

31. Bel-Aire Golf Course

1997-78 ACRES; 2009-114 ACRES

MORTEN HANSEN, JR., an avid golfer and member of the Manasquan River Golf Club, built Bel-Aire Golf Course on a former crop farm in Wall Township in 1964 in part with money he had won in the Irish Sweepstakes in the 1950s. Hansen designed Bel-Aire himself as a 27-hole executive course with a gently rolling terrain containing an 18-hole, 3,600-yard par 60 course and a 9-hole, 1,350-yard par 3 course. In the 33 years that Hansen and his two sons operated Bel-Aire, it attracted many beginner and older golfers who often prefer to play on executive courses, which have shorter fairways than regulation golf courses.

When the Hansens decided to sell Bel-Aire in 1997, about 60% of the land was zoned for highway business and the remainder was zoned for residential development. Wall Township officials urged the Freeholders to acquire the popular course to preserve it as a major recreation facility at the busy intersection of Routes 34 and 524. Preserving Bel-Aire also protected open space in a highly-developed area and complemented the Park System's earlier acquisition of the Pine Brook Golf Course in Manalapan Township to provide executive-length public golf opportunities in the northwestern portion of the County.

To expand access to golf, Park System golf staff operate more than 200 introductory and intermediate golf clinics annually for adults and juniors at Bel-Aire, Charleston Springs, and Howell Park Golf Courses. The Park System also sponsors Youth Tournaments at these courses where 125 to 150 young players typically participate. With its affordability, accessibility, and ease of play, Bel-Aire attracted the second highest number of golfers among the Park System's six golf courses in 2009.



32. Wolf Hill Recreation Area | 1997-91 ACRES

THE ELEVATED Wolf Hill area of Oceanport may have derived its name from the presence of wolves in the area long ago. Charles W. Billings, the first mayor of Oceanport, acquired the West Farm on Eatontown Boulevard around 1910 and turned it into a country estate with a large Colonial Revival house and a complex of horse and cattle barns. The N.J. Sports and Exposition Authority later acquired the 91-acre Billings Farm in 1963 as a supplement to its adjacent Monmouth Park racetrack, and used the house as a guesthouse for racetrack jockeys and VIPs. Horse trainers exercised their horses on the land, and the Authority built a softball field on it.

The Park System identified the property in 1991 as a potential recreation site to serve a densely populated area of the County and purchased it 1997 from the Sports and Exposition Authority, which had designated it as surplus. Today, the Park has two softball fields, an enclosed off-leash dog area, and large open areas for hiking, and Park System planners have outlined future recreation facilities as well. Along the north boundary an unused railroad right-of-way, targeted as a linear trail greenway in the 2006 "Open Space Plan," offers potential links to Long Branch, Eatontown, and beyond.

Park System ecologists have allowed natural processes to prevail on much of the site's former pasture, paddocks and fields to provide wildlife habitat in a developed area. Killdeer and bobolinks are among the birds that frequent the 52 acres of cool season grassy fields, which are mowed just twice a year, and visitors enjoy walking the paths through the willowy grasses. On the three acres of wet meadow, brant, loons, and greater white-fronted geese have been observed, along with wetland-dependent plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, and birds. To buffer the surrounding residential areas, the ecologists have reforested portions of the Park's periphery with trees donated by N.J. Tree Foundation.



33. Big Brook Park | 1997–379 ACRES

MARLBORO State Hospital opened in 1931 on land that had been farmed since the 18th century, and the State eventually expanded the site to over 900 acres, partly to provide some farming activities for patients. When the State announced plans to close the psychiatric hospital in the 1980s, the Park System began negotiations to acquire the farmland south of Route 520 for conservation and recreation and acquired 379 acres in 1997. The undeveloped Park borders Big Brook, which drains to the Swimming River Reservoir, and contains almost 200 acres of gently rolling fields divided by hedgerows and wooded drainages. The cool season fields of smooth brome grass and the warm season fields of native broom sedge, golden-rod, and other perennials provide a rare contiguous field habitat for several priority species of field nesting birds, including grasshopper sparrow, harrier, and bobolink. The forested areas include a young wetland forest developing along the drainages and 50 acres of maturing American beech-white oak-tulip poplar-hickory forest on the hillsides.

Right top and middle: Big Brook Park; right bottom: DeBois Creek Recreation Area.

34. DeBois Creek Recreation Area

1998–109 ACRES; 2009–165 ACRES

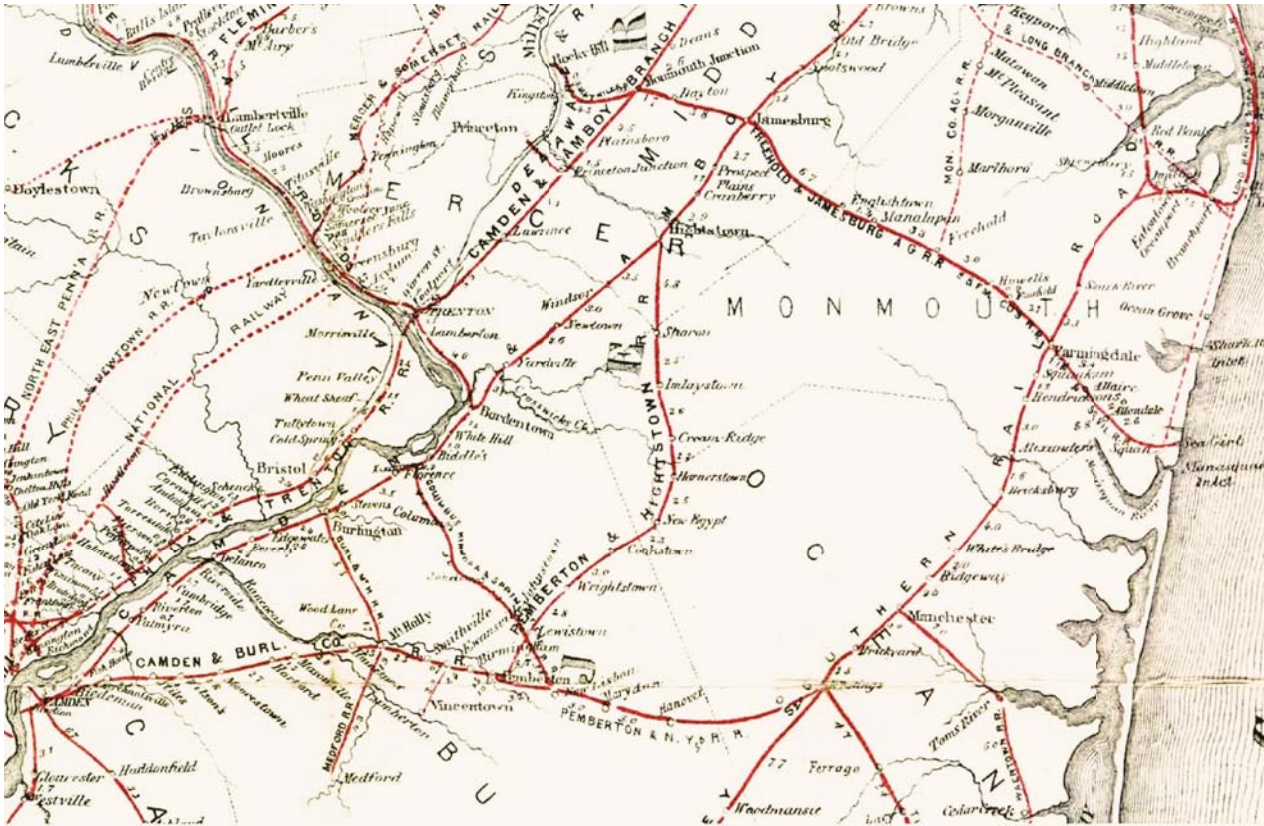
WHEN a 109-acre sod farm zoned for industrial use on Route 33 in Freehold Township became available in 1998, the Park System acquired it to protect water supply and to preserve it for future recreation opportunities for the populated Freehold area. DeBois Creek runs along the east boundary and Bunker Creek runs along the west, and both drain to the Manasquan River above the Manasquan Reservoir. About 21 acres of woods line DeBois Creek, but the majority of the undeveloped park site is open and flat. A 12-acre field of warm season grasses provides wildlife habitat on the western portion of the property, and the Park System leases the remaining field areas for sod farming and field crops. As adjacent land is developed, the stream protection in this Park will become increasingly important. The northeast corner of the Park borders the unused Freehold to Farmingdale railroad right-of-way, which could be reactivated someday but in the meantime provides a potential trail access to these communities.



35. Union Transportation Trail

1998–1.5 ACRES; 2009–6 ACRES

INVESTORS established the Pemberton and Hightstown Railroad in 1864 as a short line to provide dairies and farms along its route with access to larger railroads at junctions in Pemberton in Burlington County and Hightstown in Mercer County (route shown on 1873 map below). The Union Transportation Company acquired the line in 1888, and it prospered for many years until the construction of the New Jersey Turnpike in the 1950s cut it off from Hightstown. Portions of the line continued operating until 1976, and Jersey Central Power & Light later acquired the right-of-way. Park System planners identified the 8.6-mile right-of-way through Upper Freehold Township as a possible rail trail in their 1991 "Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan." The Park System leased the right-of-way in 1998 from JCP&L for 99 years, which also preserves it for potential reactivation as a rail corridor. The opening of the first two miles of the trail in 2010 includes the rehabilitation of an historic wood trestle bridge over Lahaway Creek in Hornerstown, one of the few physical remnants of the old railroad (pictured right in 20th century).



36. Perrineville Lake Park

1999–93 ACRES; 2009–929 ACRES

PARK SYSTEM planners recommended County acquisition of a large amount of open land around Perrineville Lake in Millstone Township in the 1991 “Monmouth County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan” for a new regional park to preserve Perrineville Lake and its rural environs, and to provide recreational opportunities in a developing area of the County. The 15-acre lake originated as a mill pond on a tributary of Rocky Brook, which drains to the Millstone River, a major source of drinking water in central New Jersey. The Park System secured a Green Acres matching grant to acquire the first 93 acres in 1999 and with the help of additional Green Acres grants and supporters of open space preservation in Millstone Township, has expanded the Park by a factor of 10 in just 10 years. By the end of 2009, this was the fifth largest park in the Park System.

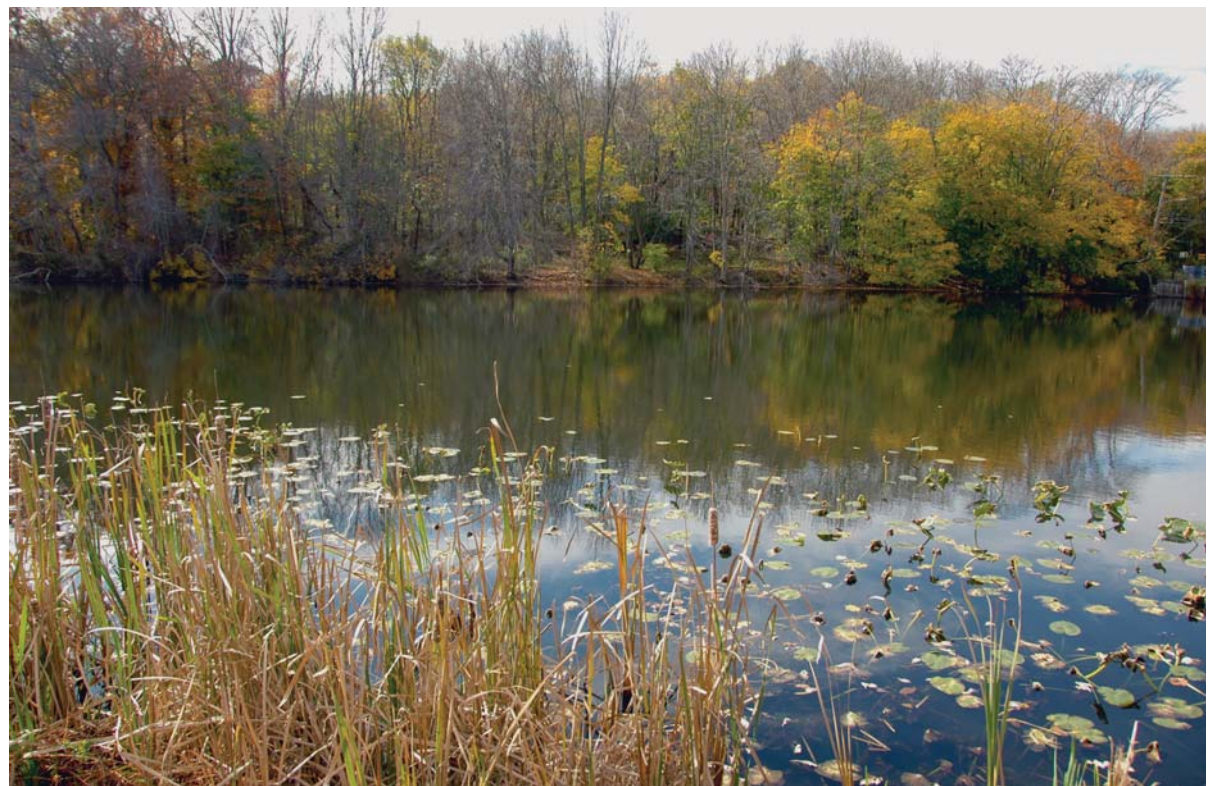
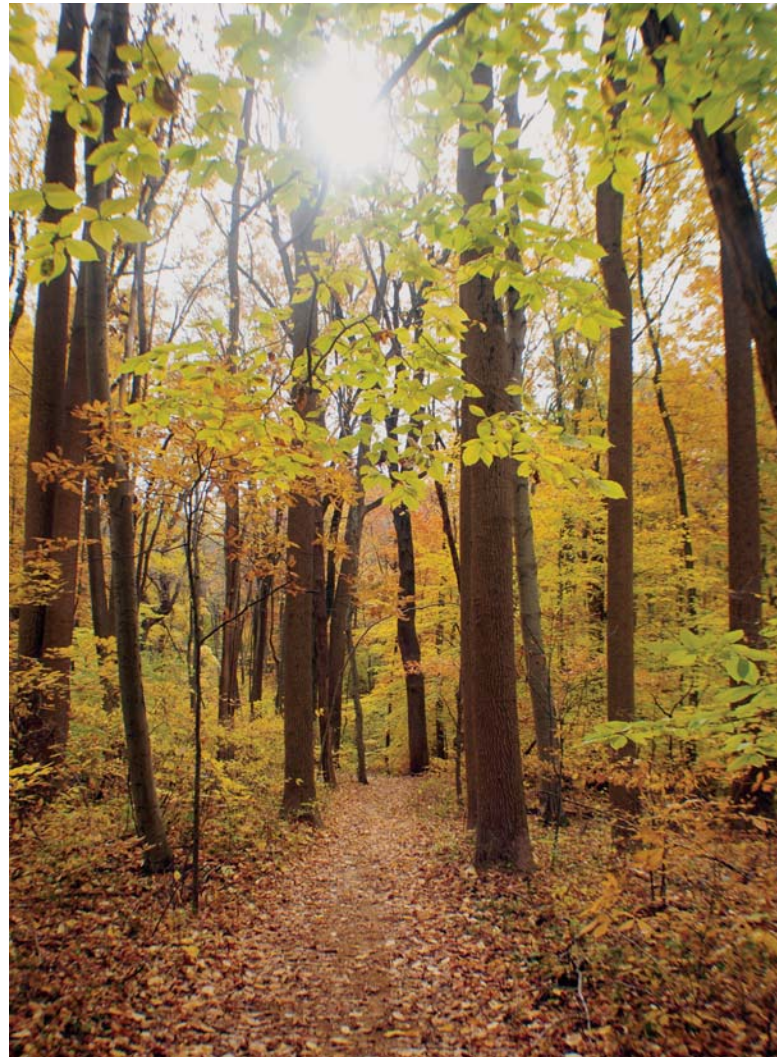
In the 20th century, local proprietors operated a summertime resort on Perrineville Lake, which is the Park’s scenic landmark and a favorite spot of local fishermen. Nearly five miles of park trails extend through forests, along fields, and around the lake, and these are particularly popular with local equestrians. The Park incorporates a significant portion of the historic green-belt of the New Deal planned community of Roosevelt, and extends to the State’s 6,323-acre Assunpink Wildlife Management Area.





The Park System leases 75% of the Park's 310 acres of fields for agricultural use with stipulations for mowed perimeters for public and maintenance access. Ecologists manage the remaining field acreage as natural areas of native grasses and other herbaceous plants to preserve wildlife habitat within a larger area of agricultural and fallow lands. Altogether these lands provide a regional habitat for some species of concern, including eastern box turtle, grasshopper sparrow, and bobolink. Spotted turtles inhabit wetland areas in the Park, and wild turkeys are commonly sighted. The Park's grassland habitat also hosts American kestrel, eastern bluebird, meadowlark, northern bobwhite, and quail.

Woodlands constitute about two-thirds of the Park, including both young and mature forest. The oldest forested portions of the Park contain red maple and black gum in wetland areas south of the lake, and old growth chestnut oak and mixed oak elsewhere. Species sighted in these forests include wood thrush, veery, red-headed woodpecker, northern parula, brown thrasher, black-throated green warbler, and eastern box turtle. Woodlands emerging on former agricultural land host black locust, sassafras, American beech, sweet gum, sweet birch, white ash, black cherry, mockernut hickory, and tulip poplar trees. Sweet pepperbush, blueberry, and black raspberry shrubs are also prominent in the Park.



37. Metedeconk River Greenway

1999–93 ACRES; 2009–121 ACRES

IN THE 1991 “Monmouth County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan,” the Park System designated the Metedeconk River as a critical stream corridor for the protection of water quality and wildlife. While most of the river forms the border between Monmouth and Ocean Counties, the Plan identified the Metedeconk’s North Brook tributary, which flows from Turkey Swamp Park to the border, as a greenway for County acquisition to protect and buffer floodplains from adjacent land use and development. The Park System is preserving land along the Metedeconk stream corridor in conjunction with similar efforts in the Ocean County portion of the watershed.



38. Yellow Brook Tract | 2000–225 ACRES; 2009–338 ACRES

THE PARK SYSTEM began preserving this important forest land in Howell Township near the U.S. Naval Weapons Station Earle in 2000 with the purchase of 142 acres and the sellers’ donation of 83 adjacent acres. The Park protects part of the Yellow Brook, a major tributary of the Manasquan River above the Manasquan Reservoir. The tract lies at the junction of the Pine Barrens to the south, where the sandy soil holds water and provides filtration, and the upland hardwood forest to the north, which generally drains more quickly. Most of the tract is forested wetland with pitch pine/red maple and Atlantic white cedar swamp communities. The limited upland areas have predominantly pitch pine and black, white and scarlet oak. The cedar swamp contains Collin’s sedge, which is threatened or endangered through most of its coastal range. The Park also contains a remnant cranberry bog, which has developed into a scrub-shrub wetland community.



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