

# Middle Township's Open Space and Recreation Team Takes a Class Trip

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Dave Golden of the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife identifies the Lizard Tail Swamp and Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Areas. Frank Weiss Photo.

3 of 3

**COURT HOUSE** – Most Township residents are familiar with the Martin Luther King Center in Whitesboro and the Davies Recreation Complex on Goshen Road, but do they know that you can launch a kayak into Sluice Creek at the Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Area, or fish in the Delaware Bay from the public jetty at Reed’s Beach? Did you know that Ockie Wisting has a total of 86 acres? In order to learn more about the lesser known recreation facilities in the Township, the Open Space and Recreation Plan Project Team toured eight sites on Thur. looking for ways to improve public information and access.

Middle Township was awarded \$8,000 by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) to develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan. The funding was provided by ANJEC’s 2012 Sustainable Land Use Planning Grant, available to municipalities that have an Environmental Commission. Mayor Dan Lockwood stated “Some of Middle Township’s greatest resources are its open space and recreational amenities. This project is the next step in analyzing ways for us to improve and preserve these areas for our community and our children. I am excited to be part of such a proactive approach to managing and developing Middle Township.”

The Project Team, made up of representatives of the Township Environmental Commission and Recreation Advisory Board, along with Federal, State, County and non-profit land conservation and environmental groups (such as the Wetlands and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions) toured the following site in Middle Township: Lizard Tail Swamp and Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Area on Dennisville-Court House Road; Reeds Beach and Bidwells Jetty; Cook’s Beach; Songbird Trail at the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge on Kimball’s Beach Road; Norbury’s Landing and County Park South in Del Haven; and Ockie Wisting site (formerly Fort Apache Campground).

There was a consensus among the group that Middle Township has some very special places that are underutilized, and that improving public information and expanding accessibility is a worthwhile effort such partnering with Cape May County government in exploring a new way to direct visitors to the municipalities through a coordinated signage system. Wayfinding signage throughout the county will help to brand all of the communities as one destination. Understanding the limited resources available for improvements, and the desire to minimize the human footprint at these environmentally sensitive areas, the group discussed improvements tailored to each site such as: improving signage identifying the locations and directing people to it; creating connectivity of trails linking the different recreational facilities to each other; improve aesthetics by removing debris; increase educational opportunities through interpretive signage; expand recreational opportunities by creating a launch area or constructing observation platforms.

In the next few weeks, the Project Team will be releasing a questionnaire for the public to provide input on the future of open space and recreation in the Township. In January, a public meeting will be held to discuss the results of the questionnaire and to set goals.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan will set forth a long term vision for the Township. The Plan was funded by a grant from the NJ Association of Environmental Commissions.