

21. Dorbrook Recreation Area

1985–381 ACRES; 2009–535 ACRES

WITH its prime location, easy access, and multiple activities, the Dorbrook Recreation Area on Route 537 in Colts Neck Township is the Park System’s most heavily scheduled area for recreational programs. When the County acquired the 381-acre Dorbrook Farm in 1985 with a Green Acres matching grant, much of the land had been farmed for well over 200 years. Murray Rosenberg, the president of the Miles Shoe Company of New York, bought the 80-acre Atlantic Stock Farm in 1937 to create a country estate for his family, and he named it Dorbrook Farm (pictured right in the 1950s). Rosenberg built a house and renovated the existing barns so he could raise prize-winning cattle. Over time he added several adjacent parcels, including the Polhemus Farm, which includes an early 19th century farmhouse that the Park System has preserved.





The large size of Dorbrook, its level terrain, and its frontage on the Swimming River Reservoir has enabled the Park System to simultaneously protect regional water supply, preserve prime farmland, and develop multiple recreational opportunities. In 1994, the Park System added the 130-acre Festoon Farm, an adjacent farm formerly owned by the Nathan family.

Visitor Services staff use the former Dorbrook and Festoon homes as venues for a wide variety programs and classes, including parent and child programs, summer camps, therapeutic recreation, cooking, fitness, and yoga. In addition to expansive playing fields for a variety of sports, the Park includes two swimming pools, tennis and basketball courts, and an in-line skating rink, and the staff offers instructions in most of these activities. With help from Challenged Youth Sports of Middletown and the Friends of the Parks, the Park System created the Challenger Place universally-accessible playground in 2004, and the same year it added the Sprayground, a water-enhanced playground.



**DORBROOK
RECREATION AREA**

The Dorbrook Recreation Area is nestled among surviving orchards and horse farms that once dominated eastern Monmouth County. The Park protects nearly one mile of frontage on the Swimming River Reservoir. About three-quarters of the park is open land, with 100 acres of recreational and buffer areas near Route 537 and almost 300 acres of grassland and leased agricultural fields. Mature forest and hedgerows cover about 130 acres. Park System ecologists established the grassland areas in 2002 on former agricultural fields by allowing native cover to grow with one annual mowing. Most of this acreage has developed herbaceous wetland characteristics and in some areas vernal pools form in the spring and provide ephemeral habitat for many species.

The varied cover between tall and short grasses, agricultural ground, herbaceous wetland, and vernal pools provides habitats for field nesting species, including some species of concern, that are dependent on extensive and diverse cover types. Ecologists have observed the State-endangered northern harrier and loggerhead



strike utilizing the fields for hunting, and the State-threatened bobolink using them for breeding, as well as black-necked stilt and eastern meadowlark. A popular 2.3-mile paved trail provides interesting views of the varied field cover along the edge of the narrow forest that borders the reservoir. The Park System has developed the intense active recreation at Dorbrook to coexist harmoniously with its natural areas and agricultural fields.



DORBROOK
RECREATION AREA



22. Bayshore Waterfront Park

1988–8 ACRES; 2009–227 ACRES

THE PARK SYSTEM realized a long-term goal to establish a County park on Sandy Hook Bay when it acquired eight acres in Port Monmouth from the Conservation Fund in 1988 (future park area pictured at right in the 1980s). Since then the Park System has consolidated 90 lots into Bayshore Waterfront Park, preserving a valuable coastal landscape from intense bayshore development and providing almost a mile of public access along the bay.

Settlers established Shoal Harbor, the historical name of the Port Monmouth area, in the late 17th century. The Seabrook-Wilson House, one of the oldest houses on the Bayshore and a local landmark rich in community and maritime history, became part of the Park in 1998 in a land transfer with Middletown Township. Daniel Seabrook acquired 202 acres on the Bayshore in 1696, and his son or grandson built the oldest section of the house in the early 1700s. After five generations as a Seabrook family farm, William V. Wilson purchased the farm in 1855 and lived there with his family until the turn of the century. Several owners operated the house as an inn during the 20th century under names like the Bay Side Manor and the White House Tavern.

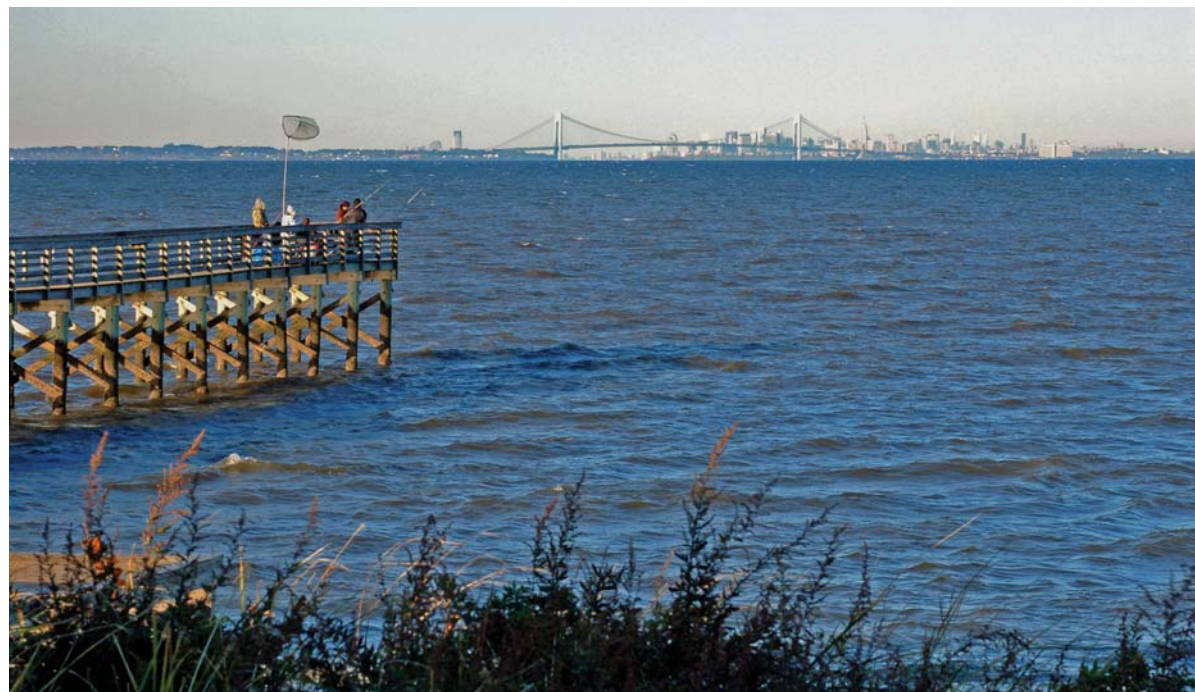
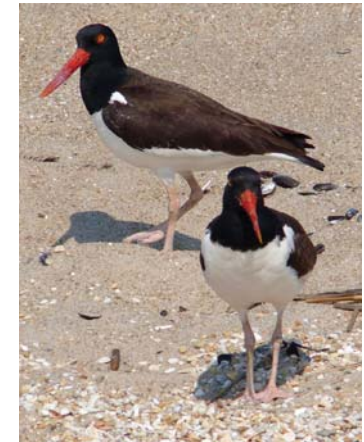
By the late 1960s the house had become dilapidated and vacant. At the urging of local residents concerned about its preservation, Middletown Township acquired the property in 1969, and a local historical association operated it as the Spy House Museum. Restored by the Park System in 2009, the building is now used for Park System programs, with exhibits under development on the history and ecology of the Bayshore. The Park includes a 300-ft. fishing pier, a favorite of local fishermen, and attracts kayakers, windsurfers, birders, beachcombers, and other visitors who enjoy the spectacular bay views.



Bayshore Waterfront Park contains the largest intact estuarine marshes in Sandy Hook Bay and includes coastal wetland, deciduous maritime shrublands, and two tidal creeks, Compton's Creek and Pews Creek, which drain small upland watersheds. The plant community in these estuaries is highly influenced by the level of salinity in different areas. Smooth cordgrass adapted to higher salt concentrations dominates the low salt marsh, which receives regular inundation of tidal water. Saltmeadow cordgrass adapted to lower salinity dominates the high salt marsh, which receives an occasional inundation.

Meandering tidal creeks like these pulse with the tides in and out of the estuary, carrying nutrients and multitudes of marine organisms that interact with the grasses. Channels dug in the mid-20th century to expose mosquito populations to fish predators have increased the efficiency of the flow, but they have also reduced shallow pooled areas, called pans, that support species like sea lavender and glasswort and provide feeding areas for many bird species. Some undisturbed meandering channels can still be detected, and as the old linear channels gradually fill in, the meanders and pools are beginning to return.

Estuaries such as these at Bayshore Waterfront Park are some of the most productive ecosystems on earth. With each tide, life is flushed in and out of these rich landscapes. Many notable species such as northern harrier, great blue and yellow-crowned night heron, American oystercatcher (pictured at right), black skimmer, and osprey feed and nest in this landscape. The marsh is filled with fiddler crabs, ribbed mussels, pulmonate snails, and dozens of other species that support the marine ecology of Sandy Hook Bay and beyond.



23. Manasquan Reservoir

1988–1,052 ACRES; 2009–1,204 ACRES

THE OPENING of the Manasquan Reservoir in Howell Township in 1990 realized 30 years of planning by County and State officials to create a water storage facility for southern Monmouth County “with full utilization of its recreational potential.” The Park System assumed recreational management of the 1,052-acre reservoir site from the N.J. Water Supply Authority and opened it initially for boating and fishing on the 770-acre reservoir and hiking and biking on the 282 acres around it. In its first full year of operation in 1991, the reservoir attracted over 128,000 visitors and recorded 2,000 boat launchings.



In 1994, the Park System opened a Visitor Center (pictured above) on the south shore of the lake with a fishing pier, a launching ramp for sailboats and boats with electric motors, and kayak and rowboat rentals. The Visitor Center also has an observation deck and a “wildlife” playground highlighting species in the reservoir habitat. Park staff use electric-powered pontoon boats for reservoir tours about surface water sources and the Park’s wildlife, including looking for herons, osprey, and bald eagles. When ice conditions permit, park rangers open the reservoir in the winter for ice skating, ice boating, and ice fishing.

The original planners of the reservoir designated a site on the west shore for environmental education, and the Park System opened the Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center in 2001. The Environmental Center focuses on wetlands ecology and wildlife conservation, and includes hands-on exhibits, classroom and program space, and indoor and outdoor wildlife observation areas. A simulated wetland at the entrance provides multiple opportunities for observation and guided learning. Naturalists present a variety of programs at the Center for school groups and other visitors about wetlands, protecting water supply, and the local wildlife.

The Cove Trail next to the Environmental Center enables visitors to walk through a wetland, and the Park's five-mile Perimeter Trail provides a scenic route around the reservoir for hikers, bikers, joggers, and equestrians. The combination of water, wildlife, and recreation opportunities has made the Manasquan Reservoir the Park System's most visited park, attracting more than 1.2 million people in 2009.



**MANASQUAN
RESERVOIR**

Creation of the Manasquan Reservoir to provide water for the growing shore population had a huge impact on the reservoir site and on the watershed below it. The site was ideal for the purpose as it consisted of a large forested wetland in the upper Manasquan River watershed where it was protected from any adjacent run-off. The reservoir collects rainwater that falls on it, and a downstream pumping station on the river pumps water to the reservoir when it is available.

The reservoir construction (pictured below) flooded most of the site's former deciduous forest wetland. The forest that remains around the water is mostly upland, composed of mixed oak-chestnut oak communities with some red maple and black gum in the wetter areas. The Bear Swamp tract to the southeast contains primarily pitch pine and is the unflooded remnant of the former forested wetland. The forests in the park remain relatively undisturbed by invasive species. The Eastern turkey beard has been found in the pitch pine lowlands and is the only known population of that perennial within the County parks. The southern twayblade, a diminutive orchid measuring only three to four inches in height, is a State-imperiled species that is also unique to the Park.



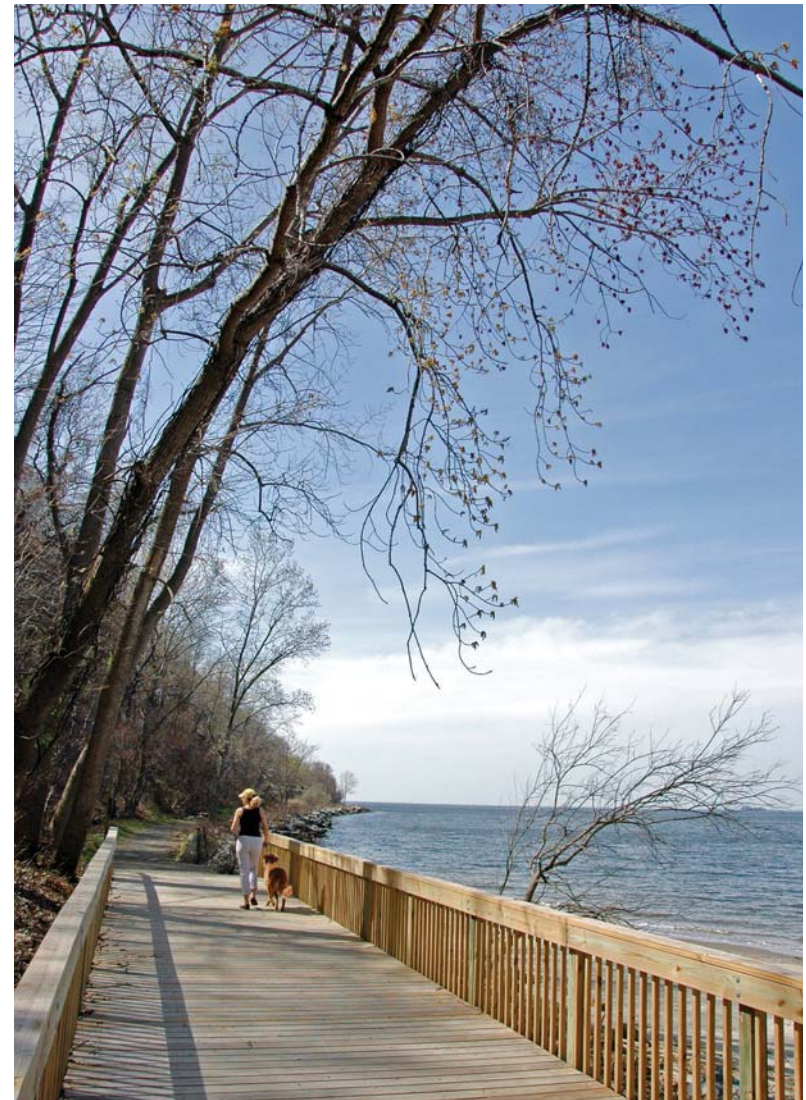
As the largest freshwater lake in the area, the reservoir has become an important habitat for many bird species, most notably American bald eagles (pictured left). An immature eagle was first noticed in 2001, and a nesting pair fledged two chicks in 2002 and in 2003, and three in 2004. When the first female died while nesting in 2005, a second replaced her in 2006 and the nesting pair fledged two chicks each year in 2007–2009. One of the 2007 chicks was an eaglet rehabilitated after being injured when a storm destroyed its nest in the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge on the eastern shore of Maryland. Although workers cleared many acres of the former forest for the grading and flooding of the reservoir, they left trees in some areas that died following inundation, and these have provided excellent snag (dead tree) habitats for the eagles and for ospreys (pictured right). They also provide microhabitats that protect fish and invertebrate water species from elements and predators.



24. Henry Hudson Trail | 1990–9 MILES; 2009–22 MILES

TO PRESERVE the right-of-way of the former Bayshore rail corridor, County officials secured a State grant in 1980 to acquire it from Conrail. The Central Railroad of New Jersey had built the rail line in the 19th century to serve the towns along the Sandy Hook Bay from Aberdeen to Atlantic Highlands. In response to the growing interest in trails, the Park System assumed management of nine miles of the right-of-way in 1990, rehabilitated a 10-foot wide portion for trail use, and opened it as the Henry Hudson Trail in 1992. In 1993, the Park System secured a Federal ISTEA transportation enhancement grant to repair or replace 11 bridges and install signage along the trail, and it opened the full nine miles in 1995.

By 2000, nearly 60,000 people were hiking, biking, or jogging on the Henry Hudson Trail and enjoying its intermittent views of stream corridors, tidal wetlands, and the Sandy Hook Bay. The Park System secured a Federal grant that year to help extend the Henry Hudson Trail along the Central Railroad of New Jersey's former Matawan to Freehold rail line. Almost 10 miles of this 12-mile southern extension are currently open for use. In 2009, an estimated 180,000 people used the Henry Hudson Trail, and in 2010 readers of *New Jersey Monthly* magazine voted it the Best Biking Trail in New Jersey.



25. Monmouth Cove Marina

1990—10 ACRES; 2009—10.5 ACRES

TO PROTECT the west end of Bayshore Waterfront Park and to help meet the public demand for rental boat slips, the Park System acquired the Gateway Marina in Port Monmouth in 1990 with the help of a Green Acres matching grant. The 1980s housing boom had led to the loss of many rental boat slips as developers converted private marinas into waterside housing clusters. The 10-acre Gateway Marina site (pictured below in 1992, prior to expansion by the Park System) included a boat maintenance shop, fuel and floating docks, storage racks, and considerable frontage along Pews Creek.

The Park System renamed the boating facility as the Monmouth Cove Marina. Today the upgraded Marina operates at full capacity and provides 154 floating wet slips with electric and water, 58 spaces of rack storage plus some land storage, and dockage for transient boaters.

