

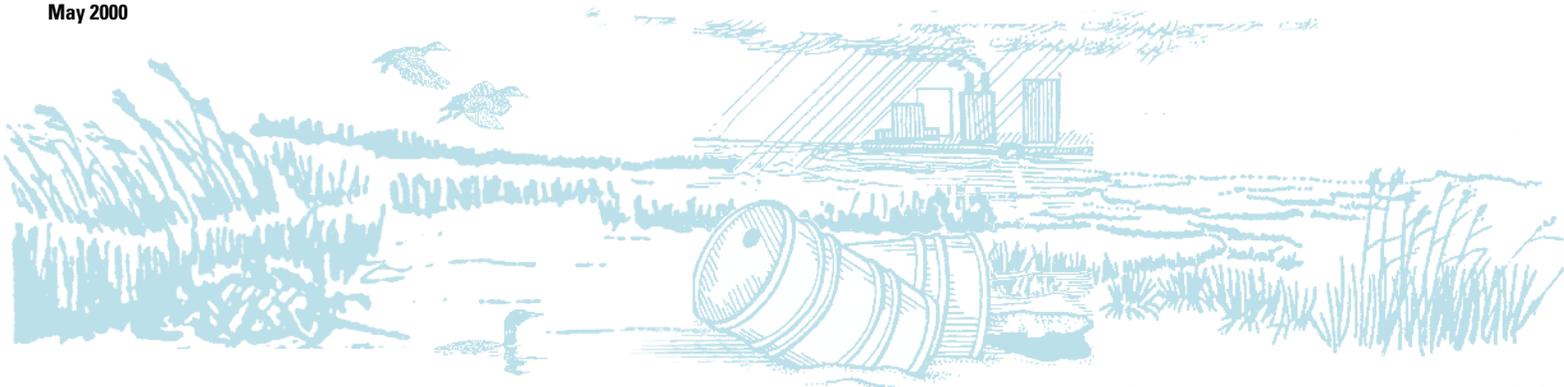


The BTAG Program in New Jersey

Cleaning Up the Garden State

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
New Jersey Field Office
927 N. Main St., Bldg. D
Pleasantville, NJ 08232

609/646 9310
609/646 0352 Fax
May 2000



Introduction

The many complex tasks and issues facing Superfund sites create the need for efficient communication between the people working to clean up these areas. To help complete these cleanup efforts, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established, on a regional basis, groups of scientists to advise Superfund site managers. The groups, called Biological Technical Assistance Groups or BTAGs, assist in evaluating ecological impacts at each Superfund site.

The BTAG responsible for sites in New Jersey is comprised of federal and State technical representatives from EPA, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service). The purpose of the BTAG is to help site managers understand and evaluate Superfund site information to ensure proper consideration of ecological impacts when designing cleanup activities.

Why BTAG's?

The Comprehensive Environmental Restoration, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA), as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA), and the National Oil and Hazardous Materials Contingency Plan mandates that remedial actions at hazardous sites protect both human health and the environment.

New Jersey has approximately 100 Superfund sites on the National Priorities List (NPL). The NPL is the federal list of the nation's worst hazardous waste sites. Each site has a unique combination of biological, hydrological, geological, and chemical characteristics that must be considered in designing the cleanup. Because a site manager cannot be an expert in all the necessary scientific areas, BTAGs can provide information and advice to site managers in the evaluation process. The agencies comprising the BTAG work to protect fish and wildlife resources associated with Superfund site activities.

The New Jersey Field Office's Role in BTAG

The BTAG is the primary vehicle for the Service's New Jersey Field Office (NJFO) to evaluate adverse impacts to natural resources from contaminants at Superfund sites.

Participating in the BTAG allows the NJFO the opportunity to provide leadership in protecting federal trust resources such as migratory birds. The BTAG serves an advisory role, assisting site managers as they evaluate ecological effects of site contamination and cleanup actions. The NJFO BTAG member reviews and comments on the New Jersey Superfund site activities to ensure federal trust resources receive full consideration during the cleanup process. The Service is the only agency on the BTAG representing certain trust resources, such as migratory birds and federally listed endangered species.

The Service's technical assistance helps ensure that the cleanup process, pursuant to CERCLA/SARA, complies with the requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934,

the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and other federal laws.

Participation in the BTAG helps the Service obtain site-specific information and recommend appropriate actions to mitigate adverse impacts due to contamination. In addition, the BTAG works closely with Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) efforts. NRDAR is a process that allows government agencies, in behalf of the American people, to collect compensation from liable parties for injuries to fish, wildlife, and their habitats due to contamination at Superfund sites. This compensation ultimately results in habitat improvements and other benefits to fish and wildlife. The BTAG facilitates the NRDAR process by ensuring the cleanup process sufficiently addresses all injuries to trust resources.

The NJFO's BTAG member attends meetings, conducts site investigations, and participates in site-specific discussions based on review of Superfund site documents. As a federal trustee of natural resources, the Service can influence activities addressing natural resource concerns. The Service can guide restoration activities -- thus avoiding cleanup actions that could have major adverse environmental impacts.



How Can the BTAG Program Benefit Fish and Wildlife Resources?

The BTAG program is an opportunity to recommend habitat improvements for fish and wildlife resources. For instance, the NJFO recently developed seed mixture recommendations for native warm-season grasses to use as vegetative cover at Superfund sites. The seed mix produces a cover that stabilizes the soil, provides habitat for a wide range of wildlife, and has a low maintenance cost. The seed mix recommendations can be incorporated into cleanup plans on suitable areas. By creating a diverse grassland community, habitat restored by the cleanup process will benefit several species of declining grassland birds as well as other wildlife.



Looking to the Future...

The release of contaminants into the environment will likely continue and new Superfund sites will probably be identified; however, the BTAG's actions will continue to help clean up these sites and reduce the number of contaminated sites in New Jersey. These efforts fit well into the Service's mission: *working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.* The effective enforcement of existing environmental laws and the Service's commitment to protect the environment will help ensure the future of our natural resources.

For further information, please contact:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
New Jersey Field Office
927 N. Main St., Bldg. D
Pleasantville, NJ 08232

609/646 9310
609/646 0352 Fax



*BTAG is Comprised of Representatives from the:
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*