

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commissio

About the Critical Habitat Survey & Rare Species Identification Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission (WPJEC) has embarked on a unique habitat examination and education program thanks to two generous grants - a Smart Growth Planning Grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) and a Conserve Wildlife Grant from the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife Endangered and Non-Game Species Program awarded to the South Jersey Land and Water Trust. Both the Township of Pilesgrove and the Borough of Woodstown have also provided matching funds to make this project possible.

The WPJEC Critical Habitat Survey Project is a multi-pronged approach to identifying and documenting rare plant and animal species and their associated habitats, as well as other areas that feature high biological diversity and special environmental characteristics, throughout the greater Woodstown-Pilesgrove community. This project will promote greater protection of rare species and important habitat, help prevent landscape fragmentation and the creation of unsustainable biological islands and will advance smart growth principles by encouraging the integration of natural resource protection and sound land-use planning.

The multifaceted project has several components, including:

- an extensive review of all known environmental inventories and biological data
- consultations with expert biologists and ecologists;
- field surveys and analysis to identify the rare species communities and areas of high biological diversity within Woodstown-Pilesgrove;
- development of informational guidelines, natural histories, and protocols for identifying and reporting seven target animal and plant species selected through an investigation and survey phase;
- education and training to enable the WPJEC and citizens to conduct ongoing species and habitat searches;
- training on how to file rare species reporting forms;
- a public presentation on the project's findings; instruction on survey techniques, training on regulatory aspects and a presentation of zoning and regulatory case studies;
- a report to the municipal governing bodies on how the project results can be used.

PROJECT PURPOSE & NEED

The WPJEC has been successful in implementing measures to protect valuable natural resources. The WPJEC has completed an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) for both communities and developed a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement Worksheet that is required for all major site plans and subdivision applications in both communities. The WPJEC authored a comprehensive light pollution ordinance, adopted by Woodstown, and was instrumental in the creation of a Woodstown's Open Space and Recreation Plan and Woodstown's Conservation Zoning and Conservation Overlay District Ordinance.

In spite of its progress, the WPJEC believes that there are gaps between the current ERI data and existing conditions within the community. This has created a need to more closely examine the natural resources within the two towns. In turn, the information and guidance materials developed as part of the Critical Habitat Survey Project will be used to preserve biological diversity and ecological sustainability through more informed decision-making. The Critical Habitat Survey Project is envisioned to build upon our successes and develop new information and tools for updating the ERI.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The WPJEC Critical Habitat Survey Project employs a strong partnership approach. In addition to the two granting agencies, ANJEC and NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, we have employed prominent wildlife biologist and environmental consultant Blaine Rothausser of BR Environmental to head the project. Our team also includes the South Jersey Land and Water Trust, a local non-profit organization dedicated to preserving watersheds and open space. Other partner organizations providing technical support are the Rutgers University Cooperative Extension Service's Environmental and Resource Management Program, the NJDEP Americorps Watershed Ambassador Program and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.