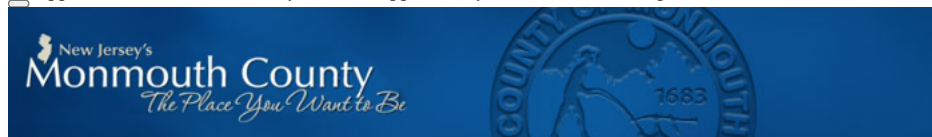


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## Monmouth County Environmental Newsletter: Winter 2025

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### Student-led Carbon Sink Garden Initiative Aims to Fight Climate Change

Shivali Sethi, a passionate student at High Technology High School, and a group of dedicated volunteers from Carbon Roots, teamed up to plant a Carbon Sink Garden at Jackson Woods Park in Long Branch this past fall. Carbon Roots is an organization founded by Shival herself, which focuses on [carbon sequestration](#) efforts aimed at reducing Monmouth County's carbon footprint.



Photo credit: Shivali Sethi

According to the Linda Zeldovich article "Five Steps to Making Your Garden a Carbon Sink", a [carbon sink garden](#) is designed to actively absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in the soils and plants. To maximize the capture of carbon, the Carbon Sink Garden at Jackson Woods Park features a variety of native perennials including Little Bluestem, Bottlebrush Grass, Culver's Root, Eastern Bluestar, Buttonbush, Fireworks and Season Goldenrod, and Swamp Milkweed. These plants work together to help mitigate global warming by reducing carbon in the atmosphere.



Photo credit: Shivali Sethi

### Upcoming Environmental & Outdoor Events for Monmouth County:

- [Feb. 8, 9:30 am-12 pm Save Coastal Wildlife Beach Clean-Up at the Tip of Sandy Hook, Meet at Parking Lot M, Free, Registration Requested.](#)
- [Feb. 8, 3-4 pm, Nature Lecture: Grey Squirrels of Monmouth County, Freneau Woods Park Visitor Center, Aberdeen, Free.](#)
- [Feb. 9, 11 am-12:30 pm, Winter Walk at Fisherman's Cove, Fisherman's Cove Conservation Area, Manasquan, Free.](#)
- [Feb. 15, 9:30 am, Earth-friendly Solutions for Your Gardening Woes: The IPM Approach Webinar, Rutgers University Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County, Free, Registration Required.](#)
- [Feb. 19, 10-11:30 am, Wonderous Winter Walks, Big Brook Park, Marlboro, Open to all ages; under 18 with adult, Free.](#)
- [Feb. 19, 7-8:15 pm, El Huerto Urbano, Urban Garden Webinar Series in Spanish - 8 weeks, Rutgers Cooperation Extension of Hudson & Essex Counties, Free, Registration Required.](#)
- [Feb. 20 & 21, Eighth Annual NJ Watershed Conference, The Watershed Institute, Registration Fee Required.](#)

Carbon Roots is eager to collaborate with others to plant more carbon sink gardens across communities. To learn about how to get involved and make a difference with Carbon Roots, please visit the website:

Carbon Roots

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## NRCS FY2025 Community Garden Grant Opportunity

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering a [FY2025 Community Gardens/Farm grant](#) to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture in urban and underserved communities. Projects can include conservation education, support for underserved growers and climate-smart practices. Additionally, on an established [USDA People's Garden](#), the grant can be used to support storm water control efforts, erosion prevention, and habitat management.

Applications are due by June 6, 2025 and can be found at this link on Grants.Gov: [NRCS FY2025 Community Gardens/Farm Grant Opportunity](#).

• [Mar. 15, 10 am-12 pm, A Beginner's Look at Lichens, 4 E. River Road, Rumson, Registration Fee Required.](#)

• [Mar. 19, 8 am-5:30 pm, NJ Coastal Resilience Collaborative Coastal Flooding Technical Workshop, Stevens Institute of Technology, Registration Fee Required.](#)

• [Mar. 22, 10 am-12 pm, Volunteers Needed for Beach Cleanup of Conaskonk Point in Union Beach, 508 Edmunds Ave., Union Beach, Free, Registration Requested.](#)

• [Mar. 25, Rain Date Mar. 27, 10 am-2 pm, Allaire State Park Barberry Removal and Trail Maintenance, Meet at Main Parking lot of Allaire Village in Allaire State Park, Free, Registration Requested.](#)

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## New Funding Boosts REPI Land Preservation Efforts

The U.S. Navy has awarded an additional \$3 million in funding to Naval Weapons Station (NWS) Earle through the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) [Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration \(REPI\) program](#). This significant funding will enable Monmouth County and Monmouth Conservation Foundation (MCF) to protect additional lands surrounding NWS Earle's nearly 12,000 acres in Monmouth County.

Since 2018, the County and MCF have been [working together through the REPI program](#) to prevent incompatible development, preserve farmland and wetlands, protect wildlife, and add to existing parks in the vicinity of the naval base. These efforts increase NWS Earle's security and decrease potential risk to the public. This ongoing public-private partnership involves the U.S. Navy, NWS Earle, Monmouth County, MCF, and relevant municipalities where the land being protected is situated.



*Monmouth County Commissioner Deputy Director Susan M. Kiley and County Commissioner Erik Anderson, Monmouth County staff, Representatives from the U.S. Navy, and MCF Commemorating the first two Inaugural Preservation Projects of the program. Photo Credit: MCF*

Land is preserved through conservation and agricultural easements, granted by willing landowners and purchased by project partners, with up to 50 percent of matching funds provided by the REPI program. In 2023, the first two conservation projects successfully closed, [preserving 255 acres](#) across two properties in Howell and Colts Neck. These significant land acquisitions not only furthered NWS Earle's goals, but also brought sustainable benefits to the local municipalities, the broader community, and the environment. With a promising pipeline ahead, securing additional federal funds will be crucial to the continued success of the program and its partnerships.

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## Monmouth County Recognized as "StormReady"

[Monmouth County has been officially recognized as a "StormReady" County](#) by the National Weather Service and the New Jersey StormReady Advisory Committee. This prestigious

designation highlights the county's proactive efforts to safeguard residents during severe weather events, such as thunderstorms, nor'easters, and hurricanes.

Achieving the StormReady designation means Monmouth County has implemented robust measures to monitor weather conditions and stay ahead of potential threats. These include utilizing multiple methods to track severe weather, receiving timely watches and warnings from the National Weather Service, and effectively disseminating critical weather information to the public.

This recognition underscores Monmouth County's commitment to keeping our community safe in the face of unpredictable weather.



## Help Build NJ's "Next Generation Farmer Program"

Traditionally, individuals became farmers by growing up in farm families or marrying into one. Farmland has also traditionally been passed down from one generation to the next. However, this tradition has shifted and is no longer the standard for continuing farm operations.

Anyone who is interested in the farming business faces challenges, some of which include having the capital required for equipment and land, or the skills needed for successful farming.

To address the challenges of getting into the farming business, the State Agriculture Development Committee is actively developing its "[Next Generation Farmer Program](#)" to support new and beginning farmers. This program hopes to target those who have gained experience through college, apprenticeships, or beginning farmer programs but struggle to launch their own operations. It will also offer assistance to individuals who require additional hands-on training, mentorship, or guidance on managing a farm business.

The "Next Gen" team is seeking input from the agricultural community to help guide its efforts and include recommendations in a N.J. Next Generation Farmers Report due out in Spring 2025. The report will utilize information gathered from this outreach and include ideas for enhancing support for next generation farms and improving overall agricultural viability in N.J.

Interested parties are asked complete a brief survey to share their experience. Please click on the relevant survey most appropriate to you:

1. [Next Generation Farmer](#)
2. [Established Farmer](#)
3. [Agriculture Service Provider](#)
4. [Other Interested Party](#)

Currently available resources for new and beginning farmers can be accessed here:



## Attention Bird Enthusiasts: Get Ready to Count



The annual [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) (GBBC) will take place this year from Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> through Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>. The GBBC is a global effort among the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada designed to bring people together to count as many birds as they can find, and then report their sightings. In 2024, it was reported on the

GBBC website that there were 7,920 species of birds identified by an estimated 642,003 participants in 210 countries or sub-regions.

Participating in this four-day event is easy and can be done anywhere. GBBC outlines the steps as follows: Step 1: Decide where you will watch birds. Step 2: Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days. Step 3: Identify all the birds you see or hear within your planning time/location and use the best tool to share your bird sightings.

[Learn how to enter the data into the Merlin Bird ID or eBird](#)

To make counting even more enjoyable, get together with a group. The Monmouth County Park System offers two opportunities for individuals ages 14 & up. The first is on Friday, Feb. 14, 9am-10am at the [Manasquan Reservoir Visitor Center](#) in Howell. The second is on Saturday, Feb. 15, 9am-10am at the [Freneau Woods Park Visitor Center](#) in Aberdeen.

### Seal Watching This Winter: Tips for a Responsible Experience

If you're thinking about bundling up and observing seals at the Jersey Shore this winter, it's important to follow responsible guidelines to ensure their safety and well-being as well as your own. If you see a seal on the beach, the best practice is to leave it alone and not stand too close. Use binoculars to observe from a safe distance of at least 150 feet.



*Photo credit: Save Coastal Wildlife*

Learn more about friendly and respectful best practices for your seal-watching experience with guidelines prepared by Save Coastal Wildlife at this link: [Seal Watching Guidelines](#).

Additionally, there are seal survey volunteer opportunities around Sandy Hook Bay on [Saturday, March 1](#) or [Sunday, March 2](#). Meet at Mount Mitchill Scenic Overlook. Advance registration is required.

### Notice of Proposed Rule: Restricting Access to Tidal Waters for Endangered Species Protection

The proposed N.J. Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Division of Fish and Wildlife [rule at N.J.A.C. 7:25-4A](#) will take steps to limit public access to tidal waters and nearby shorelines, in order to protect wildlife species that appear on the N.J. Endangered Species List.

A migratory shorebird like the [Rufa Red Knot](#) will make its way to the Jersey Shore to rest and replenish itself before continuing its journey. The proposed rule would establish a process for implementing public access restrictions in areas designated as [critical habitat areas](#). These areas are vital for the survival of endangered species that depend upon these areas for breeding or feeding spots essential to the conservation of this species.

The proposed rule will provide details on how the public and landowners will be informed about these restrictions, including methods such as installing signs or fencing to clearly mark out the restricted areas. Lastly, the proposed rule will define how penalties will be accessed for anyone who violates these restrictions.

Comments are being accepted through Feb. 13, 2025.

[Rule Comment Form](#)

## 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 Environmental & Sustainability Planning Section of the Monmouth County Division of 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: [environmentalplanning@co.monmouth.nj.us](mailto:environmentalplanning@co.monmouth.nj.us)*

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