# ANJEC REPORT

Local Environment Matters

AUTUMN 2026



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- Special section — Celebrating NJ's wetlands, swamps and marshes
- Connecting wildlife habitats
- Data Center update
- Welcome new Environmental Commissions!




*ANJEC Executive Director Jennifer Coffey*
Photo by Taylor McFarland

## Director's Report

# One step forward, two steps back – and lots of flooding!

Governor Sherrill has introduced a proposal to roll back critical flood hazard protection and stormwater management regulations appearing in the June 1, 2026, *New Jersey Register*. This proposal is being marketed as a "delay," but it is so much more than that.

Ironically, the public hearing for the rule weakening was held on July 7, the very same day that Governor Sherrill visited the City of Camden to witness the devastation that many communities across the Garden State suffered from the impacts of flash flooding on the previous weekend.

It's no secret that NJ has flooding problems that are getting worse. The first rule of getting out of a hole is: Stop digging. The New Jersey Protecting Against Climate Threat Resilient Environment and Landscapes (NJPACT REAL) rules are a commonsense approach to stop using outdated construction standards to build homes and critical infrastructure that we know will flood.

The NJPACT REAL rules use 2025 climate science to update a series of NJ regulations, including flood hazard protection, the *Coastal Area Facilities Act* and stormwater management. The NJPACT REAL rules went into effect on July 20, 2026, because the *New Jersey Administrative Procedures Act* (*APA*) requires adherence to procedures for changing or dismantling regulations. The *APA* required Governor Sherrill to publish notice of the rollback that, at its earliest, can take effect this fall due to required public comment.

The Sherrill Administration's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) states that the reason for rolling back the regulations is to "increase efficiency, consistency and accountability in its permitting processes, and that effort has been enhanced through the directives of Governor Sherrill's Executive Order No. 5 (2026)." However, the DEP is examining permit efficiency for a variety of other rules without changing or delaying them, so we are reasonably concerned that this rollback is much, much more since developers clamoring for a rollback were already given an additional year extension on compliance under the previous administration.

The only reason to roll back the NJPACT REAL rules is to allow developers to submit applications for permits to the DEP that, once approved, have a minimum five-year life span.

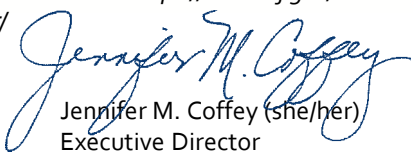
At their core, the NJPACT REAL rules are simple. They say:

1. Residences and critical infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, police and fire stations, should be built at an elevation that reflects where we know flooding occurs today and where we know it will occur through the year 2100, rather than relying on old, outdated FEMA data and maps.
2. Redevelopment projects should be required to implement some stormwater management. Redevelopment projects have been functionally exempted from stormwater management since the modern stormwater rules were adopted in 2004. Since we are the most densely populated state in the nation, we

need to address flooding from construction predating 2004. The most sensible and economical way to reduce the impacts of flooding originating from runoff on already developed properties is to implement stormwater standards for redevelopment projects.

3. NJPACT REAL includes provisions that will better protect wetland buffers and streamline permitting for nature-based solutions such as green infrastructure.

The NJPACT REAL rules are fundamentally public safety regulations. By rolling back and delaying the implementation of NJPACT REAL rules, Governor Sherrill is putting public safety at risk. The official public comment period to oppose the rollback and delay of NJPACT REAL rules closed on July 31. However, you can always call Governor Sherrill's office at (609) 292-6000 to ask her to implement NJPACT REAL NOW or email her by going to the "contact" link at *https://www.nj.gov/governor/*



Jennifer M. Coffey (she/her)
Executive Director


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564 MUNICIPALITIES ..... ONE ENVIRONMENT

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:* ***The Eastern chipmunk (Tamias striatus) is native to New Jersey and is found in woodlands, suburbs and parks throughout the State.***
**Photo by Pixabay**

# Collaborating to connect habitat across New Jersey

By Lindsay Brubaker, Community-Led Conservation Coordinator, Duke Farms

From bobcats to blue-spotted salamanders to bog turtles, New Jersey is home to a vast array of unique and ecologically important wildlife, including many species listed as threatened or endangered. To survive, wildlife must move across the landscape to find food, water, shelter and mates.

Young animals often spread out to establish new territories, while others make seasonal movements between habitats. These journeys may span from a few hundred feet to many miles, but increasingly fragmented landscapes and busy roadways can turn even routine movements into dangerous obstacles. According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), more than 60 percent of bobcats killed by vehicles are less than two years old, highlighting the risks young animals face as they cross the landscape.

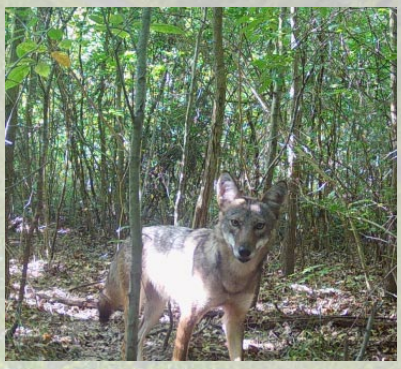
Recognizing the challenges wildlife face in an increasingly fragmented landscape, the DEP developed the Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) tools, a map and guidance document to assist the State, townships, nonprofits, counties and individuals with land preservation, restoration and mitigation projects. The map identifies "core" habitats, which are large contiguous areas that support food, shelter and breeding opportunities for wildlife as well as "corridors" that connect them. These corridors allow wildlife to move between habitats to find resources, establish territories and maintain healthy populations. Yet throughout New Jersey, corridors are developed at four times the rate of cores and preserved at only half the rate, making their protection critical for sustaining wildlife populations across the State.

## Closing the connectivity gap in the central region

One of the most important opportunities for wildlife connectivity in New Jersey lies in the State's central corridor. Identified through the CHANJ mapping tool (*https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/chanj-map/*), this



*A wildlife camera caught this bobcat using a culvert to cross under Highway 78. © NJDEP.*



*Coyote captured on camera at Duke Farms: Data from wildlife cameras helps scientists better understand species distribution and how to protect them.*
*© Duke Farms*

corridor serves as a critical link between the Highlands and the Pinelands, two of NJ's most ecologically important landscapes, and it passes through one of the fastest-developing regions in the State. While more than half of the corridor is already preserved, continued education, outreach, land protection and restoration are needed to secure the remaining pieces.

Protecting the Central Corridor requires collaboration across many organizations and levels of government. To help advance this effort, late last year the Center for Conservation at Duke Farms partnered with DEP Fish and Wildlife and the Green Acres Program to convene more than 50 conservation leaders, county officials, nonprofit organizations and municipal representatives around a shared vision for habitat connectivity in central New Jersey.

Together, we identified opportunities to accelerate land preservation, improve coordination among partners and increase outreach to local communities about the importance of wildlife corridors. Since then, Duke Farms, DEP Fish and Wildlife and Green Acres have networked with townships, counties, Environmental Commissions and Open Space Committees throughout the region to build support for connectivity planning and to help integrate CHANJ into local decision making. By fostering collaboration across jurisdictions and organizations, this effort is helping partners identify and protect the connections that wildlife depends on.

## How townships can get involved

**Connect with CHANJ and Duke Farms** – Subscribe to the CHANJ listserv and contribute data by reporting wildlife sightings to DEP.

- To attend future roundtables or learn more about the CHANJ Central Corridor initiative, contact Lindsay Brubaker at *lbrubaker@dorisduke.org*.
- Contact *chanj@dep.nj.gov* for further questions on CHANJ.

***Apply for county open space and green acres funding*** – Municipalities interested in preserving habitats can consider

*Wildlife passage* iStock

applying to county-specific open space grant programs, or to DEP's Green Acres (*https://dep.nj.gov/greenacres/*) program. Having both an open space & recreation plan and an open space tax can unlock a 50 percent match of funding through the Green Acres program. Property owners can also apply directly to Green Acres to sell or donate land for preservation. Contact Larry Fink at *Larry.Fink@dep.nj.gov* for any Green Acres questions.

***Update master plans and improve ordinances*** – Municipalities and counties can update their master plans and strengthen ordinances to elevate the importance of wildlife habitat connectivity and help advance habitat protection.

***Use CHANJ for preservation*** – Preserving any cores and corridors identified by CHANJ contributes to wildlife habitat connectivity. Use the CHANJ mapping tool to view the cores and corridors along with layers such as preserved lands, road wildlife mitigation projects and culverts to help inform planning. Utilize the CHANJ Guidance Document for in-depth explanations of the tool.

# The road to establishing an Environmental Commission

By **N. Dini Checko,** ANJEC Project Director

Neptune City and North Caldwell formally established their Environmental Commissions (ECs) in 2026, but for the people who made it happen, the effort began years earlier. Their stories offer valuable lessons for communities hoping to establish or strengthen their own environmental commissions.

## Neptune City

For Arlene Sciarappa, chair of Neptune City's EC, Green Team and Shade Tree Commission, the journey has been a long one. A dedicated volunteer and environmental advocate, she has spent years building environmental awareness and stewardship throughout the borough.

One of her earliest efforts began in 2001 with the Shark River Cleanup Coalition, which advocated for repairs to leaking stormwater outfall pipes polluting the Shark River. Despite years of raising concerns, the coalition faced resistance from local officials. Progress finally came in 2015, when Neptune City partnered with neighboring municipalities and county and State agencies to dredge the Shark River.

Another turning point came when residents united to oppose the approval of a dog food manufacturing facility in the middle of a residential neighborhood near the river. The facility was built and generated persistent noxious odors that affected residents' quality of life. As community members questioned decisions made by the Planning Board, many realized the borough lacked an important voice for environmental review. An Environmental Commission – with a statutory seat on the Planning Board – could help ensure environmental impacts were considered before projects moved forward.

Still, repeated requests to establish an Environmental Commission were denied. Critics argued that a small town didn't need one and that it would cost too much. A breakthrough came with the election of Mayor Rachel McGreevy, who campaigned



*From left, Neptune City EC and Green Team members Bill Sciarappa (chair), Karen Schroeder, Matt DeAngelis, Pamela Renee, Evan DeAngelis, Ray Preziosi, Asher DeAngelis, Angela Monaghan, and Robert Curcio (Monmouth County Parks Environmental Specialist) at the new Monmouth County Waterfront Park in Neptune City, where they are helping to plant a pollinator garden.*

on creating an EC. After taking office in 2026, she launched a series of visible community improvements, including repairing stormwater outfalls, planting a native garden, reestablishing the Green Team and revitalizing the Shark River Roundtable.

As residents watched these projects take shape, interest grew. "People started asking, "What's going on?" and 'How can I help?'" Sciarappa recalled.

The borough soon discovered an unexpected asset – its own residents. Environmental engineers, Master Gardeners and others stepped forward to volunteer their expertise and time.

"You never know who you have in your community," Sciarappa said. "There's a lot of untapped resources, and we need to get to know our neighbors."

## North Caldwell

Stephen Papageorge began advocating for a North Caldwell Environmental Commission about two years before the ordinance passed. His strategy was straightforward: Educate the governing body, identify a Council champion and then take the message to residents.

As Papageorge built public awareness by sharing ideas for projects and explaining how an EC could benefit the community, not everyone was convinced. A small but vocal group of residents opposed the proposal, expressing concerns that an EC would increase taxes and, ironically, harm the very environment they wanted to protect.

Papageorge turned to neighboring Environmental Commissions – including the very active Caldwell Environmental Commission – whose members shared firsthand examples of how volunteer-led commissions save municipalities money while enhancing community quality of life.

As the public hearing approached, Papageorge reached out to ANJEC for broader support. ANJEC staff and EC members from other municipalities, including Caldwell and Parsippany, testified in favor of the ordinance. Although turnout from North Caldwell residents was sparse, Papageorge had already laid the groundwork with Council members. The ordinance ultimately passed, with Mayor Joshua Raymond casting the tie-breaking vote.

North Caldwell's new EC is already looking ahead. Its priorities include assisting the borough with MS4 stormwater permit compliance through public education and partnering with neighboring municipalities on invasive species management.

## Formula for success

Between these two stories, a pattern for success emerges: Find a champion on the governing body; bring together passionate and knowledgeable residents; have persistence through setbacks; choose visible projects that demonstrate the value of environmental stewardship; and seek support from neighboring ECs and ANJEC.

Politics, the absence of a strong champion and community apathy can all slow the process.

But when the right leaders emerge and community perception begins to shift, years of groundwork can suddenly become lasting progress.

This year also marks another encouraging milestone – the reactivation of the Bridgewater Township Environmental Commission. Inspired by the leadership and programming of the neighboring Somerville Environmental Commission, local residents championed renewed support for environmental stewardship in their own community.

Whether newly established or reactivated, ECs strengthen their communities by bringing together volunteers, local expertise and municipal leadership to protect natural resources and improve quality of life. Their creation may take years, but the benefits can last for generations.

Congratulations to Neptune City, North Caldwell and Bridgewater Township, and welcome to the ANJEC family!




By **Jennie Aylward**, ANJEC Volunteer; **Randi K Rothmel**, ANJEC Project Director; **Michele Gaynor**, ANJEC Resource Center; and **Cheryl Reardon**, ANJEC Project Director

# Fighting overdevelopment in West Orange

Since 2000, a tenacious group of advocates has thwarted attempts to develop a privately owned, 120-acre forest in West Orange. We Care Open Space Preservation – originally the West Essex Committee Against Rezoning Excesses – first stopped a development and rezoning proposal for the Second Watchung Mountain in 2006. But in 2020, the land's owner launched another proposal to build 496 units of housing (including 100 affordable units) on 30 acres. This time, the owner had more leverage: a looming *Affordable Housing Act* deadline for West Orange to supply 660 new affordable units by 2035. The West Orange Planning Board held 29 public meetings over two years to consider the proposal. Leaders and residents of the potentially affected communities, plus many environmental organizations, joined We Care in arguing that township leaders must meet



*Rachel Klein, president of We Care, at the site of the proposed housing development*
Photo by Jennie Aylward

affordable housing obligations without sacrificing public safety and the environment. They made the case that the proposed development would damage an irreplaceable ecosystem, create the conditions for rockslides and flooding, congest traffic and pollute the Canoe Brook River, which contributes to the water supply of 32 municipalities.

A Planning Board vote against the proposal in May halted it, but the owner sued the town to overturn the decision. "I'm not going to say we've won until that land belongs to someone else," said Rachel Klein, We Care's president. The organization's goal is for the owner to sell the land to a conservancy group for long-term preservation. "But I'm also not going to say we've lost, and that it's hopeless. If we're playing smart defense, we'll do okay."

*– Jennie Aylward*





*On May 20, ANJEC trustees, staff and friends gathered for an appreciation event at Duke Farms. Top photo from left: James Shissias, Robert Becker and Senator Bob Smith. Bottom from left: Lois Kraus, Robin Suydam and Kathy Lynch* By Laura Pedrick

## Building to protect our feathered friends

Window collisions are one of the largest causes of bird mortality – more than a billion birds die annually following glass collisions in the United States. Instead of seeing a solid surface, birds either see a clear flight path to objects visible through a window or they see reflected objects such as clouds or nearby habitat when they fly towards the glass window.

These deaths are easily preventable using bird-friendly design principles that incorporate patterned or opaque exterior glass, responsible nighttime lighting controls and strategic site planning to prevent fatal window collisions and disorientation.

In New Jersey, bird-friendly building standards are primarily driven by municipal ordinances rather than a single statewide building code. Jersey City and Hoboken, both located along the Atlantic Flyway (a busy corridor for migratory birds), recently passed comprehensive ordinances that require bird-friendly materials on exterior facades for new construction and renovations. The ordinance in Jersey City was championed by Jersey City Birds, Feminist Bird Club of Jersey City and local conservation groups, and was supported by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). Passage of these ordinances will make the skies safer for the millions of birds that migrate through the region every spring and fall. Other municipalities that have passed bird-friendly ordinances include Newark (2023).

### Key details of the Jersey City ordinance

(*https://tinyurl.com/3ssrm4sb*):

- **Applicability:** Applies to all new developments, substantial renovations and additions.
- **Height requirements:** Bird-safe materials or design strategies must be used on the ground floor up to 85 feet.
- **High-risk features:** Specific architectural elements like glass corners, skywalks and atriums are also heavily regulated.
- **Design options:** The law does not mandate specialty glass alone; builders can implement cost-effective strategies such as exterior screens, window films and ultraviolet patterns.



*A new rain garden was installed at the Boys and Girls Club in Paulsboro in June. Located across the street from a very active railroad line and down the street from an oil refinery, it will bring beauty and pollinators to the area, while managing stormwater runoff.* Photo by Randi Rothmel

ABC's Legislative Toolkit (*https://tinyurl.com/6zsdxks7*) includes a model ordinance and top-rated resources for learning how bird-friendly design principles have been implemented in communities across the US. *– Randi Rothmel*

## A win for clean air and quiet neighborhoods

Montclair neighborhoods will remain quieter and the air cleaner after a federal judge rejected a challenge to the Montclair leaf blower ordinance. A group of landscaping companies and two residents challenged Montclair's ordinance on multiple constitutional and statutory grounds. Montclair's ordinance, enacted in August 2023, bans the use of gas-powered leaf blowers year-round on both private and public property. It went into effect in October 2023.

Riker Danzig, the law firm defending Montclair's ordinance, said in a statement: "In what appears to be the first challenge of its kind in the nation, the ordinance was being challenged on preemption grounds, arguing that the ordinance was preempted by the Clean Air Act, which challenge the District Court dismissed with prejudice based on Montclair's motion."

The attorney stated that by upholding Montclair's ordinance the court has provided significant legal validation that other jurisdictions can now point to if they plan to consider a similar ordinance.

*– Michele Gaynor*

## Millburn's environmental groups work together

Millburn is fortunate to have several environmental groups working to educate and provide sustainability resources to its residents. According to Millburn Environmental Commission (MEC) member René Paparian, each year one of the environmental groups chooses the focus of an annual event and takes the lead in coordinating it. Each group contributes ideas and takes part, including MEC, Millburn for Climate Action (MCA) and the Millburn High School Ocean Conservation Club (OCC).

MCA is an independent volunteer group with no formal ties to the Township, so it can move more quickly to plan events without approval from municipal government, although it often works with the EC. MCA has the great advantage of having many volunteers who show up to assist with projects and events. They are a strong group of ordinary residents who believe even small, local actions matter. MCA focuses on actions that make Millburn cleaner, healthier and more resilient.

Last fall at the Stewardship of the Earth event, which was co-hosted by the MEC and MCA, native seed packets were distributed. Some of the seeds came from the gardens of at least two MCA members and some from the town's native pollinator community garden. The seeds were packaged by the MCA and the Township Forester. Also at this event, two EC members spoke about the "Skip the Stuff" plastic reduction law, how to avoid single-use plastic and ways to make yards eco-friendly. There were interactive activities, educational displays and meaningful conversations around sustainability, climate action and caring for our shared environment.

The town's 2026 Earth Day event was initiated by Millburn High School's OCC, which did about 95 percent of the work with administrative assistance and guidance from the MEC. They focused on educating younger children and engaged them with targeted games and displays. The high school's Art Club and Environmental Club also assisted. The Millburn for Climate Action group and the Cora Hartshorn Arboretum and Bird Sanctuary also took part, each with their own displays. *– Michele Gaynor*




*A refreshed informational sign in Washington Township*
**Courtesy of Washington Twp.**

# Washington Twp. Green Team replaces faded signage

As part of their spring cleanup, the Washington Township Green Team (Morris) replaced their faded interpretive signage throughout Harrington Park. Signage is extensive in the park, informing the public about vernal ponds, bioswales, ecotones, invasive plants, pollinator gardens, wetland forests and monarch waystations.

Graphic design work was provided by a Green Team member, and local green business Blue Owl Wooden Signs created and produced the updated signs. In addition to refreshing the signage with catchy graphics, the new signs include QR Codes linking visitors to the Green Team's Facebook page and website (*wtgreenteam.wixsite.com*). Their website is an easy-to-navigate hub of information on sustainable practices, actions and community events. It also includes a Green Business Directory that features local businesses concentrating on waste reduction, energy efficiency, water conservation, sustainable landscaping, greener transportation and social responsibility.

Inspired by a social media visitor's praise for Washington Township's beautiful signage, ANJEC will add a sample environmental signage resource to its website (*www.anjec.org*). If your Environmental Commission or Green Team has a sign to share, please email it to info@anjec.org.

*– Cheryl Reardon*

Special Section:

Celebrating NJ's wetlands, swamps & marshes

# The incredible value of NJ's freshwater wetlands

By **Alison Mitchell,** Executive Director, New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Gathered around Martha's Pond in New Jersey's iconic Pine Barrens, students in Claude Epstein's environmental science class were instructed to put down their notebooks and simply observe. Under a blue sky, amid verdant grasses and patches of lily pads intertwined through soggy ground and rambling streams, the students lost track of time and space.

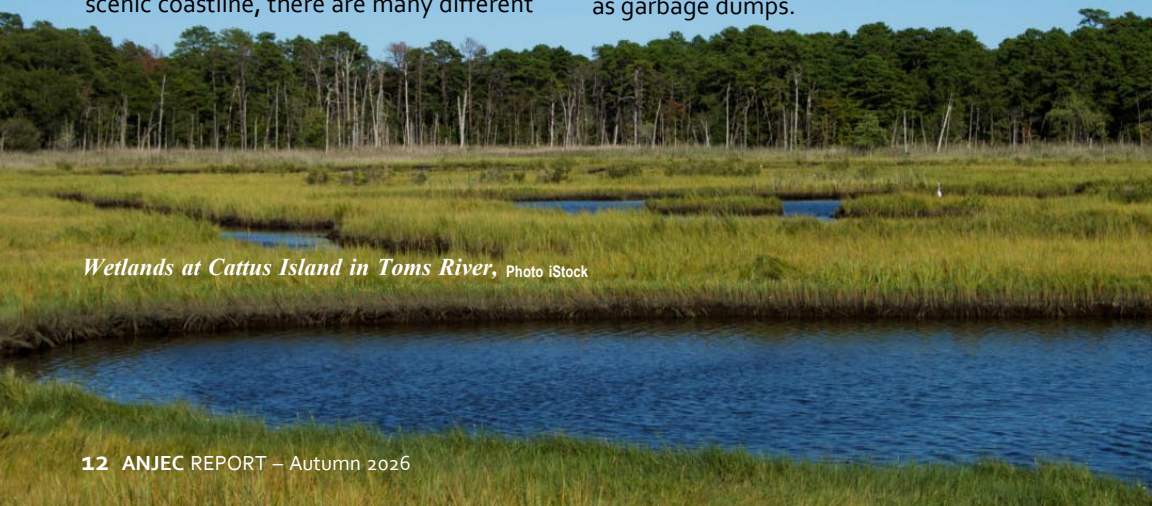
"We couldn't tell where in the world we were," remembers Epstein, who has since retired. "No indications of time, human activity, nothing to tell us we were in the 21st century. And this was in New Jersey!"

Epstein founded the environmental studies department at Stockton University and dedicated his life to hydrology - the study of water. From astounding rivers to scenic coastline, there are many different types of water features around NJ. But what often gets overlooked are our precious freshwater wetlands – marshes, swamps, bogs and fens that make up so much of our landscape.

There is an irrefutable relationship between land conservation and water. When we protect land, we also protect our water systems and ensure a balanced, sustainable environment.

## Paradise lost

New Jersey has lost over half of its original wetlands. Until the later part of the 20th Century, it was common practice to drain or fill wetlands to create land that was suitable for development and agriculture. Freshwater wetlands were often used as garbage dumps.



*Wetlands at Cattus Island in Toms River,* Photo iStock



*Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, Dave Robinson*

By the mid-1970s, 20 percent of New Jersey's wetlands had been destroyed, with losses as high as 72 percent in Hunterdon County and 50 percent in parts of the Passaic River basin.

Although wetlands gained some protections when the federal *Clean Water Act* was passed in 1972, many freshwater wetlands fell through the cracks because of the way the law was crafted.

In 1983, concerned citizens and conservation groups, working with Assemblywoman Maureen Ogden and other legislators, initiated a campaign to enact a freshwater wetlands protection law. They rallied for four years until Governor Tom Kean took the remarkable step of issuing a moratorium on building in wetlands. The measure essentially forced the State Legislature to act. Seventeen days later, NJ's Senate and Assembly unanimously passed the *New Jersey Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act of 1987*. With the governor's signature, NJ adopted some of the strongest wetlands protections in the country, even stronger than federal regulations.

## Still threatened

Now, most of the State's more than 600,000 acres of freshwater wetlands (and nearly 300,000 acres of saltwater wetlands) are protected to some degree under federal and State laws. But they are still vulnerable – threatened by climate change, contamination and human-induced destruction that occurs despite regulations.

Remaining wetlands are vital to water quality, flood control, and rare flora and fauna. Freshwater wetlands are havens of biodiversity that play a critical role in supporting and stabilizing our ecosystems. They provide essential breeding habitat for a multitude of species. But they are often underappreciated and misunderstood.

"A lack of environmental awareness is the real enemy of protecting natural wetlands, because they don't always seem like natural environments," says Epstein. The idea that wet areas are a problem to be remedied persists. Many homes were built on wetlands before protections were in place, leaving people with periodic or persistent flooding. "People have wet basements because their house was built in a floodplain or right in a stream."

But freshwater wetlands protect us and our communities. They are carbon sinks, taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. They soak up runoff from heavy rains and snow melts, providing natural flood control. They also release stored floodwater during droughts and help protect our drinking water by filtering out chemicals, pollutants and sediments that would otherwise clog and contaminate our waters.

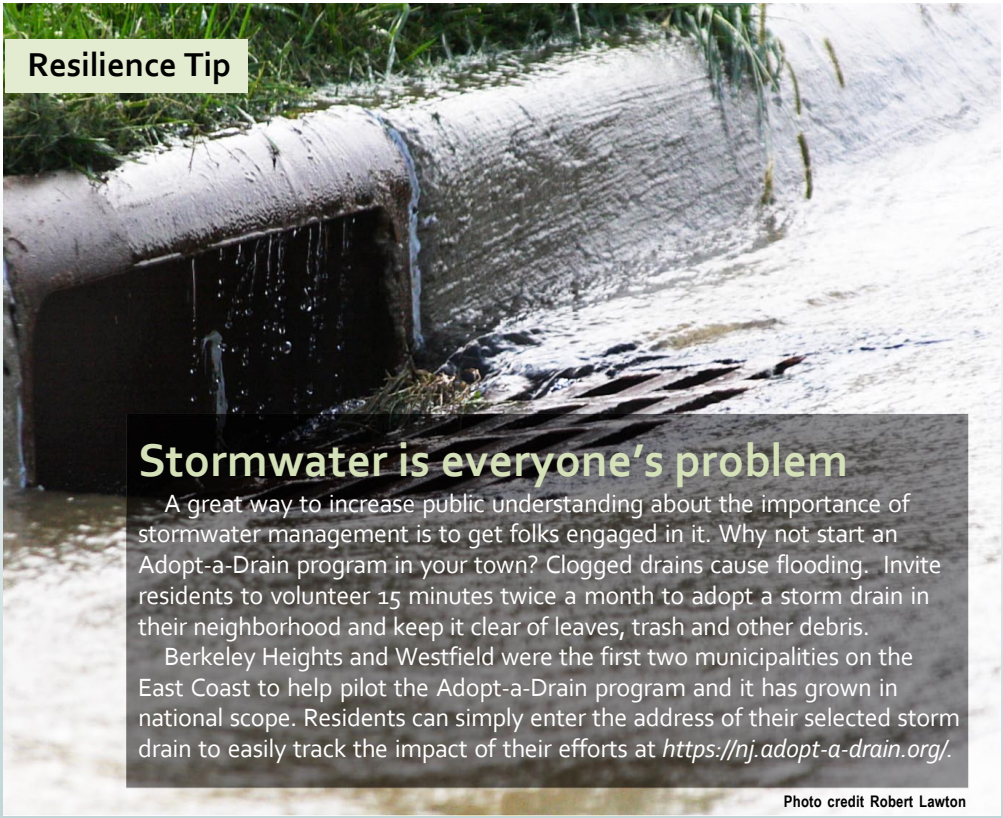
It is essential that we continue to protect freshwater wetlands and their incredible benefits. That means holding fast to our landmark *Freshwater Wetlands Protection Law* and regulations and working to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to implement and enforce them. The Sherrill Administration has committed to expediting environmental permitting. Wetlands will only be protected if the State is watching to ensure projects follow permit restrictions on the ground. Without an increase in staffing to do that, all our natural resources will be at even greater risk moving forward.

## How to help

We need strong municipal Environmental Commissions closely monitoring development applications that impact freshwater wetlands to make sure that developers adhere to permit conditions. Many of New Jersey's municipalities still don't have environmental commissions, although new ones are being established all the time (page 6).

Individuals can also help by using fewer chemicals and opting for organic alternatives to fertilizers and pesticides in yards. This reduces runoff of excess nutrients that end up in wetlands and lead to harmful algal blooms and other disruptions to the ecosystem.

If we allow New Jersey's wetlands to continue to decline, our health – and the environment around us – will diminish. But if we do our part and insist that government uphold its end of the bargain, we can keep our remaining freshwater wetlands healthy and flourishing and continue to reap tremendous benefits for generations to come.



**Resilience Tip**

### Stormwater is everyone's problem

A great way to increase public understanding about the importance of stormwater management is to get folks engaged in it. Why not start an Adopt-a-Drain program in your town? Clogged drains cause flooding. Invite residents to volunteer 15 minutes twice a month to adopt a storm drain in their neighborhood and keep it clear of leaves, trash and other debris.

Berkeley Heights and Westfield were the first two municipalities on the East Coast to help pilot the Adopt-a-Drain program and it has grown in national scope. Residents can simply enter the address of their selected storm drain to easily track the impact of their efforts at *https://nj.adopt-a-drain.org/.*

Photo credit Robert Lawton

Special Section:

Celebrating NJ's wetlands, swamps & marshes

# "Saved but not safe":

## Great Swamp Watershed Association celebrates 45 years of protecting water and land

By **Val Thorpe,** GSWA Director of Operations

Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) celebrated its 45th anniversary on March 31, 2026, marking four and a half decades of protecting water, preserving land, advancing environmental education and advocating for responsible land use throughout the Great Swamp Watershed and the Passaic River region. Spanning over 7,800 acres across ten towns, the swamp includes a diverse mix of marshes, woodlands and grasslands. It serves as a major feeding and resting station for migratory birds along the Eastern Flyway and is home to threatened wildlife like the bog turtle and blue-spotted salamander.

The Great Swamp was famously saved from becoming a proposed jetport in the 1960s through a massive grassroots citizen effort, and the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was established by an act of Congress in 1960. But by the late 1970s, developers had focused their sights on the surrounding land. At that time, land-use and zoning decisions were made by each independent municipality. No one was looking at the watershed as a single, interconnected ecosystem. It was clear that although the land had been saved, the water flowing through it was still under threat from pollution and stormwater runoff caused by rapid suburban development.

This growing concern prompted Green Village resident Abigail "Abbie" Fair to coin her famous rallying cry, "Saved but not safe." Abbie, who later became ANJEC's Water Resources Manager, enlisted the support of her neighbor Helen Fenske, a key player in the jetport battle. Fenske encouraged Fair to form a committee to ensure the water and land she helped save remained protected from this new threat. Together, they recruited their new neighbor and GSWA's future first executive director, Julia Somers.

### Something in the water

These three committed conservation leaders from Green Village – Fair, Fenske, and Somers – often joked there must have been "something in the water" that inspired their fierce dedication to protecting the 55-square-mile watershed. Their vision laid the foundation for an organization that continues to safeguard the region's natural resources today.

On March 31, 1981, Great Swamp Watershed Association officially became a member-supported environmental organization dedicated to advocating for responsible, environmentally sound land-use planning and development.

For its first decade, GSWA had no paid staff, operating only with volunteers who met monthly in a room above Rocco's Pizza in Madison. The first Board of Trustees included environmental commissioners from most of the municipalities in the watershed, along with citizens concerned about the health and natural beauty of the region. In 1991 Somers became the organization's first paid Executive Director and sole staff member.

Over her 16-year tenure, Somers was instrumental in shifting GSWA from a volunteer advocacy group to an organization that also provided water quality monitoring, environmental education and land preservation and stewardship. She also secured the organization's permanent headquarters in Morristown.

As the organization grew, so did its impact. In 2016, with Sally Rubin serving as executive director, GSWA became the official Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate for the Passaic River, expanding its mission to protect the entire 80-mile river from its headwaters in Mendham to Newark Bay. The following year, GSWA became the eighth organization in NJ to earn National Land Trust Accreditation.

## A living classroom

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of GSWA's Conservation Management Area (CMA) in Harding Township. Beginning with the preservation of the first 18 acres in 1996, the CMA has grown to 73 contiguous acres, serving as a "living classroom" for thousands of students and visitors annually. Home to several threatened species, these wetlands provide critical flood protection by storing and filtering stormwater. Hundreds of volunteers help maintain it each year.

Today, GSWA has a staff of 11, more than 1,800 members, and supporters in over 40 municipalities. The organization monitors water quality, participates in municipal land-use decisions, preserves critical open space, and provides environmental education to more than 3,000 students, teachers and community groups annually.

"Over 45 years, GSWA has achieved great things, more than living up to the expectations of its founders," said Somers, now Executive Director of the NJ Highlands Coalition. "It's a privilege to have been associated with such a wonderful group of people working together to protect this special and important place."

"GSWA continues to build on the vision of our founders who launched the organization in 1981," said Bill Kibler, current GSWA Executive Director. "Their rallying cry, 'Saved but not safe,' remains relevant today, reminding us that protecting the Great Swamp watershed is an ongoing commitment that benefits our communities today and for generations to come."

Learn more at GreatSwamp.org or scan the QR code below.



*From left: Helen Fenske, Julia Somers and Abigail Fair, courtesy of GSWA*

Special Section:

Celebrating NJ's wetlands, swamps & marshes

# NJ's urban wetlands: Wild nature against all odds

By **Erik Kiviat, PhD PWS**, Executive Director Emeritus, Hudsonia Ltd.; and **Kristi MacDonald, PhD**, Hudsonia Ltd. Executive Director

"Urban wetlands" and "urban biodiversity" might sound like oxymorons to some, but in the most industrial region of northeastern New Jersey, urban wetlands form much of the remaining wild backdrop to an otherwise developed landscape. We've studied wetlands of the New Jersey Meadowlands and the wooded swamps of the Arthur Kill drainage, and these areas, with their biota, bear witness to both humanity's historic wastefulness and the wonderful life that still prospers there.

The Meadowlands was once composed of brackish tidal marshes, Atlantic white cedar swamps and diverse other wetlands (and uplands). Now, brackish tidal marshes, impounded (restricted) tidal marshes, partly drained hardwood swamps, and wetland fill are the predominant habitats. The Arthur Kill swamps were once part of a large network of forestlands – now only tiny remnants remain. Water and marsh birds, raptors and songbirds are the iconic fauna of these urban wetlands, and many other species reveal themselves upon closer inspection.

These urban wetlands share key ecological characteristics and ecosystem services with many other urban and industrial habitats. They are fragmented, hydrologically altered, salinized, contaminated, lacking adjacent natural upland soils, used for receptacles for waste and, in some



*The raccoon is urban-tolerant.*
Photo by Jürgen

locations, serve as busy foci for outdoor recreation and ecotourism.

## Important environmental services

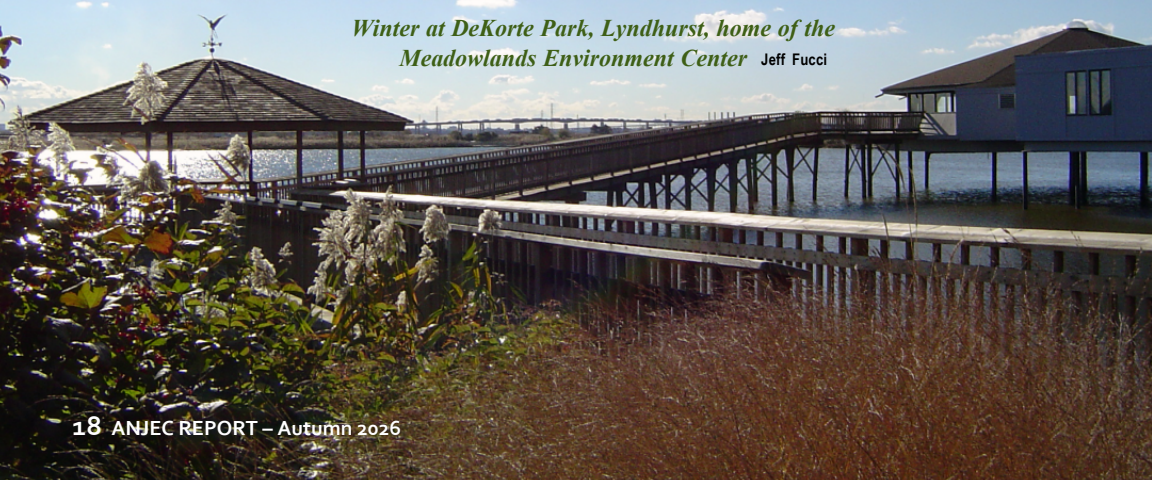
Because of the development of many surrounding habitats, the remaining wetlands and their services are even more important. Many urban wetlands absorb stormwater, sequester and store carbon, remove nutrients from water and cool the vicinity by evapotranspiration. This picture has been repeated in many metropolitan regions of the State and beyond.

Despite the alterations and degradation, many common and uncommon wetland-using organisms survive and even thrive; many would not be in the urban region but for these wetlands. Some groups do well in species or numbers, whereas others do poorly – these are "urban-tolerant" and "urban-sensitive" groups of species or individual species. For example, the raccoon is urban-tolerant, but the mink is not. Mosquitoes as a group are urban-tolerant whereas land snails are not. Some mosses withstand urban pollution and desiccation, but peat mosses (*Sphagnum*) generally do not. Various species of true sedges (*Carex*) may occur in developed areas but are present only as a few individuals. The behavior of biota in relation to urban conditions varies depending on the local environment and human activities. Interestingly, remnant forested swamps in the Arthur Kill boost songbird diversity in built areas outside the forest.

Although in some cases the numbers of native plant species may exceed those of nonnative species in urban wetlands, often one or a few nonnatives are abundant and weedy. These "weeds" may perform services as well, sometimes enhanced by their fast growth, production of abundant litter, nectar, pollen, seeds, dense physical structure, and ability to thrive where many native plants would not do well. The nonnative plants favor some wildlife and not others, depending on the species, habitat and availability of other resources. Given this context, it is very important to consider potential values of non-native species when targeting restoration and management goals for an urban wetland – especially when those species are already established and widespread.

## Health effects

Urban wetlands and their biota fascinate and educate large numbers of people who lack opportunities to observe non-urban nature, and many studies show that exposure to nature is both directly and indirectly associated with improvements in people's health and well-being. There is, however, a limitation to urban wetlands – they are challenging to manage, and restoration efforts commonly do not produce the desired range of habitat functions and other ecosystem services. Moreover, urban wetlands accumulate urban pollutants. Although scientists understand much about urban wetland benefits to biodiversity, the harms they can cause are not as well studied.



*Winter at DeKorte Park, Lyndhurst, home of the Meadowlands Environment Center* Jeff Fucci

Given all these aspects of urban biodiversity, urban wetlands and the additional green spaces that often surround them should be preserved and protected from further degradation.

Each wetland, each greenspace, must be observed, studied and managed as an individual ecosystem with its own characteristics, functions and values to humans.

To learn more about the species and habitats of the Meadowlands region, check out our book, "Urban Biodiversity: The Natural History of the New Jersey Meadowlands." For more info, please visit this link: *https://www.hudsonia.org/nj-meadowlands*



***Cape May National Wildlife Refuge marsh*** **Photo by Zeete**

# A new mapping tool for NJ's coastal wetlands

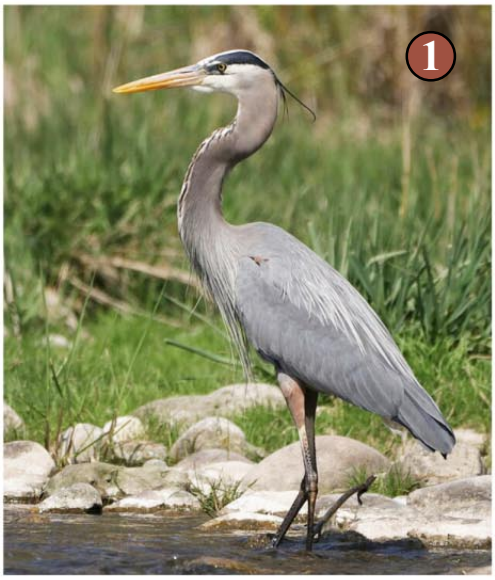
New Jersey's coastal wetlands provide critical habitat, support biodiversity and help protect coastal communities from storms and flooding. But 61 percent of these wetlands may be at risk of loss because marsh elevations are not increasing quickly enough to keep pace with sea-level rise.

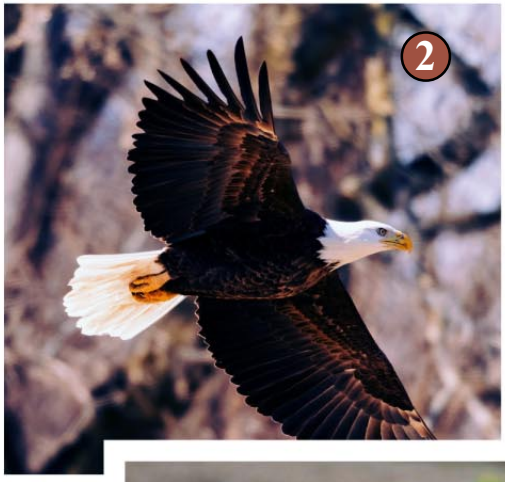
The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has launched a website and interactive mapping tool that provide science-based insights to help communities plan wetland restoration and enhancements that improve climate resilience. The tool was developed by the New Jersey Tidal Wetland Monitoring Network and is led by DEP scientists. Based on long-term monitoring data collected at sites throughout the State, the tool allows users to explore site-specific trends in marsh elevation change, sedimentation and sea-level rise, and identify areas of concern.

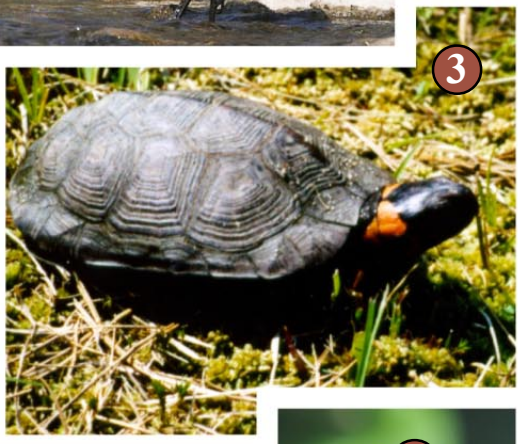
By identifying where wetlands are most vulnerable, the tool enables targeted adaptation and restoration strategies that can strengthen the resilience of NJ's natural systems and communities. The mapping tool is available at *https://tinyurl.com/muef849t*.

# Celebrating NJ's wetland

*1 Great blue heron, Dallas Penner*
*2 Bald eagle, Wrench Relic*
*3 Bog turtle, US Corps of Engineers*
*4 Wood duck, Munish Jauhar*
*5 Indiana bat, US Fish and Wildlife*







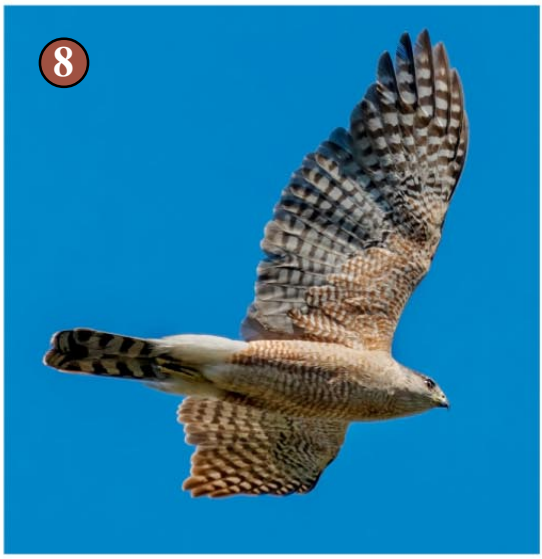





# ds, swamps and marshes

*6 Swamp Pink, US Fish and Wildlife*
*7 A dense Atlantic white cedar swamp in Brendan T Byrne State Forest, Famartin*
*8 Sharp-shinned hawk, Susan T. Cook*
*9 Monarch butterfly, Pixabay*
*10 Red fox kits, Rhododendrites*
*11 Blue spotted salamander, Chris Iron*













SUSTAINABLY PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Climate Watch

# Mapping resilience:
## New tools support better decisions

By **Sheila Baker Gujral,** ANJEC Resource Center Director

Remember back in 2012 when New Jersey was walloped by Superstorm Sandy? Do you remember all the conversations we had about how climate change is here, how we need to adapt, we need to become more resilient, we need to be "Jersey Strong?" Sandy killed at least 117 people, 40 of them in NJ. The property damage was mind-boggling. Of the over $60 billion in damage, $8 billion (approximately 13 percent) was attributable to new conditions resulting from climate change. Here in NJ, we reached the point where we could no longer ignore the climate reality staring us right in the face.



*NJ National Guard in Hoboken during Hurricane Sandy,* Dough4872

The need to adapt to changing climate conditions and strengthen resilience gave rise to Rebuild by Design, an initiative born from a 2014 US Department of Housing and Urban Development design competition that sought innovative, resilient solutions to address the widespread devastation caused by Superstorm Sandy. Since inception, a variety of tools and resources have become available to address the combined effects of flooding, heat islands, pollution, social vulnerability and vital network protection.

Rebuild by Design is housed at NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge (*https://ipk.nyu.edu/*), where they work with communities and local governments to solve environmental and economic challenges. They do this work through "data, design, community outreach, research, education and policy to co-create solutions that strengthen infrastructure and protect lives and livelihoods."

Rebuild by Design has developed a series of mapping tools that are available on their website at *https://rebuildbydesign.org/new-jersey/*.

According to this website: "Rebuild has now mapped flood risk in all 564 New Jersey municipalities, every town and city in the State. By 2050, 155 municipalities will have at least half of their public assets exposed to flood risk and, in 35 of those, 100 percent of public assets will be exposed. Any resident can now look up their town and download a fact sheet."

You can see a map of your town and locate the utilities, contaminated sites, schools, fire departments and hospitals – and you can see whether and how they are at risk of flooding.

- Search your county's risk at *https://tinyurl.com/fdx875ad*. You can examine maps and see how flood exposure is related to income levels. You can also see where flood-prone properties have been bought out by Blue Acres, a State program that assists families in relocating from homes that are subject to repeat flooding. Blue Acres then acquires the property to serve as natural flood storage, parks and community open space.
- Search your city's risk at *https://tinyurl.com/2k32sn8y*. You can also download a fact sheet about your municipality, including how many disaster declarations have been made since 2011, how many public infrastructure assets are presently at flood risk, and how much of the infrastructure will be at flood risk in 2050.
- Atlas of Accountability: You can see how often your municipality has had Federal Disaster Declarations and how much FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) aid was received per capita, as well as a guide to the elected officials serving the municipality.

## Scary but true

The new Rebuild by Design maps reveal an alarming reality: thousands of public facilities in New Jersey, including critical emergency-response assets, are at risk of flooding. As you review the maps, you may be surprised by how vulnerable many communities are. They show where public assets are located, whether they fall within flood zones, and how today's flood risks compare with projected risks in 2050. Rebuild by Design also offers a stormwater infrastructure toolkit with resources for stormwater asset management and maintenance job training.

These tools provide a powerful way to understand both today's flood risks and the challenges expected by 2050, while also identifying solutions that can reduce flooding and enhance groundwater recharge. The next step is yours: Visit the Rebuild by Design website and enter your address to see your community's flood risk. Explore where flooding is most likely to occur, identify critical assets such as homes, schools, roads and utilities, and consider whether they are vulnerable. Understanding your local risks is the first step toward building a more resilient future.

### More information

- Rebuild by Design – *https://rebuildbydesign.org/new-jersey/*
- NJ Blue Acres program – *https://dep.nj.gov/blueacres/*




***In 2013, Hoboken was a winner in the Rebuild by Design competition to create climate-resilience solutions. The city's Southwest Resiliency Park, NJ's first, combines passive green space and flood mitigation to meet the neighborhood's needs.*** **Courtesy of City of Hoboken**

# ANJEC grant highlights

By **Elizabeth Ritter**, ANJEC Deputy Director

For 13 years, ANJEC has been offering grants to New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ECs) for projects to further stewardship and community involvement in parks and other preserved spaces. These small grants of up to $1,500 have helped municipalities accomplish important and innovative work to maintain and enhance their open spaces. Here are a few recent examples.

## Morris Township

The Morris Township EC received an ANJEC grant in 2022 to enhance and improve a ballfield in town by installing a pollinator garden. Charlie Schachter spearheaded the project after observing the opportunity to repurpose part of the park into a space that would enhance wildlife habitat, highlight native plant benefits to community members, improve stormwater management for the ballfield and reduce greenhouse gas and noise pollution from lawn mowers. The volunteers realized that the project would also save the township money (always a good thing!) by reducing mowing and fertilizer use while saving municipal staff time.



*Rhinocomimus latipes weevil*
Photo by Katja Schulz

The Environmental Commission's success was due in no small part to cooperation and support from township officials, including the Parks and Recreation Dept. Volunteers helped design the garden (especially Susan Landau of neighboring Morristown), and neighbors, friends and family all contributed to the project and assisted with plantings, weeding and watering the initial garden.

The small initial project on a quarter acre was so successful that the township has since supported a full acre garden in the park! Now children who use the fields for sports have the added beauty and all the benefits of the pollinator garden with less grass to maintain without sacrificing any play area.

## Frenchtown Borough

The Environmental Commission noticed that the Frenchtown Preserve was infested with mile-a-minute vine (*Persicaria perfoliate*) encroaching on the riparian area along a creek corridor and near another preserve. Mile-a-minute vine is an aggressive native annual that can grow up to six inches in one day, smothering other native flora by blocking sunlight to them.

The EC researched the Rhinoncomimus latipes weevil, which the USDA is mass rearing for use in removing/controlling the vine. The tiny insect feeds on leaves and flowers, maintaining pressure on the vine and reducing its spread through the first frost. *R. latipes* poses no ecological risk beyond its target. Prior to approval, it was tested on over 50 plant species from 17 families in China and 28 additional species in



*Teaneck garden in full bloom* Photo by Marilyn Figueroa

US Department of Agriculture quarantine. It did not feed outside the *Polygonaceae* (knotweed) family, and its larvae could not survive on any host other than the mile-a-minute vine. Twenty years of releases across eleven states have confirmed this strict host specificity.

Recently, the Weevilfest was held in Frenchtown to release the first batch of weevils. Community members were encouraged to come see the weevils and take part in the project. Fliers for the event were fun and eye-catching, building on the Independence Day timeline and theme. The EC also produced an educational sign at the site about the weevils. There is another release planned for later this summer.

Once established, the weevil populations are self-sustaining, suppressing mile-a-minute indefinitely without additional cost or chemical inputs. The weevils disperse at roughly 2.5 miles per year. Progress will be tracked to share data with surrounding municipalities.

## Teaneck Township

The Teaneck Environmental Commission and the Garden Club of Teaneck collaborated on a Reading Garden Project to create a community space where previously there was a sewage treatment plant. The project reclaimed land that had been abandoned and was filled with weeds. The garden includes a children's sensory section with soft plants and aromas for children to enjoy. It's a perfect way to introduce a love of nature to children and the rest of the community.

The final project includes benches for reading and story times, defined pathways to encourage strolling through the garden, and a little free library so people can enjoy reading in the garden and sharing the love of books and nature.

# You have a voice on data centers in your town

By **Brooke Helmick**, Director of Policy,
New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance

News of a data center project or moratorium pops up nearly every day for New Jersey residents. While some seem to be embracing the breakneck speed of AI development, many residents and community advocates have taken the opposite approach.

## Patchwork policy design

At the State level, legislators have taken some efforts to limit the effects of data center development on NJ residents. In July, Governor Sherrill signed the *Data Center Fair Share Act (S731/A796)* that created a new rate class and structure for data centers. In doing so, the Governor's Office and legislature seek to protect ratepayers from skyrocketing electricity prices as data centers continue to strain the grid. Other related bills are currently making their way through the legislature, addressing a range of issues including accurate energy and water consumption reporting, banning the use of non-disclosure agreements to stymie resident engagement, and requiring sites to utilize their own onsite green energy. Likewise, the NJ Economic Development Authority (EDA) has paused a Murphy-era program designed to court data center development in the Garden State.

## On the ground: Communities pushing back

At the local level, many residents have rallied in the face of climate disaster and its connection to data center development. While some city councils and local elected officials trudge forward despite the risks, residents have organized to educate their neighbors, show up to council meetings and oppose data center development. Community members including Sustain SJ in Vineland and the Union County Residents Alliance Coalition in Kenilworth have come together, demanding robust access and transparency of information regarding data center developments in their communities. Meanwhile, numerous municipalities,



*Data center interior*
Pixabay

including Andover and Jersey City, have already instituted bans on data center development in their communities.

## Meeting the moment

While many of the State policies are good first steps to address the increasing threat of data center development, they often miss the core of the issue; data centers don't just gobble energy and raise costs. A hyperscale data center brings a litany of threats and challenges to community members, ranging from smaller disruptions to health like noise pollution and computer humming to truly life-threatening risks, such as PFAS pollution and extreme water consumption / drought. Not to mention increasing local air pollution if powered by fossil fuel, whether generated onsite or pulled from the grid (contributing to worsening climate change).

Local elected officials have a unique opportunity to guide State policy by listening to their residents and designing policy that doesn't just react to the present threat but imagines a better future. That can mean instituting a moratorium to more adequately study land, water and air impacts of a data center – and taking time to understand the myths of "economic benefits" that data centers bring – or heeding constituent outcry and implementing a zoning or land-use change that bans hyperscale data center development altogether. Local elected officials have the chance to come together with residents and advocates to pave the way for how the Garden State handles data center development.

## Daring to dream

We do not agree that AI and hyperscale data centers represent the future of our economy or labor: The future is what we craft it to be. We dream of a future where all people have their needs met; where clean water, air, land and food abound.

Data center development is not a foregone conclusion. Concerned citizens, Environmental Commissions and local elected officials can all help slow these projects down by calling for a moratorium to ensure robust study of environmental and public health impacts, and by implementing land-use policies to stop or limit hyperscale data centers in their communities.

**More information**

- To learn more about data center risks and threats, visit our website at: *https://njeja.org/clean-air-not-ai/* .
- For support in developing a local ordinance that best fits the need of your municipality, check out our Community Toolkit (*https://tinyurl.com/yc59tjax*) or reach out to us at *info@njeja.org*.
- NJEJA Resource Library – *https://tinyurl.com/bdz36cyx*

# The future of the Garden State is up to us

By **Rebecca Hilbert,**
The Nature Conservancy in NJ

When people think of America's natural beauty, New Jersey isn't the first state that comes to mind. But New Jerseyans know that the Garden State is home to a remarkable diversity of parks, forests, wetlands, mountains and shorelines. We're not just Route 1, superfund sites and strip malls. We're the Appalachian Mountains, the Pinelands of South Jersey, the cliffs of the Palisades, the forests and waterfalls of the Delaware Water Gap and 130 miles of iconic shoreline.

We spend our weekends at Liberty State Park and hiking in the Highlands. We pick fresh produce on farms in Salem County and grow it on urban farms in Newark. Our natural areas play a vital role in what makes our towns livable and unique, all while being the most densely populated state in the country.

That's something to be proud of, and our historic conservation legacy shows our dedication to protecting this natural beauty

and the services it provides. But this legacy is in danger. From the warehouse boom to the surge in data center development, we've come to realize that the open spaces we cherish are far more vulnerable than we imagined. With a third of our lands developed and a third conserved, it's up to us to decide what New Jersey's final landscape will look like for all of our communities: urban, suburban and rural alike.

The pace of conservation isn't keeping up with the pace of development. Red tape has slowed down conservation transactions. Land is more expensive than ever, and we lack the incentives needed to motivate sellers to choose protection over development. Without leadership from our State and local representatives, we won't have the accountability and coordination needed to get the job done.

Enter 50x50, an ambitious movement calling for the protection of 50 percent of our best remaining lands by 2050. The campaign outlines a statewide acreage goal, legislation to revitalize land conservation, and reforms that make preservation processes more efficient.

The decisions we make today will determine quality of life for generations of New Jerseyans to come. The question is no longer whether we *can* protect our last remaining open spaces, it's whether we choose to do so before the opportunity is lost forever.

# 2026 ANJEC Lechner Scholarship winner

By **Georgia Madiba**, ANJEC Membership Manager

ANJEC is proud to announce that Mateo Conza Orellana is the 2026 recipient of the Lechner Scholarship. Orellana is a rising senior and international student at Caldwell University double-majoring in Environmental Science and Political Science. His university studies have included drafting legislation on water quality in schools during an internship, lab research on the impact of humans on soil, and analysis of deforestation rates in the Amazon resulting from electoral changes in governments.



***"Environmental protection goes far beyond planting trees; real change happens when people understand that environmental issues are not distant problems, but challenges that shape their health, communities and future. When that connection is made, environmental action stops being the responsibility of a few and becomes a movement sustained by entire communities."***

*–Mateo Conza Orellana*

Orellana attributes his dedication and passionate interest in environmental issues to his parents, who are both engineers working on water quality. Observing their work in both the private and public sectors has made an impact on him at an early age. In addition, a school trip to a historically snowy area in his native Peru, which is now devoid of snow, imprinted on him a lasting image of climate change.

Upon graduation, Orellana sees himself working in environmental

public policy and/or directly working with local communities on environmental issues. His ambitions couldn't align better with ANJEC's mission: to work locally with an eye on policy at the same time! We wish him much success in his last year of university studies and hope the scholarship will help bolster his senior year.

ANJEC awards this scholarship biannually to rising college juniors and seniors, in memory of Hermia Lechner to honor her commitment to the preservation of open space and natural resources in New Jersey.

# In Remembrance

By **Julie Lange Groth**, *ANJEC Report* Editor

## "Captain Al" Modjeski

With more than 25 years of experience in coastal ecology and restoration work, Captain Al helped lead many initiatives to install living shorelines and flood-mitigating fish passage projects, restore marshes, create oyster reefs and recover beach habitats for threatened species.

A South Carolina native, Modjeski landed in NJ via the US Air Force during Desert Storm in the late 1980s, when he served at McGuire Air Force Base. He graduated from Stockton University in 1998 with a B.S. in Marine Biology and an M.S in Environmental Policy and Management. He earned his Captain's License through the US Coast Guard, where he had a unique opportunity to discover pelagic fish along the NJ coast (Pelagic fish live in the pelagic zone – neither close to the bottom nor near the shore).

According to the American Littoral Society, where Modjeski managed over 25 projects throughout NJ as Habitat Restoration Program Director, "Many of the shorelines we work on today were influenced by his innovative, science-backed approach to restoration."

Don Greenberg of the Jersey Shore Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation called Captain Al one of the region's most powerful activists in protecting the oceans, waves and beaches.




"We worked with Al on establishing the Bradley Beach Maritime Forrest, but to be clear, he was the driving force behind it." A passionate champion of coastal ecology, Captain Al will be greatly missed.




# John E Landau

John Landau grew up outside St. Louis, MO, exploring the caves, forests and fossil beds of the Ozarks. After graduating from the University of Chicago, he held senior roles in the telecommunications industry, but retirement took him back to his passion of exploring and defending the natural world.

In 2017 John and his wife Susan settled in Morristown, where they enjoyed the company of a crew of ecological enthusiasts who were championing biodiversity.

The Landaus completed the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program in 2021. Their capstone project focused on restoring Foote's Pond Wood, a 24-acre public park near their home. They became part of a community of local conservationists who launched the Friends of Foote's Pond Wood (FoFPW), a grassroots group dedicated to the care and preservation of the property and the connected ecosystems of nearby public properties. FoFPW has been recognized by the Morris Parks Alliance, the Garden Club of America, and recently received the Best Community Effort award at the Land Ethics Symposium.

In a statement, the Great Swamp Watershed Association expressed sadness at the loss of such a committed environmentalist: "John and Susan didn't just preserve Foote's Pond Wood – they gave our community a living, breathing sanctuary that will shelter wildlife and welcome families for generations to come."



# 6 tips for low-waste events

By **Julie Lange Groth**, *ANJEC Report* Editor

Summer vacations are in the rear-view mirror and it's time for business conferences, PTA meetings, autumn fairs and harvest festivals. Here are some ideas for reducing the environmental impact of your events.

## 1 Ditch single-use plastics

Items like plastic plates, utensils, straws and water bottles account for 40 percent of all plastics. Encourage attendees to bring reusable water bottles that can be



refilled at water stations. Washable plates and utensils may be available at your venue at no extra cost. If single-use items are your only option, choose bamboo products. Use compostable products only if you have access to composting facilities for the waste.

## 2 Encourage carpooling and public transport

Travel-related emissions make up to 90 percent of an event's environmental footprint. Offer a reward for those who carpool or take public transportation, such as discounted registration for those who commit to a sustainable commute to your event.

## 3 Go paperless

Paper accounts for 26 percent of total landfill waste. Instead of printed programs, list event details on screens around the venue, or on large posters. Better still, add a QR code that links to an online program, so attendees will have it on their phones or laptops.

## 4 Choose digital giveaways

Instead of yet another pen or stress ball that no one needs, offer paperless swag like digital gift cards, promo codes or professional photos that can be emailed to guests after the event.

## 5 Reuse directional signage

If your event is recurring, reuse the signs that direct guests to various activities of the day

## 6 Donate leftovers

An estimated 30-40 percent of US food goes to waste, and food accounts for more than half of methane emissions from landfills. Donate surplus food to a soup kitchen or food bank.

More info: *https://tinyurl.com/ajah9k9*



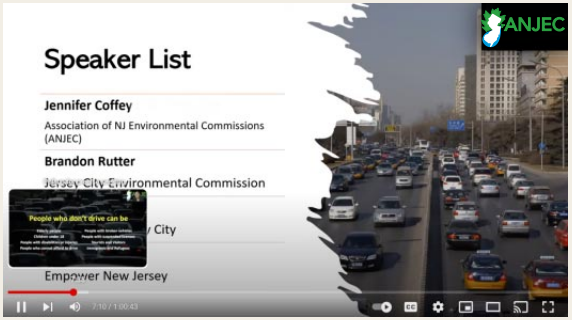

# Visit the ANJEC YouTube channel

**Now with over 175 training videos!**

You can find recordings of our webinars, workshops and trainings from the past three years, including Environmental Congress presentations, on ANJEC's YouTube channel, ANJEC Views. This is your opportunity to:

- View presentations you may have missed;
- Provide training for new environmental commission members; and
- Share valuable content with municipal officials.

Find it all at ANJEC Views at YouTube.com.



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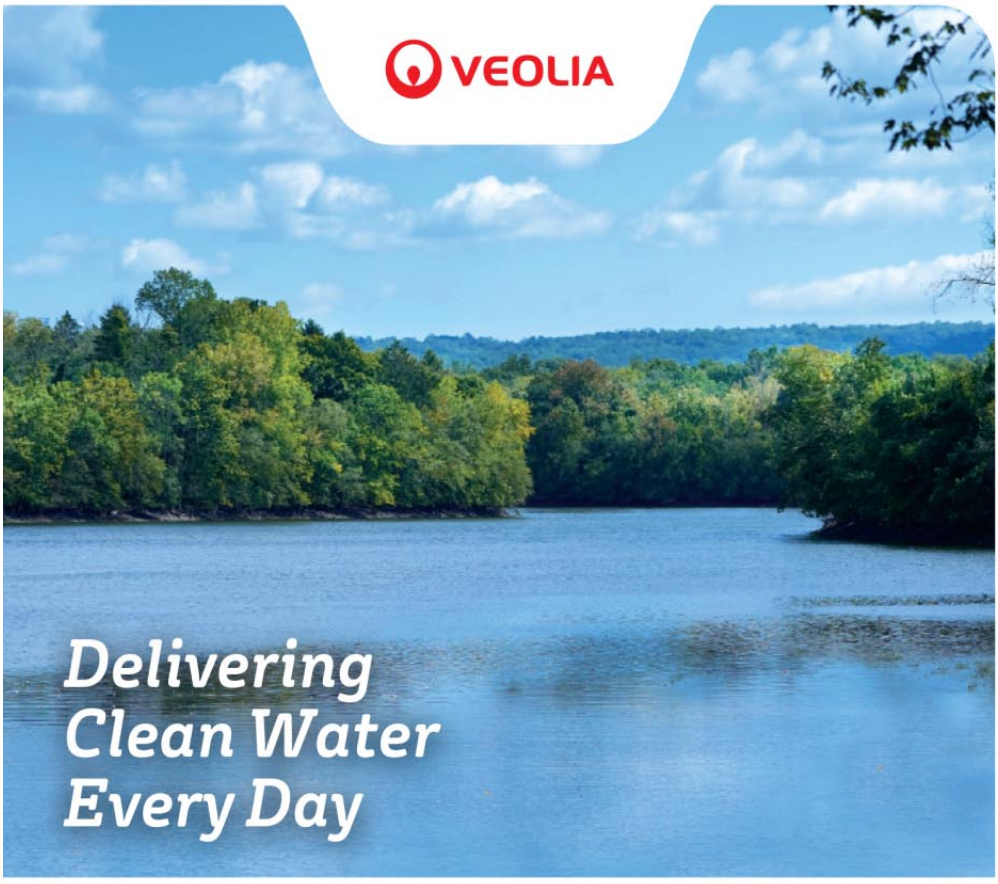
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# 2026 ANJEC Environmental CONGRESS

## Friday, September 25

**9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

## New Brunswick Theological Seminary

**35 Seminary Place**
**New Brunswick, NJ**

Keynote Speaker:
## NJDEP Commissioner Ed Potasnak

Featured Workshop:
## AI Data Centers in NJ

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

Register now: **https://anjec.org/environmental-congress-2/**

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## Register now! ANJEC Environmental Congress September 25 (page 39)