



Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project

Fact Sheet # 4

THE PROTECTION OF CRITICAL HABITATS

What Are Critical Habitats?

"Critical habitat" is a term that is generally associated with the Federal Endangered Species Act. The term refers to natural areas that support threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Critical habitats provide food, water and shelter necessary for the survival of these sensitive species.

Why Are Critical Habitats Important?

As the population of New Jersey continues to grow, more and more natural areas are being developed. This has resulted in habitat losses for many species. Currently there are 61 species of wildlife and over 300 species of plants listed on New Jersey's threatened and endangered species list. Many species spend their entire lifecycle within this region, while others depend on the region's resources for just one aspect of their lifecycle, such as breeding, or stopping to feed during migration.

The preservation of diverse numbers of plants and animals is important for maintaining a healthy ecosystem, and may also be important to human health. Throughout history, medical technology has been looking to plants and animals in search of developing new medicines. In recent times, some people previously thought that Horseshoe Crabs were valuable only as fishing bait. Now scientists have found that the blood of Horseshoe Crabs may help find a cure for some types of cancer.

One of the most important things that can be done to protect plants and wildlife is to preserve their habitat. If the habitat they use is not protected and continues to be developed, their numbers will continue to decline. Areas that are considered to be critical habitats are not only important to plants and wildlife. Blocks of uninterrupted, preserved land are also important to humans. Ground water recharge, open space, clean water and clean air all depend on keeping land preserved in its natural state.



Development in our region continues to threaten habitat necessary for the survival of plants and wildlife. Reptiles and amphibians are both extremely sensitive to environmental pollutants and declining water quality.

Working to Protect Critical Habitats...

The NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program has formed an approach to help in the preservation of critical habitats. This project is called the Landscape Project. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, the project is identifying critical habitats based on existing land use/land cover data, and the known locations of endangered and threatened species and declining species of forest interior dwelling songbirds. The Raritan Basin Project is using the information provided by the Landscape Project to determine the location of critical habitat areas in the Raritan Basin. After these strategies to help communities protect these important areas.

What Can You Do To Help?

- Find out what species of threatened or endangered plants and wildlife live in your region and work with municipal officials to develop ordinances to protect them.
- Plant native species instead of grass in your yard to attract and support wildlife.
- Support tax check-offs that benefit wildlife.
- Support the acquisition of open space in your community.

For More Information.....

If you would like to learn more about endangered and threatened species in New Jersey, contact the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program at (609) 292-9400. If you would like more information on how to become involved in the Raritan Basin Project, contact the NJ Water Supply Authority, Watershed Protection Programs Unit, at (732) 356-9344, or visit our website at www.raritanbasin.org. The Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project is a partnership of government, non-profit and private organizations working together to improve the water resources of the Raritan River. You may also contact the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Raritan Region staff at (609) 633-7020 or visit the NJDEP Division of Watershed Management website at www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/.