



Federal Projects

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
New Jersey Field Office
927 North Main Street, Building D
Pleasantville, New Jersey 08232

609/646 9310
609/646 0352 Fax
Federal Relay Service for the deaf and
hard-of-hearing 1 800/877 8339

E-mail at njfieldoffice@fws.gov
Web site at <http://njfieldoffice.fws.gov>

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Working with Federal Agencies to Conserve New Jersey's Fish and Wildlife Resources

A pair of ruddy ducks

Photos Gene Nieminen / USFWS, NJFO

What are Federal Projects?

Federal agencies conduct a wide variety of activities that affect New Jersey's environmental quality, including fish and wildlife. Different federal agencies fund community, urban, and economic development; finance or carry out transportation projects; administer pest control and human health programs; conduct water resources development projects; and manage federal lands including two National Recreation Areas, five National Wildlife Refuges, and several military bases. As directed by various federal laws, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) works cooperatively with these agencies to ensure that their actions are protective of our State's substantial fish and wildlife resources—resources that contribute to the quality of life for New Jersey residents and visitors alike. In particular, the Service is charged with protecting federal trust fish and wildlife resources, which include migratory birds, migratory and inter-jurisdictional fish, certain marine mammals, federally listed endangered and threatened species, and wild living resources on federal lands.

**The mission of the
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is
working with others to conserve,
protect and enhance fish, wildlife,
and plants and their habitats
for the continuing benefit of the
American people.**



Beach replenishment at the Jersey Shore, an example of federal, local and State agencies working together on a federal project Photos Gene Nieminen / USFWS, NJFO

Why Is the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Involved in Federal Projects?

The Service's involvement in federal project planning is authorized under three national environmental laws. These laws require the Service's participation in federal project planning to represent the public's interest for fish and wildlife conservation.

- **The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act requires federal agencies to obtain assistance from the Service and the State wildlife agency to ensure that fish and wildlife conservation receives equal consideration in the development of water resources projects.**
- **The Endangered Species Act requires federal agencies to consult with the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that a proposed project will not jeopardize the continued existence of federally listed endangered or threatened species.**
- **The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider objectively the environmental impacts of their proposed actions during the course of a public decision-making process. Agencies must document their decisions in NEPA documents such as Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Statements. The basic principle of the NEPA decision-making process is that the federal action agency proposing a project must consider several different means of achieving the stated purpose of the project. The agency evaluates these project alternatives based on many criteria in the public's interest including cost, feasibility, and environmental impacts. Federal action agencies are required to seek input from the public, and from agencies such as the Service that have special expertise to evaluate project-related environmental impacts. Through NEPA, public and private organizations and individual citizens evaluate project alternatives and recommend measures to protect public interests, including fish and wildlife resources.**



Project Planning at Work in New Jersey

The Service's New Jersey Field Office (NJFO) is most involved in the planning of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) water resource projects such as flood control, dredging (navigation), beach replenishment, and environmental restoration. As directed by the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the NJFO works cooperatively with civil works planners in the Corps' New York and Philadelphia Districts to protect and enhance fish and wildlife, especially federal trust resources.

Project planning involves development and analysis of various alternatives to select a plan that best serves the many interests of the public, including fish and wildlife conservation. Consistent with the Service's Mitigation Policy, Service biologists assist the Corps to: identify fish and wildlife resources in the project area; assess potential impacts on fish and wildlife from alternative project designs; and identify means to avoid, minimize, and compensate (in that order) for negative impacts to fish and wildlife.

To ensure close coordination with Corps planners, Service biologists often participate on a project-planning team whose members represent various aspects of the public interest. Teams may include engineers, economists, hydrologists (experts on water flow), sociologists, archaeologists, and biologists. The Service's task on the planning team is to ensure that the final project design includes conservation of the public's fish and wildlife resources. A key role of the Service biologist is to coordinate with federal, State, and non-governmental specialists in different fields of wildlife resource conservation (*e.g.*, botanists; hydrologists; fisheries, endangered species, and environmental contaminants biologists), and incorporate their expertise into the planning process. The Service analyzes project impacts both at the level of the

ecosystem (*i.e.*, changes in water flows, fragmentation of habitats), and at the level of individual species. Service biologists' knowledge of the life requirements of various species enables them to recommend project modifications to avoid impacts to sensitive or protected species; for example, fencing the construction area to keep wildlife out, or halting work during the breeding season of an endangered species.

Service recommendations to protect wildlife vary with the nature of the water resource project. Dredging projects are designed to deepen or maintain marinas and maritime navigation channels. When dredging is proposed, Service biologists consider possible impacts such as release of environmental contaminants contained in the sediments at the bottom of the water body, reduction of water clarity, death of bottom-dwelling fish and invertebrates, and habitat loss from disposal of the dredged material, which can be on land or in a water body.

Flood control projects involve one or more actions to reduce property damage from flooding. The actions can be structural, non-structural, or a combination of both. Examples of structural alternatives include levees, floodwalls, floodgates, detention basins, and stream channel modifications. Non-structural alternatives can include flood-proofing buildings and roads, implementing flood warning systems, protecting natural flood storage areas such as wetlands, and restoring natural flood plains, often by acquiring real estate. Without careful planning, structural flood control actions can severely impair fish and wildlife habitats. Service biologists work with Corps planners to minimize the environmentally harmful effects of flood control projects by avoiding the highest quality wildlife habitats and minimizing the use of structural alternatives. Then the Service and the Corps work together to develop appropriate compensation for unavoidable project impacts, usually through restoring or creating similar habitats within the project area.



Photo Gene Nieminen / USFWS, NJFO

Citizens can affect the outcome of federal projects

How Can You Influence Federal Projects?

The NEPA requires public participation in federal planning. Federal action agencies advertise and conduct public meetings to identify problems and concerns early in planning. Consider attending these public scoping meetings to voice your concerns. The NEPA public review process also promotes written comments. As a citizen, you are encouraged to become involved by expressing your ideas and concerns, verbally or in writing. Remember that good planning fosters efficient use of our tax dollars. Through sound planning, federal projects can benefit people and enhance our national fish and wildlife heritage for future generations.

For further information, please contact:
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Sanderlings on a sunny fall day at the Jersey Shore

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