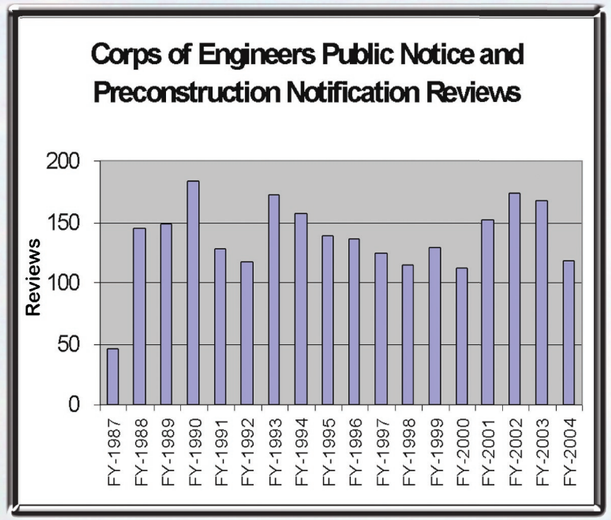
Federal Activities

Review of Department of the Army Permit Applications

The NJFO works in an advisory capacity to the U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers (Corps). The NJFO reviews and provides comments on between 115 and 175 permit applications per year. Project proposals range from routine to controversial.



Project Example

The Hackensack Meadowlands contains one of the largest contiguous blocks of brackish, tidal wetlands remaining in the northeastern United States. Its natural resources have been degraded by past land uses and its remaining 5,500 wetland acres are largely dominated by *Phragmites*; nevertheless, the Meadowlands still support huge concentrations of migratory birds, State-listed species, and rare communities.

For over 15 years, the NJFO advocated protecting the remaining wetlands and expressed serious concerns over a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) that promoted further wetland filling. Additional efforts by non-governmental environmental organizations, Congressional support, and NJFO-sponsored stakeholder work sessions have led to collaborative efforts among the NJFO, New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC), Corps, and others to promote protection and restoration. To date, the NJMC has acquired about half of the remaining wetlands. Most notably, the 600-acre Empire Tract, proposed for a mega-mall under the now defunct SAMP, became a protected site in October 2004. Pursuant to Congressional direction, the NJFO is preparing a Conservation Plan for the Meadowlands.

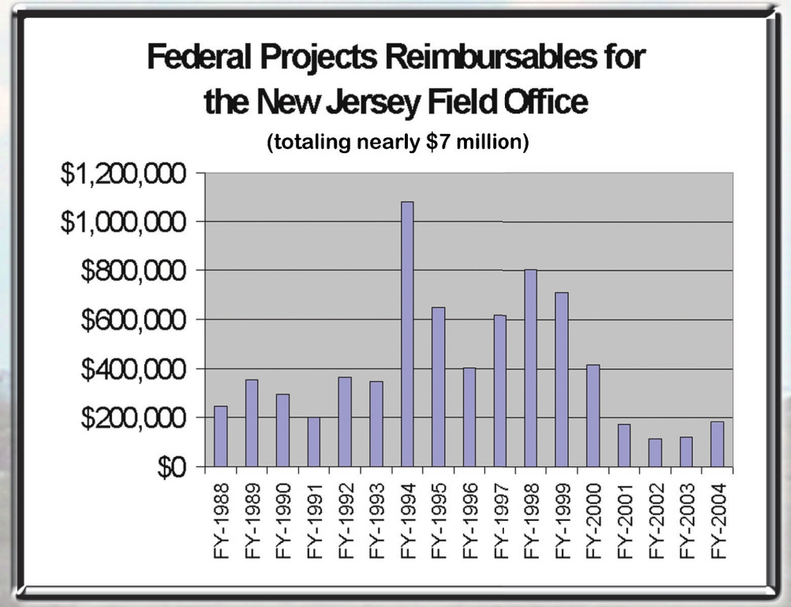
Federal Projects

Federal Projects work has always been a major Service responsibility in New Jersey. As a coastal state, New Jersey is the subject of major water resource projects, including beach nourishment, flood control, and navigation (dredging). The NJFO works with two Corps Districts (New York and Philadelphia) as part of the planning team. Since its inception as a full Ecological Services Field Office in 1987, the NJFO has assumed nearly $7 million under interagency agreements, producing over 140 Planning Aid and FWCA reports for the Corps and other agencies under interagency agreement and transfer funding.

Project Example

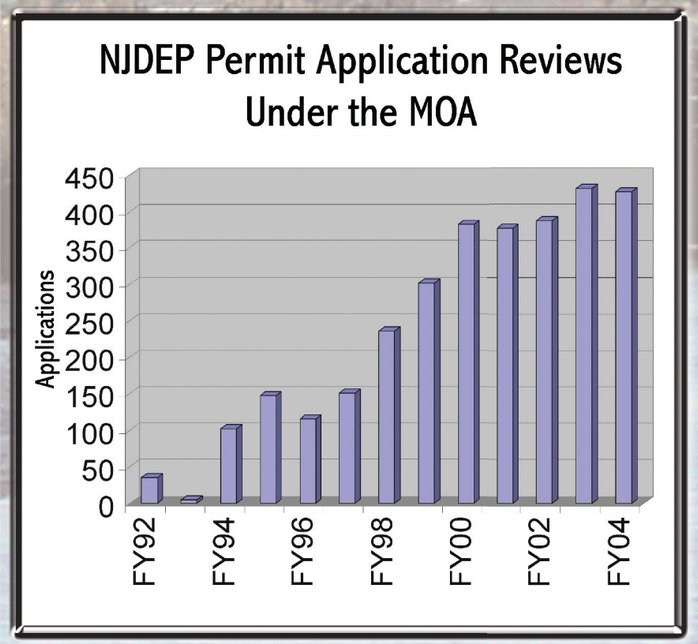
The Liberty State Park Ecosystem Restoration is a highly visible project (overlooking the Statue of Liberty and adjacent to the Liberty Science Center) with potentially extensive benefits to fish, wildlife, and environmental education in the New York metropolitan area. The NJFO is assisting the Corps as part of an interagency planning team to restore a wetland and associated uplands on a 212-acre site. Opportunities include enhancement of habitats for waterfowl, waders, and State-listed birds.

Concerns include invasive species and environmental contaminants from past rail yard activities and dredged material disposal. In addition to planning team participation, the NJFO has provided a Planning Aid Report and draft FWCA Report to the Corps.



Review of State Freshwater Wetland Permit Applications

State Assumption of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act is unique to New Jersey and Michigan. To help rectify potential inconsistencies with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Service signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 1993 with the EPA and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) for the NJFO to conduct a "functional equivalent" of ESA Section 7 consultation on applications for permits under the State's Freshwater Wetland Protection Act. Application reviews under the MOA doubled in 1998 when the bog turtle was federally listed. Surveys documenting additional bog turtle sites, discovery of Indiana bat hibernacula in Morris County and expansion of the bald eagle nesting population have quadrupled the number of State applications coming under Service review since 1994. Although the State assumption diminished the Service's ESA authority in New Jersey, active participation in the State's program has benefited federally listed species overall.

Project Example

The Woolwich Residential Development in Gloucester County was the subject of extensive coordination among the NJFO, NJDEP, and the developer to ensure long-term protection of a bog turtle population on the property. Conditions incorporated into the developer's State permit required the permanent protection of wetlands and their 300-foot buffers as well as the creation of storm water retention basins. Through the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, the developer will prepare and implement a plan to control and eradicate invasive plant species such as purple loosestrife and *Phragmites* and establish native warm-season grasses within the buffer.