

# West End Open Space & Recreation Plan

Chestnut Hill Township  
Eldred Township  
Polk Township  
Ross Township

Adopted January 2003



## PREFACE

Open space is “the most distinguishing feature” of Monroe County, according to the Monroe 2020 Comprehensive Plan, which the County Commissioners adopted in 1999. Two years later, the County Commissioners approved the Monroe County Open Space Plan, which sets the county’s conservation priorities and calls for a county that is “forever green”—a county featuring an open space system linked by a network of preserved land and trails. This Plan works to carry out Monroe County’s vision of protecting environmental resources, creating greenways and establishing new parkland. It is particularly valuable to preserve open space to protect the environment of Monroe County.

Land in the West End greatly varies in its suitability for different intensities of development. Some areas, such as flood-prone creek valleys and wetlands, are not suitable for any development. Other areas are only suitable for very low-intensity development. Still other areas are appropriate for intensive development.

Open space can be preserved in public, semi-public or private ownership. It is important to preserve open space to:

1. recharge groundwater supplies,
2. protect the water quality of creeks and the groundwater,
3. provide an important visual relief between developments,
4. preserve areas of scenic beauty, including scenic views,
5. avoid development on lands that are prone to erosion or are otherwise not physically suitable for development,
6. provide land for outdoor recreation, such as nature study and fishing,
7. preserve habitats and cover for birds, fish and wildlife, particularly for corridors for wildlife to move throughout a region,
8. maintain woodlands that are important to purify the air,
9. preserve agricultural land,
10. preserve historic landscapes,
11. protect the natural “biodiversity” (including rare and endangered species of plants and animals), and
12. conserve other important natural resources.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Plan works to carry out Monroe County's vision of protecting environmental resources, creating greenways and establishing new parkland. Open space can be preserved in public, semi-public or private ownership. This Open Space and Recreation Plan is a strategy for preserving and enhancing the natural environment of the West End.

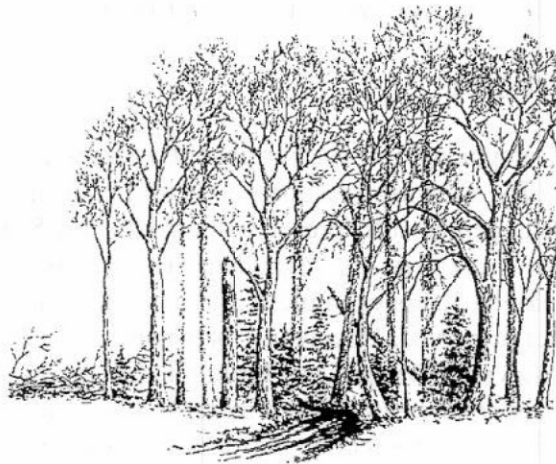
In 1998, Monroe County voters approved the \$25 million bond referendum to buy and preserve open space. By adopting this plan, Chestnuthill, Eldred, Polk and Ross Townships become eligible for Monroe County bond funds to acquire open space. One purpose of the plan is to show how the four municipalities can use these county monies, DCNR grants, private sector contributions and partnerships with non-profit conservation groups to assist in preserving land. The plan also describes how local development regulations can better protect vulnerable natural features. The Regional Open Space Advisory Committee that oversaw preparation of this plan operated in the spirit of inter-municipal cooperation.

As an early step in this process, a survey was sent to a sampling of the residents of each of the four townships. The results of that survey is included in the main body of this report.

### Goals

A set of goals provide direction for this Plan. The full set of goals are included in the main body of the report. The following is a sampling of some of the goals of this Plan:

1. Use a combination of property acquisition, purchase of conservation easements, development regulations and cooperative ventures with non-profit groups to protect the most important natural areas in the West End.
2. Emphasize the preservation of natural features along all creeks. Protect the water quality of all creeks and groundwater.



Ross Township is in the process of acquiring the Haney Tract as a primarily passive park. This tract of over 50 acres of land involves rolling farm fields and a small creek. It stretches from Anchor Road west of the Township Building south to Kunkletown Road.

Polk Township's Park is along the Middle Creek, east of Route 534 and north of Kresgeville. This Park should be expanded along the Middle Creek as opportunities for acquisition arise.

### Natural Areas

The vast majority of the Blue Mountain from western Maryland through Pennsylvania into Northern New Jersey is in public ownership as recreation land. For example, almost all of the Blue Mountain to the west and south is owned by the State Game Commission. The exception is most of the north face of the Blue Mountain in eastern Eldred and Ross Townships. Opportunities should be examined with Monroe County, the State Game Commission and the Wildlands Conservancy to purchase additional Blue Mountain land to add to the Game Commission's holdings.

This Plan considers the Chestnut Ridge, the Jonas Mountain Land north of Jonas Road and the Blue Mountain to be the most important natural features in the West End. Therefore, this Plan suggests that one or all of these features would be appropriate for preservation with funds that Monroe County has set aside for large natural area preservation.

- Large areas of the Blue Mountain should be preserved through cooperative efforts of the property-owners, the Wildlands Conservancy, the Game Commission, the townships, Monroe County, State grants, the Appalachian Trail Conference and fishing and hunting clubs.

The creek corridors are also extremely important natural areas. However, most of those areas are somewhat protected from development from existing floodplain and wetland regulations. Public acquisition or conservation easements along the creek corridors would still be valuable to avoid site alterations, protect existing vegetation and allow public access to creeks.

In any case, funding will only be available to preserve a fraction of all of the important open spaces that are worthy of preservation. Therefore, appropriate development regulations are needed to make sure that natural features are properly protected during any development. These natural features particularly include steeply sloped lands, creek valleys, wetlands and flood-prone areas.

### Conservation Design Development

"Conservation Design Development" involve permanently preserving substantial areas of open space within new development. By allowing reasonable flexibility in the lot sizes and lot layout of a development, it is possible to permanently preserve approximately 50 percent of the total land area of a development. Typically, incentives and disincentives are used to strongly encourage use of Conservation Design Development. For example, a 2 acre minimum lot area might be required for every new lot if open space is not preserved. However, if substantial open space is permanently preserved under the standards of Conservation Design Development, then the minimum lot area could be reduced to one acre. Smaller lot areas could be possible if suitable central sewage service would be available. This concept is described further in the section entitled "Using Development Regulations to Enhance Environmental Protection" in the Recommendations section of this report.