

New Jersey Conservation



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SHARED VICTORIES

Working with a variety of partners, we helped preserve three incredible properties in northern New Jersey.

7

HIDDEN WORLDS

The Burghardts have searched Franklin Parker Preserve for mushrooms for nearly 15 years, adding important discoveries to the study of the area's fungi and overall ecology.

10

STRONGER, GREENER URBAN COMMUNITIES

We are planting trees in Trenton, launching a new conference series, and bringing the joy of birding to Jersey City through local partnerships.



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ABOUT THE COVER

New Jersey Conservation's Land Protection Coordinator, Elise Cavicchi, captured this beautiful photograph of the expansion of the Schiff Nature Preserve in Mendham Township. Read more about the partnership that made this preserve addition a reality – and see more of Elise's photography – on page 6.



From Our Executive Director

Alison Mitchell

A Common Vision for the Future

For 65 years, the mission of New Jersey Conservation Foundation has remained steadfast – to preserve land and natural resources throughout the state for the benefit of all. Born from the fight to save the Great Swamp, we've faced strong headwinds time and again, prevailing against powerful forces to protect the land that makes New Jersey special. In the face of rapid policy changes and great uncertainty at the federal level, this work remains more important than ever, and we continue to move forward with resolve.

Despite the obstacles of federal funding reductions and promised rollbacks of key environmental protections, we remain deeply committed to fostering a love for the natural world and expanding green spaces. We have no plans of slowing down – and the land preservation, stewardship, advocacy, and community engagement that has been our trademark is moving full speed ahead.

At the heart of so much success, especially during challenging times like these, is the power of partnerships. Over the years, we've learned that unity is essential to overcoming adversity. Through strategic partnerships and with your critical support, we continue to safeguard wildlife habitats, ensure clean air and water, and protect threatened and endangered species.

On page 4, you'll read compelling stories of nonprofit organizations, individuals, and state agencies joining forces to preserve over 300 acres in Frankford, White and Mendham townships. The features and natural resources of these properties are invaluable and irreplaceable. Together, we've ensured their protection for generations to come.

And on page 7, you'll discover the fascinating tale of a 15-year research project at NJ Conservation's fabulous Franklin Parker Preserve, where a curious and often overlooked organism – the mighty mushroom – has become the centerpiece of a couples' research efforts. These initiatives embody the spirit of resilience and the enduring power of collaboration.

As we look ahead, I am filled with excitement and confidence in what the future holds. The strength of our partnerships continues to propel us forward, and together, we will face the coming challenges with courage and determination, creating a lasting positive impact for all – just as we have for the past 65 years.

Thank you for your continued support of this essential mission. None of this work is possible without you! Together, we are creating a shared vision for the future – where the natural world is honored, protected, and enjoyed.

With gratitude and anticipation – onward!

Alison Mitchell



New Jersey Conservation Foundation is a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve land and natural resources throughout New Jersey for the benefit of all.

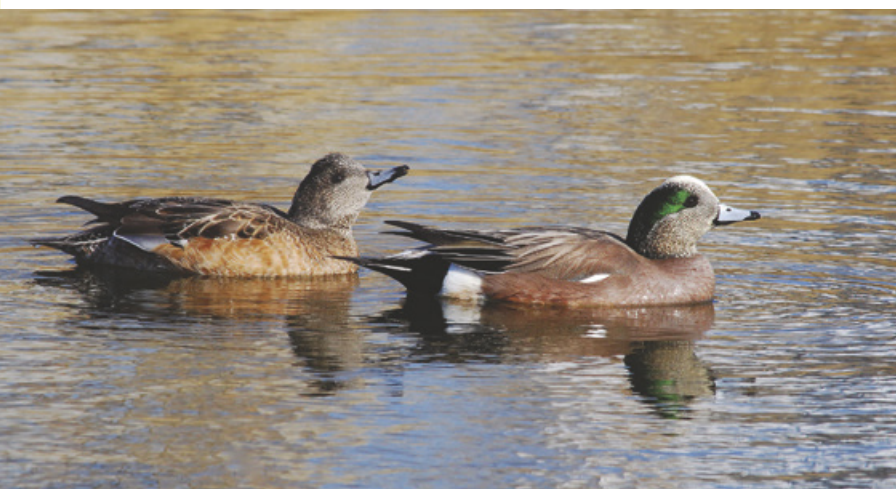
We protect strategic lands through acquisition and stewardship, promote strong land use policies, and forge partnerships to achieve conservation goals.

For membership information, please visit our website at www.njconservation.org or call us at 1-888-LANDSAVE. Our mailing address is 170 Longview Road, Far Hills, New Jersey 07931.





Spring is for the BIRDS



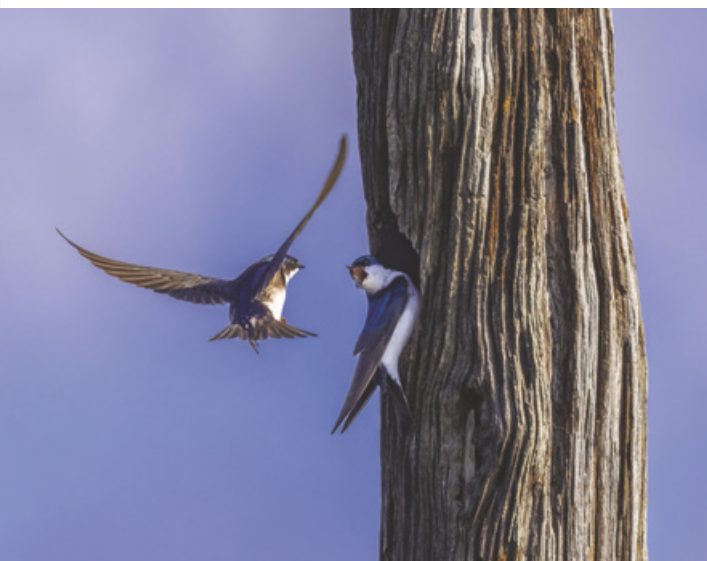
Pictured counterclockwise from top:

A pair of bobolinks on preserved grasslands near Cowtown Rodeo in Salem County. Photo by Blaine Rothauser.

American wigeons cruise one of the many coastal ponds along New Jersey's shoreline. Photo by Bill Lynch.

Tree swallows have a discussion about available nesting sites at our Franklin Parker Preserve. Photo by Richard Lewis.

An endangered least tern feeds its chick along the beaches of Cape May. Photo by Bill Lynch.



SHARED VICTORIES:

Protecting land with a lot
of help from our friends



New Jersey Conservation Foundation works with many partners, including local governments, private donors and landowners, and community members, to ensure that future generations can enjoy beautiful wild spaces, preserved farmland, and parks. Here are a few of the many recent projects where collaboration made all the difference in securing the protection of important lands.

Establishing and Rewilding Culver Brook Preserves

The creation of Culver Brook Preserve, led by the Greater Culver Lake Watershed Conservation Foundation (GCLWCF), is a true testament to the power of teamwork, with several organizations working together to protect 268 acres of land in Frankford Township, Sussex County.

The preserved land includes two special properties: the 95-acre former Culver Lake Golf Course, now called Culver Brook Preserve, and an additional 173-acre forested area, Culver Brook Preserve East. These new preserves protect the local watershed, provide much-needed wildlife habitat, and create a beautiful public space for activities like hiking and bird-watching, all while providing an escape from the hustle and bustle of our busy world.

A collective commitment to preserving New Jersey's natural beauty made this landmark preservation effort a reality. Funding and resources came from the GCLWCF, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the Open Space Institute's Delaware River Watershed Protection Fund, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, the Sussex County Open Space Fund, and Frankford Township.

A particularly exciting aspect of this project is the plan to rewild Culver Brook Preserve through a close partnership with Sussex County Municipal Utilities Authority-Wallkill River Watershed Management Group. Rewilding is all about restoring and protecting ecosystems by reintroducing species that have been lost or are at risk. The project will transform the former golf course by planting native trees and shrubs, and creating a more natural landscape, including meadows, ponds, and walking trails. Thanks to grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Natural Resource Restoration, the preserve will also feature educational signs and a wildlife viewing platform, making it a fantastic destination for visitors to connect with the land's natural beauty.

Both preserves are part of a larger effort to restore the Culver Brook, a tributary of the Paulinskill River, and to enhance connectivity between wildlife habitats. In fact, Culver Brook Preserve East has earned a special designation as a "core area" in the state's Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) program, a vital initiative to preserve wildlife corridors throughout the state.

“We’re absolutely thrilled to have protected these properties. This is a major win for the watershed, and it also gives the community more space to explore and enjoy the great outdoors. We can’t wait to involve everyone in the rewilding process.”

- RICK FERRUGGIA
President of GCLWCF



Culver Brook Preserve



Bobcat by Tyler Christensen

Preserving land in The Nature Conservancy's Bobcat Alley

In another exciting land protection success, New Jersey Conservation and The Nature Conservancy worked with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program to protect over 132 acres in White Township, immediately adjacent to the state's 683-acre Buckhorn Creek Wildlife Management Area.

The land features large swaths of forests and fields, offers incredible views of the Delaware River Valley, and is home to critical wetlands. This marks an important milestone in the ongoing effort to expand and protect the region's natural landscapes.

This property is particularly interesting as it falls within The Nature Conservancy's "Bobcat Alley," a key area for wildlife movement in the Northwest Highlands that has been identified as a top priority by New Jersey Fish and Wildlife for its ecological significance.

The newly preserved state land also plays a key role in the Warren Highlands Trail, a collaborative project that showcases the best of the Highlands Region and connects hikers to many state and county parks and NJ Conservation-owned lands in the scenic landscapes of Warren County. The 52-mile trail stretches from the Delaware River in the west to the Musconetcong River in the east, and is a fantastic example of multiple organizations working together to create accessible outdoor space.

This acquisition preserves critical habitat and gives local residents and visitors a chance to experience the natural beauty of the area. With a 275-foot elevation change to the

highest point, the views are nothing short of breathtaking. The surrounding preserved farmland and public lands add to the scenic backdrop, creating an idyllic escape for those seeking peace – or adventure – in nature.

Expanding Schiff Nature Preserve

A key tract of 11 acres of forest has been permanently protected in Mendham Township, providing critical wildlife habitat for several threatened and endangered species including wood turtle, barred owl, bobcat, bald eagle, and Indiana bat. This newly preserved land, which includes a sparkling stream running along a tributary of the Raritan River, is an expansion of the 768-acre Schiff Nature Preserve and provides the potential for extended natural trails for passive recreational opportunities.

Thanks to a partnership between Raritan Headwaters Association, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Morris County Open Space Trust Fund, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, Schiff Natural Lands Trust, and Mendham Township, these 11 acres will remain natural and wild.

These projects are merely a handful of examples of great collaborations resulting in the protection of land and natural resources – creating spaces where people, plants, and animals can all thrive.

THE HIDDEN WORLD BENEATH OUR FEET:

A Story of Partnership and Land Stewardship

In the heart of New Jersey's Pine Barrens, a dedicated couple is quietly and patiently advancing scientific understanding and stewardship of an understated but essential part of the ecosystem – mushrooms!

The Burghardts – Nina, an amateur mycologist (one who studies fungi) with a lifelong passion for mushrooms, and her husband, John, a retired economist who came to the world of fungi later in life – have spent nearly 15 years documenting the secretive, fleeting world of mushrooms at Franklin Parker Preserve, a place known for its delicate balance of ecosystems.

Nina's love for mushrooms began long ago. Growing up on the grounds of a botanical garden, mushrooms were a part of her childhood, from her father's foraging to the lush biodiverse environment surrounding her. For John, the journey into mycology started after he married Nina. Raised with a fear of mushrooms, over time he was drawn into the wonder of these organisms as an integral part of life on Earth.

Their shared passion for this mysterious world became a gateway into the larger realm of conservation. Together, they began surveying fungi at Franklin Parker Preserve in 2009, after being introduced to the preserve by Dr. Emile DeVito, New Jersey Conservation Foundation's longtime staff ecologist. His invitation was a turning point, and the Burghardts set out to learn what these species could tell them about the land.

The work is slow, methodical, and often guided by chance. Fungi are notoriously elusive, appearing unpredictably and sometimes only for a few hours or days, making their study both challenging and thrilling. Their research takes them across the preserve's 16 square miles to diverse sites ranging from bogs with pine and cedar trees to hardwood forests filled with red maples and tupelo, with different species of fungi on each tree. They track changes in these communities after prescribed burns and floods, eager to document the ways in which environmental shifts affect the growth of mushrooms.

In this pursuit, the couple has discovered more than they could have ever imagined. Their surveys have found fungi never before documented in the Pine Barrens, some of which had never been documented anywhere else in the world. Their work, which has added new knowledge to the field of mycology, highlights the critical importance of fungi to these fragile ecosystems, especially in helping trees grow and maintain their health.



Nina and John Burghardt searching for fungi by Annie Licata

Their efforts aren't just about collecting samples and documenting new species. The real reward lies in understanding the interconnectedness of all life. Fungi are not passive organisms; they are active participants in the life cycle of forests. Their mycelium, the hidden root system, forms symbiotic relationships with trees, capturing moisture, breaking down minerals, and providing nutrients that are essential for plant growth. These relationships are vital to maintaining the health of ecosystems like the Pine Barrens.

“Fungi is all around us. They are often just little, fragile things – the mushrooms – but we are constantly discovering. We have found over 1,000 different species of fungi since we started.”

- NINA BURGHARDT

Devil's Tooth Fungus by Bill Lynch

Nina and John's work also underscores the importance of partnerships in land stewardship. Their efforts rely not only on their own observations but also on collaboration with conservationists, scientists, and the larger community of mycologists. By sharing their findings with various groups, including New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the New Jersey Mycological Association, they are ensuring that their discoveries contribute to a broader understanding of the region's biodiversity.

There are so many facets to stewarding land. Sometimes it involves focusing on the smaller, often overlooked members of an ecosystem. Nina and John's partnership, built on a shared love of nature and a deep respect for the land, has taught them that every living organism plays a role in the health of our environment. Their research, and the collaboration it has spawned, is a reminder that when we care for the land, we are not just preserving it for future generations, we are also uncovering the hidden wonders that sustain life in ways we are only beginning to understand.

As they continue to explore, document, and protect the fungi of Franklin Parker Preserve, Nina and John's work demonstrates the power of partnership – with each other, the larger conservation community and with the land itself.

STEWARDED TRAILS WITH THE OUTDOOR CLUB OF SOUTH JERSEY

Meet the volunteers doing the dirty work!

Taking care of preserved land is a permanent commitment, and stewardship is essential for ensuring natural areas are truly protected for wildlife and people. New Jersey Conservation's stewardship staff are on the ground every day engaged in a whole range of activities from essential maintenance, to restoration projects fostering biodiversity, to trail creation and upkeep. The job is far too big for NJ Conservation's staff team alone, and we rely on dedicated volunteers to help bridge the gaps. Volunteer groups, like the Outdoor Club of South Jersey (OCSJ), play a pivotal role in making the experience of hiking, biking, birdwatching and enjoying nature better for everyone.

Bill Scullion, a New Jersey Conservation land steward, emphasizes the value of groups like OCSJ, noting, “It would take weeks for one of us on staff to do what a large group from OCSJ does in just a few hours.” In addition to getting their hands dirty – quite literally – the club also recruits, trains, and manages volunteers.

These invaluable volunteers not only ensure that trails are maintained, they also contribute to preserving natural ecosystems. Their work helps prevent erosion, manage invasive species, and promote the growth of native plants.

The Evert Trail Preserve at the outskirts of the Pine Barrens is a great example of the contribution OCSJ volunteers are making. The trail winds through a swampy area where vegetation grows rapidly. Without regular maintenance, plants and fallen tree limbs would overtake the path, making it inaccessible. Thanks to the tireless efforts of OCSJ, the trails remain open and usable, allowing people to experience the swamp's unique landscape and wildlife.

Partnerships between New Jersey Conservation and volunteer groups like OCSJ help ensure protected spaces are cared for and remain available for passive recreation, education, and the appreciation of nature for generations to come

Photo by Rosemarie Mason



GAINING GROUND

12 projects

July 2024

—

March 2025

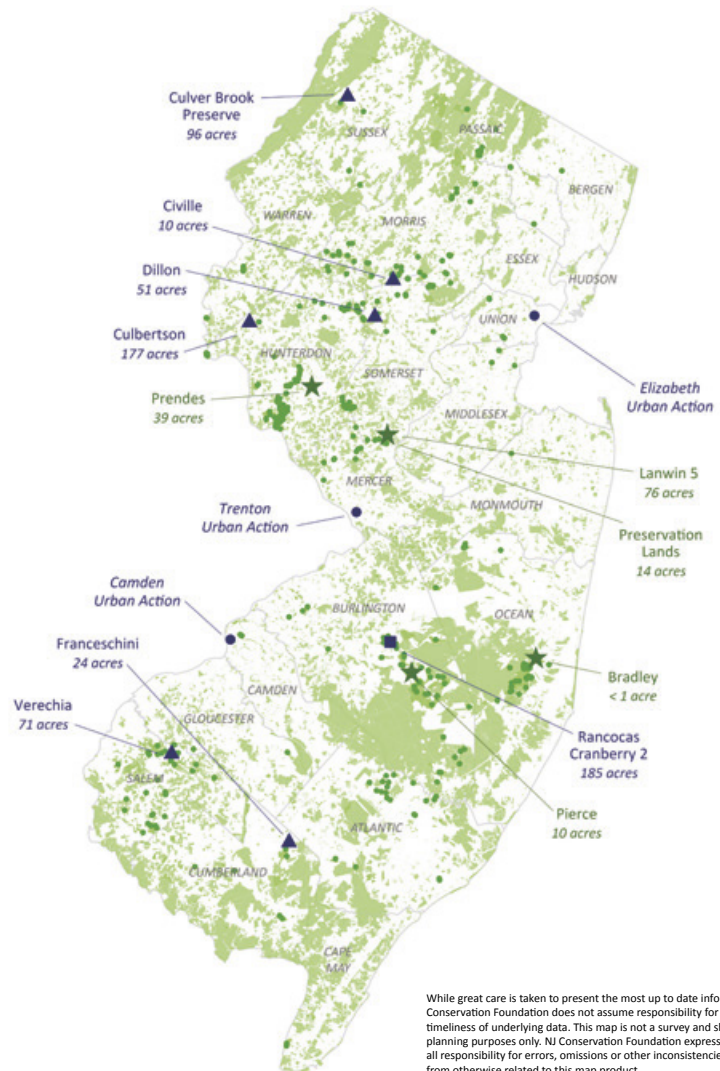
- ★ NJ Conservation Owned: **140 acres**
(Fee or Easement)
- ▲ Preserved in Partnership: **429 acres**
- Urban Action
- Transfers (**185 acres**)

● NJ Conservation Foundation
Owned & Managed Properties
(Fee or Easement)

■ Preserved Land
(Open Space & Farmland)

New Jersey Conservation Foundation and its partners permanently preserved 569 acres from July 2024 through March 2025. These lands include family farms as well as natural areas that safeguard clean drinking water, protect wildlife habitat, and offer scenic beauty and outdoor recreation.

THANK YOU TO ALL
MEMBERS, VOLUNTEERS
AND PARTNERS FOR
HELPING TO PRESERVE
THESE LANDS!



It's easy to join New Jersey
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www.njconservation.org

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Building Stronger, Greener Urban Communities TOGETHER

Photo by Jay Watson

New Jersey Conservation Foundation is teaming up with more local communities, organizations, and residents to tackle environmental challenges while building stronger, more connected neighborhoods. These partnerships are already showing how collaboration can transform our cities!

More Trees!

One of the more ambitious initiatives this year is “Trees for Trenton,” with a goal of 1,000 trees planted in the next 2 years. While this is a big undertaking, we’re confident that together with key partners, we can make it happen! This project offers so many benefits for people and wildlife, and it’s a step toward cleaner air and cooler streets in our capital city.

This effort isn’t just about adding

greenery – it’s about fostering broader awareness and knowledge so that more people come to appreciate and take care of their environment. Outdoor Equity Alliance – a Trenton-based nonprofit – is playing a central role through its Ambassador Program, where high school and college students engage with the community to share why tree planting – and good stewardship of the trees – is so important.

Nature for All

We’re not stopping there! We recently launched the Brown, Black and Green Conference along with Stono Public Affairs, Outdoor Equity Alliance, Isles, and Make the Road New Jersey. This gathering convened community leaders together near Trenton to talk about how green urban investments and engagement can respond to climate change – including extreme heat – and advance environmental justice. With future stops planned in other cities like Newark and Camden, the conference is bringing these important conversations directly to local leaders and influencers looking for solutions that resonate in their communities.

For the Birds

Our work with partners also connects people directly with nature. This spring we are hosting bird walks around the state, including in places like Jersey City, Camden, and Trenton. Our third annual “Liberty State Park Big Day” – where we attempt to identify as many species as possible – will take place on Saturday, May 17 with the Feminist Bird Club of Jersey City, Liberty State Park, and Jersey City Birds. These programs give participants the chance to learn about wildlife, the migration of songbirds, and the importance of parks and open space.

Capital Park

We’re also working on an exciting project to reclaim and develop public open space at the NJ Statehouse, with the ultimate objective of reconnecting Trenton to its Delaware River waterfront – an initiative that can transform the area into a vibrant space for recreation and community life. Working with NJ Future, the NJ League of Conservation Voters, Isles and others, we’re reviving this historic area to create new opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy.

These projects are improving the environment, bringing communities together, and supporting sustainable development through collaboration with organizations, local residents, and experts.

Together, we’re creating a greener, more resilient, and more just future for all New Jerseyans.

JOIN
US **OUTSIDE!**

SIGN UP AT: NJCONSERVATION.ORG/EVENTS
Check back often for more events!



Coral hairstreak by Bill Lynch

JERSEY CITY

Third Annual Liberty State Park
Big Day of Birding
SATURDAY, MAY 17



Liberty State Park Big Day
by Harriet Bailey

FAR HILLS

Butterflies in the Meadow with the
North American Butterfly Association
FRIDAY, JULY 11

Late Summer Butterflies with the
North American Butterfly Association
FRIDAY, AUGUST 1

Wayward Warblers
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Fall Migration Bird Walk
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Searching for Sparrows
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15

STOCKTON

Donald & Beverley Jones Memorial Hike
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9



Bamboo Brook walk by Bill Lynch

thank you!

New Jersey Conservation Foundation welcomes new donors and expresses our thanks to all who made contributions between October 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024. With your support, we preserve and protect New Jersey's lands and natural resources.

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(from October 1 - December 31, 2024)

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protect New Jersey's
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It's all about soil!

New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Princeton Day School, and Duke Farms recently co-hosted a screening of *Common Ground*, a film highlighting the urgent need to shift towards regenerative agriculture to restore soil health, combat climate change, and build a sustainable future.

With an in-depth panel discussion and audience Q&A, the event offered insights into how regenerative farming practices can change the landscape locally and globally.

Panelists and Co-hosts, pictured above from left to right: Duke Farm's Deputy Executive Director of Science and Conservation, Dr. Hila Shamoni; Princeton Day School's Director of Sustainability & Environmental Education, Courtney White; Soil In Formation's Director of Operations, Harriette Brainard; Princeton Hydro's Senior Wildlife Biologist & Ecologist, Michael McGraw; NJ Conservation's Executive Director, Alison Mitchell



Welcome New Staff



ROBYN JENEV

ROBYN JENEV, South Jersey Regional Manager, joined New Jersey Conservation Foundation in 2024 and is responsible for open space protection and farmland preservation in the Pine Barrens and Delaware Bayshore landscapes. Robyn spent the first 15 years of her career at the New Jersey Pinelands Commission, gaining valuable experience in both the regulatory and planning spheres and developing a deep, lasting affection for pine barrens botany and ecology. Most recently, Robyn developed her land protection skills with Natural Lands. She has undergraduate degrees in Philosophy and Psychology from Penn State University and a master's degree in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Resource Management from the University of Pennsylvania. In her free time, Robyn enjoys hiking and knitting.

Staff

Alison Mitchell, *Executive Director*
Erica Arles, *Land Program & Stewardship Program Coordinator*
Alix Bacon, *Project Manager, Sustainable Agriculture*
Mark Barrick, *Information Technology / Office Manager*
Tim Brill, *Regional Manager Central Jersey*
Rebekah Buczynski, *Project Manager, North Jersey Stewardship*
Elise Cavicchi, *Land Protection Coordinator*
Nicole Ceballos, *Development Associate*
Anthony Cucchi, *Director of Programs*
Beth Davisson, *Highlands & Black River Acquisition Specialist*
Emile DeVito, Ph.D., *Manager of Science & Stewardship*
Richard Dodds, *Regional Manager, Black River Greenway, Highlands, & Wickecheoke Greenway*
Jessica Fasano, *Communications Manager*
Geo Fellema, MPA, *Development Manager*
Jane Gardner, *Policy & Development Assistant*
Jane Halsted, CPA, *Accounting Manager*
Amy Hansen, *Policy Manager*
Maria Hauser, *Director Human Resources / Board Liaison*
Jalisa Hernandez, *Urban Parks Coordinator*
Bo Humphrey, *Director of Development*
Steven Jack, *Land Steward, South Jersey*
Robyn Jeney, *Regional Manager, South Jersey*
Russell Juelg, *Senior Land Steward*
Annie Licata, *Staff Writer*
Bill Lynch, M.S., *Director of Engagement & Communications*
Lisa MacCollum, *Sourlands/Hopewell Valley Acquisition Specialist*
Melanie Mason, *Land Steward*
Timothy Morris, *Director of Stewardship*
Tanya Nolte, *Conservation Information & GIS Manager*
Rudisha Okezie, *Regional Manager, Camden Area*
Allison Pieffer, *Stewardship Coordinator*
Martin Rapp, *Project Coordinator, North Jersey Stewardship*
Karen Richards, CPA, *Director of Finance & Administration*
Heidi Roldan, *Corporate & Foundation Relations Manager*
Bill Scullion, *Land Steward, South Jersey*
John S. Watson Jr., *Senior Fellow for Conservation Justice*



Nature For All

NATURE FOR ALL film continues to garner praise

Last year we worked with Sourland Studios and the Native American Advancement Corporation (NAAC) to create a film showcasing the preservation of the 63-acre Cohanzick Nature Reserve and NJ Conservation's surrounding Burden Hill Forest Preserve.

It has now been made an official selection of Jackson Wild's World Wildlife Day Film Festival, as well as the nationally touring Wild & Scenic Film Showcase.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation, NAAC, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, and The Nature Conservancy acquired the forested property in 2023, which is the traditional homeland of the Cohanzick Lenape people, who have cherished and cared for this land for thousands of years.

You can view the ten-minute film by scanning the QR code or visiting our Youtube page at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImcyQ3nWDBk>



New Jersey Conservation Foundation is an equal opportunity employer and we are committed to building a diverse workforce and Board of Trustees.



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For sponsorship opportunities or general inquiries, kindly reach out to Bo Humphrey, Director of Development, at Bo.Humphrey@njconservation.org

PHOTO: WHARTON STATE FOREST BY CARLY SCHWARTZ