



# MERCER COUNTY MASTER PLAN

## OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION ELEMENT



**PREPARED FOR THE**

**Mercer County Planning Board**

**Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board**

**BY THE**

**Mercer County Planning Department**

**ADOPTED: August 11, 2021**



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## OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION ELEMENT

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8-11-2021

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PHOTO CREDITS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



View of Delaware River from Baldpate Mountain, Hopewell

Mercer County has been aggressively preserving open space and farmland since 1990. This work has been undertaken as a result of the County's first open space preservation trust fund tax ballot question, overwhelmingly approved by the voters in 1989 and continually supported since. Prior to 1989, County residents were served by a handful of County park facilities including Mercer County Park in West Windsor/Hamilton/Lawrence; two County golf courses, Mountain View in Ewing and Princeton Country Club in West Windsor/Princeton; and Howell Living History Farm and Rosedale Park in Hopewell. In the 1980's and 1990's many areas in the County were experiencing substantial residential, commercial and corporate development. Suburban sprawl was encroaching upon the County's rural landscape and threatening the natural environment. It was evident that there was a need for more protected open space, both for recreation and to protect natural resources. Opportunities were present. Large environmentally significant lands were unprotected, but still undeveloped and available, and the new open space trust fund and a favorable real estate market provided the financial resources needed for preserving lands of regional importance. So began the race for open space.

Thirty years later, over 27%<sup>1</sup> (up from 9% in 1990) of Mercer County's land area is permanently preserved in one form or another, either as public parkland and open space, privately-owned conserved land or farmland. This was done collectively by the County, local non-profit land conservancies, local governments and the State of New Jersey. Most of the properties preserved as County-owned open space have been preserved in a largely natural or undeveloped state to protect sensitive environs and critical habitat, while also providing significant regional open space. These preserved lands are mostly in rural areas of the County, where undeveloped land was available. The Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain, Mercer Meadows, the expansion of Howell Living History Farm, and the expansion and enhancement of Roebling Park and its new Tulpehaking Nature Center enrich the quality of life for all residents of Mercer County and protect and enhance valuable environmental lands. In addition, lands preserved along the Assunpink Creek, Crosswicks Creek, Stony Brook and other streams protect watersheds, create critical greenways and the potential to connect people to open space. The tax also helped fund several park improvements such as the Visitor Center at Baldpate Mountain and the Tulpehaking Nature Center at Roebling Park as well as historic preservation efforts at the Kahn Bathhouse in Ewing, the restoration of the Hunt House in Mercer Meadows, the Rogers House constructed ruin at Mercer County Park and the preservation of 87 farms throughout the County. In 2012 the voters approved a referendum to allow 10% of the trust fund revenue to be used for stewardship purposes and many programs and projects have been implemented. Stewardship efforts on county land include grassland, meadow, wetland and forest restorations, invasive species management, deer management, green infrastructure implementation and enforcing the removal of private encroachment violations on public parkland.

There have been many changes over the last 30 years which impact the County's thinking about open space, recreational lands and stewardship of those lands. Today we are more mindful about the effects of climate change, and the resulting damage to our lands and communities. There is a heightened awareness about addressing issues such as social justice, healthy communities, climate change and sustainability. There is a need to provide more urban, walkable settings for living and working and for quality urban open space. What has also changed is the amount of land that the County manages. It has increased by more than double over thirty years. In addition to an increase in general park maintenance is the growing need to care for the lands' natural and ecological values. Damage from invasive species, overabundant deer, natural disturbance and increased public use in our parks have negative impacts and can degrade the quality of the land for the public enjoyment as well as the

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<sup>1</sup> The 27% was calculated using spatial GIS data layers and does not reflect actual surveyed acres.

environment. Since the authorization of stewardship as a permitted expense, the Park Commission and Planning Department have hired professional staff dedicated to identifying stewardship needs and implementing programs on the ground. The stewardship team has completed numerous projects throughout the Park System to address invasive species management, wildlife management and habitat restoration. The lands that the County has so diligently preserved require land stewardship and resource management, now and into the future. Finally, the pace of land acquisition for preservation purposes has slowed over the last decade. This is due, in part, to limited State funds but mostly because there is less land available to acquire and the lands remaining for preservation are much smaller in scale and more challenging to acquire.

There is still much to be accomplished. Over the last decade the County has preserved linkages in our Greenways, expanded our parkland and focused on providing open space close to where people work and live, while also instilling good land stewardship practices and policies. The 2021 Plan continues to address the goals and strategies of the 2010 Plan. This Plan examines updated data, including population, and a County-wide inventory of open space lands to identify gaps and new opportunities.

New technological tools and more accurate data provide new and interesting methods for analysis and ways in which to measure progress. Although all the preservation entities working in the County have preserved additional land over the last 11 years, it is likely that the 27% figure is the result of more accurate and improved data and mapping tools. There are new GIS tools available to the public such as CHANJ from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the NJ Blueprint created by Rowan University. These tools provide GIS information that can be layered and analyzed to illustrate and prioritize lands for acquisition.

In the summer of 2020 Mercer County undertook a Return on Environment study with the cooperation and assistance of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). This study will provide data-based calculations of economic and environmental benefits of protected open spaces in Mercer County and enhance and support the open space and farmland preservation goals and objectives of Mercer County. The Return on Environment study is expected to be released in September 2021. (add hyperlink on release)

In May 2021, President Biden announced a goal of conserving 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. This goal relies on “locally led and voluntary” efforts and is part of the administration’s overall

objective of tackling the climate crisis.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, Mercer County has had a 30-year head-start on this “30 by 30” goal. As our population grew, Mercer County residents recognized the need for land preservation and the County has been hard at work to achieve substantial land preservation objectives since 1990, while enjoying the many benefits associated with land preservation. Although the President’s goal is important and worthwhile, it will be challenging to achieve in Mercer County. To accomplish this goal would require the preservation of an additional 4,397 acres by 2030, which is ambitious but possible as we continue to work cooperatively with our partners and leverage available funds. The President’s goal is for the nation as a whole; some areas of the country will exceed 30% while others preserve much less. Nevertheless, Mercer County, along with our land preservation partners, will continue our efforts to preserve land for its environmental qualities, for use by people, and for its public health and economic benefits.

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<sup>2</sup> US Government report “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful” developed by the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce departments and submitted to Biden’s National Climate Task Force.



## I. OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION FARMLAND AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST FUND TAX



The Open Space Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Tax (Trust Fund) is the key to the thousands of acres of land permanently preserved in Mercer County. The Trust Fund was established in 1989 by the voters of Mercer County who approved it by a large margin. The tax approved at that time was the collection of one cent (\$.01) per \$100 of equalized assessed value. The first year the tax was collected was in 1990. Over the last 30 years the voters continued to support the Trust Fund Tax in four additional referenda, outlined below.

### **1989**

Levy up to \$.01

100% Farmland and open space preservation

### **1998**

Levy up to \$.02

85% Farmland and open space preservation

15% Recreational development and historic preservation

### **2004**

Levy up to \$.03

85% Farmland and open space preservation

15% Recreational development and historic preservation

## 2012

Levy up to \$.03

70% Farmland and open space preservation

20% Recreational development and historic preservation

10% Stewardship

The Mercer County open space tax has contributed to the preservation of:

- 5,174 acres of County parkland, open space and conservation easements
- 5,997 acres through the Mercer County Municipal and Non-Profit Open Space Assistance Program utilizing grants to local governments and nonprofit conservation organizations
- 5,413 acres through the County farmland preservation program
- 167 County acres transferred to municipal open space
- 1,903 acres of cooperative open space and farmland properties with direct County funding
- Examples of stewardship projects funded with the Trust Fund:
  - Native meadow and grassland restoration
  - Forest restoration
  - Freshwater tidal wetland restoration
  - Invasive species management
  - Parkland and open space boundary monitoring
- Historic preservation projects funded with the Trust Fund include:
  - Petty Run Interpretive restoration in Trenton
  - Rogers House Interpretive restoration at Mercer County Park
  - Hunt House restoration at Mercer Meadows
  - Abbott Farm National Landmark Interpretive Plan and signage
  - Kahn Bathhouse restoration and associated improvements in Ewing
- Examples of park planning and development projects funded with Trust Fund:
  - Dam Site 21 Master Plan
  - Moore's Station Quarry Master Plan
  - Stony Brook Pedestrian Bridge
  - Mercer County Park Splash pad
  - Baldpate Mountain building renovations, parking and site improvements
  - Tulpehaking Nature Center

This tax along with all state, local and farmland preservation funds helped to ensure that over 27% of the county's land has been protected and preserved. As open space acquisition slows and as the need to provide for park development, public access and stewardship grow, the County plans to go out to Mercer County voters in November 2021 to adjust the open space tax allocation accordingly.



## II. VISION

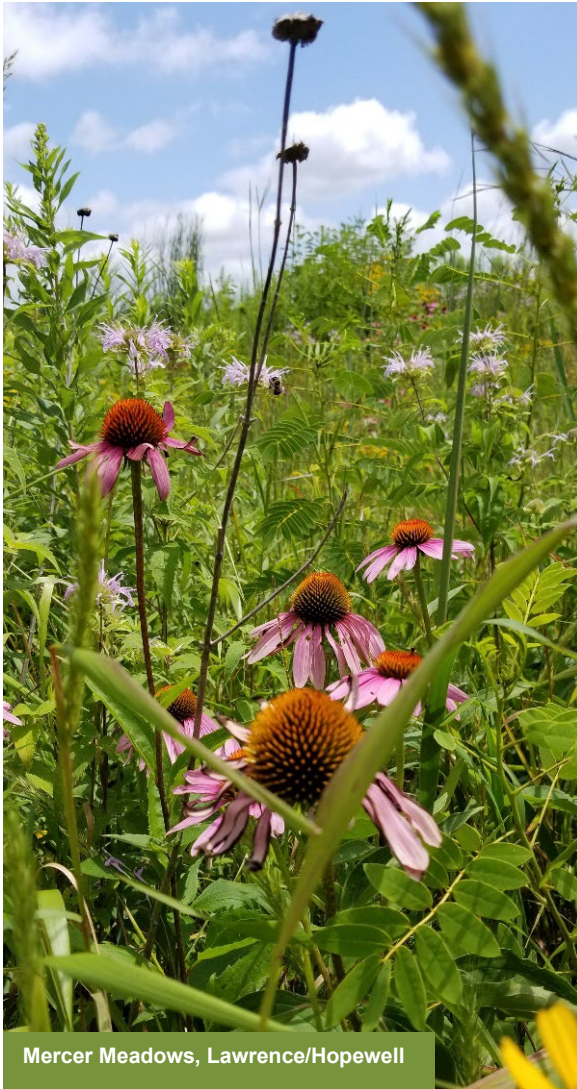


South Riverwalk Park, Trenton

Preserved land has a significant impact on our future and affects how people live, work and play. The benefits to the environment, health, economy and society are seemingly limitless. Land preservation is critical to the quality of life for current and future generations.

This Plan updates and articulates the County's vision for open space preservation which includes protecting the environment while being responsible stewards of the land in which the County has invested, serving the recreational needs of the people, providing opportunities that promote public health, and promoting a sustainable economy.

## A. Preserving and Maintaining Land for Nature and the Environment



Natural lands have always been purchased with the intention of protecting biodiversity and providing ecological services. While protected land alone cannot correct the increased effects of climate change, the preservation of natural lands assists in offsetting these effects, such as increased flooding and drought. Protected open space reduces the impact of impervious surfaces, reducing run off and flooding. Intact forests, grasslands and wetlands store and sequester carbon. The preservation of stream corridors protects the water supply, water quality, and wildlife as well wetlands within the stream's floodplains (stream corridors are typically old forest, as stream corridors were not used for agriculture as much as uplands). Mature forests absorb CO<sub>2</sub> while producing oxygen, keep the forest floor cool, and filter pollutants from water. *According to the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture, a mature forest canopy can reduce air temperature five to ten degrees, helping to counteract the urban heat island effect.* The preservation of large natural areas fosters the health and natural beauty of our community for future generations.

The successful acquisition of land for preservation is integrated with the responsibility to care for and protect the ecological features of these preserved lands. Funds and programs to steward natural land are essential. In many cases, preserved land that is not cared for will degrade over time. Historic use influences the land's resiliency to ecological threats such as invasive species, overabundant deer, and natural disturbance. Much preserved land was once either harvested or utilized for agriculture, and both have impacts in how land today responds to disturbance. Land that was once in agriculture is more prone to invasion of invasive species, and currently is hit harder by Emerald Ash Borer. Large tracts of old forest, areas untouched by man since the late 1800's, are more resilient to some of the current ecological threats, harbor different organisms, and sequester carbon at a greater rate than disturbed



younger forests. When available, old forest should be preserved for these important benefits. Performing stewardship in forests is vital to their ability to function; deer management, invasive species control, restoration fencing, and small to large reforestation plantings are vital to conserving preserved forest land. Grasslands and meadows benefit declining wildlife communities such as grassland breeding birds, reptiles and amphibians, and pollinators, in addition to their ability to sequester carbon. To keep these herbaceous habitats, annual maintenance is required to promote native grasses and wildflowers, while controlling non-native and woody plants. Natural land management, including practices such as deer population control, creating and maintaining meadows and grasslands, stream bank and wetland protection and preserving sensitive and rare species ensures that the land performs its ecological function. Diligent stewardship and management are essential for protecting our lands' natural resources. The acquisition of open space is the initial investment in the land and its inherent values, where stewardship maintains or enhances these values. Good stewardship protects environmental features, natural beauty, and the recreational opportunities it provides. Through good stewardship practices, programs, and dedicated staff, the ecological values are preserved along with the land.

## B. Preserving Land for People



Baldpate Mountain, Hopewell

Large natural preserves are in the rural areas of the County far from the major population areas because that is where the acquisition opportunities exist. Public access to them through mass transit, educational programs and community events are important tools that connect people to these natural areas.

Although areas of dense population are challenged by the scarcity of land available for passive or active recreation, opportunities on vacant land in the city and older suburbs is balanced with open space and other needed land uses such housing and economic development.

Urban parkland can be created by reclaiming lands degraded by industry and neglect. These under-utilized lands provide opportunities for recreation in the more populated and under-served urbanized areas. Environmental remediation of such parcels is a valuable community investment. It not only increases close to home recreation but also increases the value and marketability of the surrounding neighborhood. Public plazas, improved streetscape, and pedestrian scale outdoor spaces, soften and naturalize the urban landscape. Urban trees improve air quality and create cooler spaces in the warm weather months. Recent research also suggests that there is significant ecological value to natural land in urban areas.

It is important to make all of our parks and open spaces accessible to all users. Visible and clear signage, well-marked trails and adequate parking, information made available through the internet, and publications such as trail maps and brochures provide valuable information to improve and increase access, making the spaces inviting for new and repeat users alike.

Greenways provide physical linkages to connect people to open spaces, as well as connections that conserve the environment, by creating large continuous areas for habitat and watershed protection. Linking our green infrastructure promotes walkable communities, encourages walking and bicycling in lieu of driving and promotes healthy living options for our residents. County, local and statewide bicycle paths and plans are important connections to parks and greenspaces. Abandoned rail lines and abandoned and existing utility corridors have the potential to connect to and through natural areas and bicycle paths. Obtaining public access rights of way on utility and rail corridors is challenging and, in some instances, may benefit from a coordinated effort at the County level.

### C. Preserving Land for Recreation and Public Health

Creative development patterns that prevent sprawl, while providing pedestrian and bicycle friendly facilities and quality parkland and greenways, increase opportunities for physical activity. Parkland and recreational land located close to where people work and live also increases opportunities for physical activity. The earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic illustrated the importance of parkland and recreational areas in close proximity to residences as many County residents sought out parks and open space when gyms and other indoor recreational options were closed. In addition, time spent in parks and



open spaces contribute to improved mental health. We should seek quality public mass transit in the urban and suburban areas with connections to our suburban and rural passive recreation and natural resources. These connections would permit residents living in more urban areas to access our natural areas, resulting in more physical activity. The very existence of preserved lands improves public health. As noted above, preserved land improves water recharge, reducing run off and flooding in

more densely population areas of the County. Healthy forests and urban trees all contribute to air quality. All these open space benefits play a significant role in improving public health.

***The availability of recreational land and open space is beneficial to public health. There has been national concern regarding the nation's physical inactivity resulting in health problems including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. This concern is addressed in the publication from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) entitled "The Health Benefits of Parks," published in 2006. This health concern is not only for the aging population but also for the younger generation. According to the Center for Disease Control, only 25 percent of American adults engage in the recommended levels of physical activity and 29 percent engage in no leisure-time physical activity. The statistics for children and adolescents are similar: only 27 percent of students in grades 9-12 engage in moderate to intensive physical activity. According to the TPL "strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, they are more likely to exercise, which can reduce obesity and its associated problems and costs. A group of studies in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine showed that "creation of or access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach" produced a 48.4 percent increase in the frequency of physical activity.***

## D. Preserving Land for the Community and Economy

Quality open space is good for the local economy and fosters community cooperation and unity in addition to increasing nearby land values. Studies show that open space provides positive opportunities and alternatives for youth, resulting in the reduction of crime. Mercer County's active parks generate economic activity from residents and day and overnight visitors. The variety of available activities serves audiences of every age and ability. Among the County's preserved farms, several have pick-your-own operations and other forms of agri-tourism which contribute directly to the County's economic health. These farm operations are a source of locally grown produce which reduces the carbon footprint of the produce and improves public health.

***According to the Trust for Public Land, "The Benefits of Parks," there are significant social and economic benefits from quality open space. Studies show that many people are willing to pay more for property adjacent to parks and open space. Parks and open space also increase commercial land values and are an important factor in where corporations decide to locate. Parks and open space provide tourist attractions and contribute the monetary and economic benefits of tourism. There are also social benefits. Parks provide a sense of community. According to the TPL, "Access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and in particular to reduce juvenile delinquency. Recreational facilities keep at-risk youth off the street, gives them a safe environment to interact with their peers, and fill up time within which they could otherwise get into trouble."***



### III. POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The following Policies and Strategies have been established to promote the vision of the Plan.

#### A. Acquisition Policies

**Policy 1:** Preserve open space and recreational lands which are connected to where people live and work.

Policy 1 Strategies:

- Preserve regionally significant land for passive and recreational use.
- Help local government and non-profit environmental and land preservation organizations preserve land of local importance.
- Preserve, redevelop, and reclaim land in the urban areas to better serve and provide quality open space and recreation to the underserved population.
- Preserve land within redevelopment projects and properties as a catalyst for economic growth and quality land use.
- Connect densely populated areas and communities to natural areas through the preservation and acquisition of lands along utility easements, streams, abandoned rail lines, and lands that may need to be reclaimed from environmental degradation.
- Connect communities by preserving recreational land for the creation of walking and bike trails.



South Riverwalk Park, Trenton

**Policy 2:** Where appropriate, purchase lands that add to or protect property or environmental features previously preserved by the County.

Strategies:

- Actively pursue the purchase of lands which are critical to the protection of an existing County resource or environmental feature on County lands or which adds to or completes lands necessary to construct a trail, Greenway or similar amenity.

## B. Development Policies

**Policy 1:** Recognizing the financial limits of the current tax authorization, provide active and passive recreational opportunities through well-designed parks, preserves and greenways. Invest in historic structures, especially as they support recreational opportunities.



Mercer County Park, Rogers House, West Windsor

Strategies:

- Provide for both active and passive recreational development on County-owned lands.
- Design recreation improvements to limit impact on environmentally sensitive areas.
- Identify opportunities for public access on farms prior to preserving farmland.

- Design and create recreational opportunities for all user groups to help keep the community healthy and fit.
- Restore and maintain historic and cultural resources to educate and enhance recreational opportunities.

**Policy 2:** Provide active and passive recreation located in or near population centers and provide multi-modal connections.

Strategies:

- Provide recreational opportunities and improvements in urban areas that will serve the recreational needs of underserved populations.
- Redevelop, reclaim and remediate appropriate brownfield sites to expand recreational opportunities.
- Connect people to open space and places of



- interest through the creation of Greenways, trails, and other multi-modal facilities.
- Support public mass transit opportunities that will connect people to open space and parkland within urban areas as well as to the rural and suburban areas.
- Improve existing properties to be accessible to everyone with quality parking and signage, and provide information through a variety of electronic and other media.
- Support the goals and objectives of County and local bike plans and cooperate with local government to provide access to open space, community services and businesses through greenways, bike paths on road and off road, and through the implementation of complete streets efforts.



**Policy 3:** Maintain and protect the environment when developing all open space.

Strategies:

- Ensure that impacts of recreational development are appropriate to maintain and sustain the natural environment.
- Design and construct all recreational development according to all required regulations and practices necessary to preserve environmentally sensitive land, water, scenic vistas and plant and animal habitats.
- Minimize the clearing of land by situating active recreation in already cleared areas where possible and implement reforestation and restoration where appropriate.
- Maximize usable space to limit the impact on the land. Maintain and operate recreational open space to ensure the protection of environmentally sensitive features such as woodland and grassland habitat, wetlands, watersheds, streams, and water bodies.

**Policy 4:** Appreciate and care for all the ecological values of preserved open space by being custodians and stewards of the land.

Strategies:

- Evaluate and monitor the ecological significance of preserved lands and ensure that good stewardship and best management practices are implemented.
- Restore land degraded by invasive species, harmful human impacts, effects of climate change and other impacts.
- Invest in educational outreach, professional staff and resources to provide the tools and expertise for managing and protecting the county's natural resources on all preserved land.



## IV. CRITERIA

Criteria have been established to determine the appropriate lands for preservation and development. The following criteria set forth the characteristics of land which are desirable to implement the County's Policies and Strategies. These criteria are not listed in priority order.



### A. Lands in a Largely Natural or Undeveloped State:

The protection of natural resources and ecologically sensitive and significant land, such as wetlands, wildlife habitat, waterways, slopes, mature woodlands, large stands of forests and ridge lines in their natural state is the primary goal of this plan. This is the first criterion of all open space acquisitions and will govern the proposed uses of acquired lands. These large natural areas should only be developed for passive recreation.

1. Water quality protection: The protection of our watersheds and potable water supply benefits the environment and public health and is critical for the maintenance of healthy plant and animal populations. As the human population grows and development expands, there is an increased demand for both potable water and recreation. Recreation in environmentally sensitive



lands must be compatible with the natural values of the site, as noted in the policies and strategies above.

2. Wetlands and slope protection: Wetlands and steep slopes are often protected in part by government regulations. Nevertheless, it is still important to ensure protection for these sensitive environments. Disturbances to these areas and in the buffer areas surrounding them can result in flooding, erosion, increased water pollution, and loss of wildlife and vegetation.

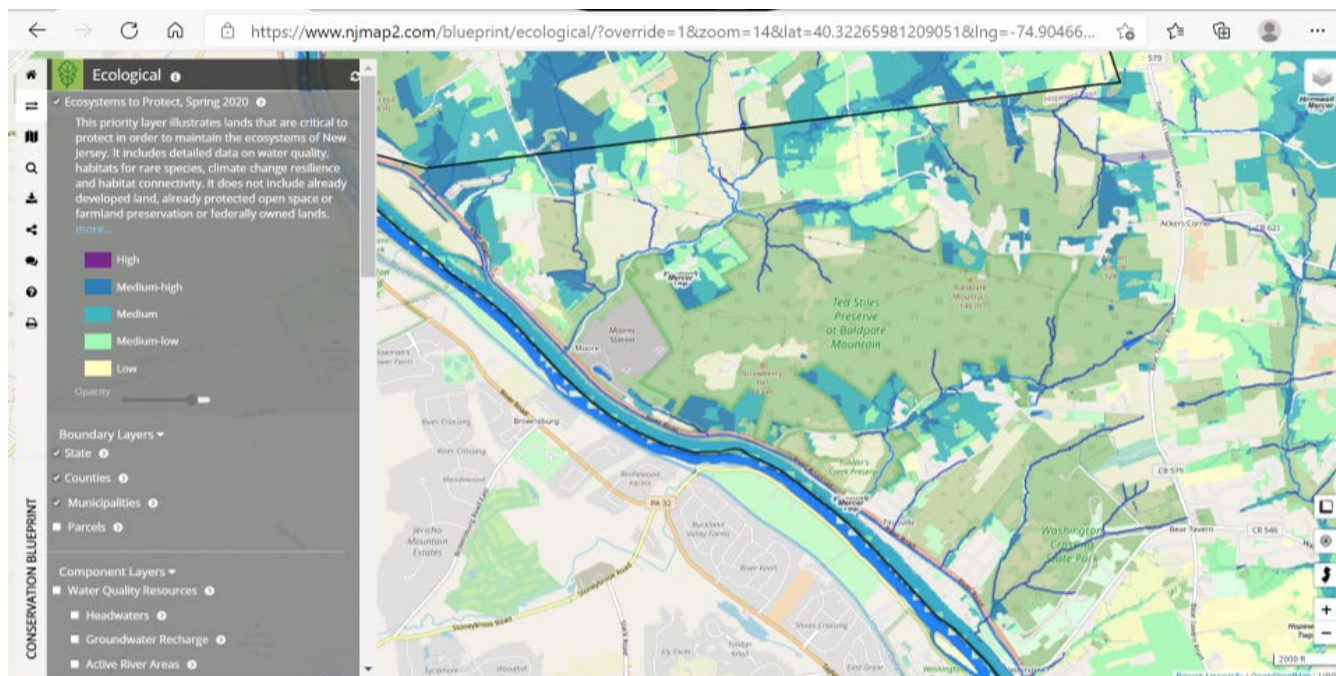
3. Plant and animal habitat: Conservation of the wildlife habitat is necessary to the survival of many unique and rare species, and maintains healthy environments for diverse communities of plants and animals that generate higher biodiversity, increasing the quality of life for the residents of Mercer County.

4. Size of open space: To provide adequate protection of a natural area, the protection of large areas of land containing many smaller natural communities is encouraged. Large natural areas reduce the edge effects that adversely affect natural communities. Large areas may include larger portions of watersheds, which serve to protect water quality and sensitive plant and animal habitats.

5. Connections with other open spaces: Open spaces that are near to or connected to other open spaces offer advantages in shared facilities and maintenance. Connected open space also provides increased protection of the natural environment by increasing the effective size of the protected open space. Although larger tracts are prioritized, the objective can also be achieved by the acquisition of smaller tracts over time that result in tracts or Greenways of significant size.

6. Threatened or endangered species: Preservation of land containing the potential habitats of endangered or threatened species and the species themselves is needed to prevent their extirpation and promote biodiversity.

7. Geological significance: Geologically significant features such as high ridges, unique land formations, and unique rock formations are to be considered as valuable natural areas for preservation and unique plant and animal communities.

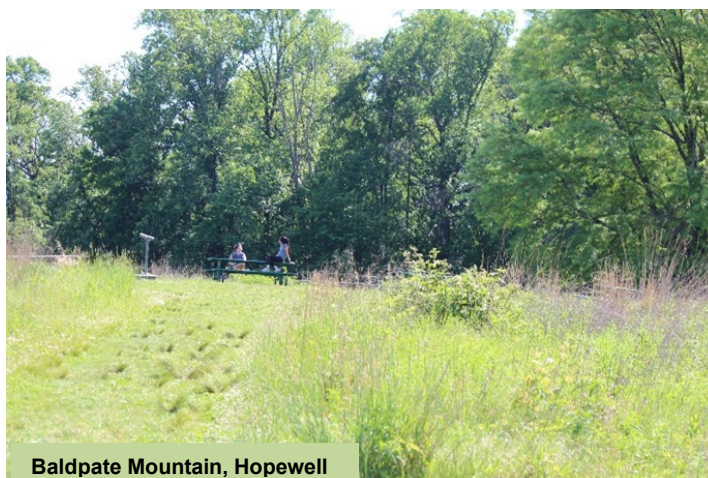


The NJMAP2, New Jersey Conservation Blueprint, and CHANJ, Connecting Habitat Across NJ both provide a visual mapping tool to identify resources and where opportunities are located throughout the County. The use of these tools can provide valuable information and analysis in identifying the criteria of this Plan such as, greenways, large forested areas, critical habitat, population related to open space needs, water features, wetlands and where the most ecologically sensitive lands can be preserved.

## B. Acquisition for Passive and Active Recreation

Open space for public recreation is important and in high demand. The preservation of recreational land that will serve a diverse community and major population areas is a criterion for acquisition.

1. Relationship to natural and undeveloped open space: The preservation and development of open space for recreational uses should provide for the preservation of the natural environment when developing recreational facilities.



2. Public access: Recreational facilities should be accessible to the public which they are meant to serve. Access in urban areas should be available through local pedestrian circulation and local mass transit systems. Regional parks outside of urban areas should also be accessible via mass transit, whenever possible. Bike trails, nature trails, and urban paths are also important public access systems. Bike trails are for use by non-motorized vehicles; motorized vehicles should be prohibited except under extraordinary circumstances.

3. Need as it relates to population: Urban areas and high population growth areas are important considerations to the location of recreational facilities. These areas have high demand for open space and there is little or no land available close to these population centers.

4. Use-specific size: The size of a park to be developed for recreation must be compatible with the use. Larger areas which are acquired for passive recreation may include activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and biking. Smaller sized parks may be appropriate for developed recreational facilities integrated with natural habitats. Small urban parks may be more suitable for playgrounds and other active recreation facilities.

5. Water access: Water access provides many possible amenities for recreation and scenic enjoyment. A river can provide a greenway for trails, non-motorized boating, and fishing. Lakes and other waterways may provide a setting for other water sports that may be practicable while maintaining the quality of the natural environment.

6. Aesthetic views and vistas: Significant and especially unique and beautiful views and vistas should be maintained. A scenic overlook of a natural, historical or expansive landscape is valuable.

7. Passive recreation: Passive recreation is best suited for natural and environmentally sensitive lands. Great care should be taken in selecting the appropriate recreational development and locating the recreational amenities appropriately.



View from Baldpate Mountain, Hopewell

8. Active recreation: Active recreation should be limited to lands that can sustain the impact of recreational development in a way that assures the maintenance of the natural environment.

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) has developed a GIS program for Mercer County that can be utilized to evaluate where there are recreational needs in the County, where there are unserved areas and also where existing parks can be improved to create pedestrian and bicycle access to adjoining neighborhoods. Planning Department staff utilized and considered the results from this tool in the development of this plan.

### C. Acquisition in Urbanized Areas

Preserving lands in urbanized areas, near where people live and work, is a priority for acquisition. Land is not plentiful or readily available in urban areas. Criteria to increase open space opportunities in the underserved urbanized areas have been established.

1. Vacant or Abandoned Properties: Many urban areas have properties that are vacant and uncared for. These properties can be preserved to help meet the open space needs of the underserved and will also help to build stronger communities by improving and utilizing vacant land.
2. Brownfield Sites: Old industrial sites and environmentally degraded lands blight the landscape and create unsafe and unclean communities. These neglected properties can be reclaimed and restored through environmental remediation and provide public open space, improve community health and safety, and provide a catalyst for economic growth.
3. Redevelopment: Urban redevelopment projects are planned to restore and promote economic growth. Successful redevelopment projects need to include elements such as public urban plazas and green spaces that will serve the community in and around the redeveloped area.
4. Community Gardens: Community Gardens should be encouraged and preserved where strong nonprofit and community organizations are involved and dedicated. These gardens provide fresh produce and support sustainable living. A community garden should also be a place

where the community gathers and socializes, while providing hands-on experience and knowledge of growing fresh produce.

5. Greenway and Open Space Connections: Greenways can provide pedestrians and cyclists with safe recreational opportunities and connections. River fronts, canals, abandoned transportation corridors, and utility rights of way can provide linear open space and alternative modes of transportation.

6. Safe and functional Open space near Schools and Community Facilities: Many urban schools do not have a proper place for children to play. Land preserved in urbanized neighborhoods should be encouraged near and adjacent to schools and other community facilities. Urban open space in the form of playgrounds and pocket parks are best utilized and protected when there is coordination with schools and other community facilities and should provide good visibility and safe access.



Mill Yard Park, Trenton



## D. Historic and Culturally Significant Lands

The preservation of cultural and historic sites is essential in the preservation of our community's and country's history.



Mercer Meadows, Hunt House, Hopewell

1. Relationship to natural and undeveloped open space: The preservation of an historic site should also include the preservation of surrounding open space. It is important that the historic resource be viewed in context as much as possible. This will enhance the preservation of the natural environment as well as the historical preservation effort.
2. Historical significance and value: Historical and cultural sites are educational and are important reminders of our heritage and our past. Preservation of historically significant landscapes must be provided.

## E. Farmland Preservation:

It is the intent of the Open Space Plan to include significant preservation of the County's farmland. This plan complements the Farmland Preservation element of the Master Plan.

1. Relationship to natural and undeveloped open space: As with all other preserved open space, farmland needs to coexist with and help maintain the preservation of the natural environment. Farmland with associated natural open space preserves our heritage of land use in Mercer County.
2. Mercer County Farmland Preservation Plan: The County shall preserve farmland consistent with the Farmland Preservation element of the Master Plan.
3. Mercer County Agricultural Development Board Criteria: Farmland preservation project selection will be based upon the established Agricultural Development Area (ADA) developed by the County Agricultural Development Board, utilizing the criteria set forth in the Farmland Preservation element of the Master Plan.
4. State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) Criteria: Farmland acquisitions will also reflect the criteria and policies set forth by the State Agriculture Development Committee.

## F. Administration and Acquisition

The following administrative criteria need to be addressed for each open space acquisition:

1. Development pressure: Projects that are otherwise appropriate for preservation but which are also under immediate threat from development will require priority and swift action. In some situations, the development pressure must be weighed against the time frame and the feasibility of the project's success.
2. Relation to planning efforts: To the greatest extent possible projects should reflect the goals set forth in the master plans of the local municipality, County, State and adjoining regions.

3. Support from other public and private groups: The support of the community, non-profit conservation organizations, local businesses and surrounding organizations is beneficial to the success of a project. Support outside of government can lead to donations and public involvement.
4. Costs: The market value of the land should be compared to the open space value of the land. A project that has a moderate or low market value along with the potential to serve a large population with a quality facility is often more appropriate than a more expensive property of equal open space value. The cost of maintenance and operating expenses must also be considered. Facilities close to existing parks that can be cared for by the same agency is more cost efficient. Generally, facilities with passive activities are less costly to develop and maintain.
5. Bargain Sales and Donations: A project with support and donations or a bargain sale to the County or a nonprofit is considered favorably. The State Green Acres program may match funding of all non-profit donations. Leveraging funds from a variety of sources and partners is essential.
6. Acquisition expediency: The lack of conflict, availability of funds, support, ease of transaction of sale and a cooperative seller are all helpful in acquiring open space relatively quickly and with minimal obstacles.

## G. Administration and Recreational Development

The Mercer County Park Commission has primary responsibility for the recreational development of County owned parks and open spaces. These criteria address overall goals for the use of the County's Open Space Trust Fund Tax in the development of these lands. The following administrative criteria need to be considered when developing County parkland:

1. Cost: The cost to develop land for recreational purposes is significantly higher per acre than the cost of acquiring land. Active recreation facilities such as ball fields, tennis and basketball courts are costly to develop, operate and maintain. Careful consideration to the limits of the open space trust fund should be considered when selecting recreational development projects. Passive opportunities such as nature trails, picnic areas, boating and fishing have less impact on the environment and are less costly to develop and maintain.

2. Private Investment and Partnerships: Due to the high cost of developing land for recreation, projects that can secure funding from public/private partnerships or other funds should be encouraged.

3. Protection of the Environment: Protection of the natural environment is an essential consideration in type and location of recreational facilities to be developed.

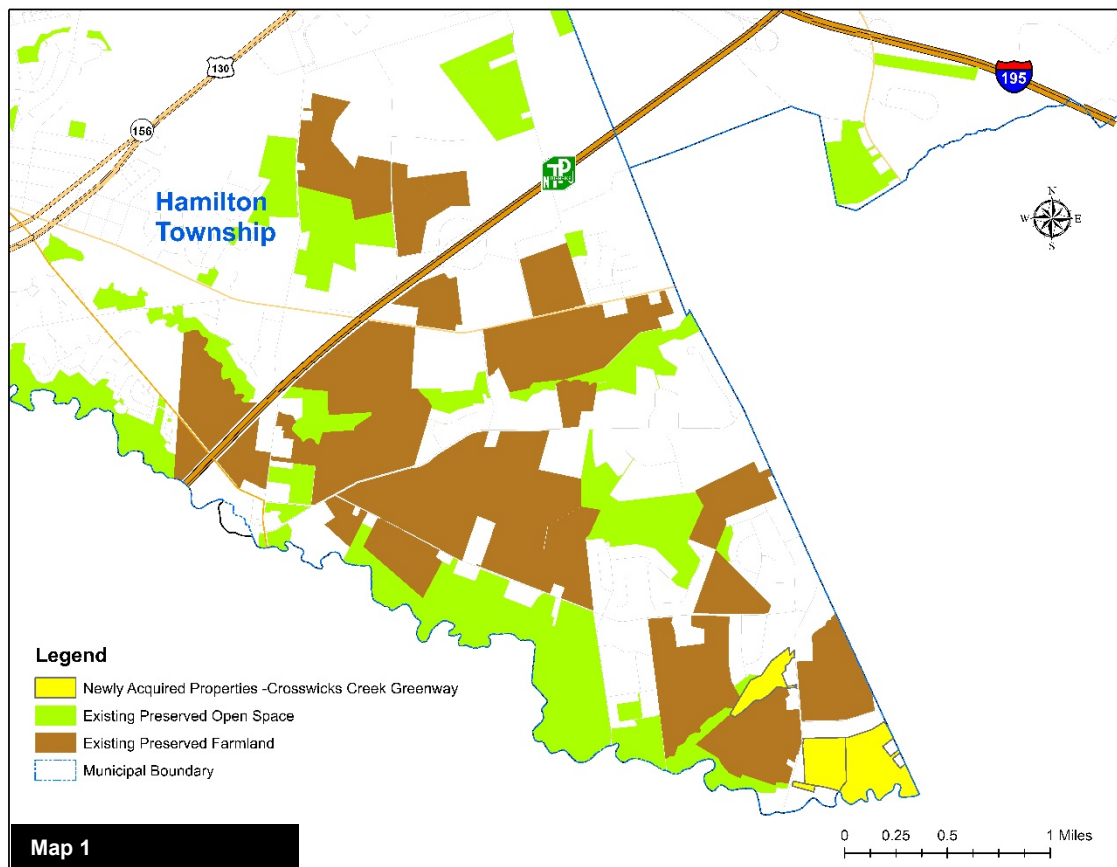
4. Coordination of development projects with the Mercer County Park Commission: It is necessary to coordinate all land acquisition and recreational development projects with the County Park Commission. The Commission is responsible for the management of these properties and their ongoing operational and maintenance costs.

## V. COUNTY LAND ACQUISITION ACTIVITY SINCE 2011 PLAN

### A. Regionally Significant County Open Space

Since 2010 the County has preserved 637.5 acres in fee simple for county public open space. While this may appear to be a small gain over an 11-year period, it consists of 15 significant properties that have enriched county owned land and improved connections. The properties that have been acquired range from 186 acres to 0.67 acres; eight of the fifteen acquisitions were less than 10 acres. Preserving key lands that connect to existing county land and or land that is along greenways has been a priority. Greenways provide regional connections to existing open space and provide opportunities to connect people to larger open space through hiking, bicycling or walking.

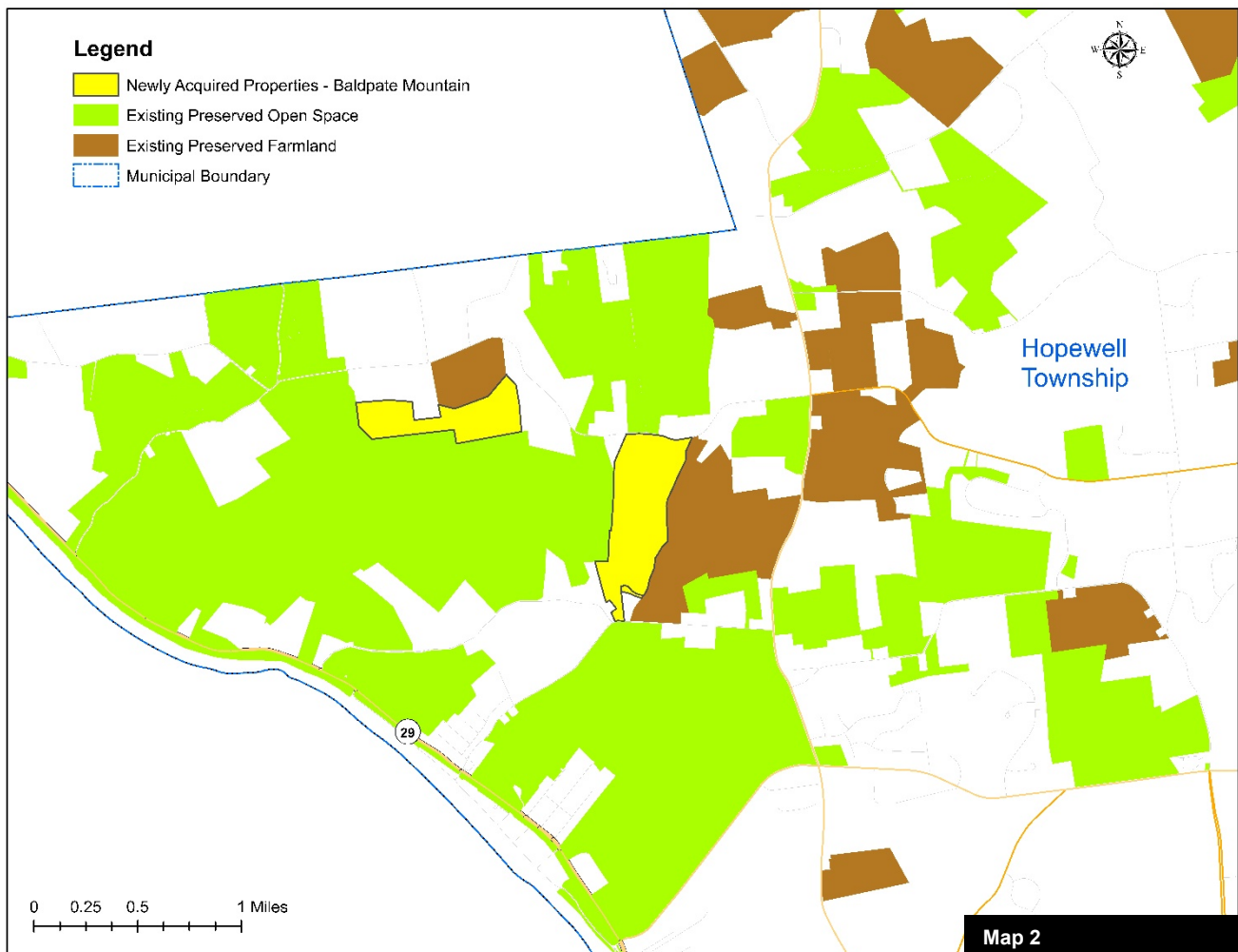
The Crosswicks Greenway has been an ongoing preservation area for the County for three decades. Almost the entire corridor of the Creek in Hamilton Township has been preserved. The Crosswicks Creek flows into the Delaware River and the Abbott Marshlands. This Greenway is also connected to the



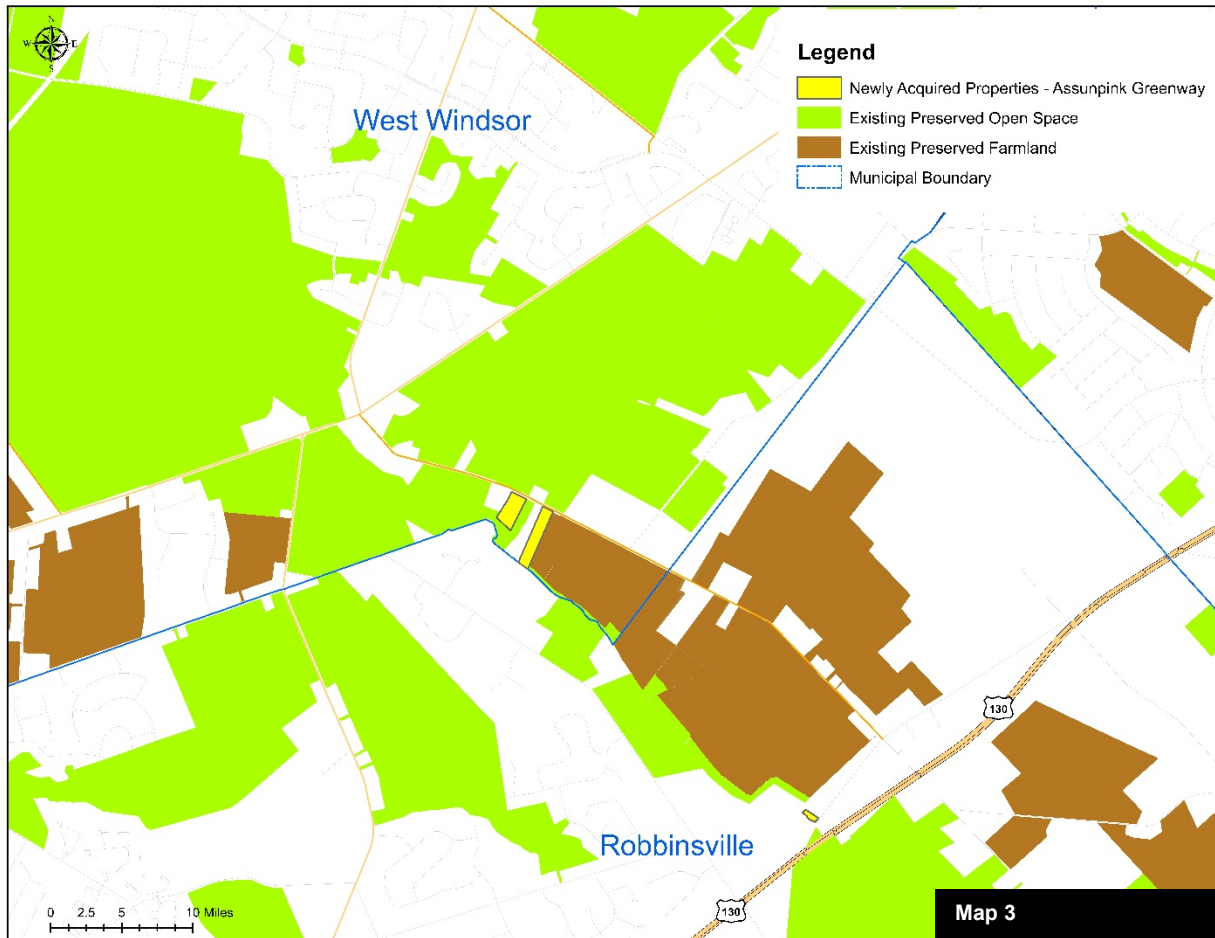


Monmouth County Greenway. Three new Crosswicks Creek greenway properties were preserved since 2010 providing small but critical missing links, stream corridor preservation, forest and grassland (see map 1).

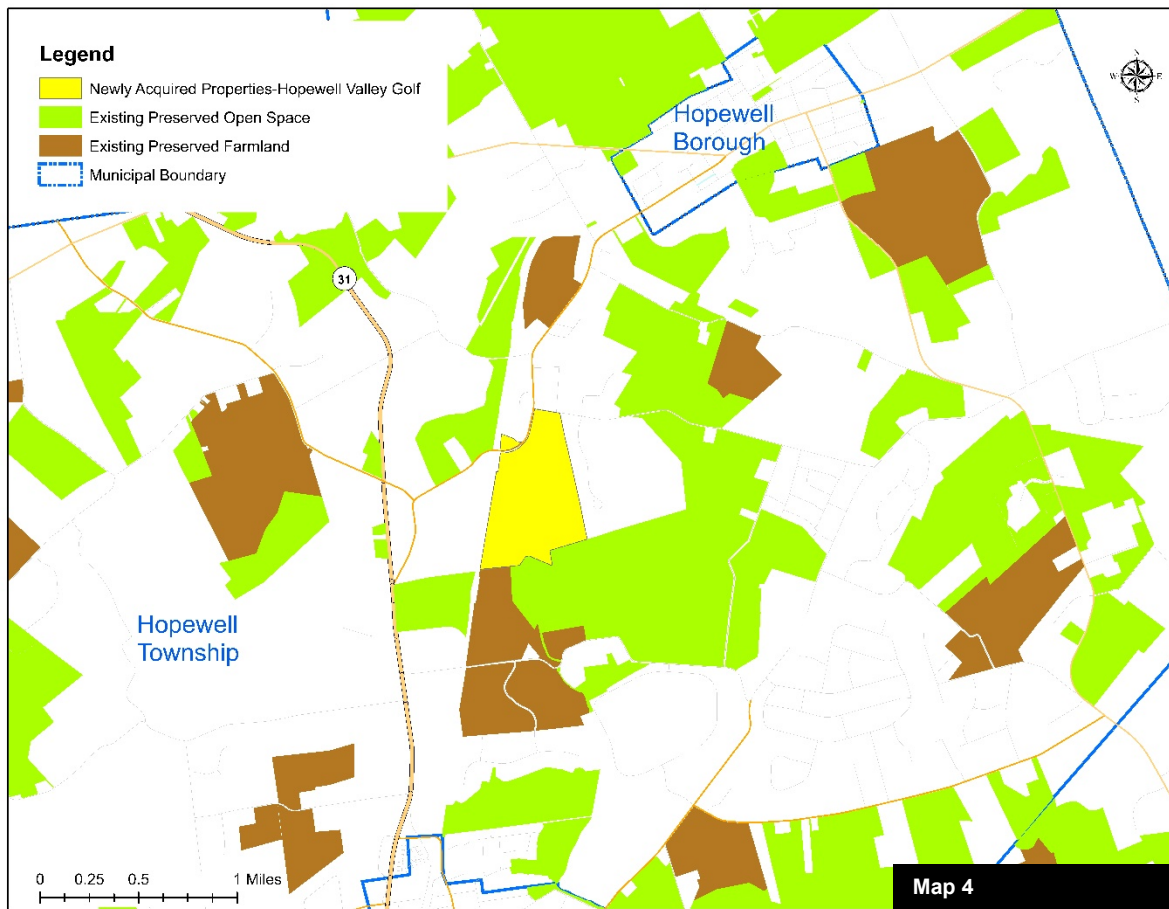
Recent additions to the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain enhance the high quality passive open space for many enthusiastic public users. Mercer County partnered with the State Green Acres acquisition program to preserve 128 additional acres on Fiddlers Creek Road and 88 additional acres were preserved by the County on the northwest side on the mountain. Another parcel that is only 0.9 acres was preserved and will provide for a trail crossing over Fiddlers Creek from the former Honey Hollow Bridge (see map 2).



Three key properties have been preserved along the Assunpink Creek. A small parcel of .67 acres which has frontage on Main Street in the Village of Windsor, Robbinsville Township provides street access to the Assunpink Greenway and the proposed future Rails-To-Trails corridor along the abandoned Camden Amboy Rail line. The second property is 5.5 acres along the Assunpink on Windsor Road. There remains only one small property between Main Street in Windsor and Mercer County Park to complete this portion of the Assunpink Greenway. The County also acquired 4.4 acres adjacent to previously preserved county land along the Assunpink in a land exchange with West Windsor (see map 3).



A significant acquisition and addition to the County's recreational facilities was the preservation of the Hopewell Valley Golf Course. The HVGC is 186 acres with an eighteen-hole golf course, a club house, swimming pool, paddle ball and tennis courts and several maintenance structures that will provide the County with a high quality public recreational facility (see map 4).



Other key acquisitions include:

- Land adjacent to Dam Site 21 in Hamilton Township
- Land adjacent to the Stony Brook Greenway (managed by The Watershed Institute)
- A small parcel next to the equestrian center in Mercer Meadows.
- Land in Princeton Township adjacent to Herrontown Woods managed by the D&R Greenway Land Trust
- Land on the Bear Brook Greenway

## B. Land Transfers

To better maintain lands on a local level the County transferred ownership of two properties to local ownership. Herrontown Woods in Princeton is adjacent to several open space properties owned and managed by the Municipality of Princeton. Transferring these 141 acres to Princeton gives the municipality the responsibility and ownership in an area where they are already providing resources and lessens the burden on the County. The second property was 26 acres of land in Mercer County Park on



Conover Road which was transferred to West Windsor Township. This portion of Mercer County Park was being used primarily for West Windsor recreational programs. In exchange, the township transferred 4.4 acres of preserved land along the Assunpink Greenway to the County.

The County has also purchased numerous farmland properties in fee that were later deed restricted and auctioned, now privately-owned preserved farmland. Therefore, these properties remain preserved but are no longer under county management and reduce the amount of County-owned fee acres.

### C. Trenton



In 2014 the County purchased almost 2 full acres in Trenton on North Clinton Avenue and Escher Avenue next to the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK). The land was deeded to the City and together the City and the D&R Greenway addressed the existing environmental remediation issues. The D&R Greenway has managed and implemented an urban farm known as Capital City Farm since 2014. In 2021 the County and the City of Trenton entered into an agreement to have the Mercer County Park

Commission oversee the management of the Farm, partnering with a nonprofit to lead the community engagement effort. The site was a vacant and undesirable blight on the neighborhood and today there is a green space and an urban farm growing fresh produce and engaging the neighborhood. Fresh produce is utilized immediately by TASK to serve their clientele. This project is an example of how the nonprofit community and the County can work together with the City to find creative opportunities for green space in Trenton and other urban areas of the County.



Before



Capital City Farm, Trenton, After

#### D. Municipal and Nonprofit Assistance Program

The Mercer County Municipal/Non-profit Assistance program provides grants to municipal and nonprofit land conservancy organizations to acquire lands of local importance. Local parkland and open space that serves a community is important in meeting the goal of providing “close to home” recreation and open space. Since 2010 the County has provided 50 grants to preserve an additional 1,733.5 acres.



## VI. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Mercer County contains 144,640 acres, over 27% of which is permanently preserved land. The preserved 27% includes all State, County, municipal, and nonprofit public open space, conservation easements and preserved farmland<sup>3</sup>.

This Plan recognizes the farmland preservation program in the total land preserved because those lands are free from residential and non-agricultural commercial development in perpetuity. Including preserved farmland also gives a more complete picture of the preservation landscape in Mercer County. Although preserved farmland is in private ownership, there are conservation, economic and health benefits associated with the preservation of the land and the maintenance of an agricultural economy in the County. Of the 27% of preserved land, approximately 6% is preserved farmland and open space and conserved open space is approximately 20%.

The development of accurate acreage figures for this Plan is challenging and has been for many years. There are several existing programs and data sources being used for the open space inventory that do not provide the same results. It is possible to evaluate the acreage of a preserved parcel using data from our Geographic Information System (GIS data), tax parcel data and the property survey and have three different acreage figures. Advances in software are available to more accurately manage and interpret the open space preservation data at the county and local levels. A new software program is being implemented by the Planning Department and the Park Commission staff. This will be a tool to improve and refine the way data is stored and evaluated for preservation goals and stewardship programming. It will also provide a more concise and accurate count for how many acres are preserved and provide a tool to better categorize the inventory and improving analysis. Implementation of this system will require the use of a single data source for property acreage (survey data, for example) which will still result acres which may differ from other source such as tax parcel or GIS data. Consistency is critical in the reporting of road rights-of-way (not preserved) and non-severable farmland exception areas (preserved in that they must remain with the preserved farm, but not subject to the Deed of Easement in the same manner).

The purpose of this Plan is the analysis of preserved public open space and conservation lands with public access. The County open space program preserves land for County parks and recreation to serve the countywide passive and active recreational needs. The program also preserves lands by working

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<sup>3</sup> The 27% was calculated using spatial GIS data layers and does not reflect actual surveyed acres.

cooperatively with the State and by providing grants to municipalities and land conservation non-profits for the preservation of locally significant open space.

Total County owned public open space including all county parkland and preserved open space, plus non-farmland conservation easements, less land transferred totals 9,537 acres. This does not include state, municipal or nonprofit open space. These open spaces are typically large open spaces or parks. There are three County parks that are over 1200 acres in size: The Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain, Mercer Meadows, and Mercer County Park. The parks operated and maintained by the Mercer County Park Commission are regionally significant and provide high quality passive and active recreation to all citizens in the County. As noted previously, larger preserved open spaces also provide offer more protection of natural resources and habitat.

Based on the Balanced Land Use Guidelines from the NJ Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), it is recommended that Mercer County preserve 7 percent of the developed and developable land which excludes steep slopes, wetlands and federal and state regulated lands. The area of developed and developable land so described equals 126,054 acres in Mercer County, resulting in a preservation target of 8,824 acres. Mercer County meets this Guideline with 9,537 acres of County open space and parkland. Although this slightly exceeds the Guideline, the County will continue to preserve land of regional significance to protect natural resources and provide passive and active public recreation.

<b>NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION</b> <b>Recommended Classification System for Local and Regional Recreation Open Space</b>		
COMPONENT POPULATION	DESIRABLE SIZE	AC/1000
MINI - PARK	1 ACRE OR LESS	0.25 - 0.5
NEIGHBORHOOD PARK/PLAYGROUND	15+ ACRES	1.0 - 2.0
COMMUNITY PARK	25+ ACRES	5.0 - 8.0
TOTAL CLOSE TO HOME		6.25-10.5
REGIONAL SPACE		
REGIONAL/METROPOLITAN PARK	200+ ACRES	5.0 – 10.0
REGIONAL PARK/RESERVE	1000+ ACRES	VARIABLE
TOTAL REGIONAL SPACE	15-20 ACRES	

Chart 1

The National Recreational and Park Association (NRPA) recommends regional parkland of 15-20 acres for every 1000 people in the County. County parkland of 9,537 acres represents 26 acres per 1000

population. Per this standard, as the population increases the need for more open space increases and open space needs continue to be in demand in more urban and growth areas of the county (see chart 1).

The New Jersey affordable housing mandate has resulted in an expected increase of residential development across the County. Court-ordered Settlement Agreements are estimated to produce an additional 9,750 residential units and 23,607 people over the next 10 years. This growth is expected to have an effect on local and county infrastructure. It is necessary to consider the impact of population growth on our systems including but not limited to transportation, water supply and treatment, libraries, and environmental mitigation measures as well as open space and recreational needs. If the anticipated population growth occurs, the County will still continue to meet the NRPA regional parkland standard of 15-20 acres per 1000 people, but by 2030 the acres per 1000 would drop to 23.6 acres. To maintain the current standard of 26 acres per 1000 population this increase in population requires the preservation of an additional 614 acres.

Geographically, County owned open space and parkland is well distributed around the County. But the balance is not evenly distributed by population. The more populated municipalities such as Trenton, Ewing, and Hightstown have little or no County parkland. Hamilton has the largest population in the County. Roebling Park is a quality County Park in a populated section of Hamilton Township, but other urbanized areas could be better served. This is a difficult issue to resolve. The more populated areas have less land available for preservation, and the larger undeveloped and natural lands are in the rural areas.

### A. Regional Open Space Opportunities

As noted, Hamilton has the largest population in the County and the County's Roebling Memorial Park is located there. In addition to being a regionally significant open space, Roebling Park serves a more urban population in the Township and is close to the City of Trenton. Other than Roebling Park and a portion of Mercer County Park in a more suburban part of Hamilton Township, the remaining County-owned land in Hamilton Township is undeveloped and provides no public recreational facilities. The Crosswicks Creek Greenway and Dam Site 21 are examples of undeveloped land that County has preserved that currently do not provide facilities for public use. These properties should be improved to provide regionally significant open space by creating safe public access and incorporate stewardship practices and resources to protect and enhance the environment and habitat of the land and the water

resources. A Master Plan process has been completed for Dam Site 21 which will bring much-needed passive recreational opportunities to this County-owned resource.

The need for regionally significant open space will continue to be a priority of the Plan. The County recognizes that much of the urban population is underserved because the larger natural recreational areas are in the rural parts of the county. Preserving land for Greenways along streams, abandoned rail lines and other land for bicycle trails, on and off road, are tools that will help increase opportunities to connect regionally significant land to more citizens of Mercer County. Improving access to Roebling Park from Trenton will help serve residents of the City of Trenton.

Based on these two standards, the Balanced Land Use Guidelines from the NJ Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and the National Recreational and Park Association (NRPA) population guideline, Mercer County is doing well preserving land of regional significance. This will continue to be an important goal for the County and will be accomplished with State and County funds and through cooperative partnerships. The focus will be to preserve lands that create connections through greenways and to expand upon regionally significant open space opportunities. The need and the challenge will be to manage and maintain these valuable public lands. The County must manage these lands to protect their natural resources, and plan and develop the land to provide for safe, quality recreational access to all citizens. Meeting these needs will be costly, but they are essential to the quality open space that the county parks must provide. Increases in funding at the county as well as the state level will be necessary in the future to meet this crucial need.

## B. Local “Close to Home” Urban Open Space Analysis

The open space deficits in Mercer County are primarily local, existing predominately in the most densely populated urban areas. Mercer County’s most densely populated municipalities are Trenton, and Hightstown Borough. Portions of other municipalities such as the townships of Ewing, Hamilton, Princeton and Lawrence also have areas of dense population. According to the Trust for Public Land, popular urban parks such as Lincoln Park in Chicago and Central Park in New York, have more annual visitors than the Grand Canyon. Obviously, Mercer County’s urban areas do not compare to these large cities, but it demonstrates the need to serve urban areas.

There are several other properties that the county owns or has invested in, in addition to Capital City Farm described in Chapter V, that serve the more urban population.



South Riverwalk Park, Trenton

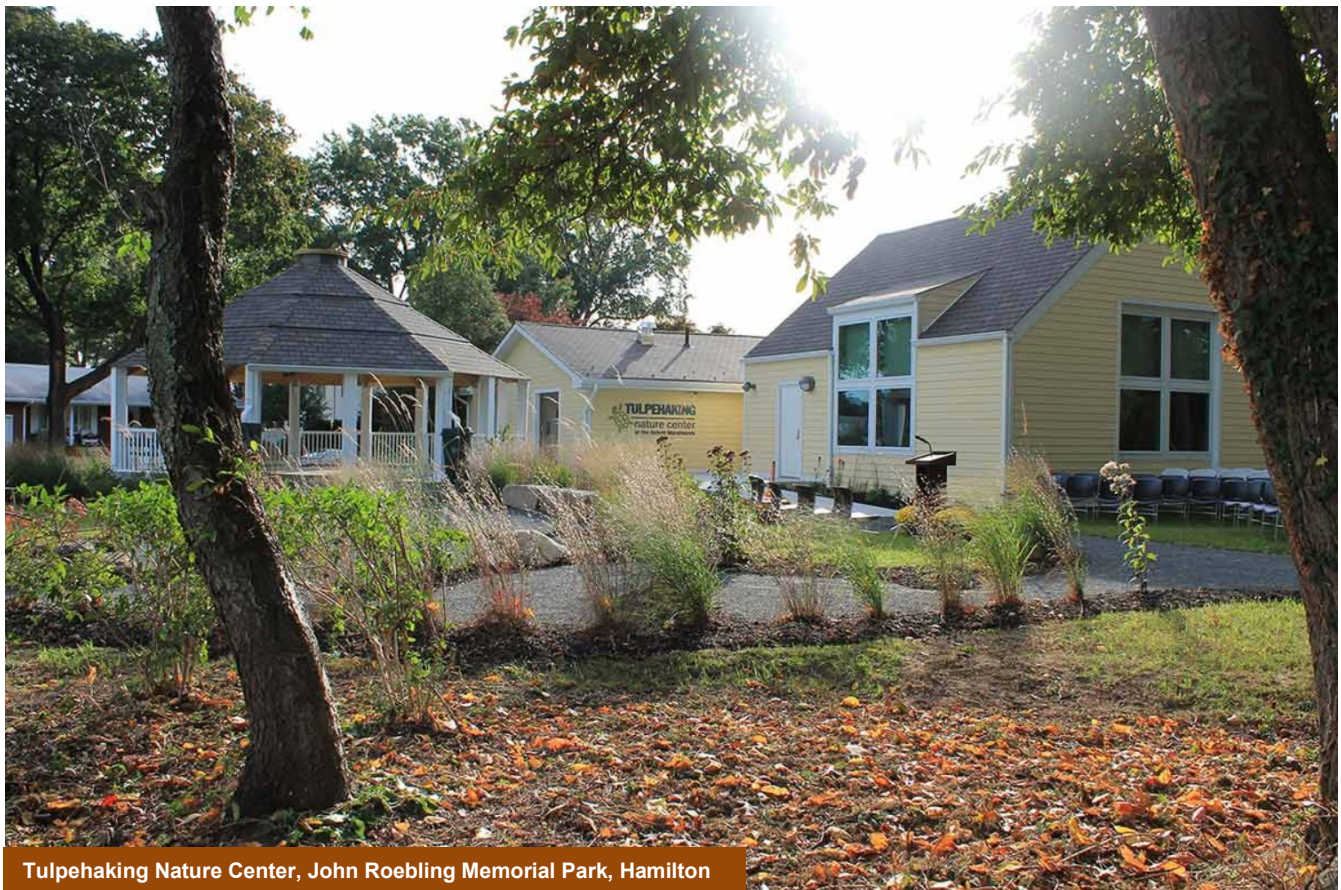
South Riverwalk Park, next to the County-owned Waterfront Park (baseball stadium), is a County park developed with State funds when the Route 29 tunnel was constructed. The County owns and manages this park. South Riverwalk Park provides an urban walkway elevated over the Route 29 tunnel and overlooking the Delaware River. The Riverwalk provides access and views of the Delaware River and an interpretive timeline of the City of Trenton. The County has committed significant maintenance resources to this facility and this urban park will continue to be a priority for the County.

The Abbott Marshlands formerly referred to as the Hamilton-Trenton-Bordentown Marsh is an abundantly diverse freshwater tidal wetland in Hamilton Township just outside Trenton's City limits. The Abbott Marshlands contains the Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark. The Abbott Farm played a significant role in the development of the fields of archaeology and geology. Archaeological research of the site was encouraged by the work of Charles Conrad Abbott in the mid-1800s and was continued internationally, as well as nationally and locally, including with Dr. Dorothy Cross of the New Jersey State Museum in the 1930s and 1940s. The "Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark Interpretive Plan" was prepared by



the County in May 2009. Tulpehaking Nature Center at Roebling Park was opened in 2014 and provides educational programs for schoolchildren and families, telling stories of the cultural, historic, and natural resources of the Abbott Marshlands. The naming of the Tulpehaking Nature Center and renaming of the Abbott Marshlands were recommended in the Abbott Farm National Landmark Interpretative Plan. Finding a way to make a walkable connection between the Nature Center and the City of Trenton and the State's D&R Canal towpath is a goal of Mercer County, as well as the Friends of the Abbott Marshlands and the Abbott Marshlands Council.

Mercer County is also working closely with the City to acquire lands along the Assunpink Greenway. The County will continue to provide the City with grants, valued at 50% of the Certified Fair Market Value, for the purchase of parcels on the Assunpink. These urban properties require a great deal of environmental remediation. Therefore, the County staff continues to support Trenton's planning process and remediation. The county is also active where the Greenway continues into the suburban areas of the County from Mercer County Park to the Village of Windsor and the State's Assunpink Wildlife Management Area.



Tulpehaking Nature Center, John Roebling Memorial Park, Hamilton

This plan recognizes the need to support local government in the urban areas of the County and will seek to be partners in the planning process, provide staff assistance and expertise, and continue to fund neighborhood and community acquisitions by providing urban grants of up to 50% of the certified fair market value of the land. The County will continue investing in the Abbott Marshlands and other regional open spaces that are in, or are easily accessible to, urban neighborhoods.

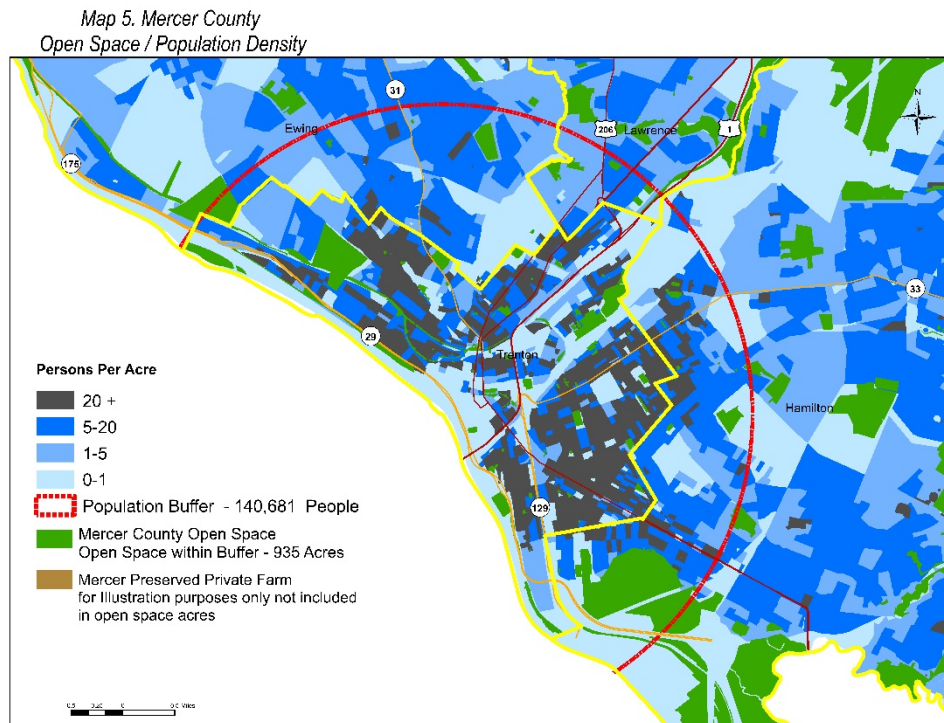
The County also recognizes the burden the City of Trenton and others have maintaining and developing urban parks. However, County development funds are extremely limited and only available for county-owned and maintained parkland. The quantity of open spaces and their size are important, but the quality, how well a park is maintained and how well it provides the aesthetics and amenities to create a functioning safe community park, are critical. The need for maintenance and development funding continues to be a concern at all levels of government.

In the sub-urban regions of the County this plan continues to support local efforts and provides municipal and non-profit open space grants, encouraging partnerships with all levels of government and land preservation organizations to preserve land that will serve the recreational needs of all the citizens in the County. It is important to ensure that these suburban and rural areas preserve adequate local recreational land for today as well as the future, particularly in pockets of population such as in the hamlets and villages within the larger community.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends meeting recreational open space needs based on population. This recommendation is appropriate for assessing local open space needs in the more populated areas of the County. As analyzed in the previous section, regional open space needs have been well addressed through the county park system in addition to some state and larger community municipal parks. These lands are primarily in the suburban and rural areas of Mercer County.

This Plan recognizes the needs of the most populated areas in the County. But it is not the intention of a county wide plan to base needs on municipal boundaries. Therefore, further analysis, based on an urban core that includes all of Trenton and the urbanized areas of Hamilton, Lawrence and Ewing, has been done to more accurately reflect the local open space needs as they relate to the County's urban population.

To better understand the need for open space for a significant portion of the County's urban population, the open space and population for the area shown on the map below was analyzed. This relatively limited area represents almost 1/3 of the total County population and has only 731 acres of preserved open space. This is less than 6 acres per 1000



people as recommended. Of these 731 acres, many are contained within the Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park, Trenton's Cadwalader Park and Mercer County's Roebling Park, which provide quality urban open spaces but do not provide local "close to home" open space for all.

### C. Local "Close to Home" Open Space Opportunities

Remediation and reclamation of under-used or contaminated properties can provide land to help meet open space needs in urban areas. Remediation and environmental cleanup take considerable time and funding, as well as qualified staff to administer the regulatory processes. Mercer County needs to work closely with the urban community to support these efforts.

## VII. PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING

Taxpayer support has been the key to the success of the County Open Space and Farmland Preservation program. The County's accomplishments have also relied on the many partnerships and programs that have leveraged and supported the county program. The many funding programs and partnerships include NJDEP State Green Acres program, NJDEP Environmental Infrastructure Trust financing program and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) as well as local government and non-profit organizations. The availability of multiple funding sources has allowed Mercer County to leverage its taxpayer money.

In the early days of our program, the Green Acres program provided grants and loans to Mercer County for assistance in preserving several significant county properties. The funding structure was typically a 25% grant and a 75% low interest loan. Projects funded under this program including 1100 acres on Baldpate Mountain, the 243-acre equestrian facility and Curlis Lake Woods, the 812-acre AT&T (Pole Farm) property and land along the Crosswicks Creek in Hamilton Township, among the most well-known. Since the Garden State Preservation Trust was established in 1998 and new State funding was established in 2009, the County has received \$12,725,000 in Green Acres planning incentive grants. These grants are based on 50% of the Certified Fair Market Value for each property acquired and have helped to keep the County acquisition program active. From 1998 through 2010, these grants have helped fund acquisitions along the Bear Brook in East Windsor, land in the Abbott Marshlands, additional land adjacent to Howell Living History Farm and Baldpate Mountain, land in Lawrence on Fackler Road, land of historic significance in Princeton, as well as properties in the Washington (now Robbinsville) Greenbelt and land adjacent to Veterans Park in Hamilton. Since the 2010 Open Space Plan, Green Acres grants provided funds for the Tulpehaking Nature Center, preserved additional land on Baldpate Mountain known as Hollystone, and several properties along the Crosswicks Greenway. Green Acres funds were also provided to the County for land purchased by the County and transferred to Ewing Township. This 44-acre site has been the County's only land purchase in Ewing Township and this purchase provided for the preservation of the former Jewish Community Center, now known as the Ewing Senior and Community Center. The County holds both conservation and historic preservation easements on the site.

Many other projects that have already been preserved by the County are eligible for Green Acres grants and Green Acres reimbursement is expected in the future.



The County open space program and County Agricultural Development Board work together to ensure that the goals of each program are accomplished where possible. For example, when preserving farms with a stream on the property boundary which is part of a priority Greenway, the County seeks to preserve an area along the stream corridor for public access while preserving irrigation rights for the farmer. This cooperative effort illustrates the value in having all of the County's land preservation efforts directed by one office with access to Trust Fund dollars. In these projects and others, State Green Acres funds and SADC funds have been leveraged with county funds. (See Farmland Preservation element of the Master Plan)

Since its inception in 1997, the County Non-profit and Municipal Assistance Program has awarded over 140 grants to municipalities and non-profit land conservancies resulting in the preservation of 5997 acres of locally important open space. Non-profits leverage these grants, and through their outreach and landowner relations they have been extremely successful in securing bargain sales and private individual and business donations. These funds raised by the non-profits, along with Green Acres grants, and county grants have been the formula for the success of this program.

The County has also partnered on large regional acquisitions such as the historic Tusculum property, lands that expand The Watershed Institute (formerly Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association) preserve, State purchases next to Baldpate Mountain and the State Assunpink Wildlife Management Area, land adjacent to Hamilton's Veterans Park and property in the Hopewell Borough Greenbelt. Large partnership projects since 2010 include the preservation of the Mount Rose Preserve on Carter Road in Hopewell Township, involving six funding partners and four managing owners, and 146 acres known as Woosamonsa Ridge. Preserving large costly projects cooperatively with numerous partners and programs has provided the opportunity to leverage multiple funding sources and greater flexibility, leading to great success.

The continued availability of a stable source of State funding is critical to the County open space program, as well as programs throughout the entire State. Future voter support for local and county open space initiatives is also essential.

The County continues its cooperation and partnerships with non-profit organizations, not just as it relates to funding, but to share all resources including professional staff knowledge and experience as well as volunteer groups and efforts. With the current state of the economy due to Covid-19 and the



demonstrated importance of open space and public recreation during the pandemic, it is vital that all these funding sources and efforts continue to be available.

## **PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION**

### **NJDEP Green Acres**

Grants and loans for acquisition and development

### **NJDEP**

National Trails Grants

### **NJDEP Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program**

Acquisition loans

### **NJDOT**

Trail Grants

### **Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission**

Regional Trail Grants

### **Local Governments**

Local open space funds

### **Regional Non-Profits**

*D&R Greenway Land Trust Inc.*

*New Jersey Conservation Foundation*

Funding, landowner negotiations, programming, staff support, volunteers

### **Local Open Space and Friends Organizations**

Funding, volunteers

### **Corporations and Local Business**

Volunteers, donations, program support

### **Volunteers**

Time, labor, support

Innovative tools and techniques for preservation are also important to leverage the available funds. Often the recreational and environmental values of certain lands can be preserved through easement purchases. The county purchases the development rights and preserves the land, but the owner continues to care for and own the land. This can save the county in acquisition and maintenance costs. The County should support and encourage local ordinances that encourage and allow for Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), cluster development and stream corridor preservation. Through site design the County and private developers should continue to build creative partnerships to further expand

preservation. Tax benefits for landowners, and creative financing are effective tools that can benefit the seller.

## VIII. GOALS AND PROGRAM ACTION AREAS

### A. County Regional Open Space Preservation Areas

**Goal: Preserve regionally significant open space that enhances the county-wide park system.**

The County's Regional Open Space Preservation Project Areas are identified as being large areas for preservation that will protect lands in a largely natural or undeveloped state and provide regionally significant recreational opportunities. These project areas are to be owned by the County and maintained by the Mercer County Park Commission as public parkland, regional greenways, stream corridors and greenbelts. These areas are primarily to be funded through the County Open Space Tax and State Green Acres funds and provide for passive and active recreation. This category recognizes expanding existing county parkland by adding lands which would protect or enhance existing facilities, provide additional regionally significant public recreation opportunities or preserve large naturally significant environs. The



Baldpate Mountain, Hopewell

County should consider opportunities to purchase nonprofit and privately held recreational facilities that may become available, especially if the facility can be permanently preserved and provide regional recreation opportunities and programs.

### **B. Regional Cooperative Open Space Projects and Green Corridors**

**Goal: Preserve land through cooperative partnerships to leverage funds on properties of regional significance and greenways.**

As funding at all levels has become more competitive, it has become imperative to work cooperatively with all preservation organizations and governments to pool all resources, expertise, experiences and funds. Many projects are too large and costly for one entity to preserve. These cooperative projects require that all funding sources be utilized, including State, County and local money, but also to leverage these public dollars with private funds. Employing non-profits to raise private funds from the community, businesses, and individuals can be very effective. These cooperative land acquisitions will require using tools such as conservation and view-shed easements, bargain sales, and innovative financing and land use principles. The ownership of these properties may result in an undivided interest with all funding entities on a single deed or divided into several properties with specific uses or restrictions that are best suited to each organization. These transactions must include clear management and stewardship responsibilities for the maintenance and use of the property.

Greenways are regional projects that most often span multiple jurisdictions and will best be accomplished through a cooperative approach. Long term, Greenways and linear parks are proposed along the Assunpink Creek, Jacobs Creek, connecting to the Stony Brook, Bear Brook, Millstone River, Crosswicks Creek, Shipetaukin and Shabakunk Creeks, Miry Run and other smaller streams. Larger patches of open space along the streams, and connections with other open spaces are proposed where important wildlife habitat, valuable farmland, or sensitive habitats are identified. These greenways and corridors are coordinated with similar proposals at the municipal level for these and other streams. Connections should be made to the efforts of the State D&R Canal Commission to reclaim and restore portions of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Park throughout the County.

### **C. Mercer County Municipal and Nonprofit Assistance Program**

**Goal: Assist municipalities and nonprofits in preserving locally significant open space through the County grant program.**

Pursuant to NJSA 40:12-15.6, distribution of grants for land preservation to municipalities and local non-profits is permissible from the County Open Space Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust fund. The Mercer County Municipal/Non-profit Assistance program provides grants to municipal and nonprofit land conservancy organizations to acquire lands of local importance. Local parkland and open space that serves a community is important in meeting the goal of providing “close to home” recreation and open space. It is recommended that the local entity secure Green Acres funds as well as landowner donations and private funds from business and foundations. The County grant is designed to fill in funding gaps. Since the County has limited funding for park development, the County grants can only be used for acquisition. Local government is encouraged to develop local parkland for active recreation.

Funding is eligible to all municipalities and non-profit land conservancy organizations for the preservation of open space. The property must be consistent with the Mercer County Master Plan Open Space element or the open space element of the municipal master plan. All applicants must apply to the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board for recommendation to the County Administration and approval by the Board of County Commissioners. The current policy is appended to this Plan.

The Open Space Preservation Board reviews the program and the grant structure guidelines annually and makes a recommendation to the County Administration for approval. Projects demonstrating regional significance, urban projects and all projects in the City of Trenton qualify for enhanced funding.

#### **D. Urban Open Space**

**Goal: Support the preservation of urban land preservation through priority funding through the County grant program.**

This program recognizes the importance of supporting the need for recreation and open space in the urbanized and under-served areas of the County. The City of Trenton and other urbanized areas in the County can receive 50% acquisition funding from the County and the State; the difficulty is finding land in the urban area that is vacant, available and clean from contamination. This initiative seeks to assist in the acquisition, remediation and maintenance of urban parkland. To accomplish this, the County will partner with the City to purchase and remediate identified parcels for acquisition and clean up. These lands could be cooperatively owned and managed by the City and or the County. The Assunpink



Greenway, lands along the Trenton waterfront, and the Abbott Marshlands are currently identified for this program.

### E. Coordinated County Wide Trails Systems and Connection

**Goal: Preserve land that creates or expands connections to open spaces, greenways and trail systems.**

Mercer County recognizes the many initiatives for trails systems within the County and for trails that connect from outside the County and State borders. Mercer County has been supportive and an active participant in the Lawrence Hopewell Trail, East Coast Greenway, Capital to Coast Trail, Heritage Trail, Crossroads of the Revolution, and Rails to Trails. Preserving lands that connect trails is a high priority not only to connect people to nature and community but also to provide alternatives to the automobile and protect corridors of wildlife habitat. This Plan supports preserving and providing land for multi-modal trail connections and supporting local and county bike plans, rail trails, as well as the efforts of local and regional organizations such as the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association's *Greater Mercer Trail Plan* and Heritage Trail Connector and other Circuit trails identified throughout the Trenton



Lawrence Hopewell Trail



Philadelphia area. The Delaware River Heritage Trail initiated by the Delaware River Greenway Partnership and now part of the Circuit Trail is envisioned as a 60-mile-long trail along the Delaware River that will link 24 communities, from Trenton to Palmyra on the New Jersey side.

## **F. County Farmland Preservation**

**Goal: Support the County Farmland Preservation Program.**

A Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan has been prepared as required for SADC cost share grants, and it sets the goals and policies for farmland preservation in Mercer County. Mercer County open space and farmland preservation efforts are coordinated and cooperatively implemented to ensure the integrity of both programs. Where appropriate, it is often best to partner with the farmland program on certain properties that may have agricultural values, as well as recreation and environmental values.

## **G. Development of County Open Space**

**Goal: Working with the County Park Commission, identify priorities to provide funding to improve and develop recreational opportunities within the County Park System.**

Mercer County parkland development projects are specifically for improvements on lands in which the county has an ownership interest. These projects are intended to improve public access and use of these County lands for recreation. Funding for parkland development and historic preservation is currently authorized up to 20% of the County Open Space Preservation tax and is therefore limited. The referendum authorizing the three cents tax imposed this limit. Therefore, the limit cannot be raised without a new referendum. The primary use of these funds is to improve access to the many County lands that have been preserved through the County Open Space Preservation tax. The acquisition of land has been aggressive and successful. These properties now need to be made accessible through trails and trail head parking, signage and comfort facilities. Development projects for major active recreational projects such as playing fields are costly and must be carefully designed to fit into natural landscapes. County open space trust funds for recreation should continue to be leveraged with County capital and Green Acres funds.

All lands preserved by the County and that are owned and operated by the County are the responsibility of the Mercer County Park Commission. All county open space is required to have public access and can be developed for active and or passive recreation at any time.

Recognizing the limited development funds allocated by the Open Space Tax, the following projects and similar projects on County parkland are currently under development for public recreation with available funds from the open space tax. Additional projects are developed as time and resources permit.



**Moore’s Station Quarry, Hopewell Township.** When Mercer County and others purchased Baldpate Mountain in 1998, a condition of the purchase was the lease back of the quarry to Trap Rock Industries. Trap Rock’s rights in the property end in April 2023 at which time management of the quarry itself reverts to Mercer County alone. A master plan effort for the recreational development of the site began in fall 2020.

**Miry Run Ponds, (also known as Dam Site 21), Hamilton and Robbinsville Townships.** Dam Site 21 was constructed as part of the Assunpink Watershed flood control project. Dam Site 21 is southeast of



Mercer County Park and it lies along the Miry Run. The land was purchased in the late 1970's to be held and used for permanent recreation and conservation of land and water resources. It consists of 370 acres. The Miry Run Master Plan, involving a comprehensive public process, was completed in January 2020. The Master Plan provides for passive recreation and environmental restoration. Master Plan implementation is anticipated in phases over the next several years.

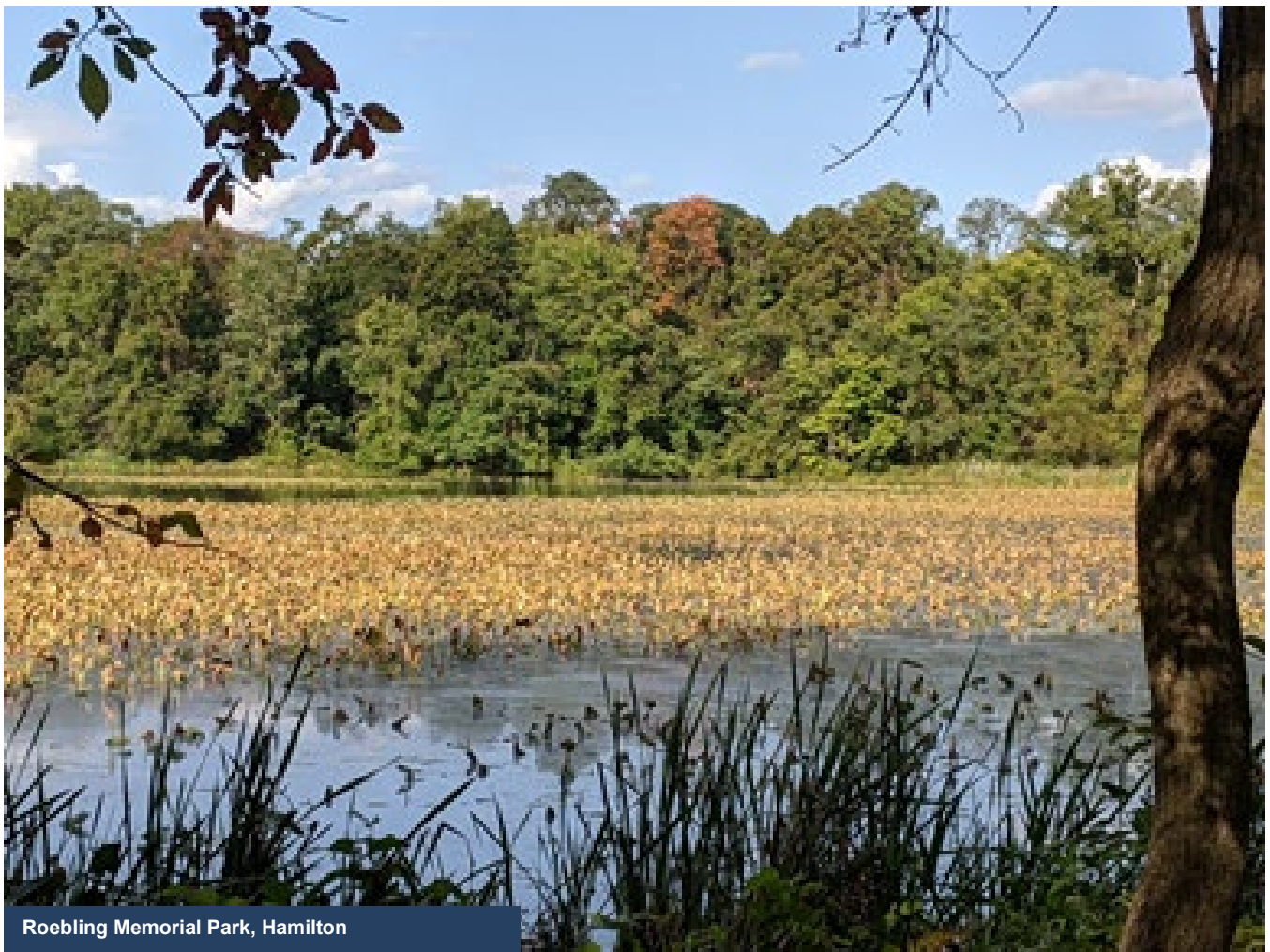


Dam Site 21, Hamilton

**Crosswicks Creek Greenway, Hamilton Township.** Mercer County has preserved several significant properties along the Crosswicks Creek in Hamilton Township. The northern portion of the Creek from Extonville Road downstream to and including the 130 acres preserved on Iron Bridge Road, has undergone some preliminary master planning and design. The design includes comfort facilities, ADA trails, parking, and canoe launches at Extonville and Iron Bridge Roads. Passive recreational improvements that will create a continuous public access trail for hiking, canoeing and associated passive recreation along the Crosswicks Creek to the Delaware River and the Abbott Marshlands are proposed.

**Assunpink Greenway, Robbinsville, West Windsor, Lawrence Townships and City of Trenton.** The County has preserved land along the Assunpink Creek from Mercer County Park to Main Street in the Village of Windsor, Robbinsville Township. Public access and the development of a trail along the Assunpink will provide regional connections to Mercer County Park and the five miles of a proposed Rail Trail along the former Camden Amboy Rail line. The Greenway also has the potential to connect to the Union Transportation Trail (UTT) in development in East Windsor and Miry Run Ponds.

**John Roebling Memorial Park, Hamilton Township.** Roebling Park is one of the County's oldest parks. A Roebling Park Master Plan should be undertaken to consider improvements to the Park including enhanced connections to Abbott Marshlands and the Tulpehaking Nature Center as well as improvements to public use and access.



**Master Gardeners.** The activities of the Master Gardeners at the County's Equestrian Facility (part of Mercer Meadows) are cramped and the County's equestrian programming is expanding. Therefore, it is desirable to consider an alternative location for the Master Gardeners which would allow for continued public programming, educational outreach and potential growth.

#### H. Land Stewardship

**Goal: Working with the County Park Commission, identify stewardship priorities to protect and improve the environmental qualities of preserved lands.**



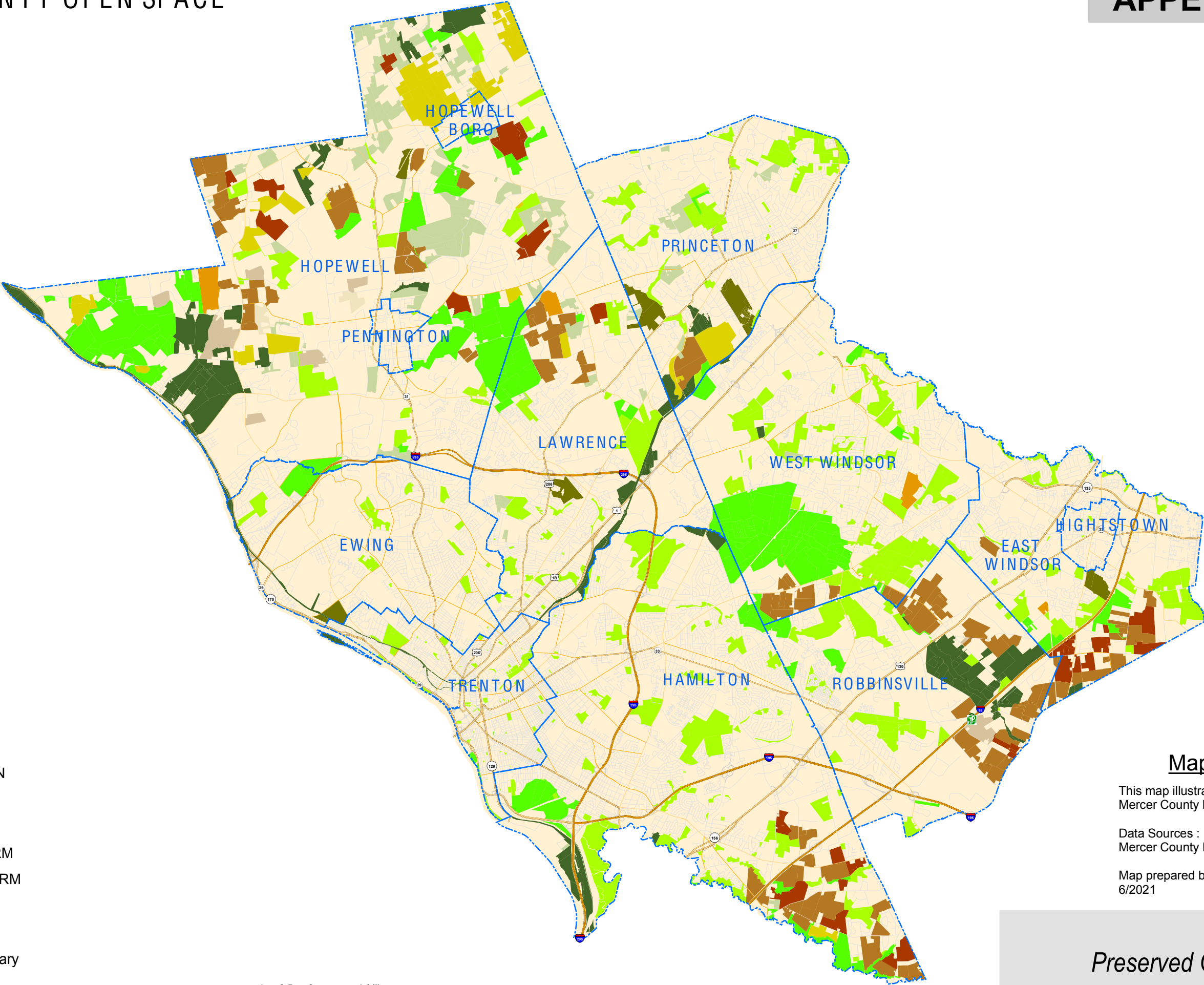
It is of utmost importance that the Open Space Preservation Plan recognize the critical need for stewardship of the preserved lands in which the County has invested. In response to this need the voters of Mercer County approved a referendum in 2012 that provides for up to 10% of the trust fund tax to be utilized for stewardship activities. These funds have been used on numerous projects throughout the County Park system and County-owned open space. Staff and resources must continue to be provided to protect and enhance the natural and environmentally significant resources of all existing and future county preserved open space.



## APPENDICES



- Legend
- COUNTY
  - STATE
  - MUNICIPAL
  - NONPROFIT
  - CONSERVATION
  - DEED PRIVATE
  - COUNTY FARM
  - MUNICIPAL FARM
  - NONPROFIT FARM
  - STATE FARM
  - GOLF
  - Municipal Boundary



1 0.5 0 1 Miles

Map Summary

This map illustrates the existing open space within Mercer County by category of preservation.

Data Sources :  
Mercer County Planning Open Space Data

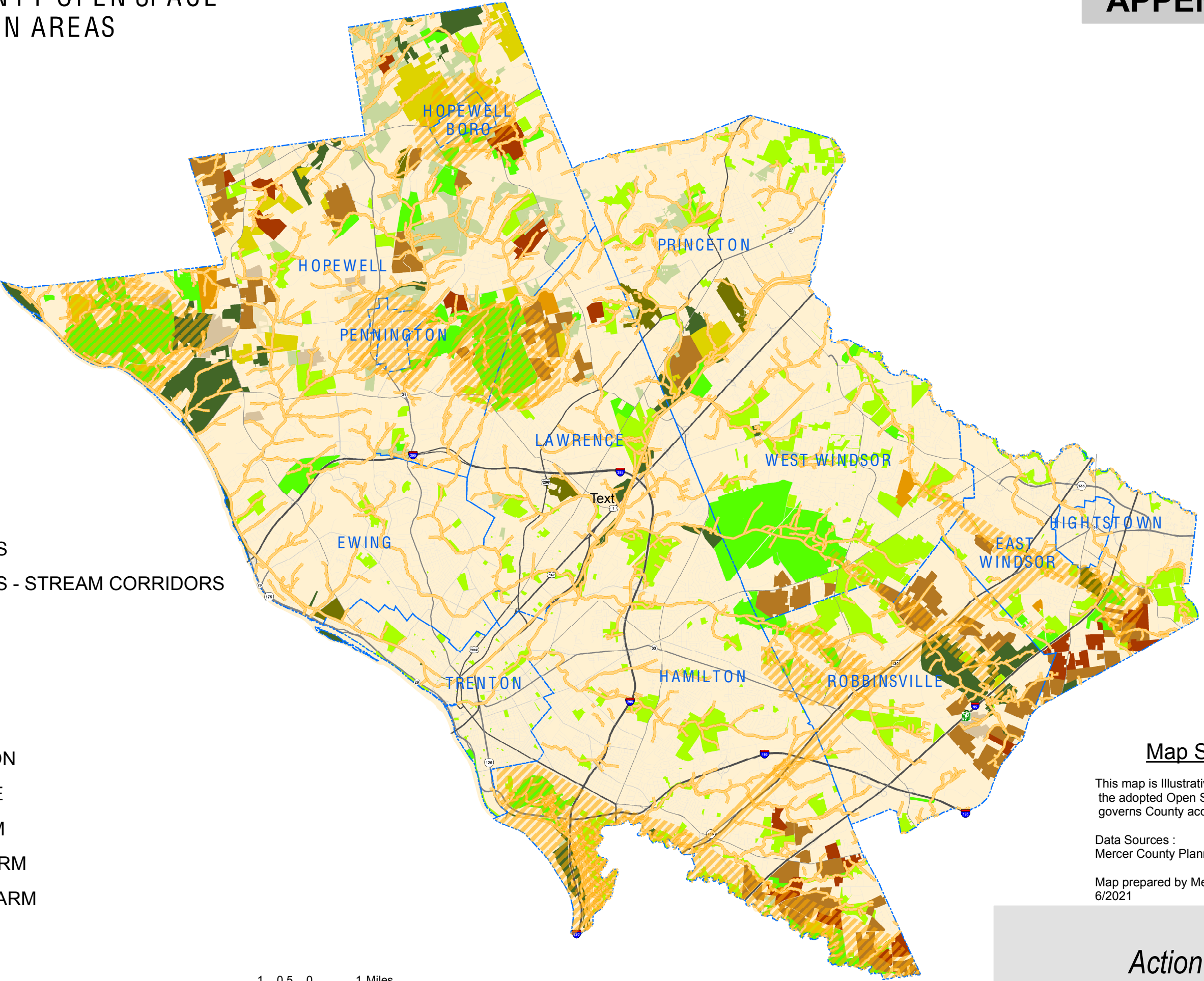
Map prepared by Mercer County Planning Department  
6/2021

Preserved Open Space



MERCER COUNTY OPEN SPACE  
ACTION AREAS

APPENDIX. MAPS



- ACTION AREAS
- ACTION AREAS - STREAM CORRIDORS
- COUNTY
- STATE
- MUNICIPAL
- NONPROFIT
- CONSERVATION
- DEED PRIVATE
- COUNTY FARM
- MUNICIPAL FARM
- NONPROFIT FARM
- STATE FARM
- GOLF

1 0.5 0 1 Miles

Map Summary

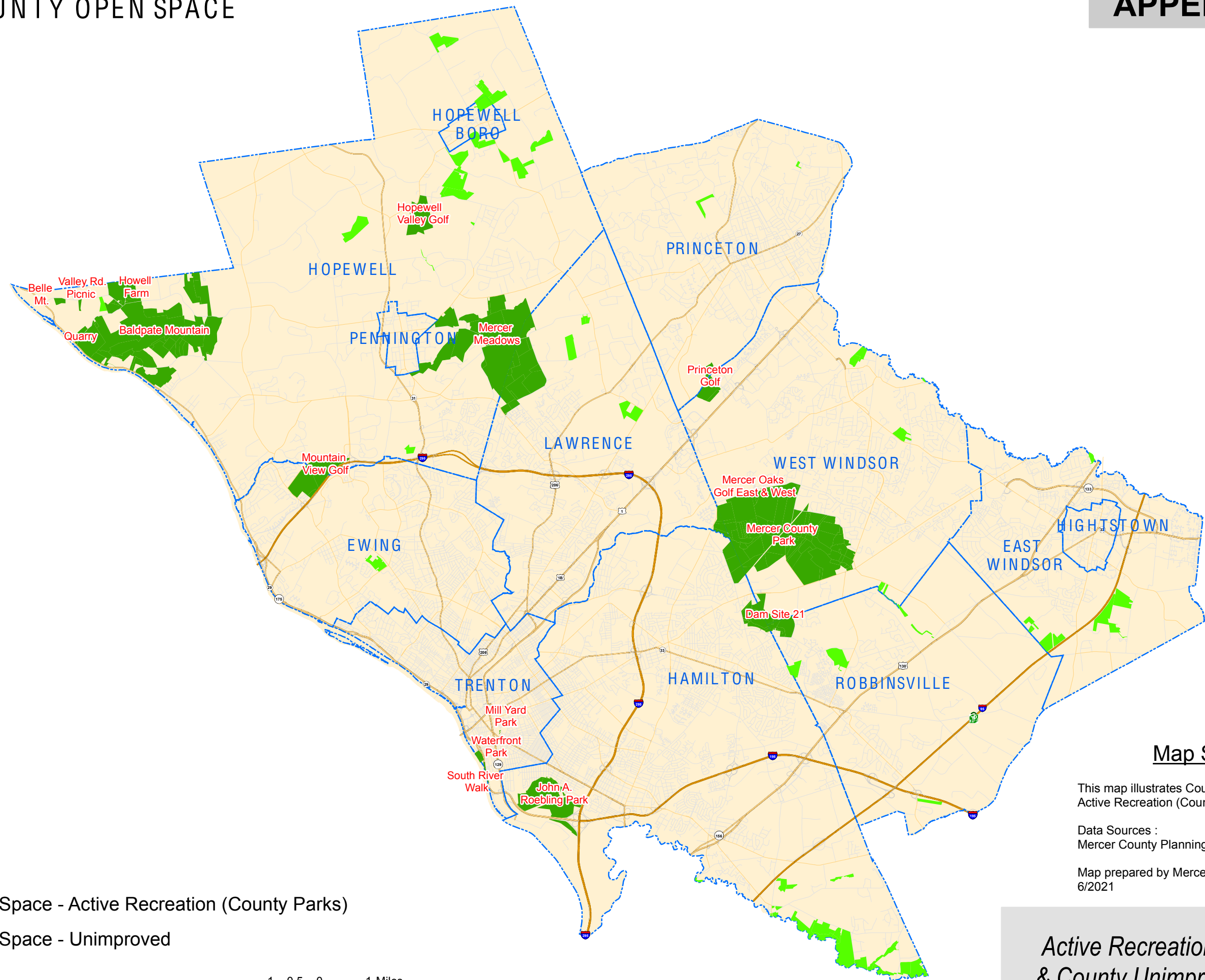
This map is illustrative of County preservation Goals: the adopted Open Space Plan governs County acquisition priorities.

Data Sources :  
Mercer County Planning Open Space Data

Map prepared by Mercer County Planning Department  
6/2021

Action Areas

## APPENDIX. MAPS



*Active Recreation (County Parks)  
& County Unimproved Open Space*

1 0.5 0 1 Miles



# APPENDIX-County Open-Active Recreation(County Parks

Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	37.00	14.4
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	5.00	516.6
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	32.00	43.5
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	7.01	5.2
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	38.00	3.9
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	23.03	17.3
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	27.00	24.9
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	23.02	15.6
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	17.00	7.5
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	7.00	23
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	59.00	14.1
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	6.00	172.2
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	31.00	20.9
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	21.00	60.3
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	23.01	19.8
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	43.00	24.1
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	59.00	2.00	20.1
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	50.00	1.4
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	52.00	8.00	15
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	52.00	19.01	64.8
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	18.00	17.5
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	52.00	32.00	77
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	133.00	14.02	113.1
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	28.00	139.4
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	29.03	143.2
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60	4.02	85.1
Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60	54	1.4
Belle Mountain	Hopewell Twp	59	3	15.8
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	29.01	60.9
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	72	0.7
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	28.01	12.2
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	5	0.7
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	7	0.9
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	3	1.9



Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	2	16.3
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	40	20
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	45	4.4
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	43	4.9
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	42	29
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	44	42.2
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	41	2.8
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	74	3.3
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	64	16.7
Dam Site 21	West Windsor Twp	29.00	3.01	4.2
Dam Site 21	West Windsor Twp	29.00	5.01	25.1
Dam Site 21	West Windsor Twp	29.00	6.00	27.4
Dam Site 21	Robbinsville Twp	4	78.01	2.2
Dam Site 21	Hamilton Twp	1631	46	4.3
Hopewell Valley Golf Club	Hopewell Twp	37.00	6.00	178.2
Hopewell Valley Golf Club	Hopewell Twp	34	3	3.5
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	55.00	2.00	2.2
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	54.00	5.00	5.5
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	54.00	7.00	14.3
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	54.00	8.00	1.3
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	55.00	1.00	82.6
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	54.00	6.00	42.8
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	59	13.02	3.5
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	59	13.03	3.7
Howell Living History Farm	Hopewell Twp	59	13.01	29.6
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2405	3	122.8
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2370	2	0.5
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2370	3	0.3
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2406	3	15.8
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2370	1	0.5
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2405	6	55.3
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2218	1	0.3

Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2405	7	58
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2405	10	4.7
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2406	2	118.1
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2405	8	2.1
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2359	10	0.2
John A.Roebling Park	Hamilton Twp	2507	4	26.3
Mercer County Park	Hamilton Twp	1512	26	42.3
Mercer County Park	Hamilton Twp	1512	28	39.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	40.00	33.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	35.00	10.3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	33.00	7.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	34.00	0.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	16.00	67.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	48.00	8.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	92.00	26
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	50.00	10
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	42.00	5.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	38.00	4.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	22.00	3.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	2.00	8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	17.00	40.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	3.00	100.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	93.00	0.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	41.00	9.3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	102.00	1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	9.00	13.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	70.00	2.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	20.00	10.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	3.00	51.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	2.00	74.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	27.00	34.3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	46.00	12.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	39.00	8.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	13.00	9.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	53.00	8.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	18.00	17.8

Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	72.00	6.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	19.00	29.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	6.00	20.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	4.00	43
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	17.00	24.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	26.00	122.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	32.00	32.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	28.00	161.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	15.00	10.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	55.00	2.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	52.00	5.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	12.00	5.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	21.00	0.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	14.00	22.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	13.00	37.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	10.00	22.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	48.00	14.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	12.00	35.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	56.00	3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	47.00	3.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	54.00	16
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	45.00	11.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	1.00	19.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	4.00	10.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	101.00	0.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	5.00	53.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	91.00	0.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	7.00	63.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	6.00	9.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	1.00	56.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	27.00	9.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	34.00	128.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	24.14	23.00	4.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	14.00	38.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	105.00	1.3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	47.00	30.5

Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	43.00	3.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	24.00	5.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	25.00	42.3
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	24.00	53.2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	35.00	52.7
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	44.00	3.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	11.00	30.9
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	43.00	31.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	85.00	0.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	59.00	2
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	36.00	18.8
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	5.00	8.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	84.00	1.1
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	23.00	17.6
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	25.00	15.00	53.5
Mercer County Park	West Windsor Twp	23.00	103.00	0.6
Mercer County Park	Lawrence Twp	4301	3	20.3
Mercer County Park	Lawrence Twp	4301	2	5.9
Mercer County Park	Lawrence Twp	4301	4	12.2
Mercer County Park	Lawrence Twp	4301	1	11.7
Mercer County Park	Hamilton Twp	1512	27	42.4
Mercer County Park	West Windsor	25.03	18	7.9
Mercer County Park Mercer Oaks Golf East	West Windsor Twp	23	8	180.6
Mercer County Park Mercer Oaks Golf West	West Windsor Twp	23	9	60
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	77.00	1.00	310.7
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	72.00	35.00	114.3
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	77.00	8.00	8.3
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	72.00	4.00	125.6
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	11.02	32.7
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	45.00	1.03	78.3
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	3	13.9
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	4	94.1
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	12	7
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	5	76.5
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	7	17.8
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	8	17.1



Facility	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	acres
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	6	6
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	14	22.3
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	13	5.7
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	2	119.6
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	15	45.5
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	11	57.3
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6101	1	10.4
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	6008	1	0.5
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	10.00	70.2
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	9.00	118.4
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	6.00	62.8
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	7.00	173.3
Mercer Meadows	Lawrence Twp	7201	28	47.8
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	12.00	27.7
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	44.00	17.02	10.1
Mercer Meadows	Hopewell Twp	72	4.01	9.6
Mill Yard Park Roebling	Trenton	16001	4	0.8
Mill Yard Park Roebling	Trenton	13701	27	0.1
Mountain View Golf Course	Ewing Twp	372	3	28
Mountain View Golf Course	Ewing Twp	372	2	23.5
Mountain View Golf Course	Ewing Twp	372	1	133.2
Mountain View Golf Course	Hopewell Twp	94.00	1.00	89.8
Mountain View Golf Course	Ewing	372	4	8.6
Mountain View Golf Course	Hopewell Twp	94.01	3	17.2
Princeton Golf Course Country Club	West Windsor Twp	7.00	70.00	12.3
Princeton Golf Course Country Club	West Windsor Twp	7.00	69.00	73.8
Princeton Golf Course Country Club	Princeton Twp	10201	1	22.8
Quarry - Baldpate Mountain	Hopewell Twp	60.00	1.00	138.9
South River Walk - Tunnel Park	Trenton	11403	0	6.4
Valley Road Picnic	Hopewell Twp	59	3	6.8
Waterfront Park	Trenton	11403	6.01	13.8
Waterfront Park	Trenton	11403	5.01	1.6

# APPENDIX - County Open Space - Unimproved

Project_Ar	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	name_1	acres
Assunpink Greenway	West Windsor Twp	32.00	2.01	Jany Stream Corridor	1.03
Assunpink Greenway	West Windsor Twp	32.00	3.00	Pietrinferno	5.89
Assunpink Greenway	West Windsor Twp	32	2	Jany Stream Corridor	1.23
Assunpink Greenway	Robbinsville Twp	10	29.02	Cuhna	0.66
Assunpink Greenway	West Windsor Twp	32	10	Wolff	5.53
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	30	24	East Windsor Regional Park	2.08
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	45	17	Lenox	9.89
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	44	9.02	Delre	2.43
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	46	26	Saltman	12.11
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	44	1.06	Frey/ Bear Brook	2.82
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	30	18	East Windsor Regional Park	91.85
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	30	16	East Windsor Regional Park	62.36
Bear Brook Greenway	West Windsor Twp	32.00	4.02	Thompson/Olenickz ak	4.37
Bear Brook Greenway	Robbinsville Twp	10	part	Windsor-Upick Greenway-PARTIAL LOT	10.39
Bear Brook Greenway	Robbinsville Twp	10	55	Updike- Herman Greenway	10.09
Bear Brook Greenway	West Windsor Twp	19	24.02	PRL -Mercer Play -WW	34.96
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	44	6	East Windsor Park	41.45
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	45	18	Lenox	14.2
Bear Brook Greenway	East Windsor Twp	44	9	Rita	4.28
Crosswicks Greenway	Hopewell Borough	25	41	Ruhland	12.74
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2731	1	Village Green	0.87
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2731	2	Village Green	0.52
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2731	4	Village Green	4.35
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2743	6.02	Runge Stream	14.8
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2726	20	Crosswicks	1.34

Project_Ar	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	name_1	acres
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2716	1.02	Groveville-Crosswicks Creek Main St.	4.49
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2743	31.02	Sakowsky	22.01
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	18	Banner Farm	132.25
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2743	36	Camp Meta	29.91
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	1	Crosswicks Main	5.83
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	9.02	Sawmill	50.36
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	14.04	Hamilton YMCA Stream Cooridor	20.94
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	15.02	Tall Cedars County Stream	8.63
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2743	22.02	Allentown/Princeton Nursery	21.42
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2746	4	AT&T	1.93
Crosswicks Greenway	Hopewell Borough	2	2	Ruggieri -Easement	38.54
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	15.01	Tall Cedars Conservation Easement	14.82
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2730	14.01	Hamilton YMCA Conservation Easement	52.89
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2746	14	Princeton Nurseries	56.38
Crosswicks Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2746	6	Princeton Nurseries	31.18
Doctors Creek Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2732	45	Nami	9.54
Doctors Creek Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2738	1.02	Samu Trail	12.3
Doctors Creek Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2732	3	Nami	2.46
Doctors Creek Greenway	Hamilton Twp	2732	4	Nami	21.03
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	17.00	1.00	Saint Alphonsus	16.85
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	15.00	14.03	Hopewell Township	44.46
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	18	8.02	Ruhland	19.02
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	18	13	Ruhland	23.36
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	18	2.02	Hopewell Greenbelt- Hoge	45.77
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	16	18.01	Country Properties	54.57
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	16.00	4.013	Hopewell Township	10.15

Project_Ar	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	name_1	acres
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	8.00	56.00	Ruggieri -Easement	34.32
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	8.00	41.024	Hopewell Boro Greenbelt - Easement	41.53
Hopewell Borough Greenbelt	Hopewell Twp	8	41.023	Hopewell Boro Greenbelt - Easement	3.53
Millstone River Greenway	West Windsor Twp	5.00	15.00	Astura	21.59
Millstone River Greenway	West Windsor Twp	5.00	16.00	Astura	24.05
Millstone River Greenway	East Windsor Twp	14.00	91.00	County Wetlands Millstone	2.1
Millstone River Greenway	East Windsor Twp	8	12	Thompson Millstone	10.82
Robbinsville Greenbelt	Robbinsville Twp	6	16	Robbinsville Greenbelt	72.26
Robbinsville Greenbelt	Robbinsville Twp	3	31	Saint Gregs	32.1
Robbinsville Greenbelt	Hamilton Twp	1841	138	Saint Gregs	5.54
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	46.00	5.02	Stonybrook Greenway	2.19
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	37.00	25.02	Niederer Trail/StonyBrook	1.51
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	18.00	31.00	Stony Brook Millstone	11.09
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	20.00	11.00	Stony Brook Millstone	57.68
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	20.00	70.00	SBMWA-MANNIX	8.49
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	20.00	32.00	Stony Brook Millstone	77.49
Stonybrook Greenway	Hopewell Twp	37	1.01	Stony Brook	2.24
X Non Project Area- Doerler	Lawrence Twp	7301	54	Doerler	8.68
X Non Project Area- Doerler	Lawrence Twp	7301	3	Doerler	7.59
X Non Project Area- Fackler Road	Lawrence Twp	5801	24	Fackler Road-Gatterdam	64.03
X Non Project Area- JCC	Ewing Twp	348	1	JCC - Jewish Community Center-Easement	42.23
X Non Project Area- Jusick	Lawrence Twp	7301	9	Jusick- Easement	52.39
X Non Project Area - Indian Run	Robbinsville Twp	41.01	22	Indian Run	18.49
X Non Project Area - Pizzini	Hopewell Twp	59	6.01	Pizzini - Easement	18.18
X Non Project Area - Powell	Princeton	3001	8	Powell	1.68
X Non Project Area - Powell	Princeton	3001	11	Powell	2.55



Project_Ar	MUN	BLOCK	LOT	name_1	acres
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2.00	9.02	Sommers Park	61.21
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2.00	29.00	Sommers Park	0.72
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2.00	35.00	Sommers Park	1.09
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2.00	37.00	Sommers Park	2.09
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2.00	32.00	Sommers Park	0.88
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2	33	Sommers Park	0.85
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2	36	Sommers Park	1.24
X Non Project Area - Sommers	Hopewell Twp	2	31	Sommers Park	1.02
X Non Project Area - Tusculum	Princeton	5201	4.02	Tusculum	24.94
X Non Project Area -Denow Rd	Hopewell Twp	88	5.03	Denow Rd \ Weidel	16.1
X Non Project Area -Woodward	Hopewell Twp	31.00	7.01	Woodward	76.66

**Subject:** Adopt the 2021 Mercer  
County Open Space  
Preservation Plan

**WHEREAS**, Mercer County is desirous of preserving open space, recreational land, farmland, environmentally sensitive land, and historic open space; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1989 the voters of Mercer County overwhelmingly approved by referendum a tax to provide for the acquisition of open space and farmland through the creation of an Open Space Preservation Trust Fund ("Trust Fund"); and

**WHEREAS**, the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board ("Open Space Board") was established to create a Mercer County Open Space Preservation Plan ("Plan") to implement strategies and priorities for the use of the Trust Fund; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1992 the Mercer County Planning Board and the Open Space Board adopted said Plan to guide the County in its use of the Trust Fund and other resources to preserve the County's natural resources and open space; and

**WHEREAS**, an updated Plan was adopted by the Mercer County Planning Board and Open Space Board in 2010 as an Element of the 2010 Mercer County Master Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2021 the Open Space Board and County Planning Department staff prepared an update to the 2010 Plan, in accordance with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program standards; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2021 Plan was reviewed by the Open Space Board at two public meetings in 2021; and


**WHEREAS**, the Mercer County Planning Board will hold a Public Hearing to adopt the 2021 Plan as an Element of the County's Master Plan; now therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board hereby adopts the 2021 Mercer County Open Space Preservation Plan.

**Date Adopted**

6/1/21

**Secretary**

  
Emily Blackman

**Subject:** Proposed update to the Mercer County 2021 Open Space Preservation Plan, an Element of the Mercer County Master Plan.

**WHEREAS**, Mercer County is desirous of preserving open space, recreational land, farmland, environmentally sensitive land, and historic open space; and,

**WHEREAS**, the voters of Mercer County have overwhelmingly approved by referendum a tax not to exceed one (\$.03) per one hundred dollars (\$100,00) of equalized assessed value to provide for the acquisition of open space and farmland, recreational development, historic preservation and stewardship; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board was established to create an Open Space Preservation Plan to implement strategies and priorities for the use of the Open Space Preservation Trust Fund; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Mercer County Planning Board and the Open Space Preservation Board adopted said Plan which guides the County in its use of the Open Space Preservation Trust Fund Tax, and other resources, with the task of providing the County with the preservation of its natural resource, open space dated February 2010 and Amended April 2016; and,

**WHEREAS**, the updated 2021 Open Space Preservation Plan has been prepared by the Open Space Board and the Mercer County Planning Department staff in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program Standards which contains goals with criteria and strategies to achieve these goals; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board per resolution # 2021-02 recommends that the Mercer County Planning Board hereby adopt the above said Open Space Preservation Plan, an element of the Mercer County Master Plan; and,

**WHEREAS**, copies of said 2021 Open Space Preservation Plan were delivered by certified mail to the Municipal Planning Board Secretaries and Municipal clerks, per the County Planning Act; and,

**WHEREAS**, on August 11, 2021 the Mercer County Planning Board held a Public Hearing where public comment on the Plan was heard; now therefore,

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Mercer County Planning Board hereby adopt the above said Mercer County Open Space Plan, an element of the Mercer County Master Plan.

8-11-2021

Adoption Date



Matthew Zochowski, Planning Board Secretary