may include trails, interpretive signage and visitor centers and typically include natural areas such as riparian zones, steep slopes, wetlands, forested tracts and areas of scenic interest.

Undeveloped Parks are areas with natural features or special environmental features. These areas are undeveloped with the occasional exception of trails and small parking areas. In some cases, these areas may be planned for further development supporting both active and passive recreational needs.

The Morris County Park System as described herein includes lands owned by the County of Morris, as well as lands owned by other government or nonprofit entities incorporated into the county park system through license or management agreements. All are under the stewardship of the Morris County Park Commission and integral to the park facilities as described.⁷²

General Purpose Parks

Hedden County Park: Hedden County Park is an approximately 421-acre general purpose park located in the Town of Dover and the Townships of Mine Hill and Randolph. Hedden offers both active and passive recreation opportunities such as paved and unpaved biking and hiking trails (approximately 4.5 miles), picnic areas, and athletic fields. The centerpiece of the park is a six-acre lake with a fishing dock. Jackson and Wallace Brooks flow through the park.

Lewis Morris County Park: Located in Morris, Harding and Mendham Townships, Lewis Morris County Park was the first county park and is comprised of 2,207 acres with 25.6 miles of trails. The second largest county park in the system, Lewis Morris County Park activities include, but are not limited to hiking, off-road biking, equestrian trails, picnic areas and shelters, a dog park and group camping areas. Sunrise Lake is located within the park, which allows for boating, swimming, and fishing. The park includes large, wooded areas and open fields which provide scenic vistas. The Morris County Cultural Center, which serves as the Morris

⁷² MCPC Acreage and trail figures derived from 12/31/22 year-end report – acreage per GIS. Deeded acres may vary. Trail miles exclude roads but include Patriot's Path.



County Park Commission Headquarters, is located within the park.

Loantaka Brook Reservation: Spanning Morris, Harding and Chatham Townships, and the Borough of Madison, Loantaka Brook Reservation is comprised of 882 acres. The Reservation buffers Loantaka Brook and its surrounding wetlands. First envisioned as a greenway to protect the Loantaka Brook, the Reservation is now one of the busiest parks in the county park system. The park includes play and picnic areas and its flat terrain and 9.6 miles of paved and unpaved trails support bicycling, jogging, horseback riding and cross-country skiing. The park is made up of five distinct areas that include Seaton Hackney Stables, and the South Street Recreation Area, Kitchell Pond Area, Loantaka Way Area, and the Giralda Farms Area with a portion of the park dedicated as the Helen Hartley Jenkins Woods.



Loantaka Brook Reservation, Morris, Harding and Chatham Township, Madison Borough - Source Morris County Park Commission

Old Troy County Park: Old Troy County Park, located in the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills, is comprised of 153.6 acres and includes 1.3 miles of hiking trails, as well as picnic areas, an athletic field and a 3-acre pond.

Passaic River County Park: Passaic River County Park is located along the Passaic River in Long Hill and Chatham Townships. A total of 833.6 acres, protecting more than 4.8 miles of riverbank, are available for picnicking, fishing and athletic field use. The Park is located in two distinct areas, with the westernmost Clover Hill section, located in Long Hill, separated from the eastern section by several miles. There are future plans for dedicated canoe/kayak launch access points.

Schooley’s Mountain County Park: Located in western Morris County in Washington Township, Schooley’s Mountain County Park offers 792.1 acres of recreational and leisure activities. About 8.9 miles of hiking trails, a picnic area and shelter, athletic field, play area and natural amphitheater are some of the features of this park. The park also offers the Adirondack-style venue “Schooley’s Mountain Lodge,” and the newly renovated boathouse with deck overlooking Lake George. A 470-foot-long floating bridge provides access to the Lake from the Lodge. Both the Lodge and the Boathouse are available for private events.



Schooley’s Mountain Lodge, Washington Township -Source: Morris County Park Commission



Silas Condict County Park: Silas Condict County Park is located in Kinnelon amidst 1,547 rolling acres with 10 miles of trails that connect several scenic overlooks. The park includes a seven-acre lake and restored historic stone building “The Casino” overlooking the lake that is available for private events. Other recreational opportunities include athletic fields, picnic areas, hiking, fishing, equestrian trails, and cross-country skiing.

Tourne County Park: Tourne County Park, located in portions of Boonton and Denville Townships and the Borough of Mountain Lakes, is comprised of 558.6 acres with 13 miles of trails. The park includes access to the Rockaway River and offers opportunities for hiking, fishing, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and sledding, along with picnic sites, playground and athletic fields. Panoramic views of the New York City skyline are available from the top of Tourne Mountain, which at its highest elevation is 897 feet. There are also a number of glacial deposits on the site identified as Denture Rock, Elephant Rock and Mouse Cradle Rock. The Emily K. Hammond Wildflower Trail with over 250 species of native plants and wildlife are maintained by the Rockaway Valley Garden Club members.

Special Purpose Parks

Golf Courses: The County Park Commission operates four public golf courses: Berkshire Valley, Flanders Valley, Pinch Brook and Sunset Valley.

The Berkshire Valley Golf Course is located in Jefferson Township and was formally the site of the Berkshire Sand & Stone Quarry. It consists of 524.8 acres and includes an 18-hole, Par 71, 6,800-yard, course designed by the Roger Rulewich Group. The course incorporates the Elephant House of the former Ringling Estate. Located atop Green Pond Mountain, the course’s topography offers unique challenges and scenic vistas.

The Flanders Valley Golf Course is located in Mount Olive and Roxbury Townships, on 410.4 acres and has two 18-hole courses (White to Blue, Par 72, 6,417 yards and Red to Gold, Par 72, 6,429 yards). Both courses have scenic layouts and challenging holes. The courses were designed by Rees Jones, Inc. and Hal Purdy.

The Pinch Brook Golf Course is located in Florham Park and the Township of East Hanover and includes an 18-hole executive length course, Par 65, 4,996 yards on 102.2 acres. The course was designed by Rees Jones, Inc.



Sunset Valley Golf Course, Pequannock Township - Source Morris County Park Commission



The Sunset Valley Golf Course is located on 208.3 acres in Pequannock Township and Kinnelon Borough. This course is an 18-hole, Par 70, 6,483 yards and was designed by Hal Purdy.

Arboreta: Focusing on horticulture, gardens and education, the County Park System includes three arboreta: Bamboo Brook, Frelinghuysen, and Willowwood.

An arboretum is a facility dedicated to the cultivation of wood plants for public display and both scientific and educational purposes, a museum with a living collection. (Morris County Park Commission)

Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center: Located in Chester Township, the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center is situated on 685.6 acres and includes formal gardens and rolling meadow areas. The gardens were originally designed by Martha Brookes Hutcheson, one of the first female landscape architects in the nation. The restored formal gardens are on the National and State Register of Historic Places. In addition to the formal garden areas, there are about 7.9 miles of trails that wind through the fields and along Bamboo and Herzog Brooks. The surrounding landscape includes wooded areas and a wide variety of wildlife.

Bamboo Brook is part of a larger network of more than 1,683 acres of preserved County parkland along the Black River and adjacent areas, extending from the Cooper Gristmill to the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center and Willowwood Arboretum. These sites are connected by a multi-mile series of trails and Patriot’s Path.

The Frelinghuysen Arboretum: Located in Hanover and Morris Townships, the Frelinghuysen Arboretum is a regional center for horticultural activities, and offers a myriad of educational programs, special tours and events and a comprehensive collection of botanical literature. The 128.2-acre site includes the 1891 Colonial Revival Frelinghuysen Mansion and the Haggerty Education Center. The property is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Surrounding the mansion are meadows, woodlands, and highly maintained gardens with a distinctive collection of trees and shrubs. The site includes 6.3 miles of trails and walkways including self-guided and interpretative nature trails.



Haggerty Entrance Garden, Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Hanover and Morris Township - Source: Morris County Park Commission

The Willowwood Arboretum: Located in Chester Township, the Willowwood Arboretum lies adjacent to the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center. It is comprised of 130.6 -acres of former rolling farmland and has approximately 2,100 varieties of native and exotic plants, many of



them rare.⁷³ The site includes the former Tubbs House residence, dating back to 1792, with beautiful vistas, formal and informal gardens, and meadow paths dominated by rolling fields, undisturbed woodlands and 6.3 miles of trails. In addition to the natural forested areas, botanic collections include oak, maple, willow, magnolia, lilac, cherry, fir, pine and others, masses of ferns and forest wildflowers.

As mentioned in the description of the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, Willowood Arboretum is part of a larger network of more than 1,683 acres of preserved County parkland along the Black River and adjacent areas, extending from the Cooper Gristmill to the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center and the Gardens of Bamboo Brook, all connected by a multi-mile series of trails and Patriot’s Path.

Historic Sites

The Cooper Gristmill: This historic site is located on 41 acres in Chester Township, adjacent to the Black River. The Mill was built in 1826 and is one of the last remaining restored water-powered mills in New Jersey. It is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. There is a visitors’ center, and guided tours are available. The site is also a trailhead for Patriot’s Path and is part of the larger network of more than 1,683 acres of preserved County parkland along the Black River and adjacent areas previously identified in the description of Bamboo Brook. The trails provide access to the Black River for fishing.

Fosterfields Living Historical Farm: Comprising 231.3 acres, Fosterfields in Morris Township is a working farm using tools, techniques and materials that would be available in the 1920s. A working farm since 1760, daily farm activities are demonstrated on site where visitors can see farm animals, witness planting and plowing of fields, use of antique machinery and take in various farm tasks. Structures on site include the 1920s farmhouse where the farm foreman once lived. and the 1854 Gothic revival-style mansion “The Willows” which was built by a grandson of Paul Revere. Educational programs are provided on site which also includes 3.5 miles of hiking trails and two reservable group picnic areas. The Farm is on the State and National Historic Registers.

Historic Speedwell: Located in Morristown, Historic Speedwell is the “Birthplace of the Telegraph.” This 7.9-acre site is listed on the State and National Historic Registers and has several historic buildings, including the L’Hommedieu House (which houses a visitors’ center and museum), and the Vail Mansion and the Vail Factory Building, a National Historic Landmark where Alfred Vail worked with Samuel F.B Morse to conduct the first successful demonstration of the telegraph on Jan 11, 1838. Offering an opportunity to view life during the early years of the industrial revolution, educational programs are offered, and certain buildings are available for reservation by the public.

⁷³ There are approximately 44 acres included as part of the Willowood Arboretum that are physically located in Somerset

County but are owned and managed by the Morris County Park Commission.



Historic Speedwell, Morristown - Source: Morris County Park Commission

Mount Hope Historical County Park: This historical park is located in Rockaway Township, is comprised of 479.2 acres and was once the location of an active iron mining industry. Mining in Mount Hope began as early as 1710, making it one of the oldest mining areas in Colonial America, with the last mine operating until 1978. The rocky landscape of the park includes deep depressions; the visible remains of shafts, adits (i.e., horizontal passages) and slopes where Black Stone-magnetite iron ore was mined. The site includes 3.6 miles of trail that allows for hiking and snowshoeing. It is anticipated that the Mount Hope Miners' Church, which is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, will become a Visitors Center, providing educational programming and curating historic artifacts and documents on the mining industry in Morris County.

Marina

Lee's County Park Marina: Lee's County Park Marina is located in the Borough of Mount Arlington on the east shore of Lake Hopatcong. This 13-acre park provides boat access to Lake Hopatcong with 100 boat slips

and three boat launch ramps. Once comprised of two smaller lakes or ponds, these were joined when a dam was erected in the vicinity of Lake Hopatcong State Park as part of the infrastructure needed for the Morris Canal. The lakeside of the Marina was donated to the Park Commission by Mr. Robert E. Lee in 1994. A former summer season pavilion on the property will be available for private party rentals.



Lee's County Park Marina, Mount Arlington Borough – Source: Morris County Park Commission

Equestrian Facility

Seaton Hackney Stables: Seaton Hackney Stables is a 21.4-acre equestrian facility located in Morris Township, contiguous with Loantaka Brook Reservation. The Stables were donated to the Park Commission in 1958 by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Moore. The facility is a full-service riding facility, servicing beginner to advanced riders, and is operated by an outside concessionaire.

Sports/Recreation Complex

Central Park of Morris County: Central Park is a multi-faceted sports complex comprised of 420 acres located in the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills. Morris County's first



accessible outdoor athletic facility, the complex includes regulation-size in-line hockey rinks, a fully accessible Challenger League ball field, two sand volleyball courts, softball field, four multi-use artificial turf fields, a 5K cross country course, dog park, all access play area and natural amphitheater, disc golf course and 11.8 miles of paved and natural trails. Long-term plans include the construction of a monument recognizing the former Administration Building of the Greystone Psychiatric Hospital using preserved exterior architectural remnants and the installation of an ADA compliant miniature golf course.⁷⁴

Craigmeur Recreation Complex: Located in Rockaway Township, the Craigmeur Recreation Complex is available as a reservation-only facility for special events and activities such as family reunions, company picnics, weddings and fundraisers. The 67.8-acre complex provides picnic pavilions and a wide range of athletic fields, game courts and play areas, as well as hiking along a 1.6-mile nature trail.

The William G. Mennen Sports Arena: Located in Morris Township, this facility was built in 1973 on an 18.2-acre site donated by the Mennen Company. With nearly one million visitors annually, the arena is a full-service ice center with skating offered year-round on its three ice surfaces. The arena offers public sessions, group lessons, and private sessions for various skate related activities. The main Rink has 2,500 permanent seats and can be reserved for private functions and office events.⁷⁵ A

rugby field is also located on the site.



Hockey Practice, Menan Sports Arena, Morris Township - Source: Morris County Park Commission

Linear Parks

Columbia Trail: The Columbia Trail comprises 8.2 miles of flat, multi-use linear trail with natural and gravel tread; the Morris section of the trail connects with the 7.5-mile portion of the trail located in Hunterdon County. The Morris County section of the trail encompasses 104.5 acres donated by the Columbia Gas Company in 1987 and traverses Washington Township. The trail can be used for a variety of activities, including horseback riding, bicycling, hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

Patriot's Path: Patriot's Path is a U.S. Department of the Interior National Trail System designated trail. It was first preserved to protect the Whippany River and its tributaries, allowing trail activities while protecting and enhancing the environmental and aesthetic integrity of the stream valley and uplands through which it passes. Comprised of 48 miles of main trail corridor and nearly 25 miles of spur trail

⁷⁴ American with Disabilities Act, 1990.

⁷⁵ E.g., the Grappler Competitions, Dog Shows, Antique Shows, Circuses.



segments encompassing about 459.5 acres, the Patriot’s Path trail and greenway system includes hiking, biking, equestrian trails and open space.

The Path links several federal, state, county,⁷⁶ and municipal parks, as well as watershed lands, historic sites and other points of interest throughout Morris County. Much of the Path lies along the Whippany and Black Rivers, and the South Branch of the Raritan River; the Black River and South Branch also being two of the most pristine trout-production streams in the state. Patriot’s Path incorporates lands owned and managed by the MCPC and land owned and managed by other entities. Combining these sections, the main stem of the existing Patriot’s Path trail system extends across nearly the entire County of Morris from Essex County to Warren County, connecting at East Hanover with the Lenape Trail in Essex County, the Allumuchy Mountain State Park in Warren County, and the Columbia Trail in Washington Township.⁷⁷

Patriot’s Path passes along many points of interest in Morris County, including: the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Acorn Hall, the Ford Mansion, Fosterfields Living Historical Farm, Pocahontas Lake, Historic Speedwell, Lewis Morris County Park, Jockey Hollow, the Black River Wildlife Management Area, Cooper Gristmill, Chubb Park, Schooley’s Mountain County Park, the Kay Environmental Center and Willowood Arboretum.

Currently there are only an estimated 2.5 miles needed to complete connectivity along the entire trail length with sections of trail in Morristown, Morris Township and Hanover Township receiving Federal and State transportation funds for completion and refurbishment.

In addition to its contribution to the county-wide trail system, Patriot’s Path is also co-aligned with various local trails and with several intra-county, statewide and national trails systems.



Traction Line Recreation Trail – Source: Morris County Park Commission

⁷⁶ Trail miles noted for various county park facilities include portions of Patriot’s Path.

⁷⁷ The Path currently includes three relative short and unlinked areas located in Morristown, Harding, and Washington Townships.



Traction Line Recreation Trail: This 2.7-mile linear trail runs parallel to the New Jersey Transit Line Railroad, stretching from Danforth Road, by Fairleigh Dickinson University, along the Florham Park/Madison Borough border to Morris Avenue in Convent Station, Morris Township and Washington's Headquarters in Morristown. The trail encompasses 15.3 acres, and provides opportunities for walking, jogging, in-line skating and cycling and features a Fitness Trail with cardio and strength training stations. Within the 15.3 acres is an opportunity to construct an additional one mile of trail through Madison.

West Morris Greenway: The West Morris Greenway encompasses 508.8 acres including Wharton Borough's Hugh Force Canal Park. With about 5.2 miles of trail currently on ground, the Greenway trail is intended to eventually be 25 miles in length, extending through Chester, Randolph, and Roxbury Townships, Mine Hill Township, Wharton Borough and Rockaway and Jefferson Townships. Most of the trail will lie on the rail beds of three former railroads: the Chester Branch of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western; the abandoned Mount Hope Mineral Railroad; and the Wharton and Northern Railroad. Hiking and unpaved biking trails are anticipated. Cooperation with communities along the trail continues to make the entire proposed trail distance a reality.

Conservation Areas

Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center: The Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center is located on an 824.8-acre site in Chester Township. The Kay family donated the original 223-acre "Hidden River Farm" to the Park Commission in 1993. The site offers access to nature, with plentiful hiking trails that run through beautiful meadows and hardwood forests. The Center includes a butterfly garden and 7.8 miles of nature and hiking trails. The Center hosts the offices of the New Jersey Chapter of the Nature Conservancy.

The Kay Center is also part of the larger network of 1,683 acres of preserved county parkland located along the Black River and adjacent areas extending from the Cooper Gristmill south to the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center and Willowood Arboretum. It includes 22.9 miles of passive recreational trail, including sections of Patriot's Path which leads from park to park through a spectacular hemlock gorge, with views of historic ruins along the Black River.

Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center: Located contiguous to the eastern end of the federal Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, the Park Commission's Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center is located on a 47.4-acre site in Chatham Township. The site includes 2.5 miles of natural trail and accessible boardwalk, providing views of swamp, marsh, ponds, forest habitats and wildlife. The Visitors Center includes many interactive and educational exhibits.



*Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center, Chatham Township –
Source: Morris County Park Commission*

James Andrews Memorial County Park: James Andrews Memorial County Park is located in Randolph Township and is comprised of 583.5 acres. There are 4.3 miles of hiking and bicycling trails, both paved and unpaved, that interconnect with the Randolph Township trails system. Den Brook, a major tributary of the Rockaway River, begins in wetlands above the park and a small brook flowing into Shongum Lake contains a population of brook trout, native to the stream.

Jonathan’s Woods: Jonathan’s Woods is located in Denville and Rockaway Townships. It is comprised of 545.4 acres of largely undeveloped land, except for seven miles of trails created in connection with the Denville-based nonprofit conservation organization “Protect Our Wetlands, Water and Woods (POWWW).” The trails permit hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and bird watching. Of note is a natural feature with historic significance known as the Hogpen. It is reported that this U-shaped enclosure of rocks was used as a seasonal animal shelter during and long before the American Revolution. The trail takes users

through forest, wetlands and ridges, and across brooks and streams.

Mahlon Dickerson Reservation: Preserved primarily as a conservation area, Mahlon Dickerson Reservation is the largest park in the Morris County Park System, encompassing 3,532.1 acres of near-wilderness and recreation areas, including 27 miles of multi-use trails.⁷⁸ Many recreational activities are available such as horseback riding, seasonal camping, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, softball and fishing at Saffin Pond. Other unique activities include a radio-controlled car track and model boat racing. One of the Reservation’s outstanding features is Headley Overlook. With an elevation of 1,280 feet, this is one of the highest points in Morris County.

Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area: Located in Kinnelon Borough, Montville and Boonton Townships, Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area comprises 1,657.4 acres of trails, fields, forests, rock outcroppings and wetlands. The highest point of the park is 934 feet, which offers views of New York City. The Park provides examples of unusual glacial erratic, the most notable being Tripod Rock, a 180-ton boulder balanced on three smaller boulders deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier over 18,000 years ago. Bear Rock located nearby is one of New Jerseys’ largest glacial erratics. The ridges and valleys of the park feed downstream reservoirs. The Park features 19.3 miles of hiking and nature trails and a

⁷⁸ Included in the acreage of Mahlon Dickerson are 413 acres located in Sparta Township, Sussex County. The Morris County

Park Commission leases and manages this property as part of Mahlon Dickerson Park.



visitors center including interactive exhibits about the history and wildlife of the area.



Snowshoe Adventures, Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area – Montville, Boonton Township, Kinnelon Borough - Source: Morris County Park Commission



Minisink Reservation, Jefferson, and Roxbury Township - Source: Morris County Park Commission

Undeveloped Parks

Minisink Reservation: Located in Jefferson and Roxbury Townships, the Minisink Reservation is comprised of 321.6 undeveloped and mostly forested acres. This area is planned as a future general-purpose park. The land is rugged with phenomenal vistas.

Mount Paul Memorial County Park: Located in Chester and Mendham Townships, Mount Paul Memorial Park presently consists of 285.8 acres of mostly undeveloped fields and woodlands. The headwaters of Gladstone Brook, a trout production stream, has its headwaters within the park. There are no current plans for active recreation development.

Waughaw Mountain Greenway: Currently undeveloped, this 476.2-acre site is located in Kinnelon and Riverdale Borough west of Route 287 and south of Route 23. Plans for its future use include an off-road bicycling and hiking system.

Morris County Park Commission Land Acquisition Program

The Morris County Park Commission’s (MCPC) Land Acquisition Program places potential acquisitions into three categories: Targeted Projects, Potential Projects, and Projects to Monitor/Long Range Projects. All projects are either adjacent to existing parks or desired for greenway preservation and/or trail development.

The MCPC has an extensive trail system that crosses both east to west and north to south. A number of missing links still remain either within or between the different trails, and future efforts can connect municipal trail systems or bike lanes to the regional trails. Targeted Projects are high priority and contiguous to existing MCPC property and/or could have potential development impact on MCPC stewarded property. A



number of these properties are also listed on MCPC's New Jersey Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) and acquisition of these properties will allow for the protection of significant natural, recreation, or historic resources. Additionally, many of the property owners on the list have been in contact with MCPC and are interested in selling their land.

Other County Open Space

Morris County also owns approximately 588 acres of other open space lands, although these are not used for public recreation purposes. Instead, these lands provide wetlands mitigation, watershed protection, open space buffers or other functions; they are non-public open space.

Municipal Open Space

Traditionally, the focus of municipal open space has been on the development of parks and associated recreational facilities created to meet the needs of local citizens, e.g., ball fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, swimming pools and bike trails. Often, municipal programs are tailored to suit the needs of particular populations such as preschoolers, teens, adults and senior citizens. These areas are typically smaller in size with a greater focus on active recreation facilities than typically provided by federal, state, or county agencies. While active recreation remains the traditional open space focus of most communities, emphasis on the preservation of open space for passive recreation and natural resource protection has increased over the years, as has the

desire to provide linkages between existing open space assets within communities and with county, state, or federal open space properties.

Municipal parks typically focus on providing recreational facilities to municipal residents but can also include significant undeveloped natural areas. Municipal parks can be defined by size and function; specific characteristics will differ by municipality.⁷⁹ Common municipal park types include:

- “Mini” or “Pocket Parks” - Typically ¼ acre to five acres in size, have a service area of about a quarter mile and generally include neighborhood playgrounds, benches, picnic tables and/or ornamental features.
- Neighborhood Parks - Typically range in size from five to 15 acres, have a service area of ½ to one mile and characteristically contain athletic fields and court facilities, picnic and playground areas.
- Community Parks - Typically range in size from 15 to 50 acres, have a service area of one to five miles and may contain a wide range of active and passive recreation opportunities.
- Linear parks/greenways – Include parks and natural corridors, usually including trails that can be further integrated with local pedestrian and bikeway facilities. Linear parks sometimes incorporate fitness courses, benches, and/or play areas. Linear parks greenways can

⁷⁹ National Recreation and Park Association Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, 1996.



effectively tie individual park system components together to form a continuous park environment.



Montville Community Park, Montville Twp.- Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Morris County municipalities have made significant additions to their open space inventories over the last 30 years, often using local funding, state and county funding resources, dedications, collaborations with nonprofits, and other methods to increase their open space holdings. With approximately 24,316 acres, municipally owned open space accounts for about 25.7% of all open space in the County, the second largest percentage behind state-owned open space, which is about 29.7%.



TABLE 2 - OPEN SPACE - ACREAGE BY MUNICIPALITY AND OWNERSHIP

Municipality	Federal	State	County	Municipal	Nonprofit	Quasi-Public	Total Open Space	% of Municipality
Boonton Town	0	0	0	111	0	138	249	16%
Boonton Twp.	0	0	604	495	132	0	1,231	23%
Butler Boro.	0	0	0	23	26	0	49	4%
Chatham Boro.	0	0	0	233	0	0	233	15%
Chatham Twp.	1,388	0	691	488	12	0	2,579	43%
Chester Boro.	0	0	0	194	0	0	194	19%
Chester Twp.	0	3,787	1,353	1,608	44	36	6,828	37%
Denville Twp.	0	52	728	848	8	20	1,656	20%
Dover Town	0	0	64	150	0	0.05	214	12%
East Hanover Twp.	0	291	45	496	238	0	1,070	21%
Florham Par Boro.	0	66	65	268	0	84	483	10%
Hanover Twp.	0	145	38	622	0	56	861	13%
Harding Twp.	5,213	0	270	209	509	0	6,201	47%
Jefferson Twp.	145	6,458	3,825	1,428	196	3,973	16,025	58%
Kinnelon Boro.	0	1,409	1,813	733	342	119	4,416	36%
Lincoln Park Boro.	0	1,127	36	287	0	0	1,450	33%
Long Hill Twp.	2,514	100	701	603	8	0	3,926	51%
Madison Boro.	0	0	26	224	0	0	250	9%
Mendham Boro.	0	0	0	284	45	0	329	9%
Mendham Twp.	23	0	940	1,080	636	578	3,257	28%
Mine Hill Twp.	0	0	210	289	0	67	566	30%
Montville Twp.	0	269	1,027	1,468	11	0	2,775	23%
Morris Twp.	78	0	1,522	602	3	0	2,205	22%
Morris Plains Boro.	0	12	11	172	0	3	198	12%
Morristown Town	37	0	16	147	18	0	218	11%
Mountain Lakes Boro.	0	0	19	622	0	0	641	34%
Mount Arlington Boro.	0	407	13	121	0	0	541	30%
Mount Olive Twp.	0	3,842	610	2,117	513	0	7,082	35%
Netcong Boro.	0	78	0	29	0	0	107	17%
Parsippany-Troy Hills Twp.	0	472	490	1,405	1,391	1,090	4,848	30%
Pequannock Twp.	0	3	161	581	0	0	745	16%
Randolph Twp.	0	15	951	1,715	2	696	3,379	25%
Riverdale Boro.	0	0	43	22	0	0	65	5%
Rockaway Boro.	0	0	0	74	0	21	95	7%
Rockaway Twp.	6	6,963	647	1,178	737	2,208	11,739	40%
Roxbury Twp.	0	1,705	237	1,705	0	128	3,775	27%
Victory Gardens Boro.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Washington Twp.	0	883	1,022	1,598	366	140	4,009	14%
Wharton Boro.	0	0	3	87	0	0	90	7%
TOTALS	9,404	28,084	18,181	24,316	5,237	9,357	94,680	

Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation. Calculations as of 5/20/24. Areas and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Includes lands held in fee simple only. Private lands, easements and lease agreements are excluded from these totals. Total acres may vary from that recorded at local government/nonprofit levels due to differing open space definitions and use of GIS Acres v. Deeded Acres. Acreage figures in this table are based on Morris County GIS data. "County of Morris" totals exclude lands owned by the Morris County Municipal Utility Authority; these properties are included within the "Quasi-Public" category. Not all lands identified herein may be deed restricted.



Nonprofit Open Space⁸⁰

Nonprofit conservation organizations usually have a specific mission as set forth in their charters and bylaws. They may be established to preserve and protect certain land characteristics regardless of the political jurisdiction, to acquire land areas located within specified jurisdictions, or provide technical and other assistance to local government and others involved in the preservation of open space and natural resources. Nonprofits typically have a funding base consisting of membership fees, charitable contributions, donations, and government grants and can qualify for certain grants that governmental agencies are ineligible to receive. Nonprofits can fill a void that governmental agencies are unable to fill because of time, lack of funding, or policy.

Some nonprofit organizations own the land they preserve, holding the land in a Trust.⁸¹ Others acquire private land with the intention of donating it to local governments for open space/natural resource preservation. Still other nonprofit conservancy organizations never own land; instead their role is to provide conservation services such as maintaining, managing,

enhancing, restoring, and/or improving properties, trail and conservation easements, working in cooperation to protect and service lands owned by governments or private entities for little or no cost.

There are over 5,200 acres of land in Morris County *independently owned by* nonprofit conservancy organizations and managed as open space. Note that in many cases, nonprofit conservation organizations own land jointly with other conservation organizations or local governments.⁸² They may also manage private and other lands in addition to that which they own, which may also include easements on private land. Therefore, lands managed by nonprofits may be greater than lands they independently own. These lands are not included in the total acreage noted above.

Major nonprofit organizations that own land for open space and conservation purposes in Morris County, and other entities dedicated to open space preservation, are described in detail in Chapter 5.

⁸⁰ Nonprofit conservation organizations include charitable conservancies as defined by the New Jersey Conservation Restriction and Historic Preservation Restriction Act 13:8B-2A. [njcrhra-web-copy.pdf](#) These are defined as a corporation or trust whose purposes include the acquisition and preservation of land or water areas in a natural, scenic or open condition, no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, and which has received tax exemption under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. Nonprofit conservation organizations as included in this analysis protect open space that may or may not be open to the general public. Properties are typically, but not always permanently preserved.

⁸¹ A land trust or land conservancy is a community-based, nonprofit organization that actively works to conserve land by

acquiring land or conservation easements from willing landowners. Land trusts may also manage or restore land once it has been conserved. ([landtrustalliance.org](#)).

⁸² Acreage totals reflect acreage independently owned by a nonprofit entity. Acres rounded to nearest whole number, based on County GIS calculations, which may differ from deeded acreage. In multiple ownership situations, the entire acreage of a parcel is assigned to the entity with a majority interest. In situations where ownership is 50/50 with a government entity, the acreage of a parcel is assigned to the government entity. In all other cases, acreage is assigned as per first owner of record listed in county tax records. Land managed by, but not owned by nonprofits are also not included as nonprofit acreage reported herein.



Quasi-Public Land

Quasi-Public refers to regionally significant properties held for water supply/watershed protection by regional water supply authorities and water purveyors established and/or overseen by a government entity or entities.⁸³ While their primary function is the protection and supply of ground and surface water, these areas may also contribute to greenway corridors and wildlife habitat. They are not typically open to the public, however, some of these lands provide limited passive recreation opportunities.⁸⁴ There are approximately 9,352 acres of Quasi-Public acres owned by regional water supply authorities identified in Morris County.⁸⁵

The Spit Rock Reservoir is located in Rockaway Township adjacent to Farney State Park and the Wildcat Ridge Reservoir. Access is provided for fishing, kayaking, or canoeing. This area also provides a trailhead for a 13.8-mile loop trail around the reservoir.

The Boonton Reservoir Protection and Trail Project. As part of a 40-year lease agreement struck between Jersey City and the Morris County Park Commission in 2018, a 7.7-mile loop trail will be added to the Boonton Reservoir site, in addition to water quality and other site improvements.

In all, Quasi-Public open space accounts for approximately 9,357 acres or about 9.9% of the defined open space in the County. In Morris County, some of the largest Quasi-Public land holdings are owned by municipalities located out of the County.

The City of Newark Division of Sewer and Water owns approximately 6,291 acres located within Jefferson, Kinnelon and Rockaway Township, protecting areas of the Pequannock Watershed⁸⁶ and including the Oak Ridge (Jefferson) and Charlotteburg (Rockaway Township and Kinnelon) Reservoirs.

The Jersey City Municipal Utility Authority owns approximately 1,255 acres with lands located in Parsippany-Troy Hills, Denville, Rockaway Township and the Town of Boonton, including the Boonton (a.k.a. Jersey City) Reservoir.

City of East Orange East Orange owns 84 acres of wetland area along the Passaic River in Florham Park as “Water Reserve,” which buffers the Passaic River.

Regional Water Purveyors⁸⁷

The two major regional water purveyors serving Morris County are the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (MCMUA) and

⁸³ Municipal water authority/water department lands are not included in this category. Municipal water authority land may be included in municipal open space totals when selected by their respective municipalities for inclusion in their open space inventories as conservation lands. Additional open space properties that also provide water supply protection are also held independently by the NJDEP and County of Morris. Unless identified as under the management of a specific and separate water supply authority, these lands are included in the general open space acreage totals for the State and the County of Morris.

⁸⁴Quasi-Public lands as defined herein may or may not be open to the public. Properties are typically, but not always permanently preserved.

⁸⁵ Reported acres may include water acres as well as land acres. Some tax parcels may include both. May also include related pump station/water tower properties.

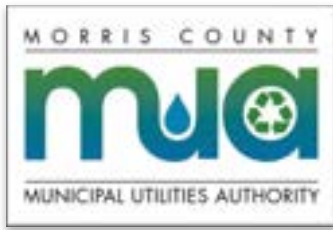
⁸⁶ The Pequannock Watershed is located in portions of six municipalities in Morris, Passaic and Sussex Counties.

⁸⁷ Municipal utility authorities, water departments and private water companies are not included in this review.



the Southeast Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (SMCMUA).⁸⁸

The MCMUA was originally established by the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders⁸⁹



in 1958 as a regional supplier of drinking water and protector of regional drinking water supplies. Its role has since expanded, but providing water and protecting water quality remains a core mission. The MCMUA makes it a priority to assist in the preservation of land located in wellhead protection, prime groundwater recharge, and headwater areas throughout Morris County and has partnered with private landowners, local government, and nonprofits to preserve thousands of acres of open space for watershed protection. The MCMUA itself also owns and manages about 580 acres of watershed protection open space and manages another 213 acres of open space owned by the County of Morris and managed for watershed protection.⁹⁰ MCMUA landholdings are concentrated in the Alamatong and Flanders wellfields; several smaller parcels are located elsewhere in Morris County.

The SMCMUA is a joint municipal utility authority formed in 1977 by the governing bodies of Morristown, Morris Township, Morris Plains and Hanover Townships. Two members from each of these communities form the Board of the SMCMUA.⁹¹ The SMCMUA provides drinking water to customers in Morristown, Morris Township, Morris Plains, and Hanover Township with some service to Mendham and Harding Townships. The SMCMUA’s landholdings encompass approximately 1,003 acres, of which the majority include the Clyde’s Potts Reservoir and surrounding properties in Randolph and Mendham Townships.⁹²

New Jersey Water Supply Authority

The New Jersey Water Supply Authority (Authority) operates the Raritan Basin Water Supply System, which comprises the Spruce Run and Round Valley Reservoirs and the Delaware and Raritan Canal. The Raritan Watershed Basin contains portions of Morris County⁹³ and the Authority, through its Land and Resource Preservation Program, aids in the preservation of land by government and nonprofit entities throughout the Raritan Basin. The Authority has partnered with government bodies and nonprofit agencies in Morris County to help them preserve approximately 900 acres of critical watershed lands.⁹⁴ The Authority also independently owns watershed protection

⁸⁸ Municipal Utility Authorities are governed under the Municipal and County Utilities Authorities Law P.L., c.183, N.J.S.A. 40:14B-1 et seq.

⁸⁹ Now named the Morris County Board of County Commissioners.

⁹⁰ Acreage figures from Morris County Public Lands Inventory.

⁹¹ Board Activities (smcmua.org).

⁹² The SMCMUA has additional minor landholdings in Hanover, Parsippany, and Morris Plains.

⁹³ Washington, Mount Olive, Roxbury, Mine Hill, Randolph, Mount Arlington, the Mendhams and all of Chester Borough and Chester Township, 2000 Morris County Natural Resource Guide.

⁹⁴ “Preservation Partners” listed by the Authority include, but are not limited to: Chester, Mendham, Roxbury and Washington Townships, the Morris County Park Commission and nonprofits operating in Morris County such as the Schiff Natural Lands Trust, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, the Washington Township Land Trust and the New Jersey Audubon Society.



lands, including approximately 140 acres in Washington Township.⁹⁵

Open Space Contributors

While not identified specifically as open space within the context of this Plan, there are several categories of land use that contribute to the open space character of the County.

Farmland - There are over 30,600 acres of farm assessed lands in Morris County, located primarily in the western and southwestern portions of the county. Of these, approximately 8,100 acres have been permanently preserved for agricultural use through the purchase of development easements funded by local and state government and the Morris County Preservation Trust Program.⁹⁶ Under this voluntary arrangement, landowners sell the right to develop their land for non-agricultural purposes but retain ownership of their land which may continue to be used (or sold) for agriculture. Permanent deed restrictions ensure that the land will not undergo non-agricultural development. The land remains private and is not open to public access. The preservation of both open space and farmland in Morris County is coordinated through the efforts of the Morris County Preservation Trust.⁹⁷

Farmlands, preserved or unpreserved, are private lands for which the primary purpose is the generation of agricultural/horticultural products or services as part of a commercial enterprise. While not “open space” as

defined herein, the County recognizes the contributions of farmland related to groundwater recharge/water supply, wildlife protection, and the protection of the County's overall open space character, in addition to being a key component of Morris County's economy. This is particularly true for farmland that is permanently preserved. Farmland is also often located adjacent to or near preserved open space and conservation areas and can provide a buffer that enhances the value of the preserved open space. Conversely, preserved open space can help protect farms from incompatible land uses. The map below illustrates the relationship between preserved and unpreserved farmland to land devoted to open space in Morris County.

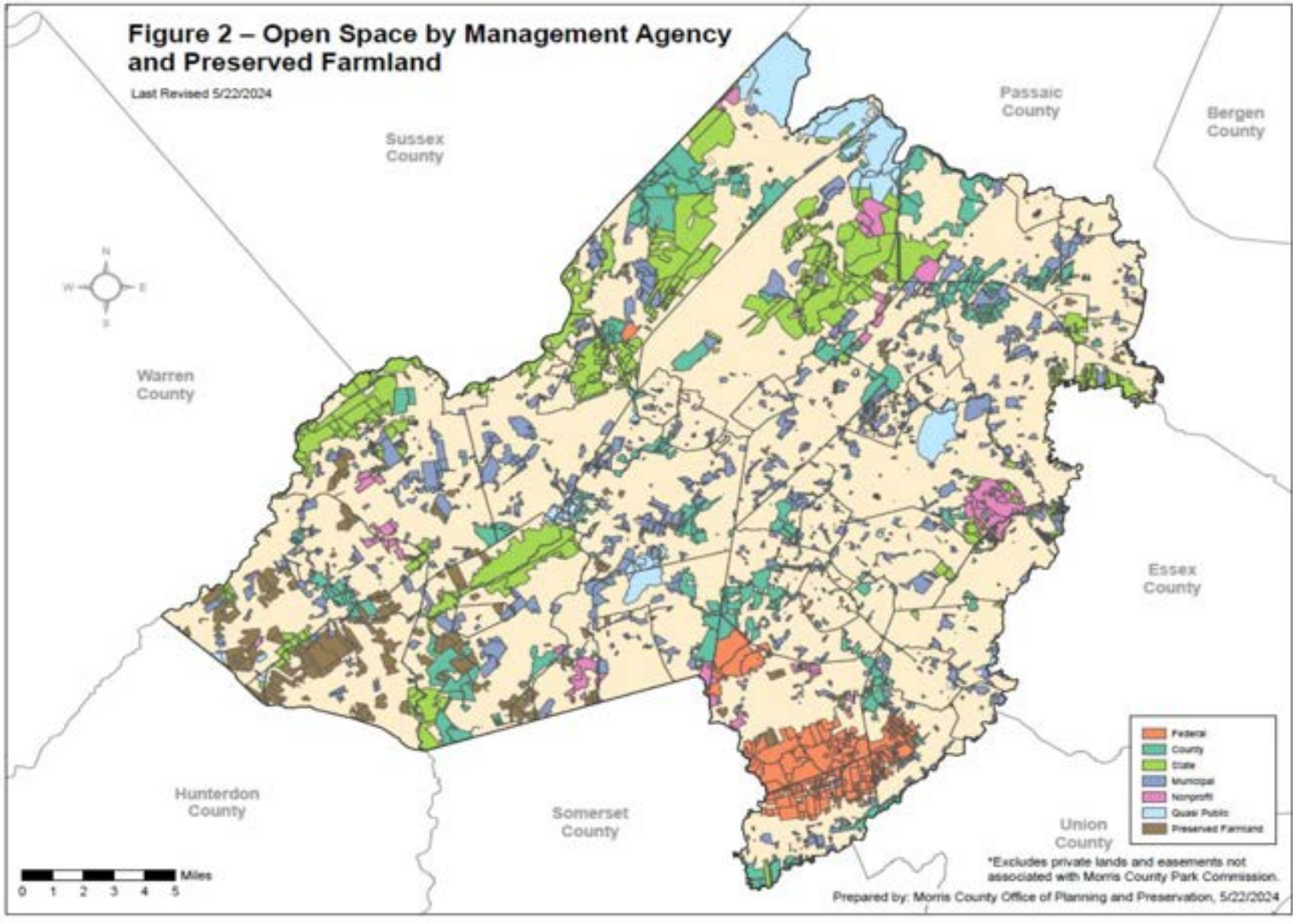


Preserved farmland, Washington Township - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

⁹⁵ Washington Township, Block 50, Lot 26, Block 51, Lot 12, Block 54, Lots 24.1, 24.02, 43, 51.03.

⁹⁶ 2022 Morris County Farmland Preservation Plan, page 1.

⁹⁷ Coordination of farmland and open space preservation through the Morris County Preservation Trust is detailed in the 2022 Farmland Preservation Plan Element of the Morris County Master Plan, pg. 93-94.





Public Schools – There are 3,355 acres of land devoted to public school use in Morris County.⁹⁸ The primary function of school property is to serve the educational needs of students. School properties may also provide play areas and/or athletic fields that may be available to local residents in after-school hours. For this reason, public schools are often included in local open space and recreation inventories. In most cases, however, school properties are subject to additional development or redevelopment. Areas devoted to outdoor recreational use may be small or nonexistent, particularly in more urbanized settings. For these reasons, while potential providers of local outdoor recreation opportunities, public school properties are not generally included in this assessment as open space. The exception occurs when a portion of school property has been specifically retained for recreation and conservation purposes through a lease, easement, or use agreement with the local government in accordance with State ROSI guidelines, in which case they are included in the reported acreage of municipal open space.⁹⁹

Commercial/Private Recreation Facilities – Some commercial / private recreation facilities can contribute to open space character, but these are private lands, open only to private groups and operated primarily as commercial for-profit

enterprises. They may provide for use of land or facilities for a fee, as a membership, or by agreement. For example, privately owned golf courses, while contributing to recreational opportunity and local open space character, may be sold and developed at any time. By contrast, County-owned golf courses are located on public land preserved as public open space and developed as part of the County Park System. Other examples of other private recreation/open space not identified as open space in the context of this plan include private lake association land/water bodies, hunting clubs, and YMCA's.

Private Land/Easements - There are many privately owned lands on which a conservation and/or trail easement or lease/use agreements have been secured by a government or nonprofit agency. Conservation/trail easements and lease agreements may prevent development on a portion or all of privately owned property and/or may involve management of a portion or all of this property by government or nonprofit entity. Ownership, however, is retained by the private landowner. A complete inventory of associated private lands restricted in whole, or in part, as open space or conservation area is not currently available; further study is necessary to accurately quantify the total protected acreage.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Morris County Tax Assessment MODIV data,

⁹⁹ Lands owned by [school boards], without primary recreation or conservation responsibilities should not be inventoried as part of a Recreation and Open Space Inventory unless they are also held for recreation and conservation purposes by the Local Government Unit through a lease, easement, use agreement or

other agreement to which the Local Government Unit is a grantee. New Jersey Green Acres Program N.J.A.C. 7:36.

¹⁰⁰ Only known undeveloped private land held through a lease, easement or use agreement and managed as such by the Morris County Parks Commission as part of Morris County Parks are included on the map of open space by management entity and only when the specific geometry associated with the lease agreement or easement is known has been identified.



The Morris County Park Commission holds easements and maintains lease/use agreements related to certain parks, including trail segments of the Patriot’s Path.¹⁰¹

Undeveloped lands associated with homeowner associations or residential common areas, or vacant lands associated with nonresidential uses are also not included as open space within the context of this Plan.

New Jersey Highlands Council – Highlands Development Credits - The New Jersey Highlands Council’s Highlands Development Credit Purchase Program obtains development easements on private land within the Highlands Region to prevent further development of certain properties. These may be residential or commercial properties, partially developed, vacant, or farmland. While not managed as open space, some of these properties may contribute to the general open space character of the County, particularly as applied to vacant land and farmland. The Highlands Development Credit Bank has purchased the development rights of over 2,565 acres in the Highlands Region.¹⁰² These may be residential or commercial properties, partially developed, vacant, or farmland.¹⁰³

In Morris County, twelve properties containing a total of 499.6 acres have sold their development rights to the Highlands Development Credit Bank. Of this acreage,

approximately 317 acres were identified as vacant, the remainder being residential or agricultural/tree farm properties. While not managed as open space, some of these properties may contribute to the general open space character of the County, particularly as applied to vacant land and farmland



Jonathan’s Woods, Denville and Rockaway Townships – Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

¹⁰¹ Easement and lease agreements lands are included within the acreage description of individual county parks but are not included in the totals of county-owned lands

¹⁰² As of December 31, 2022 - 2022 Highlands Council Annual Report, pg. 24-25 [2022AR.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#).

¹⁰³These properties include various levels of development and remain under private ownership. While easements may prevent further development, these properties are not mapped as open space or included as preserved open space acreage in this report.



REGIONAL TRAILS / GREENWAYS

Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding or other forms of recreation or transportation that can connect to or be incorporated within open space. They may be natural, unimproved areas and/or include boardwalks, gravel pathways, sidewalks, or portions of roadways, i.e., on-road segments, providing connections between open space, residential areas, community facilities, schools and downtown centers. When incorporated into open space and greenways, trails provide enhanced access to the outdoors, connecting people with nature. Trails may be improved or unimproved, multi-use or purely recreational. Trails may also incorporate sidewalks and often are of mixed modes or multimodal (paved, gravel, dirt etc.) improving access and connectivity between already existing trail segments.

Greenways are linear corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. They include natural features (land and water) and may include manmade features (e.g., abandoned railroad beds or utility corridors). Greenways often link nature preserves, parks, cultural features, farmland, water bodies and historic sites with each other; they can provide connections with populated areas, incorporating scenic roads, canals, stream valleys, ridges and other linear features. They can include permanently preserved farmland, public parks and preserves, and privately owned land with preservation easements. Greenways provide an environment needed for the survival of

varied plant and animal species. Where the focus of a greenway is a watercourse, they are often defined as blueways.

Greenways and trails often exist in the same space; many greenways include trails, others do not.

Benefits of Trails and Greenways

Wildlife Habitat: Greenways provide contiguous habitat, allowing for healthier wildlife and movement and migration of species.

Recreation and Transportation: Linking open space via greenways and trails enhances the usability of these areas for passive and active recreation. Greenways can include land and water resources, providing quality passive recreation opportunities. Trails provide access to various environments and opportunities for other recreational activities e.g., bird watching, photography, fishing, hunting, etc.

Trails can be paved or unpaved, and designed to accommodate a variety of trail users, including bicyclists, walkers, hikers, joggers, skaters, horseback riders and those with disabilities. When connecting parks, downtowns and residential neighborhoods, trails can provide an alternative pedestrian/bicycle transportation option.

Environmental Benefits: Greenways and trails provide significant environmental benefits, particularly when located along stream corridors or ridgelines. Linked open space supports natural ecological systems. Benefits include increased stormwater filtration, reduced erosion, increased water quality, resource connectivity, and



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protection of sensitive natural resources. Trails within greenways foster awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and, when used for transportation, result in fewer vehicles on the road.

Health Benefits: As part of preserved open space, greenways and trails provide various health benefits associated with a protected environment, increased physical activity and mental wellbeing.

Quality of Life: Protected open spaces increase quality of life, preserve scenic and historic landscapes, rural character, help attract businesses and talented workers, improve environmental health and the physical and mental health of residents, protect the attractiveness of communities, and increase nearby property values.

As the amount of preserved open space in Morris County has increased, so have linear greenway corridors and the development of trails within these and other open spaces, which connect and enhance these resources. The County's national and state parks, preserves and wildlife management areas include well established trail systems, many of which are linked to the hundreds of miles of trails included in the Morris County Park System. Many of these trails intersect, forming a wide-reaching network of intra- and inter-municipal trail opportunities that are constantly being improved and expanded. These trailways are becoming increasingly intertwined with the growing number of greenway trails being developed by municipalities and nonprofit conservation organizations.

Morris County has seen intense development over the last several decades, coupled with county and local efforts to preserve the County's significant open spaces and link them through greenway preservation and trail development. Preservation efforts continue, but as a maturing county, future opportunities to preserve major open space parcels will likely decline. As this occurs, open space preservation efforts will increasingly target properties that can link existing open spaces through greenway/blueway and trail connections.



Patriot's Path, Lewis Morris County Park - Source: Morris County Park Commission

Trails are a primary feature within most parks, preserves and other open space lands located within Morris County, with an estimated 530 miles of designated trails identified in Morris County by the NJDEP associated with federal, state, county,



municipal, nonprofit and private lands.¹⁰⁴ Of these, there are nearly 33 trail miles in national parks and preserves¹⁰⁵, about 57 trail miles in state parkland¹⁰⁶, and 208 miles managed by the Morris County Park Commission.¹⁰⁷

The presence of these trails is of great benefit to residents and visitors to Morris County and corresponds to outdoor features preference surveys recently conducted by the State. Surveys of state residents were included in the recently adopted 2023-2027 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which identified walking and hiking as the top activity identified by respondents, with trails being the number one feature used at outdoor recreation facilities during the survey period.¹⁰⁸

While it is beyond the scope of this plan to catalogue and detail the numerous trails and greenways that exist throughout the County, particularly at the municipal/nonprofit level, examples of major intra- and inter-county regional trail systems/greenways are highlighted below. These are identified as either Morris County Park System inter-county trails, statewide, and/or interstate/national trail systems. Many trail systems/greenways traversing the county are linked and often co-align, i.e., share segments in common. Similarly, local trails and greenways often link to and/or form

parts of inter-municipal, or intra-county regional systems.¹⁰⁹

Morris County Park System Intra-County/Regional Trails

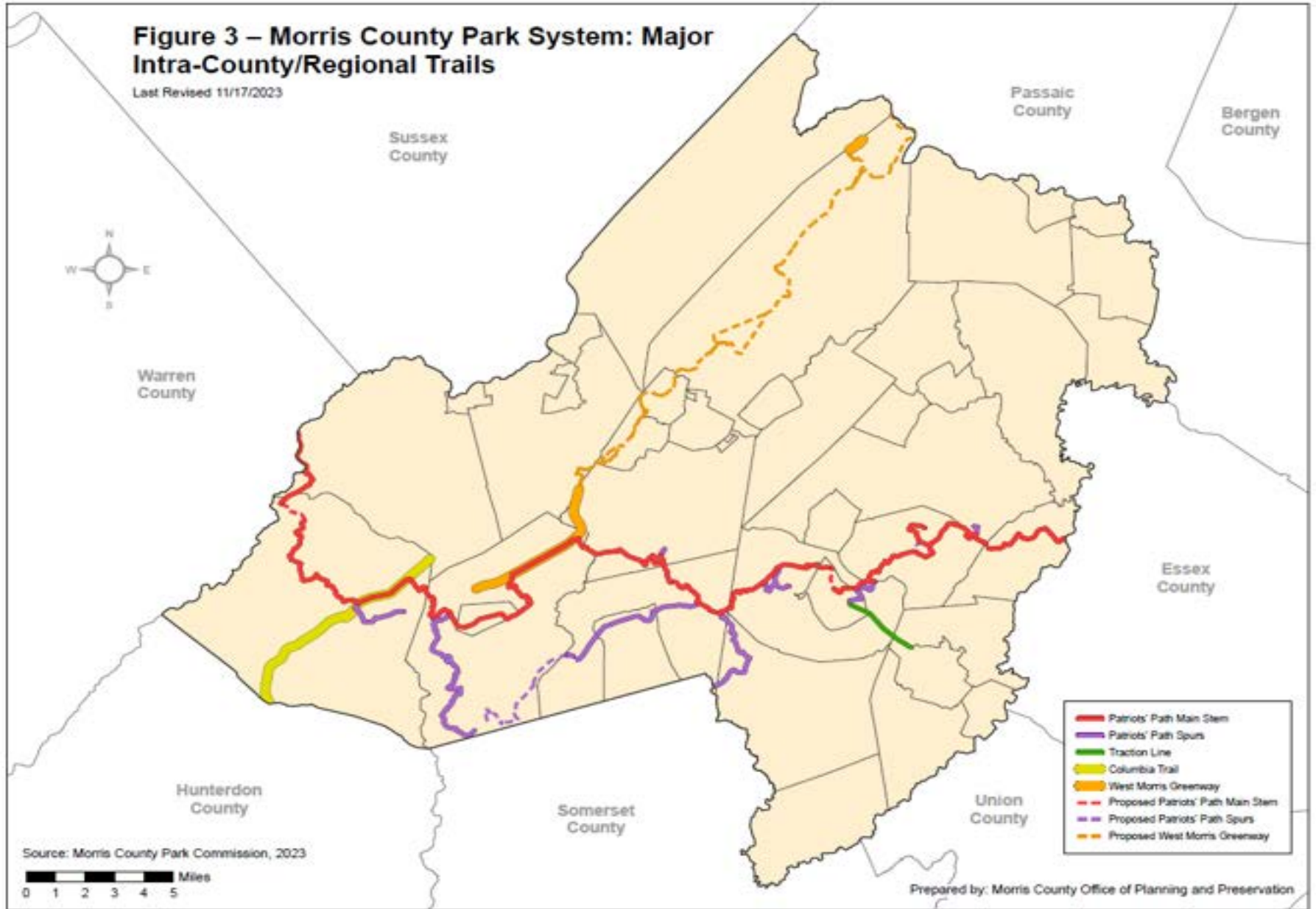
As part of Morris County Park Commission acquisition and development, the Morris County Park Commission has actively pursued the preservation of greenways and the development of trail systems. The Morris County Park Commission currently manages 208 miles of blazed and official unblazed trails within Morris County parks.¹¹⁰ Some of these trails extend beyond the confines of any individual county park, linking to and/or incorporating the vast network of municipal and nonprofit trails and associated open spaces existing within the County. In addition, Morris County Park Commission trails often co-align with major inter-county, statewide and/or national trail systems that pass through the County.

Major Morris County Park Commission intra-county trails/greenways, as described earlier, include:

- Patriot’s Path
- Columbia Trail
- Traction Line Recreation Trail
- West Morris Greenway Trail

¹⁰⁴ NJDEP Bureau of GIS “Statewide Trails in New Jersey” <https://gisdata.njdep.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/njdep::statewide-trails-in-new-jersey/explore?location=40.122475%2C-74.555300%2C9.00>.
¹⁰⁵ Superintendent Morristown National Historic Park, (5/23), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Website, Visitors Services Manager (5/23).
¹⁰⁶ NJDEP, Joy Eastman, email 5/23, excludes trails within Wildlife Management Areas.

¹⁰⁷ MCPC 2022 End of Year Report- Managed Acres and Miles of Trails by Maintenance Division.
¹⁰⁸ 2023-2027 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Appendix C, pages 7-8, 29-30.
¹⁰⁹ State parks, wildlife management areas, municipal and nonprofit trails and/or greenways may be shown in this Plan where they coincide with identified regional trails.
¹¹⁰ MCPC 2022 End of Year Report- Managed Acres and Miles of Trails by Maintenance Division.





Inter-County Regional Trails

Many significant interstate, and national trail/greenway systems cross Morris County, often incorporating portions of intra-county trails/greenways managed by the Morris County Park Commission as discussed above. These inter-county regional trail alignments often utilize and/or link to trails located within state and local park and open space areas. Many of these trails also incorporate a combination of off-road and on-road elements.

Highlands Trail

Winding through the North Jersey counties of Sussex, Passaic, Morris and Hunterdon, the Highlands Trail is being created through a cooperative effort by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, various conservation organizations, state and local governments and local businesses. The Highlands Trail is made up of a combination of co-aligned established trails, new trails, and roadways.

The route connects scenic attractions and passes through various parks, preserves and recreation areas. When completed, the Highlands Trail will link the full distance of the Highlands from end to end, a 150-mile footpath extending from the Hudson River in Cornwall, New York south to Riegelsville, New Jersey, on the Delaware River. In Morris County, the Highlands Trail runs south through Jefferson, veers into Sussex County and returns to Morris County at Mount Olive, through Washington and existing into

Hunterdon County. The Highlands trail co-aligns with the trail systems in the Mahlon Dickerson Reservation, Allamuchy State Park, Stevens State Park, and Schooley's Mountain County Park and incorporates segments of the Columbia Trail, Patriot's Path and the Morris Canal Greenway.

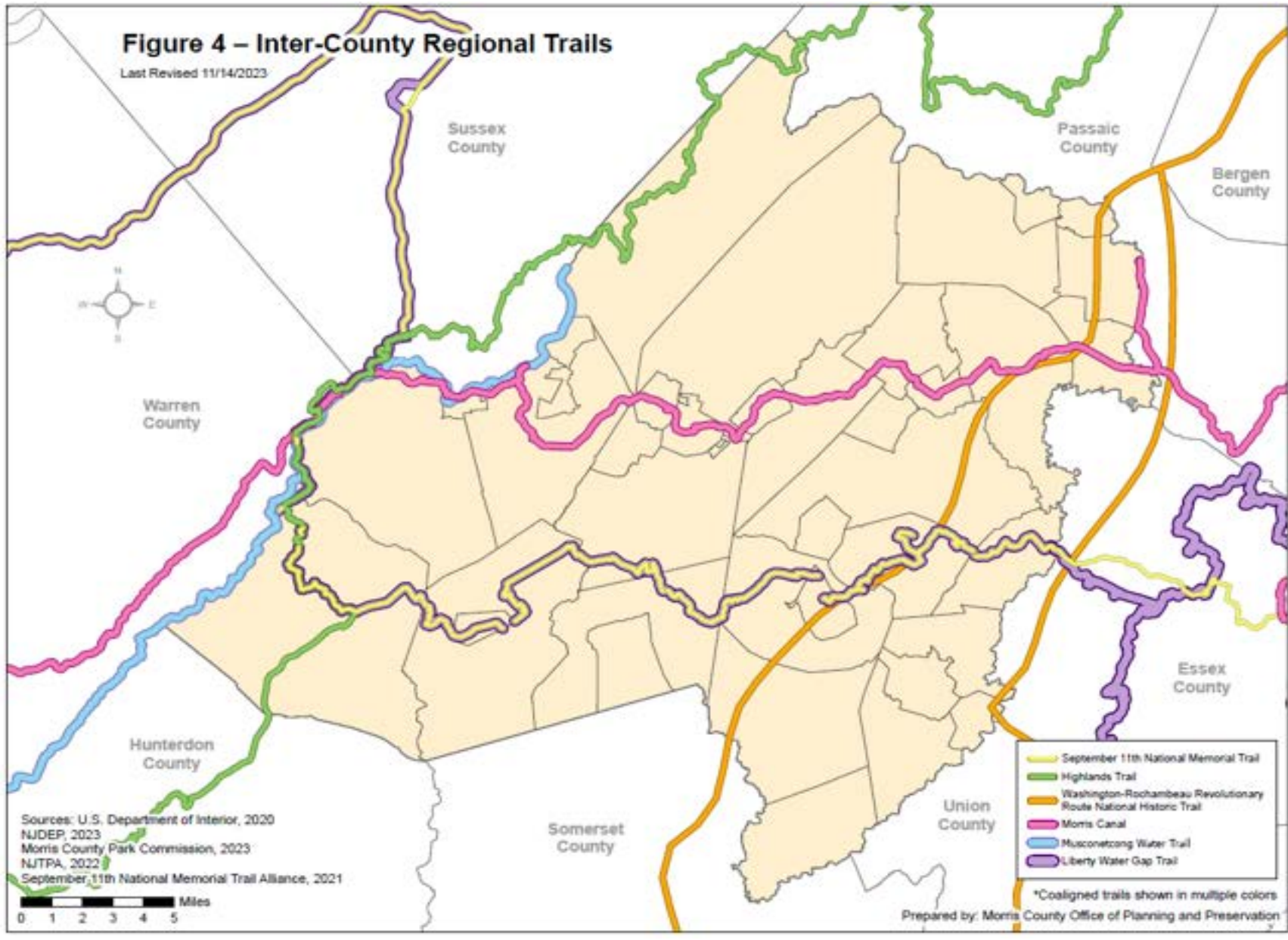
Morris Canal Greenway

The Morris Canal Greenway is envisioned as a 111-mile continuous pedestrian and bicycle trail connecting six counties in northern New Jersey and follows the path of the Morris Canal, a vital component of commerce and the development of many municipalities for nearly 100 years. The Greenway's purpose is to preserve the remains of the Morris Canal and its associated natural environment, to interpret canal sites to the public, and to offer recreational opportunities interconnected with trails, parks, and historic sites.¹¹¹



Lock 2 East Restoration Project, Wharton Borough - Source: The Canal Society of New Jersey

¹¹¹ New York New Jersey Trail Conference and NJDOT
<https://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/studies/rt57/pdf/GreenwaysTrails.pdf>.





In Morris County, the Canal ran through Boonton, Boonton Township, Denville, Dover, Lincoln Park, Mine Hill, Montville, Netcong, Pequannock, Rockaway Borough, Rockaway Township, Roxbury and Wharton. Coal and iron transported along the Canal fed forges in places like Wharton, Dover, Rockaway and Boonton.¹¹² The Canal ran parallel to the Musconetcong, along its west bank, as far as Lake Hopatcong.



Water filled portions of the Morris Canal, Boonton Ironworks Historic District, Town of Boonton. -Source: The Canal Society of New Jersey

The canal was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 for its significance in engineering, industry and transportation. The boundary was increased in 2016 to include Lake Hopatcong station in Landing.

Greenway preservation and historic restoration efforts are ongoing. When completed, Morris Canal Greenway will extend across Morris County, linking recreational, cultural, and historic areas including state parks, trails and public open

space. Overall, it will extend from the Delaware River on the west to the Hudson River on the east.

Leading preservation and restoration efforts is the Canal Society of New Jersey, a nonprofit organization formed in 1969 to foster the study of the history of New Jersey’s two towpath canals, preserve and restore canal remains and artifacts, and educate the public to this history. In 2004, the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders (currently the Board of Commissioners) passed a resolution supporting the preservation efforts of groups and individuals that work to protect Morris Canal.¹¹³ Subsequently, with a grant from the Morris County Heritage Commission, the Canal Society, in collaboration with the Morris Land Conservancy, developed the 2005 “Morris Canal Greenway in Morris County Strategic Preservation Plan.” The Plan addresses priorities and strategies for preservation of the Canal Greenway.¹¹⁴

In 2012, working with the Canal Society, the Morris Canal Working Group (MCWG) was formed by the New Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. The purpose of the working group is to bring together various stakeholders to spearhead efforts to preserve the canal with the goal of preserving, to the greatest extent possible, the former Morris Canal right-of-way for conversion into a public greenway. Morris

¹¹² [Overview-Morris Canal | Morris Canal Greenway \(arcgis.com\)](#)

¹¹³ Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders, September 8, 2004.

¹¹⁴ Morris Canal Greenway in Morris County: Strategic Preservation Plan, 2005, compiled as a collaboration between the

Morris County Land Conservancy and the Canal Society of New Jersey [Morris-Canal-Morris-County-Preservation-Plan_2005.pdf \(ago-item-storage.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#).



County staff participates in the working group.

Morris Canal Working Group Mission

Statement: *To preserve and enhance the historic Morris Canal route, a national engineering and transportation treasure, and the cultural landscape through which it passes in a manner that interconnects communities and links heritage tourism points of interest by serving as a near continuous greenway of open space across the northern New Jersey region; preserve the canal’s scenic, recreational, and historic resources, recognizing the role it plays in sustaining and improving the quality of life for New Jersey residents and attracting economic growth; tell the story of life along the canal, its influence on past events and its relevance to today’s society to support education and foster community pride and preservation; highlight its distinctive mountain climbing characteristics and the ingenious use of inclined planes; and provide convenient urban, suburban and rural access to a trail for non-motorized transportation.*¹¹⁵

In 2018, the NJTPA completed the Morris Canal Greenway Study, identifying a continuous route of 111 miles for development of the greenway, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities along or close to the route of the historic Morris Canal.¹¹⁶ The study identifies a list of 76 projects to be implemented in the short- to medium term (within 10 years) and long term (after 10 years), contingent on funding availability. The study was completed in partnership with the MCWG, the Canal Society of New Jersey, and officials from state agencies, counties and municipalities.

Liberty Water Gap Trail

Intended to stretch 130 miles statewide from the Hudson to the Delaware River, the proposed Liberty Watergap Trail alignment includes three national landmarks: the Statue of Liberty, Morristown National Historic Park and the Delaware Water Gap. The trail system co-aligns/incorporates the entire main stem of Patriot’s Path in Morris County, which also serves as part of the national September 11 Trail, and parts of the Lenape Trail in Essex County, the Sussex Branch Trail in Sussex County and the Paulinskill Valley Trail in Warren County.

Musconetcong Watershed National Water Trail

The Musconetcong Watershed National Water Trail was designated as part of the National Trails System in November 2020.¹¹⁷ National water trails are a sub-set of the National Recreation Trails Program, established to “protect and restore America’s rivers, shorelines, and natural waterways; conserve natural areas along waterways; and increase access to outdoor recreation on shorelines and waterways.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ [Working Group | Morris Canal Greenway \(arcgis.com\)](#)

¹¹⁶ Morris Canal Greenway Corridor Study, June 15, 2008. NJTPA. [Morris Canal Greenway Study | NJTPA | North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority.](#)

¹¹⁷ [Recreation | Musconetcong \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

¹¹⁸ National Park Service [National Water Trails System - National Trails System \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)



*The **National Trails System Act of 1968**) calls for establishing trails in both urban and rural settings for people of all ages, interests, skills, and physical abilities. It establishes four classes of trails: national scenic trails, national historic trails, national recreation trails, side and connecting trails.¹¹⁹*

The water trail, which promotes recreational access within the Musconetcong watershed, includes routes along Lake Hopatcong, Lake Musconetcong, and the Musconetcong River, utilizing established public access points that accommodate a diversity of water-based trip lengths and levels of difficulty.¹²⁰ It is located exclusively on the waters of the Musconetcong and its associated lakes. The Water Trail is maintained by the Musconetcong Watershed Association, in partnership with the Lake Hopatcong Foundation, and the Musconetcong River Management Council.¹²¹

Opportunities for recreation exist from Lake Hopatcong, the headwaters of the Musconetcong River, all the way down to Riegelsville, New Jersey, where the Musconetcong joins the Delaware River. Several major dams prevent an uninterrupted paddle the entire length of the river, but there are many public access points allowing for a variety of shorter or longer trips.¹²² There are ten trip segments that provide access to a variety of

opportunities for recreation and education, ranging from flat water to segments requiring advanced paddling skills. The trip segments range from four to 12 miles or longer as several river segments are contiguous. Overnight camping is allowed only at Stephens State Park.¹²³ There are many public access points along the Musconetcong, so it is possible to plan a variety of shorter or longer river trips.

*The **Musconetcong River** drains a 157.6-square-mile watershed area in northern New Jersey, and, as a major tributary to the Delaware River, is part of the larger Delaware River watershed. The Musconetcong River forms the boundaries of Sussex, Morris, Warren, and Hunterdon Counties, and its watershed includes all or parts of 26 municipalities. The river begins at Lake Hopatcong and runs in a general southwest direction 42 miles down to the Delaware River at Riegelsville and ultimately to the Delaware Bay. The Morris County portion of the watershed includes parts of Jefferson, Mount Arlington, Roxbury, Netcong and Mount Olive. In 2006, 24.2 miles of the Musconetcong River were designated to the **National Wild and Scenic River System**. Another 4.3 miles were added in June of 2022.¹²⁴*

¹¹⁹ [The National Trails System Act \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov).

¹²⁰ Access points in Morris County include but are not limited to Lake Hopatcong State Park (Landing/Roxbury), Lees County Marina (Mt. Arlington), Ashley Cove (Jefferson) and Lake Musconetcong Boat Ramp (Netcong).

¹²¹ Steven Gransky, Musconetcong Watershed Association (10/23)

¹²² Plans are underway for the removal of remaining dams along this waterway.

¹²³ <https://www.nrtdatabase.org/trailDetail.php?recordID=3999#hree>.

¹²⁴ [Musconetcong Wild and Scenic Rivers Act \(P.L. 109-452; pdf\)](https://www.rivers.gov/rivers/musconetcong.php)



Musconetcong River – Washington Township. - Source Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

The area within the Musconetcong watershed includes various public open spaces, historic sites/districts and scenic vistas.

*Congress passed the **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Act)** on October 2, 1968, to preserve selected rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Of the approximately 3.6 million miles of streams in the U.S., less than one percent are protected by the Act. The Act safeguards the free-flowing character of rivers by precluding them from being dammed, while allowing for the public to enjoy them. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation to develop goals for protecting streams.¹²⁵*

September 11 National Memorial Trail

The 9/11 National Memorial Trail route was federally designated in 2021.¹²⁶ It is comprised of a 1,300-mile evolving system of off-road multi-use trails, greenways, and roadways envisioned as linking the Pentagon in Arlington Virginia, the site of Flight 93’s

crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania and the Twin Towers site in New York City. Creation of the Trail was spearheaded by the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, a nonprofit organization formed in 2002 with the vision of creating a continuously linked multi-purpose, nonmotorized trail honoring the victims of the 9/11 attacks. The Morris County Park Commission participated in the creation of the trail.¹²⁷



Unveiling of the first blaze on the new September 11 National Memorial Trail in Randolph Township, July 2017. Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

The 9/11 National Memorial Trail route through New Jersey is comprised of two routes that cross the state: an east-west route for those traveling from the flight 93 Memorial in Pennsylvania and a southwest-northeast route, for those traveling from the Pentagon Memorial.

The Trail traverses Morris County via the east west route which crosses the Delaware River and enters New Jersey just south of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. It then follows the Liberty Watergap

¹²⁵ [Wild & Scenic Designation | MWA \(musconetcong.org\)](#) WSRA; P.L. 109-542 3/23).

¹²⁶ [PL 117-48 \(H.R.2278\)](#) October 13, 2021.



Trail, an overlay of many scenic New Jersey State Park rail trails and both forested and urban footpaths through Warren, Sussex, Morris, Essex and Hudson Counties before arriving at Liberty State Park.

The Morris County component of the east-west route enters from Sussex County at Mount Olive and continues through Washington, the Chesters, Randolph, Mendham Township, Morris Township, Morristown, Hanover and East Hanover, where it crosses into Essex County. The September 11 trail follows the main stem of the Patriot’s Path in Morris County, incorporating areas of Allumuchy and Stevens State Park, Schooley’s Mountain County Park, the Black River WMA, and Lewis Morris County Park.

Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail

The Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail was designated a National Historic Trail in March 2009 and is part of the National Historic Trail System.¹²⁸ The trail route is composed of a series of land and water trails extending nearly 700 miles from Newport Rhode Island to Yorktown Virginia. The trail follows the route along which American and French troops marched in the summer of 1781 to Cornwallis’ encircled British army at Yorktown, leading to the victory at Yorktown and essentially ending the Revolutionary War.

¹²⁸ PL 111-11, HR146 Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, Section 5204. Amends the National Trails System Act. National Historic Trails are Congressionally-designated routes associated with historic trails; they are not fully developed hiking trails and may not represent physical trails. National Trails System trails are designated to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open air,

In New Jersey, the route includes a series of roadways from the New York border south to Trenton, including parts of several present-day county roads and Route 202 and 206. The Trail splits into two different routes in New Jersey, as the American and French troops took different paths on their way south through the state. The French route crossed east of Morris County, with a small detour through parts of Florham Park and Chatham Borough. The American route ran through the center of Morris County, passing through Riverdale, Pequannock, Lincoln Park, Montville, Parsippany-Troy Hills, Hanover, Morris Township, Morristown and Harding, passing what would become the Morristown National Historic Park along the way.

Municipal Trails/Greenways

This section of the Plan focuses on intra- and inter-county regional trails, however, municipal efforts in the development of trails and open space/greenway preservation contribute greatly to the enhancement of local open space and to the county-wide trail network. Local trail development is sometimes confined to the boundaries of an existing park or greenway but is increasingly focused on linking existing municipal parks and open space with local community facilities, schools, downtowns, and residential areas. A combination of off-road and on-road municipal trails, sidewalks and bikeways can be interconnected to

outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation. 16 U.S. Code § 1241 - Congressional statement of policy and declaration of purpose | U.S. Code | US. The Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail is overseen by the National Park Service.



provide accessible recreational opportunities and alternative transportation options within and between communities. The protection of natural lands and waterways to provide greenway and blueway connections between existing parks and open space has also become a common goal in municipal master plans.

In 2013, the citizens of Morris County voted to authorize the use of Morris County Open Space Trust Fund dollars toward the design and creation of trails within municipally preserved open space. The Morris County Preservation Trust Trail Construction Grant Program began issuing grants to municipalities in 2016 for the design and construction of municipal trails. This program has shown to be a great success, contributing to the development of just over 27 new miles of local trails in 27 communities through the end of 2023.¹²⁹ This grant program is discussed in Chapter 5.



Liffy Island Trail, Jefferson Township. Funded by the Morris County Preservation Trust 2017 - Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

Over half of the County’s municipalities address trail and/or greenway planning within their open space and recreation plans or within planning documents dedicated specifically to trail/greenway issues.¹³⁰ Some municipalities have specially dedicated trail committees to address existing trail maintenance and trail expansion plans.¹³¹ Trails are often addressed in local circulation elements and/or related pedestrian/bicycle plans.

The 2016 “Chester Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan” serves as a blueprint for bicycle and pedestrian projects in both Chester Township and Chester Borough. The Plan incorporates recommendations for multi-use paths and trails in conjunction with sidewalks and bicycle facilities to create an integrated network of non-motorized mobility and recreation opportunities for both communities, linking parks, schools, neighborhoods and local downtown areas. The Plan builds upon earlier efforts of both communities to identify opportunities for improved linkages to preserved open space, farmlands and community attributes by connecting trails, road crossings and bike and pedestrian improvements found in the 2012 Integrated Trails Ecosystem Plan for Chester. Public surveys conducted for the Plan found that the top desire of Chester residents was access to “regional trails beyond Chester.”¹³²

A complete and up to date inventory of municipal trails/greenways is not currently available, however, State GIS trails data identifies approximately 96 miles of trails

¹²⁹ Morris County Preservation Trust.

¹³⁰ Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation review of local open space and recreation plans / trail plans/survey responses and website review.

¹³¹ Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation review of local open space and recreation plans / trail plans/ survey responses and website review.

¹³² 2016 Chester Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, pg. 6. Chester in the context of these Plans refers to the combined Borough and Township.



segments under municipal management.¹³³ Due to ongoing trail development, reporting issues, and “unknown” data included in State GIS data, this figure likely underrepresents the trail miles managed by local government; not all existing trails are included. Conducting a complete survey of all existing and proposed municipal trail and greenway systems, and their relationship to trail systems located on county, state and federal lands, is a recommendation of this Plan Element.

Hanover Township Pedestrian & Bicycle Connectivity Framework: In 2013 Hanover Township adopted its Pedestrian and Bicycle Connectivity Framework Plan as part of the Mobility Element of the Township’s Master Plan, establishing a town-wide network of on-road and off-road pedestrian and bicycle trails, linking key points of interest in the community with local greenways, parks, and open space.

As local trails/greenway planning has matured, it has evolved to include greater consideration of the potential for inter-municipal and regional trail connectivity. Just as the trails included in the Morris County Park System often co-align with larger inter-county, interstate and national trail systems, existing and planned municipal trails/greenways often link to or form parts of larger inter-municipal, county and/or regional systems.¹³⁴ For example, various segments of the cross-county Patriot’s Path are owned and/or managed by municipal government. Patriot’s Path, in turn, provides connections with several intra-county and

inter-county regional trail systems. Funding from the Morris County Preservation Trust has also spurred greater opportunity for inter-municipal trail development, and trail interconnectivity in general, a trend that is encouraged.

The Lake Hopatcong Regional Trails Plan: The Lake Hopatcong Regional Trails Plan envisions a multi-use recreation trail system or recreational trail in the greater Lake Hopatcong Region that includes Jefferson Township and Mount Arlington Borough, including connections between this system and trails in the neighboring communities of Hopatcong Borough, Bryam, and Roxbury Townships and beyond, incorporating access to municipal parkland, county parks, state parks and state wildlife management areas. The Plan proposes 16 new trail segments covering just over 24.5 miles connecting Jefferson with Mount Arlington. When complete, the system will stretch from the Mount Arlington NJ Transit Rail Station in the south to the Mount Paul section of Kittatinny Valley State Park in the north.¹³⁵

Lake Rogerene Trails System: Lake Rogerene, located in Mount Arlington, provides the focal point for the Lake Rogerene Trails system, which crosses the Mount Arlington municipal boundary to connect with Roxbury Townships “Ice Age” trail located at Orben Park. This trail system was developed with funding assistance from the Morris County Preservation Trust.

¹³³ NJDEP Bureau of GIS [Statewide Trails in NJ/NJDEP GIS 11/23](#).

¹³⁴ Local trails and/or greenways may be shown in this Plan where they coincide with identified regional trails; an expanded

inventory of municipal specific local/nonprofit or other municipal greenway/trail systems is not included.

¹³⁵ Lake Hopatcong Regional Trails Plan: Jefferson/Mount Arlington Borough, Greener by Design, January 2021.



Nonprofits and Trails

Trail systems are often present on lands owned and/or managed by nonprofit conservation agencies. State GIS data currently identifies just over 21 miles of trails managed by nonprofit agencies in Morris County. As previously noted, this figure likely undercounts actual miles associated with/managed by these nonprofits.

Certain nonprofit agencies may not directly own or manage land on which trails are present, but, through agreements with local governments or private landowners, are dedicated to advocating for, building, maintaining and/or protecting trails on public lands and/or private lands. For example:

Volunteers of the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference focus on the construction and maintenance of trails. At present the organization reports that its volunteers maintain 82 miles of trails within the Morris County region.¹³⁶

Other examples include:

- “Protect Our Wetlands, Water, Woods,” a nonprofit land trust based in Denville. In addition to helping preserve the lands that would eventually be incorporated as Jonathan’s Woods County Park, this organization created and maintains trails throughout Jonathan’s Woods and the surrounding area.
- The Canal Society of New Jersey works with municipalities and other

landowners along the alignment of the Morris Canal Greenway to protect and preserve canal remains, restore canal structures and towpath trails, encouraging connections to adjacent trail systems to increase access to historic tow paths, sites and structures along the canal route.

The 2009 New Jersey Trails Plan recognizes the significant contribution to trails made by nonprofit and volunteer organizations. The Plan notes that these grassroots organizations build a broad constituency of trail advocates and users, and also provide important services, from managing preserves to organizing volunteer labor, noting that:

“Much of the information about trails, maps and descriptions comes from their efforts. Many trails are in place and maintained primarily because of the enthusiasm and persistence of local volunteers and friends groups. Often in partnership with government, trails organizations guide many trail projects through the land acquisition and development process to trail opening celebrations.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ NY/NJ Trail Conference <https://www.nynjtc.org/region/morris-county-region>.

¹³⁷ 2009 New Jersey Trails Plan, page 2.



5. ACQUISITION, FUNDING AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Methods of Open Space Acquisition

The preservation of open space typically involves direct acquisition of property or property rights, or preservation through zoning, development standards or other method. Major methods of open space acquisition, preservation and protection are presented below.

Direct Acquisition

Fee Simple

The most used technique for acquisition is outright purchase with fee simple ownership. This is the simplest method of preserving land, but also the costliest. In most instances of direct purchase, counties and municipalities in New Jersey can use the New Jersey Green Acres and related county and municipal programs to provide financial assistance to cover all or a part of the costs associated with acquisition.

Fee Simple Installment Buying

This is a variation of fee simple, except that the full title is not taken immediately; instead, the land is obtained in blocks of predetermined acreage over a fixed number of years. This approach avoids large public expenditures in any one year while, at the same time, preserving the entire area. The landowner benefits by spreading capital gains over a period of years.

Installment Purchase

Land is acquired through a payment plan that provides payments to the landowner

over time. Receiving the income from the sale in installments may provide the landowner with financial management and/or tax advantages.

Less Than Fair Market Value

Some landowners are willing to sell their land at less than fair market value. The difference between an agreed upon sale price and the higher market value can be deducted as a charitable contribution on the seller's federal income tax. For the buyer, the advantage is reduced cost.

Lease Back Agreement

This method can be an effective tool for land acquisition when the land is not needed for immediate use. An agency purchases a parcel of land and then leases it to either the original owner or someone else. This method has two benefits to the public – the partial reimbursement of the purchase price through rental fee and the reduction or elimination of maintenance costs since the renter takes care of the property.

Lease/Rental of Private Land

Government agencies and private conservation groups may choose to lease or rent private land. This may be less desirable than ownership, but depending on circumstances, may be beneficial. If a landowner agrees to sell, or to donate the land to an agency, a lease agreement can be arranged until the transaction is finalized.

Donation and Bequest

Individuals or large corporations may donate land to a public body, usually for either philanthropic reasons or for tax incentives.



Some landowners may bequest property through their wills.

Pre-Emptive Purchasing

This method usually involves acquisition by a private tax-exempt group established for the purpose of holding land in trust for later sale to the public body. It allows for the establishment of a revolving fund so that when resold, funds can be used for the purchase of other properties.

Eminent Domain

Eminent domain is the power of government to acquire private property from a landowner who is unwilling to sell. The property must be used in the interest of the public health and welfare. When it is determined that a parcel should be taken, the government agency must obtain appraisals of the fair market value of the property to determine the price to be paid to the owner.

Other Open Space Preservation Methods

Clustering

Cluster zoning permits reduction in residential lot size from that normally required in a given zone district, while maintaining the same density or number of lots that would normally be permitted. The land remaining after the development of reduced size lots would be preserved as permanent open space, either through dedication to the municipality, the establishment of an organization or homeowners' association to ensure maintenance, or the lease or sale to a nonprofit conservancy or farmer. This

method of preserving open space benefits developers by reducing the cost of infrastructure while also providing opportunities for open space preservation and the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas.



Cluster Development - Regency at Flanders Valley, Mount Olive Township - Source: Near Map March, 2022

Clustering on Non-Contiguous Parcels

Clustering on non-contiguous parcels of land allows the transfer of development rights within a municipality between non-contiguous lots. A landowner must own both the open space parcel and the parcel receiving the increased density that is transferred from the sending or open space parcel.

Planned Unit Development

A Planned Unit Development typically involves the planning and development of a large tract of land on a comprehensive basis rather than lot by lot development. Planned Unit Development may include a variety of land uses, and may involve the clustering of development, making it possible to create large amounts of open space.



Deed Restrictions

A deed restriction limits the permitted uses of property. Restrictions guiding the future use of property may be placed in the deed at the time the property is transferred and become binding upon future owners of that property. Such deed restrictions may be used for the preservation of open space and/or environmentally sensitive areas.

Conservation Easements

There are various rights associated with the ownership of property. Easements permit a landowner to sell or donate certain rights, such as the right to develop or subdivide in a specified manner and can be used to protect land while retaining ownership. Conservation easements may be employed to protect all or a portion of a property from further development and/or the protection of natural resources. Scenic easements limit certain development to protect viewsheds. Access easements may be obtained to gain public access across privately owned property, for example, use in trail connections.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land to protect its conservation values. Conservation easements typically prevent development from taking place on a particular property or portion thereof, while protecting the property's ecological or open space values. Landowners retain many of their rights, including the right to own the land, sell it and pass it on to their heirs.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

This concept requires that a municipality identifies areas of open space and then prohibits development with the permission of the landowners. Although the landowners lose the right to develop the land, ownership is retained. The development rights of the landowners are then treated as a commodity, permitting the owner the opportunity to profit from the sale of what can be called the development potential of the land or development rights. This development potential is transferred from a defined "sending area" to a defined "receiving area" where construction can occur at a higher density according to the master plan and development regulations. Only the buyer of the development rights can build at this higher density. The buyer of the development rights benefits from the increased savings attributed to higher density development. The total density of the municipality is kept the same as planned, and large open space reserves can be retained.



Purchase of Development Rights

The purchase of development rights (PDR) provides a way to compensate willing landowners for not developing their land. The purchase of development rights involves obtaining an easement, sometimes referred to a conservation easement, that restricts development on land. Under this arrangement, the landowner retains ownership of the land but may only use it for purposes specified in the easement.

The purchase of development rights is typically used to preserve farmland. Once a development easement has been purchased, a restriction is attached to the deed, which permanently prohibits any non-agricultural development from occurring on these lands. This deed restriction runs with the land and is binding upon every successor. While preserving land from non-agricultural use, agricultural landowners are able to convert the development value of their land into cash, while retaining ownership of the land for continued agricultural use. This method of preserving farmland is used by the Morris County Agricultural Development Board under the guidelines of and assistance by the State Agricultural Development Board.

Funding and Preservation Support

Funding to allow for the acquisition and/or preservation/protection of open space resources may be available through an assortment of government, nonprofit and other sources, although availability,

eligibility and amount of funding will vary widely. In addition, there are multiple governmental and private nonprofit organizations that may not provide direct funding for open space acquisition, but provide support for open space protection through technical, stewardship, education and other related initiatives and activities.

Morris County Open Space Funding and Support

Parks and open space may be acquired through the use of general tax revenue or other methods; however, under state law,¹³⁸ counties and municipalities may also establish a special dedicated tax for open space and other preservation purposes including:¹³⁹

- Acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes.
- Development of lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes.
- Maintenance of lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes.
- Acquisition of farmland for farmland preservation purposes.
- Historic preservation of historic properties, structures, facilities, sites, areas, or objects and the acquisition of such properties, facilities, sites, areas, or objects for historic preservation purposes; and
- Payment of debt service on indebtedness issues or incurred by a county or municipality for any of the purposes set forth above.

¹³⁸ N.J.S.A.40:12-15.2 et seq. <https://law.justia.com/codes/new-jersey/2009/title-40/40-12/40-12-15-2/>.

¹³⁹ Not all potential purposes listed under state law may be permitted under current Morris County programs.



To establish a dedicated tax program, the governing body of a county or municipality must ask voters to authorize a fund dedicated for any or all the approved purposes, through a referendum, initiated by the governing body or through petition submitted by 15 percent of the voters, held at a general or special election. A fixed tax rate or specific tax levy are the options for funding the program and proceeds are set aside in a dedicated trust fund. Changes to the rate or tax levy must be authorized by referendum.¹⁴⁰ Morris County established such a dedicated tax program over 30 years ago.

The Morris County Preservation Trust Fund

The Morris County Preservation Trust Fund was established in 1992 for the purposes of preserving open space and farmland.¹⁴¹ Collection of funds for the Trust Fund began in 1993, via a dedicated tax on County equalized real property valuation, equal to ½ cent per \$100 of total county equalized real property valuation.

The Trust Fund program has been modified over the years regarding the amount of tax collected and use of the Trust Fund, which has evolved to include funding for improvements to the Morris County Park Commission (1998), Historic Preservation (2002) and Trail Development (2014). The 2023 Trust Fund levy is 5/8 cent per \$100 of equalized property value. Of this amount ¼

cent is dedicated to the Morris County Park Improvement Trust, ¼ cent is dedicated to the Historic Preservation Program and 1/8 cent is dedicated to the Open Space Program.¹⁴²

This funding currently facilitates local and County open space preservation, flood mitigation, farmland preservation, historic preservation, and groundwater protection projects. These actions are undertaken in association with the Morris County Park Commission, the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority, the Morris County Agriculture Development Board, the Morris County Flood Mitigation Committee, the Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund Program/Office of Planning and Preservation, participating Morris County municipalities and qualified charitable conservancies (nonprofits).¹⁴³

The Preservation Trust Fund is divided into five individual but related **Program Areas**

- 1. Open Space Preservation Program**
- 2. Morris County Park Improvement Program**
- 3. Morris County Agricultural Development Board/Farmland Preservation Program**
- 4. Morris County Trail Construction Program**
- 5. Morris County Historic Preservation Program**

¹⁴⁰ NJ Department of Community Affairs Division of Local Government Services Local Finance Notice MC-98-2, 2/2598.
¹⁴¹ Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Resolution No. 11, Adopted August 12, 1992.
¹⁴² Resolutions 2023-150 and 2023-151, adopted January 25, 2023.
¹⁴³ Charitable conservancies are qualified per N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.1,2 which defines them as corporations or trusts exempt from federal

income taxation under paragraph (3) of subsection (c) of section 501 of the federal Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (26 U.S.C. §501 (c)(3)), whose purpose includes (1) acquisition and preservation of lands in a natural, scenic, or open condition, or (2) historic preservation of historic properties, structures, facilities, sites, areas, or objects, or the acquisition of such properties, structures, facilities, sites, areas, or objects for historic preservation purposes.



Although each program is operated with distinct goals and under separate management structures, each contributes in its own way to the preservation of open space and/or the cultural resources of Morris County. The programs are overseen by volunteer committees and county staff. These committees make recommendations to the Morris County Board of Commissioners regarding the distribution of grant awards associated with each program.

Program Area 1 - Open Space Preservation Program

The Open Space Preservation Program provides open space funding through four Sub-Program areas:

Sub-Program Area A) Municipal and Nonprofit Open Space.



The Open Space Preservation Program provides funding to municipalities and eligible nonprofit land conservancies to acquire lands with the

goals of preserving land or water areas for recreation or conservation purposes. Projects eligible for consideration for funding from the Morris County Preservation Trust Fund include:

- 1) Land or water areas for recreation and conservation purposes, including but not limited to:
 - a) Parkland, natural areas, greenways.

- b) The protection of ecologically sensitive areas including freshwater wetlands, steep slopes and stream corridors.
- c) The preservation of lands containing exceptional flora or fauna.
- d) The preservation of areas of scenic, historic, and cultural value.
- e) Passive and active outdoor recreation opportunities.
- f) The protection of critical water supplies such as areas surrounding municipal/county wells, aquifer recharge protection or watershed areas, and floodplains.

2) The Open Space Program may also assist in the acquisition of historic sites eligible under the Historic Preservation Trust Fund Program.¹⁴⁴

The Morris County Open Space Committee reviews, prioritizes and makes recommendations to the Morris County Board of County Commissioners concerning applications submitted in accordance with this annual program¹⁴⁵ pursuant to Preservation Trust Rules and Regulations.¹⁴⁶ This fifteen member Committee consists of one representative from each of eight municipal open space regions in the County, plus representatives from the County Planning Board, County Agriculture Development Board, County Park Commission, County Municipal Utilities Authority, County Trail Program Advisory Committee, and two members-at-large. Committee members are appointed by the Morris County Board of County Commissioners.

¹⁴⁴ Preservation Trust Rules and Regulations, Section 3.3

¹⁴⁵ The yearly application process is described at <https://www.morriscountynj.gov/Departments/Open-Space-Preservation/ResourcesOther-Funding>.

¹⁴⁶ Morris County Open Space, Farmland, Flood Protection, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Rules and Regulations, pg. 70.



Muriel Hepner Nature Park, Denville Township - Source: Morris County Preservation Trust

Since 1994, funding awarded to Morris County municipalities and nonprofit organizations by the Preservation Trust under the Open Space Program has contributed to the acquisition of approximately 12,825 acres of open space.¹⁴⁷ The Morris County Preservation Trust has been hugely successful in supporting preservation of open space, as well as in the preservation of farmland, historic resources, watershed lands, flood prone properties, and in providing resources for trail development.

Sub-Program Area B) Morris County Park Commission



The Mission of the Morris County Park Commission is to develop and preserve a dynamic and unique system of diverse natural, cultural and historic resources, and to provide innovative education and recreation opportunities of regional value, while

exercising environmental and fiscal responsibility.

The Park Commission oversees over 20,000 acres of developed and undeveloped parkland and it continues to secure additional lands to meet the growing needs of the citizens of Morris County. The Trust Fund has been used to aid the Park Commission in its acquisition of parkland.

Sub-Program Area C) Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (MCMUA)

The MCMUA receives a portion of the Morris County Open Space Trust Fund contributions to purchase open space properties that preserve water quality and contribute to groundwater recharge. As of April 2023, the MCMUA has partnered with 19 municipalities and several nonprofit conservation organizations to assist with their purchase of over 6,400 acres of protected open space, in which only passive recreation is permitted.¹⁴⁸ This acreage has been preserved with MCMUA contributions of just over 33 million dollars, in association with 71 property acquisitions for wellhead protection, prime groundwater recharge, and headwater areas throughout the County.

MCMUA areas of high priority for preservation are identified as those where water recharge areas overlap wellhead protection areas. These significant areas are defined as those having a high recharge value per year. The MCMUA also considers a variety of environmental factors when purchasing a property such as property size, the presence of wetlands, hydrology,

¹⁴⁷ Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation.

¹⁴⁸ Correspondence from Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (4/23).



threatened and endangered species, vegetation type, proximity to other open space acquisitions, and previous site land use types.

The MCMUA Open Space Acquisition and Stewardship Plan was adopted in September 2021. The goals of the MCMUA's Open Space Acquisition and Stewardship Plan are to:

**Establish criteria for acquiring new open space properties.*

**Set guidelines for deciding what types of properties the MCMUA will allocate money to from the Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund when proposals are brought forth by outside funding partners.*

**Provide for proper stewardship of the property directly acquired by the MCMUA that is complementary with water resource conservation objectives. For lands in which the MCMUA partnered, and the partner retains stewardship responsibility, develop a program to ensure such lands are being preserved following MCMUA requirements incorporated in the partnership agreements and associated deed restrictions.*

Sub-Program Area D) Morris County Flood Mitigation Program

Morris County has endured its share of flooding,



particularly in municipalities situated adjacent to major rivers. In these municipalities, many older homes, not built to current flood hazard standards, are located immediately adjacent to these rivers and they bear the brunt of damage during

flood events. To combat the threat to the public health, safety and general welfare in these areas, the Morris County Flood Mitigation Program was created in 2012 as part of the Morris County Preservation Trust.

The Flood Mitigation Program provides grants to municipalities to assist in the acquisition of residential properties that have experienced severe, repetitive flooding, or homes with over 50% damage from a single flood event. The Morris County Flood Mitigation Committee reviews applications received from municipalities and makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners concerning the County grants. The objectives of this program are to:

- 1) Provide natural open space areas for floodwater storage.
- 2) Decrease the risk of potential loss of life to both citizens and emergency response personnel.
- 3) Lower Morris County Office of Emergency Management and other relief and recovery costs for local governments.
- 4) Create buffer areas that will protect inland homeowners and their property.
- 5) Lower property losses after storm events.
- 6) Lower property owners flood insurance costs.
- 7) Provide a new beginning for flood-prone homeowners.
- 8) Promote awareness of flood risk and mitigation measures available.

County grants provide a portion of the funding needed by local governments to preserve identified sites. The remainder may be provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the New Jersey Department of Environmental



Protection, the local municipality and/or a homeowner donation of value. All Morris County municipalities are eligible to participate in the program and the program is entirely voluntary; homeowners are not required to participate.

As of July 2023, 86 properties have been acquired in eight municipalities: Boonton Town, Denville Township, Lincoln Park Borough, Long Hill Township, Pequannock Township, Morristown, Parsippany-Troy Hills Township and Riverdale Borough.¹⁴⁹

Program Area 2 - Morris County Park Improvement Trust (PIT):

The Morris County Park Improvement Trust was established to bridge the funding gap between the Park Commission’s annual capital funding level and the capital repairs and park improvement needed to maintain the highest quality of county parks for the residents of Morris County. Funds provided by the Trust help to maintain the extensive infrastructure and facilities of the County park system, which includes, but is not limited to: seven National & State Registered Historic Sites, including a National Historic Landmark, 18 dams, 272 structures, an ice skating arena, three nationally recognized arboreta, and 233 miles of trails, paths and roads.¹⁵⁰ The Park Commission continues to receive a defined portion of the Preservation Trust tax levy to help maintain its facilities.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ M. DiGiulio, MCPB Flood Program Coordinator (8/23)
¹⁵⁰ Trails, paths, and roads as of 12/31/22 MCPC year-end report – includes Patriots Path. Other figures as per MCPC Executive Director Dave Helmer.

Program Area 3 - Morris County Agricultural Development Board – Farmland Preservation Program



The Morris County Farmland Preservation Program began with the permanent preservation of a fourteen-acre parcel in Washington Township in 1987. Since 1994, Morris County’s contribution to farmland preservation activity has been funded through the Morris County Preservation Trust Program. The allocation of the funding is overseen by the Morris County Agriculture Development Board (CADB), which was created by the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders in 1983.



Preserved Farmland Signage – Source: Morris County Preservation Trust

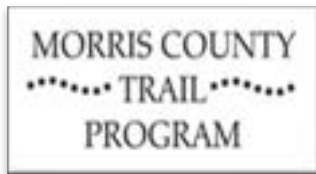
The CADB oversees the preservation of farmland in accordance with the New Jersey Agriculture Retention and Development Act¹⁵² and administers the Right-to-Farm program.¹⁵³ County funding is combined with state and local funds to preserve

¹⁵¹ In 2023, ¼ cent of the 5/8 cent tax levy was assigned to the Morris County Park Improvement Program.
¹⁵² N.J.S.A. 4:1C-11 et seq. 1981.
¹⁵³ N.J.S.A. 4:1C et seq. 1983.



existing farmland throughout Morris County’s agricultural areas. The Farmland Preservation Program has permanently preserved 142 farms totaling 8,247 acres¹⁵⁴ Pursuant to the 2022 Morris County Farmland Preservation Plan, there are approximately 20,000 acres of farm assessed land in the County that have not been preserved. Of this land, about 3,175 acres have been identified for preservation as part of the voluntary preservation program.¹⁵⁵

Program Area 4 - Morris County Trail Construction Grant Program



The Morris County Trails Construction Grant Program was approved in

2014 and is overseen by the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation and the Morris County Park Commission. The program provides grant funding to municipalities for the design and construction of trails on preserved, public parkland. The Program operates as a collective and collaborative effort of the Morris County Park Commission and the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation.

The Trail Construction Grant Program provides recreational trail use opportunities which benefit communities, enhance the quality of life for residents of Morris County and support cultural and heritage tourism. The objectives of the program are to:

- 1) Provide grant funding to municipalities to accelerate the construction of recreational trails throughout Morris County.
- 2) Promote the construction of trails, which may also be complementary to the Morris County Park Commission’s trail system.
- 3) Enhance Morris County’s quality of life.
- 4) Provide alternate means of transportation that support a healthy lifestyle.
- 5) Heighten the public's awareness of Morris County's irreplaceable historic character.
- 6) Increase opportunities for cultural and heritage tourism in the County.
- 7) Improve Morris County as a destination market for leisure travel.



Denville’s Den Brook Trail, ribbon cutting, May 2021. Funded by the Morris County Trail Program - Source: Morris County Preservation Trust

The program relies upon local communities and their government representatives to provide inspiration, planning, and commitment, as well as meeting the matching funds requirement. The Morris

¹⁵⁴ Morris County Agricultural Development Board website – 11/2023

¹⁵⁵ 2022 Morris County Farmland Preservation Plan, Appendix G, ten-year acreage goal, pg. 105.



County Trails Program Advisory Committee reviews and makes recommendations to the County Commissioners regarding grants to applicant municipalities on a yearly basis. Grants are awarded to municipalities for the construction of trails on permanently preserved parks and open space, which must be accompanied by matching funds as defined by the Program. All trail construction must occur on permanently preserved public parklands held by the municipality, or easements (dedicated to a municipality for public recreational trail use). Grants were first awarded in 2016 and between 2016 and 2023, 48 grants in the amount of 4.92 million were awarded to 27 municipalities to help fund the construction or enhancement of approximately 27.15 miles of trails throughout Morris County.¹⁵⁶

Program Area 5 - Historic Preservation Program



An important aspect of the Morris County Preservation Trust is use of a portion of the Preservation Trust Fund, approved in 2002, to support historic preservation projects.¹⁵⁷

Because of Morris County’s rich history, many of the County’s historic sites, structures and culturally significant resources are located within the County’s parks and open space locations; their preservation enhance these open space resources. For example, the Historic Preservation Program has funded historic restoration projects such as Craftsman Farms, located in a park in Parsippany-Troy

Hills, Waterloo Village, located in Stevens State Park in Mount Olive, portions of the Morris Canal, located in municipal parks in Montville and Roxbury and the Fosterfields Living Historical Farm County Park in Morris Township. The use of a portion of the Preservations Trust fund for historic preservation contributes significantly to the unique character of Morris County’s many park and open space facilities.

The Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund Review Board considers grants for the acquisition, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, or preservation of historic resources by municipalities and qualified nonprofits. The Board makes preservation recommendations to the Morris County Board of Commissioners for funding to municipalities, nonprofit groups, and the Morris County Park Commission. The objectives of the program are to:

- 1) Foster comprehensive preservation planning to ensure the continued preservation of historic resources.
- 2) Stimulate preservation activity by providing funding for technical assistance and restoration projects.
- 3) Encourage long-term facilities planning and capital budget planning of historic resources.
- 4) Further the stewardship of the built and natural environment by helping preserve historic structures on open space tracts.
- 5) Heighten the public’s awareness of Morris County’s irreplaceable historic character.

¹⁵⁶ D. Chaplick, Morris County Park Commission.

¹⁵⁷ In 2023, ¼ cent of the 5/8 cent tax levy was assigned to the Historic Preservation Program.



6) Increase opportunities for heritage tourism in the County.

7) Help ensure that preservation planning is an integral part of community development.

Between 2003 and 2023, 535 historic site grants were made in 35 Morris County municipalities. Grants were provided for a total of 290 construction projects and 199 non-construction projects.¹⁵⁸



As part of this historic preservation initiative, the Preservation Trust also oversees the Morris County Cultural Resources Survey effort, which focuses on identifying

historically and culturally important sites in Morris County, defining historic district boundaries, verifying site demolition or relocation and showcasing the broad spectrum of cultural resources in Morris County.

Federal Funding and Support¹⁵⁹

National Park Service - Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 to safeguard natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. Using zero taxpayer dollars, the fund invests

earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve historic resources, and protect lands and waters. In addition to its support for federal land acquisition and conservation programs, the LWCF program provides grants to State and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

Between 1965 and 2014, the LWCF provided more than \$16.7 billion in 40,400 grants to State and local governments, supporting the purchase and protection of 3 million acres of recreation lands in over 29,000 recreation projects in every State and territory of the nation.

As of May 2023, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has contributed to 20 projects in Morris County, preserving 3,166 acres via investments totaling \$7,166,806.¹⁶⁰

In 2020, the LWCF was boosted by the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act,¹⁶¹ which includes major investments in recreation infrastructure, public lands access, and land and water conservation. This Act provided permanent full funding to the LWCF.

Federal Highway Administration – Recreational Trails Program

Pursuant to the National Recreation Trails Fund Act of 1993, the Federal Highway Administration’s Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides financial assistance to states for developing and maintaining trails and

¹⁵⁸ Morris County Preservation Trust, 6/2023.

¹⁵⁹ Note that in some instances, federal funding is distributed through state agency programs and may be referenced under those programs.

¹⁶⁰ 2023-2027 “Outside, Together - A Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan,” DEP Appendix B, page 94 (Draft).

¹⁶¹ Public Law 116-152-August 4, 2020. <https://www.tpl.org/lwcf>.



trail facilities. The RTP funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund and represents a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from non-highway recreational fuel use.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection administers the RTP in New Jersey, through the Green Acres New Jersey Trails Program, consistent with the New Jersey Trails Plan.¹⁶² Since the program's inception in 1993, New Jersey has awarded more than \$16 million from the RTP to federal, state, county and local governments, and nonprofit agencies. Projects are funded on an 80% federal share and 20% local matching share basis. Of the funding available each year, 30% is allocated for non-motorized trail projects, 30% for motorized trail projects, and 40% for diversified use trail projects.

Eligible applicants include local governments and nonprofits. Eligible projects include construction of trails, existing trail maintenance, development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities, and trail linkages.

Projects are reviewed and recommended for funding by the New Jersey Trails Council and approved by the Federal Highway Administration.¹⁶³ The Trails Council comprises interest groups for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, motorized trail use and canoeing/kayaking, as well as several general trail advocates and state government representatives.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Acquisition Program

Many of Morris County's municipalities have been subject to major flood events in recent years. In response to federally declared flooding disasters, States and communities may receive funding through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Flood Mitigation Assistance Programs, which allow, among other measures, for the acquisition of land from voluntary sellers and demolition of structures on that land to address flood impact mitigation. This action results in the subsequent preservation of previously developed tracts of land while providing an opportunity for people who live on or near hazard areas to relocate to safer areas. Such properties, where appropriate, may be developed into community parks, protected as conservation lands, made part of protected greenways or maintained in similar fashion. These properties must be devoted to open space. They may not be sold to private individuals and may not be developed.

United States Fish & Wildlife Service

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is a branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Among its many responsibilities, such as management of the National Wildlife Refuge System (including the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge), the Service is active in providing Conservation Planning and Habitat Restoration assistance to private, corporate, municipal, county, and nonprofit landowners for fish and wildlife habitat

¹⁶² The NJ Trails Plan was developed by the NJDEP pursuant to the New Jersey Trails Act of 1974. The last NJ Trails Plan was updated in 2009. <https://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/trails/plan.html>

¹⁶³ Federal Highway Administration approves projects under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users.



restoration projects. One example is the "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Program." Under this voluntary program, the Service typically works with private landowners to provide technical assistance, materials, supplies and field assistance for designing and implementing habitat restoration projects.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation¹⁶⁴

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation was created by Congress in 1984 as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a Board of Directors approved by the US Secretary of the Interior. The organization awards competitive grants to protect and conserve the nation’s fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats through a variety of regional and nationwide programs. Grants are available to local governments, nonprofit and other agencies involved in fish and wildlife preservation and conservation activities through the United States and its territories. Its preservation and stewardship programs are often conducted with the support and/or in partnership with government agencies, foundations or private corporations.

The United States Department of Agriculture

Four relevant programs operate under the authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and include the Forest Legacy Program, NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants, NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program and the Urban and Community Forest Program.

1. *Forest Legacy Program.* The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a conservation program administered by the U.S. Forest Service (*operates under the USDA*) in partnership with State agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands through conservation easements or land purchases. The purpose of the FLP is to identify and conserve environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. The program provides economic incentives to landowners to keep their forest as forest, encourages sustainable forest management, and supports strong markets for forest products.

Landowners may participate in the Forest Legacy Program by either selling their property outright or by retaining ownership and selling only a portion of the property’s development rights; both are held by state agencies or another unit of government. The use of conservation easements allows the land to remain in private ownership while ensuring that its environmental values are retained.

Since its creation in 1990, the Forest Legacy Program has conserved over 2.8 million acres of forest land across the county. These "working forests" protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat forest products, opportunities for recreation and other public benefits. The program is funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

¹⁶⁴ The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is not a federal agency, although created by Congress, having a federally

approved Board of Directors and awarding grants utilizing federal funds provided by Congressional appropriation.



2. *Natural Resources Conservation Service / Conservation Innovation Grants* – This is a competitive program that supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands. Grants support innovative strategies to improve water quality, air quality, soil health and wildlife habitat while improving agricultural operations.

3. *New Jersey Conservation Stewardship Program*. Also administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, this program builds on existing conservation efforts of farmers, ranchers and forest landowners, strengthening operations by providing connections with the USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) liaisons who can assist with the development of conservation plans. These plans can address natural resource problems or help landowners attain higher stewardship levels in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.

4. *Urban & Community Forest Program (UCFP)*. This is a technical, financial and education assistance program dedicated to urban forestry.¹⁶⁵ Its purpose is to support urban tree planting, urban forest planning and management, and related activities, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Grant funding is available to community-based

organizations, tribes, state and municipal governments, nonprofits, and universities.

State Funding and Support

New Jersey Green Acres Program



The first New Jersey Green Acres Bond Act was signed in 1961. Since then, the constantly

evolving Green Acres Program has funded the acquisition of open space for recreation and conservation purposes, and the development of outdoor recreation facilities. While originally funded through various bond issues, the passage of the Garden State Preservation Trust Act and subsequent amendments have provided the Green Acres Program, as overseen by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, a permanent funding source for the preservation of open space and other purposes.¹⁶⁶

The Green Acres Program has five program areas targeting open space preservation. These are: State Park and Open Space Acquisition, Local Governments and Nonprofit Funding, Stewardship and Legal Services, Planning and Information Management, and the Office of Natural Resource Restoration. Green Acres makes various grants and loans available to county and local governments and qualifying

¹⁶⁵ Urban forests include urban parks, street trees, landscaped boulevards, gardens, rivers and coastal promenades, greenways, river corridors, wetlands, natura preserves, shelter belts of trees

and working trees at former industrial sites. USDA Forest Service [Urban Forests | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/land-management/urban-forests).

¹⁶⁶ DEP Open Space Preservation Bulletin [Open Space.pdf \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/dep/osp/osp_bulletin.pdf).



nonprofit conservancies for land acquisition, park development, and natural resource stewardship projects.

The Green Acres *Local Government and Nonprofit Assistance* program provides funds to acquire open space and develop outdoor recreation resources.¹⁶⁷ Included under this program are the following grant and loan initiatives:

- *Parks Development – Green Acres Acquisition (Standard) and Development (Non-Urban Aid)* Green Acres provides low interest (2%) loans and grants (25% matching) to local (municipal and county) governments to acquire open space and develop outdoor recreation facilities, e.g., outdoor sports, biking, picnicking, camping, boating, fishing, swimming and nature interpretation). These funds are also available for facilities that support outdoor recreation, e.g., lighting, parking areas, structures that provide restrooms, concession, or storage for park equipment.
- *The Green Acres Planning Incentive Land Acquisition Program* provides grant and loan funding to local governments that have enacted an open space tax and have adopted an Open Space and Recreation Plan. This program focuses on acquisition eligible projects including the purchase of natural areas, historic sites, conservation areas, water bodies and open space. Qualifying applicants are eligible for a 50% match (compared

to a 25% match available for a standard acquisition.)

- *Green Acres Site Specific Incentive Acquisition Grants*: This category of grant is for municipalities and counties that have an open space tax but do not yet have an Open Space and Recreation Plan approved by Green Acres. Projects in this category are eligible to receive assistance in the form of a 50% matching grant.
- *Urban Aid Acquisition and Development Projects*: For municipalities eligible to receive state aid pursuant to P.L. 1978, c.14, funding for property acquisition and park development is available in the form of a 75% matching grant and, subject to funding availability, a zero percent interest Green Acres loan.¹⁶⁸
- *Urban Parks*: Funding is available to eligible local governments for the acquisition of land that will be transformed into a park, the development of park facilities, or the rehabilitation of historic properties. Applicants are eligible for grants up to \$500,000 per project. These grants do not require a local match. The list of eligible municipalities is included in the Urban Parks application.
- *Nonprofit Assistance- Land Acquisition and Park Development*. Qualifying Charitable Conservancies are also eligible to receive a 50% matching grant

¹⁶⁷ Projects funded under the Green Acres *Local Government and Nonprofit Assistance* program require public access.

¹⁶⁸ There are no urban aid municipalities in Morris County for 2022 [Urban Aid Municipalities SFY 2022 \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/education/urbanaid/).



for the land acquisition and outdoor recreational development.¹⁶⁹ Eligible acquisition projects include, but are not limited to, the purchase of forests, natural areas, historic sites, conservation areas, water bodies, and open space for active or passive recreation purposes. Nonprofits may also to receive matching grants for development of outdoor recreation and conservation facilities.

- Green Acres Stewardship Grants – In addition to providing a stable source of funding for various preservation initiatives, the Preserve New Jersey Act also provides funding for *stewardship activities* on lands held for public recreation and conservation purposes.¹⁷⁰



Dixson's Pond, Boonton Township – Source: Morris County Preservation Trust

Open Space Stewardship: *The cost of open space preservation does not end with the acquisition of land. Land ownership carries with it maintenance and stewardship responsibilities. Ongoing maintenance and stewardship is needed to protect the public's substantial investment in open space acquisition and recreational development.*

The Preserve New Jersey Act defines stewardship as "an activity which is beyond routine operations and maintenance undertaken by the State, a local government unit, or a qualifying tax-exempt nonprofit organization to repair, or restore land acquired or developed for recreation and conservation purposes for the purpose of enhancing or protecting those lands for recreation and conservation purposes."

This grant is available to municipalities, counties and qualifying charitable conservancies for natural resource and conservation projects, but not active recreation facilities. Local governments and nonprofits are eligible for a 50% matching grant (75% for an Urban Aid municipality). Minimum funding awards are for \$50,000 with only projects with more than \$100,000 in project costs considered.

Funding under this program is available for stewardship projects such as, but not limited to:

- Landscape restoration, including historic landscapes
- Invasive species removal/control
- Wildlife habitat restoration/enhancement

¹⁶⁹ Charitable Conservancies pursuant to P.L. 1979, c. 378 (C.13:8B-1 et seq.).

¹⁷⁰ Under this program, stewardship funds can be used for natural resource and conservation projects but not maintenance of active recreation facilities.



MORRIS COUNTY MASTER PLAN - OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

- Freshwater/tidal wetlands restoration/enhancement
- Dam removal as an element of an approved river/waterway restoration project
- Forest/woodland restoration/enhancement
- Stream corridor restoration/enhancement
- Rain gardens
- Shoreline restoration/enhancement
- Trails, boardwalks, bird blinds, lighting and interpretive signage
- Facilities that provide or enhance public environmental education
- Blue Acres Floodplain Acquisitions -The Green Acres, Farmland, Blue Acres, and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2007 authorized \$12 million for acquisition of lands in the floodways of the Delaware River, Passaic River or Raritan River, and their respective tributaries, for recreation and conservation purposes. An additional \$24 million was approved by the voters in the Green Acres, Water Supply and Floodplain Protection, and Farmland and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2009. Properties (including structures) that have been damaged by, or may be prone to incurring damage caused by, storms or storm-related flooding, or that may buffer or protect other lands from such damage, are eligible for acquisition under this program. Blue Acres acquisitions must be from willing sellers.
- Tax Exemption Program: Although not a form of direct funding, a Tax Exemption

Program, also administered under the NJDEP Green Acres Program, provides exemption from local property taxes to eligible nonprofit organizations that own recreation or conservation lands and permit public use of their private lands. Since the program's inception, 75,885 acres of open space owned by 67 nonprofit organizations have been opened to the public for a wide variety of environmental and recreational uses, with 415 sites located in 158 municipalities throughout New Jersey.

- Jake’s Law Playground Funding: The Green Acres Program introduced a new pilot program for counties to create Completely Inclusive Playgrounds, promoting accessible park improvements for children and adults with disabilities. Jakes’ Law, passed in 2018, provides funding for New Jersey counties to build inclusive playgrounds that exceed those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act to accommodate people with disabilities to the greatest degree feasible. Counties can apply for 75% matching grants with awards anticipated to be between \$750,000 and \$1,00,000, depending on demand.

Since 1961, the Green Acres Program has provided grants and loans to municipal and county government and nonprofits for open space projects in Morris County totaling approximately \$176 million. This funding has assisted in the preservation of approximately 26,500+ acres of land, the



development of various open space facilities and related stewardship activities.

In addition, Green Acres funding has also been provided for state projects within Morris County for state parks, conservation areas and watershed protection areas, flood buyouts and related facility development and stewardship activities. Funding for state projects since 1961 has totaled \$124.8 million, which has included the preservation of an additional 31,957 state-owned open space acres in Morris County.¹⁷¹

Garden State Preservation Trust Act

In 1998, New Jersey voters approved a constitutional dedication of \$98 million annually to create a stable funding source to preserve open space, farmland, and historic resources, as well as to provide funds for recreational development. Signed into law in 1999, the "Garden State Preservation Trust Act" provided a framework for the state to set aside that amount of state sales tax revenues each year for 10 years, and to issue up to \$1 billion in bond proceeds to supplement the sales tax revenues over the same period.¹⁷²

Additional open space funding has come from a \$200 million Green Acres bond referendum in 2007¹⁷³ allowing the issuance of general obligation bonds for the acquisition and development of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, preserving farmland and funding historic

preservation and Blue Acres projects.¹⁷⁴ Another Green Acres bond referendum was approved in 2009, which approved \$242 million for state land, local government, nonprofit, and Blue Acres projects.

Preserve New Jersey Act

In 2014, New Jersey voters approved a referendum resulting in the Preserve New Jersey Act¹⁷⁵ to create a permanent funding source for State open space, farmland, and historic preservation programs. Initially this Act, which amended the Gardens State Preservation Trust, provided that 4% of the revenue derived from the Corporate Business Tax Act (CBT) be dedicated to Green Acres, Blue Acres, and Farmland Preservation programs as well as historic preservation. In 2019, the CBT dedication for these programs increased to 6%.¹⁷⁶ The Garden State Preservation Trust allocates these annual CBT collections for various environmental, conservation and preservation programs supporting environmental protection, open space acquisition and development, farmland preservation, stewardship, and historic preservation.

New Jersey Natural Lands Trust



New Jersey
NATURAL LANDS TRUST

The
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Natural Lands Trust was created in 1968 by the Legislature as an independent agency in

¹⁷¹ Green Acres funding statistics via correspondence from Allie Brody 10/3/23, Division of Green Acres, NJDEP. Data as of 9/2023.

¹⁷² P.L. 1999, c.152. (N.J.S.A. 13:8C-1 et seq.)

¹⁷³ Green Acres Farmland, Blue Acres and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2007.

¹⁷⁴ The blue acres bond program permits the State to purchase from willing sellers land for recreation and conservation purposes

in the Delaware River, Passaic River and Raritan River basin. floodways that are prone to or have incurred flood or storm damage.

https://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/blue_flood_ac.html.

¹⁷⁵ (P.L. 2016, c.12) C.54:10A-1 et seq. (*amendment of the Garden State Preservation Trust Act*).

¹⁷⁶ P.L.2019, c.136, signed June 26, 20.



but not of the Division of Parks & Forestry in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Its mission is to preserve land in its natural state for enjoyment by the public and to protect natural diversity through the acquisition of open space. The Trust acquires open space primarily by donations of land and easements. In creating the Trust, the Legislature’s goal was to establish an agency with the protective power of the State that would have the support of private-sector open space preservation and conservation organizations. The Trust’s autonomy is a key factor in garnering the confidence of individuals interested in preserving their land and that of the conservation community.

The Trust manages its properties to conserve rare plant and animal species habitat and rare ecological communities. The Trust invites passive use by the public for recreational or educational purposes wherever such use will not adversely affect biological diversity. Currently, the Trust is responsible for over 26,000 acres of open space, including over 2,500 acres of conservation easements. In Morris County, the Trust manages the Black Meadows Preserve, Budd Lake Bog Preserve and the Great Piece Meadows Preserve.

New Jersey Water Supply Authority



The New Jersey Water Supply Authority is a public body, corporate and politic, constituted as an instrumentality of the State

of New Jersey, exercising public and essential governmental functions. The Authority was created by the New Jersey Water Supply Act on October 7, 1981,¹⁷⁷ and in connection with the Act, all water supply facilities owned or operated by the State were transferred or leased to the Authority. Through the rate support of its customers, the Authority seeks to maintain a dependable supply of water to central New Jersey residents and preserve and enhance source water quality and quantity through planning, preservation, and assessment and rehabilitation of critical watershed parcels.

The Authority supports land preservation as part of its Comprehensive Source Water Protection Program. The Authority’s Source Water Protection Program is implemented by the Authority’s Watershed Protection Unit to protect the water resources in the watersheds of the Raritan River, the Manasquan River, and the Delaware & Raritan Canal. The Authority’s role in watershed land preservation is to identify and then assist in acquiring and managing critical watershed parcels that protect source water supply.

In 2001, the Authority commenced the Spruce Run Initiative (SRI) to preserve critical watershed properties in the vicinity of the Spruce Run Reservoir. Since then, the Authority expanded its land preservation efforts to include lands within the watersheds of the North and South Branches of the Raritan River as well as the Lockatong Creek and Wickecheoke Creek watersheds. Beginning in 2002, the Authority has utilized a portion of its Source Water Protection rate component to fund Source Water Protection

¹⁷⁷ P.L.1981,c.262.



activities. A dedicated portion of the rate, paid by water customers, is used to assist in protection and preservation of critical watershed properties.

The Authority has formed partnerships with nonprofit, municipal, county and State entities to leverage funding for watershed acquisitions. With these partners, the Authority has participated in the preservation (both cost sharing and management responsibilities) of more than 3,600 acres of critical watershed properties and holds conservation easements on 300 additional acres throughout New Jersey. The Authority has partnered with government bodies and nonprofit agencies in Morris County to help preserve approximately 900 acres of critical watershed lands.¹⁷⁸

The Authority continues to contribute funds on a case-by-case basis to protect critical watershed parcels in their water resource area and supports partner preservation, monitoring, and stewardship efforts.

New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council)



The Highlands Council operates two land preservation programs: The Highlands Open Space Partnership Funding Program (OSP) and Highlands Development Credit Purchase Program (HDCPP). Both programs increase protection of Highlands resources, while also advancing landowner equity priorities through acquisition or deed restriction of land throughout the region. They also "fill a

unique need among other preservation programs in the state" since parcels of any size may qualify and the programs will consider applications for land that is forested, agricultural and/or mixed use.

1. *Open Space Partnership Funding Program (OSP)* The Highlands Council OSP is a matching grant program open to government and nonprofit entities. The Highlands Council provides up to a 50% match for acquisitions in fee simple or via deed restriction. Funding provided by the Highlands Council may only be used by project partners to support acquisition costs as payments to property owners. State agencies, Highlands counties or municipal governments, and charitable conservancies are eligible for the OSP program.¹⁷⁹

2. *Highlands Development Credit Purchase Program (HDCPP)* The HDCPP is a deed restriction program open to individual property owners wishing to retain ownership of their property while placing a conservation easement on the land. The program is under the purview of the HDC Bank. Until voluntary Receiving Zones are established, the HDC Bank serves as the sole purchaser of these HDCs. Any lands that are within the Highlands Preservation Area and have remaining development potential as determined by Highlands Council analysis are eligible to receive Highlands

¹⁷⁹ As of 5/20/24, the Program has provided partial funding in conjunction with The Trust for Public Land to help preserve on

property in Morris County, a 115.5-acre site in Kinnelon, now owned by Kinnelon. (N.J. Highlands Council)



Development Credits, which may in turn be purchased by the HDC Bank, preventing the land from further development. While not preserved as open space per se, both vacant land and farmland, along with any accompanying environmentally sensitive areas, have been preserved as part of this program.

NJDEP / New Jersey Forest Service - Urban and Community Forestry Grants

Operating within the Division of Parks and Forestry within the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Forest Service is the steward of all forests and trees across the state. Through sustainable science-based management and conservation practices, the New Jersey Forest Service "promotes the resilience of New Jersey's forests and their interdependent natural systems in the face of societal needs and a climate crisis that demands urgent and decisive action."¹⁸⁰

The New Jersey Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program provides financial assistance in the form of grants to counties and municipalities statewide to assist in implementing their local management plans for trees and forests. The grants are used for work on a variety of projects, including but not limited to, community tree and forest inventories, risk tree assessments, tree planting, and reforestation.

This program offers "Green Community" grants which provide financial assistance for the development of management plans for trees and forests. The program also offers the Urban and Community Forest Stewardship Grant. Authorized by the New Jersey Shade Tree and Community Forestry Assistance Act, this program works to encourage, promote and support local stewardship and effective management of trees and forest ecosystems in New Jersey's communities.¹⁸¹ The Program provides technical and financial assistance on municipal or county property for resiliency planning, reforestation and tree planting initiatives.

Examples of recent grant awards include a \$50,000 Reforestation/Tree Planting grant to Pequannock Township in 2023 and Resiliency Grants with a combined total of \$101,000 awarded to Riverdale, Morristown (2022) and the Morris County Park Commission (2023).¹⁸²

The Forest Service also offers programs to private landowners to maintain wildlife habitat, promote biodiversity, prevent wildfires, and otherwise protect forested lands. Several programs are available, one example being the Forest Stewardship Program. This program provides technical and financial management assistance to private landowners to help them maintain healthy forest resources. Through cost sharing, landowners are refunded up to 75% of the cost of a new or revised forest stewardship management plan.

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/forest/index.html>.

¹⁸¹ N.J.S.A.13:1L-17.1 et. seq.

<https://www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/forest/docs/cf-assistance-act.pdf>.

¹⁸² Daily Record, 23/23/22 and NJDEP News Release, March 20, 2023.



The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act¹⁸³

The FAST Act includes a set-aside of funds under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) for the *Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) Program*. This program provides federal funds for community based “non-traditional” surface transportation projects designed to strengthen the cultural, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of the nation’s intermodal system." It is administered by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), in partnership with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) and the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO).

Eligible applicants include local governments, natural resource or public land agencies, and transit agencies. No local match is required. Eligible projects must fall into one of the following seven categories, which, among other things, can be used to develop trails facilities in open space, greenway linkages or otherwise enhance related open space conditions and protect related historic and/or environmental features:

- Design and construction of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation.

- Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized transportation users.
- Construction of scenic turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.
- Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities both land and water such as building structures and canals.
- Community improvement activities, specifically: streetscaping and corridor landscaping.
- Environmental mitigation to address stormwater management, control, and water pollution prevention or abatement related to highway construction or due to highway runoff.
- Reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality or restore and maintain connectivity among terrestrial or aquatic habitats.

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs – Local Recreation Improvement Grant

The Local Recreation Improvement Grant (LRIG) is a competitive grant program that supports improvement and repair of public recreation facilities. LRIG funds will be allocated to each grant recipient to help cover costs associated with updating community centers, playgrounds, pools, fields, walking or bicycle trails, rail trails and multi-court facilities. The program also provides funding for project development

¹⁸³ P.L.114-94. The FAST Act replaced the NJDOT Transportation Alternative Program which was established by the Federal government in 2012 under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the

21st Century Act (P.L. 112-141) or MAP-21, a transportation program that supports highway, transit, bike and pedestrian programs and policies.



professional service costs; equipment costs including playground and recreation equipment, and environmental remediation costs required to prepare recreation sites for use.

New Jersey Department of Agriculture – Morris County Soil Conservation District

The Morris County Soil Conservation District is a special purpose subdivision of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. District staff works with private landowners and regulates the construction industry to reduce soil erosion and promote proper conservation measures with the goals of reducing the impact of sediment on New Jersey’s waters while securing healthy soils for New Jersey’s future. The Morris County Soil Conservation District was the first soil conservation district in New Jersey to require review and development of site plans for soil erosion and sediment control. The Morris District also provides education and outreach, as well as technical assistance and forestry management services.

Municipal Open Space Funding and Support

Municipal governments have long provided open space opportunities within their communities in the form of parks and recreation initiatives and programs. These lands were typically obtained using general municipal funds, expended to serve local park, recreation and open space needs, but as discussed earlier in this chapter, there are a variety of methods by which open space can and has been preserved. Municipal lands for parks, recreation and open space have often been made available through

charitable donations and/or bequeathed by local residents. Sometimes open space is preserved through the subdivision and development process, either through fee dedications or the use of conservation easements for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands. Municipalities may also fund open space purchases with funds obtained through Federal, State and County grants and loans. In some cases, lands may be preserved by entering into partnerships with nonprofit land preservation/conservation entities. Municipalities may undertake additional actions in support of open space and environmental resource protection.

Municipal Open Space Tax

Recognizing the increasing need and desire to protect open space, many municipalities have issued a special property tax levy to fund open space acquisition.

In 2023, 28 of 39 Morris County municipalities collected over \$12.6 million through their local open space tax for open space preservation, park, and recreation projects.



Boonton Ave. Recreation Facility, Kinnelon Borough – Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation



TABLE 3 – MORRIS COUNTY MUNICIPALITIES WITH A DEDICATED OPEN SPACE TAX

Municipalities with Dedicated Open Space Tax	Open Space Tax Levy \$
Boonton Township	260,956
Chatham Borough	96,211
Chatham Township	507,374
Chester Borough	43,859
Chester Township	364,091
Denville Township	773,788
East Hanover Township	249,674
Hanover Township	771,994
Harding Township	843,356
Jefferson Township	286,769
Kinnelon Borough	105,645
Lincoln Park Borough	135,994
Madison Borough	649,959
Mendham Borough	109,594
Mendham Township	215,317
Mine Hill Township	20,000
Montville Township	1,676,397
Morris Township	596,669
Mount Olive Township	584,851
Parsippany-Troy Hills Township	1,461,601
Long Hill Township	380,937
Pequannock Township	201,848
Randolph Township	921,239
Riverdale Borough	97,401
Rockaway Township	371,000
Roxbury Township	424,733
Washington Township	358,065
Wharton Borough	125,654
Total Municipal Open Space Levy	12,634,976

Source: New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Municipal Tax Summary, 2023

In addition to providing the funding for the preservation of open space, municipal open space preservation efforts are supported and guided by municipal governments, local Planning Boards, Municipal Open Space

Committees and Environmental Commissions.

Local Open Space Plans

Municipalities may create open space and/or recreation plans as part of their master plans. These can be included as part of a comprehensive master plan or developed as an independent master plan element. These plans typically address existing open space and recreation resources, goals and objectives and potential actions to guide the preservation of land for open space and recreation purposes. The adoption of such plans is necessary for municipalities interested in receiving New Jersey Green Acres open space and/or recreation funding. Most Morris County municipalities have adopted open space and recreation plans or elements as part of their municipal master plan or have addressed open space issues in reexamination or other reports. In recent years, some municipalities have also incorporated trails and greenway plans as part of their open space planning, illustrating existing and potential linkages between parks, schools, population centers, and downtown areas. Nearly all municipalities in Morris County have developed open space elements as part of their master plans.

Municipal Open Space Committees

Municipal Open Space Committees (a.k.a. Open Space Advisory Committees or Open Space and Recreation Committees) are made up of volunteers appointed by local governing bodies and are formed to advise and assist local government in the identification, analysis, acquisition and/or



preservation of local open space of recreational, natural, scenic, and sometimes historical value. They may work to educate the public on open space issues, help secure grants from government and nongovernmental sources, seek additional funding sources, assist in local land use and open space plan development and/or identify local landowners interested in donating land for open space purposes. One key function of a municipal open space committee is to make recommendations on open space land acquisitions/expenditure of preservation funding, including local Open Space Trust Funds, where applicable. Specific functions will vary by municipality, but their overall purpose is to help communities achieve their goals for open space. They are often integrally involved in local open space planning and may be the entity overseeing the development of local open space plans. The work of municipal open space committees complements that of local environmental commissions, planning boards, conservation land trusts, county or state parks and conservation agencies. Open space committees may or may not be established by ordinance. About half of Morris County municipalities have formally established open space committees.

Municipal Environmental Commissions / Committees

Under New Jersey Law, a municipality may pass an ordinance to establish an Environmental Commission. First permitted as "conservation commissions," that would

be advisory bodies on natural resource planning and protection, and open space issues, they were later renamed "environmental commissions" and their permitted responsibilities were expanded to study and make recommendations concerning open space preservation, water resources management, noise control, soil and landscape protection, environmental appearance, marine resources and protection of flora and fauna.¹⁸⁴

Environmental Commission v Environmental Committee:

An Environmental Commission is established by ordinance. Under the state enabling legislation (N.J.S.A. 56A et seq), a member of the Environmental Commission also sits on the Planning Board.

Environmental Committees are usually ad hoc groups appointed by the governing body on a yearly basis. Environmental Committees generally have no representation on the Planning Board. (ANJEC)

Environmental Commission members are volunteers appointed by municipal officials and act as advisors and advocates for environmental problems and opportunities, providing information to public officials and the public. They can perform research, develop educational programs and advocate for sound environmental policies. As indicated, they can advise local government on a variety of issues, but most notably; Environmental Commissions are typically key participants in the development of

¹⁸⁴ N.J.S.A 40:40:56A <https://law.justia.com/codes/new-jersey/2021/title-40/>.



natural/environmental resource inventories and open space plans.

By law, an environmental commission "shall keep an *index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned*, including open marshland, swamps and other wetlands, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas and may from time to time recommend to the Planning Board plans and program for inclusion in the Master Plan and development of such areas."¹⁸⁵ Commissions may work with local open space committees, land trusts and environmental organizations, elected officials, planning boards, and citizens to protect important natural resources through acquisition, master plan development, and local ordinances. They can create inventories of local public and private open space and make recommendations for their use. They may also participate in development review and advise local planning and zoning boards in their reviews of development applications.

Subject to the approval of the governing body, Environmental Commissions may acquire property, both real and personal, in the name of the municipality by gift, purchase, grant, bequest, devise or lease for any of its purposes and shall administer the same for such purposes subject to the terms of the conveyance or gift. Such an acquisition may be to acquire the fee or any lesser interest, development right, easement (including conservation easement), covenant or other contractual right (including a conveyance on conditions

or with limitations or reversions), as necessary to acquire, maintain, improve, protect, limit the future use of, or otherwise conserve and properly utilize open spaces and other land and water areas in the municipality.¹⁸⁶ Just over two-thirds of Morris County municipalities have Environmental Commissions or Committees.

Municipal Environmental/Natural Resource Inventories

The Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) is a compilation of text, tables, maps and other visual information about the natural resource characteristics and environmentally significant features of an area. Traditionally called a "Natural Resources Inventory," the title "Environmental Resources Inventory" is now commonly used, reflecting the addition of manmade features to the inventory, such as historic sites, brownfields and contaminated sites.

An ERI provides baseline documentation for measuring and evaluating resource protection issues. It is an objective index and description of features and their functions. Identifying significant environmental resources is the first step in their protection and preservation and in assuring that future development or redevelopment protects public health, safety, and welfare.

The ERI is an important tool for governing bodies, environmental commissions, open space committees, planning boards and zoning boards of adjustment. Planning Boards may adopt the ERI as part of a

¹⁸⁵ P.L.1968,c.245,amended P.L. 1972,c.35,s.2; 1975,c.334,s.8; 1989,c.168,s.2.

¹⁸⁶ N.J.S.A. 40:56A-6.



municipal master plan or this data may be included in a master plan conservation element.

“A Natural Resource Management Guide for the County of Morris” was prepared by the Morris County Planning Board in 2000. This document includes information on Morris County’s geology, topography, soils, ground water, surface water, vegetation, wildlife, and climatology, and a summation of the major federal and state environmental regulations existing at that time.

About two-thirds of Morris County municipalities have developed natural resource or environmental resource inventories. The NJDEP and its various divisions also maintain a wealth of online data sources that can be used to identify a variety of environmental conditions. The New Jersey Highlands Council also provides much of NJDEP data on their website for communities in the Highlands Planning and Preservation Areas, as well as associated data developed by the Highlands Council.

Nonprofit Open Space Preservation

Nonprofits and other open space support entities play a significant role in the preservation and stewardship of open space and related protection of environmental resources. Each acts in accordance with their specific mission, often independently, but also often in partnership with governments entities and/or other nonprofits to achieve common open space goals. They often work cooperatively to obtain funding, conduct stewardship activities or engage in other

activities to preserve or protect open space and related resources. In some cases, nonprofits or other open space support entities fulfill a role that governmental agencies are unable to fill because of time, policy boundaries and/or limits on funding.

Many nonprofit land trusts,¹⁸⁷ nonprofit conservation organizations, quasi-governmental and other entities that support the preservation and/or conservation of open space operate within Morris County. They may hold property for open space / conservation purposes and/or may assist in open space and environmental conservation efforts by others. Many of these groups own and maintain property for open space and/or conservation purposes, often working in partnership with local, county, and state agencies, or other nonprofits to preserve open space. In some cases, once preserved, property is donated to local governments. Other arrangements result in joint ownership of properties between nonprofits and local government agencies.¹⁸⁸

Nonprofit organizations that have preserved significant open space in Morris County include the following:

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey

Originally established as the Morris County Parks and Conservation Foundation in 1981 by Russell Myers of the Morris County Park Commission, this organization changed its name to the *Morris Parks and Land*

¹⁸⁷ A nonprofit organization focused on acquiring and stewarding land.

¹⁸⁸All acreages reported as owned by nonprofits based on county inventory calculations. Acreages as reported by nonprofits may

not match those reported due to calculation method, use of GIS v. deeded acreage and/or adjustments related to shared ownership of properties.



Conservancy in 1992 and to the *Morris Land Conservancy* in 1999. With its scope of work reaching well beyond the Morris County area, the name was finally changed to the *Land Conservancy of New Jersey* in 2008. The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, headquartered at 19 Boonton Ave, Boonton Twp. is a member-supported nonprofit land trust dedicated to preserving and protecting vital natural lands and water resources. The organization works with municipalities and nonprofit organizations throughout New Jersey providing planning, land stewardship and open space advisory services. It offers a wide variety of technical support to municipalities in planning, grant preparation, land management and conservation programs.

The Land Conservancy obtains or protects lands through private sales, easement sales and donations of land and easements. Examples of stewardship activities include stream restoration, trail creation and maintenance, and habitat restoration. It has worked with municipalities throughout New Jersey. As reported in their 2022 annual report, the Land Conservancy has preserved over 29,000 acres of land via 492 separate transactions.¹⁸⁹ The Conservancy owns approximately 526 acres in Morris County with properties in East Hanover (Hatfield Swamp Wildlife Preserve) and Mount Olive (South Branch Preserve). Additional acres are owned jointly with East Hanover Township as part of the Hatfield Swamp Preserve.

Conservation Land Trusts formed for the purpose of preserving, protecting, or maintaining open space and/or environmental resources are charitable organizations that acquire land or conservation easements or that act to steward land or easements to achieve one or more conservation purposes. These purposes may include protection of natural habitat, water quality, preserving land for outdoor recreation, forestry, farming, or other related values. Some land trusts own and operate preserves that may be open to the public. Others may own no land but hold conservation easements established by mutual agreement between a landowner and land trust. Some land trusts acquire land and then transfer that land to governments for use as parks, trails, or other conservation purposes. Most land trusts are independent, private charitable, tax-exempt corporations, organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Headquartered at the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center in Chester Township, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) is a private, not-for-profit organization that relies on philanthropic support and grants from a variety of public and private organizations and individual donors. The NJCF was founded in 1960 as the Great Swamp Committee, which successfully fought a plan by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to build a major airport in the middle of the Great Swamp south of Morristown. This action led to the founding of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey’s first National Wildlife Refuge.

¹⁸⁹ The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, [Land Preservation | The Land Conservancy of NJ \(tlc-nj.org\)](https://www.landconservancyofnj.org/).



Through acquisition and stewardship, the NJCF protects strategic lands, promotes strong land use policies, advocates for environmental protection laws and forges partnerships through education and assistance programs to achieve conservation goals.

Since 1960, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation has helped protect over 125,000 acres of natural areas, including many that are now federal, state, county or local parks. In addition to its work in securing the Great Swamp, the NJCF has been involved in several notable preservation projects in Morris County, e.g., the Dismal-Harmony Reserve in Mendham Township, Morristown National Historic Park-Jockey Hollow, Patriots Path, Pyramid Mountain National Historic Area, and Schooley's Mountain.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation owns approximately 563 acres in Morris County with properties in Mendham Township, Rockaway Township, Washington Township, Hanover Township, Morristown, and Harding Township. Its most significant holdings include the Maureen Ogden Preserve in Washington Township and Dixon's Pond in Rockaway and Boonton Townships.

Harding Land Trust

The Harding Land Trust, incorporated in 1990, is a nonprofit organization "dedicated to preserving the farmland, woodlands and natural areas that give Harding Township its distinctive quality of life." The Trust works to safeguard natural resources and preserve the rural character of Harding. The Trust has acquired and preserved lands in Harding

Township through donation and purchase, often with the assistance and cooperation of the Township of Harding, the Morris County Open Space Trust, and other nonprofit and/or governmental agencies. The Trust manages ten separate preserved properties on which it conducts various education and stewardship activities and also holds trail easements on multiple properties identified as bridle paths.



Harding Land Trust – Frelinghuysen Fields - Source: Harding Land Trust

The Trust owns over 300 acres of open space and environmentally sensitive land in Harding Township. Of its eleven sites, the largest include Primrose Farm, Frelinghuysen Fields, and Waterman Meadows.

Washington Township Land Trust

The Washington Township Land Trust of Morris County is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation incorporated in 1991 with the mission of protecting and preserving those natural areas, including but not limited to woodlands, farmlands, wetlands, marshes, ponds, water courses, and related structures, that contribute to and enhance the rural character of Washington Township.



Included in this mission is the promotion of the public interest in conserving land for open space, aesthetic, recreational, cultural, ecological, and agricultural uses in harmony with the natural environment. The Washington Land Trust acquires interests in land by purchase and donation, manages land uses for the benefit of the public and makes itself available to the Township of Washington to assist in the stewardship of public lands and easements. The Trust works with other land trusts, open space groups and conservation organizations to meet common open space goals. The Trust reports having helped preserve over 1,000 acres in Washington Township.

Most land owned by the Trust is owned in partnership with others, i.e., government agencies and other organizations such as the New Jersey Water Supply Authority and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. These include but are not limited to the Covallesky Nature Preserve co-owned with Washington Township (87.9 acres), the Woodpecker Point Preserve (with New Jersey Water Supply Authority 38.2 acres) and Crystal Springs Park, co-owned with Hunterdon County and others, (58 acres in Washington Township and 250 acres in Hunterdon County). The Washington Land Trust has also been instrumental in helping to preserve properties owned by other entities, notably the Maureen Ogden Preserve (227 acres co-owned with New Jersey Conservation Foundation and New Jersey Water Supply Authority). Additionally, the

Washington Land Trust independently owns approximately 27 acres associated with Mill Pond Park in Washington Township and also holds conservation easements on several other properties.

Schiff Natural Lands Trust

The Schiff Natural Lands Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Mendham Township whose mission statement is to foster an understanding and appreciation of the natural world through land preservation, environmental stewardship, education and passive recreational activities. Schiff Natural Lands Trust has four separate nature preserves. Approximately 548 acres are owned independently by the Trust. The four nature preserves include approximately 767 acres under management¹⁹⁰ located primarily in Mendham Township, with some properties in Mendham Borough and Chester Township. Their “flagship preserve” is the Schiff Nature Preserve in Mendham Township, which includes a nature center and native plant garden. Other properties include the McVickers Brook Preserve, co-managed with Mendham Borough, the Mosle Preserve and Recreation Area co-owned and co-managed with Mendham Township and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority and Mt. Paul Preserve, preserved in partnership with Mendham and Chester Townships.

¹⁹⁰ Not all properties managed by Schiff Nature Preserve are owned individually by the Preserve and may be assessed under other ownership. For example, Mendham Township owns the majority interest in several parcels in the McVickers Brook

Preserve, with a minority interest owned by the Schiff Nature Preserve. Primary ownership of these parcels is assigned to Mendham Township.



Passaic River Coalition

The Passaic River Coalition (PRC) is a watershed association established in 1969 in protecting water quality and supply in the Passaic River Watershed, which includes northern New Jersey and Rockland and Orange Counties in New York. Headquartered in historic Willow Hall in Morristown¹⁹¹ the Coalition is engaged in a number of initiatives aimed at protecting this watershed, including flood management, the creation of new surface water supply systems, wellhead protection and supporting related legislation and studies.

In 1993, the PRC created the Passaic River Land Trust to acquire properties of ecological significance and unique landscape character for water resource protection. The Land Trust has acquired over 1,000 acres within the watershed. Funding has been provided by an endowment to the Coalition, New Jersey Green Acres matching funds, county and municipal open space trust funds, foundation support and private donations (lands and funds). The PRC owns properties in six counties (Passaic, Morris, Bergen, Essex, Sussex and Somerset) with approximately 214 acres identified at sites within seven municipalities within Morris County.¹⁹² The greatest amount of preserved acreage is found in western Jefferson Township.

¹⁹¹ Willow Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a contributing element of the Speedwell Village Historic District Extension, a 7.5-acre property containing other historic elements. The structure was preserved with the assistance of Morris County Historic Preservation Trust, the New Jersey Garden State Historic Preservation Trust and the Passaic River Coalition.

Great Swamp Watershed Association

The Great Swamp Watershed Association (Association), located in Harding Township, is a nonprofit (501(c)(3) member-supported environmental organization/land trust founded in 1981 to protect the Great Swamp from increased development around the watershed. In 2016, it became the official Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate for the Passaic River, expanding its purview to include the entire Passaic River, from the headwaters in the Great Swamp Watershed to Newark Bay. The Passaic River headwaters flow through or beside the Great Swamp Watershed; Mendham Township, Mendham Borough, Harding Township, Long Hill Township in Morris County and Bernardsville and Bernards Township in Somerset County all contain portions of the headwaters. The organization monitors and protects water quality and investigates and participates in land use issues in the Great Swamp Watershed and Passaic River region. It also provides environmental education to community groups, teachers and students on the issue of drinking water and environmental protection.¹⁹³

The Association owns a wooded 76-acre natural area in Harding Township, located north of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, known as the Conservation Management Area, which is open to the public. The Association conducts various

¹⁹² Rockaway Twp. Butler, Denville, Chatham Twp. Long Hill, Jefferson, Morristown [PRC's Land Trust - Passaic River Coalition \(PRC\)](#).

¹⁹³ <https://www.greatswamp.org/history-of-gswa/>.



stewardship and education activities on this site, which includes 3.5 miles of boardwalk and mulched trails.

Raritan Headwaters Association

The Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) is a 501(c)(3) organization that serves as a watchdog for the 470 square mile north and South Branch of the Raritan River Watershed, a region covering 38 municipalities in Hunterdon, Somerset, and Morris Counties. The RHA was formed by the 2011 merger of the Upper Raritan Watershed Association and the South Branch Watershed Association.

Morris County municipalities within the watershed area include Chester Township, Chester Borough, Mendham Township, Mendham Borough, Randolph, Roxbury, Mount Olive, and Washington. The Association is engaged in conducting water monitoring, conservation research, land stewardship, education, and advocacy activities and is also an accredited land trust, owning ten wildlife preserves, 33 conservation easements and, in partnership with others, preserved nearly 7,000 acres of watershed lands.¹⁹⁴

*In 2010, the Raritan Headwaters Association partnered with the Morris Land Conservancy, N.J. Water Supply Authority, Mount Olive Township, the County of Morris and the Trust for Public Land to help preserve the 135-acre Rezamir Estates property which contains the headwaters of the South Branch of the Raritan River.*¹⁹⁵

At this time in Morris County, RHA individually owns approximately six acres in Mendham Township and jointly owns an additional 44 acres in Washington Township with the New Jersey Water Supply Authority.

The Nature Conservancy

Founded in 1951, the Nature Conservancy is a global environmental nonprofit (501(c)(3) organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia. The mission of the Nature Conservancy is to "conserve lands and waters on which all life depends." Organization funding comes from dues, private contributions, investment income, government grants and land sales/gifts. Methods of land protection/acquisition include outright purchase, donations, use of conservation easements and partnerships with local agencies and other groups. The Nature Conservancy has chapters in all 50 states,¹⁹⁶ owns nearly 1,500 preserves nationwide covering more than 2.5 million acres, and in New Jersey, reports that it has protected more than 60,000 acres of land and water. At the time of this writing, none of these acres are in Morris County.¹⁹⁷

New Jersey Audubon Society

The New Jersey Audubon Society is a privately supported, not-for-profit, statewide membership organization which focuses on environmental education and conservation advocacy. The Society maintains several nature centers and wildlife sanctuaries throughout New Jersey with

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.raritanheadwaters.org/>.

¹⁹⁵ <https://www.tlc-nj.org/our-story>.

¹⁹⁶ The New Jersey Chapter office is located at the Lizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center in Chester Township.

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/new-jersey/places-we-protect/>.



activities such as birding, photography, and nature walks. An approximately 71-acre portion of the 276-acre Scherman-Hoffman Sanctuary is located in Harding; the remainder located in Bernardsville (Somerset County). This Sanctuary serves as the headquarters of New Jersey Audubon.¹⁹⁸ The Audubon Society also owns a 42-acre parcel in Jefferson that contributes to the Russia Brook Sanctuary located in adjacent Sussex County.

The Society engages in education and outreach on conservation issues through its sanctuaries, visitor centers and publications. It advances conservation, habitat and wildlife protection and preservation issues through advocacy and through participation in state and national agency rule-making and policy implementation.

New Jersey Audubon is an independent Audubon entity and is not a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Wildlife Preserves, Inc.

Wildlife Preserves is a private, nonprofit land conservation corporation dedicated to the preservation of natural areas, open space, wildlife, and wildlife habitats for conservation, education, and research.¹⁹⁹ Wildlife Preserves' mission is to purchase and protect natural lands and wildlife as an intermediary for government acquisition for passive, natural uses, park preserves and wildlife sanctuaries.

Wildlife Preserves land is administered as natural area and wildlife sanctuary; their

properties are open to the public for passive recreational uses such as hiking, biking, bird watching, photography, nature observation and study, with prohibitions against hunting, fishing, trapping, dumping, and off-trail motor vehicles.

Wildlife Preserves owns and manages approximately 6,000 acres in six preserves in the State of New Jersey located in Atlantic, Cumberland, Essex, Morris, and Warren Counties. It also owns land in Westchester County, New York. Wildlife Preserves maintains habitats in each of its sanctuaries for common, threatened, and endangered species of fauna and flora. Wildlife Preserves lands are varied, and may include freshwater wetland marsh, rivers, streams, ponds, mountains, hardwood forests, pine forests, coastal marsh and shore habitat.

In Morris County, Wildlife Preserves land holdings encompass approximately 1,629 acres, almost all of which is located in Troy Meadows, a 2,600-acre freshwater marsh located in East Hanover, Hanover and Parsippany-Troy Hills. The State of New Jersey also owns a substantial portion of this area with additional properties owned by local governments. The meadows are managed as a wildlife sanctuary by Wildlife Preserves and a Natural Area for the preservation of natural diversity by the New Jersey Division of Parks and Forestry. Troy Meadows is designated as a National Natural Landmark," by the National Park Service and "Natural Heritage Priority site" by the NJDEP.

¹⁹⁸ Audubon offices are located at the Hoffman Center for Conservation and Environmental Education located at 9 Hardscrabble Road, Bernardsville, NJ (Somerset County).

¹⁹⁹ Wildlife Preserves properties are held and managed for conservation purposes but may not be deed restricted from future development.



Wildlife Preserves also helps to manage lands at Great Piece Meadows in Montville with the New Jersey Natural Lands Trust.

Protect Our Wetlands, Water, Woods

Protect Our Wetlands, Water, Woods (POWWW) is a nonprofit conservation organization and land trust based in Denville Township. Its mission is to protect the wetlands woodlands and potable water supplies throughout the Beaver Brook watershed in Denville, Rockaway and Boonton Townships. POWWW identifies and supports land acquisition and provides site stewardship and public education programs. POWWW, working in partnership with New Jersey Fish and Wildlife, the Morris County Park Commission, the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority, Denville Township and New Jersey Green Acres helped create the Jonathon Woods Preserve. Approximately 634 acres have been preserved with POWWW assistance, of which 556 acres are included in the Johnathan Woods County Park.²⁰⁰ POWWW created and maintains trails through the diverse habitats within Jonathan's Woods. These trails and the surrounding forest provide a direct connection to the 3,000+ acres of open space at the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Rockaway Township.

The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land, founded in 1972, is a national nonprofit land conservation

organization headquartered in Morristown that works to conserve land as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places. The organization differs from conventional land trusts as it does not generally hold land,²⁰¹ but rather helps agencies and communities plan, identify and raise funds for conservation from federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources and structure, negotiate, and complete land transactions that create parks, playgrounds, and protected natural areas. The organization offers technical assistance, including GIS mapping and spatial analysis, and works with willing sellers, public agencies and conservation nonprofits to acquire land for parks and open space.

Other Major Nonprofit Open Space Contributors

Boy and Girl Scouts of America

The Boy Scouts (a.k.a Scouting America) and Girl Scouts of America are two separate 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organizations which maintain large landholdings across the County in the form of campgrounds for use by their members. Although not all lands are permanently preserved, the lands they hold as campgrounds are largely undeveloped and contribute greatly to the open space character of an area. Environmental resource protection and conservation are central tenants of scouting education/activities.

²⁰⁰ POWWW and the County of Morris jointly own a 22-acre parcel located within Johnathan Woods County Park.

²⁰¹ The Trust's real estate and legal staff may help complete a land transaction itself, often optioning or purchasing a property

temporarily until it can be permanently protected by a government or community land trust. [Frequently Asked Questions - Trust for Public Land \(tpl.org\)](#).



Boy and Girl Scout properties encompass approximately 1,056 acres, including properties in Kinnelon Boro, Harding, Mendham, Boonton and Rockaway Townships. Most of this acreage is located in Kinnelon and Rockaway the vicinity of Farny State Park and Buck Mountain.

Camp Marcella – New Jersey Camp for Blind Children

Camp Marcella is a facility designed and owned by the New Jersey Camp for Blind Children (NJCBC), a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1947. The Camp facility is located on 171 acres of woodland located between the northern and southern sections of Farny State Park in Rockaway Township, west of the Split Rock Reservoir and abutting lands owned by the Boy Scouts of America.

Open Space/Environmental Support Organizations

The Whippany River Watershed Action Committee (WRWAC)

The WRWAC was established in 1999 and is a member-based nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that identifies and implements projects to preserve and protect waterways and surrounding natural areas within the Whippany River Watershed, an area of approximately 69 square miles within Morris County. The Whippany River overlays the Buried Valley Aquifer, a significant source of drinking water for the region.

The WRWAC is comprised of twelve member towns within the watershed and the County of Morris. Member municipalities include Boonton Town, East Hanover, Florham Park, Madison, Morris Plains, Morris Township,

Morristown, Mountain Lakes, Parsippany-Troy Hills, Mendham Township and Mendham Borough. The County of Morris is also a participating member including the Morris County Board of Commissioners, Soil Conservation District, Office of Planning and Preservation, Mosquito Commission, Municipal Utility Authority and Park Commission. The Committee:

- Provides wildlife management workshops to reduce fecal contamination of water.
- Conducts clean-ups to remove trash, downed trees and other objects contaminating the water and blocking river flow/causing flooding.
- Restores lakes shores, stream corridors and riverbanks with plantings.
- Engineers retention and detention of storm water to reduce pollution and encourage groundwater recharge, monitors water quality and identifies sources of pollution.
- Designs model ordinances for storm water management and headwater protection.

Musconetcong Watershed Association

The Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA) is an independent, nonprofit (501(c)(3) organization formed in 1992 that is dedicated to protecting and improving the quality of the Musconetcong River and its Watershed, including its natural and cultural resources, and obtaining designation of the River under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, which was achieved in 2006 when President George W. Bush added 24.2 miles of the river to the national system.



With the passage of the Musconetcong Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Musconetcong Advisory Committee (MAC), which guided the designation process, was replaced by the Musconetcong River Management Council. The purpose of the Musconetcong River Management Council is to implement the River Management Plan developed by the MAC, the Musconetcong Watershed Association, the Heritage Conservancy, the National Park Service, and a variety of local, county and state representatives.

The MWA monitors water quality, provides environmental education programs for children, landowners, and local governments, conducts river cleanups, and promotes recreational programs throughout the watershed. The MWA works in partnership with the Musconetcong River Management Council, including local municipalities and counties, to protect and promote the river, other conservation organizations, and the Lake Hopatcong Foundation, formed in 2012, which implements similar programs with the lake community.

Lake Hopatcong Commission

The Lake Hopatcong Commission is an independent state entity created in, but not of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in 2001 through the Lake Hopatcong Protection Act.²⁰² The Commission consists of an eleven-member volunteer Board of Commissioners with representation from Morris County, Sussex County, the municipalities of Hopatcong,

Jefferson, Mount Arlington and Roxbury, and several state representatives.

The Commission is dedicated to protecting the water quality of Lake Hopatcong and to permanently preserving its natural, scenic, historical, and recreational resources. The Commission manages and coordinates activities for the preservation, restoration and enhancement of Lake Hopatcong and its watershed, conducts water quality and water quantity monitoring, and works with local communities to protect and improve the Lake and its watershed. The Commission also identifies, seeks grant funding for, and engages in, activities such as weed harvesting/management, public education, water quality/aquatic studies and treatments, lake/boating safety, Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) mitigation, and water level monitoring. It also develops stormwater and nonpoint source pollution management plans in conjunction with Lake Hopatcong communities to prevent such pollutions from degrading water quality, interfering with water-based recreation or adversely affecting aquatic life.

Rockaway River Watershed Cabinet

The Rockaway River Watershed Cabinet (RRWC) is an inter-municipal not-for-profit organization formed in February 1998. The mission of the RRWC is to provide a unified, coordinated approach for Rockaway River watershed municipalities and interested private organizations to protect and improve water quality on a watershed-wide basis.²⁰³

²⁰² P.L. 2000, c.175 Lake Hopatcong Protection Act, supplementing Title 58 of the Revised Statutes (C.58:4B et. seq.)

<https://lakehopatcongcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Lake-Hopatcong-Protection-Act.pdf>

²⁰³ [Rockaway River Watershed Cabinet](#)



The Rockway River watershed is located within Morris and Sussex counties. The river's headwaters begin in Sussex County and extend into the northwestern portion of Morris County. The river flows south towards the Berkshire Valley, then through Jefferson Township, Roxbury Township, Wharton Borough, and Rockaway Township. The river then goes through the areas of Dover Town, Rockaway Borough, and Denville Township. The course continues through Boonton Township and the Town of Boonton where the river is dammed to form the Boonton Reservoir (a.k.a. Jersey City Reservoir). The Rockaway River continues flowing through Parsippany and Montville Townships and continues to its confluence with the Passaic River in East Hanover. The river is approximately 40 miles in length with a catchment area of 220 square miles.²⁰⁴

North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program assists multi-county areas in enhancing conservation, water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation agricultural sustainability and rural development. Established by the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962,²⁰⁵ the RC&D Program began in 1964. The Food and Agricultural Act of 1981 reauthorized the program and then the United States Congress made the RC&D program permanent with the Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. The Act empowers the United States Department of Agriculture

to provide technical and financial assistance to state and local units of government and nonprofit organizations. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) facilitates and administers the RC&D program on authority of Congress.

The mission of the North Jersey RC&D is to facilitate the transition to sustainable use and protection of the region's human and natural resources through partnerships, education, and innovation.²⁰⁶

RC&D activities are coordinated by local regional councils. There are 375 RC&D Councils across the United States. New Jersey hosts two authorized RC&D Areas. North Jersey RC&D serves Sussex, Warren, Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon, and Union Counties. The South Jersey RC&D serves Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Salem Counties.

The North Jersey RC&D was first authorized in 1972 and expanded to its present membership in 1988. Through partnerships with municipal, state, federal agencies, and various private entities, the North Jersey RC&D Council develops and manages grant-funded programs that promote the conservation and improvement of the region's resources and protect the area's quality of life.

RC&D Councils are composed of volunteers appointed by county governing bodies (Board of County Commissioners), soil

²⁰⁴ Rockaway River Watershed Macroinvertebrate Study, 2014, Normandeau Associates, Stowe, PA.

²⁰⁵ P.L.87-703.

²⁰⁶ North Jersey RC&D <https://www.northjerseyrcd.org/about-us>.



conservation districts (Board of Supervisors) and other members of the community as determined in the individual Council's by-laws. The Council serves as the local planning and management organization that NRCS cooperates with in implementing the RC&D program. These individuals develop and implement area plans, initiate and direct the process of planning RC&D projects, and then act to maintain the plans. The approved RC&D Area Plan and Annual Plan of Work serve as the formal agreements for a council to receive RC&D program technical assistance. The North Jersey RC&D Council operates as a U.S. Internal Revenue Service 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Grant funding received by the Council is used to engage landowners in various programs that focus on three areas: Agricultural Sustainability, Water Resource Protection, and Community Development.

Heritage Conservancy

The Heritage Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization that specializes in open space preservation, planning for sustainable communities, natural resource protection, property stewardship, historic preservation, adaptive reuse of existing structures, wildlife habitat restoration and biodiversity. The Conservancy works with community groups, private landowners, local/county governments, state, and federal agencies to achieve these goals.

Based in Doylestown, PA, Heritage Conservancy projects are focused in Bucks and Montgomery Counties in Pennsylvania, however the Conservancy has been active in parts of New Jersey and in areas important

to Morris County. For example, the Heritage Conservancy completed the Musconetcong River National Wild and Scenic River Study on behalf of the Musconetcong Watershed Association, helping to designate the Musconetcong as a Wild and Scenic River. There are currently no known Heritage Conservancy preserved lands in Morris County.

Open Space Institute

Founded in 1974 and headquartered in New York City, the Open Space Institute (OSI) is a nonprofit conservation organization that works with government agencies, landowners, and local land trusts to acquire land to protect diverse landscapes; preserve habitat for rare or endangered species; ensure water quality; facilitate wildlife adaptation to climate change; and enhance recreation access. It also facilitates the use of conservation easements to protect areas of private lands.

The Institute engages in direct acquisition of land and conservation easements through purchase or donation and administers various conservation grant programs, such as "The Resilient Landscapes Initiative" which provides capital and planning grants to land trusts and state agencies, and education and training to protect climate resilient lands. Resilient landscape protection funding is available in the Northeast and Southeast project areas, including the Highlands and Kittatinny Ridge in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

In 2014, OSI led a collaborative effort to acquire and preserve the 136-acre Giralda Farms site, working with Chatham Township,



the County of Morris (the Morris County Park Commission and the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation) and other nonprofit, private and public partners. After the property was acquired, OSI worked with the Morris County Park Commission to add 2.3 miles of pedestrian trails to Giralda Farms to better connect it to the adjacent 744-acre Loantaka Brook Reservation.

Another recent Morris County activity of the OSI was the development of the Boonton Reservoir Protection and Trail Project property management plan, with the Morris County Park Commission and consultant Greener by Design, LLC, that includes the construction of a 7.7-mile trail around the approximately 700-acre Boonton Reservoir, located in Boonton and Parsippany-Troy Hills, which is the primary source of drinking water for Jersey City. The Plan also includes the incorporation of drainage, native plantings and other enhancements that will improve the water quality of this important reservoir. Approved in 2019, this plan follows on the Jersey City's authorization of a 40-year lease with the Morris County Park Commission to develop and manage a passive recreation trail around the Boonton Reservoir.²⁰⁷



Boonton Reservoir Protection Trail Plan - Source: Open Space Institute

NY-NJ Trail Conference

The New York/New Jersey Trail Conference (Conference) is a volunteer-based 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that builds, maintains and protects public trails. The organization, which reports a membership of 10,000 individuals and 100 organizations, conducts advocacy, conservation and stewardship activities on a network of more than 2,150 miles of public trails in New York and New Jersey, from the Catskills to the Delaware Water Gap, establishing programs that protect open space at both the state and local level.²⁰⁸ In addition to its advocacy and stewardship activities, the Conference actively conserves lands by acquiring fee simple properties and easements needed to improve, preserve and extend the long-distance trail networks with which the Conference is involved. Once acquired, their

²⁰⁷ Boonton Reservoir Protection and Trail Project, Nov. 2019, pg.4

²⁰⁸ NY/NJ Trail Conference Business Reports - <https://www.nynjtc.org/about-us>.



goal is to transfer ownership of properties to other entities such as the State. The Conference cultivates relationships with other nonprofit entities, government agencies and landowners to develop opportunities for the acquisition of lands, easement rights, license and right-of-way agreements or consents deemed important for the improvement of the Conference's trail network.

In New Jersey, the Conference maintains 682 miles of trails ranging from the Delaware Water Gap to the cliffs of the Palisades, including approximately 82 miles of trails in the Morris County Region.²⁰⁹

Canal Society of New Jersey

The Canal Society of New Jersey (CSNJ) is a nonprofit organization formed in 1969 to foster the study of the history of New Jersey's two towpath canals: the Delaware and Raritan Canal and the Morris Canal. CSNJ preserves and restores canal remains and artifacts and educates the public in Canal history. The Morris Canal connected the Delaware River at Phillipsburg to the Hudson River at Jersey City. This unique transportation system enabled the development of the northern part of the state from 1829 to 1924. Since its founding in 1969, the Canal Society has and continues to restore, preserve, and study portions of the canal system and the many artifacts discovered during this effort. The Canal Society is currently working with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and the Morris Canal Working

Group to preserve locations, to the greatest extent possible, along a planned 111-mile continuous pedestrian and bicycle trail/greenway envisioned to connect the six counties of which Morris County is central. The Canal Society helps secure grants and provides technical, educational, and administrative assistance for the preservation, restoration and improvement of locations along the path of the Morris Canal. This effort contributes to the creation of the greenway and preservation and restoration of various historic structures and artifacts along the canal route. The Canal Society is also working to expand the historic register nomination of the Morris Canal to include Canal assets not identified in the original nomination, which may provide linkages to additional trails, open space, and greenway assets.



Morris Canal Lock 2 East, Wharton Borough – Source: The Canal Society of New Jersey

In Morris County, the Morris Canal route and proposed Morris Canal Greenway runs through Netcong, Mount Olive, Roxbury, Wharton, Dover, Rockaway Township, Rockaway Borough, Denville, Boonton

²⁰⁹ NY/NJ Trail Conference – Morris County Region
<https://www.nynjtc.org/region/morris-county-region>.



Township, Town of Boonton, Montville, and Lincoln Park.

National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national nonprofit organization that promotes the funding and improvements of recreational facilities, parks, and open space for health and wellness, conservation, and social equity. Their stated mission is to "advance parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people." The organization advocates for the importance of open space and open space funding while providing publications, research, educational resources, data on best management practices and partnership opportunities to municipalities and stakeholders. Founded in 1965, the organization produced various national studies pertaining to open space and recreation facility needs. Its earlier recommendations pertaining to national general standards have been replaced by support for the development of individual community-based need assessments. The organization continues to provide education and certification programs for parks and recreation professionals. It also provides grants (non-acquisition) and information on funding opportunities for parks and open space initiatives and programs.

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)

ANJEC is a statewide nonprofit organization that helps New Jersey environmental commissions, individuals, local and state agencies to preserve natural resources and

promote sustainable communities. Its mission is to "promote local action to protect and restore New Jersey's natural resources and to ensure healthy communities for today and the future." The organization provides technical assistance, educational programs, materials and publications in support of its mission. Assistance is provided on a variety of topics, including but not limited to, the operation and responsibilities of environmental commissions and the creation of environmental resource inventories, land use planning, site plan review and stormwater management, green infrastructure, climate change, financing open space and open space planning, pollution reduction, and brownfield redevelopment. Grants may be available to Environmental Commissions for local open space stewardship projects.

The Conservation Blueprint and Other Environmental Resource Links

New Jersey Conservation Blueprint

The New Jersey Conservation Blueprint is a data-driven, interactive mapping tool developed through a partnership of The Nature Conservancy, Rowan University, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, together with a collective of 21 conservation-focused groups, both governmental and nonprofits. This online interactive mapping tool contains multiple data layers with environmental and other information that may be used by governmental and nongovernmental open space advocates to locate and prioritize lands for open space, conservation, or farmland preservation.



This tool identifies priority land rankings based on various conservation themes including:

- Water Quality – lands that help safeguard water resources, rivers, and streams.
- Ecological Integrity– lands to protect biodiversity, water quality and climate resiliency.
- Agricultural – lands important to protect, support and maintain agriculture.
- Community Green Space – lands important for connecting people to nature and recreation.

Each theme includes a series of component and reference layers. Component layers may be used to establish priorities for each theme. Reference layers include additional information on which the component layers are based.

For example, to identify those lands important to water quality, the Conservation Blueprint provides component layers such as wetlands, groundwater recharge, headwaters, active river areas, and impervious surface. Reference layers include impervious surfaces, New Jersey hydrography (lakes, waterbodies, rivers and streams), C-1 Streams, and other data. Applications of each layer to a digital map provides data that may be used for the prioritization of lands for conservation.



Conservation Blueprint interactive map illustrating potential connections linking preserved open space, waterbodies, greenways and farmland

Environmental Resource Tools/Links:

- [New Jersey Conservation Blueprint: New Jersey Conservation Blueprint | Conservation GIS Mapping Tool \(njmap2.com\)](https://njmap2.com)
- [NJDEP New Jersey Landscape Project: Wildlife Habitat Mapping for Community Land Use Planning and Species Conservation. https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/conservation/new-jerseys-landscape-project/](https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/conservation/new-jerseys-landscape-project/)
- [NJDEP New Jersey Flood Indicator Tool: Screening tool providing users with information regarding the presence of indicators of potential flood risk on or near a property of interest. https://dep.nj.gov/inland-flood-protection-rule/flood-tool/](https://dep.nj.gov/inland-flood-protection-rule/flood-tool/)
- [New Jersey Geological Survey](#): Public service and research agency within the NJDEP. The mission of the survey is to map, research, interpret and provide



scientific information regarding the states' geology and ground water resources.

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/njgs/>

- [NJDEP Bureau of GIS/Open Data:](#) Multiple datasets concerning environmental conditions, historic properties, open space, land use / land cover, etc.
<https://gisdatanjdep.opendata.arcgis.com/>
- [NJDEP Green Acres Program: Local and Nonprofit Assistance Programs.](#)
<https://dep.nj.gov/greenacres/local-government-and-nonprofit-assistance/>
- [NJDEP Index by Topic:](#)
<https://www.nj.gov/dep/topics.html>
- [New Jersey Highlands Interactive Map.](#) Online interactive tool that allows users to explore various features of the New Jersey Highlands Region using Highlands-specific and state-wide data sources.
https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/gis/interactive_map/index.html
- [New Jersey Highlands Interactive Environmental Resource Inventory:](#) Map based application designed to assist in the development of municipal ERI's.
<https://www.highlandseri.com/>
- [Morris County Soil Conservation District:](#) The Morris County Soil Conservation District works with private landowners and regulates the construction industry

to reduce soil erosion and promote proper conservation measures.

[Morris County Soil Conservation District \(mcsd.org\)](http://mcsd.org)

- [Outside Together - Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2023-2027:](#) Identifies state open space outdoor recreation goals and objectives. Includes resident survey information and general information concerning resident access to outdoor recreation and acres potentially available for recreation development.
[nj-scorp.pdf](#)
- [NJDEP 2020 NJ Scientific Report on Climate Change:](#) Summarizes the current state of knowledge regarding the effects of climate change on New Jersey's environment.
[NJDEP | 2020 Scientific Report on Climate Change](#)
- [Environmental Justice Mapping, Assessment and Protection Tool:](#) This interactive mapping tool allows users to view overburdened communities, the criteria each block group meets, and the municipality for which the overburdened community is designated in accordance with the New Jersey Environmental Justice Law, N.J.S.A. 13:1D-157, as well as query addresses to determine if they are within an overburdened community.
[NJ Environmental Justice Mapping, Assessment and Protection Tool \(EJMAP\) \(arcgis.com\)](#)



6. MAJOR STATE PLANNING INITIATIVES

2023-2027 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) a.k.a. “**Outside Together**” is updated every five years by the NJDEP. The update maintains New Jersey eligibility to receive national funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund administered by the National Park Service. SCORP defines the broad goals for State outdoor recreation efforts for the five-year period. The Plan also identifies statewide recreation needs and opportunities for park development and includes an extensive citizen survey that indicates New Jersey resident’s attitudes on outdoor recreation.

Overall Objectives

1. Identify opportunities for expanding public access to recreation areas and facilities and improving the user experience at existing recreation areas.
2. Educate the public about the importance, needs, benefits, and availability of open space and outdoor recreation opportunities statewide.
3. Identify high value open space and recreational needs and opportunities with particular focus on better serving the health and wellness of residents in underserved and Overburdened Communities.
4. Enhance the focus on the economic benefits of preservation, including those associated with climate resilience, sustainability, ecotourism, and biodiversity.

5. Identify necessary policy, regulatory, and legislative actions to advance open space and outdoor recreation goals.

6. Fully engage the public and key partners to ensure an informed approach to outdoor recreation and conservation.

7. Encourage collaborative partnerships and programs to enhance open space and outdoor recreation at multiple levels of government.

8. Satisfy the NPS requirements so New Jersey continues to qualify for Federal LWCF opportunities

Guiding Principles

1. Expanding high-quality open space and recreation opportunities for all New Jersey residents and visitors.
2. Enhancing climate resilience and sustainability through acquisition and development of open and green space.
3. Empowering communities through investments in ecotourism and outdoor recreation.
4. Embracing the role of technology in conservation and outdoor recreation.
5. Furthering equity and environmental justice through outdoor recreation.
6. Continuing commitments to stewardship and the conservation and restoration of biodiversity.



2001 New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan)

Formulated in accordance with the State Planning Act of 1986, the most current State Plan was adopted in 2001. The State Plan is intended to guide municipal, county and regional planning, as well as state agency functional planning and infrastructure investment decisions.

The State Plan recognizes that open space is a critical component of attracting people and jobs, keeping neighborhoods safe, and providing amenities. Goal #7 of the eight goals of the State Plan is to “Preserve and Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value.”²¹⁰ Regarding infrastructure decisions, the State Plan seeks to “protect recreational facilities and open space from direct, indirect and cumulative impacts associated with the installation of infrastructure and induced development” and “provide infrastructure in a manner which maintains the functional integrity of contiguous open space areas and corridors.”²¹¹

The State Plan includes a policy category devoted exclusively to Open Lands and Natural Systems, including 34 policies focused on Open Space and Recreational Lands, Biological Diversity, Critical Slopes, and Forested Areas. The overall intent of these policies is to:

“Protect biological diversity through preservation and restoration of contiguous open spaces and connecting corridors; manage public land and private incentives

for private land management to protect scenic qualities, forests and water resources, and manage the character and nature of development for the protection of wildlife habitat, critical slope areas, water resources and for the provision of adequate public access to a variety of recreational opportunities.”²¹²

2008 Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP)

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act enacted in 2004, has as its overall purpose the protection and preservation of environmental resources and water supply within the Highlands Region. The Highlands Region includes 859,358 acres, 88 municipalities, and seven counties. Thirty-two of Morris County’s 39 municipalities are in the Highlands Region.

The Highlands Council, created through the passage of the Act, was charged with creating a Regional Master Plan to restore and enhance the significant values of the abundant and critical resources within the Highlands Region.²¹³ These resources include protected open space, which at the time of the RMP adoption in 2008, made up approximately thirty-two percent of the Highlands Region.

The RMP assesses the environmental and economic benefits of natural resource and open space protection, particularly as they relate to water supply, and includes recommendations related to the preservation of open space, which it identifies as a shared community value in the Highlands Region. The RMP proposes

²¹⁰ 2001 State Development and Redevelopment Plan, pg. 87.

²¹¹ Ibid., pg. 124.

²¹² Ibid., pg. 151.

²¹³ 2008 Highlands Regional Master Plan, page 12.



prioritization and acquisition of fee simple or conservation easements in the form of open space and farmland preservation in those lands within the Region that have the most significant resources.²¹⁴ Open space goals of the RMP include but are not limited to: protection of critical resources through land preservation and stewardship of open space throughout the Highlands Region. Conforming municipalities are required to include open space preservation and land stewardship programs in their master plans.

Related policies and objectives of the RMP include but are not limited to: maintaining an inventory and database of public and private open space in the Region, promoting coordination of open space acquisition by all government levels, advocating for the establishment of dedicated sources of funding for the preservation and stewardship of open space in the Region, and encouraging municipalities and counties to establish and fund open space acquisition and stewardship programs.

2009 New Jersey Trails Plan

The 2009 New Jersey Trails Plan was developed by the NJDEP pursuant to the New Jersey Trails Act of 1974, building on earlier New Jersey Trails Plans from 1982 and 1996. The Plan presents goals and

strategic actions to help guide the efforts to plan, build, operate and maintain trails throughout New Jersey. It identifies priorities for implementation, which include the establishment of community pathways. The goal is to provide a walking trail within ten minutes of every resident that can be used by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and transportation.

The Trails Plan includes an extensive number of goals and recommendations, including, but not limited to creating a dedicated state funding source for trail management and advocating for trail continuity, linkages, and the acquisition of rights-of-way to create these linkages. The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan also advocates for the implementation of the New Jersey Trails Plan.

2009 Trails Plan “Trails Vision” – New Jersey’s residents value the diverse networks of trails throughout the state, well-maintained facilities within cities, suburbs and countryside that provide everyone with access to a full range of outdoor recreation activities, transportation alternatives within and among communities, and quality trail experiences.

²¹⁴ Ibid., page 41.



APPENDIX

Municipal Outreach Survey and Open Space Inventory Update



Appendix -Municipal Outreach Survey and Open Space Inventory Update

Municipal Outreach Survey

A survey was distributed to each municipality in Morris County to obtain local government input and help inform the development of the County’s Open Space Plan. An email with the survey went to all municipal administrator/managers on 11/18/2022. A follow up email was sent on 12/9/2022, which included a copy to the mayor, and another follow up again on 12/27/2022. The survey was administered using the SeamlessDesk survey platform, which permits development of a fillable form for ease of completion by potential respondents. Surveys were requested to be completed by December 31, 2022. Any surveys received after 12/31/2023 were also accepted.

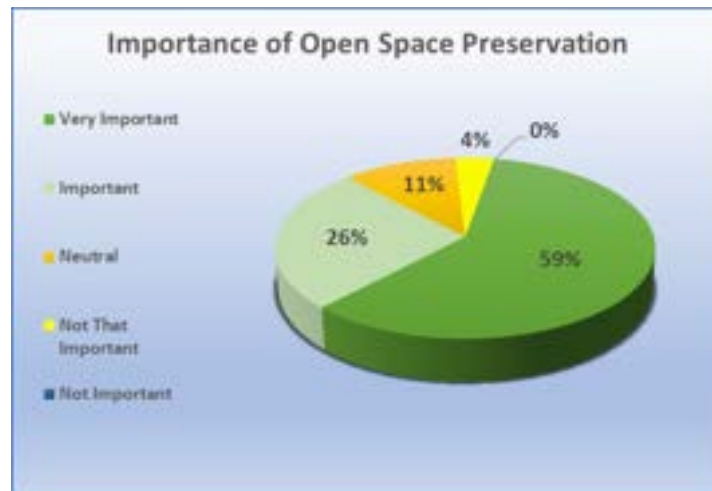
Twenty-seven municipalities responded to the survey. Respondents included:

Boonton Twp.	Mendham Boro.
Butler	Montville
Chatham Twp.	Morris Twp.
Chester Boro.	Morristown
Denville	Mount Olive
Dover	Netcong
Florham Park	Parsippany-Troy Hills
Hanover	Pequannock
Harding	Randolph
Jefferson	Rockaway Boro.
Lincoln Park	Rockaway Twp.
Long Hill	Roxbury
Madison	Victory Gardens
	Washington

The survey questions and a summary of responses are provided below. Note that respondents sometimes elected not to answer certain questions; in these cases there were fewer than 27 responses.

1. How important is the preservation of open space to the community?

There were twenty-seven responses to this question. Sixteen identified open space as very important, seven identified open space as important, three communities were neutral, and one community identified open space as not that important. No community selected the “not important” option.



2. What are their Top Three Open Space Goals and/or Priorities

Twenty-Four municipalities responded to this question; their responses are as follows:

1. **Boonton Township:** Land preservation, active recreation, trails.
2. **Butler:** Retain the very little open space that we have. Maintain the existing open space natural resources. Allow passive recreation (i.e., trails) on the existing open space.
3. **Chatham Township:** Thematically, the municipality's top three open space goals and priorities include: 1) Maintaining high quality open spaces and experiences for residents that serve diverse purposes in residents' lives; 2) Acquiring additional lands in a highly strategic and judicious manner that enhance existing open spaces, greenways, and residents' lives; 3) Safeguarding our open space natural areas that are performing important ecological functions for our residents and for the natural world at large. To accomplish these goals, Chatham Township values its partnerships with Morris County, the State of New Jersey and many others. The Chatham Township Open Space Advisory Committee maintains an informal watch list of 30 parcels that members believe could be preserved if the opportunity arises for a consensual, market-price agreement between the owner and the conservation buyer. To develop the parcel list, the Committee used the same prioritization system provided by the Open Space Element of the Chatham Township Master Plan (last updated 2020). For instance, a very important factor in our prioritization is a parcel's connectivity with existing Morris County-owned land in Chatham Township. An example of a top priority for new preservation is Block 48.16, Lot 121-122 along Southern Boulevard (17 acres). Agreeing on a price with the owner of this parcel is the key step needed to provide the many benefits that preservation of this parcel would afford area residents. The Morris County Open Space Trust has formally pledged a grant in support of the protection effort.
4. **Chester Borough:** Inventory existing open space, identify future potential open space, update master plan regarding open space.



5. **Denville:** Continuous Green Belts, Reducing Development, and Increased Recreational Opportunities.
6. **Dover:** Enhance public access to Rockaway River Corridor Incorporate public gathering spaces and other open urban spaces in redevelopment projects Enhance Morris Canal route as a cultural heritage resource.
7. **Florham Park:** Preserve as much open space as possible, preserve natural areas that can be used to create walkways and trails allowing access from one part of town to another, to create more passive recreation areas in town.
8. **Hanover:** To preserve and protect as much remaining open space land in the Township but at the same time setting aside a portion of open space for active recreation purposes.
9. **Harding:** Acquisition
10. **Jefferson:** 1) The Township has enough open space due to Highlands being 80% in the preserved. 2) The Township wants to enhance the potential for eco-tourism. 3) Create more recreational opportunities.
11. **Lincoln Park:** Flood mitigation, provide recreational facilities, protect undeveloped land.
12. **Long Hill:** Enhance current inventory on open space with additional trail opportunities. Expand opportunities and options for recreational activities. Where practicable, provide enhanced buffers to flood-prone and environmentally sensitive areas.
13. **Madison:** Outdoor Recreation, Historic Preservation.
14. **Mendham Borough:** Preserve land; develop trails; develop parks and amenities.
15. **Montville:** Protect drinking water sources. Ensure riparian corridors and floodplains are set aside from encroaching development. Improve and expand existing recreation facilities and parks.
16. **Morris Township:** Properly maintain existing open space properties. Obtain open space for passive recreation Increase funds in Open Space Trust account for future preservation.
17. **Morristown:** Preserve additional open space by acquisitions as they become available, expand the system of trails and paths in Town, improve existing facilities under the Capital Improvement Program.
18. **Mount Olive:** Purchase open space property to further expand our recreational opportunities, Enhance our current open space properties.
19. **Pequannock:** Flood Prone Property Mitigation Parks & Recreation Active Use Parks & Recreation Passive Use.
20. **Randolph:** The Engineering and Parks and Recreation Departments should continue to work together to identify appropriate lands within the Township that should be purchased and set aside as parkland. Linkages in the trail system discussed in the Circulation Element and illustrated in Figure VI- 2 Trail Map should be completed between existing parks and open space areas in conjunction with other agencies. The Township should budget funds and apply for grants to expand its existing inventory of recreation facilities identified above in terms of high, medium and low priority.



21. **Rockaway Borough:** Open Space Master Plan Element adopted in 1995. Goals included: 1. Maintain all existing municipal park and recreation land in the Borough and the open space recommendations of the 1978 Master Plan. 2. Evaluate the open space and recreational potential of the following sites for future acquisition by the Borough: a. Block 84, Lot 35 (12.01 acres) for streamside open space along the Rockaway River. b. Block 141, Lot 6 (2.11 acres) as a permanent open space link between the existing Borough-owned land lying north of the homes on Drake Avenue and extending southward to Ogden Avenue opposite the nine (9) acre parcel owned by Jersey City proposed in the 1978 Master Plan for acquisition by the Borough. This would create a substantial belt of open space in this neighborhood. c. Block 21, Lot 4 (6.35 acres) adjoining the Denville boundary near Beaver Brook for passive open space.
22. **Rockaway Township:** Maintain existing open space and recreation facilities. Better manage the utilization of active and passive spaces. Provide linkages between community facilities and parks, both within the Township and with adjoining communities.
23. **Roxbury:** 1) Preserve open spaces to maintain community character, quality of life and protect natural resources. 2) Establish an integrated greenway system to connect local neighborhoods to their parks, natural areas and schools. 3) Acquire and preserve land for expansion of existing parks, trails and recreational facilities to meet the Township's need for both active and resource-based, passive recreation.
24. **Washington:** 1) Protection from overdevelopment 2) passive recreation 3) protection of environmental resources.

3. Has your community adopted an Open Space Plan or Open Space and Recreation Plan as part of its Municipal Master Plan, either as a standalone master plan element or as part of a comprehensive master plan? If yes, include title date of plan or last revision. If not, is it the intent of the municipality to adopt an open space plan in the future?

Of the 26 municipalities responding to this question, 21 municipalities reported adopting an Open Space Plan or Open Space and Recreation Plan as part of their Master Plan. Five municipalities reported that they have not adopted such a plan; of these, two indicated an intent to develop or investigate development of a plan.

4. Does your Municipality have an Environmental Resource Inventory or Natural Resource Inventory? If so, please provide title and year of adoption/approval. Please indicate whether this is a stand-alone document or incorporated as within a comprehensive master plan.

Of 25 responses to this question, 11 municipalities reported having an Environmental or Natural Resource Inventory and 14 municipalities responded in the negative. One municipality reported that an ERI is currently in development.

5. Does your municipality have a designated Open Space Committee or Open Space Advisory Committee or Open Space and Recreation Committee? If yes, what are its primary functions?



Of 26 municipalities responding to this question, 14 municipalities reported having an Open Space or Open Space Advisory Committee and 12 did not. Primary functions as noted include:

1. **Chatham Township:** The Open Space Advisory Committee shall prepare and submit to the Township Committee an Open Space Plan for the Township of Chatham consisting of identification of undeveloped, private land parcels, annually recommend a particular parcel or parcels for acquisition by the Township, update the Plan on an annual basis and include the following criteria when selecting parcels for preservation (Lands that connect existing public land; Lands that include environmentally sensitive areas, streams, wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, aquifer recharge areas; Lands that provide recreational use; Lands that preserve scenic vistas. The Open Space Advisory Committee is authorized to monitor and to conduct inspections of properties acquired by the Township for open space and to report its findings to the Township Committee.
2. **Chester Borough:** Stewardship of existing land, working with consultants on an updated ROSI and ERI. The committee also serves as the Environmental Committee.
3. **Denville:** Review and prioritize Open Space acquisition opportunities. Combined with local Trails committee, so this committee is also involved in trail development projects.
4. **Hanover:** To assist the Township Committee in assessing properties that might be available for acquisition as part of the Township's Recreation and Open Space Inventory.
5. **Long Hill:** a) Develop a comprehensive open space program for consideration by the Planning Board in connection with the Planning Board's preparation of the Township Master Plan. b) Evaluate the importance of specific Township lands for recreational use (both active and passive), stream corridor protection, preservation of aesthetic, cultural and historical value, establishment and maintenance of greenways, and general preservation and conservation. c) Identify specific sites and recommend acquisition of open space and other lands. d) Recommend that the Township Committee apply for specific County, State and nonprofit foundation grants to supplement the Township's Open Space Fund for the acquisition of these lands. E) Interact with other boards, commissions, committees and citizens groups to obtain broad public input for the development of the open space program and to provide the Township Committee with information for dissemination to the residents of the Township. f) Assist in the implementation of open space programs established by the Township Committee. g) Comment to the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment on the potential for open space preservation opportunities in applications that involve lands that have special open space and recreational potential. h) Submit a report to the Township Committee at the end of each calendar year, including specific budget requests for ongoing activities and the status of grant applications and awards.
6. **Madison:** (link to website provided: <https://www.rosenet.org/898/Open-Space-Rec-Hist-Pres-Adv-Committee>) The Open Space, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Advisory Committee makes recommendations to Mayor and Council to implement the Madison Borough Open Space and Recreation Plan.



7. **Mendham Borough:** Maintain and protection natural resources, review sites and recommend which lands and historic properties should be acquired. Assist and advise on the Borough Urban Forestry and Tree City USA programs
8. **Montville:** The Montville Township Open Space Committee works with the Planning Board and the Township Committee in an effort to preserve land in Montville Township. The group meets monthly to discuss issues that affect the Township's Open Space Plan and periodically assists in the revision of the Master Plan. Montville Township residents have repeatedly approved, through referendum, one of the most aggressive open space programs in the state of New Jersey. It is the goal of the Open Space Committee to execute this strategy and preserve one of the most valuable resources the Township has, its land, character, and environment.
9. **Morris Township:** Seek properties that may be for sale to add to the Township's Open Space preserved lands. Make recommendations to the governing body for acquisitions. Assist with grant applications.
10. **Mount Olive:** The Open Space Committee shall make an initial determination of which parcels of land should be acquired and the method of acquisition.
11. **Parsippany-Troy Hills:** The Open Space Committee makes an initial determination of which parcels of land should be acquired in fee and/or those parcels of land from which the Township should acquire development rights.
12. **Pequannock:** It is an advisory committee to the Township Council.
13. **Roxbury:** Plan for open space acquisition and development
14. **Washington:** **A.** The Open Space, Recreation and Farmland Preservation Committee shall from time to time submit written recommendations to the Township Committee as to: 1) Which parcels of land should be acquired for recreation and conservation purposes and whether such parcels should be acquired in fee or only by acquisition of development rights. 2) Which of the lands acquired for those purposes should be developed and/or maintained. 3) Which farmland should be acquired for farmland preservation purposes and whether such farmland should be acquired in fee or only by acquisition of development rights. **B.** The Open Space, Recreation and Farmland Preservation Committee shall submit to the Township Committee a prioritized list of properties: 1) Which it recommends that the Township acquire; and/or 2) From which it recommends that development rights should be acquired; and/or 3) Which the Township has acquired and which the Committee recommends be developed and/or maintained for recreation and conservation purposes. **C.** After selection of the properties to be acquired, developed, maintained or preserved referred to in Subsections A and B above, the Township may proceed to acquire by gift, purchase or by eminent domain proceedings, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 20:3-1 et seq., or to develop, maintain or preserve the identified parcels within the financial constraints established by the Township Committee.



6. Does your municipality have a designated Environmental Commission or Environmental Committee? If yes, what are its primary functions?

Of the 26 municipalities responding to this question, 19 municipalities reported having an Environmental Commission or Environmental Committee and seven responded that they did not have such a Commission or Committee. Primary functions as noted include:

1. **Chatham Township:** The Environmental Commission shall have power to conduct research into the use and possible use of the open land areas of the Township and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes, and may advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which in its judgment it deems necessary for its purposes. It shall keep an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas, and may from time to time recommend to the Township Planning Board plans and programs for inclusion in a Municipal Master Plan and the development and use of such areas.
2. **Chester Borough:** Stewardship of existing land, working with consultants on an updated ROSI and ERI. The committee also serves as the Environmental Committee.
3. **Denville:** Review Land Use Board Applications.
4. **Florham Park:** To maintain environmental health for specific natural areas in town
5. **Hanover:** To protect the natural resources within the Township and also to assist the Township in determining properties that might be available for open space conservation and preservation.
6. **Long Hill:** The Environmental Commission established herein shall have all of the powers pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 40:56A-2 and N.J.S.A. 40:56A-6, as supplemented and amended.
7. **Madison** (link to website provided <https://www.rosenet.org/396/Environmental-Commission>) Study and make recommendations to the Mayor and Council in areas of conservation and environmental protection, which shall include but not be limited to pollution control of all types, waste disposal, including sewage, garbage and solid waste, open space preservation, with emphasis on outdoor recreation needs, aesthetic flora and fauna preservation and beautification; and water resources. Plan local conservation programs and inform the public about those programs. Prepare, print and distribute informational materials, such as books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which in its judgment it deems necessary for its purposes, within the limits of funds appropriated to the Commission. Keep an index of all open areas, publicly and privately owned, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas. Recommend, from time to time, to the Planning Board, plans, and programs for inclusion in the Master Plan of the Borough of Madison for development and use of such areas. Operate conservation programs on lands donated or purchased for conservation purposes by the Borough of Madison. Do such other acts and things as are



reasonably related to and assigned to carry out the purposes and objectives of the Commission.

8. **Mendham Borough:** Mendham Borough has a joint Open Space and Environmental Commission. As such, its primary functions are the same, i.e. Maintain and protection natural resources, review sites and recommend which lands and historic properties should be acquired. Assist and advise on the Borough Urban Forestry and Tree City USA programs.
9. **Montville:** The Environmental Commission conducts reviews on the use and possible use of the open land areas of the Township of Montville and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes. The Commission may advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets relating to its function. It maintains an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas. From time to time, it recommends to the Montville Township Planning Board or the Township Committee, plans and programs for inclusion in the Township of Montville Master Plan and the development and use of such areas. The Commission also studies and makes recommendations concerning open space preservation, water resources management, air pollution control, solid waste management, noise control, soil and landscape protection, environmental appearance, marine resources and protection of flora and fauna. The Environmental Commission is also involved in the development review process and may submit a report to the Planning Board. A report from the Environmental Commission is required wherever an application includes an environmental impact statement.
10. **Morris Township:** Review Land Use Applications. Promote Green Energy, promote recycling, promote energy aggregation.
11. **Morristown:** The Environmental Commission was established for the protection, development or use of natural resources, including water resources, located within the territorial limits of the Town of Morristown. The Commission has power to conduct research into the use and possible use of the open land areas of the Town and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes and may advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which in its judgment it deems necessary for its purposes. It keeps an index of all open areas publicly or privately owned, including open marshland, swamps, and other wetlands, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas and may from time to time recommend to the Planning Board plans and programs for inclusion in the Master Plan and the development and use of such areas.
12. **Mount Olive:** The Commission is established for the protection, development or use of natural resources, including water resources, located within the territorial limits of the Township of Mount Olive. The Commission shall have the power to conduct research into the use and possible use of the open areas of the Township and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes and may advertise, prepare, print and



distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which, in its judgment, it deems necessary for its purposes.

13. **Parsippany-Troy Hills:** To represent the people of the Township in matters that relate to the protection of our land, water, air and energy. Our Committee is dedicated to maintaining a healthy and aesthetic environment for the residents and visitors of Parsippany-Troy Hills for current and future generations.
14. **Pequannock:** The Township has an Environmental Commission, which focuses on its salutatory responsibilities. Priorities for the Commission are education and community outreach.
15. **Randolph:** The committee is empowered to conduct research relating to the protection, development and use of open space and natural resources within the township and the protection, enhancement and preservation of township sites and structures with historical, architectural or cultural significance. The committee may also make recommendations to the township council, planning board and other township agencies regarding the same.
16. **Rockaway Borough:** Section 169-12 -Citizens Advisory Committee; Environmental Commission.
A) After the appointment of a Land Use Board, the Mayor may appoint one or more persons as a citizens' advisory committee to assist or collaborate with the Land Use Board in its duties, but such person or persons shall have no power to vote or take other action required of the Board. Such person or persons shall serve at the pleasure of the Mayor. B) Whenever the Environmental Commission has prepared and submitted to the Land Use Board an index of the natural resources of the municipality, the Land Use Board shall make available to the Environmental Commission an informational copy of every application for development submitted to either board. Failure of the Land Use Board to make such informational copy available to the Environmental Commission shall not invalidate any hearing or proceeding.
17. **Rockaway Township:** To perform assigned research and to serve in an advisory capacity regarding assignment requests.
18. **Roxbury:** Review and advise with respect to existing and future environmental issues facing the Township.
19. **Washington:** Section 3-94 Powers and duties -The Environmental Commission shall have the power to conduct research into the use and possible use of the open land areas of the Township and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes. It may advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which, in its judgment, is necessary for its purposes. It shall keep an index of all open space areas, publicly- or privately-owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas, and may from time to time recommend to the Planning Board plans and programs for inclusion in a Township Master Plan and the development and use for such areas.



7. Does your municipality have a Trails Committee or Trails Advisory Committee? If yes, what are its primary functions?

Of the 26 municipalities responding to this question, eight reported having a Trails Committee or Trails Advisory Committee and 18 reported not having such a committee. Primary functions as reported by municipalities with a Trails Committee include:

1. **Chester Borough:** Joint Committee with Chester Township as most of the trail (except for a portion of Patriots Path) are in the Township.
2. **Denville:** Combined with Open Space Committee. Review and prioritize Open Space acquisition opportunities. Combined with local Trails committee, so this committee is also involved in trail development projects.
3. **Jefferson:** Reviewing the potential for more trails and looking at the ecotourism ability to bring people to Jefferson.
4. **Madison:** See response for Environmental Commission
5. **Mount Olive:** Maintain existing trails.
6. **Randolph:** The committee is empowered to do the following: oversees the implementation of the recommended actions included in the adopted trails master plan for the town assists with the design and development of trails makes recommendations on the maintenance and upkeep of township trails makes policy recommendations to the township council on trail related matters educates the public and promotes the township trail system addresses other trail related issues and projects and makes recommendations as assigned by the township council or township manager reviews and revises the trails master plan as deemed necessary.
7. **Roxbury:** Development and maintenance of trails.
8. **Washington:** To identify and prioritize the need for various types of trails (paved/natural, walking/biking/equestrian, etc.) and open space parcels that could provide locations for such amenities. The Committee will seek to identify locations: 1) with existing amenities that need improved access, 2) which can be connected to others with existing trail or other recreation amenities and 3) are most appropriate for the types of trails identified as a high priority. The Committee will also liaise with the Morris County Park Commission and trail organizations in neighboring municipalities in order to identify opportunities for collaborative trail development and potential development resources.



Montville Community Park -Source: Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation

8. What are the purposes of acquiring open space in your municipality? – check all that apply.

Twenty-four of the 27 municipalities responding identified specific purposes for acquiring open space based on the selections provided. Municipalities selected all that they felt applied. Results are as follows:

- **Recreational fields and lands:** 23
 - *Provide for Active Recreation* 18
 - *Provide for Passive Recreation* 20
 - *Provide for trails* 22
- **Environmental resource protection/conservation** 22
- **Buffer existing parkland** 12
- **Preserving historic or cultural sites** 13
- **Water supply / water quality protection** 12
- **Provide for Flood Control** 14
- **Maintain scenic vistas** 15
- **Manage Development** 11
- **Maintain/Improve local quality of life** 19
- **Preserve property values** 12
- **Promote tourism** 5
- **Reduce local service costs** 6
- **Other / Specify** 0



9. Does your municipality believe the preservation of local or county open space has improved property values in your community and the county?

Twenty-seven municipalities responded to this question. Fifteen answered yes and twelve answered no.

10. Does your municipality believe the preservation of local or county open space provide an economic benefit to your community?

Twenty-seven municipalities responded to this question. Sixteen answered yes and eleven answered no.

11. Has the community established an acreage goal or target needed to meet its local open space and recreation goals: If so, what is that total acreage needed? How many additional acres are still needed for local acquisition to achieve this goal/target?

Of the 25 responses to this question, only one community indicated having established an acreage target and 24 indicated they have not established an acreage target.

12. Does your community have its own open space trust fund? If Yes, for what purposes may the open space trust fund be used (check all that apply).

Of the 25 responses to this question, 19 reported have an open space trust fund and 6 indicated they have not established such a fund.

Purposes for which the trust fund may be used were identified as follows:

Acquisition	19
Park/facility improvements	18
Maintenance	16
Property Stewardship²¹⁵	9
Salaries benefits	3
Bonds / debt service	0
Other: (please identify)	0



²¹⁵ “An activity, which is beyond routine operations and maintenance, undertaken by the State, a local government or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization to repair or restore lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes for the purpose of enhancing or protecting those lands for recreation and conservation purposes.



13. If you have county parkland in your community does it positively impact your residents?

Of the 23 municipalities that responded to this question, nineteen municipalities found that having county parkland in their community positively impacted their residents; four did not.

14. Is there land in your community that would be well-suited for a county, state or national park? If so, please provide the Block and Lot(s) of the subject property(s) and any specific related to the property suitability for use as county, state or national parkland.

Of the twenty-six respondents to this question, six responded affirmatively and twenty did not. Information related to specific properties, when given is included in the individual responses.

The Morris County Preservation Trust Open Space Preservation Program provides funding to municipalities and eligible non-profit land conservancies to acquire lands with the goals of preserving land or water areas for recreation or conservation purposes including but not limited to:

- a) Parkland, natural areas, greenways*
- b) The protection of ecologically sensitive areas including freshwater wetlands, steep slopes and stream corridors*
- c) The preservation of lands containing exceptional flora or fauna*
- d) The preservation of areas of scenic, historic, and cultural value*
- e) Passive and active outdoor recreation opportunities*
- f) The protection of critical water supplies such as areas surrounding municipal/county wells, aquifer recharge protection or watershed areas, and floodplains.*

The Preservation Trust also provides funding for local historic preservation, trails development and flood mitigation.

15. Has your community participated in the Morris County Preservation Trust Open Space Program?

Of the 25 municipalities responding, twenty-three reported participation in the Morris County Preservation Trust Open Space Program. Two indicated that they are not participating.

16. How can the Morris County Preservation Trust Fund be modified to better support municipal open space goals in your community? The following comments were provided:

1. **Butler:** Butler does not have open space available for preservation so programs to help us maintain what little open space we have and to preserve historic structures is more beneficial to Butler.
2. **Chatham Township:** Chatham Township is truly grateful for its partnership with the Morris County Preservation Trust Program, which has served residents extremely well over the years. Most importantly, we hope the program remains strong and its staffing and standards remain high. One area for enhancement might be for the Trust to have a



way to support certain Morris County Park Commission goals for enhancing its lands in a way that services local residents. For instance, when Giralda Farms was preserved in 2014, the Commissioner and members of the Township Open Space Committee discussed the ardent wish for a short additional trail-spur to connect the Giralda Farms trail loop with Treadwell Avenue. Another discussion expressed hope for a connection between the County's Loantaka Trail with the Township's Green Village Conservation Area. It may be that Park Commission funds and staff time have been significant limiting factors. It's possible that the Preservation Trust Program could help us collectively realize the fuller potential of our Parklands. Another area for enhancement might be for Preservation Trust Program staff to proactively visit municipal Open Space Committees to brainstorm ideas to improve cooperation between them.

3. **Chester Borough:** With only 1.6 total square miles, we really have no large parcels still available for preservation, perhaps a few acres here and there that are contiguous to existing open space.
4. **Denville:** Utilization of Some of the Trust Fund for Active Recreational Development in addition to trails. In Passaic Co. 25% of the county trust fund is dedicated to active recreational development (playgrounds, fields, etc.)
5. **Madison:** Continued assistance.
6. **Mendham Borough:** The program has worked well for the Borough in the past. Funding for small projects would be helpful.
7. **Montville:** Expand Trust Program to allow municipalities to improve and expand existing recreation facilities and parks.
8. **Morris Township:** Do not penalize us financially because we maintain a Open Space Trust Fund and are fiscally responsible in management of the Open Space Trust Fund.
9. **Mount Olive:** Allow money to be used for capital improvements in recreational facilities similar to the Bergen County Open Space Trust.
10. **Netcong:** There is a great need to fund upgrades and improvements to existing recreational facilities. However, because the Borough does not have an open space tax/trust fund, it cannot be the recipient of Trust grants. This is unfair. Borough residents pay into the county Preservation Trust Fund. The Borough is completely built out and has no need for an "open space" trust fund or tax.
11. **Pequannock:** The program has worked well.
12. **Rockaway Borough:** Regular grants and notifications when such grants are made available.
13. **Roxbury:** (1) Provide grant funds for open space stewardship (2) Award of multi-year project grants to ensure project completion.



17. Please provide any additional information or comments you may have with respect to open space in Morris County.

1. **Chatham Township:** Chatham Township is thankful for its partnership with the Morris County Preservation Trust Program. We want to maintain a very open dialogue in discussing our shared goals and priorities.
2. **Chester Borough:** With all of the development happening due to COAH lawsuit settlements, it's important for the county to continue to preserve open space and work with state departments and agencies such as the NJ Highlands to keep the county from being over developed.
3. **Madison:** Diversify uses for funding as pure acquisition becomes more limited.
4. **Mendham Borough:** The Borough is very interested in preserving open space, developing trails and improving existing open space. Any assistance in this regard is helpful. Thank you
5. **Morris Township:** Program is run very well. Morris Township enjoys the benefit of several County parks and open space lands.
6. **Netcong:** (Refer to comment on question 17 "How Preservation Trust Program Can be Modified")
7. **Randolph:** County should work with the township to develop trails within County parks as part of the township network. The township cannot receive a County grant to develop trails in the County parks.
8. **Rockaway Borough:** Rockaway Borough is very flood prone.
9. **Rockaway Township:** The Township has a strong desire to better link its parks to one another, as well as to other nearby communities.
10. **Roxbury:** The County should be more active in completing the West Morris Greenway.



Municipal Request for Open Space Inventory Update

On January 13, 2023, all Morris County municipalities were sent a spreadsheet of preserved open space as identified in the County inventory of open space parcels. The spreadsheets included information for open space parcels located in the municipality²¹⁶, i.e., name, alternate name, owner, manager, block, lot, preservation status, tenure (e.g., fee simple, easement, lease agreement), primary use and access. Municipalities were requested to review and confirm the information provided or identify any needed corrections. The spreadsheet included a separate tab in which to add any open space parcels not included in the inventory submitted by the County. A review of each municipal master plan, open space and recreation plan element was conducted to update the list before sending to each municipality. Instructions were provided related to the inventory update request via a **Municipal Open Space Update Appendix**.

Municipalities submitted primary responses between January 13 and April 18, 2023. A response was received from all 39 municipalities. County staff followed up on responses where clarification was needed. The County database of open space parcels was subsequently updated to reflect the data received from the municipalities. The County database was subsequently updated to include additional data available via NJDEP Open Space databases.

²¹⁶ Parcels identified as owned by the Morris County Park Commission / County of Morris were not included in these spreadsheets.



MORRIS COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

P.O. Box 900 Morristown, NJ 07963-0900

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EMAIL: jbarilla@co.morris.nj.us

TO: Morris County Municipal Administrators

FROM: Virginia Michelin, Assistant Planning Director

Date: January 13, 2023

The Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation is updating its inventory of public open space in Morris County in preparation for development of a new Morris County Open Space Element of the Morris County Master Plan. We hope to provide as accurate an inventory of existing open space as possible and seek your assistance in collecting local data. We are asking all municipalities to provide an updated inventory of open space parcels within their municipality for use in developing a new Morris County Open Space Element. An Excel spreadsheet with identified open space parcels in your community (**excluding county owned open space**) is attached for your review. Please review and make any necessary changes. Please highlight these changes in yellow. In addition, the spreadsheet includes a second tab in which open space parcels not included in our existing data should be recorded. An associated map identifying known open space parcels (excluding county owned open space) is included for your reference.

The primary task is confirmation and completion of the spreadsheets. Marked up municipal maps may also be provided where they help clarify the data included on the spreadsheets. See the document "Open Space Update Appendix" for instruction on completion of the spreadsheets. A GIS file including all open space parcels in your municipality will be available upon request after our inventory process is completed.

Your assistance in this matter is very important and your help is greatly appreciated. A hard copy of this information, including the maps and appendix is also being sent to you via regular mail. We are asking that all respondents send their completed spreadsheets to asoriano@co.morris.nj.us by **March 13, 2023**.

If you have any questions, please contact Anthony Soriano at the Morris County Office of Planning and Preservation at asoriano@co.morris.nj.us.

Thank you

Enclosures/Attachments (3)

cc: Mayor (via email w/attachments)

Planning Board Secretary (via email w/attachments)



Municipal Open Space Update Appendix

The Excel spreadsheet includes two tabs. Tab1 is the Preserved Open Space Report, generated from our existing files, excluding County of Morris open space. Please review Tab 1 and correct where applicable, highlighting any areas changed in yellow. Tab 2 is labeled Preserved Open Space Update and should be used to identify any new/additional open space parcels not included on Tab 1. Highlighting is not necessary in Tab 2. Do not include County of Morris open space in either Tab.

Column headers for both spreadsheets are identified as follows. Please identify all applicable, if known. Cells left blank will be considered unknown or not applicable. Space is provided on each spreadsheet for the identification of the respondent, which is necessary for authentication and the potential need for additional clarification/contact.

Guidance concerning interpretation of selections is provided where applicable below.

- 1. Name**
- 2. Alternate Name(s)**
- 3. Owned By** - *If owned by multiple owners, please include all*
- 4. Managed By** - *If managed by multiple entities, please include all*
- 5. Block**
- 6. Lot**
- 7. Permanently Preserved** - *Select cell, use drop-down menu to select Yes or No*

For the purposes of this update, permanently preserved open space is defined as lands permanently devoted to open space, recreation and/or conservation purposes, the protection of which can only be rescinded by legal or legislative action. These include land preserved by:

- a) Federal or State Constitutional provision or statute,
- b) Deed restriction/easement or other legal instrument that limited development for open space and/or conservation purposes
- c) Listed on a county or municipal Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) filed with the NJDEP Green Acres Program
- d) Lands purchased with dedicated preservation trust dollars for open space and/or conservation, e.g., Land and Water Conservation Fund, Green Acres Program, Morris County Preservation Trust, or municipal preservation trust program.
- e) Encumbrances in perpetuity resulting as a condition in a Will or Estate, funding contract or grant agreement between a landowner and the federal, state, county or local government, private foundation, or nonprofit conservation entity.



- f) Lands preserved via lease or use agreement for recreation and conservation purposes included within a municipal ROSI and/or held for recreation and conservation purposes by the local governing body through lease, easement, use agreement or other agreement to which the local governing body is a grantee.

8. Acres Preserved - *Complete only for partial preservation*

- a) Preserved acreage should only be provided for parcels where the acres preserved are less than the entirety of the identified parcel. For partially preserved properties, provide the recreation/conservation acreage only. Mapping of partially preserved parcels will require submission of a metes and bounds survey or tax map with the recreation/conservation area shown to scale or GIS file.
- b) The acreage of fully preserved parcels will be determined based on County GIS parcel data.

9. Tenure - *Select cell and use the drop-down menu to select one of the following:*

- a) Fee simple: complete and total ownership of the land
- b) Conservation easement: A legal agreement between the landowner and a government entity, qualified land trust or conservation organization with the purpose of permanently protecting natural resources. An interest in land less than fee simple stated in the form of a right, restriction, easement, covenant, or condition, in any deed, will, or other instrument, other than a lease, executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land. Trail easements should be included within this category.
- c) Lease or use agreement: A legal contract with a landowner for use of the land for recreation and/or conservation purposes.

10. Primary Use - *Select cell and use the drop-down menu to select one of the following:*

- a) Park – Includes federal, state, county, and municipal lands with the primary purpose of providing public recreation. Parks may include active and/or passive recreation facilities and may also include significant cultural, historic and/or natural resources and natural areas.
- b) Conservation –These lands have the primary purpose of protecting natural/environmental resources, preventing environmental degradation and/or mitigating negative environmental impacts that may result from land disturbance or development. Examples include wildlife protection/management areas (e.g., Great Swamp), public water supply/protection (e.g., watershed/wellfields/reservoirs), wetland/flood mitigation areas, conservation nonprofit lands, and other areas



providing natural/environmental resource protection. They may or may not be open to the public.

- c) Regional Trails – Regional trails are regionally significant shared-use trails used for biking, hiking running and other non-motorized uses which link preserved lands, municipalities, counties and sometimes, states. Patriots Path and the Columbia Trail are examples.

Trails are often, but not always included within a Greenway, i.e., corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and passive recreation purposes, often following natural land or water features. Greenways and trails are often interchangeable. For this inventory, the primary purpose of greenway parcels without trails should be identified as “Conservation.” Where the primary purpose of the parcel is to provide a non-motorized transportation connection, the primary purpose of the parcel is “Regional Trail.”

- d) Undesignated
- e) Other

11. Access - *Select cell and use the drop-down menu to select one of the following:*

- a) Public – lands where the public can access all or a portion of the property on some level
- b) Restricted – authorized access only
- c) None
- d) Unknown



Notes:

Public School Property – While some municipalities identify public school property within its recreation and open space inventory, this acreage should only be included in this survey when it is included in a municipality’s ROSI or where such area is held for recreation and/or conservation purposes by the local government via lease, easement use agreement or other agreement to which the Local Government Unit is a grantee. Where a school parcel is partially held for recreation/conservation as per the above standard, report only the acreage restricted for recreation/conservation purposes. Mapping of partially preserved parcels will require submission of a metes and bounds survey or tax map with the recreation/conservation area shown to scale or GIS file.

Not included in this inventory: While contributing to open space character and recreation opportunities, certain properties sometimes included in municipal assessments of open space should not be included in this inventory. Preserved farms and private commercial recreation facilities (private golf courses, tennis centers, bowling alleys), lands held by homeowners’ associations are not included in this inventory.



Open Space Update Completion Dates

Municipality	Date Completed
Boonton	2/28/2023
Boonton Twp.	3/15/2023
Butler	2/9/2023
Chatham Boro.	3/13/2023
Chatham Twp.	3/21/2023
Chester Boro.	3/11/2023
Chester Twp.	3/9/2023
Denville	1/17/2023
Dover	3/9/2023
East Hanover	2/15/2023
Florham Park	1/20/2023
Hanover	4/6/2023
Harding	2/17/2023
Jefferson	3/3/2023
Kinnelon	3/13/2023
Lincoln Park	3/13/2023
Long Hill	3/16/2023
Madison	1/23/2023
Mendham Boro.	1/19/2023
Mendham Twp.	3/10/2023
Mine Hill	3/24/2023
Montville	3/17/2023
Morris Twp.	3/10/2023
Morris Plains	4/18/2023
Morristown	3/13/2023
Mountain Lakes	3/13/2023
Mount Arlington	2/17/2023
Mount Olive	3/27/2023
Netcong	3/15/2023
Parsippany	3/29/2023
Pequannock	3/12/2023
Randolph	1/27/2023
Riverdale	3/30/2023
Rockaway Boro.	1/23/2023
Rockaway Twp.	2/28/2023
Roxbury	3/17/2023
Victory Gardens	1/18/2023
Washington	4/6/2023
Wharton	3/15/2023