



# South Mountain Conservancy

South Mountain Reservation Stewardship, Advocacy & Public Engagement

## 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

25 YEARS! In 2024, the Conservancy celebrated 25 years making a difference in Essex County's largest park and to the communities it serves. Over the last fifty years, County maintenance staff working in the reservation decreased by more than 80 percent. Yet, one could argue the needs have never been greater. That's where the Conservancy has stepped in...and the community has stepped up through financial support like yours and sustained volunteer effort: in 2024, our dedicated volunteers devoted nearly 5,000 hours to improve the reservation and run our programs. (For a retrospective of our 25-year journey, go to [www.somocon.org](http://www.somocon.org).)

During 2024, we served as stewards of the reservation and engaged the broader community in several ways.

- **Ecology.** Invested over \$31,000, by: funding an assessment and ten-year plan to manage invasive species by the NJ Invasive Species Strike Team; removing the solarizing plastic and sowing seeds at the one-acre Shady Nook Pollinator Meadow; holding multiple public volunteer days and hiring two summer interns to maintain the Wildflower and Forest Preserve. We also repaired, through Eagle scout projects, three forest regeneration site fences to keep deer out. (Photo below, Lori LaBorde instructs Girl Scouts on sowing seeds at the Pollinator Meadow.)



- **Trail Infrastructure.** Improved storm water management by: deepening swales and clearing culverts on woods roads; installing dozens of water bars throughout the park and rerouting steep, eroded hiking trails (mostly the Lenape north of Ball's Bluff, see photo). Oversaw Eagle scout projects that expanded the steps at Tulip Springs, built or painted dozens of bog bridges and updated kiosk signage.



- **Trail Maintenance.** Three dozen Trailkeepers monitored the trails while other volunteers removed 188 trees off the trails and 215 bags of garbage from the trails and picnic areas. If a tree falls across our 55 miles of trail, we may not hear it, but we soon hear of it --- and it is quickly gone.

A 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporation

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- **Public Programs.**

- Over sixty-five free guided hikes, including special hikes for kids and a poetry hike.
- Three new Wildflower Sculpture Park exhibits (co-sponsored with the County)
- Spring and fall SMR Family Campouts (co-sponsored with the County) (Photo of fall participants on a slack line.)



- Mayapple Trail Runs hosted 176 runners
- Fall SMR photo contest
- 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration entertains 64.

- **Advocacy.**

- After three years, the SMC-conceived West Falls Parking off South Orange Avenue was paved and marked by County increasing access and safety.
- SMC continues to advocate for improved woods roads for emergency access and reduced fire risk.

**In 2025**, we will continue our stewardship and public programs and will also be working to add benches and a shelter to the Fairy Trail through a recently received **\$25,000 Bolger Foundation challenge grant**. So if your are not