



6. OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION



OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Preserved Open Space

State, county and municipal governments have been aggressively acquiring open space, most actively over the last 20 years. The amount of land preserved as public open space, not including farmland, has tripled since 1972, an increase of about 210%.

Preserved Public Open Space Overview¹

Category	1972 Total Acres	2005 Total Acres
Federal Land	6,139	9,391
State Land	6,316	20,671
Municipal Land	3,518	17,763
County Land	5,208	17,330
Total	21,181	65,155

While the open space holdings for all levels of government have increased significantly from 1972, state and municipal open space lands have seen the greatest expansions, followed by county and federal lands. Much of the municipal open space purchased in recent years has been accomplished with the assistance of the Morris County Preservation Trust Fund.

¹Morris County Master Plan Open Space Element, 1972, Morris County GIS Database, October 2005 and Morris County Park Commission, Summary of Acreage Report 2005. Analysis does not include privately owned properties, non profit open space, properties in process of being acquired or preserved farmland.

Morris County Preservation Trust Fund

The Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund was established in 1992 by the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Collection of funds for the Trust Fund began in 1993, via a dedicated tax on county equalized real property valuation. The current levy is 4.5 cents per \$100 of equalized property value. Since its inception, the county has collected over \$240 million via the Trust Fund tax.²

As of January, 2007, 15,528 acres have been preserved by the Trust Fund as farmland or open space, with projects pending that will add more than 5,500 acres to the preservation total.³ The number of acres preserved is constantly rising as county support for various county, municipal and nonprofit preservation activities continues.

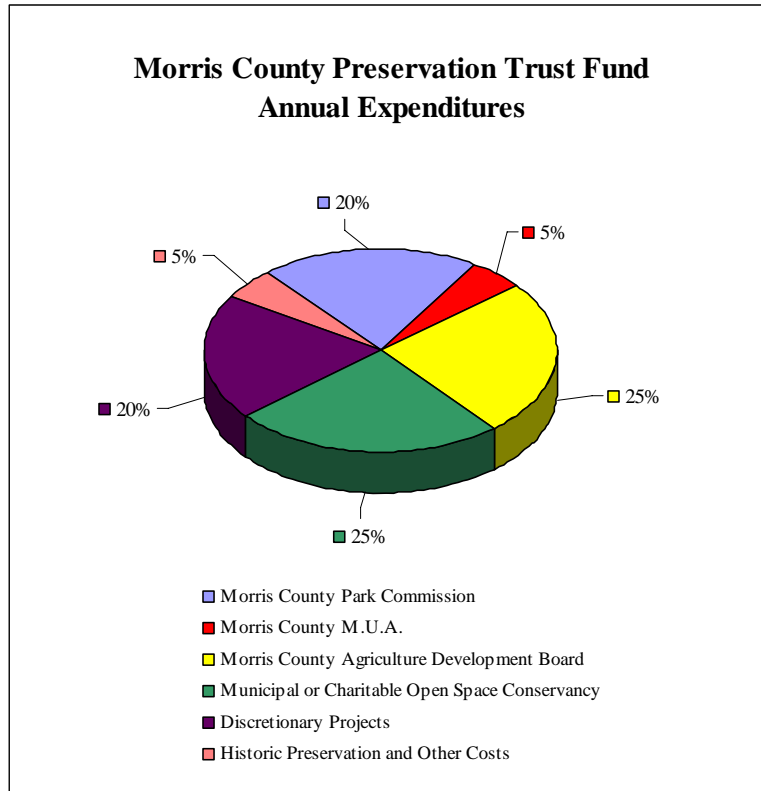
Collected funding is divided among the Morris County Park Commission, the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority, the Morris County Agriculture Development Board for farmland preservation, municipalities, qualified charitable conservancies, and discretionary preservation projects. A small amount of this funding has been used to fund the county Historic Preservation Trust Program, and other ancillary county costs.

² Morris County Preservation Trust Fund Revenues, January 2007.

³ Morris County Preservation Trust – Trust Fund Statistics January 2007.



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Source: Morris County Preservation Trust

Municipalities and charitable conservancies are allotted 25% of the overall amount of funds collected, to which are added any unused or cancelled funds from previous allocations and part of the discretionary funding as available. Since it began accepting applications in 1994, over \$59 million has been awarded to Morris County municipalities and nonprofit organizations to aid in the acquisition of nearly 8,900 acres of local parks and open

space.⁴ The fund has also aided in the acquisition of over 2,000 acres of county parkland through the expenditure of nearly \$25 million. The Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority also received nearly \$6.7 million to add 419 acres for watershed protection.⁵

The Morris County Open Space Committee reviews, prioritizes and makes recommendations to the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders concerning the funding of municipal and nonprofit open space applications. This fifteen member committee consists of one representative from each of the eight municipal regions in the county, plus representatives from the Morris County Planning Board, Morris County Agriculture Development Board, Morris County Park Commission, Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority, Morris Tomorrow (formerly Morris 2000), and two members at-large. Committee members are appointed by the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

The Trust Fund is administered by the Morris County Preservation Trust, a division of the Department of Planning, Development and Technology. The Division also provides staff support to the:

- ◆ Morris County Open Space Committee
- ◆ Morris County Agriculture Development Board
- ◆ Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund Review Board

Twenty-nine of the thirty-nine municipalities in the county have also approved the use of a dedicated open space tax for land acquisition, development rights purchase, improvements, maintenance and/or bond payments.⁶ Funds collected by the county are used in conjunction with local funds to meet both local and regional preservation goals.

⁴ Morris County Preservation Trust database, January 2007.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Morris County Preservation Trust, January 2007.



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County-Owned Open Space

Morris County open space holdings account for about 25% of the over 65,000 acres of preserved park and other public open space land in the county. The majority of this land is managed for public use by the Morris County Park Commission.

Morris County Park Commission

There are currently 35 county park facilities owned and managed by the Park Commission, including traditional parks, golf courses, linear trail systems and indoor sports facilities. In all, these parklands total 16,322 acres, which are dedicated to recreation/cultural resources, open space and historic preservation.⁷



Pinch Brook Golf Course

Morris County Park System

<u>Name</u>	<u>Acres (rounded)</u>
Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center	681
Berkshire Valley Golf Course	525
Black River Park (Cooper Mill & Kay Environmental Center)	645
Columbia Trail	100
Craigmeur Recreation Area	70
Flanders Valley Golf Course	411
Fosterfields Living Historical Farm	210
Frelinghuysen Arboretum	127
Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center	44
Hedden Park	383
Historic Speedwell	8
Hugh Force Park	11
James Andrews Memorial Park	583
Jonathan Woods	11
Lee's County Park Marina	13
Lewis Morris Park	1,941
Loantaka Brook Reservation	532
Mahlon Dickerson Reservation	3,000
Minnisink Reservation	302
Mount Hope Historic Park	475
Mount Paul Memorial Park	286
Mt. Olive-Old Vo-Tech Property	26
Old Troy Park	153
Passaic River Park	769
Patriot's Path & West Morris Greenway	411
Pinch Brook Golf Course	102
Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area	1,313
Schooley's Mountain Park	786
Silas Condict Park	1,218
Sunset Valley Golf Course	169
Torune Park	552
Traction Line Recreation Trail	12
Waughaw Mountain Greenway	94
William G. Mennen Sports Arena	18
Willowood Arboretum	131
Total	16,322

Source: Morris County Park Commission – Summary of Acreage Report 2005, confirmed 2006

⁷ Morris County Park Commission – Summary of Acreage Report – 2005. Total acreage given excludes 880 acres of land not owned by the Park Commission, but managed by the Commission through conservation easements, including portions of Jonathan's Woods, the Mahlon Dickerson and Loantaka Brook Reservations.



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Other County Open Space

The county also owns approximately 1,008 acres of other open space lands, although these are not used for public recreation purposes. Instead, these lands provide wetlands mitigation, watershed buffers and open space buffers adjacent to other preserved or environmentally sensitive lands.⁸



Willowood Arboretum

Trends/ Issues

- ◆ With rising land values, the ability to acquire new open space lands is increasingly limited, particularly the acquisition of lands suitable for active recreation purposes.

- ◆ As open space purchase slows, maintenance of existing open space and the need for improved recreational facilities will grow in importance. More emphasis may be placed on the restoration of open space resources.
- ◆ Historically, the Morris County Open Space Trust Fund has focused on the acquisition of new properties. The potential to diversify the use of the fund to address facility and maintenance requirements may need to be explored.
- ◆ The Morris County Park Commission maintains an inventory of county recreation and open space lands and the Morris County Department of Planning, Development and Technology maintains a list of municipal recreation and open space lands by means of the New Jersey ROSI (Recreation and Open Space Inventory) listings. The last Morris County Master Plan Open Space Element was adopted in 1988. A county-wide, comprehensive review of recreational demand and inventory of available facilities may be considered, particularly in light of changes in population and the availability of improved environmental data.
- ◆ New NJDEP regulations continue to restrict the use of land, including open space lands set aside by counties and municipalities for active and passive recreation purposes. Increased buffers along waterways and development limitations associated with the Highlands Act will hinder potential recreational development of open space lands in the Highlands Preservation Area. These restrictions will require consideration in the assessment of existing and future recreational development plans.

⁸ Morris County GIS database, October 2005.



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Farmland Preservation

The Morris County Farmland Preservation Program began with the permanent preservation of a 14 acre parcel in Washington Township in December of 1987. As of January 2007, 93 farms have been permanently preserved totaling 6,162 acres.⁹ Other farms are currently in various stages of the easement purchase program. Nineteen additional farms are pending preservation that, when preserved, will add another 960 acres to farmland preservation totals.¹⁰ Another six farms totaling about 530 acres are in the temporary “eight-year” preservation program.



Morris County Preserved Farmland

Since 1994, all county farmland preservation activity has been funded through the Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Program. The allocation of the funding is overseen by the seven-member Morris County Agriculture Development Board, appointed by the Morris County Board of

Chosen Freeholders. In total, the county has provided funding of over \$49 million dollars, which has been combined with state and local funds to preserve farmland.¹¹

Preserved Farmland in Morris County			
Municipality	Acres of Farmland	Preserved Farmland	Percent of Farmland Preserved in Municipality
Washington Twp.	11,165	4,223.7	37.8
Chester Twp.	3,880	1,019.1	26.3
Boonton Twp.	1,249	141.1	11.3
Randolph Twp.	818	146.8	17.9
Mt. Olive Twp.	2,991	189.8	6.4
Mendham Twp.	1,561	92.4	5.9
Harding Twp.	1,658	109.2	6.6
Lincoln Park Borough	175	76.6	43.8
Long Hill Twp.	104	53.6	51.5
Chester Borough	165	53.4	32.4
Mendham Borough	1,039	29.4	2.8
Montville Twp.	314	26.9	8.6
Total Preserved Farmland Acres: 6,162			

Source: Morris County Preservation Trust, January 2007

The Morris County Farmland Preservation Element, adopted in March of 2003, established one, five and ten year preservation targets of 5,888 total acres preserved by the end of 2004, 9,972 total acres preserved by the end of 2008, and 15,077 acres preserved by the end of 2013. Significant acreage has been added, even though rising land values experienced in the last few years have made farmland purchases more costly.

⁹ Morris County Preservation Trust, January 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Morris County Preservation Trust, January 2007, includes pre-trust and post-trust dollars.



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Trends / Issues

- ◆ The economic realities of farming in New Jersey have increased the need to intensify the use of acreage to maximize profits. This can result in development of farm structures of significant size which can change the character of an existing farm and impact surrounding neighborhoods. The size and placement of farm structures such as greenhouses and animal boarding facilities are issues that will require careful attention.
- ◆ In Morris County, more farmland is being devoted to the breeding, boarding and care of horses, and activities devoted to the support of the equine industry. The size and scale of these operations will need to be carefully reviewed so as to address environmental protection concerns, maintain compatibility with nearby uses and avoid potential right-to-farm conflicts.
- ◆ The Highlands Act may result in an increase in the number of preserved farms and farmland in the Highlands Preservation Area due to limitations on non-agricultural development and the rising emphasis being placed on preservation in this area by state policymakers. Farms in this area are now also subject to Highlands-related regulations that require Farm Conservation Plans and Resource Management Systems Plans in some instances.
- ◆ Agri-tourism and direct farm marketing have become increasingly important aspects of agriculture and its success as a thriving industry. Promoting agri-tourism throughout the county will continue to be a high priority.
- ◆ As suburban residential development continues to encroach into agricultural areas, increased sensitivity to right-to-farm issues may be required to protect agricultural activities and the rights of farmers.



Long Valley Farmland and Open Space

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