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## **NJMC and NJ Audubon Society Announce Sites for Birding, Wildlife and Fishing Trails Guide**

LYNDHURST, N.J. -- The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission and the New Jersey Audubon Society have announced the sites that will be included in the NJ Meadowlands Birding, Wildlife and Fishing Trails guide.

The guide, which will be released this summer, will direct wildlife viewing enthusiasts to great destinations for wildlife viewing in the Hackensack River Watershed area of Bergen and Hudson counties. The NJMC is funding the guide and is collaborating with Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce. NJAS is serving as the project manager.

“We hope those interested in wildlife and nature will want to explore all of our trails, and that this guide will open their eyes to locations they never thought of visiting before,” said NJMC Chair Susan Bass Levin, also the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner. “The evolution of this guide will mirror the growing amount of open and recreational space in the Meadowlands. We hope eco-tourists will continue to visit this area and explore the new opportunities to view wildlife that will be available in a few short years.”

Most sites were nominated by members of the public and individuals involved in site management. The public sites will be linked to form three different driving routes. These sites include a number of New Jersey Meadowlands Commission properties, including the Kingsland Overlook trail, Lyndhurst Nature Preserve, Marsh Discovery Trail, Transco Trail and Saw Mill Trail at Richard W. DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst, along with the Meadowlands Environment Center. Other NJMC sites include the Kearny Marsh, Laurel Hill County Park, Sawmill Wildlife Management Area, Mill Creek Point Park and Mill Creek Marsh in Secaucus, Losen Slotte Park in Little Ferry and Skeetkill Marsh in Ridgefield.

Other nominated sites are the Closter Nature Center, Demarest Nature Center, Emerson Woods, Flat Rock Brook Nature Center, Hackensack River County Park, Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck, Haworth Watershed Preserve, Liberty State Park, Overpeck County Park, Overpeck Preserve, Palisades Interstate Park headquarters office, Palisades Interstate Park State Line Lookout, Ridgefield Nature Trail, Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Tenafly Nature Center, Van Saun County Park, Pascack Brook County Park and Wood Dale County Park.

Each trail will be designed with a primary target audience in mind. Those preferring an action-packed eco-tour with destinations in close proximity will enjoy a trail linking sites inside the boundaries of the Meadowlands District. A trail connecting all the sites with staffed centers and educational programs will target families interested in getting closer to nature. In addition, one driving trail will attract independent naturalists, both budding and experienced, to the wide variety of locations within the Hackensack River Watershed.

The guide also will include a collection of locations that are either undergoing renovations or have limited public access. Among these sites are River Barge Park and the Richard P. Kane Natural Area, which currently are open but will become major attractions for eco-tourism in the next few years after the NJMC completes projects that will include trails, a promenade and educational areas to encourage people to use the Hackensack River for recreational purposes. The restoration of the 587-acre Richard P. Kane Natural Area, formerly known as the Empire Tract, will be the largest restoration project in terms of acreage undertaken by the NJMC. The guide will explain which sites are appropriate for a, “Stop and Scan,” and those worthy of more in-depth exploration.

“Although over half the states in the country have or are pursuing Birding Trails on some level, we believe our efforts in the Meadowlands and surrounding Hackensack River Watershed are unique. Nowhere else can you find such a variety of natural resources, from upland forest, to the astounding views over the Hudson River from the Palisades, to the wetlands of the Meadowlands, all nestled in the most densely populated region in the country,” said Tom Gilmore, president of the New Jersey Audubon Society. “We believe the NJ Meadowlands Birding, Wildlife and Fishing Trails guide will bring well-deserved recognition and increased nature-based tourism to the region.”

“If anyone still needs proof that the Meadowlands had turned the corner, this project is it,” added Captain Bill Sheehan, executive director of Hackensack Riverkeeper, Inc. “Not long ago, the only things the Meadowlands was known for was garbage, controversy and the Sports Complex, but nowadays, when people hear the word, ‘Meadowlands,’ they’re more likely to think about birding, fishing and exploring this unique urban wilderness.”

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