

# **2015 Annual Report**

## **Mendham Township Environmental Commission**

During 2015, the Environmental Commission participated in a wide range of activities directed at the protection and enhancement of the environment in Mendham Township. The most significant activities follow:

### **Open Space Stewardship**

#### **Native Plants**

A project begun in 2012 under a Somerset Hills Garden Club grant continued. The objective is to replace invasive plants in a plot adjacent to the Township Elementary School with native plants and create a picnic area. The work in 2015 involved maintenance of 150 Christmas Ferns planted in 2014 which demonstrated their deer resistance by surviving a year without the protection of a fence which was vandalized and removed in 2014. Expansion and maintenance of the project will be continued in 2016 if we are successful in obtaining another grant.

#### **Trail Maintenance**

Commission members continued to maintain trails, remove litter and repair storm damage to the many miles of trails in the over 1200 acres of Township owned open space land. The Department of Public Works led by Dave Read did an excellent job of maintaining parking areas, routinely mowing trails in many of the parks and natural areas, greatly improving trails that would otherwise have become overgrown in summer and responding to requests to remove large fallen trees that could not be removed by volunteers.

#### **Trail Construction**

With the completion in 2014 of an extensive network of cross country running trails at Mosle Preserve by a group of volunteers with very substantial support from the Department of Public Works, and the suspension of new open space acquisitions by the Township, new trail construction was limited to minor improvements to existing trails.

#### **Eagle Scout Projects**

Interest by Eagle Scout candidates in projects benefiting Township open space properties was unusually light in 2015. Only one scout, Tim Schryver based his Eagle project on Township property. He improved and re-blazed the one mile long loop trail in Meadowood Park.

### **Birdhouses**

Commission members maintained 36 bluebird boxes in Buttermilk Falls Natural Area, India Brook Park and Tempe Wick Reserve. Maintenance involved cleaning the boxes annually and repairing persistent vandalism. The Commission also monitored American Kestrel nest boxes at Tempe Wick Reserve, Buttermilk Falls and India Brook Park. Unfortunately no kestrels have taken up housekeeping so far.

### **Grassland Management**

Since 2007 the Environmental Commission, with the assistance of the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has worked to restore grasslands and wildlife habitat in Tempe Wick Reserve. Past land use practices greatly reduced the population of natural grasses reducing the desirability of the fields as wildlife habitat. In 2007 the fields were replanted with natural grasses and five "ephemeral pools" were constructed to enhance wildlife habitat. Selective mowing by our conscientious DPW was used in 2015 to control invasive plants. Wildflowers planted with the native grass mix have unfortunately disappeared, but a strong stand of native grasses has survived.

## **Information to Residents**

### **Conservation Easement Information**

Continued to maintain a comprehensive inventory of the Township's conservation easements first begun in 2007. Records of ownership changes for properties containing conservation easements are retained to keep the records current.

### **Environmental Information**

Made copies of trail maps and other publications of interest to residents on environmental topics available at the Town Hall and the Library. Commission members contributed articles to the Township website on matters related to the environment.

### **Hikemendham.org**

Commission members provided assistance to Jon Wager and Ken Beckerman, volunteer creators of Hikemendham.org an innovative on line site containing maps for 24 hikes on trails in Mendham Township open space properties and Patriots Path. In addition to the tremendous advantage of the easy access of the maps, their format permits easy low cost revision when necessary. In 2015, information was assembled to assist Jon in updating the site

## **Environmental Issues**

### **Electronic Recycling**

The Environmental Commission partnered with Mendham Borough Environmental Commission in a one day collection of electronic devices in May. A 53 foot trailer was completely filled with some 20,000 pounds of recyclable electronic devices to be sent for recycling. Some \$713 in donations were received from the public and shared by the two Environmental Commissions.

DPW employees and equipment from both municipalities were important and much appreciated participants.

### **Rechargeable Battery Recycling**

Continued responsibility for managing the recycling of rechargeable batteries. Morris County has advised that single use batteries may now be included in household trash; however, rechargeable batteries must be recycled. A station is maintained in Town Hall to receive batteries. A total of 40 pounds of batteries were recycled in 2015.

### **Freshwater Wetlands Applications**

Commission members reviewed all applications to the NJDEP for Letters of Interpretation and Permits under the Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act for projects in Mendham Township. Comments were directed to the agency as appropriate.

### **Planning Board and Board of Adjustment**

Commission members monitored applications submitted to the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment and provided comments on environmental issues. The Commission was represented on the Planning Board by Jamie Kinsel.

### **River Basin Organizations**

For over 10 years, Commission members have represented the Township on the Whippany River Basin Action Committee along with representatives of other municipalities in the watershed. The organization has been very active in obtaining grant support for projects that improved water quality in the Whippany watershed. Our participation was suspended in 2014 when Mendham Township officials elected not to pay the \$1,200 assessment paid by all members.

Commission members did participate in water quality monitoring and stream clean up events sponsored by the Raritan Headwaters Association. The Commission was able to make a \$300 donation to Upper Raritan from Commission funds.

No support was provided to the Great Swamp watershed Organization, the other watershed to which the Township contributes.

### **Schiff Nature Center**

Commission members worked closely with Schiff Nature Center staff, supporting programs at that outstanding community resource for environmental education, improvement and enjoyment. The Commission profited greatly from our association with Jeanne Rice, Schiff Executive Director. EC members provided building maintenance and trail development assistance at Schiff.

### **Mendham Township Sustainable Jersey Committee**

The Commission was represented on the Township "Green Team" and "Sustainable Jersey" Committees and has supported its initiatives in the past. Neither was active in 2015.

## **Financial Support**

The Environmental Commission received a budget of \$500 in 2015, of which \$330 was committed to maintaining our membership in the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)

A grant of \$300 was received from the Garden Club of Somerset County to support a project to plant native plants at the entrance to India Brook Park.

The Township's half of the proceeds from the joint Borough/Township Electronic recycling event was placed in a long standing Conservation Fund for future use.

## **Department of Public Works Assistance**

Many of the accomplishments listed above would not have been possible without the assistance of Dave Read and the Department of Public Works staff. Every request for help was satisfied promptly and professionally employing a wide range of skills and much hard work. The Environmental Commission is sincerely grateful for the assistance provided.

## **2015 Membership**

### **Members**

Susan Schmerler

Rich Cotter

Jamie Kinsel

Teri Cosentino

Sarah Dean Link

Ralph Rhodes, Chair

John Schmerler

In 2015 Sarah Dean Link received a proclamation of appreciation from the Township Committee and Planning Board upon her retirement as liaison to the Planning Board after serving for 10 years. In 2016, Sarah Dean will retire from the Environmental Commission after serving for 27 years.

### **Alternate Members**

Brian Boden

### **Representation on Other Boards and Committees**

Susan Schmerler – Township Green Team

Jamie Kinsel – Planning Board

### **Township Committee Liaison**

Diana Orbin Brown