

**Pennsylvania / Delaware Chapter of  
The American Society of Landscape Architects**

**2021 Professional Design Awards Program**

**ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CATEGORY**

*Miry Run Ponds Master Plan*

*Mercer County, NJ*

# Miry Run Ponds Master Plan

*Hamilton, Mercer County, NJ*

In the late 1970s, Mercer County purchased flood-prone land along Miry Run in order to build a park and one of several dams as part of a flood mitigation initiative known as the Assunpink Creek Watershed Water Works Plan. The dam was constructed in the mid-1980s and created a lake of almost 50 acres. Since then the 279-acre dam site has become a popular place for neighbors to walk, fish, enjoy nature, and sled in the winter, but few beyond the neighborhood know of this largely hidden natural area. Now, after a year-long planning process, the Mercer County Park Commission is set to restore the park's natural areas and to create new passive recreation opportunities for the public's enjoyment.

Over the course of 2019, the Mercer County Park Commission and a team of consultants performed environmental research on Dam Site 21 and hosted a series of public meetings to solicit input for potential improvements to the park. The Park Commission's Dam Site 21 Steering Committee has finalized its plan and it was adopted at the Park Commission's January 29, 2020 meeting.

The Master Plan will serve as a long-term vision for improvements to the park, which will be implemented over multiple phases depending on funding availability and other factors. Of the property's 279 acres, only 17 acres, or approximately 6.1% of the site would be disturbed for trails, parking and other park visitor facilities; the majority of which is limited to previously disturbed areas. When complete, the site's valuable natural features will be augmented through the establishment of 34 acres of new forest, which will contain an estimated 14,800 new trees, and 64 acres of new native meadows.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



Today, the site provides a tranquil setting. However, there are no trails, handicapped access, or any visitor amenities. There are numerous invasive plant species in the park and deer browse is significant. Since the site has not been developed for its intended park use the County has provided only minimal maintenance.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



Project landscape architects and ecologists conducted site reconnaissance visits on land and water. The freshwater marsh in this picture is a unique habitat that will be enhanced and protected. Freshwater marsh plant communities are declining in New Jersey.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



The Composite Site Analysis depicts both site constraints and potential. Eighty acres of the park are leased for agriculture. This land offers opportunities for habitat restoration and water quality protection. Special habitats on the site include vernal pools, wetlands, a freshwater marsh, and floodplains. Many site plants communities in these areas are dependent on the site hydrology emphasizing the need to protect and enhance water quality on the site.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



The agriculture land uses on and around the site predates the construction of the dam and reservoir and is the primary factor affecting water quality of the ponds. The master plan recommendations focus on creating and expanding riparian buffers in the form of both native warm season meadows and reforestation of large areas of the park.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



A bathymetric survey determined the depth of the reservoir. Accumulated sediments within the reservoir area were also determined. This was the basis for recommended dredging to provide for clear flows, safe recreational boating and a robust aquatic habitat.



The consultant team conducted 4 public meeting, numerous focus groups, advisory and steering committee meetings as a part of a transparent process during which several concepts were presented, discussed, dissected and revised. 818 people participated in a public opinion poll about the park that showed a diversity of opinions and a passion about the existing site...

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# The Trentonian

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## THE DAMMED



*County Dam Site 21 park improvement would cost \$9-20M,  
public split in opinion of project » PAGE 5*

All public meetings were well attended. A small but vocal contingent of nearby residents voiced strong opposition to proposed “*over-development*”. This generated widespread media coverage including this newspaper headline - great exposure for landscape architects and landscape architecture. Project metrics did not support opposition based on “*over-development*”. Only 17 acres or 6% of the site will be disturbed for trails and other facilities. New native meadows and forests will total 98 acres and the 19-acre vernal pools area will be fenced to preserve and protect it.

PLAN METRICS

Total Site Size: **279 acres**

with 49 acres of ponds

and 230 acres of land

Primary New Use: **76 acres**

of farmland will be incorporated back into the park - mostly as new habitat

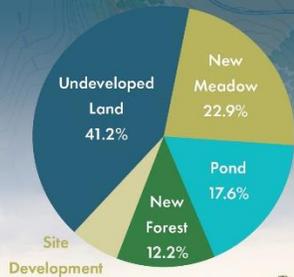
Proposed Improvements: **117 acres**

- of habitat created.
- New meadows: 64 acres (22.9% of land)
  - Forest restoration: 34 acres / 14,800 trees (14.7% of land)
  - Fenced vernal pool area: 19 acres (8.2% of land)

**50.8% of the park will be restored and protected as natural habitat.**

- Improved trails: 6 miles - includes a 1.3 mile segment of the Capital to Coast Trail
- Site "development" consisting of trails, parking, playgrounds, driveways, etc. totals just 6.1% of the site

Master Plan Land Use:



LEGEND

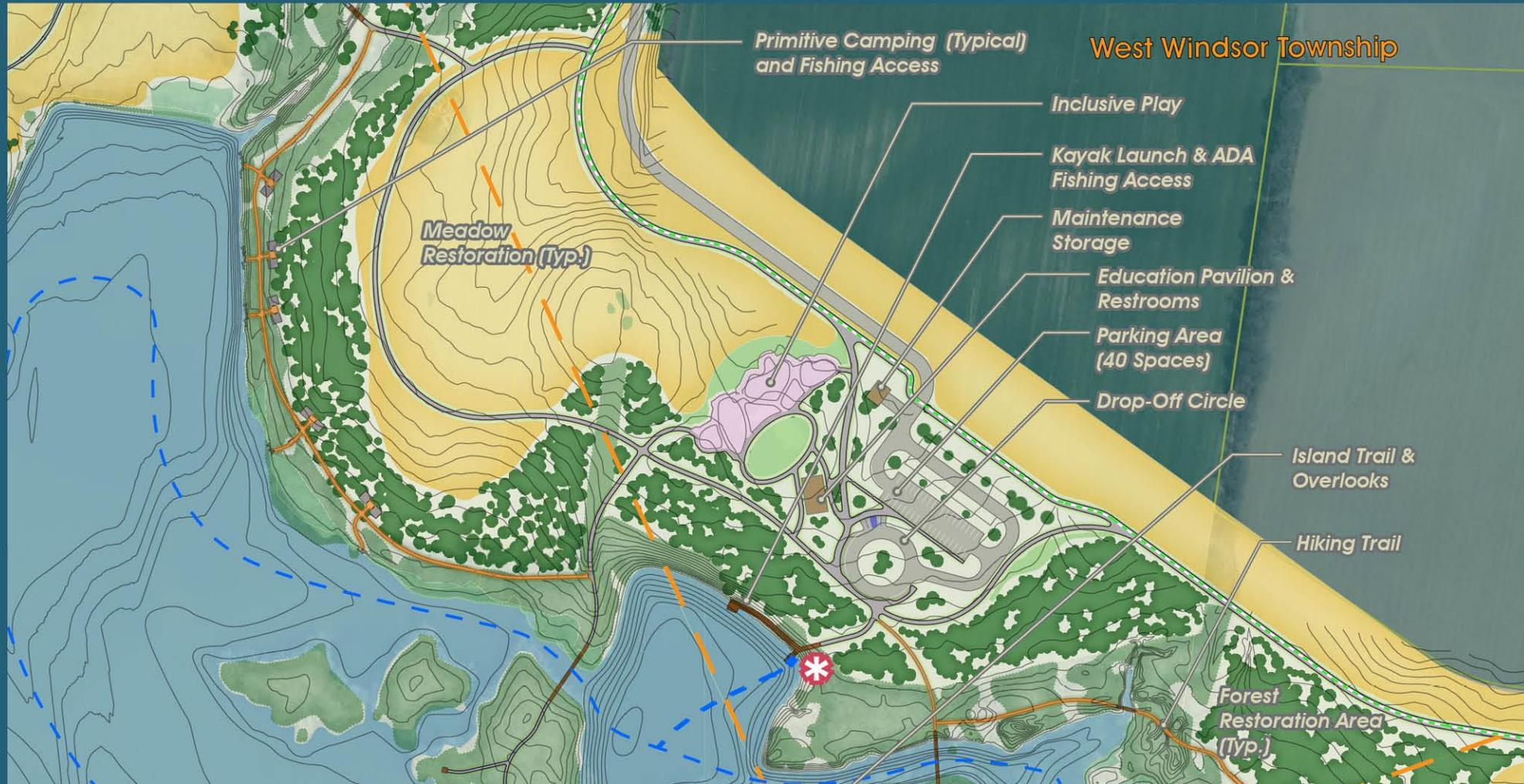
- Parcel Lines
- Existing Roadways
- Existing Building
- Existing Open Water
- Existing Wetland
- Existing Tree Line
- Proposed Multi-Use Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Proposed Hiking Trail
- Bridge / Boardwalk
- Water Trail
- Proposed Buildings
- Proposed Camp Sites
- Proposed Trees
- Proposed Buffer Trees
- Proposed Meadows
- Emergency Water Access



Master Plan improvements focus on passive improvements including handicapped accessible trails, wetland boardwalks, fishing access and non-motorized boating access, invasives removal and reestablishment of native plant communities. Restrooms, pavilions, parking and other limited user amenities are also a part of the plan. Total improvement costs are estimated at \$19 million.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



The Park's Core Activity Area includes a pavilion and restrooms, ADA accessible kayak launch, inclusive playground, and one of the park's only lawn areas. Maintenance facilities are also located here. This area is reached from Old Trenton Road, a major arterial, minimizing any new traffic to nearby residential neighborhoods.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



The park's vernal pools are one of the park's most unique habitats and will be fenced to protect it from deer and human intrusion. However, an ADA accessible canopy boardwalk will give visitors a treetop view of the pools and associated habitats. This area also contains the existing dam which will be spanned with a new bridge and accessible fishing area. .

MERCER COUNTY  
**MIRY RUN PONDS**

Master Site Plan



A 19-acre vernal pool area will feature an accessible treetop boardwalk. The area will be fenced to protect it from deer damage. Park visitors will be afforded breathtaking views while also preventing damage from well-intentioned humans. .

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



Before

A bridge is proposed for access over the dam spillway and to provide for accessible fishing access. The bridge will also be a part of the loop trail around the park.

# MERCER COUNTY MIRY RUN PONDS

## Master Site Plan



On the southern border of the Ponds, the Flock Road Forest will provide a backdrop for an ADA accessible boardwalk, sections of which will take hikers out over the water's edge.