



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Hackensack Meadowlands Initiative

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After two centuries of being drained, filled, and polluted, New Jersey's Hackensack Meadowlands, the largest wetlands complex in the New York / New Jersey Harbor Estuary, is being reclaimed for fish, wildlife, and people thanks to the collective efforts and dedication of citizens, lawmakers, scientists, government agencies, and conservation groups. Almost within the shadows of Manhattan's skyline, the 5,400-acre Meadowlands provides habitat for over 700 species of plants, fishes, shellfishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. Birds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway feed and rest throughout the Meadowlands. In fact, of the 443 bird species known to occur in New Jersey, over 332 can be found in the Meadowlands. The Meadowlands is a national treasure for wildlife and a vital natural area for the 20 million residents of the greater New York metropolitan area. Collaboratively, a strategy is being developed to clean up, restore, and protect the Meadowlands. Partnerships, remediation and clean-up, restoration, public education, and protection are central to the Hackensack Meadowlands Initiative.

Major challenges lie ahead. The ecosystem is impaired by its long history of industrial use. The Hackensack River, backbone of the Meadowlands, flows at only about 10 per cent of its historic volume. A major component of the river's flow is effluent from sewage treatment plants (100 million gallons of secondary-treated sewage is discharged daily). Throughout the Meadowlands, dense stands of invasive common reed and other exotic species reduce the value of wetlands for wildlife. Environmental contaminants from both past and current sources are pervasive in Meadowlands soils, sediments, and waters.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District (Corps), the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) are partners in the federally funded (nearly \$2 million in 2005) Hackensack Meadowlands Environmental Restoration. A Feasibility Study will lead to the development of a Comprehensive Restoration Implementation Plan. Additionally, the NJMC has acquired or leased 13 potential restoration sites (1,542 acres) in addition to the 6 sites (393 acres) owned and already restored as mitigation for previous wetland impacts. In 2002, the New Jersey

Division of Fish and Wildlife, which manages the 878-acre Sawmill Creek Wildlife Management Area in the heart of the Meadowlands, developed a Vision Plan for the Meadowlands with the Service. The results of these and other partnership efforts demonstrate a collective commitment to natural resource stewardship and help resolve the water, wetlands, and fish and wildlife issues of the Meadowlands.

As directed by Congress (2005 Consolidated Appropriations Bill [P.L. 108-447] and other authorities), the Service has been asked to provide technical assistance for the restoration and protection of the Meadowlands. To accomplish this directive, the Service is collaborating with other stakeholders and is also developing a Preliminary Conservation Plan for the Hackensack Meadowlands, which will be completed in 2005. The Plan addresses baseline conditions and is making recommendations for contaminant remediation, water quality improvement, and habitat restoration.

The remediation and restoration of the Meadowlands is a monumental undertaking. We will succeed only if all stakeholders pool their resources and work together.