



ANJEC REPORT

Local Environment Matters

SUMMER 2026

Inside:

- Special section — Celebrating the NJ Highlands
- Tackling data center threats
- Removing high hazard dams



*ANJEC
Executive
Director
Jennifer Coffey*

Photo by Taylor McFarland

Director's Report

Apparently, no good deed does go unpunished.

For 17 years, I have worked with scientists, policy makers, local officials, floodplain managers, developers, insurance company experts and more to relentlessly support the development of building standards that better protect New Jersey residents from the escalating impacts of flooding induced by climate change. Anyone who has lived in NJ for a little while knows that we have flooding problems. We just have too much water, except when we don't have enough of it, but that's for another conversation.

Science shows that NJ will continue to experience larger rainstorms followed by longer periods of dryness that can lead to drought. Science also shows that our State will experience at least 4.4 feet of sea level rise by the year 2100.

The New Jersey Protecting Against Climate Threats Resilient Environments and Landscapes (NJPACT REAL) regulations were adopted by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in January. The NJPACT REAL rules are common sense regulations that require any new residential development or critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, roads, police and fire stations, to be built above the year 2100 floodplain level. The rules will protect what matters: lives, family homes and critical infrastructure paid for with public tax dollars.

The NJPACT REAL rules also incorporate first-time requirements for stormwater

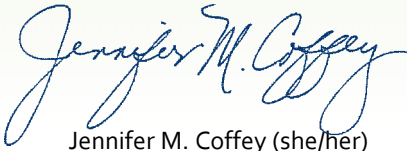
management on redevelopment projects, with additional protections for wetlands, permit efficiency measures and faster permitting for nature-based solutions, including green infrastructure projects.

The NJPACT REAL rules are scheduled to become effective as of July 20, 2026. And now, after incredible coordination and struggle to adopt science-based climate resiliency policy, some members of the NJ Legislature are trying to stop the DEP from implementing the rules. Senate Continuing Resolution (SCR) 106 (primary sponsors: Senate President Nicholas Scutari and Senators John Burzichelli and Michael Testa) and Assembly Continuing Resolution (ACR) 59 (primary sponsor Assemblyman Antwan McClellan) have been introduced alleging that the DEP doesn't have the authority to adopt the floodplain maps and regulate development for safety within NJ's floodplains. However, the State's *Flood Hazard Area Control Act*, as adopted by the NJ Legislature, explicitly directs the DEP to "adopt rules and regulations which delineate as flood hazard areas such areas as, in the judgment of the department, the improper development and use of which would constitute a threat to the safety, health and general welfare from flooding." (NJSA 58:16A-52)

Here's one of the problems: with a continuing resolution, there is no opportunity for veto by NJ's governor. There's also no check to balance the incorrect informa-


tion in a continuing resolution. So, we are facing a disinformation campaign by developers against the NJPACT REAL rules. As a result, some mayors are understandably upset by misinformation about what the rules will do, taking root in the form of the continuing resolution that will prevent the implementation of science-based, common-sense rules under careful development for more than a decade.

We need your help to protect New Jersey lives, homes and critical infrastructure. Please call your one State senator and two members of the Assembly and tell them that you want New Jersey to be a leader and build more resilient communities. Ask your elected officials to VOTE NO on SCR106/ACR59.



Jennifer M. Coffey (she/her)
Executive Director

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Executive Director Jennifer M. Coffey
Editor Julie Lange Groth

The mission of ANJEC is to promote local action to protect and restore New Jersey's natural resources and to ensure healthy communities for today and the future. ANJEC advances its mission by engaging in equitable and inclusive practices through leadership, partnerships, education, advocacy for strong public policy, and in support of environmental commissions, public officials, and communities throughout New Jersey.

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On the cover: Wildflowers on Sparta Mountain

Photo by Dwight Hiscano

Stemming the surge in data centers

By **Randi K Rothmel**, ANJEC Project Director

Thousands of data centers exist across the US, housing computers used for IT, data-managing services and artificial intelligence (AI). Nearly 600 of these are considered hyperscale centers drawing over 100 MW of power. The US Department of Energy predicts these centers will consume 12 percent of all energy usage in the US by 2028. Training AI models demand unprecedented levels of energy – a typical ChatGPT prompt can consume 10 times as much energy as a Google search.

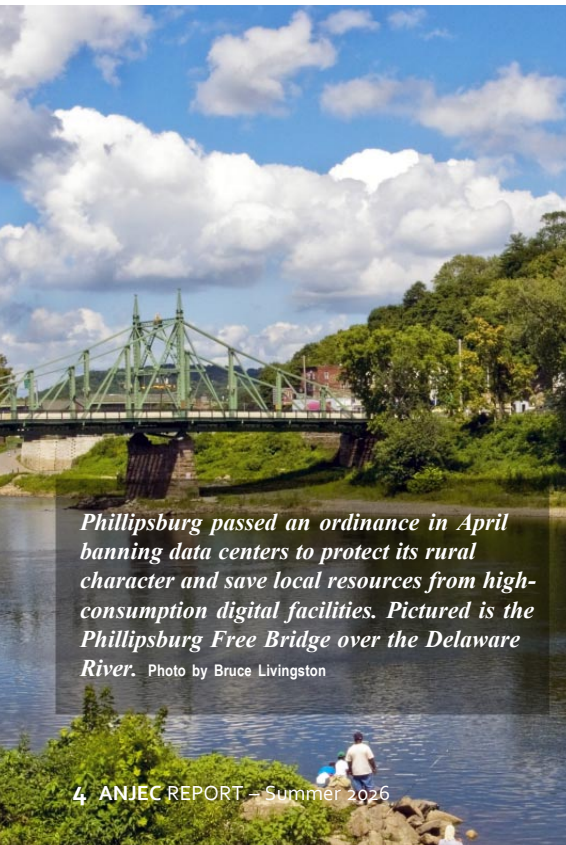
NJ is becoming an AI data center battleground, with more than 80 data centers operating or under construction. A few examples are:

- A massive \$17 billion, 300-MW AI data center (DataOne) in Vineland, consuming double the entire city's energy use;
- CoreWeave — a \$1.8 billion, 250-MW project in Kenilworth – with a \$250 million State tax credit, expected to be operational by 2027;
- Earth Station 76 (150 MW) is under construction in Logan Township, scheduled to open later this year.

The environmental costs

While data centers promise jobs, tax revenue and long-term economic growth, these massive facilities run 24/7, consuming enormous amounts of water and electricity, often rivaling small cities. A single large AI-focused data center can consume as much electricity as 100,000 homes. Resulting demand for electricity is increasing faster than new resources can be added to the shared 13-state PJM electrical grid. Electric bills for NJ residents have already jumped about 20 percent in the last year.

Data centers also run hot, and those designed to cool with water require massive amounts. A hyperscale center can require three to seven million gallons per day, and water-based cooling systems frequently require chemical additives to control bacteria, algae and corrosion. These chemicals are eventually discharged as wastewater (“blowdown water”), contaminating rivers, lakes and municipal treatment systems if not properly managed, and chemical drift off the cooling towers can affect nearby communities. When systems are designed with air cooling, even more electricity is required for operation.



Phillipsburg passed an ordinance in April banning data centers to protect its rural character and save local resources from high-consumption digital facilities. Pictured is the Phillipsburg Free Bridge over the Delaware River. Photo by Bruce Livingston



Amazon web services data center in Arizona

Photo by Tedder

acceptable use and others are looking to adopt new ordinances.

Most AI facilities rely on large banks of diesel backup generators to ensure uninterrupted power. These generators emit high levels of nitrogen oxides, particulates and carbon monoxide – pollutants linked to asthma, heart disease and premature death.

The constant noise generated by data center cooling fans and mechanical equipment can exceed 96 dBA, well over the OSHA threshold of 85 dBA for hearing damage. In addition, 24-hour security systems are required that disrupt nearby neighborhoods, creating significant quality-of-life impacts.

These huge hyperscale AI centers are replacing forests, open space and agricultural land, fragmenting wildlife habitat, increasing stormwater runoff and permanently altering local land-use patterns.

Resistance mounts

NJ is seeing fierce, organized pushback from residents, who say these facilities threaten their water supplies, electricity costs and quality of life. Last February, hundreds of people packed a New Brunswick council meeting and successfully blocked a proposed AI data center. Concerns about electricity and water consumption prevailed and now the site will be developed for mixed use, including a public park, apartments and small business warehouses.

A few towns have already revised their zoning ordinances to ban them as an

Phillipsburg, Monroe and Pemberton Townships (to name a few municipalities) moved preemptively to adopt ordinances prohibiting data centers entirely, blocking the structures before they could even materialize.

In Vineland, the battle continues. Residents report construction noise complaints, concerns about gas emissions and fears surrounding water usage near the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer, the region's main source of drinking water. The site is also in a Wellhead Protection Area safeguarding the aquifer. While 85 percent of the energy for the facility is said to come from a natural gas pipeline, a liquified natural gas (LNG) facility is also being requested onsite to ensure uninterrupted power. Twenty million gallons of water will be required annually according to DataOne's CEO, which will be generated utilizing waste heat to extract moisture from the air, a claim yet to be verified.

Legislation on the way

A proposed State law (S680/A1170) would require data centers to submit a plan showing that all their electricity will come from new, clean energy sources and to pay their fair share. A second bill (S731/A796) aims to shield households and small businesses from electric bill hikes caused by large data centers.


In the US Congress, three separate laws have been proposed:

1. directing states to create new energy rate classes specifically for data centers and requiring them to secure their own power supplies;
2. requiring study of the impacts of AI Centers; and
3. imposing a freeze on AI data centers until safeguards are established.

At least 12 states have or are considering moratoriums, including New York, and there is a push to pass one in NJ.

Municipalities can also adopt stronger safeguards before allowing AI data centers to outpace local land use planning. A model ordinance developed by the Pinelands Alliance banning data center

development can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/kafzww76>.

Stay informed about local zoning and redevelopment decisions and get engaged early in providing input into AI data center development proposals in your town. 

More info

ANJEC, the Pinelands Alliance and the NJ Environmental Justice Alliance have been taking a lead in addressing data centers.

- Informative webinar – www.youtube.com/@anjecviews5871/videos
- Pineland Alliance website – <https://pinelandsalliance.org/datacenters/>
- Environmental Justice Alliance – <https://njeja.org/clean-air-not-ai/>

Dam removal

Reduce risk. Reduce costs. Restore your local waterway.

By **Beth Styler Barry**, Director of the Freshwater Program,
The Nature Conservancy

For a mix of historical, geographic and practical reasons, New Jersey has a lot of dams. The State was heavily developed very early in US history during a time when dams were commonly built to power grist mills, sawmills, iron works and textile factories. Before the advent of steam power and electricity, flowing water was a primary source of energy. As a result, nearly every town had at least one mill and, therefore, a dam. Even after these mills closed, many of the dams remained in place.

Altogether, there are more than 1,700 regulated dams overseen by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Dam Safety. Just over 500 of these dams are owned by towns or counties. Of these dams, 86 are considered to have High Hazard Potential (likely to cause loss of life or extensive property damage), and 146 are considered to have Significant

Why remove a dam?

- Eliminates long-term inspection and maintenance costs;
- Reduces public safety liability;
- Provides safer recreation for anglers, paddlers and waders;
- Restores healthier waterways; and
- Potentially reduces nearby flooding.

Hazard Potential (likely to cause significant damage to property or infrastructure, but not loss of human life).

The burdens of dam ownership

Many municipalities and counties find themselves owners of one or more dams, some them acquired after land is donated for open space. Although these dams may no longer serve their original purpose, they

*The Paulina Dam
before removal in 2002*

Photo by Beth Styler Barry



*The Paulina River
one year after
removal*

Photo by Beth Styler Barry

still require maintenance, inspection and occasional repairs, all of which can mean a line item on an already strained municipal budget.

In addition to the cost of complying with NJ Dam Safety regulations, these dams often present a public safety hazard, especially those located on public recreation space. Sometimes these dams can make flooding worse for roads, houses and businesses in the area.

As the financial, legal and safety burdens of dam ownership continue to grow, NJ towns are increasingly viewing dam removal as a more practical and sustainable alternative. Aging dams often require costly inspections, engineering studies, repairs, liability insurance and emergency action planning – expenses that can strain municipal budgets, especially when the dam no longer serves a clear public purpose. At the same time, the risks associated with dam failure have risen due to climate change-driven extreme rainfall, increasing a town's potential exposure to upstream and downstream flooding,

property damage and loss of life. In contrast, dam removal is typically a one-time capital project, often supported by state or federal funding, after which long-term maintenance and liability disappear.

Some New Jersey towns and counties have already opted for removal.

- After more than a decade of considering removal and making repairs to the Lake Hudsonia Dam, Rockaway Township removed it in 2021.
- Similarly, the Borough of Bernardsville Council decided in 2022 to proceed with removal of the Memorial Park Dam after comparing the costs of continuing maintenance and repairs; they plan to complete its removal in 2026.
- In addition to relief from the cycle of inspections and repairs, Blairstown saw the return of the iconic American shad to the Paulins Kill after the removal of the Paulina Dam.

Last January, The Nature Conservancy partnered with ANJEC to deliver an online program for elected and appointed local government officials. During this presenta-

tion representatives from the New Jersey Statewide Dam Removal Partnership covered several topics of interest to local government dam owners, including: "Dam Removal 101;" "Dam Ownership in New

Jersey;" "Dam Removal and MS4 Requirements;" and "Funding Your Dam Removal." A recording of this webinar can be viewed at (<https://tinyurl.com/4thakyfr>).



By **Robyn Jeney**, South Jersey Regional Manager, New Jersey Conservation Foundation; **Michele Gaynor**, ANJEC Resource Center; **Jennie Aylward**, ANJEC Volunteer; **N. Dini Checko**, ANJEC Project Director; and **Julie Lange Groth**, ANJEC Report Editor

Conservation in sight after decades of advocacy

In March, New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJ Conservation) signed a contract to purchase approximately 835 acres in southwestern Evesham Township, known as the Black Run Headwaters property. For years, the forested headwaters adjacent to the 1,300-acre Township-owned Black Run Preserve have remained vulnerable to development, despite their importance to water quality, wildlife habitat and the health of the Rancocas Creek.

The property in the New Jersey Pinelands was originally designated under less restrictive development standards in 1980 due to the presence of an existing landfill and its anticipated impacts on water quality. After years of scientific monitoring and data analysis, the area was formally recognized as supporting one of the most pristine subwatersheds of the Rancocas Creek.

For decades, NJ Conservation, ANJEC, the Pinelands Alliance, the

An autumnal pond on the Black Run Headwaters property in Evesham Township

Photo by Robyn Jeney



Rancocas Conservancy, Friends of the Black Run Preserve and others advocated for the implementation of planning strategies recommended in the NJ Pinelands Commission's 2006 *Southern Medford/Evesham Plan* and a 2008 Ecological Integrity Assessment. Despite efforts by the Pinelands Commission and Evesham Township, only minor progress was made.

In 2000, NJ Conservation began working with the landowner towards a conservation acquisition. In early 2026, Linda Samost, on behalf of her family's company, Kettle Run Investments LP, agreed with other owners to sell the property to NJ Conservation for \$15 million – approximately \$2.4 million less than its full market value. Evesham Township subsequently agreed to accept ownership of the property and incorporate it into its adjacent Preserve.

With a contract now in place, NJ Conservation, in cooperation with the sellers, will move forward with the due diligence process typical of a conservation acquisition as we continue working with partners to finalize funding, ensuring that this vital landscape remains protected and accessible for future generations to enjoy.

– Robyn Jeney

Serving up *Environmental News You Can Use*

Environmental commissions (ECs) sometimes work behind the scenes, quietly maintaining and protecting their towns' natural resources. Residents often have no idea such a group exists, but the Morris Township EC works hard at getting their message out.

Their *Environmental News You Can Use* is an informative, engaging newsletter that offers residents practical, hands-on ideas and projects they can implement around their home and property.

(www.morristwp.com/QuickLinks.aspx?CID=134)

The EC publishes the digital newsletter nine to 12 times a year on a variety of environmental topics useful to people in

the community. It provides guidance for residents who want to incorporate sustainable practices in their daily lives. The newsletter was originally started four years ago by EC member Charlie Schacter. As it grew popular and more demanding of his time, he recruited others to help. All articles are written by EC members.

Since its inception, the newsletter has informed residents on over 100 wide-ranging environmental topics, including sustainable landscaping, native plants, anti-idling and light pollution reduction, to name a few. It's a helpful way to teach residents about new State laws impacting the environment, such as the *Invasive Species Management Act*, which can make for smoother implementation and enforcement.

The newsletter reaches over 800 residents/subscribers and 59 percent of them open it. *Environmental News You Can Use* is also included in the Township's monthly *Municipal Messenger* that reaches more than 3,800 residents, allowing the Commission's efforts to be further amplified.

Worthy news and action items like tree giveaways, plant sales, cleanup days and special presentations are broadcast in the newsletter. In-person EC events have had greater attendance and participation thanks to the newsletter.

Siva Jonnada, Township Council liaison to the EC, commented that in all the years the newsletter has been in existence, there has been nothing but praise and admiration for it.

– Michele Gaynor

A winning project in Highland Park

At ANJEC's silent auction last fall, the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership (LRWP) won a guided tour of the beautiful Highlands Park Meadows (The Meadows) and the Raritan River Trail. On March 29, the Highland Park Environmental Commission (HPEC) hosted a wonderful and informative walk.



Collin Marx standing in front of a native flower garden planted in honor of his father, Richard Marx II, in The Meadows, an 18-acre recovering urban forest along the Raritan River in Highland Park Photo by Heather Fenyk

The Meadows is an 18-acre recovering urban forest along the Raritan River in Highland Park that demonstrates how formerly degraded land can become an ecological treasure. HPEC and the Meadows Trail Crew were awarded an ANJEC Open Space Grant to support improvements, including boardwalk replacement and construction of an observation deck. This

conservation-zoned site is now listed on the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Open Space Inventory, and what was once a municipal landfill has evolved into a thriving habitat.

The tour explored trails built and maintained by HPEC and the Meadows Trail Crew, highlighting the site's transformation and ecological value. The Meadows also serves as a critical bird migration stopover, and sites like this – urban forest recovery areas – are rare.

Many thanks to Craige Ambroch of the Meadows Trail Crew for sharing his deep knowledge of this special place.

– N. Dini Checko

Signs of success for Lawrence Township bioengineering project

This spring, new branches and buds appeared on fledgling trees along a Shabakunk Creek tributary, heralding success for a pilot demonstration bioengineering project led by Lawrence Township's Environmental & Green Advisory Committee (EGAC). The newly rooted trees were planted as dormant branches one year before, as reported in the Summer 2025 ANJEC Report (<https://tinyurl.com/mvfwxaj7>). This "live staking" project was designed to prevent erosion of the tributary bank and stop silt and pollutants from washing into Colonial Lake.

The Township uses downstream water quality testing and modeling calculations to evaluate the impact of the project, and erosion is also assessed visually, looking at before-and-after photos of the site.

"We've completed a second planting phase to build on early establishment and lessons learned," said EGAC member Annette Loveless. The intent was to prove the viability of the live-staking methods

Annette Loveless evaluates the progress of the live staking project in April.
Courtesy of Annette Loveless



and materials, such that the project could be replicated in other locations in Lawrence Township and beyond (page 2). Future projects may benefit from a new permitting process for nature-based restoration projects included in the new NJPACT REAL regulations that ANJEC advocated.

Reflecting on progress along the stream bank, Loveless said that EGAC benefited from building trust over time with municipal partners, volunteers and the public, including residents of the immediate area. "It's taken us years to develop the relationships and also

build the trust” among neighbors and partners, she said.

Loveless noted that after about two years, more live stakes can be harvested from the original plants, to enable further plantings in

new locations where erosion and water contamination are a problem. “Let’s do this in all of our streams!” she said.

– Jennie Aylward

A walk on the wild side – with bats

The Wildlife Conservation & Education Center is preparing for another bat walk, building on the success of a similar event at the Ridgefield Park Nature Preserve last May, where about 45 to 50 people came to learn about the winged mammals.

The exact location of that event was not disclosed beforehand to help protect the local bat colony and keep them safe from disturbance. As the crowd waited for sunset, they heard a talk about the types of bats in NJ and their importance to the environment, including the little brown bat, big brown bat, northern long-eared bat and the Indiana bat, which is listed as endangered both in NJ and federally.

Joseph D’Angeli, Director of the Wildlife Center and a licensed chiropterologist, led the walk and fielded questions from participants. One person asked about the outbreak

of White-nose Syndrome, caused by a fungus (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*) with no known cure. It has caused a population decline of 72 to 88 percent of hibernating bat species in the north-eastern US.

D’Angeli and some assistants carried listening devices that could detect a bat’s echolocation call. Soon multiple bats flew over for their evening hunt. Some stayed above the treetops while others swooped down to gather food.

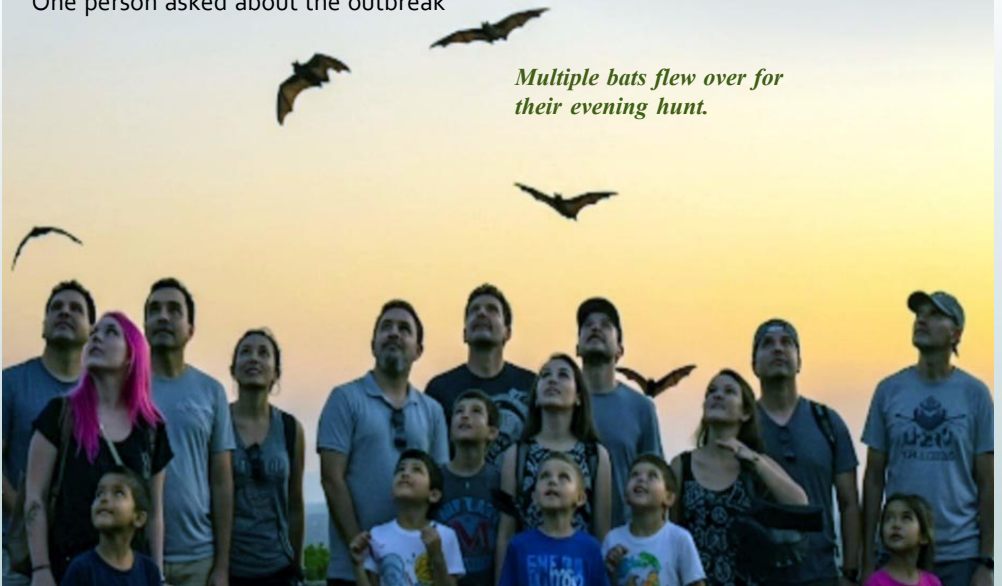
One young man in a bat costume said he had asked guests at his birthday party to donate to The Wildlife Conservation & Education Center (<https://thebatcave.org/>) instead of bringing gifts.

– Julie Lange Groth

More info

National Invasive Species Information Center – <https://tinyurl.com/453ptj78>

Multiple bats flew over for their evening hunt.



NJ's Highlands: A land of pristine waters and unique resources

By **Julia Somers**, Executive Director, the NJ Highlands Coalition

After more than 16 years of advocacy, the New Jersey Highlands were recognized as a special region in our State through bi-partisan approval of the 2004 *New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act*. The effort was led by the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, then a program of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and today an independent nonprofit organization.

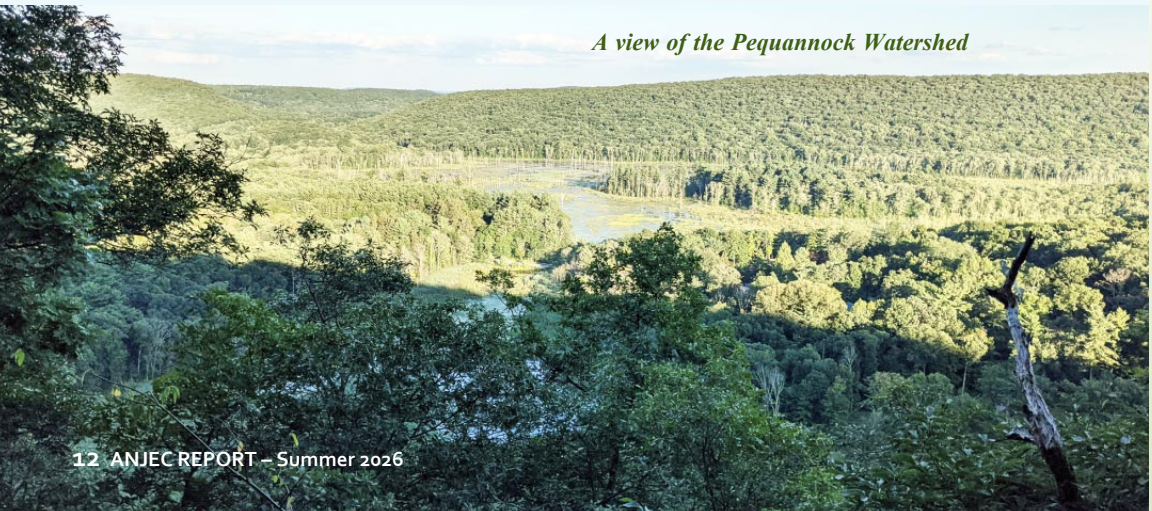
The region stretches from the Delaware River in Warren and Hunterdon Counties to the New York State border. It covers approximately 1,300 square miles and includes 88 municipalities, made up of portions of seven counties (Bergen, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Warren).

Long recognized for its scenic beauty and environmental significance, the region

encompasses rolling hills, pastoral valleys, steep ridges, diverse forests and critical wildlife habitats. It is also rich with extraordinary historic, cultural and archaeological resources. It held a central place in American Revolutionary War era history – iron mining (thanks to the availability of iron ore, furnaces and wood to fire them) was a primary reason George Washington spent so much time in the Highlands during the Revolution.

The Morris Canal, a critical 102-mile transportation route connecting the Delaware River at Phillipsburg to the Hudson River in Jersey City, is considered an engineering marvel of its time, used largely to transport anthracite coal serving agrarian settlements and early industry. Astonishingly, more types of fluorescent rock are found in the Highlands than

A view of the Pequannock Watershed





anywhere else in the world! The area around Franklin Borough (Sussex) and Ogdensburg is recognized as the “Fluorescent Mineral Capital of the World.” It possesses the highest concentration of such minerals known anywhere, with over 90 types identified. A total of more than 360 mineral species are found in this area, including dozens found nowhere else on earth. Visit the Stirling Hill Mining Museum or the Franklin Mineral Museum websites (www.franklinmineralmuseum.org) to learn more.

A precious wellspring

Although the region covers less than 15 percent of the State’s land area, 70 percent of NJ residents get some or all their drinking water from the Highlands, including eight of 10 people living in overburdened communities. The headwaters of several of the State’s major river systems rise in the Highlands, including the: Passaic, Raritan, Wallkill, Wanaque, Pequannock, Pequest, Musconetcong, Lopatcong, Pohatcong, Whippany and Rockaway Rivers.

The region is, in fact, so special that a unique State agency – the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (page 16) – was created by the 2004 Act to oversee protection of its myriad resources, particularly its water supply.

With its abundant and varied natural and cultural resources, the region’s economic future depends on an active agricultural industry and on visitation, recreation and tourism. Consider that one in nine US residents – more than 20 million people – live within a two-hour drive of the Highlands. Clearly, economic opportunities abound and well-reasoned, cooperative planning continues to be key to a healthy and prosperous future for the region that a large majority of the State’s residents depend on. More recently, when the new *State Development and Redevelopment Plan* was adopted by the State Planning Commission last year, it included the provision that the *State Plan* recognizes the *Highlands Regional Master Plan* as the State land use plan applicable for the Highlands Region.

The 2008 *Highlands Regional Master Plan* was adopted to guide planning decisions in the region made by State agencies, Highlands counties and municipalities.

A coalition of caring

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition truly is a coalition of organizations that take many forms. Leading nonprofit groups active in northern New Jersey are member organizations, as are grassroots groups of all descriptions, environmental commissions, businesses with a presence in the Highlands, historic and cultural groups – well over 100 and growing

every day. If they concur with our mission, which is to advocate for the protection of the Highlands' natural and cultural resources, they are welcome.

They support us because we:

- safeguard the Highlands water and forest resources by advocating for effective strategies and strong environmental and land use policies, including the implementation of the *Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act* and the *Highlands Regional Master Plan*;
- educate about the Highlands' critical role in ensuring clean water, climate resilience and economic viability in the immediate region and beyond;

- activate and empower a coalition of people and organizations who care about the Highlands and its role in the State's water supply;
- provide expert support to our many grassroots groups to amplify their community-based advocacy efforts; and
- lead advocacy efforts at every level of government to ensure the protection of all Highlands natural and cultural resources for every resident of the State.

You are welcome to join us too! Learn more at www.njhighlandscoalition.org.

**ANJEC is a proud member of
the NJ Highlands Coalition**



The Musconetcong River on Point Mountain at the Lebanon Twp./Mansfield Twp. border

Threats to the Highlands

By **Dylan Medici**, Director of Outreach and Education, New Jersey Highlands Coalition

When New Jersey enacted the *Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act* in 2004, the northwestern part of the State was in the midst of a major development boom. The completion of Interstates 80 and 78 several decades earlier had

connected NJ's relatively rural hinterlands to the New York City metropolitan region, effectively paving the way for rapid population and economic growth in what was once considered a remote area.

The *Highlands Act* sought to curb this

growth by limiting development across the seven-county Highlands region. Its purpose was to protect a critical water supply serving what was then roughly half of the State's population, as well as to preserve agricultural lands and high-integrity forests.

As many NJ residents recognize, development pressure in the State continues to intensify. Situated between the New York City and Philadelphia metropolitan areas, and with direct interstate access to the Port of New York and New Jersey, the Highlands remains an attractive area for both residential and commercial growth.

Although the *Act* has helped constrain certain types of development, it is ultimately a planning and protection framework rather than a preservation mandate. It does not directly prohibit development, permanently preserve land, or independently enforce regulations. Instead, it ensures that development, when it occurs, aligns with the *Act's* resource protection goals. Since its passage in 2004, however, a range of new and evolving threats to the Highlands have emerged.

Warehouse and data center development

In recent years, warehouse development has become a significant issue across the State, including within the Highlands. In the western portion of the region, where large expanses of flat farmland are common, warehouse construction has contributed to unnecessary urban sprawl and the permanent loss of agricultural soils and forests. Increased truck traffic on local roads has also created serious public safety concerns and persistent congestion.

The rapid expansion of data centers is increasing demand on water supplies, such as the Oak Ridge Reservoir.

More recently, the rapid expansion of data centers – driven by growing demand for information processing and artificial intelligence – has introduced new pressures, especially energy and water consumption. (Page 4)


At the same time, New Jersey continues to experience one of the fastest-growing populations in the Northeast, placing significant strain on its housing market. Municipalities are required to meet affordable housing obligations, but in the Highlands, these efforts can conflict with the need to protect a water supply that serves a majority of the State's residents. Towns attempting to adhere to the *Highlands Act* have faced legal challenges from the Fair Share Housing Center, while proposed State legislation could exempt certain affordable housing developments on nonprofit or church-owned land from local zoning requirements – potentially undermining the *Act's* authority.

Less visible than the construction of warehouses or data centers are efforts to weaken the *Highlands Act* that have persisted since its inception. The law remains controversial, as it restricts development across approximately 15 percent of the NJ's land area while effectively assigning it the burden of safeguarding a water supply for approximately seven million residents.

Despite its significance, many New Jerseyans remain unaware of the Highlands region and its critical role in the State's environmental and economic well-being. The combined New Jersey-New York Highlands region sees more annual visitors than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks combined, yet the region continues to suffer from an identity crisis

when compared to the neighboring tourism regions of Pennsylvania's Poconos or New York's Hudson Valley and Catskill Regions.

With a new marketing and branding plan

in place for the region, hopefully more people living and recreating in the Highlands region will learn of its significance and, importantly, invest in its future and advocate for its continued protection. 

The Highlands Council: Protector of the NJ Highlands Region



By **Benjamin L. Spinelli**, Executive Director,
New Jersey Highlands Water Protection
and Planning Council

In the tradition of the New Jersey
Pinelands Commission and the New Jersey
Meadowlands Commission (now the NJ
Sports and Exposition Authority), the New
Jersey Highlands Council was established
through an act of legislation to protect an
important natural area of the State for
generations to come. Passed in



*Lake Hopatcong viewed from
Memorial Beach in Mount
Arlington*



2004, the *New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act* is the youngest of these three siblings.

To truly understand the work of the Highlands Council today, it's necessary to go back in time a bit. In the decade preceding the adoption of the *Highlands*

Act, the region was subject to intense development pressure. On average, 17,000 acres of forested land and 8,000 acres of farmland were lost to new development annually. With more than half of NJ residents getting their drinking water from the region, this threat to the water supply led to the passage of the *Highlands Act* and

the creation of the Highlands Council.

The intention of the *Act* was two-fold. One aim was to slow or halt the overdevelopment that characterized the late 1990's and early 2000's. The second was to bring a unified, comprehensive and strategic approach to the management of the region's resources. The *Act* significantly reduced development pressure immediately by placing regulatory limits on the extension of sewer and water service in the region and prohibiting large subdivisions in about half of the region. At the same time, it charged the Council with overseeing the longer-term protection and stewardship of the natural and cultural resources within the Highlands Region through the development of a regional master plan.

Enter the Highlands Council

The Council and its professional staff of 23 work with the region's counties and municipalities to implement the *Highlands Act* by applying the goals, policies and objectives of the *Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP)* at the local level, which has been amended and strengthened repeatedly since its inception in 2008. The Highlands Council also has authority to review certain development projects in the region for consistency with the *RMP*.

While local governments throughout the Highlands are instrumental to successful *RMP* implementation, the Highlands Council also works closely with sister State agencies, non-governmental organizations and private entities to implement larger initiatives, such as watershed-based planning, development of regionwide

warehousing guidelines, climate guidance, affordable housing counseling and associated tools. This is necessary because in special resources areas, statewide guidance is often insufficient or doesn't consider specific needs and sensitivities. One example is forestry.

The best-available science recognizes the critical connection between healthy forests and water quality, quantity and timing the flow of water during extreme precipitation or drought. The Highlands exports more than 860 million gallons of clean drinking water to the rest of the State each day. Highlands water is distributed to 332 of the State's municipalities, including localities as far away as Gloucester County. In addition to residential use, the Highlands provides water to businesses vital to the economic well-being of NJ's agriculture, food and beverage, and pharmaceutical industries and others that rely on a reliable source of high-quality water.

Considering that 54 percent of the Highlands region is wooded with some of the best intact forests in the State, the Highlands Council developed region-specific forest guidance to supplement the "current" (1995) statewide guidance and provided it to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Although the statewide guidance has not yet been updated to reflect this, it helps inform activities in the region.

While the past 21 years have seen much success in implementation of the *Highlands Act*, the region still faces challenges, and the

Wanaque Reservoir as seen from Wyanokie High Point in Norvin Green State Forest, Ringwood



Highlands Council remains critically short staffed and underfunded, leaving important program areas unaddressed: Natural resources that were degraded at the time the *Highlands Act* was enacted either remain unaddressed or worse. Nearly 230 square miles of the Highlands remain vulnerable to development. Forests of the region are threatened by pests, disease, fragmentation, invasive species and other stresses. As illustrated by the ongoing drought warning, climate change and its effects provide a present and growing threat.



View from Merrill Creek Reservoir in Harmony Township

For all these reasons, protection of the Highlands is not a regional matter. It's an issue of statewide importance with dramatic implications not only for water supply, but also food production, flooding, forest health and the economy of the State.

The Council has an excellent website at www.nj.gov/njhighlands that is a fount of

information and also offers more detailed, public, mappable data than can be found almost anywhere else. 🌿

Rattlesnake hot spots in the Highlands

Though NJ is the most densely populated state in the Union, there are plenty of wild and natural areas that the endangered timber rattlesnake calls home. In the Highlands, they may be seen in the mountainous portions of Warren, Sussex, Passaic, Morris and Bergen Counties. Their dens



Timber rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus) - Photo by Peter Paplanus

are typically found on rocky, south-facing slopes where there is scant tree canopy.

You may encounter them in:

- Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area
 - Wawayanda State Park
 - Worthington State Forest
 - Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area.

If you see a rattlesnake:

- Stay calm and keep your distance from the snake (at least 15 feet).
- If possible, take a photograph of the snake.
- Report your observation online through NJ Wildlife Tracker (<https://tinyurl.com/3x5sma33>).
– Julie Lange Groth, Editor

Celebrating Earth

1 Parsippany Earth Week cleanup on Saturday, April 18 – *Courtesy Parsippany Twp.*

2 ANJEC Executive Director Jennifer Coffey and Trustee Laura Szwak at Church and Dwight Earth Day event on April 24 – *By Sheila Baker Gujral*

3 The Denville Environmental Commission held a ceremony to dedicate two new educational signs at Muriel Hepner Nature Park on April 24. – *By Laura Szwak*

4 The Earth Day Tree Giveaway and Community Farmers Market hosted by Neighborhood Collaborative Community Gardens in Camden – *By Kyle Krejdoski*

5 South Orange volunteers clean up the East Branch of the Rahway River on May 3 – *By Sheila Baker Gujral*

6 Environmental advocates held a press conference at the Earth Day hearing on NJ PACT REAL at the NJ State House on April 22. From left are: Anjuli Ramos, NJ Sierra Club; Allison McLeod, NJLCV; Jim Waltman, Watershed Institute; Michael Klein, Pineland Preservation Alliance; Daniel Greenhouse, Eastern Environmental Law Center; Lucia Ruggiero, American Littoral Society; and N. Dini Checko, ANJEC – *By Jackie Greger*

7 Daisy Troop 40282, Brownie Troops 40548 and 40025, and Girl Scout Troop 40998 helped plant the Roselle Park community garden on 4-18-26. *Courtesy Roselle Park EC*

8 Roxbury Environmental Commission led a stream cleanup on April 24 along Black River Pond in Succasunna. *Courtesy Roxbury EC*

9 Pittman Environmental Commission hosted their annual Earth Day event on April 18. *Courtesy Pittman EC*



Week 2026



The first people of the Highlands

By **Elliott Ruga**, Policy & Communications Director,
New Jersey Highlands Coalition

The era of “First Contact” is a milestone in history when the invasion of the lands of the native people of North America by Europeans began in earnest. Here on the East Coast the incursion was mostly completed by the time of the Revolutionary War – there would be no reason to fight a war for independence for a land that wasn’t fully owned by the colonists.

The era of First Contact is generally regarded as beginning in 1609 with Henry

Hudson’s encounter with the natives along New Jersey’s coast and at Sandy Hook. There were several meetings, some highly cordial and mutually respectful. Gifts were exchanged and food was shared. Other encounters were hostile and one resulted in an arrow shot through the neck of one of Hudson’s crew. Hudson was not the first explorer of the East Coast of North America – Giovanni da Verrazano, John Cabot, Cornelius Hendrikson and Juan Ponce DeLeon were here before him, and fur traders had been trading with the native peoples for decades. But Hudson’s adventure directly led to the Dutch West Indies Company’s expansive interest, which



From left, NYU/Langone's Dr. Judith Zelikoff, Chief Vincent Mann and Elliott Ruga of the NJ Highlands Coalition at the September 2025 press conference at the Ringwood Mines Superfund Site

institutionalized the seizure of native lands in the name of profit and the furtherance of Christian values.

The Lenape people of the Ramapos

The Munsee-speaking Lenape people roamed an area from the Raritan River, north to southern New York, northeastern Pennsylvania and southern Connecticut. After their lands were taken, after they were decimated by European diseases and after many were slaughtered in the occasional massacre, most of the remaining native people moved westward and out of the colonies by the mid-18th century. A few families stayed behind, however, seeking refuge in the Ramapo Mountains, where they remained in relative isolation until the successive rings of ever-expanding suburbia erased any buffer between the two cultures.

Today, three clans exist in the hills of the Ramapos where New Jersey and New York State meet. Vincent Mann is the Acting Tribal Chief for the Wolf, Deer and Turtle Clans of the Ramapough Lenape Nation. Formerly he was Chief of the Turtle Clan, who mostly reside in Upper Ringwood in and around the area of the former Peter's Mine complex. There, from 1967 through 1980, the Ford Motor Company dumped paint sludge and other highly toxic contaminants from its auto assembly plant in Mahwah.


Turtle Clan members were experiencing decimation from illnesses that resulted from exposure to the toxins in more than 25 million pounds of paint sludge. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed the land on the National Priorities List and declared it a Superfund Site in 1983. The agency declared the cleanup of the Ringwood Mines Superfund Site completed in 1994 and it was delisted from the National Priorities List, but Turtle Clan members continued to sicken and die.

In 2005, the *Bergen Record* completed an eight-month investigation and published a five-part series, "Toxic Legacy," that found persistent and extensive contamination

throughout the community. In 2006, the EPA, for the first time in its history, had to re-list a site. The EPA and Ringwood Borough have now agreed to a consent decree outlining the final phases of the cleanup, addressing groundwater contamination at a cost of \$3.4 million.

The EPA has deemed the site "Human Exposure Under Control." In 2025, however, NYU Langone Health completed a community health survey of the Turtle Clan, taking blood, urine and biometric sampling that found elevated levels of heavy metals, serum PFAs, C-reactive protein and other chemicals. These substances resulted in various exposure-related symptoms – an ongoing, serious health crisis that is not addressed in the consent decree.

The Ringwood Mines Superfund Site may never be fully cleaned up to the point of sustaining a healthy community. No one truly knows how much waste Ford dumped into Peter's Mine and the vicinity. Toxins are in the water, soil, air and in the game animals the Turtle Clan traditionally hunt.

In solidarity with Chief Mann and the Ramapough Lenape Nation, the NJ Highlands Coalition and New Jersey LCV are advocating for their relocation from the Ringwood Mines Superfund Site. We support continuing discussions with the Governor's Office, the Department of Environmental Protection and others, to build a low impact, natural resource-protective community with a public history component to help tell the true history of the native experience since First Contact: the dispossession of land, abuses, decimation and massacres – an undermining and destruction of a people that continues today. We of the dominant culture, who have inherited the relatively good life from the founders of this nation in our pursuits of happiness, owe the Ramapough the support they need so they can reclaim their dignity, prosper and find a productive and meaningful place in contemporary society. 

Bringing back the night sky

By Cheryl Reardon, ANJEC Project Director

Many of us remember looking up at the night sky and making a wish while reciting this childhood nursery rhyme: “Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight – wish I may, wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight.”

Sadly for people of all ages, the stars look dimmer due to light pollution, especially for those in cities and suburbs. When people first went to space, it became dramatically evident how much humans were altering the night sky. Cities are easily viewable from the International Space Station at night and astronauts have observed the light pollution growing as cities sprawl ever larger.

Rural places aren’t off the hook either. Over-lighting can happen anywhere unshielded light causes glare, light trespass and upward scattered light.

What is light pollution and what are its impacts?

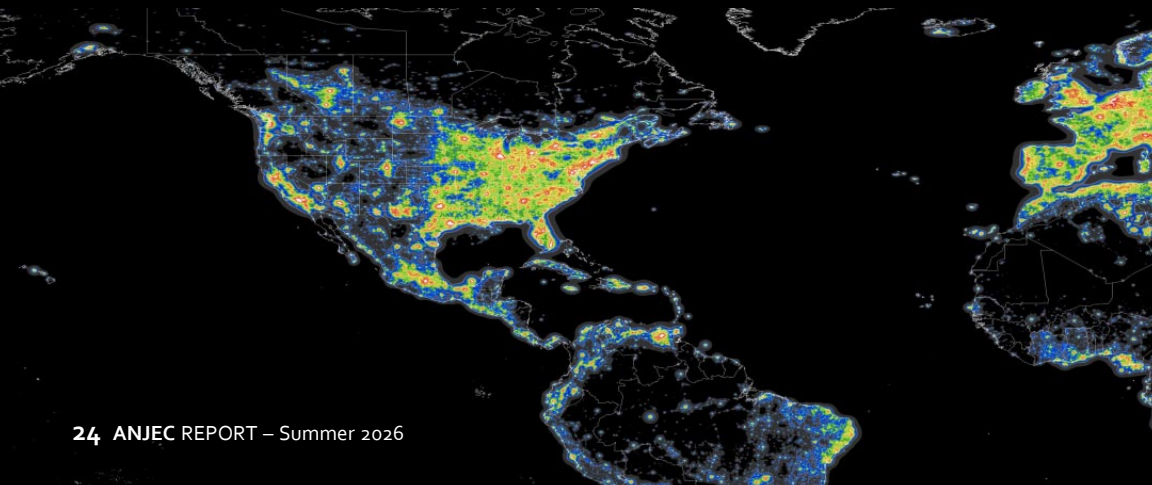
Light pollution is the human-made alteration of naturally occurring outdoor light levels. Light pollution disrupts wildlife, impacts human well-being, wastes money and energy, contributes to climate change and impedes our view of the universe.

Scientific data suggest that exposure to artificial light at night presents significant risks to human health. While greater light exposure comes from indoor lighting and electronic devices, municipalities can limit residents’ exposure to artificial light during outdoor nighttime activities while providing adequate light levels to ensure safety and security.

Wildlife is all around us, whether we live in urban or rural settings. Outdoor lighting choices can impact all species and are especially important for locations in or near sensitive habitats. Bad lighting policies can have lethal consequences for wildlife, but good policies can actually help restore healthy ecosystems.

What can be done about light pollution?

From unshielded pathway lights and streetlights to illuminated signs, electronic billboards, warehouse distribution centers, parking lots, car dealerships and shopping centers, most places are over-lit, causing costly and wasteful light spillage upward into the sky instead of down at the ground where it’s needed for safety and wayfinding.



Policies that minimize light pollution also reduce energy consumption by promoting efficient outdoor lighting technologies. These policies control the types of outdoor lighting that various public and private entities may install and determine appropriate lighting levels and conditions (whether lights may be installed in certain areas and/or operated during particular hours.)

Poorly designed and installed outdoor lighting is a known hazard to motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians at night. The same policies that reduce light pollution will reduce glare and put the right amount of light in the right place and at the right time to ensure the safety of all.

The notion that preserving dark skies requires turning lights off and compromising security is not supported by scientific evidence. Over-lighting outdoor spaces at night in the belief that lighting deters crime can actually create favorable conditions for crimes of opportunity by making victims and property easier to see. A Chicago Alley Lighting Project (<https://tinyurl.com/mpxhzcfs>) showed a correlation between brightly lit alleyways and increased crime.

While nighttime sports offer plenty of valuable benefits, poorly designed lighting at outdoor sports fields causes increased light pollution in areas that are often adjacent to open space and parks – habitat for our non-human neighbors. Recreational sports lighting can be effectively shielded to illuminate the field of play and minimize or eliminate glare and light pollution.

It's estimated that 15 million tons of carbon dioxide are emitted each year from lighting residential properties. We love our backyard landscape lights, but they should always be on a timer, sensor or just shut off when no one's there.

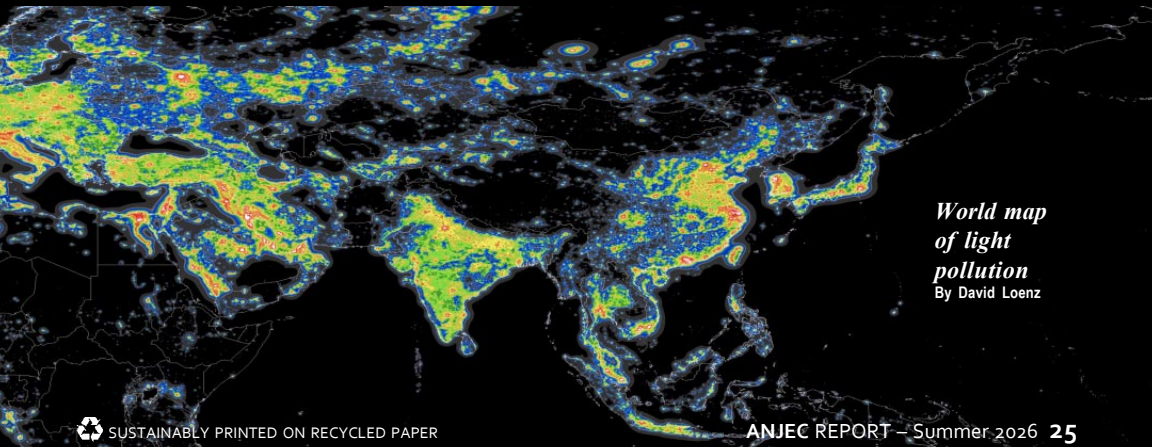
What can Environmental Commissions do?

Environmental Commissions can encourage the public to support their municipal leaders in adopting a Dark Sky Ordinance (samples listed below.) Involve the community by leading a night hike with a local conservation/watershed group or by hosting a night sky viewing event with a local astronomy group. DarkSky New Jersey (steve.mariconda@darksky.org) is an excellent organization to assist you with planning an event.

Resources

ANJEC's Resource Center (info@anjec.org) is here to assist, and ANJEC's website has a list of publications/handouts and resources for your use when tabling at community events, along with templates and sample ordinances (<https://tinyurl.com/ys7z468y>). There's also an informative handout for public education, along with a full display for use at events. To reserve, contact ANJEC's Resource Center at info@anjec.org.

- ANJEC handout: <https://tinyurl.com/2trrbmsw>
- Dark Sky New Jersey template for municipal ordinance: <https://tinyurl.com/k2fz2huu>
- Sample municipal ordinances (adopted):
 - East Amwell sample ordinance: <https://tinyurl.com/2tzy7jy7>
 - Hopewell Township sample ordinance: <https://tinyurl.com/5eadvs44>



*World map
of light
pollution*
By David Loenz

How NJ youth are leading environmental change

By Sheila Baker Gujral, ANJEC Resource Center Director

A few years back, I attended a county freeholders meeting. During the public comment period, various people got up to voice complaints and concerns. A large, three-minute countdown clock let us know how much time we had to talk and when we needed to stop. The freeholders sat there stone-faced and listened, promising to provide written responses in a few weeks.

Then a young Girl Scout got up to comment. She was concerned about plastic pollution and wanted to enact a county-wide plastic bag ban. The faces of the freeholders softened. One of them said they didn't need to run the clock for her but to please turn it off and let her say her piece. I had heard about this phenomenon.

ANJEC Executive Director Jen Coffey once told me that Girl Scouts are "hands down the best lobbyists I have ever worked with." The Girl Scouts in Teaneck led the

charge statewide on plastic bag bans. They did education and outreach, and the movement grew until they got a plastic bag ban passed in their town.

"We're only 14 and we've already passed a law," said Troop 19 member Ella Myers. "We're really proud that we've gotten this far." Their leadership inspired municipalities across NJ to pursue plastic bag bans, which ended up snowballing and becoming a State law in 2022.

More and more Environmental Commissions (ECs) are recruiting youth members. Glen Rock, Maplewood, Lawrence, Livingston, Montgomery, Morris Township, Mountain Lake, Parsippany, Pequannock, Sparta and Wyckoff all have youth members. Wyckoff has three Junior Environmental Commissioners each year, and they each have a dedicated project that they work on.

Harnessing youth power goes beyond



Teaneck Girl Scouts meeting with former Governor Murphy about a proposed plastic bag ban in Nov. 2019 By Kelly Sheehan

local ECs. In 2022, Victoria Foundation initiated the NextGen Fund, where Newark youth have worked together to learn the grant application process as funders. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection has launched a Youth Inclusion Initiative that empowers young people from overburdened communities by providing hands-on experiences and environmental insights, and introduces them to some of the technical skills necessary to pursue a career in environmental protection.

Last December, when ANJEC staffers were accepting the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence, we heard about all the great work being done around the State. Among the winners was Landon Hoberman, named the James J. Florio Emerging Environmental Leader. A junior at Point Pleasant Beach High School, Landon founded the Student Environmental Ambassador (SEA) Program when he realized that many of his fellow students wanted to do something about the environment but didn't know where to start. He developed three toolkits to educate residents about ways to reduce plastic pollution.

When asked what motivated him to found the SEA program, he said: "Students cared deeply about environmental issues but lacked a clear, credible pathway to translate that concern into measurable impact.

"The SEA Program operates through three core toolkits, each designed to integrate sustainability into a different part of the community while maintaining a focus on measurable outcomes in the business community, local community and school community."

Landon has at least 1,370 ambassadors across 18 states and nine countries. "Nearly

a quarter of Ambassadors are based in international schools, reflecting the model's adaptability across diverse geographic and cultural contexts. This growth was driven by a deliberate shift from leading individual initiatives to designing systems that enable others to lead. The program's decentralized structure allows ambassadors to implement standardized toolkits while adapting them to their local environments, ensuring both consistency and relevance."

The toolkits allow students to get straight to work and see their measurable impact. "From eliminating 8.1 million single-use utensils and saving restaurants over \$200,000, to mobilizing large-scale

cleanups and reaching over 100,000 students through educational outreach, ambassadors see tangible outcomes from their work. This focus sustains engagement and demonstrates that student-led efforts can drive meaningful, systemic change at scale," he said.

"One of the most important lessons I have learned is that meaningful impact begins with clarity, not scale. Many students hesitate to get involved because they feel they lack the expertise, resources or platform to make a difference. In reality, the most effective initiatives often start small but are designed to be consistent and replicable."

Landon has learned through his work what ANJEC tells ECs all the time: Collaboration is essential. The most durable solutions are developed with communities, not simply for them, which requires listening, adapting and remaining responsive to local needs.

Landon's website is: <https://www.studentenvironmentalambassador.com/>



Landon Hoberman

Rutgers Environmental Stewards celebrating 20 years of community engagement

By N. Dini Checko, ANJEC Project Director

The Rutgers Environmental Stewards Program (RES) teaches participants about important environmental issues facing New Jersey and empowers them to help solve community problems. Last fall, the RES Impact Summit celebrated two decades of environmental education, community engagement and collaborative success with communities across the state. In 2025 alone, 21 Stewards collaborated with 30 organizations to:

- educate 2,203 community members about climate change solutions;
- divert 10,622 pounds of waste from landfills;
- plant 1,071 native specimens,
- improve 20 acres of land; and
- secure \$3,599 in funding to support their efforts.

As part of their certification, the stewards complete a 60-hour community-based environmental project. These initiatives range from improving stormwater management and reducing food waste to restoring wildlife habitats and educating youth. Here are some examples:

Hopewell Valley Gardens for Wildlife, Hopewell Township

In Mercer County, Jeanne DeMoss partnered with the town's Environmental Commission (EC) and deputy mayor to transform Woolsey Park into an educational native plant garden supporting the community's certification through the National Wildlife Federation's Community Wildlife Habitat program.

Designed with careful attention to site conditions, the garden features 75 native plants – including a historically significant Salem Oak sapling – installed with the help of volunteers and grant funding. Beyond habitat creation, the site now serves as a living classroom, educating visitors about native plants, sustainable landscaping and the impacts of climate change, while



Rutgers Environmental Stewards at the 2025 Impact Summit celebrating their 20th anniversary

fostering community involvement in long-term stewardship.

Reclaiming Our Passaic River, Fair Lawn

Further north in Bergen County, this project brought together local partners to restore and celebrate the Passaic River as a vital natural and cultural

resource. Wendy Dabney and Reina Valenzuela combined hands-on environmental action with community outreach, including river cleanups, commemoration of a historic fish weir, and the creation of a public reflection space. A key highlight was a Land Acknowledgment Ceremony led by members of the Ramapough Munsee Lenape, which deepened public understanding of the river's ecological and cultural significance. Through collaboration with the town's Environmental Commission, Green Team, Shade Tree Advisory Committee and other community partners, the project also advanced watershed protection planning, demonstrating how environmental stewardship can unite diverse stakeholders around shared goals.

Eastern Bluebird Monitoring Project at Huber Woods Park, Middletown Township

Down in Monmouth County, Nick Bernardo's project focused on strengthening habitat for a native bird species while contributing valuable scientific data. Nesting boxes were installed and monitored across 10 acres, with data collected over 27 weeks using standardized protocols from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nest Watch program. The project not only supported bluebird populations but also launched a long-term monitoring effort in the county to better understand how rising temperatures affect breeding and habitat conditions. Data were shared with regional



As their capstone project, Rutgers Environmental Stewards John and Susan Landau helped restore Foote's Pond Wood Park in Morristown

and national organizations, informing future conservation strategies. Public outreach engaged community members in bluebird conservation and raised awareness about the broader ecological impacts of climate change.

Rewild Clinton, Town of Clinton

Meanwhile in Hunterdon County, Denise Birmingham demonstrated how local action can restore ecosystems while inspiring the next generation. Her project removed invasive species and installed more than 340 native plants across six public sites, improving two acres of land. Volunteers, including students, played a central role, gaining hands-on experience in planting, species identification and habitat restoration. Educational components reached over 100 students through interactive activities such as building birdhouses and learning about pollination and climate change. The resulting gardens now function as public learning spaces, complete with signage that highlights the importance of native plants and pollinators. Ongoing stewardship plans aim to expand these efforts and sustain community engagement. Birmingham partnered with the Environmental Commission and a local scout troop.

Foote's Pond Wood Park, Morristown

In Morris County, John and Susan Landau were celebrated as Alumni of the Year for their work transforming an overgrown, unused park into a thriving natural space and community haven. Beyond Morristown, the Landaus mentor stewards, support restoration projects and promote native planting across northern NJ. Their "Going Native for Northern New Jersey" brochure has reached thousands, and they have helped advance eco-friendly legislation, including the *Invasive Species Act*.

These projects illustrate how local leadership, volunteerism and education can drive meaningful environmental change. By restoring habitats, fostering partnerships and connecting residents to their natural surroundings, RES Stewards are helping to build healthier, more resilient communities across the State.

ANJEC is a proud, long-term partner of RES. The program is a helpful resource for ECs and communities, and a pipeline for future environmental commissioners, ANJEC supporters and staff. ANJEC's very own Sheila Baker Gujral and Georgia Madiba are RES alumni! Learn more about the Environmental Stewards Program at <https://envirostewards.rutgers.edu/>

Thanks to ANJEC member communities

We are grateful to the thousands of volunteers serving as local officials in more than 300 municipalities and counties that are members of ANJEC. These dedicated people – from municipal and regional environmental commissions and green teams to open space committees, planning boards, governing bodies, shade tree commissions and zoning boards – dedicate their time and efforts to assure a clean environment and high quality of life in their communities throughout our State. Thank you!

Welcome new ANJEC trustees

By **Georgia Madiba**, ANJEC Membership and Development Manager

ANJEC has gained seven new board members, whose skills, knowledge and resources will greatly enhance the organization. While six board members have cycled off the team, most remain connected and supportive by serving on the ANJEC Advisory Council.

Susan Boyle

A member of the Board of the NJ Licensed Site Remediation Professionals Association Foundation, Boyle



is a long-time national thought leader in brownfield remediation and redevelopment. She is a mentor for women in environmental professions and an engaging speaker and instructor. She has held leadership roles at the Brownfield Coalition of the Northeast and the NYC Brownfield Partnership, and has served as Assistant Commissioner of Site Remediation at the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Lee Clark

Clark is the Program Manager for New Jersey Future's Funding Navigator program and is an adjunct professor of



communication at Kean University. He is also a councilman in Phillipsburg and holds a certificate in Board Leadership and Governance through the DiverseForce Program from the University of Pennsylvania. In his spare time, Clark is an avid hiker and camper.

Stephen C. Fiedler

An advocate for the environment for over 60 years, Fiedler became involved in Galloway Township’s environmental activities in 1972. He is the current Chair of both the Galloway Township Environmental Commission and the Go Green Galloway Green Team. He enjoys kayaking, camping, history, music and writing.



David Hinchey

As leader of the Development/ Environmental Affairs organization for PSEG, Hinchey is responsible for all aspects of environmental policy, environmental regulation and permitting for commercial growth, renewable projects and other commercial ventures. He focuses on ensuring environmentally responsible development by working closely with federal, state and local agencies. He also serves on the Monmouth University Urban Coastal Institute Advisory Board.



Raymond LeChien

A proud public servant and member of the Brick Township Environmental Commission, LeChien previously worked for the Ocean County Health Department and the Department of Parks and Recreation. He also served as the AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassador for WMA 13 (Barnegat Bay). He loves New Jersey and may be its biggest fan.



Francesca Mundrick

Mundrick is a Professor of Geography at Rowan University and is the Founder and Executive Director of the Rewild New Jersey Community Cooperative, an organization focused on scalable community rewilding that works to transform both nature and people. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Sustainability Education with Prescott College in Arizona. Mundrick serves as Community Outreach Commissioner on the Pitman Environmental Commission and as the NJ Ambassador for the American Conservation Coalition.



Daniel J. Van Abs, PhD, PP/ FAICP

A retired professor of water resources and environmental policy at Rutgers New Brunswick, Van Abs previously worked as a manager for three State agencies (DEP, NJ Water Supply Authority and NJ Highlands Council) and has nearly 45 years of professional experience. He is a licensed planner and holds a PhD in environmental science policy. He is involved both locally in Princeton and at the State level, including on the NJ Highlands Council and as Trustee of the Passaic River Coalition. 💧





New measures to strengthen grid, control electricity costs

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) approved several major initiatives on March 4 to expand in-state, clean energy generation and help control electricity costs for NJ families and businesses. The measures will add 355 MW of battery storage, expand community solar adoption, cut costs and improve grid reliability.

“Solar and battery storage are the fastest and most cost-effective ways to build new electricity generation. Today’s actions advance Governor Sherrill’s clean energy goals while continuing the Board’s commitment to balancing affordability and promoting clean, in-state energy resources,” BPU President Christine Guhl-Sadovy said.

The Board awarded incentives to three large battery storage projects and opened a second round of storage solicitations. These measures respond directly to rapid load growth – driven in part by new data centers straining the grid and pushing electricity prices higher (page 4). Incentive payments for these projects will come from existing Societal Benefits Charge funds, so no new rate increase will be required to support these projects.

The Board also approved awards under the third solicitation of the Competitive Solar Incentive (CSI) Program, totaling more than 24 MW of new solar generation across three projects. The CSI Program awards Solar Renewable Energy Certificates to eligible grid-supply solar, solar-plus-storage, and large non-residential net-metered projects, helping secure new solar energy at the lowest possible incentive cost.

One of the projects, the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission’s plan for the Wanaque Reservoir, would be the largest floating solar facility in the nation.

Historic expansion of community solar

The Board approved a 3,000-MW expansion of NJ’s Community Solar Energy Program – the largest capacity allocation in State history. It will provide clean energy savings for about 450,000 subscribers and move NJ from seventh in the nation into the top tier for community solar deployment.

Community solar lets residents, especially renters and those without suitable rooftops, subscribe to off-site solar projects and receive energy bill credits, typically cutting their bills by 15 to 25 percent. Low- and moderate-income (LMI) households will receive at least a 25 percent bill credit; at least 51 percent of total program capacity is reserved for LMI subscribers, ensuring those most affected by energy price swings benefit the most.

To date, New Jersey’s community solar program has delivered more than \$70M in bill credits and \$14M in net savings to more than 37,000 subscribers across 162 operational projects totaling 228 MW. This expansion will build on that progress and turn underused landfills into clean energy assets for local communities.

More information is available at <https://tinyurl.com/kfbcabh4>.



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Save the Date!



2026
ANJEC
Environmental
CONGRESS



Friday, September 25

9:00 am – 4:00 pm

New Brunswick Theological Seminary
35 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ

Featured Speaker:
NJDEP Commissioner Ed Potasnak

The Environmental Congress is an annual statewide gathering of environmental commissions, local officials, agencies, citizen groups and environmental organizations.

- Browse exhibits from local nonprofits and businesses
- Learn from environmental experts
- Celebrate local efforts around NJ
- Network with local officials, environmental commissioners and State policymakers

Presentation of
2026 ANJEC Environmental Achievement Awards

Check back soon for details and registration information:

<https://anjec.org/environmental-congress-2/>



Save the date! Friday, September 25
ANJEC Environmental Congress (page 39)