

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

project flash

New Jersey Partnership Receives \$32,000 for Wetlands Project

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$32,000** in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program for the **Liberty Marsh Restoration Project** in New Jersey's **Sussex County** in **Congressional District 5**. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

Project partners intend to restore 207 acres of wetlands at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge, created, in part, because of its location in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Atlantic Coast Joint Venture** Northern New Jersey Limestone Focus Area, straddles two major **Atlantic Flyway** waterfowl migration corridors, one between eastern Canada and the Atlantic Coast and the other between the Delaware River and the Hudson River. The Wallkill River Bottomlands are one of only a few large areas of high-quality waterfowl habitat remaining in northwestern New Jersey and are particularly important to American black ducks.

The project area was managed as the Liberty Sod Farm for several decades prior to acquisition in 1994 by the Service. During this period, the owners installed miles of ditches and a perimeter dike system to drain the wetlands and segregate the site from the natural hydrology of the river and adjacent uplands. Despite these degradations the site is still used by thousands of ducks and geese during flood events. The remaining sod farm infrastructure, however, continues to drain water off the area as flood waters recede. Thus, wildlife use of the site is minimized.

The primary objective of this project is to provide improved habitat conditions for spring and fall migratory waterfowl, primarily dabbling ducks. This will be achieved by restoring and enhancing floodplain conditions that were lost when the area was drained for farming. The project also will provide foraging and roosting habitat for wintering raptors and for migrating shorebirds and wading birds. Numerous species will benefit, including short-eared owl, northern harrier, rough-legged hawk, greater yellowlegs, pectoral sandpiper, red-backed

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sandpiper, and great blue heron. The habitat improvements achieved by this project will complement the conservation work already completed in the New York portion of the complex.

Partners Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and New Jersey Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee will contribute **\$34,836** in matching funds to achieve their project goals. The Service's contribution amounts to \$86,000. Once completed, this restoration will provide passive recreational opportunities for refuge visitors. Additionally, the expected increase in waterfowl populations will significantly improve hunting opportunities in that part of the refuge open for consumptive uses.

For more information about this project, contact Cindy Patterson, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., cpatterson@ducks.org, (631)286-2378, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.