



## Monmouth County Environmental Newsletter: Spring 2024

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### 255 Acres Bordering Naval Weapons Station Earle Permanently Preserved

The U.S. Navy, Monmouth County, and Monmouth Conservation Foundation ([MCF](#)), in partnership with Colts Neck Township and Howell Township, have announced the preservation of two properties bordering Naval Weapons Station (NWS) Earle through the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program run by the U.S. Department of Defense. The two parcels – 20 acres of mostly mature hardwood forest in Howell and 235 acres comprising a thoroughbred horse breeding and training farm in Colts Neck – represent the inaugural conservation projects achieved through this partnership, with aspirations for many more to come.

Monmouth County has spearheaded a number of planning projects in the last decade to support the 12,000-acre NWS Earle, including the 2017 [NWS Earle Joint Land Use Study](#) and the [2022 Next Steps to Compatibility Planning Study](#). As a complement to these efforts, Monmouth County and MCF have also been working with the Department of Defense to protect land in the vicinity of the installation through the [REPI Program](#). The REPI Program is a tool for combating land use encroachment that can limit or restrict military operations. Outside pressures can include scenarios such as incompatible development or the varying effects of climate change – especially increased temperatures, changes in precipitation volume and intensity, and flood and wildfire risk.

So far, the partners have secured over \$3 million in REPI funds and shared the cost of acquisition of easements from willing sellers. In these examples, MCF, Monmouth County, and the Navy crafted easements to meet specific conservation, agricultural, and military objectives. The landowners will retain ownership of the properties.

### Upcoming Environmental Activities and Volunteer Opportunities in Monmouth County:

- [April 13, 9am-12pm, Millstone Stream Cleanup, meet at Municipal Court Building, 215 Millstone Road, Millstone - Registration required](#)
- [April 20, 10am-12pm, Earth Day Beach Cleanup at Sandy Hook, South Beach Parking Area B, Highlands. Registration required](#)
- [April 20, 10am-2pm, Earth Day Open House at Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center, Howell](#)
- [April 20, 11am-1pm, Jersey Shore Earth Day Cleanup at Long Branch - Register for exact location](#)
- [April 21, Beach Cleanups and Beach Combing, 10am-12pm at Bayshore Waterfront Park & 1pm-3pm at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park](#)
- [April 22, 5pm-6:30pm, Earth Day Shore Planting](#)

The initial project, a 20+/- acre parcel, is adjacent to the southern boundary of Naval Weapons Station Earle in Howell Township. The property had the development potential for 10 new homes. It contains biologically diverse forest habitat with varied species composition, including stands of century forest and groves of American Holly. Monmouth Conservation Foundation will hold the easement.



20-acre parcel in Howell Township recently preserved. Photo by Fred Yahn, Eagle Drone Solutions

The second project, located on Hockhockson Road in Colts Neck, abuts the military base as well as the county's 520-acre Dorbrook Recreation Area. The 235-acre horse breeding, raising, and training operation had received preliminary approvals for 30 new residences. The property encompasses diverse forest and wetland habitat, pasture and hay fields, vernal pools, and prime agricultural soils. It borders Iron and Obre's brooks, both tributaries of Hockhockson Brook, that feeds into the Navesink and Swimming rivers. Monmouth County took title to this easement.



235-acre farm in Colts Neck Township recently preserved. Photo by Fred Yahn, Eagle Drone Solutions.

Moving forward, Monmouth County and MCF are awaiting a new infusion of REPI funds to further their land preservation efforts.

[at Bayshore Waterfront Park, Port Monmouth](#)

- [April 28, 12pm-5pm, Earth Day Festival & Greenway Walk at Bayonet Farm, 41 Middletown Road, Holmdel](#)
- [May 3, 9am-4pm, Sustainability Summit at Bell Work, Holmdel](#)
- [May 11, 10am-12noon, Beach Cleanup at Cedar Street Park in Keyport, NJ, Registration Required](#)
- [May 17, 8:30am-12:30pm, Half Day Fridays at Sandy Hook by New Jersey Audubon, Meet at Parking Lot B, Pre-Registration Required](#)
- [May 17, 8am-5pm & May 18, 9am-3pm, Rutgers Master Gardeners of Monmouth County, Plant Sale at the Monmouth County Agriculture Building](#)
- [May 18, 11am-3pm, Ocean Fun Day at Island Beach State Park, Seaside Park & May 19, 11am-3pm, Ocean Fun Day at Sea Grant Consortium, Sandy Hook](#)

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## Flood Hazard Mitigation Projects Showcased through Mobile Tour

March marked the inaugural New Jersey Coastal and Climate Resilience Conference hosted by the New Jersey Coastal Resilience Collaborative (NJCRC) and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The 3-day conference took place at Monmouth University and was organized with assistance provided by the University's Urban Coast Institute (UCI). NJCRC was established to foster sustainable, resilient coastal communities and ecosystems by generating informed action. It was exciting to see 280 participants gathered around a common goal, with a wealth of information to share.

On behalf of the Monmouth County Division of Planning, the County's AmeriCorps Ambassador Charlene Kiley, organized a mobile conference session (bus tour) that showcased flood hazard mitigation projects in four different coastal communities.

New Jersey, specifically Monmouth County, has some of the most densely populated coastal towns in the nation. The construction of the Garden State Parkway, in the 1950s, enabled coastline development and sprawl, which both eventually impacted the inlands. Since the [Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962](#), federal and state decision making has subsidized development in coastal regions, by shifting the cost of fortification, beach replenishment and flood insurance from the local municipalities to the state and nation at large (Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy Rutgers University, Spring 2012). In more recent years and due to increased development, sea level rise and more severe storms, municipalities have had to exhaust all possible funding sources, partnerships, and solutions to stay on top of flood mitigation.

The first stop on the tour was the [South Riverside Drive Living Shoreline](#), a 2,050-foot-long living shoreline in the Shark River Hills section of Neptune Township (photo below taken in January 2024). South Riverside Drive runs alongside the Shark River, which is a tidal river connecting with the Atlantic Ocean in Belmar. South Riverside Drive and the homes on the opposite side of the street have historically flooded, making the area suitable for mitigation. Although the initial plan was to bulkhead the entire shoreline, the entire shoreline, the residents stepped in and changed the course of the project. Ultimately, the American Littoral Society—with funding from FEMA and in cooperation with the Township of Neptune—designed and installed a nature-based solution, which included sand replenishment, shell mattresses, and dune grass planting, and, as such, is adaptive to the changing environment. The project will have a second phase and will continue to be monitored. As of the NJCRC's tour date, the solution has prevented flooding on South Riverside Drive, despite several storms in the previous weeks.



The weather was in full cooperation for the tour, which was evident when the group arrived at Sea Bright to find sunbathers on the beach, in March. The Sea Bright Beach Pavilion provides spectacular views of one of the Jersey Shore's most iconic beaches. The building itself was part of Sea Bright's rehabilitation efforts after Superstorm Sandy ("Sandy"). Sea Bright is uniquely situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Shrewsbury River, a tidal river which drains a 27-square-mile area. Sea Bright's Mayor, Brian Kelly, and the township administration recounted the events and reconstruction required after Sandy. The group then took to Center Street, which abuts the Shrewsbury River – the more common source of Sea Bright's flooding post-Sandy. The phases of the moon, full and new, and its impacts on the tides contribute most to Sea Bright's current flooding problems. Attendees saw, firsthand, the strength and speed of the river and the need for the completion of a bulkhead system. The river flows along private and public property, so Sea Bright's administration needs to collaborate with many entities to reach their goal of a contiguous wall. Protection isn't possible with gaps in the wall.

The next stop was the Port Monmouth area of Middletown. Port Monmouth is part of the Bayshore, an area that sits along the Raritan Bay. The area was identified by the Army Corps of Engineers as an area that required a comprehensive flood mitigation plan. The plan called for pump stations, flood gates, flood walls, levees, and the raising of roads. The approximately \$300 million [project](#) is being funded through federal Sandy relief monies. Township Administrator, Tony Mercantante, and Floodplain Administrator, Stacy Krause, toured attendees through the major aspects of the project. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, responsible for the operation of the floodgates and pump stations, treated us with a live demonstration of what takes place prior to flooding. Tony and Stacy's knowledge of the project and its impacts was matched by their intimate knowledge of their community and how to adapt mitigation efforts to the unique needs of the Port Monmouth's inhabitants. For example, Tony referenced the increase in housing pricing combined with residents' desire to remain in the school district and near other family members as a challenge to pursuing buy-outs as a solution.

Union Beach's Mayor, Charles Cocuzza, met the group at their final stop, the Union Beach Beachfront, alongside rows of meticulously planted dune grass. The area was unrecognizable to those who hadn't seen it since 688,000 cubic yards of sand increased the width and length of the beachfront area (photo below). Like Middletown, Union Beach is a Bayshore community that was identified by the Army Corps of Engineers as an area in need of mitigation. It, too, will require a comprehensive [project](#) including pump stations, dunes, tide gates, floodwall, and more. Phase I of the project will cost approximately \$50 million.



The Monmouth County Division of Planning would like to thank all the municipalities who participated and shared their community's approach to flood mitigation. It is NJCRC's mission to generate informed action for resilient coastline communities, and this tour showcased four communities that, although taking different approaches, are doing just that.

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## Colts Neck Natural Resource Inventory Update

Colts Neck Township is in the process of updating its Natural Resource Inventory. The Natural Resource Inventory or Environmental Resource Inventory (NRI/ERI) compiles text, maps, tables and other visual information to integrate a variety of data on a municipalities land use, geography, topography, geology, hydrology, soils, surface and ground water resources, vegetation, wetlands, climate, wildlife, air and water quality, and historic structures. The NRI/ERI is a tool used by governing bodies like the Municipal Township Committee, Environmental Commission, Planning and Zoning Boards, together with developers, engineers, and the general public, to enable land-use based decision-making. The NRI/ERI works to provide the most complete picture of a municipalities natural and cultural resources, critical areas, existing development/infrastructure as well to highlight its environmental challenges. It is recognized by Colts Neck Twp. as an unbiased report which serves to educate the residents about the town in which they live, to provide a resource for students to understand the world around them and to provide background information on climate change and how it has and will impact Colts Neck in the future. The 1983 Colts Neck Twp. Natural Resources Inventory can be viewed [here](#).

While Colts Neck is working to update its inventory, it's noteworthy that many Monmouth County municipalities have also proactively identified the natural resource characteristics and features within its borders. Further, those Monmouth County municipalities with a NRI/ERI are encouraged to continually update their Inventories to recognize changes in the use of the land as it affects the balance of its natural resources and the long-term health of the municipality.

### Knowing Your Flood Risk



More and more flooding events are impacting the safety of Monmouth County and NJ residents in our coastal and inland

### Protecting the American Horseshoe Crab

The horseshoe crab is often referred to as one of



Earth's most ancient creatures. Fossil records conclude the horseshoe crabs have been crawling ashore for more than 450 million years. Most people who walk

communities. The new [Flood Disclosure Law P.L. 2023, c93](#) requires sellers of property and landlords to provide prospective purchasers and renters of a property with the history of its flooding, to identify its flood risk, and to note if the property is in a FEMA designated Special or Moderate Flood Hazard Area.

The [Seller's Property Condition Disclosure Statement](#) now contains a section on flood risk. It advises that by 2050, some 40,000 New Jersey properties will be at risk of permanent coastal flooding because of sea-level rise of 2.1 feet above the year 2000 level. It also notes that increased precipitation intensity places inland properties at risk for flash flooding events. As of March 20, 2024, every seller of real property must disclose specific flood risk information through the Property Condition Disclosure Statement before the signing of any contracts, leases or lease renewals. Additionally, the law requires landlords to notify tenants of the availability of insurance for renters through the National Flood Insurance program.

An online tool is available to assess the current and future flood risk of any property in NJ. The [New Jersey Flood Risk Notification Tool](#) allows you to search by address to determine if a property has been impacted by floods or is at risk for a future flooding event.

the beaches and bays of Monmouth County have come across the shell of a horseshoe crab.

The Center of Biological Diversity along with 22 partner organizations fear the horseshoe crab is at risk of extinction. There is a [petition](#) before the Secretary of Commerce to list the American Horseshoe Crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) under the Endangered Species Act and to concurrently designate critical habitat to protect them.

Overharvesting, as well as habitat loss, has caused a sharp decline in the horseshoe crab population in recent decades. The blue blood of the horseshoe crab is valued by biomedical companies to detect bacterial toxin in drugs and medical devices. A synthetic alternative to horseshoe crab blood is being utilized in Europe, and if authorized in the United States, could lessen the dependence on horseshoe crab blood. This would be beneficial to the local ecology as horseshoe crabs play a valuable role supplying nutrient dense eggs for migratory shorebirds, sea turtles, and fish in addition to supporting other endangered species like the rufa red knot.

Local partner organizations will continue to monitor the horseshoe crab populations through tagging events. Save Coastal Wildlife hosts training and tagging events [along the shores of Raritan Bay and Sandy Hook Bay](#) and American Littoral Society hosts [Shark River Horseshoe Crab Tagging](#).

## Draft 2024 Water Supply Plan is Accepting Public Comments

[Read the Full Plan](#)

The NJDEP has released its draft for the 2024 New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan. This Plan by NJDEP concludes N.J. will have adequate volumes of source water supply and is well-positioned to contend with water supply challenges provided that actions to mitigate threats of climate changes, aging infrastructure and emerging contaminants are addressed. This draft Plan is reported by NJDEP to assess the water supply challenges and impacts due to climate change with a focus on temperature, precipitation, and sea-level changes. Public [comments](#) for the draft plan are being accepted through April 26, 2024.

### *About This Newsletter*

*The purpose of the newsletter is to inform Monmouth County citizens on the health of their environment and list environmental outreach events in their community. The newsletter is produced by the Monmouth County Division of Planning Section of Environmental & Sustainability Planning in coordination with the Monmouth County Environmental Council. The County of Monmouth and the Board of County Commissioners do not necessarily share the viewpoints of any environmental group mentioned in this newsletter.*

If you have questions, comments, or wish to have an event listed in the newsletter, please contact: [Melissa.Bezahler@co.monmouth.nj.us](mailto:Melissa.Bezahler@co.monmouth.nj.us)

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