

The Mercer County Park Commission, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, Hopewell Township and NJ Division of Parks & Forestry are beginning the process of developing a Forest Stewardship Council ® (FSC) compliant Forest Stewardship Plan for the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. We plan to collaborate with NJ Audubon to conduct a comprehensive vegetative inventory of the property. The inventory will be conducted in a manner consistent with mathematical principals outlined in Avery and Burkhart's Forest Measurements, Fourth Edition (Avery, 1994). Exact stand level sampling statistics will be shared with stakeholders at a later date and will be found in the final draft of the Forest Stewardship Plan. Field data will be recorded using the NED Lite (North East Decision model) software platform (Knopp, 2009), and later uploaded and post processed through NED 2 and NED 3 desktop modeling software (Twery, 2012). NED software has the ability to incorporate management goals for multiple objectives, analyze current forest conditions, recommend management alternatives, and predict future conditions under different alternatives. The software is designed and periodically updated to include a long-term, landscape-level view of the forest as an interconnected ecosystem.

Information recorded during the inventory will include the identification of overstory, shrub and ground layer species. Fixed radius plots of 1/100 and 1/500 of an acre will be used to collect shrub and ground cover data respectively. Overstory data will be collected using one or several Basal Area Factor (BAF) prisms at variable radius plots. Vegetative attributes that will be collected include species, diameters, height, size class, live crown ratio, quality, vigor, product, defect and more. Other features such as high conservation values, geographic areas of interest, trails, and riparian crossings will also be noted. Small portions of the property may not be inventoried due to inaccessibility caused by standing water or extremely dense vegetation. Although vegetation tied to these features may not necessarily be detailed in the Forest Stewardship Plan, future management of these sites will also be unlikely.

Mercer County and its partners acknowledge the important environmental, social and economic services our forested lands supply to the state, local communities, and the gamut of wildlife for which these woodlands are home to. We are committed to maintaining the integrity of these ecosystems and are hopeful that, in the spirit of collaborative planning, stakeholders and experts will be open and willing to share their knowledge. Whether you can offer information regarding rare, threatened and endangered species, geo-spatial data for areas of cultural-archaeological significance, or any other high conservation value information we welcome and hope you take this opportunity to communicate with us. The objective is that eventually the completed Forest Stewardship Plan will encompass the many conservation values we collectively share. Thus far Mercer County and its partners have developed a draft version of its 10 Year Management Objectives which we would like to share with all of you.

This will be the first of two, one-month stakeholder comment periods. If you wish to comment on the proposed forest inventory design, 10 year objectives, or other high conservation value considerations please do so via email by December 11, 2015. A second, comment period will be conducted upon completion of the draft Forest Stewardship Plan. All comments should be directed to Michael Van Clef (Stewardship Director, FoHVOS) and all comments will be shared with Mercer County Park Commission along with other co-owners (NJDEP and Hopewell Township).