

OPEN SPACE NEEDS IN THE BOROUGH OF RINGWOOD



“Ringwood is unique and a gem. Its character and strength lies with its surrounding natural habitat. We should use open space funds wisely to maintain its natural beauty. The more open undeveloped land we preserve, the safer our water reserves, and less chance we have of creating environmental problems that we will have to fix (erosion, pollution of lakes, crowded roads, destruction of animal habitats).”

-- Comment from Borough of Ringwood Open Space Survey

In the Open Space Survey conducted in 2003 as part of the groundwork for formulating the 2004 *OSRP*, residents voiced clearly and strongly what needs to be done to preserve the outdoor resources of their community. These needs were expressed in the open space planning process that consisted of a mailed survey, comments from a public hearing and the Ringwood Open Space Advisory Committee. That input is still valid as seen by the Open Space Committee’s re-confirmation of the 2004 *OSRP* goals. Those goals drive this *Needs* section.

Protect water resources, both groundwater and surface water

Ranked #1 and #2 in the 2003 Open Space Survey

The implementation of the Highlands Act through the Highlands *Regional Master Plan (RMP)* is a major change since the 2004 *OSRP* and places an increased emphasis on what was already Ringwood’s number one open space priority: the quality and quantity of its water resources. In the Highlands Preservation Area, which includes all of Ringwood, the *RMP* replaces the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan* as the overarching regional planning document. A draft *Highlands Environmental Resource Inventory (Highlands ERI)* for the Borough of Ringwood, produced in October 2009, provides data specific to Ringwood, including a detailed analysis and mapping of its natural resources. These tools help identify areas, such as wellhead protection areas, groundwater recharge areas, subwatersheds with net water availability deficits and contaminated sites, that need protection, stewardship or mitigation in order to ensure that the water resources of Ringwood will provide clean and plentiful water both for residents and for the larger region that depends on the Wanaque and Monksville Reservoirs for their drinking water.

In addition, the NJDEP has classified all streams and water bodies in Ringwood as Category One, indicating that they are to be maintained at their current level, or better, and not allowed to degrade in quality. Many of these streams also support trout production or are capable of maintaining trout. Three hundred foot buffers are recommended for Category One waters (and required for new development on property containing such waters). Since many of these

waters pass through private property, education of the public as to the importance of stewardship and conservation may be an alternative solution to outright acquisition of these lands.

Maintain the character of Ringwood, preserve scenic vistas and control development

Ranked #3 and #4 in the 2003 Open Space Survey

The Highlands Act and the Highlands RMP now play a role in limiting development in Ringwood. Local ordinances that address environmental constraints help limit development to appropriate areas, thus minimizing development in areas of steep slopes, wetlands, critical wildlife habitat or Well Head Protection Areas (WHPAs). Conformance to the Highlands Act will require Ringwood to review its existing ordinances regarding WHPAs, steep slopes, etc., to bring them into compliance. In addition, as part of the Highlands Act Plan Conformance process, Ringwood has undertaken an assessment of potential opportunities for redevelopment. Recognizing the scenic value of Ringwood's as yet undeveloped areas, the report notes: "...viable development and redevelopment sites in Ringwood will probably be keenly sought after....however, these densely wooded tracts are highly visible to passersby and their appearance after development could have significant negative impacts, both environmentally and as it affects significant scenic vistas." It identifies three areas currently zoned for non-residential use and concludes that small-scale opportunities may be available in areas such as infill areas in the Ringwood Industrial Park and that the Skyline Drive Community Commercial zone offers an opportunity to transform this gateway into the Borough through envisioning and implementing a new town center, rather than allowing haphazard strip mall type expansion. (*A Procedure for Identification and Evaluation of Redevelopment Opportunities*)

Ringwood residents have been proactive in voicing their opinions about developments that would negatively affect the character of the community and its vistas, such as a proposed condominium development on a ridgetop in eastern Ringwood or a proposed development on a large tract on the West Brook Mountain, which was successfully preserved and is now part of Norvin Green State Forest. Monitoring development opportunities for appropriateness to this vision should continue to be an ongoing commitment in Ringwood.

Enhance System of Trails and Pathways: Connecting Neighborhoods and Public Lands

Ranked #5, #7 and #8 in the 2003 Open Space Survey

The need for connectivity encompasses both the purchase of additional lands and granting of easements to "connect the dots" between existing open spaces and between those open spaces and the Ringwood communities that desire access to them. It can also mean establishing trails in recently acquired parcels and adding signage and parking areas at trailheads so residents and visitors can find and access these additions to the public lands. Connectivity can also provide alternative modes of transportation for getting around town for purposes other than leisure recreation, such as shopping, visiting the library, walking to school. The Borough has taken steps to build a vision of connectivity through its recently adopted *Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan*, which lays out a vision of proposed pathways and steps for implementing this vision.

In addition, the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) has been instrumental in blazing trails in newly acquired property, including the Hasenclever Iron Trail in Tranquility Ridge County Park (currently the only blazed trail in that park) and the Manaticut Point Trail through the former Lefkovitz property (now part of Norvin Green State Forest) off Burnt Meadow Road and Crescent Drive, which leads to other trails in the vicinity of Manaticut Point and Lake Sonoma (West Milford). Passaic River Coalition is working with the NYNJTC to establish trails through its Highlands Meadow and Waterview properties that will connect into Long Pond Ironworks State Park and Tranquility Ridge County Park. But there is more to be done, such as connecting the western (Tranquility Ridge) and eastern (Ringwood State Park) portions of the Hasenclever Iron Trail. This trail is interrupted by the closure of a section on State land that is part of the Ford Superfund cleanup site

Protect Ringwood's natural resources and diverse wildlife habitat

Ringwood lies entirely within the Highlands Preservation Area. Its terrain is classified as Forest Resource Area defined as critical habitat and laced with wildlife corridors and steep slope protection areas. Its waterways are identified as High Integrity Riparian Corridors. The *Highland ERI* for Ringwood includes a series of maps which delineate where these natural resource assets exist, providing a helpful tool in the planning process. One need for Ringwood is to fill in the gaps where contiguity is absent, such as the large properties on Saddle Mountain that interrupt the connectivity of Norvin Green State Forest, or the Borough owned, PSEG and Franciscan Sisters land that interrupt the contiguity of public open space in northeastern Ringwood. The second and equally important need is for stewardship of environmentally sensitive lands, including not only public lands but also private lands identified as high Conservation Priority Areas or Special Environmental Zones by the Highlands Council mapping. Educating the public as to conservation measures they can take on their own properties can help protect these non-public resources.

Expand and maintain recreational facilities

Ranked #9 on the 2003 Open Space Survey

Ringwood is facing a challenge common to many communities. With active recreational programs expanding to include both older and younger participants and with more sports being played in multiple seasons, existing fields and facilities can suffer from overuse. The Borough has been proactive in trying to keep fields healthy and viable by installing irrigation systems at several fields, both Borough owned and on Board of Education property. They have also installed lighting at several fields, which extends available playing time. The Recreation Department would like to see more fields lighted. Monies from the Open Space Trust Fund are used some of the maintenance costs associated with active recreation facilities; other improvements have been funded through grants from public agencies. At this point, generally, all programs are accommodated and no one is turned away from participating, but additional fields would allow more practice time and more opportunity for fields to rest.

There are two other strong desires for active outdoor use of public lands. Residents would like an area set aside for a dog park and an area or areas dedicated to community gardening. Additionally, on the Recreation Department's wish list is a combination indoor recreation facility and senior center. Currently, senior activities are spread around the Borough or even

located in neighboring communities. There is no one common meeting point for seniors. Similarly, the Borough's indoor recreation programs are held at the regional high school in neighboring Wanaque.

The development of a Recreation Master Plan can help to guide and document future improvement needs and desires. The plan should inventory and document all recreational program needs, recreation facilities, improvements needed on the facilities, where expansion may be possible, and prioritize those facilities most in need of improvements. By documenting what is most needed in the Borough for recreational purposes, costs can be determined and plans made for addressing the immediate needs.

Preservation of historic sites, landscapes and farmland in the community

Ranked #10 on the 2003 Open Space Survey

Of high concern by respondents to the Open Space Survey was the need to maintain and improve already identified historic sites, as well the many historic structures within the state parklands. Unfortunately, preserving lands does not automatically preserve the structures on them. With limited public funding available for such preservation and maintenance efforts, it often falls to volunteer and nonprofit groups, such as Friends of Ringwood Manor, to be proactive in finding ways to effect or fund upkeep.

Historically significant sites within Ringwood include not just the manor homes but the many mines and mine structures associated with them. While many of these mines are located on State land, they can also be found on the Borough-owned parcels located between Tranquility Ridge and Ringwood parks. These historic artifacts can pose not only preservation but safety concerns. Additionally, Elbertus Prol, Borough Historian, has nominated Governor Mountain in Ringwood State Park for designation as a historic landmark district (2004 OSRP). Establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission and creating an inventory of historic sites can help promote the visibility of historic preservation issues in the Borough.

There is very little farmland in Ringwood and, for the most part, it is not tilled land but land under woodland management. As such, these lands are not eligible for preservation under the farmland preservation program, but landowners can take advantage of public education opportunities offered by the State to understand how to responsibly manage their lands. Encouraging the continuation of woodland management on these properties as opposed to development helps to maintain the contiguity of Ringwood's forests. The farm-assessed land surrounding Harrison Mountain Lakes, for example, has been identified by the Highlands Council as a Special Environmental Zone that is a top priority for protection.

A SYSTEM OF OPEN SPACE IN THE BOROUGH OF RINGWOOD



"Let the beauty of Ringwood be around for many generations to come."

-- Comment from Borough of Ringwood Open Space Survey

A system of open space and pathways for Ringwood Borough considers the goals and needs expressed by the community together with its resources. It builds on the general vision and guidelines of the 2004 *OSRP* and promotes a vision for the Borough that combines the community's desires for resource protection, recreational opportunities and connectivity. This includes a network of parks, pathways and preservation areas that is represented in the *Greenway Map* included in the *Maps* section of this Plan. The *Greenway Map* identifies the following areas of focus:

- West Brook/Burnt Meadow Brook Greenway
- Wanaque Preservation Area
- Long Pond/Ringwood Greenway
- Ringwood Park Connection
- Community Gateway
- Meadow Brook Greenway
- Natural Heritage Area
- Connections – Trails and Pathways

West Brook/Burnt Meadow Brook Greenway

The goals for this greenway are to protect water resources and critical wildlife habitat through land preservation and conservation measures, and to increase connectivity through expansion of the existing trail system.

- The West Brook subwatershed, defined by Saddle Mountain and West Brook Mountain, is a key area for land preservation in Ringwood Borough to protect both groundwater recharge areas and the drinking water supply of the Wanaque Reservoir. This southwestern portion of the Borough is part of the Wyanokie Highlands and was named a "Critical Treasure of the Highlands" by the Highlands Coalition.
- Additional lands have been acquired by the State since the publication of the 2004 *OSRP*. This has allowed several of the goals of that Plan to be reached, such as connecting Long Pond Ironworks State Park to Norvin Green State Forest. This was supported through the efforts of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to complete the Ringwood section of the Highlands Trail.
- Acquiring large parcels of Saddle Mountain would open up previous trail systems that have been closed by the landowner and allow more contiguity between the northern

and southern sections of Norvin Green State Forest, and the reconnection of the Hewitt-Butler Trail, which now stops at the borders of this property. The State continues to pursue possible acquisition of the Saddle Mountain properties.

- A large tract along Burnt Meadow Road once proposed for development has also been acquired and annexed to Norvin Green since the writing of the original *OSRP*. Now a trail through this property along a woods road provides connectivity for residents and other hikers to a new hiking trail leading to Lake Sonoma and Overlook Rock in the West Milford portion of Norvin Green State Forest and to Manaticut Point. The establishment of additional blazed trails in this property can link up to the Tory Tract and the Stonetown Circular Trail. Additional acquisition in this vicinity can help protect a tributary of Burnt Meadow Brook at its headwaters.
- Garden State Greenways proposes a connector between the Tory Tract and watershed land in the vicinity of the junction of Stonetown and Magee Roads. A consideration might be to seek a conservation easement along properties that stretch between the Tory Tract and Stonetown Road across from a section of NJDWSC land that meets Stonetown Road in the vicinity of Windbeam Mountain.
- Currently West Brook flows through residential and farm assessed land, except for 12-acres of wooded property owned by the NJCF that borders the brook on its north side. In cases of private land ownership stewardship and education by the Borough can, with the help of resources from State and nonprofit conservation agencies, work to inform the landowners about conservation practices that can help to minimize pollution and maximize protection of these C1 trout production waters.

Wanaque Preservation Area

The main goal for this area is to protect water resources. There is also the possibility that certain properties in this area can also be used, in concert with lands in the Long Pond Ringwood Greenway (*see below*) to create and expand trail connections between Long Pond Ironworks State Park and Passaic River Coalition properties to the west and Tranquility Ridge County Park to the north. Several vacant properties in this area that are ranked as High or Moderate Conservation Priority Areas by the Highlands Council back onto North Jersey District Water Supply Commission (NJDWSC) property. The Borough can work with organizations such as the Passaic River Coalition (PRC) and the Watershed Preservation Partnership (WPP) to negotiate for the acquisition of these properties, which can be annexed to adjacent PRC or NJDWSC lands.

Long Pond/Ringwood Greenway

The goals for this area are to provide connectivity between public lands and to explore the opportunity to provide additional recreational facilities on Borough-owned land. This greenway encompasses the Passaic River Coalition Highlands Meadow and Waterview properties adjacent to Long Pond Ironworks State Park; wooded farm-assessed properties adjacent to the Borough's open space acquisition on Greenwood Lake Turnpike near Beech Road and to Tranquility Ridge County Park; and Borough-owned property and PSEG properties between Tranquility Ridge and Ringwood parks.

- Connect public lands: Long Pond Ironworks east of Monksville, PRC properties, Tranquility Ridge, and Ringwood State Park, through establishment of new trails and possible rerouting of closed section of Hasenclever Trail in vicinity of Peter's Mine.

Acquisition of additional vacant properties (*see below*) can help promote this trail system as can the dedication of portions of the Borough-owned land in the vicinity of Peter's Mine Road as preserved open space.

- Acquire additional lands for watershed protection: Work with WPP and other agencies to acquire High Conservation Priority vacant properties along Greenwood Turnpike that are adjacent to existing NJDWSC lands
- Expand recreational facilities: consider siting additional active recreational facilities and/or a community garden or dog park site on the Borough-owned land that fronts on Margaret King Ave. This parcel, Block 603, Lot 13, (identified in the tax data as recreation/playground) appears to be a relatively flat area with some clearing already done. The land is not identified as a wildlife corridor, has no waters flowing through it and is not identified as a high ranking groundwater recharge area. It is bounded by a ridge of steep slope on the west and a small section on the east, but is not identified on Highlands Council mapping as part of a wildlife corridor. Therefore this property may be suitable for recreational development. Access is available from Van Dunk Lane. It also may be possible to connect this area via a pathway/trail system north to the Upper Ringwood playground and beyond, to the Hasenclever Iron Trail (*see above*).

Ringwood Park Connection

The goals for this area, which encompasses the Mount Saint Francis Complex owned by the Franciscan Sisters, are to close the hole in the donut of Ringwood State Park and explore the possibility for additional municipal recreation facilities to be sited here. Surrounded by Ringwood State Park land, the property is across Sloatsburg Road from existing municipal recreation facilities at the Hoffman Recreation Facility and Van Dunk and Ballard Fields. The municipality can work with the State to explore acquisition of this land and/or the Borough may want to consider purchasing or leasing all or part of it. The 94-acre property is a combination of conference and retreat center, housing for the sisterhood, woodlands and grassy slope. The conference center facilities include a swimming area, which could provide opportunities to swim for residents who do not live in the lake communities. The open, grassy areas might provide land for additional active recreation facilities, community garden or dog park, and the built areas might provide opportunities for the senior center/indoor recreation facility the Recreation Department and Recreation Commission have identified to fill a need in the community.

Community Gateway

The goals for this area, which stretches along Skyline Drive from Cannici Drive to High Mountain Brook, include connectivity of neighborhoods and destination points through sidewalks and pathways, expansion of Borough-owned land for resource-based (passive) recreation and the possibility of a community garden or dog park on existing Borough properties including the library, park 'n ride and playground facility on Cannici Drive or on vacant land adjacent to the Jerry Wyckoff Preserve at the eastern end of this gateway. Both the redevelopment assessment prepared as part of the Highlands Plan Conformance process and the *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* adopted in September 2009 see this as an area worthy of focus and enhancement. The Borough has submitted the pre-application for an NJDEP Greenhouse Gas Grant toward implementing sidewalk between the library and the shopping

centers along Skyline Drive, as recommended in the *Bicycle Pedestrian Plan*. The *Bicycle Pedestrian Plan* also calls for possible realignment of the shopping center entrances to improve and encourage pedestrian access between the centers.

Meadow Brook Greenway

The goal for this area is to protect water resources. Several vacant and residential properties in this area line Meadow Brook. This brook is currently classified as C1 waterway that does not support trout along the Ringwood section, but which becomes a trout production waterway south of East Belmont Avenue in Wanaque Borough. Members of the Open Space Committee suggest that the vacant property behind Peter Cooper School might be a potential site for a community garden, although the area is low-lying and characterized in large part by wetlands and shallow soils that collect the run-off from the surrounding steep slopes.

Natural Heritage Area

This area encompasses a Natural Heritage Priority site called “Seems Like a Good Place,” which has been described as “*an area of open rock ledges occurring on a wooded hillside situated between Skyline Lakes Drive and Ringwood Avenue.*” (See *Natural Features Map* in *Maps* section) The properties in this area are a combination of NJDWSC, residential, commercial and vacant land. The OSC can take steps to inform property owners of the significance of the area and educate the public regarding steps to take to safeguard the environment. This area can be monitored for opportunities to protect the environment. This site is located within the General Shopping District along Ringwood Avenue. A 4.4 acre vacant property situated in the heart of this significant natural area has been described in an assessment of redevelopment opportunities as “*a gateway that should be seen as an asset that would be useful as an element in the ecotourism or heritage tourism initiative in Ringwood.*” (*A Procedure for Identification and Evaluation of Redevelopment Opportunities in the Borough of Ringwood. January 2008*) It is a wooded lot adjacent to NJDWSC lands and a residential property that is largely wooded. Preserving this parcel would ensure that a larger portion of this Natural Heritage Site would be protected, helping to promote the ongoing viability of the slender pinweed, a small perennial herb.

Connections – Trails and Pathways

The *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* adopted in September 2009 addresses connectivity within areas of the Borough through multi-use pathways, sidewalks, bicycle routes and trails. It calls for consideration of easements on private and Borough-owned land to facilitate these connections, looks at the possible use of the abandoned railway on NJDWSC land as a pathway, and considers other ways to improve connectivity and facilitate pedestrian and bicycle traffic in Ringwood, providing the dual purpose of increasing residents’ opportunities for leisure recreation and healthy lifestyles while reducing vehicular traffic and thereby improving the carbon footprint in the Borough. The *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* was adopted as presented, with the exception of the suggestion to change the roadways around the lake community lakes to one-way traffic to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. Many of the proposed trails and pathways from the *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*, include a road bicycling loop around Ringwood have been incorporated on the *Greenway Map* included in the *Maps* section of this Plan.

ACTION PROGRAM AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The Action Program suggests projects that the Borough should pursue to implement the Open Space and Recreation Plan. The activities listed for the first year after the completion of the Plan are the most urgent and will further Ringwood Borough's Open Space program immediately. The "three year" recommendations are also important, but will take some time to complete. The "five year" projects should take place in the appropriate time frame, as opportunities arise. The Open Space and Recreation Plan is not a static document, and therefore, the ongoing section lists actions that may be repeated on a cyclical basis. It can be helpful to review and update the Action Program on an annual basis, and report progress to the governing body.

First Year

- Adopt the *Open Space and Recreation Plan Update* as an amendment to the Borough of Ringwood's Master Plan.
- Submit the *Open Space and Recreation Plan Update* to Green Acres for the State's Planning Incentive Program.
- Continue ongoing review and prioritization of potential properties for preservation or conservation easements.
- Review the list of potential properties in the *County Open Space and Recreation Master Plan* and determine the viability of as yet unacquired properties.
- Work with the State, WPP and other public and/or non-profit agencies to aggressively pursue acquisition and preservation of priority properties, particularly properties located on Saddle Mountain and West Brook Mountain and adjacent to existing North Jersey District Water Supply Commission properties.
- Pursue funding partners including the State Green Acres Program, the Passaic County Open Space Trust Fund, non-profit organizations such as the Passaic River Coalition, New Jersey Conservation Foundation and WPP.

- Enact or enhance existing, critical areas ordinances to protect, at a minimum, floodplains and wetlands, stream corridors, steep slopes, well-head protection areas and groundwater recharge areas. This should be done in concert with the Environmental Commission and Planning Board.

Within Three Years

- Examine Borough-owned properties and consider placing them on the State Green Acres Recreation and Open Space Inventory for permanent protection. A list of these properties is included in the *Appendix*.
- Explore the possibility of additional recreational facilities such fields, community gardens, dog park and indoor facilities as suggested in the *Systems* section of this Plan and by the Ringwood Recreation Commission.
- Continue working to protect those parcels identified in the first year as valuable properties for preservation.
- Inventory existing easements on properties in the Borough.
- Contact private landowners to discuss the placement of conservation easements on wooded portions of their property.
- Meet with adjacent municipalities to discuss open space objectives and common programs and goals.
- Work with neighboring municipalities to coordinate and enhance the above ordinances.
- Open discussions with the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission on the possibility of trails on portions of their property.
- Develop a trail plan or brochure indicating existing trails and potential trails throughout the Borough.
- Develop a Recreation Master Plan to help identify recreational needs and guide future improvement needs and desires.
- Inventory and map historic properties in the Borough .Work with the Borough Council to establish an Historic Preservation Commission or Committee.
- Discuss preservation priorities and other work being done by non-profits active in the area to form partnerships.

Within Five Years

- Develop a formal network of trails and bicycle/pedestrian paths based on existing trails and as outlined in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
- Continue to develop partnerships and explore ways to leverage the Borough's Open Space Trust Fund.
- Contact landowners to discuss conservation options for their lands or develop materials addressed to landowners.
- Pursue the listing of any additional historic sites in Ringwood Borough on the state and national registers of historic places.
- Discuss preservation priorities and other work being done by non-profits active in the area to form partnerships.

Ongoing

- Apply annually to New Jersey Green Acres for grant funding for lands preservation
- Apply annually for funding from the Passaic County Open Space Trust Fund.
- Periodically review and update the *OSRP* to reflect changing needs and achievements (minimum every six years).
- Update the Borough's Recreation and Open Space Inventory.
- Meet regularly with adjacent municipalities and the County to discuss mutual goals and objectives for open space, connectivity and natural resource protection.
- Reach out on a regular basis to landowners within the Borough about the possibility of preserving their property or considering conservation or trail easements, where appropriate.
- Continue to educate residents about the value of open space and their roles in protecting natural areas.
- Continue to look for opportunities to expand the Borough's trails and pathways systems, particularly for multi-use pathway opportunities to connect destination points, neighborhoods and public lands.
- Continue to educate residents about the open space and recreation opportunities in the Borough and promote the Borough's ecotourism opportunities to visitors.

- Encourage set-aside or easement opportunities with the Borough Planning Board in reviewing commercial or residential development opportunities, especially as they pertain to large residential or commercial properties adjacent to existing protected lands.
- Work with the Highlands Council and surrounding municipal, county, and state governments to develop regional cooperation in fulfillment of the goal of protecting the water supply.