

The Hackensack Meadowlands

Protecting Valuable Wetlands

Why is the Meadowlands important?

The Meadowlands is the largest remaining brackish wetland complex in the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary. Just 7 miles west of Manhattan, the Meadowlands supports a remarkable diversity and abundance of fish and wildlife.

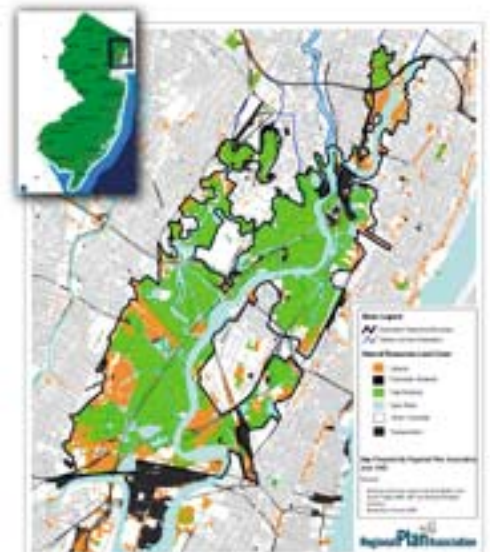
Birds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway feed and rest throughout the Meadowlands. Eighty-eight rare and/or managed species depend upon this diverse landscape. The value of the Meadowlands and its wildlife is made even more extraordinary by its proximity to almost 20 million people. According to reliable sources, the Meadowlands provides habitat for approximately:

- 275 species of plants,
- 332 of the 443 species of birds observed in New Jersey (including 65 nesting species),
- 50 species of fish and shellfish,
- 25 species of reptiles and amphibians, and
- 24 species of mammals.

What are the problems?

Just 150 years ago, the Hackensack Meadowlands was comprised almost exclusively of waterways and wetlands—in all some 21,000 acres. Atlantic white-cedar forests grew along the banks of tidal creeks. By the time the construction of Oradell Dam changed the hydrology and salinity of the Meadowlands in 1923, the forest was already gone. Approximately 15,000 acres of wetlands were gradually filled; today only 5,500 remain within the 8,400-acre complex. Accommodating the transportation, energy, and waste disposal demands of the growing urban population caused additional loss and pollution of the Meadowlands. In 1960, the Meadowlands Regional Development Agency was formed

to “reclaim” the wetlands for development. Resulting land uses were incompatible with ecosystem health and exacerbated the problems. Wetlands loss from development continues, though down from an annual average of 300 acres during the 1960s and ‘70s to 20 acres a year. Much has been done to allay the pollution of the Meadowlands, yet more work remains. One can still find landfill waste eroding into the river or see and smell earth laden with toxic pollutants at abandoned factory sites. Both restoration and conservation are imperative if the Meadowlands is to regain its value as a productive ecosystem, vital habitat for fish and wildlife, and a recreational resource for the New York metropolitan area.



"Hackensack Meadowlands Restoration Watershed Natural Resources Ground Cover," a Discussion Draft by the Regional Plan Association

Milestones

1960: Meadowlands Regional Development Agency is formed to promote development.
1969: Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission is established.
1975: State of New Jersey designates Sawmill Creek as a Wildlife Management Area.
1988: Controversial Special Area Management Plan is proposed.
2000: New Jersey Field Office of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service initiates a series of stakeholder work sessions to build consensus for protecting the Meadowlands.
2001: Special Area Management Plan is discontinued.
2001: New Jersey Acting Governor promotes protection of the Meadowlands ecosystem.
2001: Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission is renamed the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and emphasizes restoration and land acquisition.
2001: Congress directs the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to review alternative approaches to restoring and protecting the Hackensack Meadowlands.
2002: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife complete the "Vision Plan for the Fish and Wildlife Resources of the Hackensack Meadowlands."
2002: Interagency work begins on Comprehensive Restoration Implementation Plan for restoring and conserving the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary, including the Hackensack Meadowlands.



Mill Creek in the Hackensack Meadowlands with Manhattan on the horizon

How does the New Jersey Field Office protect the Hackensack Meadowlands?

For three decades, the New Jersey Field Office of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has worked to protect the fish and wildlife resources of the Hackensack Meadowlands.

Regulatory Activities

- The New Jersey Field Office has promoted the reduction of wetlands filling in the Meadowlands through permit review and enforcement under the Clean Water Act.

Planning & Technical Assistance

The New Jersey Field Office

- conducted several work sessions for other government agencies and organizations to develop a consensus for protection of the Meadowlands during 2000-2001.
- provides technical assistance to the Corps of Engineers on federal projects.
- participates in Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration in the Meadowlands.
- reports to Congress on how best to sustain and safeguard the fish and wildlife resources of the Meadowlands.

Research, Partnerships & Education

The New Jersey Field Office

- developed a Vision Plan with the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife.
- published an issue of *Field Notes* dedicated to the Hackensack Meadowlands in 2002.
- with the Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute, Hudsonia, Inc., and the Corps of Engineers sponsored the Meadowlands Symposium in 2003 to showcase research.
- continues to build meaningful partnerships with non-governmental organizations for Meadowlands protection.
- with its partners is contributing to a growing network of websites and databases.



Officials tour the Meadowlands on August 27, 2002



The third Stakeholder Work Session, Morristown, October 31, 2001



The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife lead the 2002 Meadowlands tour



The second Stakeholder Work Session, Elizabeth, May 23, 2001



The first Stakeholder Work Session, Secaucus, October 17, 2000

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