

# Fair Haven Fields Natural Area Advisory Committee (FHFNAAC)

## 2023 Annual Report

Date: March 25, 2023

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# 2023 Committee Overview

## Committee Members

1. Carolyn Ferguson (Chair)
2. Jennifer Spitz (Vice Chair)
3. Paul Ferguson (Secretary)
4. Dave Bordelon
5. Alison Countryman
6. Mark Olson
7. Stephen Sheehan
8. Meg Chrisner-Keefe
9. Bonnie Torcivia

## Lifetime Members

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

Plus **volunteers** who join our meetings

## Borough Council Liaison (2023)

- Laline Neff

# 2023 Committee Overview (con't)

## Natural Area History

In 1974, Fair Haven set aside 45 acres of Fair Haven Fields for the Natural Area. No action was taken on this property until 1987, when the Fair Haven Fields Natural Area Advisory Committee was formed. Following that, the nature trails and the Ridge Road parking lot were added, and that was the beginning of the “natural area” as we know it today.

## Benefits of the Natural Area

- Passive recreation for walkers, runners, dog walkers, and those who might like sit and contemplate nature
- A local home to insects, animals, plant life, and trees that serve vital roles in our environment
- A place where residents young and old can learn about nature
- A natural source of coolness (See heat map in the appendix)

# 2023 Committee Overview (con't)

## Small Natural Areas Have Unique Challenges

The primary activities in this area are natural processes. However, as an ecosystem, the Natural Area is small, and that presents unique challenges:

- The area is too small to buffer itself from the surrounding developed area. Birds can easily carry in seeds from the outside that sprout to produce destructive invasives.
- In any year, conditions in a natural area can cause a reduction in the plant and animal species it hosts. In a large area, the amount of each species is reduced, but the species remain and can recover. In a small area, the amount of each species is small, and a reduction may become the end of that species in that space.

## Natural Area Philosophy

The Natural Area cannot remain healthy without assistance. It is the job of the Natural Area Committee to advise on what kinds of assistance are necessary.

Since the inception of the Natural Area, the goal has been to allow this space to be a truly natural environment, that is, a place where birds and butterflies, trees and bushes and wildflowers, chipmunks and squirrels and turtles are allowed to thrive in a near self-sustaining environment. We inherited this guidance, we respect this guidance, and we work to see it carried out and carried forward.

Our work to provide “assistance” in the Natural Area is always balanced with a desire to keep it natural.

# 2023 Committee Overview (con't)

## Partnership with the Dept. of Public Works (DPW)

DPW collaborates with our committee in the following ways:

- Covering Natural Area trails with wood chips per the established 3-year schedule
- Working during our volunteer weekends to do heavier work with boro tools and machinery
- Meeting monthly in the Natural Area with our Maintenance Committee
- Planning and executing special projects. For example, this year they replaced the sign on Ridge Road, and repaired the Dery's Pond overlook.
- Participating in our meetings, either in person or by submitting a report

**Important:** The FH 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 collaboration and expertise. The team is a pleasure to work with, and we thank them for their hard work in the Natural Area.

# Review of 2023 / 2023 Goals



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



2. Spend Down Our Community Appeal Money / Accomplished

3. Honor Distinguished Committee Members / Not Accomplished, but planned for 2024



4. Community Engagement / Accomplished



5. Continue Partnership with Monmouth County Parks / Accomplished

6. Improve Natural Area Committee Connection to the Borough / Not Accomplished

- But hopeful for improvements in 2024

# Review of 2023 / 2023 Accomplishments

## Restoration of the Natural Area's Northwest Section

- Our **2021** Annual Report identified the Northwest section of the Natural Area as being in dire need of restoration. This area was overrun with invasive vines and downed trees, was largely inaccessible, and did not contribute to the ecology of FHFNA. Additionally, it was an incubator of invasive vines and plants that then spread throughout town.
- In **2022**, work began on this project when our Committee requested for the DPW to cut a trail on the border of the Natural Area and the Christ Church to demarcate the property edge, and to create a break to separate the vines on church property from our restoration area.
- In **2023**, we took a major step forward. Used \$20,000 of Community Appeal donations to have the area professionally cleared. Consulted w Monmouth County Parks, who provided valuable guidance.

# Review of 2023 / 2023 Accomplishments (con't)

## Spent Down Natural Area Community Appeal Money

- 2023 starting balance = \$27,000
- Spent \$20,000 for professional clearing of the Northwest restoration area
- Spent \$2,500 for wildflower seeds that were planted in the meadow
- Spent \$2,300 for 51 native species bushes that we planted (with wire fencing to protect them from deer)

**Community Engagement.** Hosted 2 Volunteer weekends and 1 nature walk. Posted educational information in the kiosk and on our social media channels.

**Continued Partnership with Monmouth County Parks (MCP).** As we did last year, we once again engaged w MCP for their annual review/assessment of the Natural Area. Also continued to engage with **Rutgers**, for guides for our nature walks, and for other advice.

## Also

- Participated in Love Where You Live Day
- Repaired the bench in Moraller's Meadow
- Developed a friendly relationship with the church that shares a border with the Natural Area. Their property shares the same problems as our Northwest restoration area, and for the sake of the Natural Area we need the invasive vines on their property to be managed.



# Goals for 2024

1. **Continue the Project to Restore the Northwest Section of the Natural Area**
2. **Celebrate 50 Years of Fair Haven Fields**
3. **Honor Distinguished Committee Members.** Jim Ingle was the first Chair of the FHFNAAC, and served on it from 1987 until he died in 2022. We hope to honor him in the Natural Area (perhaps a rustic bench with a plaque).
4. **Improve Committee Collaboration with the Borough.** Our committee is eager to deliver maximum value to the Borough Council and to Fair Haven's taxpayers, and we think effective collaboration with the Borough is critical to this mission.
5. **Develop a Plan to Begin Tackling Invasives in the North Section of the Natural Area.** This area has had no maintenance in recent history.

# Requests for the Borough Council

**1. Add Curbs on Fair Haven Road Along the Cherry Tree Area** (requested in our Annual Reports since 2021). To prevent water flowing down Buttonwood right into the Natural Area and causing erosion in the pine tree forest.

**2. Address Deer Overpopulation in the Natural Area** (requested in our Annual Reports since 2021). 2022 is the year that the deer destruction of the understory in the Natural Area reached a critical level, observed by both the FHFNAAC and Monmouth County Parks. We encourage the borough to devise a plan to address deer overpopulation in the Natural Area.



Mature tree

Understory  
(young trees)

Mature tree

Deer eat the young trees. When mature trees fall, there are no young trees to then shoot up and replace them.

# Requests for the Borough Council

## 3. Improve Committee Collaboration with the

**Borough.** Although we work for the borough, we feel that our collaboration is lacking. We'd like to see the following improvements, which we feel will help us deliver maximum value to the Borough Council and to Fair Haven's taxpayers:

- A. Clarify how committee will report regular status to, and get direction from, the Borough Council. Recently we began providing monthly reports, and we are hopeful that this may solve this issue.
- B. Boro to keep our committee informed about activities happening in the Natural Area (for example, licenses being issued for use by groups at a cost, or visits by Green Acres personnel).
- C. Establish a single point-of-contact at the borough. Currently, our interactions with the borough often become confusing, and we believe a single point-of-contact would improve efficiency for all. We ask for this single point-of-contact to do the following to help us work effectively: file work orders, arrange meeting logistics, and help to shepherd our purchases through the borough procedures. We would be happy for this to be a member of the office staff or a member of the DPW.
- D. Continue DPW participation in our meetings, and at our volunteer weekends

# Conclusion

Thank you to the Natural Area committee. They not only plan and execute projects, but on any given day, you can find one or more of our committee members doing physical labor in the Natural Area or on the 3rd Street Trail. Their level of concern and care for the Natural Area, and for Fair Haven in general, is very high.

We estimate that our committee members donate 800 hours a year of work, and coordinate an additional 500 hours of time donated by the public at our volunteer weekends. This adds up to the equivalent of .6 of a full-time employee.

Thank you to the Borough Council for your consideration of this report. Our committee looks forward to growing our partnership with the Borough so that we can work effectively to preserve the Natural Area so that it remains an ecological and recreational asset for Fair Haven that can be enjoyed by generations to come.

# Appendix: Heat Map

