

My Story



Landscape Improvements

High School Park

By Kevin Reis, Restoration Manager

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High School Park is an 11.5-acre open space along the Tookany Creek in Cheltenham Township. This passive recreation park is an open space comprising of the creek and riparian area; a small tulip-poplar and red maple woodland; and a wildflower grass meadow. The park is enjoyed by dog walkers, nature lovers, and residents of the Elkins



Keystone Fund Investment: \$237,500

Local Funds Leveraged: \$373,500

Park community and surrounding neighborhoods. Park stewardship is supported by the work of The Friends of High School Park (FHSP), an over 20-year-old organization of neighbors that works with the township to maintain the park.

In 1995, High School Park was created in this suburb of Philadelphia with the help of the Montgomery County Open Space Acquisition Program. In 2012, the park received grant money from the Department of Conservation

and Natural Resources (DCNR) Keystone Fund to address stormwater concerns in the park. The projects funded by grants have improved the overall landscape and allowed FHSP to educate visitors on native plants and stormwater issues in our area.

In my time at High School Park, I have seen its wildlife diversity and habitat value markedly increase because of this work. Resident birders have reported almost four times the amount of migratory birds using the park now. Foxes have been seen roaming the meadow trails and resident hawks are a near-constant presence. This past spring, I spotted a bald eagle in the creek while walking my dog. All this points to greater diversity and better stormwater management in our community.

Learn more at [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.KeystoneFund.org).

Because of the improvements made possible by the DCNR grant money, FHSP has been able to dedicate its resources to other projects within the park, which utilize the improved landscape. We have designed a meadow walkway, placed new seating areas, and provided more birdhouses. Organizations in the area such as the Wyncote Audubon Society have begun using the park for bird walks. Visitors sit on benches surrounded by the meadow, birds and insects flying past their heads. Improvements like this allow our organization to better serve the visitors, as well as the ecology.



In my work at the park I have been able to better utilize the volunteers who come to weed out invasive plants, while teaching them about the landscape. I have hosted elementary school groups and graduate level classes to use the park as an outdoor classroom. Many of them are learning about the park and ecological processes for the first time. Additionally, I have had multiple classes from Temple University utilize the park for plant surveys, landscape analysis, and other academic projects.

The park and its improvements have become an anchor in the overall landscape of Elkins Park and surrounding communities. The influence from the work done at the park has radiated through the neighborhood with residents, businesses, and the municipality embracing native plants and habitat in their backyard.

[Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.](https://www.KeystoneFund.org)