

Open Space and Recreation Plan

Township of Hopewell
Mercer County, New Jersey
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Executive Summary

Hopewell Township is a 58.91 square mile municipality in Mercer County, New Jersey which contains a rich ecological, historic, cultural, and scenic diversity that gives rise to the rural character and sense of place cherished by residents and admired by visitors. The Township is flanked by rich farmlands, the Sourland Mountains to the north, and the federally designated Wild and Scenic Delaware River to the west. The cultural landscape is represented by historic settlement areas and land use patterns that reflect this unique mix of resources. The Township's understanding of these valuable features has resulted in unified planning and management regulations to preserve environmentally sensitive lands.

Hopewell, like much of New Jersey, is faced with increasing development pressures that could potentially impact the natural resources of the Township. Limited groundwater, critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, high quality surface waters, and a host of other environmental indicators require preservation and conservation to maintain these features for future generations. To this end, the Township's goal of land management is to conserve resources, open lands, and farmland.

The preservation and conservation of natural resources is furthered by the acquisition, use and maintenance of open space and recreation areas in the Township. The purchase of open space areas that expand existing contiguous preserved land and create linkages of open space and recreation facilities can provide an additional safeguard to the Township's resources while helping to guide development to appropriate and suitable areas.

The Township is fortunate to contain a variety of both active recreation facilities and passive open space areas that are owned and managed by a variety of State, County, local and non-profit organizations. The combination of these lands allows residents to enjoy a large assortment of recreational opportunities from hiking, fishing and bird watching to organized athletic leagues, skate parks and educational activities.

The goal of the Open Space and Recreation Plan is to identify the current inventory of active and passive recreational areas, identify the needs of the Township for these lands, highlight natural resources in need of preservation, and identify an action plan to acquire, manage and use open space and recreation facilities.

The Township has actively participated in the preservation of open space, increasing areas for active recreation, and protecting natural resources since the 2004 Open Space and Recreation plan was adopted. As outlined below, the Township has been able to add over 4,000 acres for open space, recreation and conservation uses, has increased active recreational facilities and expanded on the greenbelt system surrounding Hopewell Borough.

- Total Open Space and Recreation Areas, including conservation easements and preserved farms, has increased from 10,644 acres in 2004 to 16,400 acres in 2021.
- In 2004 lands dedicated to recreation open space and conservation totaled 28% of the Township. In 2021, that percentage has increased to 43%.

- Athletic fields have been added to Back Timberlane providing additional active recreation opportunities.
- New athletic fields were built at Twin Pines in cooperation with Lawrence Township.
- Land preserves have been established at Mount Rose, Saint Michaels and Woosamonsa Ridge greatly increasing open space areas and passive recreation opportunities.
- The greenbelt around Hopewell Borough has been expanded through open space purchases and new conservation easements.

The above listed efforts demonstrated that through careful planning and enlightened use of lands, the Township can retain its bucolic character and natural resources while providing all Township residents with a variety of recreational opportunities.

Goals

The purpose of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is to provide guidance for current and future acquisition, preservation and management of open space and recreation areas in Hopewell Township. The following goals, taken from the Township's Master Plan and amplified in the development of this OSRP, are designed to offer guiding principles when considering the acquisition and use of open space and recreation areas in the Township. These goals, like the rest of the Plan, are to be viewed as an organic document that has the ability to be flexible to the future changes and needs of the Township.

- To promote the provision of appropriate and balanced public open space and recreational facilities, with priority to serve the greatest population, through public action and the Planning Board's development review process.
- To prepare and maintain recreation and open space master plans to establish and enhance recreational lands and public open space; to establish linkages of public spaces through the use of greenways, greenbelts, waterways, paths and bikeways; and, to establish as the highest priority for public acquisition, areas of critical recreational, scenic or environmental value.
- To encourage the public acquisition of areas of exceptional recreational or scenic value, or environmental sensitivity, at all levels of government, with priority given to acquisition and development of land to meet current and future recreation needs, as well as acquisition of land to protect water supply and State endangered species.
- To continue the Township's commitment to work with the State, County, neighboring municipalities, the Hopewell Valley Regional School District and interested groups and citizens to establish and promote recreational opportunities through regional partnerships, for both active and passive recreation and for people of all ages.
- To promote cultural activities that provide recreational opportunities for a broad spectrum of residents and visitors.

- To assess and provide opportunities for active and passive recreation to meet the needs of all citizens.
- To devise appropriate strategies for the public and private ownership and maintenance of open space and recreation lands.
- To provide tax benefits for private owners who permit public use through participation in the State's open lands program.

Inventory

The Township contains multiple municipal, County, State- and privately-owned open space and recreational areas. These facilities offer a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities from nature walks and hiking to active sport fields and playgrounds. Altogether, recreational, and open space areas total 13,140.18-acres, or 35% of the Township's total land area. When preserved farmland is added to preserved areas this total increases to 16,400 acres or 43% of the Township's total area. The attached map entitled, "[Figure 1: Open Space and Recreation System Map](#)" depicts the location of these various parcels. The following is a brief description of ownership, size and type of open space and recreation parcels in the Township.

Township-Owned Lands

Hopewell Township owns a variety of recreational and open space areas that provide an assortment of passive and active recreational opportunities for Township residents. The following section provides a summary of these lands.

Table 1: Township-Owned Open Space and Recreation Lands by Block and Lot

Block	Lot	Description	Acres
15	2.98	Hopewell-Rocky Hill Road – Open Space	43.4
15	14.01	St. Michael's – Open Space	33.68
22	3	Stony Brook Road – Open Space	2.33
22	18	Stony Brook Road – Open Space	3.89
22	17	Stony Brook Road – Open Space	6.26
28	3.01 & 11	Harbourton-Rocktown Road – Open Space	60.3
29	18.01	Regan Harbourton-Woodville Road– Open Space	12
29	18.02	Regan Harbourton-Woodville Road - OpenSpace	27.44
31	64	Route 31 – Open Space	2.09
31	3	Route 31 – Open Space	4
32	6.09	Route 31 – Open Space	10.33
37	19	Farmland (Else)	67.18
39	14.01, 26 & 32	Carter Road/Mt. Rose – Open Space	151.37
50	4	Pennington-Harbourton Road - Open Space	31.17
58	69	Riparian Rights	0.08
75	1.01	Twin Pines Recreation Facility	50.04
78.31	63.01	Independence Park	14.89
78.42	26	Independence Park	7.05
85	8	Hutcheson/Zaitz – Open Space	27.78
88	5.021	Weidel – Open Space	52.41
88	33.10	Heritage Trail	2.73
92	5	Municipal Athletic Complex	54.4
92	6	Old School House	0.48
92	9	Woolsey Park	167.3
92	46 & 49	Municipal Athletic Complex	10
92	2.012	Else Pennington-Titusville Road– Open Space	5.29
39	26, 32	Martin, Bayberry Road– Open Space	86.3
93	3.03	CF Hopewell – Open Space Greenbelt	174.02
TOTAL			1,108.21

Township-owned Facilities

The vast majority of Township-owned recreation and open space land is undeveloped open space. There are several parcels which contain active recreation amenities including the following:

Hopewell Township Municipal Athletic Complex

The Hopewell Township Municipal Athletic Complex offers a variety of active recreation facilities and is the main park for organized sport activities. It is located behind the Township Municipal Building. The site contains:

- 4 baseball fields (3 lighted)
- 1 baseball/softball field (lighted)
- 1 football/multi-purpose field (lighted)
- 1 playground
- Skate Park
- Restrooms (limited access)
- Snack bar
- Storage buildings

Independence Park

Independence Park is located on Stephenson Road. This park is fully developed and contains a variety of active recreation facilities including:

- 2 baseball/softball fields
- 2 multi-purpose fields
- 2 outdoor basketball courts
- 4 tennis courts
- Playground
- Walking/jogging trail
- Restrooms (limited access)/Pavilion
- Storage buildings

Twin Pines Recreation Area

The purchase of Twin Pines Airport was a joint proposal with Hopewell Township, Lawrence Township, Hopewell Borough and Pennington Borough proposing to develop multi-purpose athletic fields on the 51-acre property on the Lawrence-Hopewell border. The acquisition of the property occurred in 2007 following the award of the Mercer at Play Grant, Municipal Assistant grants by Mercer County and additional funds from Hopewell and Lawrence Townships.

There is a 138,000 sq. ft. synthetic turf field at this site that is operated and maintained by the Hopewell Township Parks & Recreation Department. The field is lighted for night use. This portion of the site is accessed by Pennington-Lawrenceville Road and contains a parking lot. The

turf field is available to youth and adult sport organizations by permit only. The public has access to the field when not used by an approved organization for a permitted use.

There are also three soccer/multi-purpose fields located at this site. These fields are operated and maintained by the Lawrence Township Recreation Department. A parking lot for vehicles for this section of the site is accessed by Federal City Road.

The walking/jogging trail at Twin Pines connects to the trail in Independence Park by crossing over Pennington-Lawrenceville Road. It also connects to the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail by crossing over Federal City Road.

Woolsey Park

Woolsey Park is 167 acres of mostly undeveloped land located near the Municipal Athletic Complex. The site offers the opportunity for a wide variety of both passive and active recreation and community activities. It is the site of the Hopewell Valley Veterans Memorial, the September 11th and Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial, and the Woolsey Brook hiking trail. Future improvements to the park will include a bandshell, parking, landscaping, and may include amenities such as restrooms and an arboretum. This site abuts the Township municipal complex and public works facilities.

Quarry Field

Quarry Field is leased to the Hopewell Valley Baseball and Softball Association (HVBSA) by the Trap Rock Corporation and is located on the Trap Rock Quarry property. The site contains:

- 1 softball field (lighted)
- Restrooms (limited access)

Picnic area

Table 2: Total Number of Facilities located on Township-Owned Land by Type

Facility Type	Number of Fields/Facilities
Baseball/Softball Fields	7
Multi-Purpose Fields	2
Football Field	1
Football Practice Field	1
Tennis Courts	4
Outdoor Basketball Courts	2
Playgrounds	2
Walking/Jogging Trails	2
Synthetic Turf Field with Lights	1
Skate Park	1

Board of Education-Owned Lands

The Board of Education also provides a variety of recreational opportunities for Township residents. They are as follows:

Table 3: Board of Education Sites in Hopewell Township by Block and Lot

Block	Lot	Description	Acres
18	9	Hopewell Elementary School	3.52
18	64	Hopewell Elementary School	14.28
38	72	Vacant – across Scotch Road from Timberlane Middle School	2.76
63	27	Timberlane Middle School	2.76
63	4	Timberlane Fields	62.44
63.01	1	Hopewell Valley Central High School	38.82
78.31	62	Stony Brook Elementary School	12.74
95	31	Bear Tavern Elementary School	27.32
TOTAL			204.96

Board of Education-owned Facilities

Central High School and Timberlane Middle School Complex

These two schools combined contain the following facilities:

- 1 turf multi-purpose field / stadium with lights (High School)
- 2 grass practice fields (High School)
- 2 large gymnasiums (High School)
- 1 small gymnasium (High School)
- 1 dance studio (High School)
- Weight/fitness room (not for public use) (High School)
- Auditorium (High School)
- 4 grass multi-purpose fields (Back Timberlane)
- 1 baseball field (Back Timberlane)
- 2 softball fields (Back Timberlane and High School)
- 1 small baseball field (Middle School)
- 2 multi-purpose/practice fields (Back Timberlane)
- 1 outdoor basketball court (Middle School)
- 6 tennis courts (Middle School)
- Running track / grass football field (Middle School)
- Cross-Country course (Back Timberlane)
- 1 gymnasium (Middle School)
- 2 small gymnasiums (Middle School)

- 1 weight/fitness center (Middle School)
- 2 fitness trails / rope course (Middle School and High School)

Bear Tavern Elementary School

The Bear Tavern Elementary School complex offers some recreational opportunities such as:

- 4 multi-purpose fields
- 2 playgrounds
- 1 outdoor basketball court and black top
- 1 small gymnasium

Stony Brook Elementary School

This school has few available recreational facilities. Independence Park, which is adjacent to the school, largely provides the outdoor recreational facilities for the school. The school property contains the following:

- 2 playgrounds / black top
- 1 small gymnasium

Toll Gate Elementary (located in Pennington Borough)

The Toll Gate Elementary School sits on 11 acres in Pennington Borough and has the following facilities:

- 1 softball/ baseball practice field
- 1 multipurpose / soccer field
- 1 playground
- 1 outdoor basketball court / black top
- 1 small gymnasium

Hopewell Elementary School

The Hopewell Elementary School is located on 29 acres (18 acres in the Township) and contains:

- 3 multi-use fields
- 1 softball / baseball practice field
- 1 outdoor basketball court
- 1 playground
- 1 small gymnasium

Hopewell Valley Regional School District Administrative Building

The Administrative Building is located in Pennington Borough and contains:

- 1 open field used for pee wee soccer and t-ball stations
- 1 small gymnasium

Table 4: Total Number of Facilities located on Board of Education-Owned Land by Type

Facility Type	Number of Fields/Facilities
Baseball/Softball Fields	6
Multipurpose practice Fields	12
Tennis Courts	6
Gymnasiums	10
Outdoor Basketball Courts	4
Playgrounds	5
Running Track	1
Fitness Trails / Ropes	3
Multi-sport game Fields	6
Dance Studio	1
Auditorium	1

County-owned Lands

The Mercer County Parks Department and related entities own 3,810.24 acres of open space, farmland, and recreational areas in the Township. These parks add to the recreational opportunities for Township and County residents. Where the Lot contains a recognizable facility, the facility name is identified under the Description column. The following is an inventory of County-owned lands in the Township:

Table 5: County-Owned Sites by Block and Lot

Block	Lot(s)	Description	Acres
2	9.02, 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37	Undeveloped Featherbed Lane	68
15	14.03	St. Michaels - Aunt Molly Road	45.07
16	18.01	St. Michaels - Aunt Molly Road	53.46
16	4.012 & 4.013	St. Michaels - Aunt Molly Road	38.64
17	1	Hopewell Princeton Road Joint Green Acres/vacant	16.85
18	2.02, 8.02, 13 & 31	Lawyers Lane Joint Green Acres/vacant	100.66
20	11, 32, 77, 78, 85	Trails – Crusher Road/ Moores Mill	136.81
31	7.01	Marshalls Corner Woodsville Road Undeveloped (Woodward tract)	76.6
34	3	Golf Course	2.4
37	6	Golf Course	183.6
37	25.02	Niederer, Titus Mill Road	1.3
44	6, 7, 9,10, 11.02, 12, 17.02	Rosedale Park	497.15
45	1.03	Pennington Rocky Hill Road Undeveloped	78.26
46	5.02	Niederer, Titus Mill- Road	2.1
50	40	Woosamonsa Road Undeveloped	4.71
51	24	Woosamonsa Road Undeveloped	1.43
51	39	Woosamonsa Road Undeveloped	3.63
52	8, 19.01, 32	Pleasant Valley Harbourton Road Undeveloped	156.79
54	5, 6, 7, 8	Howell Living History Farm	63.83
55	1, 2	Howell Living History Farm	84.89
59	13.01, 13.02 & 13.03	Howell Living History Farm	37.13
59	1 & 3 (partial lots)	Valley Road Picnic Area	127.42
59	6.02	Pizzini, Valley Road	8.8
59	2	Baldpate Mountain	18.7
60	4.02, 5, 6, 7.01, 17, 18, 21, 23.01-23.03, 27, 28, 31, 32, 37, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 59	Baldpate Mountain	1,202.88
72	4.01	Mercer Meadows - Riding Arena	239.84
72	72.01	Mercer Meadows - Curlis Lake	8.9
77	1, 8	Mercer Meadows - Northwest Park	319.07
88	5.03	Weidel, Pennington Road	16.51
94	1	North of Mountainview Golf Course	89.79
94.01	3	Farm, Nursery Road	17.22
133	13.01 & 14.04	Fiddlers Creek Preserve	107.8
TOTAL			3,810.24

County-owned Facilities

Some of the County's facilities in the Township include the following:

Mercer Meadows

The Township contains portions of the County's Mercer Meadows Park, including the Rosedale Park District, Equestrian District and Curlis Woods. The overall park contains an equestrian center, historic farmstead, fishing, boating, playgrounds, picnic areas, dog park, multiple trails, natural areas, and restrooms. Mercer Meadows is located off Federal City Road near the junction of Blackwell Road.

Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain

Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain is Hopewell Township's largest contiguous forest, and owing to its size, is home to numerous unique and rare plant and animal species and is an Audubon Important Bird Area. Seven miles of trails wind through the preserve which also provides parking areas for access. Additional areas of interest include a remnant farmstead, historic houses, and a visitor center. The main entrance is found at Fiddlers Creek Road near the intersection of Route 29.

Valley Road Picnic Area

Located in Hopewell Township on Valley Road, ½ mile east of Route 29, the Valley Road Picnic Area is available to groups on a reservation basis.

The area is a 19-acre facility in its natural state comprised of picnic tables scattered under and around the pavilion. The pavilion area can accommodate up to 300 people and is available to reserve seven days a week. The pavilion has two stationary cooking grills and one barbecue pit, as well as a beverage bin, electricity and running water. There is a softball field, volleyball court, basketball court, and children's play equipment. Ample parking, permanent rest rooms and trash/recycle containers are available.

Hopewell Valley Golf Club

The County recently purchased the Hopewell Valley Golf Club which will continue to provide golf, tennis, paddle board and pool facilities to residents. The golf course is located at 114 Pennington-Hopewell Road and will undergo renovations to provide a variety of recreational opportunities to residents.

Mercer County Parks Commission – Moores Station Quarry Park Plan

The Mercer County Parks Commission has approved a plan for the development of the Moores Station Quarry Park. The site is currently owned by the County but is leased by Trap Rock Industries until 2023. At that time, the quarry activities will be decommissioned, and the development of a new park will begin. The County developed the overall park plan with

extensive public visioning and input. The goals of the park plan are to implement a rehabilitation plan to restore the ecosystems and utilize the existing features of the site is to provide a unique recreational experience. At this time the County is conducting ongoing public informational and visioning sessions. The Township will continue to be a partner in the development of the park which will provide expansive recreational opportunities to Township residents and be a recreational destination in the region.

State-Owned Lands

State-owned lands in the Township total 2,582 acres. While many acres are undeveloped open space lands, two significant parks exist in the Township, Washington Crossing State Park, and the Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park. Washington Crossing State Park offers not only active and passive recreational opportunities but also contains resources of historic and cultural significance. The other significant State-owned park is the Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park. The following is a summary of State-owned facilities in the Township:

Table 6: State-Owned Lands by Block and Lot

Block	Lot	Description	Acreage
2	1.02	Hopewell Wertsville Road, Undeveloped	16.80
2	9.01	Featherbed Lane, Undeveloped	37.71
2	10	Highfields	182.43
4	12 & 12.01, 14, 38 & 63.01	Featherbed Lane, Undeveloped	71.42
8	8.031	Dunwald Lane Undeveloped	20.60
18	8.02, 13	Hopewell Princeton Road Undeveloped	16.85
22	11.02	Route 31, Undeveloped	19.11
23	11	Marshall's Corner-Woodsville Road	72.22
29	6 & 7	New Road	143.8
30	4	Harbourton Woodsville Road, DEP and FOHVOS	75.90
30	6.01	Marshalls Corner Woodsville Road, DEP	10.25
30	16	Marshalls Corner Woodsville Road, DEP	28.50
46	53.01	Baldwin Lake	47.05
58	1, 1.01, 2, 2.01, 3, 3.01, 3.02, 3.03, 3.04, 3.05, 4.01, 5, 6, 62	D & R State Park	551.02
60	29.03, 58	Baldpate Mt. Park	149.88
61	2	Pleasant Valley and Bear Tavern Roads (Undeveloped)	60.66
61	6.01	Church Road (Undeveloped)	32.80
62	6	Pennington Titusville Road	55.20
92.03	13	Washington Crossing State Park HQ	9.00
97	3, 4, 5, 6, 12	Washington Crossing State Park	193.47
117	68	Washington Crossing State Park	0.75
121	3-14, 20-22, 24, 26.01, 26.02, 27-29, 34-35, 40-42, 44, 48, 54, 59, 60	Washington Crossing State Park	712.60
134	1, 1.01, 1.02, 1.03	Water Way/Undeveloped	4.42
135	2-5, 74	Water Way/Undeveloped	11.19
136	1, 2, 17	Water Way/Undeveloped	7.02
137	1.01, 3, 4, 7-9	D & R Canal State Park	52.20
TOTAL			2,582.85

State-owned Facilities

Washington Crossing State Park

Originally preserved for its historical significance, the park is also well known for its trails and wildlife habitat. A wide variety of migrating birds use the stream and ravine as a resting place and for nesting. Many bird species winter in the park, creating a perfect location for bird observation year-round.

The park supports an interesting assortment of plants including mixed hardwoods, red cedar forests, plantings of Eastern white pine, Japanese larch, Norway spruce and red pine. A splendid variety of spring and summer wildflowers can be found throughout the park. Among the most notable species of wildlife are White-tailed Deer, fox, raccoon, Great-Horned Owl, Screech Owl, Red-tailed hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk and Eastern Bluebird. The park also is popular for picnicking and, in the winter, for cross-country skiing on existing hiking trails.

- Museum / visitor center
- Johnson Ferry House
- Nelson House
- Swan Historical Foundation Collection of the American Revolution
- Interpretive center
- Picnic tables, picnic shelters, group picnic facilities, group picnic shelters
- Playground
- Fishing
- Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing
- Hiking
- Nature trails
- Horseback riding
- Mountain biking
- Outdoor amphitheater (repairs needed)
- Arboretum
- Pond
- Restrooms (limited access)
- 3 grass soccer fields
- Cross country trail
- Camp sites

The Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park

The Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park is one of central New Jersey's most popular recreational corridors for canoeing, jogging, hiking, bicycling, fishing, and horseback riding. The canal and towpath are part of the National Recreational Trail System. The 70-mile linear park is a valuable wildlife corridor connecting fields, forests, and water habitats.

With its 19th-century bridges, bridgetender houses, past and present locks, cobblestone spillways and hand-built stone-arched culverts, the canal is a tremendous attraction for history lovers. The upper reach of the feeder canal wanders through quaint New Jersey towns along the Delaware River such as Stockton and Lambertville and continues through Titusville and Washington Crossing in the Township. The main canal passes the Port Mercer canal house, through the charming village of Griggstown to Blackwells Mills, ending up in New Brunswick. Canoes can be rented at points from private concessionaires.

Most of the canal system remains intact today and is a reminder of the days when the delivery of freight depended upon a team of mules or steam tugboats. Nearly 36 miles of the main canal and 22 miles of the feeder canal still exist, with many historic structures along the canal.

Facilities & Activities:

- Cook Natural Area (South Brunswick, Middlesex County)
- Six Mile Run site (Franklin Township, Somerset County)
- Trails
- Picnic tables
- Fishing
- Boating/Canoeing
- Cross-country skiing
- Hiking
- Horseback riding
- Mountain biking
- Biking

Semi-Public Recreational Facilities

Non-profit, semi-public organizations have taken an active interest in purchasing property in the Township. In total 2,861.81 acres have been purchased in the Township through the efforts of non-profit organizations. These organizations purchase lands for the purpose of preservation and generally allow public, low impact access to the areas.

Lawrence Hopewell Trail Corporation

The Lawrence-Hopewell Trail Corporation (LHTC), in collaboration with community, government, corporate and nonprofit partners, promotes and guides the construction, maintenance, and promotion of a 22-mile pedestrian/bicycle trail loop connecting Lawrence and Hopewell Townships ([Figure 2](#)). LHTC also actively encourages development of connections to

adjacent areas and regional trail networks to expand the impact of the trail as an enduring amenity for the public.

The LHT is a multi-use trail with many different owners. Some parts are paved with porous asphalt, and others with compacted stone dust. All segments are used by walkers, runners, cyclists, and even cross-country skiers in winter. LHTC does not own any of the trail, rather ownership of the trail includes many private institutions, public property, and private ownership. The trail crosses property owned by major institutions such as BMS, ETS, Lawrenceville School, public property owned by the Mercer County Parks Commission and Lawrence Township, preserved lands owned by non-profit organizations, and in a few cases, property owned by private landowners from whom easements have been obtained.

As of early 2019, all but a few miles of the 22-mile trail loop were completed, and the mission of the LHTC is expanding beyond that loop. The final segments of the original loop are in design and engineering stages, with construction likely to be completed in the near future. The LHTC's attention is now also focused on creating and expanding connections between that loop and local communities and neighborhoods, and on integrating this network into a larger bicycle trail network being developed at the regional scale under the leadership of the Mercer County Planning Division. LHTC's first "community link" from Pennington Borough to the LHT crossing of Pennington-Rocky Hill Road was completed in 2014, through the collaborative efforts of Pennington Borough and Hopewell Township. Possible routes for connecting Hopewell Borough to the main LHT loop are being explored with the cooperation of Hopewell Borough and Township. Mercer County has developed a plan for a bikeway along Route 546 from the Delaware River to the D&R Canal near Route 1, raising the possibility of additional connections between the LHT loop and a larger evolving network of bicycle trails and walking trails.

The Watershed Institute (www.thewatershed.org)

The Watershed is an important partner in the Township's preservation efforts. The Watershed is dedicated to protect and restore natural habitats and preserve the regions water resources. In addition to the preservation efforts, they also host a variety of educational programs for students from kindergarten through high school. The Watershed has been a primary force in the preservation of open space areas in the Township. To date the Watershed has preserved over 600 acres in the Township, which includes the nearly 1,000-acre nature reserve. The Township continues to support, not only a preservation partnership with the Watershed, but also seeks to utilize the Watershed's educational initiatives as the Township places more efforts into the stewardship and maintenance of preserved areas.

D&R Greenway Land Trust (www.drgreenway.org)

The D&R Greenway Land Trust is another strong partner with the Township to preserve and protect open space areas. D&R's mission is to preserve and care for land and inspire a conservation ethic, now and forever. Conservation and stewardship remain at the heart of D&R as they utilize the Johnson Education Center and surrounding campus as a means to provide

outdoor and indoor educational spaces to inspire the conservation ethic in all those who visit. To date, D&R greenway has helped to preserve over 900 acres of open space in the Township.

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) (www.fohvos.org)

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is another important partner in the Township open space preservation efforts. FoHVOS is a non-profit land trust that is dedicated to preserving Hopewell Valley's character through land and natural resource protection and preservation. Through this land trust over 542 acres in the Township have been acquired for natural resource protection and open space preservation.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) (www.njconservation.org)

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation is a private, not-for-profit organization seeking to protect strategic lands, promote strong land use policies and partnerships in the effort to protect natural resources and open space areas. Since 1960, New Jersey Conservation Foundation has protected over 125,000 acres of natural areas and farmland in New Jersey.

Crossroads of the Revolution Project Area

Green Acres, along with the National Parks Service, has been undertaking a variety of projects highlighting the rich historical role New Jersey played in the Revolutionary War. A variety of proposed project areas and trail systems to document significant Revolutionary War sites and events have been instituted. One such project is the Crossroads of the Revolution Project Area, which aims to preserve the landscapes and trail corridor system from Morristown National Historic Park, Washington's Crossing State Park, The Trenton Barracks, Princeton Battlefield State Park, and the Monmouth Battlefield State Park.

Other Providers of Open Space and Recreation Opportunities

Other recreation providers include the Hopewell Valley YMCA located in Pennington, as well as several other summer day camps in town which provide recreation for children during the summer. Private and non-profit organization providing recreational opportunities to residents of all ages and abilities are valuable in providing access to all residents and fulfill a regional need.

In addition, local planning efforts from Pennington and Hopewell Borough also provide for continuing open space acquisition and recreational facilities. Partnerships with the Boroughs helps to expand greenway belts and provide access to additional resources.

Preserved Farmland

The Township has a rich farming history and the preservation of farmland in the Township is abundant. Farmland Preservation is part of a separate preservation process through the County Agricultural Development Board (CADB) and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC). The Township's Agricultural Advisory Committee, one of only two such committees in Mercer County, works with these State and County government entities. Preserved farmland

is privately owned and not accessible to the public. The preservation of large contiguous tracts of farmland provides valuable opportunities to support continued agricultural production, protect valuable farmland soils, create grassland habitat, and provide conservation of natural resources. Preserved farmland also retains the rural character of the community and enhances the quality of life for residents. The Township currently includes 3,260.26 acres of preserved farmland.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are important tools for preserving agricultural and open space land, and in many cases for creating public access to open space. Conservation easements prohibit or limit future development when public agencies or non-profit entities purchase development rights to the property from willing property owners. When certain public funds are used to purchase easements, it is often required that the land under easement be opened for public access on low-impact trails. In other cases, easements may be privately held and simply serve conservation goals and contribute to corridors of preserved land. Easements can include a portion of or the entire property. There are 1,822.68 acres of conservation easements in the Township helping to protect valuable natural resources such as stream corridors areas, wetland areas, and valuable forests.

Summary of Open Space and Recreation Areas

The preceding analysis indicates that the 16,400.14 acres, 43% of the Township, are dedicated to open space, recreation, and preserved lands.

Table 7: Summary of Open Space and Recreation Areas

Parcel Type	Acreage
Township Owned	1,108.21
County Owned	3,810.24
State Owned	2,582.85
Subtotal Publicly Owned	7,501.30
Board of Education	204.96
Semi-Public	3,611.24
Preserved Farmland	3,260.26
Conservation Easements	1,822.68
Subtotal Other	8,899.14
TOTAL	16,400.44

Needs Analysis

There are a number of standards that can be utilized to determine the recreation lands and facilities needed to continue to meet the requirements of the various programs and users in the Township. One is the Balanced Land Use Concept, endorsed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). The Balanced Land Use Concept, as outlined by the NJDEP, will be discussed, and applied to the Township. Another Standard is the application of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) “Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines,” published in 1996. In addition to these concept standards, the Township authorized a report entitled “A Recreation Report for Hopewell Township’s Outdoor Recreation System” in 2003, by Kinsey Associates. This report provided an extensive look at the recreation system in the Township and provided a series of recommendations. Not all recommendations in the Kinsey Associates report were accepted by the Planning Board as noted below. In 2019 a Township-wide survey was conducted to assess the recreational needs of residents.

Active Recreation Facility Needs Analysis

2003 Recreation Report

The Township, with the assistance of Kinsey Associates, prepared “A Recreation Report for Hopewell Township’s Outdoor Recreation System” in 2003. This report set out to not only document the Township’s active recreation facilities, but also to identify each park’s long term and short term needs and its ability to service the residents of the Township.

The report offered, and the Planning Board endorsed, the following goals and objectives as a guiding point for future decisions concerning the Township’s recreation lands, which remain valid today:

1. Maintain existing facilities to protect against deterioration caused by current over utilization.
2. Provide a variety of recreation facilities that meet diverse needs of the township’s existing and future residents.
3. Enhance recreation facilities to improve service capabilities in the neighborhoods in which they are located.
4. Provide for adequate access, circulation, and compliance features so that the safety aspect for both residents and recreation participants is considered.
5. Complete the full range of improvements to the Back Timberlane. [Project was completed.]
6. Provide for multi-use facilities wherever possible.

7. Coordinate the most efficient use and scheduling of facilities between the Board of Education and Recreation Department with expanded emphasis on effective communication and joint planning.
8. Improve coordinated recreation efforts with those of Mercer County and the State of New Jersey to the extent that local objectives can be facilitated to the mutual benefit of all parties.
9. Persistently upgrade and increase plantings within existing sites, clearly identify entrances, and incorporate appropriate plantings, furnishings, and aesthetic improvements in new work. Landscaping between homes and active recreation fields should be maximized to reduce adverse effects on residents.

The report recommended that additional areas be acquired for open space, nature preserves and walking trails, which has been accomplished over the past 15 years. Other items, such as adding signage for better access to public parks and trails, has also been addressed. Finally, the report contains recommended actions, which were broken down into near- and long-term projects. For the sake of brevity, the following is a shortened list of the actions endorsed by the Planning Board, many of which have been completed (for the complete recommendations, please review the entire Kinsey Associates report):

- Renovate and improve existing park areas where rigorous wear and tear have deteriorated fields and park facilities.
- Add necessary improvements to parks where necessary, such as improved access and signage.
- Develop the Back Timberlane park area and identify the best future arrangement for the Timberlane/High School site complex. [Project was completed].
- Identify and develop appropriate sites for future active recreation facilities.

After consideration of the Kinsey Recreation Report, the Planning Board prepared a series of recommendations and comments. The Board emphasized the following recommendations seen in the Recreation Report:

The Township continues to lack active recreation facilities with a need for new turf or natural grass fields and a community center. A plan should be instituted to respond to these deficiencies through identification, modification, and construction of existing and future recreation areas. While some needs have been addressed through improvements at the Twin Pines facility and development of various school properties, recreation organizations still have difficulty scheduling field time at reasonable hours.

- Reinforce and amplify existing relationships with citizen associations.
- Reinforce and amplify partnerships with Pennington and Hopewell Boroughs.

- Create nature areas, trails, and passive open space on the Else and Alliger tracts, and active recreational facilities on the Else tract.
- Identify and address the need for adequate restroom facilities at all parks, especially in any new active recreation facility.
- Modify existing sites with attractive and appropriate plantings to make recreation areas more appealing. Develop a relationship with local operations to produce native plantings to effectuate this objective.
- Evaluate the need to construct a community swimming pool.
- Evaluate the need and ability to form or create a community center.

The Board disagreed with the following items:

- Funds raised through the open space tax should not contribute to development of Board of Education recreation facilities or to the purchase of properties abutting Board of Education properties and, instead, other cost sharing options should be investigated.
- The Board questions the need for pocket parks in the locations identified in the Recreation Report. However, the need for pocket parks should be reconsidered as part of the Township ongoing consideration of recreation facilities. The recent approval of larger scale multi-family residential developments may create a need for smaller pocket parks accessible to these areas to provide additional recreational opportunities to those residents.

"Have Your Say" Hopewell Open Space and Recreation Survey

The Township Open Space and Recreation Plan subcommittee conducted a "Have your Say" survey in the Spring of 2019 which was available online and publicized through social media, newspapers, local news outlets, and Township meetings. The survey's intent was to provide a forum for public input during the Open Space and Recreation Plan update process. The survey consisted of a series of questions related to the types of active and passive recreation Township residents participate in, what facilities they use, what they enjoy most about the Township's active and passive recreation facilities, and where there could be improvements.

The results of the survey, while informal, indicated that most residents felt the current facilities were convenient, well maintained, and safe. Many residents utilized the walking and bike trails, tennis courts, golf course, and youth sport league facilities. Respondents cited the need for additional safety and security features at recreation areas and the need for more public restroom facilities. Many respondents identified a need to add more walking and hiking trails, which appeared to be one of the most popular recreation uses.

The survey was intended to provide a starting point for additional investigation. The Township should build upon this initial sample and conduct a more thorough Level of Service Survey to

determine additional information for the betterment of the active and passive recreation facilities and ensure access to all residents.

Future Recreation Planning

The population of the Township has increased by approximately 8 percent over the past 20 years. Several new planned residential sites have been established as part of the State's affordable housing requirements, which will see a more rapid increase of the Township's population over the next 15 years. Although the number or age composition of the additional residents is not yet known, the Township should begin to estimate future active recreation needs to determine whether the existing facilities are adequate, and whether any of the existing Township-owned properties can accommodate new facilities or whether additional parcels should be acquired. Future site plans for these developments should include a recreational needs analysis and provide recreational facilities for the residents.

Passive Recreation Needs Analysis

NJDEP Balanced Land Use Concept

The Balanced Land Use Concept (BLUC) is a tool used to determine the minimum amount of open space that a municipality should set aside for recreation purposes. The BLUC is not intended to be a limitation on a municipality's independent determination of the amount of space that should actually be set aside for open space purposes. With the amount of land contained in County and State Parks within the Township, there does not appear to be a deficit of passive recreation lands; however, the BLUC identifies needs based on Township owned lands separately. Future acquisitions of passive recreation lands may include lands to link existing passive parcels. The Township may want to consider retaining a portion of one or more future acquisitions as a set aside for future active recreation amenities. These sites would need to be evaluated for their appropriateness for active recreation facilities and development.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection endorses the BLUC, which simply states that a minimum 3% of a municipality's developed or developable land should be set aside for recreational use within the community. Land deemed developable is exclusive of slopes greater than 12%, wetlands, federal, state and county owned lands along with other environmentally sensitive land that is not suitable for development.

In order to apply the BLUC to Hopewell Township, a variety of data sources were consulted and analyzed using a Geographic Information System (GIS). Data sources utilized for this analysis included the NJDEP 2012 Land Use/Land Cover information, a United States Geological Survey Digital Elevation Model and the Open Space and Recreation Inventory. GIS analysis was undertaken to provide information for input into the BLUC, the results of which are found in Table 8.

Table 8 - Balanced Land Use Concept

Item	Area in Acres
Developable land in Township ¹	24,012.0
Steep Slopes (greater than 12%) developable areas ² (subtract)	840.0
Land within County, State and Municipal Parks (subtract)	7,501.30
Developed land ³ (add)	9,868.7
Total Developed and Developable	25,539.40
3% of Total Developed and Developable	766.18

The BLUC indicates that 25,539.40 acres of developed and developable land remain, being agricultural, forest and barren land categories. Currently 7,501.30 acres are protected by the State, County and Township. Finally, 840 acres are removed from the calculation due to steep slope constraints. The BLUC calculation indicates that Hopewell Township should have a minimum of 766.18 acres of land set aside for recreation purposes, to include both active and passive recreation lands. Currently, the Township owns approximately 1,108.21 acres, not including conservation easements, which could be applied toward this figure. Therefore, the Township exceeds the minimum guidelines set by the State. However, these guidelines only depict a minimum set aside and are not indicative of the Township’s goals and objectives.

¹ NJDEP 2012 Land Use/Land Cover: cumulative sum of agriculture, forest, and barren land categories

² USGS DEM approximation of slopes greater than 12% not including those located in protected open space.

³ NJDEP 2012 Land Use/Land Cover: urban category

Resource Assessment

Resource Management and Conservation

The Township's population continues to grow and change as development continues. The rural character of the area makes living in Hopewell Township attractive and desirable. Despite this growth the Township still retains many valuable natural resources and important habitats that will benefit substantially from conservation efforts. The benefits of acquiring open space go far beyond creating additional recreational facilities. Safeguarding open space ensures the viability of fragile ecosystems that support the high environmental quality, and quality of life, that residents associate with living in Hopewell Township. The forests, wetlands, edge habitats, stream corridors and other environmentally sensitive features are interconnected components that create an overall healthy environment. Hopewell also has a long history as a farming community and these activities are strongly supported by the Township and its residents. Thus, Hopewell Township is host to a variety of environments and habitats that make protection of these areas not just a recreational incentive but also an important step to maintain the future ecological and biological base of the region and the State.

Forested Areas

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) publication titled "Protection and Care of Urban Forest" provides a detailed list of the resources that are protected, and benefits offered by forested areas:

- Modify local climatic conditions near and within their boundaries
- Create a feeling of privacy
- Serve as recreational facilities
- Provide habitats for plants and animals
- Reduce surface runoff because of the high moisture holding capacity of the forest soils and tree canopy
- Enhance the visual characteristics of scenic corridors
- Reduce noise pollution
- Produce oxygen

The Township retains large tracts of contiguous areas, as seen in [Figure 3: Forested and Grassland](#). These contiguous areas of forested land provide an interconnected series of woodland habitat that allows for unrestricted movement for many wildlife species.

Larger patches of forested areas occur in the northern part of the Township, along the Sourland Mountain areas and following west toward the Delaware River, especially in the area of Baldpate Mountain and Washington Crossing State Park.

Wetlands

The New Jersey DEP places a high priority on the protection of wetlands. Wetlands perform many valuable functions that help to maintain balance throughout surrounding ecosystems.

- Wetlands protect drinking water by filtering out chemicals, pollutants, and sediments.
- Wetlands absorb runoff from heavy rains and snow melts, providing natural flood control.
- Wetlands release stored floodwaters during droughts.
- Wetlands provide critical habitats for a major portion of the State’s fish and wildlife, including endangered, commercial, and recreational species.

Township wetland areas are depicted on [Figure 4, “Surface Water and Steep Slopes”](#). The largest areas of wetlands are found along most of the stream corridors with smaller isolated wetlands sprinkled throughout the Township.

Streams and Stream Corridors

Stream corridors are important features that provide aquatic habitat, semi-aquatic habitat, drinking and bathing water and allow for movement of various species throughout an ecosystem. Stream corridors are vital to the health of streams by protecting the watercourses through erosion control, pollution filtration and providing protected habitat for aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Stream corridors in the Township run through a variety of habitats including forests, grasslands, and residential areas (see [Figure 4, “Surface Water and Steep Slopes”](#)).

There are a number of streams in the Township. Steele Run, a tributary to the Delaware River and located in Washington Crossing State Park, is classified FW1, which means that it is preserved and not subject to wastewater discharges of human origin. The remaining streams in the Township are classified as FW2, with Moores Creek and Fiddlers Creek classified as Trout Maintenance Streams. Trout Maintenance streams are so classified because they are able to support trout throughout the year. North Branch of Steele Run, a tributary to Steele Run and then the Delaware River, is classified as a Non-Trout C1 stream as are portions of Baldwin’s Creek and the Stony Brook.

Steep Slopes

Steep slopes are environmentally sensitive features that merit special protection. Forested steep slopes provide protection from many devastating environmental consequences. Loss of cover on slopes can:

- Increase soil erosion and sedimentation
- Decrease surface water quality
- Decrease soil fertility
- Increase overland flow and decrease ground water recharge
- Alter natural drainage patterns

Hopewell Township remains relatively flat with steep slopes less than 15%. However, steeper slopes occur near the Delaware and along stream corridors which creates a variety of viewsheds and character in those locations (Figure 4, “Surface Water and Steep Slopes”).

New Jersey DEP Landscape Project

In order to address habitat loss, NJDEP’s Endangered and Non-Game Species Program (ENSP) needed to grasp the extent and suitability of remaining resources in the State. To accomplish this, they partnered with the Center for Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis (CRSSA) at Rutgers University. Utilizing Landsat Thematic Mapper satellite imagery, CRSSA mapped land cover for the entire State of New Jersey, broken down into 20 different habitat/land cover types. After generalized cover types were classified, detailed methodologies were developed to address the habitat suitability issues for each focus category, including beach/dunes, emergent wetlands, forested wetlands, forested areas, and grasslands.

After reclassifying data based on standards developed for each category, the habitat data was intersected or combined with the Natural Heritage Program’s Biological Conservation Database (BCD). This database is a Geographic Information System (GIS) coverage that provides information on the sighting of threatened and endangered species, based on the fieldwork of ENSP scientists and sightings reported by members of the public. It is the most comprehensive data available in digital form on the location of threatened and endangered species.

The combination of these data sets resulted in the data that is depicted in Figure 5: [New Jersey Landscape Project](#). The Landscape Program data provides users with scientifically sound, peer-reviewed information on the location of critical habitat based on the conservation status of the species that are present. Habitats are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, based on the following criteria:

Table 9: NJ Landscape Program Ranking System

Rank	Indication
1	Suitable habitat, no special concern, threatened or endangered species sighted
2	Habitat patch with species of special concern present
3	Habitat patch with State threatened species present
4	Habitat patch with State endangered species present
5	Habitat patch with Federal threatened or endangered species present

Hopewell Township is rich in species habitat that is suitable to support populations of threatened and endangered species. Most of these habitat types have documented presence of State threatened and endangered species as well as federally listed threatened and endangered species.

There are two primary areas of important habitat with the presence of a federally listed endangered species and state listed endangered species in Hopewell Township, located in the Rank 5 and Rank 4 patches in the eastern portion of the Township, where the presence of the Northern Long-eared Bat (federally listed) and Bobcat and Red-shouldered Hawk has been identified.

In addition to habitat with state endangered species, there is habitat in Hopewell Township with State threatened species documented, such as Bobolink, Barred Owl and Long-eared Owl. Again, these areas are most prevalent in the northeastern and eastern portion of the Township, with some important grassland habitat located in the central region. These lands do not coincide with a great number of properties already preserved, which threatens their protection and availability as a resource into the future.

The Landscape Program data is intended to aid municipalities, County and State governments, conservation agencies and citizens in determining the extent of critical habitat within their respective jurisdictions and communities. After identifying critical habitat, a variety of means can be employed to protect it, including the following:

- Prioritizing open space acquisitions based on the presence of habitat for threatened and endangered species
- Adopting regulations aimed at protecting critical habitat
- Adopting management policies for open space that are consistent with protection of critical habitat
- Permitting flexibility in development techniques that can accommodate the protection of critical habitat
- Promoting land stewardship practices that are consistent with the protection of critical habitat

Hopewell Township has chosen to utilize the New Jersey Landscape Project data to further define priorities for preservation, in keeping with the goals and policies of this plan.

Groundwater Resources

Hopewell Township has acknowledged that the protection of groundwater resources is a major priority. The Township contracted M² Associates, Inc. to prepare an evaluation of the Township's groundwater resources⁴, which should be consulted for the complete findings. The conclusions reported in the study show that there are two distinct aquifer systems in the Township, the Lockatong/Diabase Zone, and the Stockton/Passaic Zone. The Lockatong/Diabase Zone has well yields, capacities and transmissivities that are significantly less than the Stockton/Passaic Zone. The result of these lower yields means that the Township is nearing its dependable yield and that continued demands could adversely affect stream ecosystems, downstream consumers, or current residents. The Township also encompasses nearly all of the headwaters for surface waters flowing in its boundaries. This means that the Township cannot rely on upstream sources or conservation measures to ensure long-term adequate water supply. Thus, it is up to the Township to determine appropriate measures to ensure the viability of water sources. The Township understands the needs of protecting groundwater systems for the longevity of local water needs and long-term natural resource protection. Protecting and preserving open space areas will help to maintain and protect groundwater systems by creating areas of groundwater recharge.

⁴ Mulhall, Matthew J. 2001. Evaluation of Groundwater Resources of Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey. M² Associates Inc.

Sourland Mountain Region

The Sourland Mountain Region is a unique landscape noted for its water resources and mature forested areas and wetlands. The Sourland Mountain region encompasses approximately 94 square miles area in Hunterdon, Mercer and Somerset Counties and includes portions of Lambertville, East Amwell Township, Hillsborough Township, Hopewell Borough, Hopewell Township, Montgomery Township and West Amwell Township. Sensitive environmental features, like the vernal pools that support rare species, are highly susceptible to being lost or compromised. Increasing consumer demands for potable water can also have the effect of robbing the base flow from streams whose biota are indicative of high environmental quality. Limiting the demands placed on these resources will be essential to the long-term health of the region. The Township's northeastern portion is included in the Sourlands. This region is also where a majority of the Township's Rank 3 and 4 habitats from the Landscapes Data, as previously noted, are located. Protecting and preserving this area would contribute to not only local resources, but also the health and longevity of the entire Sourland ecosystem.

Action Plan

In order to carry out the objectives of this Open Space and Recreation Plan, a number of actions must be carried out by the Township and its officials. There are a number of cost sharing options the Township can utilize to help manage the costs of acquiring open space and recreational lands as well as improving recreational land. The following is a summary of acquisition criteria, potential acquisitions/conservation easements, and implementation approaches and resources that can be used as guidance to current and future decision makers.

Acquisition Criteria

The Township's acquisitions of open space, within the limits of available resources, are guided by three factors: 1) Broad goals; 2) a process for setting acquisition priorities, and 3) specific criteria applied to potential acquisitions.

Acquisitions of open space lands are pursued with several goals in mind. In the broadest geographic terms, the Township tries to focus land preservation in several corridors stretching across the Township, and in greenbelts around population centers, including Pennington and Hopewell Boroughs and other population concentrations. Acquisitions ideally maximize access to open space for populations throughout the Township and maximize protection of wildlife habitat and diversity of plant life. Where possible, open space acquisitions can provide to active recreation facilities and preservation of agricultural lands as well.

There are three main elements of the Township's approach to decisions on open space acquisition. First, it identifies potential open space preservation targets. Identification of such targets is guided by the goals described above but is also triggered by information about land ownership changes or owner interests, environmental threats, or emerging interests created by ongoing development and recent open space preservation transactions. Second, The Township assesses potential preservation targets. The Hopewell Valley Open Space Advisory Committee (HVOSAC) monitors the status of known targets and new ones, maintains a list of "priority

properties," evaluates them annually, and reports to the Township Committee. The third element is the specific criteria that HVOSAC applies in this evaluation, as explained below.

The criteria that guide HVOSAC evaluation of potential open space preservation efforts identify the attributes of potential preservation properties that affect their value for conservation and recreation purposes, and the urgency of considering them for acquisition. HVOSAC maintains, updates annually, and shares with the Township Committee a list of potential preservation properties of interest, described in terms of these criteria. The purpose of the list is to identify properties of high interest, but not necessarily to dictate the priority order for preservation efforts, since acquisitions are always affected by market conditions, owner interest, and the extent of available funds. Properties that satisfy more of these criteria should, however, be regarded as the most attractive for preservation. These criteria are as follows:

- **Greenbelt** - the property would contribute to an area of largely undeveloped, wild, or agricultural land surrounding neighboring urban/suburban developed areas.
- **Stream Corridor** - an ecosystem that usually consists of three major elements. Together they function as a dynamic and valued corridor in the landscape. (This criterion refers to properties within such a corridor identified in the Township's stream corridor ordinance, or properties that include a stream corridor or any of its elements.):
 - stream channel
 - transitional upland fringe
 - floodplain
- **Proximity to Preserve** - Situated close to land that is already protected and managed to preserve its biological and environmental attributes. Highest value is placed on property immediately adjacent to preserved land, but similar value is placed on properties separated from preserved land by other properties that also have conservation value and potential for preservation.
- **Ecological Value** - the contribution a property makes to overall air and water quality as well as environmental biodiversity, i.e., its ecological benefits.
- **Connector** - a piece of land that either adjoins or connects at least two adjacent natural or preserved areas - or connects a developed area to preserved land.
- **Viewscape** - an attribute that maintains the rural character and vistas of a community and provides a sense of "place and feel" for both residents and those passing through that is worth protecting.
- **On the Market** - a property that is listed for sale.
- **Seller Interest** -the property owner has an expressed interest in selling or donating a property.
- **Development Risk** -the property is at substantial risk of private development, as indicated by expressed owner interests, submission of development or subdivision plans, zoning status, or other indicators.
- **Agricultural List** - the property has been identified as a priority by either the Mercer County Agricultural Preservation program or the Hopewell Valley Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee.
- **Historical List** - the property has been included on the Hopewell Township Historical Commission's list of priorities or some other public or private registry.

- **Proximity to Population Centers**-the property is in close proximity to established neighborhoods, town centers, or other types of residential development that currently have limited access to nearby preserved lands.
- **Recreational Potential** - The property has strong potential for active or passive recreational use.

Other Recommendations

Active Recreation Facility and Open Space Management

Development of Township owned parcels is necessary to meet the active recreation needs in the Township. Management of Township-owned facilities and areas should be assessed for optimum benefit to users and habitat maintenance. As noted in the Kinsey Associates report, better maintenance of some Township-owned recreation fields was considered an important initial step. Additionally, there is a need to set forth policy for the continuing maintenance of open space areas. For example, an open field purchased for preservation should be maintained by the Township to allow for continued grassland habitat and not be allowed to reforest. Finally, a requirement for permanent site markers on privately held conservation easements should be instituted in order to assess if the easements are properly maintained. These steps will help to ensure proper long-term care of the Township's open space and recreation areas, and viewsheds.

Stewardship of Open Space

The Township's successful efforts in preserving land has shifted some of the Township's focus from land acquisition to considerations of how to be meaningful stewards of preserved lands. Hopewell Township is fortunate to have several experienced and dedicated non-profit partnerships who are not only dedicated to land acquisition, but also the conservation and stewardship efforts needed to protect natural resources and appropriately maintain preserved lands.

Stewardship and maintenance of lands varies across preserved lands based on a several factors. Determining the appropriate stewardship and maintenance of land and developing goals, policies, and objectives associated with open space and recreation areas, needs to be determined to provide guidance in the future. Considerations should include:

- Development of new or expanded trails and the maintenance of existing trails
- Deer management program to help limit the population and reduce damage to vegetation
- Invasive plant species assessment and management
- Native species plantings to improve wildlife habitat
- Evaluation of stream corridors and where appropriate measures to stabilize and restore degraded stream corridors
- Conservation easement markers, informational materials for privately held easement areas, and ongoing monitoring

The ownership and management of preserved open space is divided among public agencies and non-profit organizations requiring stewardship of lands to be coordinated as much as possible.

Activities of the kinds listed above can have consequences beyond the boundaries of any particular property, extending to other preserved lands as well as land in private ownership.

It is therefore recommended that Hopewell Township, in concert with area non-profit organizations and state and county agencies, develop a comprehensive stewardship plan that would identify regional historic, present, and future open space and recreation lands and facilities and also provide guidance on the programming listed above. Coordinated efforts will help to ensure a regional approach to stewardship that will benefit regional ecosystems.

Community Education

Educating residents on ways to preserve and conserve natural resources can be a valuable tool for expanding open space resources in the Township. Providing educational materials and informative seminars at a Township or neighborhood level may encourage residents to place conservation easements on their property or help to encourage others in the community to do so.

New Jersey Trails Association (NJTA)

The New Jersey Trails Association is a project of D&R Greenway Land Trust, led by a steering committee that includes representatives from a variety of area non-profit organizations active in preserving open space. NJ Trails plays two main roles in developing area open space and recreation. First, it maintains the www.njtrails.org website, which offers trail guides, maps, and directions to a wide array of properties managed by public agencies and non-profits throughout central New Jersey, including Hopewell Township. At least 16 guides are available for properties in Hopewell Township, and the website's offerings expand as new preserves are created and new trails are opened. Second, NJ Trails deploys experienced volunteers to build and maintain hiking trails, on lands owned or managed by public agencies and non-profit organizations. Trails are planned and designed in collaboration with the entities that own or manage preserved lands. Particular emphasis is placed on developing trails that offer connections between existing open space properties, and on trails that offer opportunities for extensive walks in natural areas away from development, in settings with unusual natural features.

Implementation Approaches and Resources

A coordinated open space and recreation effort should integrate environmental, cultural, and social protection strategies as core elements of the preservation effort. The Township will utilize this approach, as outlined in this plan. The programs and approaches outlined below represent a menu of implementation strategies which the Township will research in order to determine their merit and application in Hopewell Township's continued preservation efforts.

Municipal Open Space Tax

Hopewell Township first adopted an Open Space Tax in 1998, which now generates three cents per hundred dollars of assessed value. These revenues can be used to fund the acquisition of land for open space preservation, farmland preservation, historic site preservation, and recreational purposes.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program

In 1999 the State Legislature passed the Garden State Preservation Trust Fund, securing funding for a state-wide open space plan for New Jersey. In order to provide support to local governments who have adopted an open space tax and prepared an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), the Green Acres Program developed the Planning Incentive Grant (PIG). This program provides 50% matching grants to local governments for the acquisition of land for recreation and conservation purposes. To be eligible for funding, local governments must have a Green Acres approved OSRP, and either an open space tax, or an approved alternative funding source which is stable and sufficient, such as an annual tax levy. The Township is a participant in the PIG program by virtue of its open space tax and adopted Open Space Plan.

Mercer County Open Space Preservation Program

Mercer County provides two assistance programs for the acquisition of open space properties.

County-wide Regional Open Space

Land that provides regionally significant open space opportunities for a large majority of the County's residents is preserved, maintained, and operated by the County. The land must be consistent with the goals and criteria of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. There is a priority list of properties proposed for acquisition in the Plan, and conceptual long-range open space areas such as stream corridors, greenbelts, and expansions of existing facilities. The preservation of these lands is reviewed by the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board. The Board recommends proposed properties to the County administration for acquisition.

Mercer County Open Space Assistance Program

Through municipal and non-profit initiatives, the County will assist non-profits and municipalities in acquiring land. Funding preferences for projects will be based on their consistency with the Goals and Criteria of the Mercer County Open Space and Recreation Plan, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, and local master plans. Municipal projects being considered for County assistance that are not included in the Mercer County Open Space and Recreation Plan shall be identified for preservation in the local Master Plan or local Open Space Plan. Non-profit projects shall be included in the county plan or the local plan. Projects should demonstrate efforts to leverage other governmental and private funds while providing regionally significant open space for the residents of Mercer County.

The New Jersey Water Bank (NJWB)

The New Jersey Water Bank - NJWB (formerly New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program - NJEIFP) is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust (Trust) to provide low-cost financing for the design, construction, and implementation of projects that help protect and improve water quality and help ensure safe and adequate drinking water.

The NJWB finances projects by utilizing two funding sources. The Trust issues revenue bonds which are used in combination with zero percent interest funds to provide very low interest loans for water infrastructure improvements. The NJDEP administers a combination of Federal State

Revolving Fund (SRF) capitalization grants, as well as the State's matching funds, loan repayments, State appropriations and interest earned on such funds.

National Recreational Trails Program

When program funds are made available from the Federal Highway Administration's Recreational Trails Program, NJDEP offers financial assistance to federal, state, county, and local governments as well as non-profits for developing and maintaining trails and trail facilities for non-motorized, motorized, and multi-use purposes. The maximum grant award is \$25,000, and projects are funded on an 80% federal share and 20% matching share basis. This program was utilized to help construct segments of the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail.

Conservation Easements

Recreational land, both passive and active, can be made more accessible with access provided through conservation easements. Conservation easements typically encompass some desirable environmental resource, such as a stream, floodplain, or steep slope area, and provide a measure of protection against development to that resource. Limited access permitted through conservation easements is a means to make certain lands more accessible to the public. Access through conservation easements should promote the creation or expansion of linked open space corridors or other recreational areas to create or enhance a network of open space that can be accessed by means other than automobile and should not impact the resource protected by the conservation easement. Conservation easements should be encouraged for all properties with habitats that support threatened or endangered species.

Partnering with Other Agencies

There are a number of agencies in the area aside from the County and State that are active in land preservation initiatives. Hopewell Township is fortunate to have many highly active land preservation groups including the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, the D&R Greenway Land Trust, The Watershed Institute, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation operating within its borders. These groups can often provide leveraging funds to municipalities or other agencies and are critical to the overall process. There are few preservation deals made which do not involve at least one non-profit or watershed group whose project support was critical.

Summary of Action Plan

The Action Plan provides a toolbox for the Township to assist in the identification, selection, and implementation of acquiring open space and recreational areas. Identifying potential acquisition parcels can be attained by using the acquisition criteria which have been identified as features that are environmentally, socially, or culturally significant to the Township. These include critical environmental resources, linkages, contiguous holdings, and the like. Once the Township has identified potential parcels, these lands can be acquired or protected through a variety of means. Partnering with the State, County and non-profit and private organizations as well as reaching out to private landowners helps to bolster open space preservation. Consequently, the

Action Plan can be viewed as a guidebook to create a long-lasting agenda of open space and recreation opportunities in the Township.

System Map

The Open Space System Map is depicted in [Figure 1: Open Space and Recreation System Map](#). This map includes existing open space lands at the municipal, county and state level and private and quasi-private areas. This map can be used to focus acquisition priorities.