

Meeting Summary for Native Habitat Collaborative Meeting – 11-20-25

Meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/5OMBYvIvkzY>

Key takeaways

- The Native Habitat Collaborative website is now live and under construction, featuring resources, meeting information, and collaborator details
- A successful native plant meadow was established at Hopewell Elementary School with 400+ students participating in planting 18 native species
- FoVOS's American Kestrel Nest Box program has grown from 3 successful boxes in 2019 to 23 in 2025, with approximately 80 chicks banded annually
- The New Jersey invasive plant ban has passed and been signed by the governor, representing a significant milestone for native plant advocates
- The seed sowing extravaganza organized by Kari Lloyd was successful with 900 milk jugs prepared for native plant propagation and many filled with soil and seed at past and upcoming events
- Evening Meeting has had low to no attendance so unless we get feedback to convince us to continue – we'll be cancelling that meeting going forward.

Discussed topics

Native Habitat Collaborative Website

Terry presented the newly created website for the collaborative group.

- **Details**
 - **Terry:** Created the website using Google Sites, which is free and easy to maintain. The site includes pages for meetings, collaborators, education and outreach, projects, native design and maintenance, grants and plants, certifications, and volunteering.
 - **Rosalind:** Complimented the website's design and functionality.
 - **Kelly:** Asked about the volunteering page and whether it would list upcoming volunteer events.
 - **Terry:** Clarified that the site won't maintain regular event listings as that would be too time-consuming, but will list organizations to contact for volunteering opportunities.

- **Conclusion**

- The website will serve as a central resource hub for the collaborative.
- Members should review their organization's section on the collaborators page and provide feedback.
- Members can send Terry resources to add to the site.

Hopewell Elementary School Meadow Project

Marian presented on the native plant meadow project at Hopewell Elementary School.

- **Details**

- **Marian:** The project was funded by a Green Matters grant to restore an underutilized field into a native plant wet meadow. In April 2025, they began preparing the site with cardboard and wood chips to suppress crabgrass.
- **Marian:** Over 400 students planted native species during a 3-hour event with 20 volunteers from various organizations including EcoPTO, Sourland Conservancy, FoVOS, Mercer County Park Commission, and Native Plant Collaborative.
- **Marian:** The project increased plant diversity with 18 native species and impressed the school administration.
- **Marian:** Expressed appreciation to members of the Collaborative who came out in force to assist students with planting
- **Kelly:** Asked about maintenance plans and communication with maintenance staff to prevent mowing.
- **Marian:** They used survey flags initially, which worked until late summer. Future plans include installing rebar poles with fishing wire as inexpensive fencing, which would be noticeable to maintenance crews.
- **Mike:** Agreed with making barriers very noticeable to prevent accidental mowing.
- **Steve:** Asked about the age groups involved.
- **Marian:** Students from pre-K through 5th grade participated, with pre-dug holes to accommodate younger children.

- **Conclusion**

- The project successfully engaged students and community members in creating a native habitat.
- Future plans include another planting in April, ongoing education through the school's garden club, and integration into the curriculum.
- Maintenance will require ongoing communication with school staff.

Challenges

- Maintaining the Hopewell Elementary School meadow and preventing accidental mowing by maintenance staff
- Ensuring long-term stewardship of school native plant projects as parent volunteers' children eventually move on

FoVOS American Kestrel Nest Box Program

Kaitlin presented on the American Kestrel Nest Box program.

● **Details**

- **Kaitlin:** American Kestrels are the smallest falcon in North America, listed as threatened in New Jersey since 2012 due to population declines.
- **Kaitlin:** Kestrels prefer open grasslands and meadows, primarily eat invertebrates, and require tree cavities for nesting.
- **Kaitlin:** FoHVOS received a grant in 2019 to install 50 nest boxes throughout Hopewell Valley. Success grew from 3 boxes with 12 chicks in 2019 to 23 successful boxes with about 80 chicks in 2025.
- **Kaitlin:** The program involves 22 private landowners, 4 public schools, and partner organizations. Volunteers monitor boxes every two weeks during breeding season.
- **Kelly:** Asked about potential toxicity in kestrels due to their insect diet.
- **Alyssa:** Noted that while toxicity might contribute locally, the exact causes of population decline remain unknown.
- **Marian:** Suggested installing wireless cameras in nest boxes for educational purposes.
- **Alyssa:** Expressed interest in this idea, especially for school locations.

● **Conclusion**

- The program demonstrates successful community science collaboration.
- State biologists band chicks to track movements and lifespan.
- The program is expanding to Hunterdon and Somerset Counties through partnership with Wild Bird Research Group.

Challenges

- Expanding the kestrel nest box program while maintaining adequate volunteer coverage

Seed Sowing Extravaganza

Terry and others discussed the recent seed sowing event.

- **Details**
 - **Terry:** Kari Lloyd organized the event where 900 milk jugs were prepared for winter sowing of native plants.
 - **Terry:** Nearly 90 native seed varieties were available, collected and placed in envelopes at a previous volunteer event.
 - **Kelly:** Appreciated how visitors were directed to partner tables, which facilitated conversations with experts and exposure for the partner organizations.
 - **Terry:** Noted that this approach helped address the needs of both experienced participants and newcomers.
- **Conclusion**
 - The event successfully engaged the community in native plant propagation.
 - Partner organizations benefited from the opportunity to connect with participants.
 - Additional events are planned in West Windsor and Princeton.

New Jersey Invasive Plant Ban

Mike and Rosalind discussed the recently passed legislation.

- **Details**
 - **Mike:** Expressed satisfaction that the bill finally passed after a long process.

- **Rosalind:** Noted that the governor signed the bill on Monday morning.
- **Rosalind:** Highlighted the significant sacrifice made by the nursery industry, particularly regarding popular plants like barberry, burning bush, and Bradford pears.
- **Mike:** Explained that stakeholders worked together to establish phase-out times and allowances for certain cultivars to minimize impact on the trade.
- **Kelly:** Asked how education organizations could help with the transition.
- **Mike:** Mentioned that the next step is for the governor to populate the New Jersey Invasive Species Council, which will guide implementation.
- **Terry:** It would be great if we could discuss the process and how to best support it in more detail at a future meeting.
- **Conclusion**
 - The ban represents a significant achievement for native plant advocates.
 - Implementation will require continued collaboration between various stakeholders.
 - The phase-out timeline is designed to allow nurseries to adapt financially.

Challenges

- Supporting nurseries and landscapers in transitioning away from newly banned invasive plants

Action items

- **All members**
 - Review their organization's section on the collaborative website and provide feedback to Terry
 - Send Terry any resources that should be added to the website
- **Terry**
 - Complete the collaborators page on the website and continue working on other pages soliciting information from the group.
 - Add Rosalind's landscaper information to the website

- Ask Olivia from the Watershed Institute to the education group and possibly share her rain garden curriculum

- **Marian**

- Continue outreach to maintenance staff at Hopewell Elementary School about meadow preservation
- Plan for the next planting event in April
- Work on integrating the meadow into the school curriculum

- **Kaitlin**

- Consider Kelly's suggestion about educational presentations at the Tulpehaking Nature Center
- Explore the possibility of installing cameras in kestrel boxes at school locations