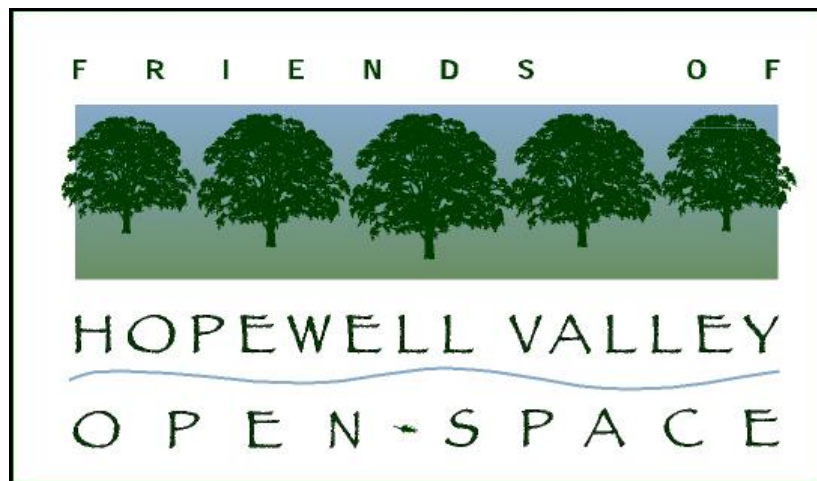


Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space Strategic Plan 2011-2016

Adopted April 14, 2011



Vision Statement

The Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space envision a future in which significant areas of privately and publicly owned and managed open space, scenic resources, farm lands and habitat for native flora and fauna are a cherished and protected part of the landscape and character of the Hopewell Valley.

Mission Statement

The mission of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space is to preserve and protect open space for the benefit of the community through preservation, wise stewardship, education and outreach.

Goal 1 – Preserve open space in the Hopewell Valley

Objective 1: Develop criteria for land acquisition

Strategy:

- Review and approve criteria for land acquisition taking into account the Hopewell Township Master Plan and criteria used by other non-profit conservation groups, NJDEP Green Acres Program and Mercer County by the end of 2011.

Objective 2: Acquire land to preserve as open space consistent with land acquisition criteria

Strategies:

- For large acquisitions, partner with NJDEP Green Acres Program, Mercer County, Hopewell Township, and other entities acquiring open space in the Hopewell Valley.
- Identify specific tasks FoHVOS would do to complement and supplement efforts of acquisition partners by the end of 2011.
- Publicize land acquisition efforts, including those involving other acquisition partners.

Objective 3: Secure conservation and trail easements

Strategies:

- Encourage landowners to grant or sell conservation easements to FoHVOS consistent with land acquisition criteria.
- Work with landowners to donate trail easements to make possible trails along stream corridors, such as the Jacobs Creek, and through significant forest areas.
- Continue to identify land that is best suited for preservation and access by the public with the goal of adding one new easement per year.

Objective 4: Provide outreach to major landowners to facilitate acquisition or donation of land to FoHVOS

Strategies:

- Invite major landowners to attend “land owner forums” and/or “tax seminars” to explain the benefits and procedures for donating conservation easements including potential federal and/or state tax benefits. There will be 1 to 2 functions per year.
- Periodically send information to major landowners concerning FoHVOS and tax benefits of land donations and seek direct meetings with individual owners. The goal is to begin significant contact with at least three new landowners per year.

Goal 2 - Restore and protect the ecological health of open space in Hopewell Valley by providing labor, expertise and models for land stewardship.

Objective 1: Manage white-tailed deer in order to attain and maintain a population that allows for both healthy deer and healthy ecosystems in the Hopewell Valley.

Strategies:

- Continue to implement a Deer Management Program across FoHVOS Preserves.
- Facilitate implementation of the Hopewell Valley Deer Management Plan toward meeting quantitative Plan goals across the Hopewell Valley by providing leadership and expertise.
- Partner with landowners throughout Hopewell Valley (e.g., nonprofit conservation groups, private and corporate landowners, state, county and local governments) to achieve congruent management goals and strategies.

Objective 2: Identify and control newly emerging invasive species in Central New Jersey in order to prevent future degradation of open space.

Strategy:

- Partner with the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team by serving as their Central Region Coordinator.
- Incorporate the control of newly emerging invasive species into planning and implementation activities throughout the Hopewell Valley.

Objective 3: Actively manage and monitor FoHVOS easements and preserves to deter undesirable activities; document issues that need to be addressed; and identify opportunities to maintain or restore ecological health.

Strategies:

- Easements will be monitored by the Stewardship Director or a qualified designee at least annually to assure that land uses and activities are within easement allowances. Annual monitoring reports will be prepared, retained and provided to the landowner.
- Preserves with trails will be monitored by a volunteer Site Steward at least four times per year.

- Preserves without trails will be monitored by staff or board members annually.
- FoHVOS staff will develop stewardship plans for all preserves that include detailed analysis of ecological conditions and provide specific prescriptions that maintain or restore ecological health, including detection and control of widespread invasive species that are not included in efforts of the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team.

Objective 4: Provide significant public access to FoHVOS preserves and easements in order to support recreational opportunities, scientific research and public knowledge of local ecology and ecological issues.

Strategies:

- Provide outreach to academia that outlines stewardship issues and encourage ecological research by supporting access to preserves and throughout the Hopewell Valley.
- Encourage citizen science by expanding bird surveys on FoHVOS preserves through e-Bird and other related efforts to track biodiversity such as Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, 4th of July Butterfly Counts and BioBlitz events involving the public and various taxonomic experts.
- Complete trails and related amenities (e.g., interpretive signage, informational kiosks and benches) on seven FoHVOS preserves. Trails should be accessible to people with a wide range of physical abilities. Interpretive signage will serve to increase public understanding of the local ecology and ecological issues at the preserves. Complete by end of 2011.
- Prepare a guide to Hiking Trails in Hopewell Valley that describes all trails managed by FoHVOS and its partners. Complete for existing trails by end of 2011.

Objective 5: Demonstrate responsible land stewardship on FoHVOS preserves and encourage partners throughout the Hopewell Valley (e.g., nonprofit conservation groups, private and corporate landowners, state, county and local governments) to implement similar practices.

Strategies:

- Prepare a community stewardship plan that includes detailed analysis of ecological conditions and provides specific prescriptions that maintain or restore ecological health across the Hopewell Valley by end 2011.
- Initiate a Private Lands Stewardship Program that encourages private land owners to steward their lands in congruence with the community stewardship plan (e.g., use of native plants in landscaping, allowing appropriate deer

hunting access, etc.). This effort would also include outreach with the agricultural community and other statewide efforts being conducted by conservation partners regarding private landowner enrollment in USDA Farm Bill Programs and other conservation programs.

- Engage in activities to encourage and support sustainable farming practices.
- Assure success of recent restorations (e.g., forest habitat at Baldpate, meadow habitat at Thompson), future restorations, and other stewardship activities to demonstrate effective stewardship within the Hopewell Valley.

Objective 6: Assist with fundraising that supports stewardship goals and objectives.

Strategies:

- Support the ongoing efforts to build a stewardship endowment fund with the goal of providing a long-term, durable funding source to meet stewardship objectives.
- Investigate and implement appropriate fundraising concepts such as memorial benches, honorary trails, etc.
- Seek project-based grant support to maintain and restore ecological health across the Hopewell Valley.

Goal 3 – Increase Community Connectivity

Objective 1: Increase awareness of FoHVOS' work and the benefits of preserved open space

Strategies:

- Survey awareness of FoHVOS and its role in the community at public events in 2011.
- Increase publicity output to newspapers, radio, cable TV and other outlets.
- Update and improve webpage by April 2011 and at least bi-monthly thereafter.
- Set up a ConstantContact or similar account for sending e-mail updates by May 2011. Activate Facebook page and update every two or three weeks.
- Conduct a Valley-wide membership campaign in early November 2011, incorporating our 25th anniversary theme for the year 2012.
- Recruit a 25th anniversary planning committee and begin 2012 planning in May 2011.
- Expand Events Committee to plan and provide social events, fundraising events and school programs. Continually work to recruit new members and aim for a core committee of at least 10 members.
- Increase presence and expand exhibits and materials at existing events, e.g. Hopewell Harvest Fair, SBMWA Butterfly Festival, Pennington Day and Community Cleanup Day beginning in April 2011.
- Promote our "A Trail Near You" theme by Increasing trail awareness and use through sponsored hikes, trail runs, yoga and other activities beginning in spring 2011. Beginning in 2011, there will be at least three such events with the goal of adding one additional event per year through 2016.
- Develop a program to connect youth to FoHVOS' conservation efforts by spring 2012.

Objective 2: Engage the community in support and use of preserved open spaces

Strategies:

- Highlight benefits of open space
 - a. Aesthetics – art and/or photography contests; produce a calendar featuring our preserves that can be used in conjunction with fundraising, etc. Plan first contest for 2012. Produce a 25th anniversary 2012 calendar featuring our preserves
 - b. Health benefits – distribute trails booklet to hospital and doctors offices
- Educational programs
 - a. Partner with schools to encourage students to experience nature
 - b. Develop citizen science projects

Goal 4 - Raise money from diverse sources to sustain operations.

Objective: Increase yearly income to support and enhance FoHVOS activities in the field. A realistic target is to raise an additional \$25,000 by the end of 2012 and then an additional \$10,000 each year thereafter

Strategies:

- Increase small donor funding via membership and other initiatives by at least 50% (from \$25,000 to \$40,000).
- Increase grant income over the next five years to \$100,000/year to assist with the expansion of particular programs listed in previous goals.
- Increase funding from large donors and corporations to \$35,000 per year
- Develop a framework for funding that includes a fundraising process with quantifiable targets. Hire a part-time Development Director to accomplish goals. Funds from the endowment and an increase in annual donations will support this position for 2 years. Assessment of the fund raisers success will determine whether the position and program will be continued and/or expanded.
- Assess creation of an advisory board by the end of 2011.

Goal 5 – Increase the effectiveness of the organization

Objective 1: Assess how much time and money is committed to each FoHVOS activity.

Strategies:

- Implement a tracking program and perform an analysis of how staff, community volunteers and board members allocate time to various activities supported by FoHVOS.
- Analyze the distribution of funds that FoHVOS allocates to its various activities.

Objective 2: Develop a budget planning process

Strategies:

- Review income and expenses from previous 3 years and analyze likely income and expense scenarios for 2011.
- Implement a 2011 budget by May 1.
- Use these steps as a model for subsequent annual budgets.

Objective 3: Assess the quality of Board meetings

Strategies:

- Critically review minutes from 2010 meetings and evaluate how board meetings are conducted.
- Assess alternative ways of running meetings by the end of 2011. Assessment can include reviewing printed guidance material.
- Implement appropriate changes throughout 2012.

Objective 4: Strengthen Board governance

Strategies

- Update all sections of the Board Manual by June 2011. Review and update at least annually thereafter.
- Conduct annual board self-assessment starting in 2011, perhaps concurrent with annual submission of Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms.
- Expand and diversify the board.

Objective 5: Review and update bylaws

Strategy

- Assess the intent and appropriateness of each by-law and update the document by the end of 2012.

Objective 6: Pursue accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance

Strategy

- Initiate steps to achieving accreditation by October 2011 with the goal of completing the process by 2015.

Objective 7: Compile a list of 'success stories' for each of FoHVOS' activities

Strategies:

- Develop a list of measures of success.
- Characterize as many of FoHVOS' activities as reasonable according to these measures.
- Compile a collection of stories to be distributed to the public, officials and donors via the web and/or booklets.