

New Jersey Conservation



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From Our Co-Executive Directors

Alison Mitchell | Jay Watson

ABOUT THE COVER

Nature is for everyone - whether you're vigorously hiking a rugged trail or sitting in quiet contemplation of a peaceful landscape. This photo by Co-Executive Director Jay Watson, taken at Mercer Lake at Mercer County Park, perfectly illustrates the serenity that nature provides. In addition to serving as the cover photo of this newsletter, the image also graces the cover of "Nature for All: A 2050 Vision for New Jersey." Find out more about the report on page 4.

It's a common job interview question: Where do you see yourself in five years? A good answer demonstrates thoughtful planning.

Looking ahead is also a critical exercise for organizations. During the strategic planning process, we ask: What do we want to accomplish in the next five years? What actions are needed to achieve these goals? How do we ensure that we have the necessary staff and funding?

New Jersey Conservation Foundation just completed an ambitious 2024-2029 strategic plan, and we're energized and ready to carry it out!

Over the past 64 years, NJ Conservation has grown from a grassroots group fighting to protect the Great Swamp, to the state's nonprofit leader in land preservation. We've protected over 140,000 acres, created a system of public preserves, and advocated for strong laws and policies at all levels of government.

Significant challenges and opportunities await! There have been compelling calls for greater justice and equity, and an increasingly urgent need to address climate change and increase the state's ability to adapt to its impacts.

Over the next few years, our top priorities include preserving at least another 4,000 acres of open space, farmland and urban land; planting shade trees, micro-forests and pollinator meadows in urban communities; securing strong state legislation to protect and steward forests; working with partners to create a "Green & Healthy Cities" initiative; and restoring key habitats and conducting other important stewardship work to protect natural resources and benefit people, plants and wildlife.

Other priorities include protecting natural resources that sequester carbon or help the state become more climate resilient; defending preserved lands against diversions and inappropriate development; improving accessibility at our preserves; ensuring that the state's dedicated land preservation funding continues; and engaging younger, more diverse and urban communities.

There's much to be done by 2029, but it's all part of our mission to protect New Jersey's land and natural resources for the benefit of all.

We're also looking beyond the next five years. In this newsletter, you'll read about a new report, commissioned by New Jersey Conservation Foundation and authored by former executive director Michele S. Byers, which recommends saving half of New Jersey's remaining land that is not developed or preserved and a much more ambitious effort at greening our cities. It's a bold vision, but one that many of our partners have already embraced!

As always, the work we do is only possible because of the generosity of our members and supporters. Thank you for all you do to keep New Jersey a great place to live, work and play!

Alison Mitchell



New Jersey Conservation Foundation is a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve land and natural resources throughout New Jersey for the benefit of all.

We protect strategic lands through acquisition and stewardship, promote strong land use policies, and forge partnerships to achieve conservation goals.

For membership information, please visit our website at www.njconservation.org or call us at 1-888-LANDSAVE. Our mailing address is 170 Longview Road, Far Hills, New Jersey 07931.



JOIN US OUTSIDE!

SIGN UP AT: NJCONSERVATION.ORG/EVENTS
Check back often for more events!



FAR HILLS

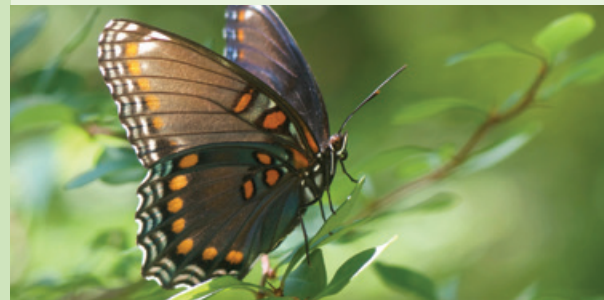
Spring migration
bird walks
MAY 1, 8 & 15

Butterfly walks with
the North American
Butterfly Association
JULY 19
AUGUST 9

Autumn migration
bird walks
SEPTEMBER 18
OCTOBER 9 & 16

JERSEY CITY

Liberty State Park
Big Day of Birding
MAY 4



CAMDEN

Bird walk from
Gateway Park to
Farnham Park
MAY 5

Black Birders Week
at Cramer Hill
Waterfront Park
MAY 30

TRENTON

Cadwalader Park Bird Walk
MAY 5



STOCKTON

30th Anniversary
Donald & Beverley Jones
Memorial Hike
NOVEMBER 10

NATURE FOR ALL

A 2050 VISION FOR NEW JERSEY

A call to preserve half of the state's undeveloped land

New Jersey has reached a crossroads in the decades-long effort to protect land where nature can thrive.

The Garden State has preserved about a third of its land mass: nearly 1.6 million acres of open space, farmland, historic sites and flood-prone areas. The state has also invested in urban communities, with a high priority on providing city parks and access to waterfronts.

Our land preservation programs have enjoyed tremendous success and popularity, but their pace has slowed in recent years. This begs the question: Has enough land been preserved as of now to ensure a safe and healthy future for all residents, in the face of a changing climate and a growing population?

The short answer is no.

A new report commissioned by New Jersey Conservation Foundation, *"Nature for All: A 2050 Vision for New Jersey,"* calls for a strong push to permanently preserve half of the state's remaining undeveloped land – including at least 500,000 acres by 2050.

“ This is no time to rest. New Jersey must redouble its efforts to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the environment, communities and the economy.”

- MICHELE S. BYERS
Former Executive Director, NJCF

New Jersey is the nation's most densely populated state, with a population now over 9.3 million and growing. A soon-to-be-released study by Rutgers and Rowan universities found that over the last 30 years, development has claimed 377,000 acres.

As the *Nature for All* report makes clear, land and nature are essential to our state's clean water, clean air, healthy local foods, biological diversity, and natural solutions to climate change. In addition, exposure to nature and the outdoors provides tremendous physical and mental health benefits.

According to the report, New Jersey has about 1.4 million acres remaining that are neither developed nor preserved. About 816,000 of these acres - mainly upland forests and farms - are not constrained by regulations and, thus, most vulnerable to development.

Another 644,000 acres include wetlands, wetlands buffers, floodplains and flood hazard areas that have some level of protection through laws and regulations. While less likely to be developed, these lands are priorities for permanent protection because of their incredible ecological values.

Right now, although most of New Jersey's undeveloped acres are in private ownership, they're still providing ecosystem services benefitting the public. For example, forests sequester carbon to fight climate change, soak up stormwater to prevent flooding, cleanse our air and drinking water, and provide habitat for a diversity of native plants and animals.

Without permanent protection, these properties could be sold at any time, potentially leading to environmental degradation.

The idea of preserving half of our remaining land is not new. In his 2016 book, *Half Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*, the late Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson called for preserving 50 percent of the Earth's land and waters to ensure the survival of humanity. He argued that humans need a high biodiversity on land and sea to survive, and protecting 50 percent of the

world's lands and oceans will save 85 percent of our plants and animals.

The *Nature for All* report also calls for New Jersey to establish a "Green and Healthy Cities" initiative to improve water and air quality, reduce flooding risks, remediate contaminated sites, improve access to healthy local foods, provide clean and safe parks and waterways, plant trees, enhance existing urban forests, and ensure expanded urban agriculture and community gardens. Lands suitable for parks and green infrastructure should be priorities for open space funding investments.

New Jersey faces many challenges in the years ahead: climate change, sea level rise, environmental justice, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, and invasive species, to name a few. The report presents a comprehensive vision of how New Jersey can ensure its future livability and sustainability by preserving half of our remaining available land and greening our cities.

To read the report, go to njconservation.org/nature-for-all.



The cost of inaction is huge. Land is a precious, non-renewable resource. If New Jerseyans don't act quickly to protect undeveloped land while it's still available, the state is at risk of losing priceless ecological benefits – at a time when they're needed more than ever.



How can we identify the BEST LANDS FOR PRESERVATION?

With 30 percent of New Jersey’s land area still available for either preservation or development, which lands are the most important to save? Which are most vulnerable to development? Which have the highest conservation values?

To help answer these questions, the *Nature For All* report utilized the New Jersey Conservation Blueprint mapping tool to analyze data on land in the Garden State that has not yet been developed or preserved.

Conservation Blueprint was developed in 2016 by Rowan University, the Nature Conservancy of New Jersey, and New Jersey Conservation Foundation, with input from the state’s larger conservation community. This Geographic Information System (GIS) tool was created to help identify top priority lands for preservation.

For the *Nature For All* report, the Conservation Blueprint analysis first identified all “available” lands (those not yet preserved or developed) by region and land use type, then ranked them for ecological and water resource features, agricultural value, and community green space value.

Land categories were further broken down into those with environmental constraints to development – such as wetlands and stream buffers – and those without constraints. Lands with no environmental constraints are considered to be at the greatest risk for development and, thus, a high priority for preservation.

The Conservation Blueprint tool is easy to use and available to the public.

To try it out, go to <http://NJMap2.com>.

Conservation + Blueprint

A NEW WAY TO VISUALIZE PRIORITIES





From left are Tom Gilbert, trustee Finn Caspersen, Jay Watson, Alison Mitchell, Bruce Tucker and trustee president Louise Wilson.

Pollinator meadow

honors memory of Bob Tucker

A former hayfield at the Hill & Dale Preserve in Hunterdon County is being transformed into a native pollinator meadow in memory of longtime New Jersey Conservation Foundation supporter and board member Bob Tucker.

A resident of Glen Gardner and breeder of Standardbred racehorses, Bob is remembered for his love of New Jersey's natural landscapes and enthusiasm for land conservation. He had served as a trustee of the CTW Foundation – a charitable organization that supports conservation – for 57 years until his passing in 2016, including many years as president.

Tucker Meadow, which was dedicated at a ceremony in October 2023, is being created on a large hayfield at the Hill & Dale Preserve in Tewksbury Township. A diversity of wildflowers, native grasses and herbaceous plants that support insect pollinators are being added to the landscape by our stewardship team.

Visitors to Tucker Meadow will be able to enjoy an array of colorful wildflowers blooming throughout the growing season, as well as the butterflies, bees and moths that they will attract. The meadow will also provide shelter and food for overwintering insects.

Bob Tucker's son, Bruce, said the meadow is "a great tribute" to his father, who was raised on a farm outside Morristown and appreciated the importance of pollinators.

"Farming and the outdoors were always a passion for him, so I think he would be very excited about this," said Bruce. "As a butterfly enthusiast, I can't wait to go out and visit" when the meadow matures and is filled with flowers and pollinators.

The Tucker Meadow dedication included the unveiling of an educational sign describing the decline of insect pollinators in New Jersey, and how native meadows can provide critical assistance in their recovery.

Established in 2011, the 295-acre Hill & Dale Preserve is used for passive recreation like hiking, horseback riding and nature observation, as well as farming. The highest point of the preserve offers sweeping views of Round Mountain, the surrounding countryside, and the distant Cushtunk Mountains.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HILL & DALE PRESERVE AND LOOK AT A TRAIL MAP, GO TO:

www.njconservation.org/preserve/hill-dale-preserve



Bruce & Nancy Tucker

2023

GAINING GROUND

July 2023

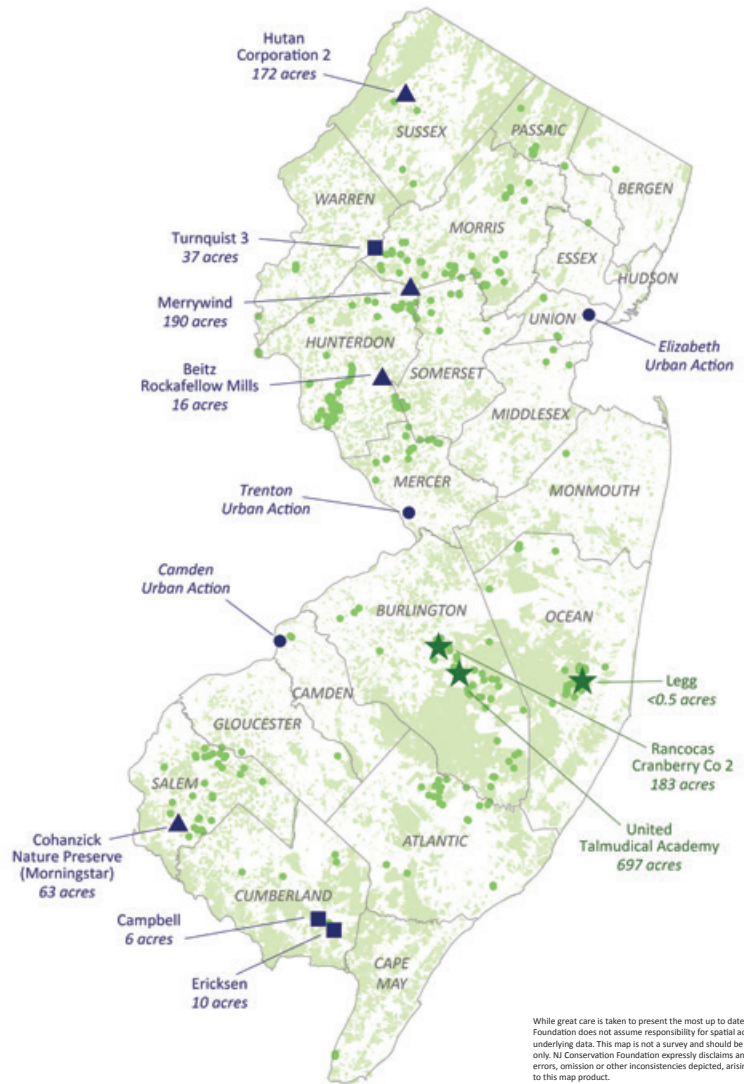
Feb. 2024

- ★ NJ Conservation Owned: 880 acres (Fee or Easement)
- ▲ Preserved in Partnership: 441 acres
- Urban Action
- Transfers (53 acres)
- NJ Conservation Foundation Owned & Managed Properties (Fee or Easement)
- Preserved Land (Open Space & Farmland)

New Jersey Conservation Foundation and its partners permanently preserved 1,374 acres from July 2023 through February 2024. These lands include family farms as well as natural areas that safeguard clean drinking water, protect wildlife habitat, and offer scenic beauty and outdoor recreation, in addition to NJ Conservation's work in urban communities.



THANK YOU TO ALL MEMBERS, VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS FOR HELPING TO PRESERVE THESE LANDS!



While great care is taken to present the most up to date information, NJ Conservation Foundation does not assume responsibility for spatial accuracy or timeliness of underlying data. This map is not a survey and should be used for planning purposes only. NJ Conservation Foundation expressly disclaims any and all responsibility for errors, omission or other inconsistencies depicted, arising from otherwise related to this map product.

It's easy to join New Jersey Conservation Foundation online - visit the website at www.njconservation.org

Become a Member Today!



Cranberry farm permanently preserved as open space

With the help of our partners, New Jersey Conservation Foundation permanently preserved more than 180 acres of a Pine Barrens cranberry farm as open space this past winter. Preservation of this property will protect water quality and wetland habitat for critical species, and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities.

The land in Southampton Township, Burlington County, was part of a farm operated for over 90 years by the Mehler family, owners of the Rancocas Cranberry Company.

The newly-preserved property is located across from NJ Conservation's 170-acre Evert Trail Preserve, and adjacent to Brendan Byrne State Forest. It also adjoins Blueberry Acres, a 205-acre property preserved by the Trust for Public Land and transferred to NJ Conservation in 2021.

The land is within the headwaters of the South Branch of the Rancocas Creek, which flows through the property and supplies water to a reservoir on site. Approximately 98 percent of the property is wetlands, with the remainder upland forest.

“This property is truly a gem of the Pine Barrens, representing a history of conservation that we are proud to uphold. Continuing the Mehler family’s vision of preservation will not only protect valuable wildlife habitat and water quality in the area, but also enable the public to share in enjoying this special place.”

- STEPHANIE KREISER
NJ Conservation's Director for South Jersey

According to data from New Jersey's Landscape Project, the land provides habitat for endangered and special concern species, including red-headed woodpeckers, timber rattlesnakes, northern parula warblers, great blue herons, bald eagles, barred owls and Pine Barrens bluet damselflies.

New Jersey Conservation will partner with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA) to manage the land and host outdoor education programs there. Pinelands Adventures, a PPA initiative, plans to offer guided trips to the property to showcase the beauty and wildlife of the Pine Barrens.

Four generations of the Mehler family had maintained the property since 1933, starting with the great-grandfather of Craig Mehler, the current Rancocas Cranberry Company president. Craig said his grandmother and father always wanted to see the property “stay natural.” In 1979, Craig's father secured from Burlington County one of the first land conservation agreements in the state to protect the property from development. Craig is retaining 33 acres of the farm that include active cranberry bogs.

Funding for the purchase of the 183 acres came from the New Jersey Green Acres Program, Open Space Institute, PPA, and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant. Ducks Unlimited, Inc. also contributed toward acquisition costs.



Capital Park in Trenton moves closer to reality



CURRENT SPACE VS PROPOSED PARK (LEFT)

Photo by Jay Watson

We did it! A long-abandoned plan for a new park in downtown Trenton, located behind the historic State House and near other landmarks, has been brought back to life and is now moving closer to becoming a reality.

For the past year and a half, New Jersey Conservation Foundation and our partners have been vigorously advocating for the state to resume planning for Capital Park – first proposed in 2004 but abandoned five years later. The park is envisioned as an inviting green space that will serve

Trenton residents while attracting visitors to the downtown area and providing opportunities for outdoor programs.

The first good news came last summer, when the State Legislature and Governor Murphy agreed on a \$3 million appropriation in the 2024 budget for design and engineering. The state is now in the process of hiring a landscape design firm to perform the work.

The next step is for the Legislature to appropriate \$10-15 million for the actual construction of Capital Park, something we hope will happen soon. Time is of the essence!

New Jersey will be in the national spotlight in 2026 for two great reasons. First, the United States will be celebrating its 250th anniversary, and New Jersey will stand front and center as the crossroads of the American Revolution. New Jersey has more Revolutionary War sites than

any other state, including many in and around Trenton. Second, New Jersey will be hosting the finals of the World Cup, a wildly popular event that will draw visitors from around the globe.

The renewed effort to make Capital Park a reality was propelled by the completion in early 2023 of a six-year, \$300 million renovation of the State House. The gold-domed landmark, built in 1792, is the nation's second oldest continuously-used state capitol building.

Along with our main partners, New Jersey Future, the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, Isles Inc. and Greater Trenton, we worked to rally public support behind the idea that now is the time to get Capital Park back on track.

The park is a long-needed amenity in an area of Trenton that is sorely lacking a unifying green space. When completed, it will link many state assets, including the State House and Annex, State Library, State Archives, State Museum and Planetarium, Old Barracks Museum, War Memorial building, and Petty's Run archaeological site.

THANK YOU to our partners and to all residents who encouraged the Governor and Legislature to fund Capital Park. Let's keep up the momentum, so the completed park will be a place the entire state can be proud of!

Thank you!

New Jersey Conservation Foundation welcomes new members and gratefully acknowledges donors who made contributions between October 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023. With your support, we preserve and protect New Jersey's lands.

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(from October 1, 2023
through December 31, 2023)

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Pamela DeLosSantos
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Joanne Hall
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Scalla Jakso
Jay Kalyanaraman
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Community Foundation
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Karen Malzone
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Kenneth Meyers
Miranda Fund of the
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Stephen and Elizabeth
Parker
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Perrault
Edmund W. Peters
Edward C. and Carol L.
Pfeiffer
Louis G. Piancone
Charitable Foundation
Pinelands Preservation
Alliance
Dionne Polk
Kathryn A. Porter
Pockets - A Family
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Inc.
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Robbi
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Michael Steigerwald
Martha Steinberg
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Stewart Winter and
Joseph Saba
Bob and Barbara Wolfe
Charitable Fund
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W. Wolfe
Brann and Ellen Wry
Michele W. Wu
Bo Xing and Aili Liu
Beth Yingling

Memorials

(from October 1, 2023
through December 31, 2023)

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Dawn Lapham
Peter Evert
Debra Becker
Nancy Burke
Elizabeth Healy
Michele S. Byers
Alison Mitchell and
Chris Keep
Pam Hirsch
Michele S. Byers
Alison Mitchell and
Chris Keep
Janet Hunt
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Hunt
Marion Kingsford
Alessandra H.
Kingsford
Ruth Margaret Krajewski
Karen Malzone
Daniel Levenson
Jay Levenson
Edward Lloyd
Alison Mitchell and
Chris Keep
Mary Moore
Chana R. Fitton and
William A. Timpson

John Munn
John and Joann Munn
Tort - My furry buddy, the
best hiking companion a
person could ask for
Kristin Redmond
James Snow
Judith Snow
Ryan Stuart
Deborah Stuart
Kenny Washington
Stephen Behrens
Robert Wolfe
Susan W. Lauffer and
Donald E. Lauffer
Barbara B. Wolfe

Tributes

(from October 1, 2023
through December 31, 2023)

Avalokitesvara
Ronald Manning
Penelope Ayers
Paul and Amy
Schottland
Patrick Brunetti
Stewart Winter and
Joseph Saba
Rebecca Buczynski
Judith Glassgold
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Ruth Charnes and
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Michael Dawson and
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Susan Dorward
Eileen Ferrer
Timothy Duggan
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Chris Keep
Clem Fiori
Daniel and Margery
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Bossert
Pam Hirsch
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Barbara Webb
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Noah Yaskulka
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Architect, PC:
Evan Anderson &
Annie Dunham
Baxter Construction
Ben Bair & Evelyn
Gilbert-Bair
Alastair Binnie & Zoe
Brookes
Mo and Arnold Chen
David and Bertha
Fubini
Colleen Goggins
John and Megan
Jackson
William and Regina
Lindner
Andrew Magenau and
Kristin Schroeder
Susan Craig Scott
Mitja Trkov and Ziva
Petrin
Ronald Berlin



BEST WISHES TO

Tom Gilbert

In early January we bid farewell to Tom Gilbert, who served as one of New Jersey Conservation Foundation's Co-Executive Directors in 2022-23, and as our Campaign Director for Energy, Climate and Natural Resources for the seven previous years. Tom is now president of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. We wish Tom all the best in his new endeavor protecting the environment in our neighboring state!



'For the Birds' brew supports wildlife

When something is said to be "for the birds," it's usually not meant as a compliment. But a special craft beer created by Stockton-based microbrewery Odd Bird Brewing truly was for the birds ... and preserved land, clean water and wildlife habitat!

Last fall, Odd Bird Brewing owners Adam Juncosa and Karen Malzone donated \$584 to New Jersey Conservation Foundation from the sale of a batch of their "For the Birds" IPA. The funds will help NJ Conservation carry out our mission to preserve New Jersey's land and natural resources. In addition, Adam and Karen provided samples of "For the Birds" and another delicious brew to hikers (age 21 and over) returning from our annual Jones Memorial Hike in Stockton.

"For the Birds" debuted in 2021, after Adam and Karen rescued a clutch of tree swallows that fledged their nest too early during a 100-degree heat wave. Funds raised by the sale of the batch were used to purchase a dozen birdhouses, which the brewery owners installed in Stockton Park with the help of their neighbors. Thanks, Adam and Karen, for your dedication to supporting birds and other wildlife!



REMEMBERING Pamela Hirsch

This past December, New Jersey Conservation Foundation lost one of our most dedicated supporters and longtime trustees, Pamela Hirsch.



Pam joined the Board of Trustees in 2014 out of a desire to help preserve the state's land and natural resources. She served with distinction on the governance and the development and communications committees, providing valuable input and generously volunteering to host donor gatherings at her New York City apartment.

An avid gardener, Pam was active in the Garden Club of America (GCA), serving both on the local club level in Morristown, and in leadership roles on several committees at the national level. In recognition of her

contributions, Pam received GCA's Medal of Merit Award for her dedication to the sustainability of natural resources, Chris Willemsen Award for her contributions to the protection of the local environment, and Isabel Bartenstein Award for her floral designs and horticulture.

Pam always went above and beyond as a trustee and in all of her endeavors, with a powerful combination of smarts, energy, and compassion. We extend our deepest sympathy to Pam's husband, Howard, as well as her children and extended family.

Welcome Our New Trustee!

New Jersey Conservation Foundation's Board of Trustees welcomed Alex Rivera earlier this spring.



ALEX RIVERA is director of Kean University's Center for Economic and Workforce Development, Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, which develops supportive programming for businesses in New Jersey's urban communities.

He serves as chair of the Garden State Preservation Trust, the independent state authority responsible for managing corporate business tax revenues dedicated to preserving New Jersey's open space, farmland and historic resources.

Alex also is chair of the Outdoor Equity Alliance, and a member of the Newark Workforce Development Board, where he chairs the Green Energy and Infrastructure Committee. In addition, he serves as a National Science Foundation grant program reviewer, providing expertise in community engagement, workforce development, and climate/natural resource-related proposals.

Previously, he worked as a land steward for the Mercer County Park Commission, restoring ecosystems and distressed habitats, and developing programs for K-12 students. A resident of Ewing Township, he holds a bachelor's degree from the College of New Jersey and a master's degree in public administration from Arizona State University.

You can help protect New Jersey's forests, open spaces, wildlife and communities! Sign up for our Action Network for updates on how you can make a difference.



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Please send your email address to info@njconservation.org or call 1-888-LANDSAVE (1-888-526-3728).

Share Your Photos!

We will be celebrating biodiversity throughout the year and would love to highlight the photography of our supporters on social media and in our upcoming annual report.



SEND PHOTOS OF NATIVE PLANTS AND WILDLIFE TO:

blynch@njconservation.org

Please include species name, location, and your full name for credit.



Photos by Bill Lynch