In Perpetuity

The Stony Brook Greenway

Since 1987, Delaware & Raritan Greenway, Inc. has been helping conservation-minded landowners protect their lands along the Stony Brook. Some of these lands have limited development potential, yet they include many important environmental elements which contribute to stream stabilization and flood control and help protect wildlife, plant life, and water quality. Each protected acre joins a growing ribbon of publicly and privately preserved lands along the length of the stream—the Stony Brook Greenway.

The Stony Brook, which reaches from Hunterdon County’s Sourland Mountains to the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park in Princeton Township, is one of central New Jersey’s most important and most beautiful waterways. From its headwaters in the rural Amwells, the Stony Brook passes through farmland in Hopewell and Lawrence Townships, along the northern border of Pennington Borough, and through residential and farm areas in Princeton Township before it empties into Carnegie Lake. The Stony Brook has played a significant role in our area’s history; its protection will make it an equally important part of our future.

Before their displacement by Europeans, the Lenape Indians inhabited the Hopewell Valley and the Sourland Mountains; for them the Stony Brook was a source of drinking water and fish, a sweat lodge location, and a guiding route on semi-annual travels between Hopewell Valley and the Atlantic coast. The Stony Brook may have had a wilder character then: “the banks... show that before cutting off the virgin forests it was a wide and turbulent stream.” Dense forests of hickory, oak, beech, and maple trees supported black bear, panther, and wolf as well as the more familiar deer, raccoon, opossum, and turkey.

Central New Jersey forests were once so thick that early settlers could only travel by foot or single-file on horseback as they migrated to the inviting watershed framed by Stony Brook and Assunpink Creek. In the 1600s these “gently undulating, well-watered, and drained” lands were perfect for farming. The Stony Brook and Shipetaukin Creek were large enough to power grist mills, and the “periodic flooding of the Stony Brook frequently replenished the loam which had accumulated for centuries to a depth of eight feet.” The population quickly grew and land was cleared for agriculture and travel.

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Griggs town/Canal State Park

We’re working to preserve more lands near historic Griggs town, thanks to a new round of funding by Green Acres. These 55 acres of rural property lie adjacent to Wilson Fields and parallel the D&R Canal State Park. Some of the lands are wooded, with the fields on the east side of the canal mainly in agriculture. The property is a critical link in a proposed open space corridor which will buffer and parallel the canal between Griggs town and Six-Mile Run.

Hamilton/Trenton Marsh

Over the next year, we will be promoting the marsh with help from a $30,000 grant from the William Penn Foundation, and grants from PSEG, the Delaware Estuary Program, and Mobil R&D. Look for news of more events, slide shows, talks, and a brochure about the marsh’s incredible resources. In addition, we have recommended three properties to Green Acres for purchase; preservation of these wetland and bluff properties will protect fragile animal and plant habitat.

Crosswicks Creek

In September, D&R Greenway convened a meeting of representatives from four counties along the Crosswicks Creek. Participants discussed progress in creating a greenway along the entire length of the creek, which begins in Ocean County and flows into the Delaware River at Bordentown. Monmouth County related its successful techniques of landowner contact and creative planning; 75% of their greenway is complete. Our role was to facilitate a discussion about ways to coordinate efforts and cross borders in order to preserve the entire corridor.

Assunpink Greenway

The City of Trenton is a few steps closer to creating an urban greenway along Assunpink Creek. With a grant from the Fund for New Jersey, D&R Greenway staff put together an inventory of properties along the Assunk pink, rating them for acquisition priority. Top rated tracts were submitted by Trenton Green Acres for acquisition funding consideration.
From the Director

MAUDE BACKE S N D E R
Executive Director

The coming year will be a wonderful one for central New Jersey land conservation! D&R Greenway was approved for $2.5 million in matching grants by the Green Acres nonprofit grants program. One of only three groups to win approval of five projects by Green Acres (the others were the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and The Nature Conservancy), Delaware & Raritan Greenway has truly established itself as central New Jersey’s open space advocate. 1992’s successful Green Acres bond measure allocated $20 million to nonprofit organizations to acquire land for land acquisition. With this funding qualified land conservancies can purchase land, or easements on important lands, for permanent protection. Since all of the money we receive goes to direct acquisition costs (i.e., no overhead), the program efficiently uses public funds—especially since we will use the State’s $2.5 million to acquire properties with a combined value of $5 million. The other good news is that we have done our homework by talking with many of the landowners in our project areas well ahead of the grant approvals. Land conservation is often very time consuming, and requires attention to a myriad of important details.

Our initial work will help narrow the gap between the legislature’s appropriation of funding and closing the deal. In the next 12 to 18 months we hope to nearly double the number of acres we have protected along the Stony Brook from 500 acres to close to 900 acres! More detailed descriptions of each project area are on page three, and can be located on the enclosed map.

The Stony Brook Greenway was our first project, and from the accompanying article you will learn about the stream’s importance. This model project has given us many opportunities to practice land preservation in a rapidly growing and developing region.

In the early days of the project we helped each municipality to design and adopt greenway elements in Master Plans or stream corridor protection ordinances. During the past three years we have worked directly or in association with other groups or public agencies to protect private and public lands.

Many of the properties we seek to preserve will be protected through easement programs, which are described below. These deed restrictions benefit the landowner, the conservation organization, and the lands themselves.

Conservation Options
The Conservation Easement

If you wish to continue to own your land and to protect it, an advantageous and flexible option is a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a restriction created to preserve land, yet it is tailored to suit your needs, protect land as you wish and allow activities you want on your land.

A conservation easement is a conveyance of a servient interest of real estate which allows the owner to retain control of the property and its use. You can continue to live, sell, lease, or convey the land, subject to the terms of the easement.

The responsibilities of the landowner and responsibilities of the conservation organization and the easement terms of the property must be tailored to the physical and ecological characteristics of the land and the conservancy organization, and the requirements of the State and local governments.

The timing of a conservation easement can be immediate, by bequest, or be a remainder interest with reserved life estate. Each vehicle has different tax advantages affecting income tax, estate tax, or both. By lowering the fair market value of your land, a conservation easement may also result in a reduction of property assessment and property taxes.

This article does not address all the details of valuation and deductibility. Should you be interested in exploring the benefits of granting a conservation easement, it is advisable to seek the counsel of several specialized professionals including a tax attorney or accountant, the proposed recipient of the gift, an appraiser and a surveyor. We are always happy to help you get started; call us at (609) 452-1414.

BY KATHERINE BUTFOLPH
Creating the Story Brook Greenway

In Perpetuity
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As the area grows more accessible, the topography and the economy changed. Early roadways based on Lenape footpaths evolved into an extensive network connecting cities and towns along the Philadelphia-New York axis. The Delaware and Raritan Canal was completed by 1834, and in 1899 a trolley line iqrted Lawrenceville farms in order to connect Princeton with Trenton. The Story Brook has also been altered over time: mills, dams, bridges, and roads were built in, over, and alongside the stream, filling the needs of early life.

Situated almost entirely in the Piedmont Plateau, the stream derives much of its character from the four rock types that characterize that formation locally—Brucite shale, Lockatong argillite, Stockton sandstone, and igneous diabase. Extensive deforestation in the Story Brook watershed worsened the Piedmont formation's already poor water storage capacity, and during drought conditions portions of the Story Brook have no measurable flows. The weathering of the parent bedrock has produced soil with similarly poor water holding and transmitting properties. The periodic flooding which created fertile farmlands, now closes roads; the combination of bedrock and soils contributes to the Story Brook's ability to quickly rise or fall in water level.

Centuries of agriculture and decades of development have taken a toll on the Story Brook. Despite the addition of soil erosion and sediment control dam, the stream quickly turns opaque following a rain storm. Relatively high levels of phosphorus and fecal coliform bacteria and the decomposition of organic matter using up dissolved oxygen, combined with a poor assimilative capacity, have contributed to a stressed biological community.

Additional excessive and poorly located development along the stream would increase flood damage, degrade water quality, destroy wildlife habitats and aquatic ecosystems, and spoil the beauty and natural character of the region. Even with sophisticated technology it is difficult and expensive to replicate natural systems once they are destroyed.

The Story Brook corridor retains enough of its original character that conservation groups, municipalities, and residents are actively pursuing its preservation and protection. With the help of forward-thinking landowners, D&R Greenway is piecing together the Story Brook Greenway, creating a ribbon of publicly and privately owned lands that are protected in perpetuity. Many acres already leased and protected (see front and back of map). Yet a great deal of work remains to be done. The long-range success of our efforts depends on the involvement and support of community members—people who share a deep appreciation for this vital natural resource, and who are dedicated to protecting an ecological treasure that is so intertwined with our history.

1. Hopewell Valley Heritage, by Alice Blackwell Lewis 2. Old Lawrenceville, by Donald H. Tyler

Some important funding projects

This $350,000 property acquisition by D&R Greenway was funded by the New Jersey Green Acres Program, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Lawrenceville Township, The Nature Conservancy, the Friends of the Lawrenceville Nature Reserve, and the Lawrenceville Foundation.

Noteworthy Projects

The Story Brook Greenway project received $350,000 from the NJDEP Green Acres Program, $255,000 from the D&R Greenway, and $14,300 from several local foundations and organizations.

Guidelines for Advanced Projects

The Story Brook Greenway is a case study for the preservation of a rare and unique natural area. The project will serve as a model for other conservation efforts in the region.

Central Story Brook

The Story Brook Greenway is a 15-mile linear park that connects Lawrenceville, Princeton, and West Windsor Township. The park will feature a variety of natural habitats, including wetlands, forests, and streams.

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Our thanks to...

We wish to thank retiring board members Duffy Hutter, Harry Sayén, and Dick Sword for their dedication and for the expertise they so generously shared during their years as D&R Greenway trustees.

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