

## County and State Preservation Activities

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*Figure 4.*

*Milford Bluffs in Holland Township, managed by the New Jersey Natural Lands Trust and The Nature Conservancy. The New Jersey Office of Natural Lands Management considers this the best natural red shale cliff community in New Jersey. Numerous State rare and endangered plant species are located on the cliff face and adjacent ravines. The Bluffs are also managed for rare grasslands birds.*

identifying critical rare species habitats. These maps will assist programs like Green Acres, the State Farmland Preservation Program, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's refuge system to prioritize parcels for future acquisition. Likewise, they will be available to municipalities, counties and private organizations to locate important habitats and protect them as desired.

### *Delaware & Raritan Canal Commission*

The Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission is coordinating with the Office of Green Acres and Division

of Parks and Forestry to accomplish several important goals. The northernmost point of the Canal Park along the Delaware River Feeder Canal is located at Bulls Island. This is technically where the Canal begins. However, the Division of Parks and Forestry also maintains the towpath that continues north of Bulls Island, ending approximately two miles north of Frenchtown. Partial funding has already been secured to extend the path all the way into Milford, through a combination of fee simple purchases and easements through private property. (Map 5)

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Hardly a day goes by that the local newspapers fail to report on a preservation effort somewhere in Hunterdon County. Whether initiated by the County, State, municipality or nonprofit organization, there are literally dozens of projects, programs and plans underway in Hunterdon County.

As we continue to plan for open space, farmland and historic preservation, we must be fully informed of the plethora of initiatives that will potentially affect future County spending decisions. In this way, we can anticipate where priorities and goals may overlap among the various players and thereby identify possible "partners" with whom to collaborate in the future.

The following is a description of existing and planned County and State efforts. County historic preservation initiatives are described beginning on p. 71.

Farmland Preservation Program  
Hunterdon County maintains the largest number of farms and second highest amount of farmland-assessed property statewide. Roughly 57 percent of the land base is farm-qualified under New Jersey's Farmland Assessment Act. Additionally, Hunterdon County ranks third in permanently preserved farmland acreage acquired through the State Farmland Preservation Program. Approximately 8,200 acres have been preserved since the first acquisition which occurred in 1985 (Table 1). This includes approxi-

mately 1,800 acres on which the County expects to close by early 2001.

Nonetheless, total acreage preserved through the State Farmland Preservation Program comprises only 5.6 percent of farmland assessed properties and three percent of the total land area in the County. Furthermore, Hunterdon County ranks second in growth rates statewide. It has maintained among the most rapid growth rates for decades.

Given overwhelming public support for farmland preservation, the County Agriculture Development Board has established an aggressive agenda for itself in the coming decade. This is articulated in its draft Farmland Preservation Plan.

The CADB hopes to preserve 50,000 acres of farmland in total, including existing preserved land, by the year 2010. To plan for this, the CADB has mapped "Agriculture Development Areas" (ADAs) and "Preservation Priority Areas" (Map 1).

State-mandated regulations require the identification of "Agriculture Development Areas" (ADAs) within which farms meeting certain requirements are eligible to apply for farmland preservation funding. ADAs were initially identified by the CADB in the early 1980's. The CADB adopted criteria by which to evaluate possible ADAs, which have been amended over the years. In order to be considered an ADA, the

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subject area must be a minimum of 250 contiguous acres, contain a predominance of prime or statewide important soils, be reasonably free of nonfarm development, and outside of a public sewer service area. Additional lands have been added to ADAs over time, upon demonstration that they meet the criteria.

ties who may wish to request further expansion of the ADAs to include such properties. The map also shows clusters of properties within Preservation Priority Areas located at municipal borders. Inter-municipal cooperation may prove valuable in future farmland preservation initiatives.

More recently, the CADB introduced for consideration "Preservation Priority Areas" which target a smaller, more refined group of properties that should be actively pursued for farmland preservation. These areas were identified using the following criteria:

The CADB will rely on a combination of easement purchases and municipal Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) applications to preserve roughly 40,000 acres. It anticipates that landowner donations and fee simple acquisitions by the State will supplement purchase of development

*Table 1.  
Preserved Farmland in Hunterdon County*

	Acreage	Total Cost	County Share	Municipal Share	State Share
Easement Purchases	7102.94	\$27 million	\$6.3 million	\$3.6 million	\$17.1 million
State Fee Simple Acquisitions	607.42	\$6.8 million	-	-	\$6.8 million
Donations	475.69	-	-	-	-
Total	8186.05	\$33.8 million	\$6.3 million	\$3.6 million	\$23.9 million

- farms equal to or greater than 40 acres;
- farmland assessed properties;
- a portion of the properties include prime farmland soils; and
- at least 50 percent of the farm is tillable (no more than 50% tree cover).

rights to achieve its ambitious 50,000-acre goal.

### *Easement Purchase Program*

The easement purchase program relies on a cost-sharing arrangement between the State, County and municipality to purchase the development rights on a farm property. The County Agriculture Development Board ranks applications for easement purchases that are submitted either by individual property owners or else by municipalities. (In

*Note: Table 1 indicates acreage preserved through the State Farmland Preservation Program and includes properties on which the County anticipates closing by early 2001.*

When mapped, it becomes evident that not all of the Preservation Priority Areas fall within Agriculture Development Areas. However, the map serves as a guide to municipali-

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the latter instance, municipalities purchase development rights initially and then apply through the easement purchase program to receive reimbursement). The CADB then forwards selected applications to the State Agriculture Development Committee for a final determination. Currently, there are two rounds of applications pending review and approval: 2000A and 2000B applications (Map 2).

Hunterdon County has pursued a variety of creative opportunities in recent years to facilitate easement purchases. Most notable was the acquisition of an 826-acre farm straddling the borders of Readington Township, Hunterdon County and Branchburg and Hillsborough Townships, Somerset County. The Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board teamed up with the County Park System, the Somerset County Agriculture Development Board, the Somerset County Park Commission, Readington Township and the State Agriculture Development Committee to ensure that the \$6.8 million acquisition would succeed.

In the end, the State preserved 328 acres of farmland by purchasing the land in title. Easements were purchased on another 160 acres of the Kanach Farm plus 100 acres on an adjacent farm within Hunterdon County through a combination of local, County and State contributions. The Hunterdon County Park System acquired nearly 10 acres for a linear park along the South Branch of the Raritan River. The Somerset

County Agriculture Development Board purchased 118 acres and the Somerset County Park Commission purchased 210 acres to preserve the flood plain along the river. Preservation of this property probably would not have been possible without the creative partnership that formed among multiple government entities.

The Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board is also realizing the benefits of teaming up to preserve farmland with nonprofit conservation organizations. Currently, negotiations with landowners are underway in West Amwell to preserve farmland through the easement purchase program and also to preserve woodland and wetlands associated with these farms through Green Acres funding.

The easement purchase program evaluates individual applications based on a number of criteria. Among the criteria is the extent of good quality agricultural soils. Non-profit organizations, working in collaboration with the County and property owner, can sever the non-tillable portion of the property from the application and seek Green Acres funding to preserve it as conservation or recreational land. This increases the ranking of the farm parcel in the farmland preservation application process because it removes that portion of the property with less desirable soils.

*Planning Incentive Grant Program*  
The Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) program is a newly conceived pro-

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gram that offers an additional avenue for farmland preservation. In essence, it offers grants to municipalities and counties that identify project areas consisting of reasonably contiguous farms. This program aims to preserve large areas by qualifying blocks of farms – called project areas – for funding, rather than reviewing individual applications for each property.

The program also emphasizes the need for planning. Municipalities must undertake a comprehensive planning process to identify such project areas and include them in a farmland preservation element of the municipal master plan. Additionally, they must be willing to take advantage of a variety of financial strategies including installment purchase (payments toward total cost are made in installments over several years). Like the easement purchase program, the County receives applications for Planning Incentive Grants from municipalities that are seeking County cost-share, and ranks them according to its own criteria. It then forwards the applications to the State for its consideration.

To date, five municipalities have submitted PIG applications to the County Agriculture Development Board. During the first funding round, Bethlehem, East Amwell, Raritan and Readington submitted applications. All of them were approved by the SADC, however State funding allocations have not been determined yet. Delaware, Bethle-

hem and Readington submitted applications for additional project areas in the second funding cycle. They are currently under review by the SADC. Tewksbury Township did not seek County funding and therefore applied to the State directly. Thus, if awarded funding, it will be strictly State funding. This, too, is currently under review by the SADC.

The PIG program has the potential for dramatically increasing the number of farms the County preserves in the future. Between 1998 and 1999, the County closed on five farms. In FY 2000, the CADB anticipates closing on 13 more farms. An additional 43 farms identified in the municipal PIG applications have been approved by the State. If the PIG funding is in place in the coming weeks, a total of 43 farms could be preserved by early 2001.

### *Additional Farmland Preservation Techniques*

Three additional programs are utilized to complement the easement purchase and PIG programs. The SADC administers a fee simple program whereby the State purchases the entire farm from a willing seller, imposes development restrictions so that it is permanently preserved, and then sells the farm at a public auction to the highest bidder.

The Municipality Approved Farmland Preservation Program requires land to be actively farmed for eight years. This makes a landowner eligible for state soil and water conservation cost share grants.

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Landowners also participate in farmland preservation by donating development easements on part of all of their farm either to the SADC or else to the County.

While none of these programs alone have had as much participation as the easement purchase program, they are certainly important components of farmland preservation in Hunterdon County.

### Summary

Thus far, the County has contributed

As such, the County could spend up to \$58,000,000 to meet the CADB's 10-year goal of securing 40,000+ additional acres of farmland.

### Hunterdon County Park System

The County acquired the Wescott Nature Preserve in Delaware Township through a private donation in 1966. This comprised the beginning of what would eventually become the Hunterdon County Park System. In 1973, the Freeholders appointed a seven-member Board of Recreation Commissioners to establish the

*Figure 1.  
The Kanach Farm  
in Readington,  
Branchburg and  
Hillsborough  
Townships was  
preserved through  
a joint effort in-  
volving eight gov-  
ernment agencies.*



on average approximately \$900 per acre toward the cost of purchasing easements on farmland. The County Agriculture Development Board projects the County cost to increase to nearly \$1,400 per acre over the next decade. This is due to anticipated increases in land values.

policies and direction of the County Park System.

The first County Park and Recreation Plan was adopted in 1972. In 1980, the Hunterdon County Planning Board prepared a management plan for parks and open space in

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consultation with the Park System. The second plan proposed additional policies for the Park System. It called for the goal of maintaining a total of 19,284 acres as County parkland. It also identified the need for several additional active recreation parks, preservation of 13 "unique sites", and protection of five major ridgelines.

Today, the Hunterdon County Park

- 3) Linked/Greenway Areas – corridors with natural features along rivers, streams or abandoned rail lines which are part of a linked open space system featuring rails and limited development;
- 4) General Use Areas – areas developed for active and passive recreation and made available for general public use; and
- 5) Special Use Areas – areas developed for one or several unique



Figure 2.  
The Wescott Preserve in Delaware Township.

System maintains 5,389 acres of parkland (Map 3). Parks fall into one of five classifications:

- 1) Unimproved Natural Areas – areas retained in their natural state with no improvements or off-street parking;
- 2) Improved Natural Areas – areas with limited development to accommodate off-street parking, trails, rest rooms, campgrounds and picnic facilities;

uses (such as the Arboretum), requiring special care and made available for public use in a controlled manner.

The Board of Recreation Commissioners is nearing completion of a new County Park and Recreation Plan to update the 1972 and 1980 plans. The draft plan identifies a need of 12,300 additional acres of county parkland, a goal the Park

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System hopes to reach by the year 2020. Coupled with existing parkland, the County Park System would contain approximately 17,600 acres of land. The acreage goal is generally consistent with the standard established by the New Jersey DEP for county-owned parkland (seven percent of developable land in a county).

The Plan envisions future parkland acquisitions to consist of the following:

- 8,500 acres of Bioregion Preserves – Bioregions are defined as areas with distinct physiographic and biological features that are representative of the County's landscape. The Plan suggests one or two parks in each of six bioregions that are exemplary of the particular region's unique geological and vegetative characteristics. These areas would be managed as undeveloped natural areas;
- 1,900 acres of Improved Natural Areas;
- 1,100 acres of General Use/Special Use Parks; and
- 800 acres of Linked Greenways and Trails (Maps 4 and 5).

In addition, the Park System has mapped what it calls conservation zones. These are broad areas within which the County Park System should collaborate with other County and State agencies, municipalities, and nonprofit groups to preserve exemplary properties. Conservation zones are considered wor-

thy of preservation and limited development due to their distinctive environmental features. The Sourland Mountains, Delaware River Bluffs, stream and river corridors, and portions of the Highlands comprise the 17 conservation zones that have been identified.

While the Board of Recreation Commissioners has mapped the general locations for future parks, site-specific land purchases will be subject to a variety of criteria. For example, the land must exhibit regional significance. To be regionally significant, the property must satisfy one or more of the following:

- adjacent to an existing/imminent park;
- enhances public access to an existing county park;
- contains a significant specimen of fragile flora and cannot be preserved by any other means;
- contains habitat significant enough to support endangered plants or animals;
- links preserved open space, public trail corridors or alternative transportation corridors;
- contributes to an existing greenway;
- contains more than 150 acres for active recreation, provides good access, and has the potential to fill an identified public recreation need; located convenient to areas of population concentration;
- located in a major viewshed of an existing County Park or other public preserve;
- affords an opportunity for coop-

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erative ventures with little or no management responsibility.

The Park System currently holds 204 acres in conservation easements. However, the vast majority of park properties have been purchased in fee simple. In the past, the County secured 25 percent grants, coupled with two percent loans from the Office of Green Acres to help facilitate acquisitions on a property-by-property basis. Upon completion of the new Park and Recreation Plan and the implementation of the County Open Space Trust Fund, the County will be eligible to receive Planning Incentive grants.

The Green Acres Green Trust Planning Incentive (PI) program offers 50 percent grants to counties with approved Open Space and Recreation Plans and with either an open space trust fund or other dedicated funding source. Green Acres rewards proactive planning by streamlining the preservation process. Rather than submitting individual funding requests for each property, an approved Planning Incentive application receives funds for multiple parcels identified in the plan.

The PI program was developed in 1996. At that time, funding packages generally consisted of 25% grants and 75% low interest loans. Again, the Garden State Preservation Trust Act has enhanced the program by making qualifying applications eligible for 50 percent grants rather than the aforesaid combination of more modest grants com-

bined with low interest loans.

Future acquisitions will hopefully involve more partnerships with non-profit conservation organizations and municipalities to help defray costs even further. The draft Park and Recreation Plan acknowledges the benefits of partnerships, not only in terms of acquisitions but also in terms of shared management. A recent example of this is the Hoffman tract in Union Township, which was purchased jointly by the County and municipality and will be jointly managed as well (the County will manage the land and the Township will maintain the buildings).

Thus far, the County has spent roughly \$23.5 million on parkland—or \$4,360 per acre. Assuming a projected cost of \$7000 per acre for parkland (based on prices over the last five years), the target goal of 12,300 additional acres may require \$43 million in acquisition funds, according to the Park System Director. Assuming half is secured over the next 10 years, \$21.5 million would be necessary. This assumes 50 percent State grants but does not include administrative costs (e.g. appraisals, legal fees, survey costs, etc). Furthermore, it presumes no additional leveraging through municipal or nonprofit contributions.

### State Open Space Priorities

Several state agencies and offices are actively involved in planning, funding and managing State-owned parks and conservation lands. These include the Office of Green Acres, Division of Parks and For-

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estry, Division of Fish and Wildlife, and D&R Canal Commission. All of these entities reside within the Department of Environmental Protection.

### *Office of Green Acres*

The Office of Green Acres directly purchases or assists in the purchase of open space. It provides grants and low interest loans to municipalities and counties for property or easement acquisition. It also administers a grant program for non-profit organizations.

In addition, the Office of Green Acres buys land on behalf of the Division of Parks and Forestry, Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Natural Lands Trust to incorporate into the State system.

The Office of Green Acres has established a series of preservation goals and priorities for future parks and open space throughout the State. To meet the Governor's million-acre goal, the Office seeks to accomplish a number of objectives, among them, the following:

- Create an interconnected system of public and private lands and greenways;
- Preserve large parcels to protect biodiversity, scenic landscapes and water supplies;
- Foster partnerships with public and private entities through cooperative projects, funding, planning and technical assistance;
- Support open space preservation and park development to as-

- assist in urban revitalization;
- Complement sustainable natural resource-based businesses;
- Provide accessible recreation, retain community character and historic landscapes and preserve important natural and historic resources;
- Increase efficiency and flexibility in the administrative process; and
- Implement open space policies consistent with the State Plan.

Also, it is important to note that while the State Agriculture Development Committee and County Agriculture Development Boards have primary responsibility for farmland preservation, Green Acres also provides funding for farmland to preserve landscape character, connect existing open space parcels and provide trail linkages.

The Office of Green Acres has also identified geographic areas throughout New Jersey considered high priority for open space and recreation funding. Those including portions of Hunterdon County are:

- Highlands – This includes nearly one million acres in northern New Jersey, much of it forest land, farmland, and potable water supplies, including all or portions of 14 municipalities in Hunterdon County;
- Delaware River and Delaware and Raritan Canal Corridors – The goal is to protect scenic values, retain the river as a major flyway for migratory birds, broaden the width of public hold-

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Table 2.

*FY 2001A Second Round Green Acres Funding Recommendations for Projects in Hunterdon County*

\*Note: Funding reflects entire project area which includes more than just Hunterdon County.

Project Areas	State Acquisitions	County Acquisitions	Local Acquisitions	Nonprofit Acquisitions
*Crossroads of the American Revolution <i>E. and W. Amwell</i>	\$2.5 million			
*Delaware River Greenway (includes Delaware River Bluffs & Nishasakawick Greenway) <i>Stockton, Frenchtown, Lambertville, Alexandria, Holland, Kingwood, Milford, W. Amwell, Delaware</i>	\$1 million			
*Musconetcong River <i>Bethlehem, Hampton, Bloomsbury, Alexandria, Franklin, Holland, Lebanon Tp</i>	\$1 million			
*Nonprofit Youth Camps <i>E. Amwell</i>	\$1.5 million			
*Raritan River Greenway <i>Clinton, E. Amwell, High Bridge, Lebanon, Raritan, Readington, Tewksbury, Union, Franklin, Bethlehem</i>	\$1 million			
*D&R Greenway, Inc. Includes Sourland Mountain & Stoney Brook Greenway <i>E. Amwell, W. Amwell</i>				\$500,000
Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance (Watershed lands and Delaware River Bluffs) <i>E. Amwell, Delaware, Kingwood, W. Amwell</i>				\$500,000
New Jersey Conservation Fndtn (Wickecheoke Creek Project) <i>Delaware Township</i>				\$500,000 Note: funding goes toward several projects including Wick. Cr. Other projects are outside of Hunterdon Co.
*Phillipsburg Riverview Organization (Warren Co. Greenway) <i>Holland</i>				\$500,000
Tewksbury Land Trust <i>Tewksbury Township</i>				\$500,000
*D&R Canal Greenway <i>(Lambertville, Stockton)</i>	\$1,000,000			

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*Table 2.*  
*FY 2001A Second Round Green Acres Funding Recommendations for Projects in Hunterdon County*  
 \*Note: Funding reflects entire project area which includes more than just Hunterdon County.

Project Areas	State Acquisitions	County Acquisitions	Local Acquisitions	Nonprofit Acquisitions
Spruce Run Overlook Acquisition <i>Union Township</i>			\$1 million	
Open Space Plan Implementation <i>(Bethlehem Township)</i>			\$1 million	
Franklin Township Open Space Plan <i>(Franklin Township)</i>			\$1 million	
Tewksbury Township Recreation and Open Space Plan <i>(Tewksbury Township)</i>			\$1 million	
Sourland/Open Space Acquisition <i>(West Amwell Township)</i>			\$1 million	
Hunterdon County Open Space Plan Acquisition <i>(Hunterdon County)</i>		\$1 million		

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ings, protect historic resources of the Delaware River, afford greater protection to resources adjacent to the Canal;

Additionally, the Office of Green Acres has interest in several river corridors within Hunterdon County (Map 6).



*Figure 3.*

*This 37-acre property in West Amwell Township was preserved through a partnership between the D&R Greenway, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, and the Office of Green Acres. In addition to its woodland and agricultural values, it is an important link within the Crossroads of the American Revolutionary Trail, a State-envisioned Revolutionary War Landscape Corridor. It was on this property that George Washington's aide, Cornelius Coryell, helped Washington plan the Christmas Crossing of the Delaware River in 1776.*

- **Revolutionary War Landscape Corridors** – Broad corridors of open space will be secured to link historic battlefields and war sites. This could involve a path through the Sourland Mountains in Hunterdon County, eventually connecting to the Morristown National Historic Park via the South Branch and/or Lamington Rivers. The Garden State Preservation Trust, the entity responsible for receiving and approving project lists submitted by the DEP and SADC, has approved over \$74 million in Green Acres funding recommendations for the FY 2001A appropriation. Among the numerous projects considered for funding are several which encompass portions of Hunterdon County (Table 2).

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*Office of Natural Lands Management; Division of Fish & Wildlife*  
The Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM) resides within NJDEP's Division of Parks and Forestry. There are two projects of interest to Hunterdon County managed by ONLM. The first is the New Jersey Trails Plan.

The purpose of the Trails Plan is to preserve and expand trails and provide a mechanism for creating State-designated trails. Such trails are not necessarily State-owned. They are managed and owned by other levels of government but receive a state designation if they meet certain management and maintenance standards. Such trails may receive higher priority for State funds in the future.

The New Jersey Trails System was created in 1974 by the New Jersey Trails System Act. At that time, the only existing trail receiving designation was the Appalachian Trail. Twenty-six trails and trail systems have been found eligible or potentially eligible for inclusion in the State Trails System. They include land-based trails and waterways. The Delaware River from Trenton to the border of New York State, the D&R Canal State Park, the Musconetcong River, and the South Branch of the Raritan River are among existing trails and waterways in the New Jersey Trails Plan deemed eligible or potentially eligible.

The Trails Plan also identifies trail routes that may be eligible for inclu-

sion in the future. For example, the Cross-Jersey Trail is envisioned as a 100-mile trail from the Delaware River in Hunterdon County to Newark, New Jersey. A site-specific trail proposal has not yet been completed for this route as yet.

The second project of interest is called the Natural Heritage Priority Sites. ONLM maintains a database called the Natural Heritage Database. This database identifies areas representing some of the best habitat for rare species and exemplary natural communities in New Jersey, referred to as Natural Heritage Priority Sites. These are considered top priorities for preservation of biological diversity. The Natural Heritage Priority Site database is available for use in public and private land protection efforts. ONLM updates maps as new information becomes available.

In total, New Jersey hosts 389 Natural Heritage Priority Sites. Fifteen Sites occur in Hunterdon County (Map 6).

The Landscape Project is a related but separate effort, managed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The Landscape Project identifies critical wildlife habitats within large landscapes based on rare species locations as well as land cover classifications.

The project identifies five landscape regions in New Jersey, including the Highlands and Piedmont in Hunterdon County. Within these broad regions, the Project will develop maps