



# South Mountain Conservancy

South Mountain Reservation Stewardship, Advocacy & Public Engagement

## SMC 2025 Accomplishments and Year-End Solicitation

**Let's be honest: For those of us for whom the South Mountain Reservation has become part of the fabric of our lives, we are very fortunate.** First, that 130 years ago a foresighted Park Commission was formed that created our 2,000+ acre, forested oasis that now sits within densely populated suburbs. Second, that our Conservancy has existed since 2000 to supplement the work of the County to enhance the reservation's ecology and infrastructure, to serve as an advocate, and to offer programs in this wilderness at our doorstep. And finally, that hundreds of diligent volunteers give back to their community as stewards of this remarkable park, each year providing over 5,000 hours of service. A simple number provides an indication of how they make a difference: this year, our Chainsaw Gang removed 241 trees from trails (close to 100 from the late September windstorm!). We alone do this. The County addresses parking areas and roads but not the reservation's trails except for an occasional tree too large for us to handle (for which we thank them).

**If you want to be a part of keeping the South Mountain Conservancy financially secure so that it can continue its mission for another quarter century, please remember us in this season and become a [member or donate](#).**

**If you are currently a member, donor, or a stalwart volunteer, we thank you for your commitment. We could not do this without you!**



Trail Work Crew constructing the new Lenape Trail crossing at the Beech Brook Cascades, November

For hundreds, perhaps even thousands, the South Mountain Reservation has been an essential part of their lives—whether they visit only monthly or almost daily. From walking a dog, hiking the miles of trails, visiting the Fairy Trail, exploring new sculptures, picnicking, participating in the Conservancy's public events and free hikes, or engaging in dozens of volunteer opportunities, the Reservation enhances our lives in countless ways throughout every season.

This was brought home this week when the Conservancy received a donation with this simple written declaration: **"We love our 'Rez.'"**



Building fairy houses and toasting marshmallows at the SMR Spring Family Campout, May

**If you feel that way and want to help us continue to make a difference, please [become a member or donate](#). There are funds that focus on our General Activities, the Fairy Trail, the Wildflower Sculpture Park, and our broad initiative of Forest Stewardship. All add to our multi-faceted “Rez.”**

In many ways, 2025 was an exceptionally productive year as the Conservancy pursued goals through Advocacy, hands-on Stewardship, and Public Programs. Some of the highlights are:



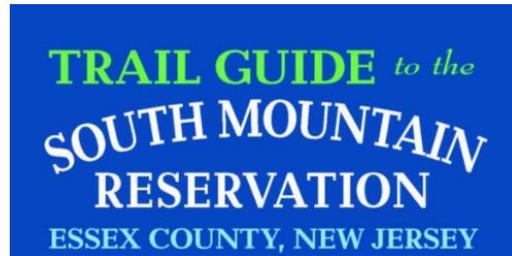
“Green Whale” lowered onto foundation by crane, October

**Conservancy Infrastructure:**

- **The “Green Whale”:** Conservancy equipment, tools and materials have found a new home in a 40-foot, 8,000 lb. steel shipping container donated by Mark Minnett of MTS Towing in Irvington. A concerted effort by dozens of volunteers over months constructed the foundation and cleaned and painted the container (see the slide show [HERE](#)). We thank John Sowell for securing the container and the County Parks Department for allowing us to install it and providing gravel for the foundation.

**Updated Conservancy Publication:**

- **[2025 SMR Trail Guide, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition](#):** The revision of the Dave Hogenauer’s original guide by Dennis Percher offers updated trail descriptions and new features such as additional hikes, information on picnic areas, unusual entrances and an index. Don’t leave home without it!



**Advocacy**

- **\$1M NJ Green Acres-County Open Space Grant:** The County agreed to the priorities set by the Conservancy to improve eroded woods roads for better emergency access and to make significant improvements to the Fairy Trail. Surveying, funded separately by the County, was completed in late 2025, with improvements planned for spring 2026.
- **Forest Stewardship Initiative:** The County agreed to partner with the Conservancy to implement a 10-year program for managing emerging invasive plants based on a [study](#) funded by the Conservancy in 2024. Initial work began in 2025 through a contract with [FoHVOS-NJISST](#) and plans are being made for next year.

**Stewardship- Ecology**

- **Forest Regeneration:** Dozens of volunteers and two paid summer interns maintained the Preserve and neighboring regeneration sites. Volunteers removed tens of thousands of invasive plants and we’ve nearly eliminated the worst invasive trees in the Wildflower Preserve: Tree of Heaven (a favorite of Spotted Lanternfly) and Aralia (Japanese Angelica Tree), using limited, targeted herbicide applications.



Forest Regeneration volunteers at the Preserve with coordinators Rich Rockwell (green shirt) and Tom Pollard (r)

- **Pollinator Meadow:** The acre-sized meadow began to show growth after seeding a year ago. A \$10k grant from the Hyde and Watson Foundation will allow perimeter fencing next year (to be installed by volunteers). A high school advisory group is helping plan the pathways within the meadow.
- **Citizen Science:** Data collection continues with FrogWatch USA volunteers. Maintenance of Hawk Hill nest boxes and data collection also occurred through NestWatch.

**Stewardship-Infrastructure**

- **Lenape Trail:** Major reroutes at Beech Brook Cascades with an all-out push over three months to avoid two rickety bridges and north of Ball's Bluff earlier in the year.
- **Drainage Improvements:** Water bars and drainage swale clearing along the River, Oakdale and Ball's Bluff and West Connector trails. Gravel improvements were made on the Fairy Trail.
- **Trash Tacklers:** Cleaner trails and picnic areas were the result of 530 hours of volunteer time and the removing of 234 bags of trash!



Livingston's Young Men's Service League (YMSL) join Trash Tacklers, August

- **Repairing Forest Regeneration Fencing at several sites**

*All this cannot happen without financial backing.  
Memberships and donations make the difference.  
Click [HERE](#) to join this effort.*

**Public Engagement:**

- **Free Hikes:** 51 hikes led the way for over 500 participants.

- **SMR Spring Family Campout:** 43 families with young children took part in our award winning, nature-focused, overnight campout. The next campout will be in the fall.
- **Mayapple Trail Runs:** 202 runners braved the challenging trails in routes ranging from 5 to 50 miles again this year. In 2026, the event is scheduled for Saturday, May 16th. Start getting in shape!



Racers at start of 5, 10 and 20-mile Mayapple Trail Runs, May



- **Fairy Tales at the Fairy Trail:** The third annual event was held in May with an estimated 500+ people attending. Several local businesses helped sponsor the event. Prizes were given for the most [exceptional houses](#). Plus another local [magazine](#) featured the Fairy Trail (on page 10).
- **Wildflower Sculpture Park:** A range of activities were held this year with new exhibits, an opening in September, artist walks, and the first-ever eight-week artist residency program which developed new art installations by local Essex County artists.

*Again, this does not happen without  
financial and volunteer backing.  
Click [HERE](#) to chip in.*

As jazz musician Bill Tally sang in his memorable [tribute](#) to the South Mountain Reservation at our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration last year:

*South Mountain Reservation, the place for recreation...  
South Mountain Reservation, don't need no invitation.  
Sixty miles of trails, who's going to repair them?  
SMC does, so we can share them.*

[Become a member today](#) to help ensure that the “Rez” is here for generations to come. And if you are now a member or volunteer, know that your commitment makes a difference.

See you on the trails,

Dennis Percher, Chair and the Board of Trustees  
South Mountain Conservancy