



**CONTACT:** Karen Livingstone  
Communications  
732-842-4000, ext. 4256  
[klivings@monmouthcountyparks.com](mailto:klivings@monmouthcountyparks.com)

or

Patti Conroy  
Visitor Services  
732-842-4000, ext. 4247  
[pconroy@monmouthcountyparks.com](mailto:pconroy@monmouthcountyparks.com)

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MONMOUTH COUNTY PARK SYSTEM'S CLAYTON PARK INDUCTED INTO THE OLD-GROWTH FOREST NETWORK**



UPPER FREEHOLD – The Monmouth County Park System is proud to announce that a 76-acre section of Clayton Park, Upper Freehold, was recently inducted into the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN). Brian Kane, Mid-Atlantic Director of the OGFN, bestowed this distinction during a brief ceremony on Wednesday, November 29. Held at the trail head located at 161 Emley's Hill Road, Upper Freehold, the ceremony honored the preservation of the site for its ecological significance.

“Preservation of old growth forests and habitat for native wildlife is a critical objective of County’s Open Space Plan,” said Monmouth County Commissioner Ross Licitra. “Clayton Park is the perfect destination for

residents wishing to connect with nature and experience the beauty of the towering trees that can be found there,” Commissioner Licitra noted.

After the ceremony, the Park System held a Naturalist-led hike to the area. Encompassing the park’s Doctor’s Creek and Old Forge trails, the designated 76-acre section of forest is notable for its diversity of animals and rich understory of herbs, shrubs and saplings. The area features high-quality hardwood trees including the American beech; white, red and black oak; birch; tulip poplar; and shagbark hickory. There is also a small pond that provides habitat for beavers, turtles, egrets, herons and snow geese. Quail, pheasant, and wild turkey can also be spotted nearby.

The site has been protected from development and logging since the Park System purchased it from farmers Paul and Thelma Clayton in 1979. Owned by the family for over 70 years, the Claytons resisted offers from those interested in harvesting the trees or developing the land. After the initial purchase, the Clayton family donated several additional acres. Over time, the park grew as land was acquired from other local property owners.

Today the park has 450 acres and features one of the best preserved historic rural landscapes in Monmouth County. Open to the public daily from 7 a.m. until dusk, Clayton Park offers nearly seven miles of rugged trails for outdoor enthusiasts. Popular activities in the park include hiking and bird watching. Visitors are sure to appreciate the beauty of the park’s old-growth forest and the knowledge of its preservation for future generations.

Clayton Park joins two other New Jersey forests - Bear Swamp at Red Lion Preserve in Burlington County and Game Branch Preserve in Salem County - in the Old-Growth Forest Network. These old-growth forests are ecologically significant for their ability to improve water quality and air quality.

Brian Kane noted, “New Jersey has remarkable areas of old-growth forests that need to be protected in perpetuity. The example set here by the Clayton family and the Monmouth County Park System is remarkable and serves as an inspiring example to combat climate change by protecting mature and old-growth forests.”

The OGFN includes over 228 forests across 35 states. Founded in 2012 by Dr. Joan Maloof, its goal is to locate and designate at least one protected forest in every county in the United States that can sustain a

native forest. It also recognizes exceptional forest advocates, educates about the ecological benefits of old-growth forests, and speaks out regarding immediate threats to specific ancient forests. To learn more, visit [www.oldgrowthforest.net](http://www.oldgrowthforest.net).

The inclusion of Clayton Park in the OGFN is the latest example of the Park System's commitment to protect open space and provide recreational opportunities. With its parks, recreation areas, historic sites, golf courses and greenways, the Park System manages over 18,000 acres of permanently preserved open space throughout the county.

For more information about Clayton Park or the Monmouth County Park System, please visit [www.MonmouthCountyParks.com](http://www.MonmouthCountyParks.com) or call the Park System at 732-842-4000. For persons with hearing impairment, the Park System TTY/TDD number is 711. The Monmouth County Park System, created in 1960 by the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners, is Monmouth County's Open Space, Parks, and Recreation agency.

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