



Fair Haven Fields Natural Area Advisory Committee (FHFNAAC) 2022 Annual Report

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Committee Overview

2022 Committee Members

1. Carolyn Ferguson (Chair)
2. Jennifer Spitz (Vice Chair)
3. Paul Ferguson (Secretary)
4. Dave Bordelon
5. Alison Countryman
6. Mark Olsen
7. Stephen Sheehan
8. Pat Quigley

Plus volunteers who join our meetings

Lifetime Members

- Audrey Ingle (lifetime member)
- Dick Fuller (lifetime member)
- Doris Moraller (lifetime member)

Borough Council Liaison (2022)

Meghan Chrisner-Keefe

Natural Area Philosophy

In 1974, Fair Haven set aside 45 acres of Fair Haven Fields for the Natural Area. Natural processes are the primary activity: birds and butterflies, trees and bushes and wildflowers, chipmunks and squirrels and turtles should thrive together in a near self-sustaining environment. We use this vision of an independent ecosystem to guide our activities in the Natural Area.

As an ecosystem, the Natural Area exists within an otherwise developed area, and it is small. Birds can easily carry seeds from the outside that sprout to produce destructive invasives. This has happened and will continue. Such an environment cannot exist without assistance. Yet while we need to actively work within and manage the Natural Area to approximate the give and take of natural cycles, it is important to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to re-create a truly natural environment: we are striving for a place where residents can find enjoyment in nature “doing its own thing.”

Partnership with the Department of Public Works (DPW)

Our committee's partnership with the Department of Public Works (DPW) continues to be strong. The DPW collaborates with our committee in the following ways:

- Keeping the Natural Area trails covered with wood chips per the 3-year schedule established by our committee
- Working during our volunteer weekends to do heavier work using machinery we cannot have our volunteers use
- Meeting monthly in the Natural Area with our Maintenance Committee to review and plan maintenance work
- Planning and executing special projects as they come up

It is important for the Borough Council to know the following:

- Our DPW provides an exceptional level of in-house knowledge and expertise on the overall ecology of the Natural Area, and its plants and trees. We rely on their knowledge of plants, trees, invasives, and use of herbicides as we explore projects and manage the invasive vines and non-native plants.
- The representatives from Monmouth County Parks have **repeatedly** complimented our DPW's level of knowledge about the ecology of the Natural Area, and the trees and plants that grow there.

The FHFNAAC is grateful for the DPW's partnership and expertise. The team is a pleasure to work with, and we thank them for their hard work in the Natural Area.

2022 Accomplishments

Goals We Set for 2022

The committee's 2022 goals were documented in the 2021 annual report.

Goal	Status	Update
Community Education	Accomplished	See below
Resuming nature walks after covid	Accomplished	See below
Partnering with other Fair Haven committees to create a joint Earth Day celebration	Not Accomplished	We took steps to join previously separate Earth Day activities into a town-wide Earth Day, but it turned out the first Love Where You Live Day was being planned in the same timeframe, so we dropped our plan for Earth Day.
Remove Non-Native Species and Plant Native Species: begin removing non-native species like Japanese Holly and Andromeda from the Natural Area	Not Accomplished	Deprioritized based on guidance from Monmouth County Parks. While these are non-native, they are not spreading and causing damage. We were advised to focus on non-natives that are causing damage.
Plant new native trees	Partially Accomplished	6 native trees were purchased and planted, but our goal is 20+ trees a year.
Seed the meadows with wildflowers to support pollinators	Not Accomplished	But this is currently in progress for 2023

What We Accomplished in 2022

1. Formalized and Improved Our Processes

- Presented our first Annual Report to the Fair Haven Governing Body. This increased the visibility and impact of our committee with the Borough Council and other committees.
- Created a "volunteer weekend planning checklist" to ensure the committee can organize these events efficiently, effectively, and with consistency.

2. Educated the Community

- Hosted 3 nature walks. More than 20 people attended each walk.
- Shared educational materials in the kiosk, via our social media channels, and at Love Where You Live day. Topics:
 - **Invasive species**
 - **Natural Area ecology** - what trees and shrubs belong in this area
 - **Leave no trace** - Including not dumping pumpkins in the natural area.

3. Improvement/Maintenance Activities

- a. Continued monthly maintenance walks in the Natural Area with representatives of the DPW to align on maintenance plans.
- b. Organized two Volunteer Weekends, where committee members, the DPW, and volunteers worked in the Natural Area for 4 days, removing invasives and clearing downed wood.
- c. Purchased 6 trees that were planted as part of an Eagle Scout project.

4. Began Using Resources from Monmouth County

- a. Established a relationship with Monmouth County Parks. They evaluated the Natural Area and provided the borough and our committee with a 6-page assessment that included valuable information and advice. We intend to continue this relationship.

FHFNAAC member Dick Fuller engaged the county to begin this relationship, and it provided the committee with professional guidance for the first time in many years.

- b. Arranged for mosquito treatment of Fourth Creek within the Natural Area in June 2022.

FHFNAAC member Dave Bordelon connected with the Mosquito Commission at Love Where You Live Day. The Mosquito Commission treated the creek in June 2022.

5. Initiated Work to Restore the Northwest Section

In our 2021 Annual Report, we identified the Northwest section of the Natural Area as being in dire need of restoration. This area is overrun with invasive vines and downed trees, is largely inaccessible, does not contribute to the ecology of FHFNA, and is an incubator of invasive vines and plants that are spread by wildlife all over town.

During 2022, the Committee identified a project to kick off the restoration of this area, which was a request for the DPW to cut a trail on the border of the Natural Area and the Christ Church. We feel this trail will serve the following purposes:

- a. The church property is a mess of vines also, and we would like to create a break to inhibit the church vines from spreading into the Natural Area.
- b. Provide safe access into this area, so that it can be evaluated for next steps.
- c. Demarcate which portion of this problem belongs to the owner of the church property, in hopes that they can be encouraged to minimize the vines on their land.

FHFNAAC member Mark Olson met with the pastor of Christ Church in January 2023 to share our plans with him, and to share information about the problem of invasive vines.

6. Honored Distinguished Committee Members

- a. Established 3 lifetime members of the FHFNAAC. These members have dedicated decades of their lives to the preservation and care of the Natural Area. Doris Moraller, Audrey Ingle and Richard Fuller were honored at the February 2022 Borough Council meeting.

Goals for 2023

1. Begin Restoration of the Northwest Section of the Natural Area

- a. Present a plan to the Borough Council to restore a Phase 1 section of the Northwest section that is adjacent to the border trail. Gain Borough Council's approval of the plan.

2. Spend Down Our Community Appeal Money

- a. Purchase and plant trees and bushes, with a focus on planting bushes that can create an evergreen understory (for example, mountain laurel, witch hazel, and native azaleas).
- b. Seeding pollinator-friendly wildflowers in the natural area's meadows. In addition to helping pollinators, we intend for this to crowd out the invasive Japanese stiltgrass that has taken over one of the meadows.

3. Honor Distinguished Committee Members

- a. Long-time committee member Jim Ingle passed away in 2022, and our committee plans to permanently honor him in the Natural Area (similar to the Dery's Pond marker).

4. Community Engagement

- a. Continue to host Spring and Fall Volunteer weekends
- b. Continue to host Nature Walks

FHFNAAC member Paul Ferguson plans to introduce new topics, starting with a bird expert in March .

5. Continue Partnership with Monmouth County Parks

- a. Make review/assessment of the Natural Area by Monmouth County Parks occur annually.

6. Improve Natural Area Committee Connection to the Borough

Note that, organizationally, our committee reports to the Borough Council.

- a. Appear more frequently before the Borough Council in order to:
 - i. Understand the Borough Council's goals for our committee, and get direction and feedback
 - ii. Ensure that the work being done by our committee has visibility to the Borough Council, related borough employees, and to Fair Haven taxpayers
- b. Collaborate effectively with borough processes for communications, spending, and generating work orders for the DPW so that we deliver maximum value to the Borough Council, and to Fair Haven's taxpayers

Requests for the Borough Council

Requests We Made in 2022

Request	Status
1. Professional Planning for the North End of the Natural Area	Not provided
2. Add Curbs on Fair Haven Road Along the Cherry Tree Area	Not provided

2023 Requests for the Borough Council

1. Northwest Section Restoration

- a. Consider and approve a plan that we plan to present (in March) to restore the Northwest Section of the Natural Area. Partner with our committee to carry out the approved plan.

2. Consider the Deer Problem in the Natural Area

- a. 2022 is the year that the deer destruction of the understory in the Natural Area was discovered, observed by both the FHFNAAC and Monmouth County Parks. We encourage the borough to work with Monmouth County Parks to devise a plan to address the local deer overpopulation.

3. Help Our Committee Be Connected and Aligned with the Borough

Note that, organizationally, our committee reports to the Borough Council.

- a. Clarify how our committee is to report regular status to, and to get direction from the Borough Council. We suggest the Borough Council agenda include an item for a workshop discussion with our committee every 3 months for this purpose.
- b. Help us understand the missions of all borough committees, so that we may work together effectively when our missions overlap (for example, tree safety in the Natural Area is presumably owned by the Shade Tree Commission, and preservation of the Fair Haven Road Cherry Tree Row will require collaboration of multiple committees).
- c. Our committee coordinates 500-900 hours of volunteer time a year to complete a variety of projects. We request that the borough fund 2 hours a month (24 hours a year) of borough employee administrative time to help us work effectively. Problems this could solve:
 - i. When a committee includes a borough employee (for example, DJ working on Rec committee), that employee can file work orders for their committee. DPW asks us to file work orders, but we have no ability to do that.

- ii. It is difficult for us to successfully execute some borough procedures because we don't use them enough to ever get good at them. An employee who knows these procedures as part of their job could guide us so that our interactions with the borough can go smoothly for all, and remove this unpleasant part of our work for our volunteer members.

Tasks that could be done include arranging meeting logistics, and sending out meeting invites, filing work orders for the committee, posting agendas and notes provided by the committee to the borough website, and helping to shepherd our purchases through the borough processes.

Conclusion

Thank you to members of the Natural Area committee. 2022 was a bit of a breakthrough year for us, where ideas we had discussed in prior years came to fruition. The members are thoughtful and hard-working. Not only do they do a wide variety of project work, but on any given day, you can find one or more of our committee members doing physical labor in the Natural Area or in the 3rd Street area. Their level of concern and care for the Natural Area, and for Fair Haven in general, is very high.

Thank you to the Borough Council for your consideration of this report. Our committee looks forward to continuing our fruitful partnership with the Borough Council to support the Natural Area this year.