



MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST HELPING TO PROTECT THE HACKENSACK RIVER WATERSHED

The Meadowlands Conservation Trust was formed to acquire and preserve environmentally valuable land and to enhance the environment of the Hackensack Meadowlands District and the Hackensack River Watershed.

Working with government and qualified non-profit entities, the Meadowlands Conservation Trust has helped to protect and manages over 800 acres of lands within the Hackensack Watershed.



Cover photo: Richard P. Kane Natural Area

OVERVIEW



The Meadowlands Conservation Trust (MCT) was established by an act of the New Jersey State Legislature in 1999 and empowered to obtain land through fee simple acquisitions and conservation easements for the purpose of permanently preserving wetlands, waterways, woodlands and other environmentally sensitive open space in the New Jersey portion of the Hackensack River Watershed. In addition to preserving new properties, the Trust works to maintain, improve and enhance its existing inventory of natural spaces. The Hackensack River begins in Rockland County, N.Y., and flows south, emptying into Newark Bay. The watershed in New Jersey includes 60 towns in Bergen and Hudson counties. The MCT owns or manages nine properties totaling more than 800 acres.

Such land offers many important benefits for residents and visitors, both human and wildlife. For instance, MCT properties include ecologically critical wetlands that provide a home for birds and fish while filtering pollutants. Marshes also absorb stormwater, helping to mitigate flooding in nearby areas. Green spaces protected by the Conservation Trust also provide an opportunity for passive recreation and tranquil relaxation. Properties include walking trails, benches and views of ponds and streams.

In the southern section of the watershed, the Meadowlands is a prime example of the importance of the Trust's work in protecting dwindling, ecologically important marshes and open space. Set against an urban backdrop, the Meadowlands hosts a unique ecosystem that includes more than 8,400 acres of vital wetlands less than 10 miles from New York City and in close proximity to major highways. Once an urban wasteland, the Meadowlands today is a natural oasis set within one of the busiest economic corridors in the country.

To fund land preservation in the Hackensack River Watershed, the MCT may apply for grants, receive donations (money and land), and generate other forms of revenue, including the sale and yearly renewals of specialized Meadowlands Conservation license plates sold by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission.

The MCT welcomes the opportunity to work with public and private property owners on transferring land rights. The many benefits of donating your land and easements for preservation include:

- Preservation protects the natural beauty and value of the property in perpetuity.
- Conservation helps to maintain habitats that exist on the property today for generations of wildlife to reside on and migrate through in the future.
- Open space requires little or no municipal services so the tax burden to the town is much less than development of the site. Preserving land may amount to federal and/or state income tax deductions, as well as property tax relief.
- Preserving property adds to the pool of open space owned and managed by the Meadowlands Conservation Trust and may enhance recreational areas identified in your municipal and county Open Space and Recreation Plans. Land for passive recreational opportunities is at a premium in this densely populated part of the state.
- A conservation easement provides the landowner with the opportunity to retain some of the accrued value on the land while adding a layer of conservation protection to all or part of the property. This is done without having to sell the land outright.
- A conservation plan or strategy can be tailored to fit your land and your financial needs. If you would like to discuss a piece of land that may be suitable for donation, or a conservation easement, please contact Colleen Mercado at cmercado@njsea.com or 201-460-3722. ❖



MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST BOARD OF TRUSTEES



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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



William Sheehan
The significance of the Meadowlands Conservation Trust's work in acquiring and preserving environmentally valuable land for public access and enhancing the environment of the Hackensack Meadowlands District has never been felt more strongly than in the past year.

The COVID-19 pandemic halted life as we know it in its tracks. The virus shuttered restaurants, theaters, shopping centers, extracurricular school activities and many more facets of everyday life. Faced with these losses, individuals and families in increasing numbers turned to the places still available for the public to enjoy: our parks, open spaces and natural resources.

These areas include many parcels that the Meadowlands Conservation Trust has ensured will remain green in perpetuity, such as the Skeetkill Creek Marsh in Ridgefield, the Pomander Walk property in Teaneck and Emerson Woods in Emerson, to name a few. People flocked to these spots in 2020 to get a break from the indoors, underscoring the peace and tranquility that green spaces provide and providing a new understanding for young and old alike of the critical environmental conservation and protection.

The MCT has no doubt that people will continue to take more advantage of, and pay attention to, the value of public lands in the years to come. We remain committed to carrying out our crucial work in providing increased access to open space in the future.



The importance of preserving and improving environmentally vital wetlands has also never taken on such immediacy due to the momentous challenges in the future with the prediction of more frequent and severe storm events due to sea level rise.

The MCT has preserved hundreds of acres of wetlands in properties including the Richard P. Kane Tract in Carlstadt, the Skeetkill Creek Marsh in Ridgefield, Pine Terrace in Demarest and Fox Hill West in Norwood.

These marsh areas filter pollutants and absorb stormwater runoff, pesticides and other materials that have a detrimental effect on the Hackensack River. They also provide significant habitat and breeding grounds for many species of animals and vegetation.

In 2020, the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority continued work on a pilot project at the Trust's Skeetkill Creek Marsh property in Ridgefield to improve the wetlands by controlling

invasive plants without the use of herbicides. I'm happy to report that this year a diversity of native plants sprung up, while the invasive species became less dominant. The project will continue in 2021.

The project began in 2019 when NJSEA Natural Resources Department staff used a cutting regime on one of the three islands within Skeetkill in the fall as opposed to spraying herbicide. In 2020, NJSEA staff measured stem height, stem density, and native plant occurrences and compared with other sites that were sprayed with herbicide and those that were not managed.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our Board of Trustees, New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority support staff, MCT is poised to continue and expand its vital mission of preserving environmentally sensitive open space in perpetuity, granting increased public access to green spaces, and improving the quality of life, for both humans and wildlife, in the Meadowlands and northern New Jersey. ❖

MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST LICENSE PLATE



By purchasing a Meadowlands Conservation Trust specialized license plate, you can both help support the MCT and let others know about the importance of conserving the Hackensack River Watershed. The plate's colorful design incorporates the juxtaposition of the human and natural elements that make the Meadowlands such a unique and important urban ecosystem.

A Great Egret and a Diamondback Terrapin, two of the many wildlife species found along the Hackensack River, are in the foreground while the New Jersey Turnpike is seen at a distance, exemplifying the interaction of nature and man in this critical urban wetland region.

Funds raised from the purchase of license plates help the MCT to acquire open space in the Hackensack River Watershed, and to protect and enhance its existing inventory of woods, wetlands, natural areas, passive recreation spots and other important properties.

The Hackensack River Watershed is an extremely important urban watershed system, especially in the Meadowlands. The waterway has been getting cleaner following decades of illegal dumping in the region that polluted the river. This improvement has helped lead to a remarkable environmental and wildlife renaissance in the area.

The Meadowlands, where the most prevalent birds were once seagulls picking at garbage, is now a birding hotspot. More than 285 species of birds have been seen throughout the region, including 34 on the State's threatened, endangered and species of special concern lists. This would not be possible without improvements to the Hackensack River that include preserving its wetlands and surrounding green spaces.

Meadowlands Conservation license plates cost \$50, with an annual renewal fee of \$10. A portion of the proceeds support the Trust's preservation efforts. Sales of the plate have raised more than \$340,000 since being introduced in 2004. The plates can be purchased over the counter at any Motor Vehicle Commission office; online at: www.state.nj.us/mvc/vehicles/dedicated.htm or by calling 609-292-6500, extension 5061. ❖



SKEETKILL CREEK MARSH



Eupatorium rotundifolium, roundleaf thoroughwort



Solidago rugosa, wrinkly-leaf goldenrod

SKEETKILL CREEK MARSH STUDY PROJECT

The NJSEA Natural Resources Department has been undertaking a pilot project at MCT's Skeetkill Creek Marsh property in Ridgefield. The focus of the pilot project is to try to control invasive plants on the marsh islands without the use of herbicides.

The pilot project goals include increasing plant diversity throughout the marsh and improving overall water quality, while also helping to improve the marsh's resiliency in light of climate change and sea level rise.

Work began in October 2019 with Natural Resources staff cutting and removing *Phragmites australis* (common reed), *Persicaria prefoliata* (mile-a-minute) and other invasive plants from one of the marsh islands. At the end of the 2020 growing season, staff returned to the previously-cleared marsh island to observe whether any changes had occurred within the plant community. The team found that a diversity of plants had sprung up, with over 20 herbaceous and grass species growing across the site. Common reed and mile-a-minute were still present on the island, but were not dominant; enough land had been cleared to allow other plant species to grow. The remaining common reed and mile-a-minute was cleared by Natural Resources staff in October, and then again in November. The site will continue to be cleared throughout the winter and early spring to allow for more new growth of native species during the 2021 growing season.



Based on the success observed on this first marsh island, the team started similar clearing on an adjacent island. As the team cleared the common reed and mile-a-minute that dominated the second marsh island, it was found that a number of *Baccharis halimifolia* (eastern baccharis) shrubs had been covered and killed by the invasive plants. A small number of baccharis still exist on the northern edge of the island, along with small tufts of *Spartina alterniflora* (salt marsh cordgrass). The team will continue to clear the island over the winter and early spring months, and monitor new plant growth during the 2021 growing season. ❖

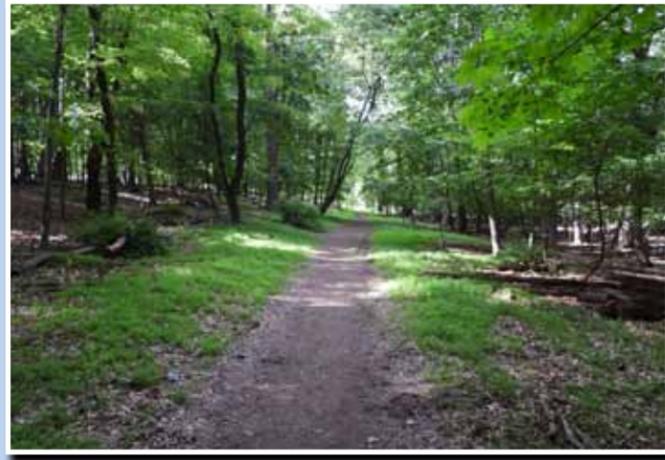
SKEETKILL CREEK MARSH CLEANUP

The MCT extends a hearty thank you to the Numerator Corporation, which in October conducted a socially distanced cleanup of the Skeetkill Creek Marsh in Ridgefield. Three employees filled garbage bags with litter and debris and cleared the park trail by cutting away overgrown brush and branches that were hindering access. In addition to beautifying the area, their hard work helped to increase public access to the park's trails, providing a great public benefit. The cleanup was overseen by Don Smith. ❖

MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST
PERMANENTLY PRESERVED PROPERTIES IN THE HACKENSACK RIVER WATERSHED



Central Woods, Norwood



Emerson Woods, Emerson



Skeetkill Creek Marsh, Ridgefield



Richard P. Kane Natural Area North, Carlstadt



Pomander Walk, Teaneck



Clarke Property, Demarest



Fox Hill West, Norwood



Richard P. Kane Natural Area South, Carlstadt



Pine Terrace, Demarest



MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST STATEMENT OF REVENUES & EXPENDITURES
DECEMBER 31, 2019

OPERATING REVENUES

Richard P. Kane Tract - current year *	100,000
NJDMV - License Plate Sales	20,458
Interest Income	14,207

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TOTAL OPERATING REVENUES \$ 134,665
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OPERATING EXPENDITURES

Administrative Services	175,000
Program Expenses	21,382
Insurance	11,767
Professional Fees	29,355

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TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES \$ 237,504
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OPERATING GAIN/ (LOSS) \$ (102,839)
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* Revenues for Richard P. Kane Tract are restricted for perpetual preservation of Kane Tract.



American Eagle Juvenile — Photo courtesy of M.E. Raine



Hooded Merganser



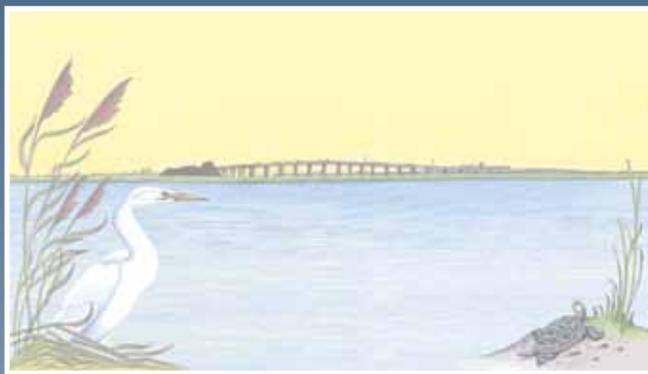
Broad-winged Skipper — Photo courtesy of Joe Koscielny



Greater Yellow Legs — Photo courtesy of M.E. Raine



Wood Sandpiper — Photo courtesy of Milton Collins



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