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## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Earth Stewards in New Jersey

## *A Partnership Among Resource Professionals, Neighborhood Schools, and Communities*

### *What is the Earth Stewards Program?*

The Earth Stewards Program, developed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), educates students and communities about fish and wildlife resources and local conservation issues. The Service's Washington office oversees the Program. Earth Stewards is a national Program providing teachers with new ways to engage students in science and other core curricula through hands-on activities, professional mentors, and community stewardship projects. Combining the knowledge of natural resource professionals with outdoor experiences varying from field trips to habitat monitoring and restoration, Earth Stewards provides an opportunity for individual schools and communities to work with the Service to increase environmental awareness and knowledge. Earth Stewards is not designed as an add-on to regular classroom activities; rather, it should integrate into a school's curriculum, giving students a chance to learn about the environment while they study history, math, or English.

### *How does Earth Stewards Work?*

Earth Stewards helps the Service fulfill its mission: "working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people." Earth Stewards brings our mission to the classroom by encouraging fish and wildlife conservation. The first year focuses on planning and organization, relying on the Service for support. Goals include integrating conservation education topics into the school's curriculum, training faculty on environmental education curriculum and education methods, and providing a wildlife experience off school grounds. The Program grows to include integrated, research-based projects with teachers assuming the lead role, and a science career-orientation component. Service support continues as long as the Program remains active. Our goal in New Jersey is to provide the framework to establish the Program and then introduce other schools to Earth Stewards.

Providing ongoing consultation and educational sponsorship are among the Service's commitments to Earth Stewards. The NFWF provides financial support in the form of challenge grants. Challenge grants require matching funds from other sources. Partnerships are the cornerstone of a successful Earth Stewards Program. Financial and non-financial partners are essential. Partners often include local school groups such as parent-teacher associations, local businesses, parents, teachers, philanthropic foundations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and corporations.

### *Smithville Elementary School:*

In 1994, the New Jersey Field Office (NJFO) was selected as one of seven pilot sites nationwide to implement the Earth Stewards Program. Once announced as a pilot site, the Service and Smithville Elementary School, located in Galloway Township, Atlantic County, New Jersey began building the framework to create a long-term Program. A challenge grant through the NFWF required matching funds from the community; numerous contributors met the challenge. With a secure commitment from our partners, the Service and Smithville Elementary began implementing the Program.

The theme of Smithville Elementary's first year was endangered species. Themes for following years concentrate on wetlands. Each grade focuses on a different aspect of the Program. Students built and maintain a nature trail, run a composting Program, created butterfly attracting gardens, planted trees, and enhanced a drainage pond to attract wildlife and provide an outdoor laboratory. Each year Smithville Elementary hosts a wildlife conservation week with Service sponsorship and participation. Service staff remain available to answer questions and address other needs, and work closely with the students to enhance their education, provide hands-on nature walks, and offer information about careers with conservation agencies like the Service.



**The mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.**



Educational Programs cannot work without teacher support, and Smithville Elementary teachers are dedicated to achieving success. One example of this dedication is Ms... Jan Manganiello, a fifth grade teacher, who helped foster a successful Earth Stewards Program. In 1997, the National Science Foundation selected her for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Elementary Science. More than 30 teachers and two administrators join Ms.. Manganiello in celebrating the school's Earth Stewards achievements.

Partners:

- Atlantic County Parks
- Atlantic County Utilities Authority
- Bally's Park Place Casino Hotel and The Grand
- Barnegat Bay Decoy and Baymen's Museum
- CapeAtlantic Soil Conservation District
- Galloway Township Public Schools
- Galloway Township Recycling Office
- Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
- Alex Harrison - Boy Scout
- National Conservation Training Center
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Ocean County Parks
- Peter Lumber Company
- Schairer Brothers Sawmill
- Smithville Parent-Teacher Association
- South Jersey Chapter - National Audubon Society
- Specialty Garden Design
- Peter Staub - Richard Stockton College
- TropWorld Casino



*Pinelands Regional High School:*

Once the Program successfully developed at Smithville Elementary, the NJFO considered other schools for Earth Stewards participation. In 1997, the NJFO selected Pinelands Regional High School in Tuckerton, Ocean County, New Jersey as the next Earth Stewards site, the first high school to implement this national Program.

At Pinelands Regional High School, students study watershed and wetland issues. Water quality is among the topics examined. A bog system on school property provides an excellent outdoor laboratory. The NFWF challenge grants and community support provided environmental monitoring equipment. Detailed aerial photographs of the local area are among the donations received, allowing students to see the connection between development and watersheds. Through their enthusiasm and dedication, teachers and students ensure the growth of their Earth Stewards Program. As the first year concludes at Pinelands Regional High School, their flourishing efforts promise another successful Program.



Partners:

- Alliance for a Living Ocean
- Atlantic County Audubon Society
- Barnegat Bay Decoy and Baymen's Museum
- National Conservation and Training Center
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- New Jersey Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife
- Ocean County Parks Department
- Ocean County Planning Department
- Ocean County Soil Conservation District
- Rutgers Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences
- Stafford Township School District

*Washington Elementary School:*

In 2001 the NJFO entered into an agreement to initiate the Earth Stewards Program at the Washington Elementary School in Trenton, Mercer County.

Partners:

- Public Service Electric and Gas Company
- Keystone Science Center
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- Isles, Inc.
- Stoneybrook - Millstone Watershed Association
- Washington Crossing Chapter of the National Audubon Society
- Delaware - Raritan Greenway
- Rider University and Hamilton - Trenton Marsh Education Committee

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