

Morrisville Riverfront Preserve



The Borough of Morrisville is actively working to restore 8.8 acres of land along the Delaware River. The area will be maintained as a natural preserve to enhance wildlife habitat and to provide the opportunity for the public to enjoy recreational activities such as walking, fishing, wildlife watching, relaxing and paddling in a natural setting along the river.

The **Morrisville Riverfront Preserve** is uniquely situated along the uppermost portion of the Delaware River Estuary (i.e., the tidal portion of the Delaware River), which is recognized in the Natural Lands Inventory of Bucks County. Just upriver is the uppermost end of the estuary, the head of tide, at the Calhoun St. Bridge (upper free bridge) in Morrisville. The waters above the head of tide are part of the Special Protection Waters of the northern section of the river. This designation means that these waters have been determined to have exceptionally high scenic, recreational, ecological and water supply value and are protected by Special Protection Waters' anti-degradation regulations. Southeast of the project site, across the river in New Jersey is Abbot Marshlands, which is a documented habitat and migration path for many species of birds. The ecological value of the area is great.

Our objectives are to:

- Improve air and water quality
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Provide public access and educational opportunities
- Improve floodplain function and flood protection



History



In 2010, the site was re-zoned as Natural Lands and Community Service Districts, and was preserved as open space. Since then, the area has received herbicide treatments to combat Japanese knotweed and Japanese hops. Both species are highly invasive and choke out native plants.

In 2012, 90 native trees were planted throughout the Preserve. Our selection of species included sycamore, red maple, sweetgum, and river birch. Seeding with native grasses and herbaceous plants also took place throughout the Preserve in 2012.

Also in 2012, preliminary trails were established throughout the Preserve. This required the rearrangement of large amounts of natural debris which had been left by floods. Trails may change over time as the site adapts to natural events.

In early 2013, large amounts of dumped concrete and asphalt were removed from the northern end of the Preserve. This area was then re-planted with a variety of 20 trees, 50 shrubs and 105 perennial plants and grasses, using only native species such as willow oak, river birch, red maple, red twig dogwood, Clethra, winterberry, black-eyed Susan, beebalm, and aster.

In spring of 2013, 139 native oak, birch and maple trees were planted. A sign to educate the public about the value of riparian buffers was developed and installed at the northern entrance.

In 2014, an informational brochure was developed which describes the Preserve and the value of a natural riverfront. Access improvements were made at the upper lot section and evergreen buffers were planted. A variety of 240 native maples, oaks, sycamore, hackberry and boxelder were planted.

Since 2015, an additional 218 native species trees have been planted and regular community stewardship workdays have been held to maintain trails and clear invasive vines and plants.

The Morrisville Environmental Advisory Council has been the Borough's Project Coordinator and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN) has been our partner since the project's inception. DRN has provided valuable technical restoration guidance, grant assistance and volunteer resources. Funding for the project has been provided by the Bucks County Municipal Open Space Program, Coastal Zone Management Program (NOAA), Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, Consortium for Scientific Awareness of Watersheds (PADEP), PECO Green Region, TreeVitalize Watershed Program, Morrisville business and private donations.

Ongoing and Next Steps



Seasonal nature walks with Master Naturalist, photographer and author Mary Anne Borge provide fascinating informational tours focusing on both wildlife and vegetation. These free tours of the Preserve help us appreciate its value to the environment and our community.

Restoration efforts will be focused on protecting trees from invasives and targeting specific species for removal, such as cutting oriental bittersweet and other vines that are seen as threatening the survival of trees. Vigilant monitoring is especially needed to keep Japanese knotweed, Japanese hops and mile-a-minute vine at bay.

We will be improving public access through trail work, identifying shoreline access for paddlers and encouraging increased educational opportunities at the Preserve. Stewardship activities connect people to the River and promote a healthy community.

Volunteers are needed and welcome as we continue our activities to protect and restore the ecosystem of the Delaware River watershed.

