

THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

OUTDOOR ISSUES

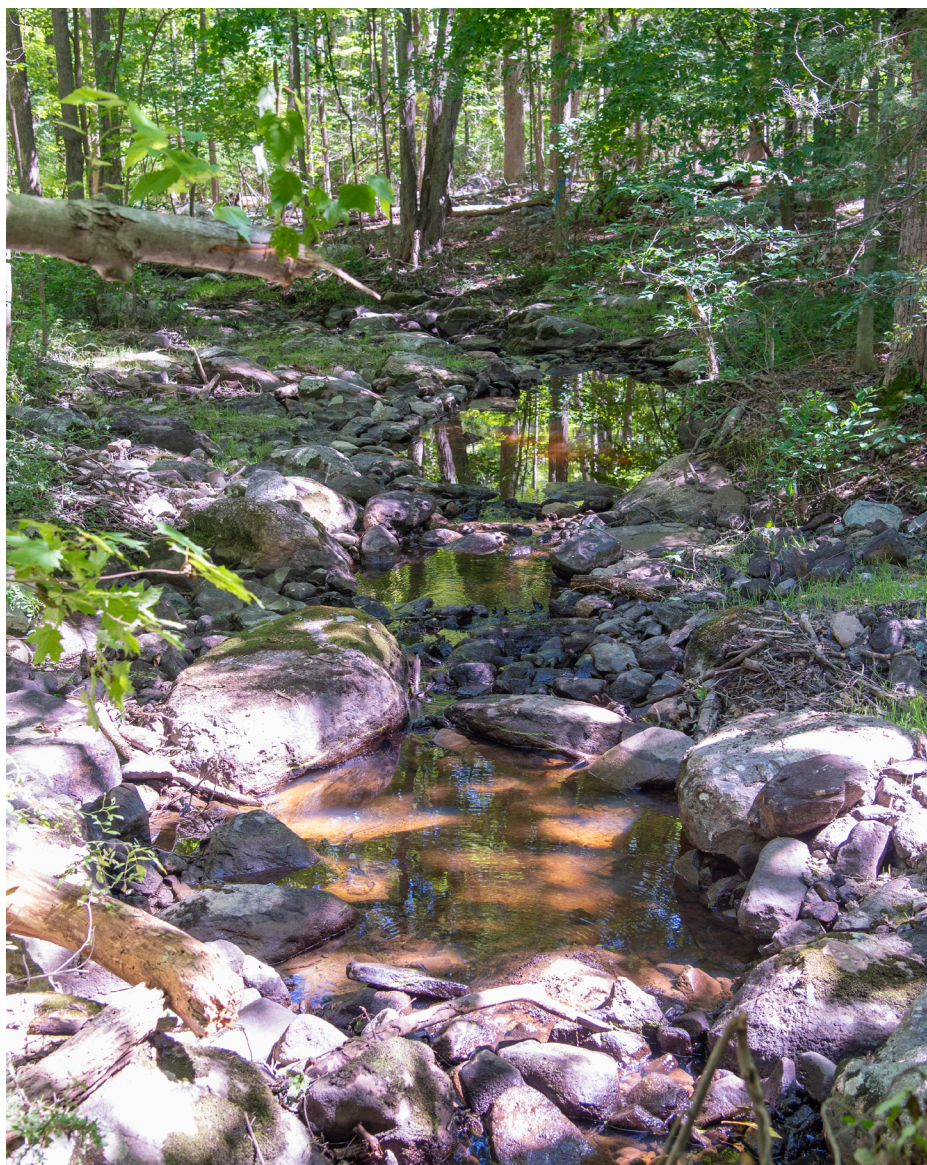
FALL 2020

WEST BROOK FLOWS FREE THANKS TO RESTORATION

For the first time in 60 years, the West Brook is flowing back in its historical channel, thanks to our restoration project that was finished in August. West Milford is home to the headwaters of this important stream, which was rerouted 60 years ago during a development project that was then abandoned. The landscape was badly degraded, changing the flow of the West Brook and damaging the surrounding wetlands.

The West Brook is a major source of clean water for the Wanaque Reservoir, which 2 million New Jersey residents rely on for drinking. In 2017, The Land Conservancy purchased this property and took on the herculean task of rehabilitating the land. Of course, a project this big requires a lot of planning and fundraising, so it wasn't until this summer that all the permits were obtained, the money was raised, and contractors were scheduled to break ground.

We removed berms and culverts so the water was no longer being diverted into man-made ditches that were draining the wetlands and disrupting the seasonal water levels. Staff and volunteers relocated hundreds of native plants along the waterway to re-establish the habitat for flora and fauna.



The historic stream bed was remade in a holistic way so the stream meanders, with deep pools to encourage cold groundwater to bubble up and local trout to

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THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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West Brook Restoration, cont'd

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spawn. Materials found on site were used to create these wildlife-friendly features—a hallmark of Joe Urbani, the fisheries biologist who did the construction on this project. Urbani believes in following the “bones” of a stream and making sure there are pools and riffles to encourage a healthy, natural environment that will be resilient in storms and droughts for many years to come.

On the last day of work, the last dam was removed. Everyone on site cheered as water flowed into the West Brook for the first time in many decades. From now on, a steady stream of cold, clean water will flow into the reservoir during dry periods, erosion will be reduced, native plant species will flourish, and the brook will once again become a healthy habitat for the imperiled eastern brook trout. Already the groundwater has risen up 15 feet, and we hope to introduce native brook trout to the West Brook next spring. And now the fun part: monitoring the site and watching nature heal itself.



Intern Carmine Colasurdo relocates cardinal flowers during the West Brook restoration project.

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



A smiling David stands next to the just-unveiled sign with Bill Conger (far left) and Congressman Josh Gottheimer (far right) at the grand opening of the Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve in West Milford.

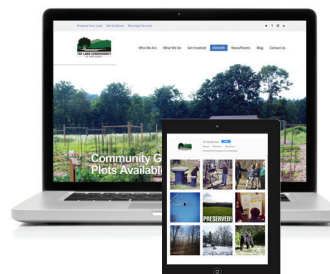
In late August, The Land Conservancy re-established a devastated segment of the West Brook near its headwaters, our fourth major restoration project. Over the years we have focused on preserving as much land as possible due to our belief that we are in a race to save New Jersey's dwindling open space. And we have had much success—preserving more than 28,000 acres of land that we have added to a wide variety of federal, state, county, and local parks, as well as establishing six preserves that we own and manage. But during this race we have come to recognize that some of the important lands we have permanently preserved have been so badly damaged by past development that they must be restored in order to provide all of the benefits we have come to expect from our natural lands.

Restoring the natural features of land is an expensive and challenging undertaking, with no guarantees of success. We completed the first three restoration projects at our South Branch Preserve—removing a housing subdivision, restoring a channelized stream, and establishing a native forest; transforming four fallow fields into 31 acres of butterfly meadows; and transitioning four former fields into a forested riparian buffer. We raised more than \$1 million to complete these projects—about half from government sources and half from private donors. Thus far, each of the projects has been successful, though maintenance challenges will continue into the future.

Development over the past 400 years has dramatically altered the landscape of our state. Restoration offers us some remedies to re-start and enhance some of the natural processes that have been lost. We are proud The Land Conservancy has set examples for others to follow to more proactively care for our watersheds, forests, and grasslands so that they continue to provide natural benefits to generations that have not yet had the opportunity to enjoy them. Restoration is not replacing our land preservation work, but it is another important tool for us to use to care for the lands we love.

GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can also visit tlc-nj.org to read our blog.



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South Branch Community Garden Stronger Than Ever

It's been an unusual year to say the least, but some things remain—like the dedicated group of gardeners who come back to their plots at the South Branch Community Garden year after year. This year every plot was spoken for, and many members were grateful to have a quiet, relaxing place to spend time outdoors working in the soil. Of course the social events and open houses were missed, and the additional health measures weren't anyone's favorite, but everyone cooperated—with many already renewing their membership for 2021!

Despite a frost in late April, it was a good season for many members, who grew a cornucopia of food: zucchini, tomatoes, peas, many types of lettuce, and even overwintered garlic. And the lovely sunflowers, marigolds, and milkweed brought lots of butterflies to the garden.

The gardeners clearly share our commitment to the community as well; they donated a total of 350 pounds of food to Mt. Olive food pantries. Satisfying all around!

Growing and Giving at City Green Farms

City Green Farms is in its third year growing crops on 12 acres at South Branch Preserve, and as of publication they've harvested 41,000 pounds of veggies—and they're still harvesting! And best of all that tasty, nutrient-dense organic food goes to those who can use it most.

According to Farm Manager Joe, the star crops of 2020 have been sweet potatoes, winter squash, carrots, and cabbage, which will keep hundreds of children in northeast New Jersey healthy and fed this year.

That's not to say the growing season was without challenges. The farmers had to combat wire worms in the potatoes and maggots in the onions, which forced them to replant an entirely new onion field in a second location.

Overall, though, it has been a productive and plentiful season. Executive Director Jennifer Papa says, "I'm excited that so much healthy food has gotten into the hands of people who need it most, through our pantry donation program, as well as our Good Food Buck market program."

Here's to many more abundant years!



City Green staff joined farmers Joe and Emily at South Branch Preserve to assist with the popcorn harvest in September.

Reforeesting Yards Creek with Roots for Rivers

Staff and volunteers for The Land Conservancy of New Jersey recently planted 575 native trees at Yards Creek Preserve in Blairstown, thanks to a grant from the Roots for Rivers program.

The weather was sunny and cool, but the work was hard as the workers dug holes in rocky soil for four days of planting, putting in hundreds of saplings and plastic tubes to protect tender trunks from deer and mice. Land Conservancy staff members were joined by a whopping 59 volunteers, who came from all over north Jersey to plant native species of oak and black tupelo trees over four workdays.

Once the mature forest is established, it will reduce erosion and rehabilitate wetlands on the Paulins Kill River, which feeds the Delaware. The trees will also provide shade to cool the water, discourage invasive species from growing, provide a root system to stabilize stream banks, filter out pollutants, and store flood waters. The restored floodplains will also supply food and habitat for a diversity of wildlife.

This work was made possible by a Roots for Rivers grant, funded and organized by the Watershed Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and Sustainable Jersey. Roots for Rivers is a floodplain reforestation incentive program operating throughout New Jersey's watersheds. The grant paid for 400 of the trees, while Conservancy donors footed the bill for the rest.

Sandy Uργο, TLCNJ's Vice President of Land Preservation, is pleased with the



Volunteer Bob Falcone from Long Valley worked hard for several days to plant trees at Yards Creek.



results. "We endeavor to be excellent stewards of land after we acquire and preserve it. Years from now, this will be a forest filled with mighty oaks, which is an amazing legacy for The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, the Roots for Rivers program, and every volunteer who gave so generously of their time and energy. Thanks to the grant and our friends who were willing to come out and work hard on our behalf, it was a success!"

The Buzz About Bee Meadow Trail



LEFT: Planning map of Phase I of the Bee Meadow Trail, which has already been constructed.

BELOW: Bee Meadow Pond.



Since 2017, Hanover Township has been working on the Bee Meadow Pond Nature Trail, and The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has been helping them every step of the way. The township made the trail a priority since it supports the Mayor's Wellness Campaign, was recommended in their 2013 Connectivity Plan, and offers residents a beautiful, wooded pathway along a scenic, secluded corner of the park.

Bee Meadow Park is a popular recreational facility used for fishing, football, lacrosse, concerts in the amphitheater, and the main attraction: Bee Meadow Pool. The first phase of the nature trail was a 1-mile loop for walkers and bicyclists connecting the parking lot to the water. The Land Conservancy contributed trail layout and design, data analysis, and mapping to aid Hanover Township in making this ambitious project a reality. The first phase was so well received that it was followed by two additional phases, and a fourth phase to make parts of the trail ADA compliant.

Opportunities like this are rare in eastern Morris County, so it's inspiring to see municipalities making meaningful efforts to preserve green spaces. We're very proud to be a part of it.

Warren County Farm Plans

The Land Conservancy is helping six towns in Warren County update their farmland preservation programs to ensure that local farmers remain eligible to receive state funding. Our Vice President of Programs, Barbara Davis, meets regularly with local officials, using her years of expertise and data analysis to help make sense of complicated regulations and get everyone's input. These conversations, and the resulting farm plans, impact the lives of real families in New Jersey who are growing your food and stewarding the land for future generations.



Shaley Hill Farm in Frelinghuysen boasts gorgeous flowering trees, antique farming equipment, pasture, and a beautiful pond. It's a beautiful, bucolic, quintessential farm.



Shiloh Hill Farm in Frelinghuysen. Out of view are about 25 cattle in pasture—a lovely sight.



Bob May with a lamb at his farm in Hope. Bob has two preserved farms and has been farming in Hope for the last 20 years—a relative newcomer compared to many farming families in Warren County. He raises sheep and cattle and grows hay.



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REVIVE THE WEST BROOK

This latest conservation effort is to purchase and restore 43 acres that we will add to the Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve, which contains the headwaters of the West Brook. The new parcel is located across the street from our Preserve and is home to a vital feeder stream leading into the West Brook. This property also includes a pond with a dam that we will need to remove and restore as a stream with wetlands.

We are poised to do this important work, but we need to raise \$98,000 for the purchase and \$50,000 for the restoration work. Happily, an anonymous couple and Bill Conger, Nancy Conger's husband, are donating \$20,000 in "seed money" to get this project started.



You are part of a passionate community of people committed to preserving New Jersey's natural spaces. Your donation will ensure this critical piece of property is available for everyone to enjoy for generations to come. Together we can protect the West Brook, now and for the future.

Visit expandingwestbrook.causevox.com to learn more and make a gift.

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