

December 2, 2023

The last of the Thanksgiving leftovers have, finally, been dispatched. Holiday shopping has launched in earnest and the dipping temperatures reveal more than a hint of the coming winter. In the reservation, the leaves now cover the ground and the trails can be slick...

And yet, I bet you are still out there, as the reservation's meandering paths and natural beauty still entice, still allow you to enter this bit of wilderness at our doorstep. You are not alone - hundreds visit each week, especially if it's not raining. Families travel miles to the Rahway Fairy Trail (which SMC maintains), Scouts and school groups take special outings, and dozens join our free hikes. And multiple times each week, numerous local ramblers visit (perhaps with a dog in tow) as part of their routine.

If you also take advantage of this remarkable resource, you might have seen our wooden trailhead signs: *These trails are maintained by South Mountain Conservancy. Join-Donate-Volunteer.* Yet, even after 23 years as stewards, not everyone knows how hard SMC's volunteers work to keep the reservation accessible and special.



If a tree falls in the forest (and across a trail), we may not hear the sound, but we soon hear of it. In short order, one of our dozen volunteer Chainsaw Gang members will clear it away (this happened over 150 times this year). People may not know that more than two dozen Trailkeepers brush back encroaching vegetation, or that multiple Trail Work Crews improve drainage and build bridges to keep our trails useable and sustainable in the face of increasing heavy rains, or that a legion of individuals and community groups, grabbers in hand, serve as Trash Tacklers whisking away litter from paths and picnic areas. In total, our volunteers logged over 4,000 hours this year!

***If you appreciate this work, help support our programs by becoming a [member for the next 12 months](#). Your contribution allows the SMC to tackle an expanding set of projects large and small that ensures the reservation remains a revered place. (If you are already among our many members, thank you. It makes a difference.)***

Of course, our focus goes beyond infrastructure to address the reservation's ecology and forest canopy. Our Forest Regeneration Corps and two summer interns maintain the 14-acre Wildflower and Forest Preserve, removing invasive plants. A special group repairs damaged fencing at the 41 smaller forest regeneration sites so deer are kept out and native plants can thrive and seed the rest of the reservation. Citizen Science volunteers run FrogWatch and maintain birdhouses, and have launched an ambitious,

multi-year, acre-sized Pollinator Meadow Restoration project south of Shady Nook (you might have wondered what the solarizing plastic was doing there).



SMC also runs programs that draw people from near and far: free hikes almost every week of the year, at every skill level (members can sign up early) and a long-distance Mayapple Trail Run for those seeking a challenge. With Essex County's help, we curate the Wildflower Sculpture Park that presents new, innovative, large-scale artworks in a naturalistic setting each year, and offer a yearly SMR Family Campout for some 50 families. (Unfortunately, the fall campout was rained out, but has been rescheduled for early June).

Finally, we oversee Eagle Scout projects, like the recently restored Tulip Springs steps and the expanded set of mini-maps, now at all major trail intersections. The SMC also maintains the signage system which we are updating based on the revised SMR map published this year. And we are happy to announce that later this month for the first time a digital version of the map will be available for both Android and Apple smartphones on the Avenza platform. We can't guarantee you won't get lost, but we are making it much, much harder!

***All this takes time and funds for tools and materials (and snacks!). The Pollinator Meadow Restoration Project, for example, will cost about \$20,000. If you want to help make this all possible, I urge you to become a [member](#) at any level. There are new premiums such as the Hemlock Falls and Fairy Trail posters, as well as the map and trail guide. And if you want to volunteer, please join our mailing list at [www.somocon.org](http://www.somocon.org) to learn of those opportunities. (BTW, we are looking for coordinators for the Trash Tackler program.)***

Thanks in advance for your support and see you on the trails.

Dennis Percher  
Chair, Board of Trustees

**Note:** We are a qualified 501 (c) (3) non-profit so your donations are deductible to the extent allowable by law (and eligible for corporate matching grants). Also, people age 72 or older can contribute from their IRAs directly to the Conservancy and avoid paying income taxes on that distribution. This is known as a [qualified charitable distribution](#).