26. Sunnyside Recreation Area

1990–129 ACRES; 2009–135 ACRES

SUNNYSIDE Recreation Area is located in the historic Nut Swamp section of Middletown, which Europeans settled in the late 17th century. A member of one of Middletown's earliest settlement families, Sylvanus Grover, acquired land along the Middletown-Lincroft Road in 1759 and built a small tenant house that today is the oldest section of the extant farmhouse. After George W. Crawford of Holmdel acquired the property in 1856, it became known as Sunnyside Farm. The 135-acre farm remained in the Crawford family until 1933 when Henry and Katherine Neuberger of New York bought it and transformed it into a country estate. The Neubergers renovated the house and some of the barns in the Colonial Revival Style, and they raised pedigreed steers and horses on the farm.

In the 1980s, Middletown Township fought a six-year court battle to prevent Calton Homes from building 1,250 housing units on the farm under the State's Mount Laurel "builder's remedy" program, which allowed builders to increase density in exchange for affordable housing. The Park System

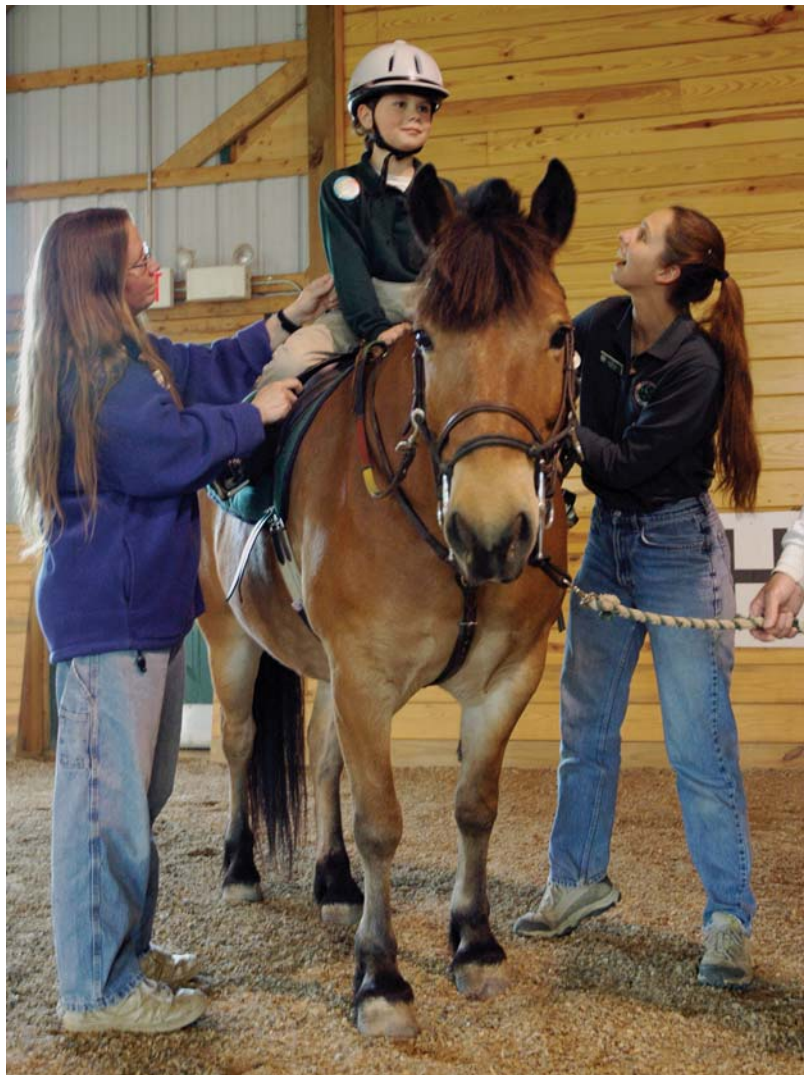
acquired 116 acres in 1990, and Calton Homes donated the remaining 13 acres. Because of its location and suitability for active recreation, the Park System named the new park the Sunnyside Recreation Area.

Situated at the confluence of Nut Swamp Brook and Crooked Run, roughly half of the Park is wetland, a reminder of the old Nut Swamp. The historic Nut Swamp name of the area derives from the wooded wetlands that once extended widely along Nut Swamp Brook and contained an abundance of nut-producing trees. Like the surrounding area, the Sunnyside landscape has been highly transformed by settlement and agriculture. Early farmers drained much of the former wetlands for field crops and livestock pasture, and agriculture continued on the site until the Park System's acquisition.

Nut Swamp Brook runs through the northern portion of the Park and flows to Shadow Lake, which drains to the Navesink River. The brook has remnants of mature American beech/white and red oak forest on its steep slopes and a bottomland of red maple/green ash forest. These bottomlands are late successional woodlands developing on what was pasture or hayfield for several centuries, with mockernut hickory, black walnut, and tulip poplar trees. In the 1990s, Park System ecologists initiated a management plan to restore old field and wetland habitats from the former agricultural land use. Wet meadow and herbaceous fields enhanced with wildflowers and tall prairie grasses now edge Middletown-Lincroft Road that divides the Park, providing a distinct contrast to the equestrian facility and its surrounding paddocks and pastures. A 1.4-mile trail winds through the meadows on the west side of the road.

When the leaders of SPUR (Special People United to Ride) approached Park System officials about expanding their joint therapeutic riding program, which had outgrown the facilities at Huber Woods Park, the officials recommended moving it to Sunnyside. SPUR raised $750,000 in a memorable "Off to the Races" fundraising event in October 2000, and celebrated the opening of the Sunnyside Equestrian Center with the Park System in 2002 with three performances by the Royal Lipizzaner Stallions from Austria. The Equestrian Center includes an 80 ft. by 200 ft. indoor arena, 18 stalls, instructional rooms, and offices.

Each year over 100 SPUR volunteers assist Park System equestrian staff in helping hundreds of people with disabilities enjoy riding. The Equestrian Center also provides riding opportunities and lessons for able-bodied persons. The staff conducts programs for small groups of children and aspiring equestrians in horse care, safety, and riding. They also run an introductory summer camp in the fundamentals of horsemanship, stable chores, and English riding.

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27. Charleston Springs Golf Course

1990–204 acres; 2009–781 acres

TO PROVIDE a public golfing opportunity in southwestern Monmouth County, the Park System began acquiring suitable land in Millstone Township with its 1990 purchase of the 204-acre Bobbink Nursery founded by the noted horticulturist and rosarian Lambertus Bobbink. In 1992, the Park System purchased 383 acres of the adjacent Bulk Nursery, and the sellers donated an additional 34 acres. Park System staff set the goal of building and operating an environmentally sustainable golf course that would provide a high quality golfing experience, and they hired the nationally-known golf course architects Cornish, Silva and Mungeam of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, to design two 18-hole, par 72 regulation courses for the site to achieve the goal.

Mark Mungeam, the project architect, planned both golf courses to utilize the site's existing terrain, natural features, man-made ponds, and native plants as much as possible. He designed the North Course on the former Bobbink Nursery as a Scottish links-style course with broad undulating fairways defined by water hazards and meadows of native grasses and wildflowers. For the South Course on the former Bulk Nursery, he designed a classic parkland-style course with tree-lined fairways and intermittent native grass meadows. The golf course first opened for play in 1998.

Charleston Springs also has a five-acre Short Game Area for practice and teaching with two chipping greens, a putting green, and bunkers. The full-service Golf Center, designed by architect George Rudolph, complements the landscape. More than just a golf course, Charleston Springs includes 70 acres for other recreational uses, including the 2-mile Stone Bridge Trail that meanders through old fields and a forest along the Manalapan Brook, crossing the historic Sweetman's Stone Bridge. In a 2010 survey, readers of *New Jersey Monthly* magazine selected Charleston Springs Golf Course as one of the Best Public Golf Courses in the State.

Tributaries of the Manalapan Brook bisect the North and South Courses and flow to the South River, which drains into Raritan Bay. Bulk Lake, adjacent to the South Course on the former Bulk Nursery, originated as a mill pond, and Bobbink Pond on the North Course was created by the former Bobbink Nursery for irrigation. Both nursery sites had been farmed for two centuries or more, and their extensive agricultural fields, limited forest areas, and plentiful water sources provided excellent resources for the new golf course.

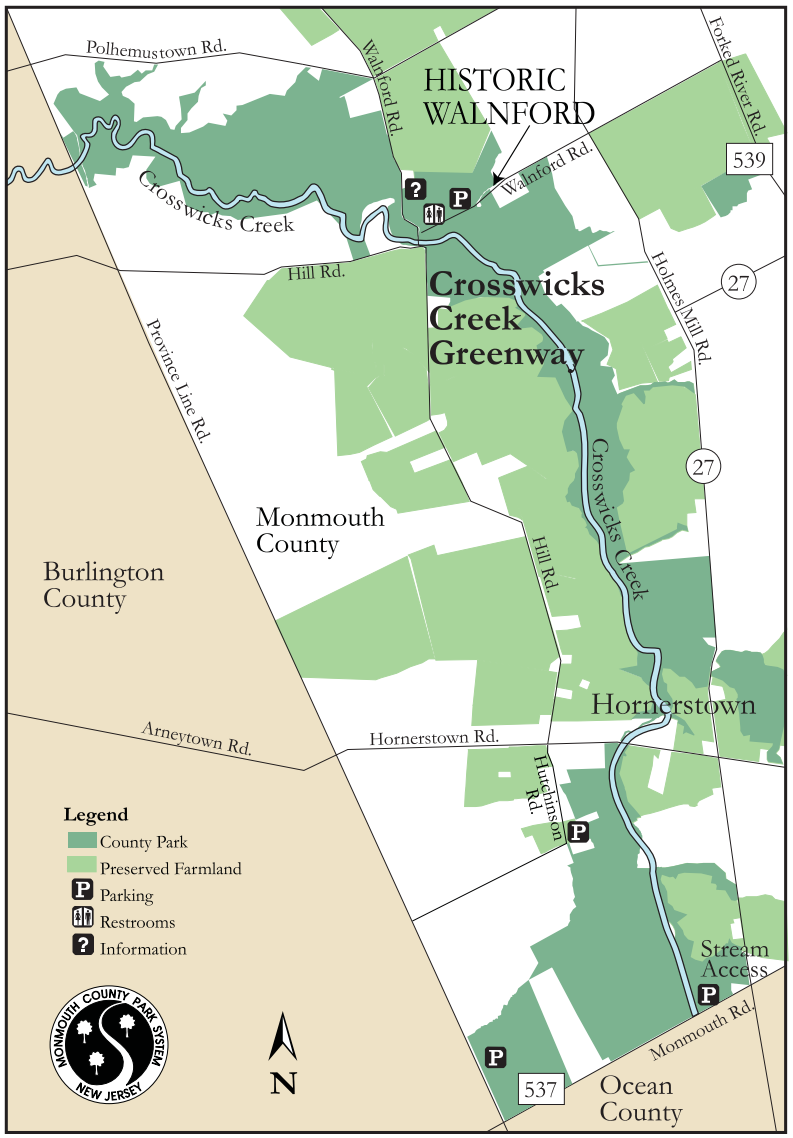
To help mitigate the loss of old field habitats in the region, Park System ecologists incorporated nesting bird habitats into the design of the courses. Along the shoreline of new water features they developed aquatic habitats for snipe, long-legged waders, and many aquatic insects. The meadow areas incorporate prairie species such as big and little bluestem, switchgrass, purple coneflower, and coreopsis, all of which provide an attractive backdrop to the fine fescue rough areas. The low maintenance design includes native plantings that require mowing only once a year, need no fertilization, and filter runoff into the ponds, which provide all the water needed for the courses.

Acquisitions of adjacent land have added forest habitat, which includes shrub lands and woodlands developing on former farmland and late successional forest of American beech/red oak uplands and red maple swamp lowlands.

28. Crosswicks Creek Greenway

1990–88 acres; 2009–1,480 acres

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP with the County and State farmland preservation program, the Park System envisioned the Greenway as a way to protect the Crosswicks Creek stream corridor and to preserve a significant rural landscape of farms and forest in Upper Freehold Township. Starting with the preservation of Historic Walnford's immediate setting and historic lands to its north, the County gradually expanded the Greenway along the full six miles of the creek that flow through the County and preserved adjacent farms in the stream valley. Together with county parkland, farmland preservation and conservation easements on private property, more than 4,000 acres are permanently protected in the Crosswicks Creek watershed within Monmouth County. Today the Greenway is part of a regional multi-county effort to protect the water quality of this important watershed. From its headwaters in Fort Dix, Crosswicks Creek drains into the Hamilton Marsh at the Delaware River, where freshwater combines with tidal saltwater in a highly diverse habitat supporting over 780 plant species and 230 bird species.



In addition to the riparian areas adjacent to the stream, the park-lands within the Crosswicks Creek Greenway include forests and fields that contribute to the area's rural landscape. The historically forested areas of the Greenway maintain exceptional forest quality, with fine examples of rare plants not found elsewhere in the County, including wild rice, wild pinks, green-dragon, lizard's tail, Virginia bluebells, and golden saxifrage perennials, as well as surviving American elm and pumpkin ash trees. The dominant forest communities are red maple swamp with green ash in the bottomlands adjacent to the stream and hickory/white ash in the uplands. A mixed oak/tulip poplar forest community has developed where farming was discontinued. The Park System leases about two-thirds of the fields within the Greenway to farmers and nurseries, and the remaining one-third are natural areas of wet meadows and fields with warm and cool season grasses.

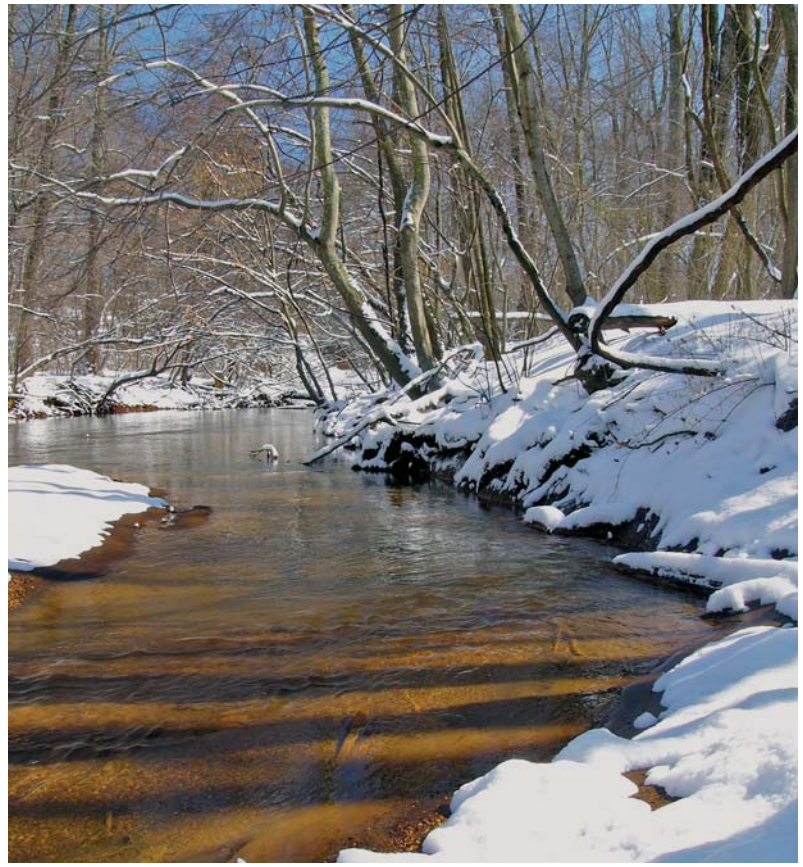
Some of the many wildlife species recorded in the Greenway include American bittern, bald eagle, black-crowned night heron, bobolink, dickcissel, great blue heron, kingfisher, little blue heron, northern harrier, pileated woodpecker, quail, red-tail hawk, wild turkey, wood duck, yellow-crowned night heron, cormorant (pictured right), black and water snakes, and box and painted turtles.

29. Manasquan River Greenway

1990–17 acres; 2009–337 acres

THE PARK SYSTEM established the Manasquan River Greenway in 1990 to expand the protection of the upper Manasquan watershed, which provides the major source of drinking water in the southern portion of the County. By the end of 2009 the Park System had acquired 51 parcels along the river totaling 337 acres. The Greenway connects Howell Park Golf Course, the Manasquan Reservoir, and Turkey Swamp Park, and the preserved forested wetlands and adjacent uplands protect the riverine habitat for many species, including bald eagles. While some land uses adjacent to the Greenway contribute to excess storm water runoff and pollutants in the river, public officials and watershed managers have developed and implemented strategies to mitigate these impacts.

Characteristic trees in the Greenway include chestnut, scarlet, red, white and black oak, sweet and black gum, pitch pine, and red maple. The dominant shrubs include huckleberry and sweet pepperbush, and significant perennials include trailing arbutus and eastern turkeybeard.



30. Fisherman's Cove Conservation Area

1995–35 ACRES; 2009–55 ACRES

PARK SYSTEM planners identified the privately-owned 35-acre Fisherman's Cove site on the Manasquan River in 1990 as the largest piece of undeveloped land along the County's Atlantic coastline (1992 aerial shown below). A 15-acre filled area of the site had been used for parking for many years, and was zoned for a planned unit development with a maximum of six residential units per acre. The County acquired Fisherman's Cove in 1995 to preserve it from intensive development and to protect the Manasquan River and Deep Creek, a tidal stream that borders the western boundary. Additional acquisitions have preserved adjacent wetlands. The Park System converted an old bait and tackle shop on the property into an Activity Center for environmental programs.

Fisherman's Cove lies within the Outer Coastal Plain, and about 20% of the land consists of tidal communities of mudflat, low salt marsh dominated by smooth cordgrass, and high salt marsh of salt meadow cordgrass, all fringed by the invasive common reed called phragmites. Another 20% of the Park consists of upland dune communities of beachgrass, bayberry, and tidebush, and an interior maritime shrub forest of black cherry, red cedar, and American holly. Fisherman's Cove had been used periodically between 1931 and 1984 as a deposit area for silt dredged from the river, and the balance of the Park is a highly-disturbed urbanized environment largely dominated by phragmites. Park System ecologists implemented a restoration plan in 2005 to control the phragmites and to nurture a maritime forest and shrub habitat.