

NEW JERSEY AUDUBON

Forging a Bridge to the Future

A Strategic Plan - 2009-2012



Overview



Photo by David McNicholas

New Jersey Audubon was founded in 1897, at a time when nature was viewed as limitless and when little consideration was given to the conservation of natural resources. During its early years, the Society's focus was on abolishing the feather trade which was decimating populations of egrets, terns and other showy species in the name of women's fashion. Throughout the 20th century, as development burgeoned and habitat loss became the primary threat to wildlife, New Jersey Audubon's focus broadened toward shaping innovative land protection legislation. The Pinelands Protection Act, Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act, Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and the Garden State Preservation Trust Act are among the conservation measures that New Jersey Audubon has championed. These legislative safeguards protect key wildlife habitats, those very same landscapes that harbor our drinking water, filter the air we breathe and provide a respite from our fast-paced society. In this way, New Jersey Audubon is truly *making New Jersey a better place for people and wildlife*.

As New Jersey Audubon broadened its mission, the organization itself experienced tremendous and exciting growth. Membership grew from 3,000 individuals to a community nearly 25,000 strong. From a staff of 11 and five small nature centers, the Society has expanded to 75 employees, ten nature centers and hundreds of volunteers who have helped this organization become a respected leader in environmental education, avian research, conservation advocacy and land stewardship.

We are now at a critical juncture in New Jersey Audubon's long and proud history. Our recent growth and broadened activities have challenged this organization to craft a strategic plan that will inspire and sustain its talent and vibrancy, and keep the society relevant in the next decade. Over the course of this past year, staff, board, volunteers and members have spent countless hours developing this plan. Through a process of consulting with key constituents, funders, decision-makers and colleagues in the conservation, research and environmental education fields, we have learned to celebrate our accomplishments and embrace both our strengths and the challenges that lie ahead. We invite you to review this summary of our mission priority goals and objectives, and are proud to share with you our vision for the future of New Jersey Audubon.

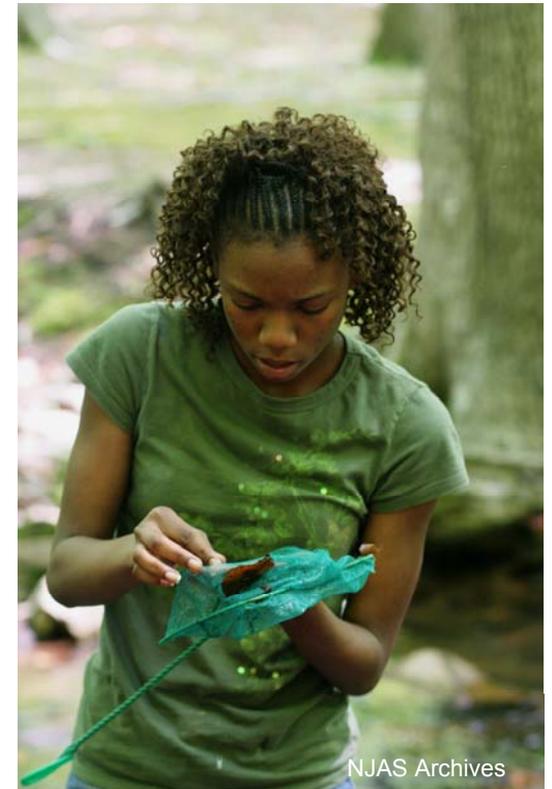
Mission and Vision

New Jersey Audubon's mission is threefold: to foster environmental awareness and a conservation ethic among citizens; protect New Jersey's birds, mammals, other animals, and plants, especially endangered and threatened species; and promote the preservation of natural habitats.

We envision a time when all citizens recognize and respect the place and function of all living things. We strongly advocate for people of all ages and backgrounds to attain both the opportunity and the desire to engage in the natural world. We are working right now to realize a future where *green* innovation drives our economy, land-use decisions are grounded in science, and sustainable growth occurs without placing our environment at risk.

Through this strategic planning process, we have identified five primary goals that will better enable us to carry out our mission and fulfill our vision for the future of our Garden State and the health of its residents and wildlife:

- 1. Protect and enhance the viability of natural systems now and for future generations.**
- 2. Engage and reconnect people with nature, while raising public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.**
- 3. Foster nature as a way to enhance quality of life for all New Jersey residents.**
- 4. Exemplify sound principles and practices at all New Jersey Audubon facilities, properties, programs and activities.**
- 5. Ensure that mission area departments, centers and sanctuaries work together effectively to achieve New Jersey Audubon's mission.**



Objectives and Measures of Success

Goal #1: Protect and enhance the viability of natural systems for now and for future generations.

New Jersey's picturesque and ecologically significant landscapes are critically threatened. Despite having one of the nation's best-funded land acquisition programs - The Garden State Preservation Trust - New Jersey loses more than 50 acres to development each day. The integrity of our natural ecosystems is impacted by development, changes in management techniques, competition from non-native, invasive species and pressure from species overpopulation. We cannot allow natural habitats to continue degrading to the point where species disappear. New Jersey Audubon is committed to preserving wildlife and the natural systems upon which they – and we – depend. **Our objectives are to:**

- Reduce the amount of habitat loss and degradation in New Jersey.
- Increase the amount of public and private lands actively managed to maintain healthy natural systems.
- Reduce the rate of decline of threatened and endangered species, as well as species of concern.
- Improve the viability of migratory populations that move through New Jersey
- Increase the effectiveness of NJAS programming focused on protecting and enhancing the viability of natural systems.



Partnerships in conservation have a proven track record of success. New Jersey Audubon's leadership in the Highlands Coalition and the *Keep It Green* Campaign are examples of working together to stem development of sensitive lands and secure permanent funding for preservation. Our Important Bird and Birding Areas and Citizen Science programs engage volunteers in identifying and monitoring key habitats in need of protection. These, in turn, collaborate with larger-scale projects like the state Landscape Project and federal Partners in Flight, leveraging the strengths and expertise of the conservation community as a whole. Ever more promising are our alliances with the Food Shed Alliance, Raritan Piedmont Partnership, Harmony and Franklin townships, and local farmers growing New Jersey Audubon's own S.A.V.E. birdseed, all aimed at encouraging sound conservation farming practices and restoring critical habitat while stimulating rural economies. Identifying and fostering new partnerships and improving collaborative programs within our NJAS mission areas will enable us to achieve our conservation objectives. Decreased habitat loss, increased habitat restoration and a decrease in species listed as state-threatened or endangered are benchmarks of our success.

Goal #2: Engage and reconnect people with nature, while raising public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.

Education, the cornerstone of our mission, is as urgently needed today as it was when New Jersey Audubon was founded more than a century ago. The health of our planet now depends upon reawakening an appreciation and respect for its natural systems. A few generations ago, our society knew intimacy with the land. We planted, cultivated, and harvested. There were seasons and our lives were adjusted by their dials of control. Today, we find more and more people having less connection to the natural systems that support life. Many children grow up oblivious to the rhythmic chirping of spring peepers; they never notice the tiny egg sacs carefully positioned on milkweed leaves to promise a new generation of monarch butterflies; they miss the dragonfly migrations, the scent of sweet pepperbush, the Ovenbirds and the running of the shad. How can we begin to address mounting environmental challenges without an appreciation of what's at risk?

New Jersey Audubon recognizes that continued preservation of vital habitats and conservation of their resources will only happen if the next generation learns to care. Environmental education lays a foundation for understanding how ecological systems work; for respecting the place and function of every living thing, and for recognizing how we impact the environment through the personal choices we make each day. New Jersey Audubon educators are committed to rekindling a sense of wonder in people of all ages and backgrounds, and restoring the bonds that compel us to defend what we hold dear. **Our objectives are to:**

- Gain information on target audiences and populations across the state to improve outreach and programming to specific populations.
- Increase the effectiveness of NJAS programming focused on broadening and deepening individuals' awareness of their connection to nature.

As NJAS educators assess, improve and develop our programs to better serve the needs of our audiences, they will also work to cultivate and enhance partnerships with urban-based organizations to expand our effectiveness and reach underserved populations.



Goal #3: Foster nature as a way to enhance quality of life for all New Jersey residents.



Programs like New Jersey Audubon's Important Bird and Birding Areas (IBBA), and our Birding and Wildlife Trail (BWT) initiative, provide access to trails and spectacular wildlife viewing opportunities for Garden State residents and visitors. *Audubon on Call* brings NJAS naturalists to schools in urban communities, drawing attention to nature in local parks and schoolyards. Making it easy to connect with the natural world opens the door to new enriching experiences.

Walks in nature are healthful for body and spirit. Wildlife viewing provides endless opportunities for discovery and enlightenment. In short, engaging with the natural world enhances our quality of life. These are the benefits New Jersey Audubon programs convey to people of all ages and backgrounds. Our educational plan calls for assessing our entire slate of programs in order to build on our successes and expand our outreach to better serve a more diverse audience. **Our objectives are to:**

- Increase our effectiveness in cultural competency in interacting with and engaging diverse audiences; develop programming to suit a wide range of interests among those audiences.
- Increase the effectiveness of NJAS programming focused on fostering nature as a way to enhance the quality of life for all New Jersey residents.

Building strong connections within diverse communities, increasing our environmental education outreach to underserved populations, and effective assessment and development of standardized programs that meet the needs of a wide range of communities throughout the state will be our measures of success.

Goal #4: Exemplify sound principles and practices at all NJAS facilities, properties, programs and activities.

As New Jersey Audubon's network of nature centers has expanded over the years, more focus has been given to identifying, modeling and promoting conservation practices that reflect our mission. From solar panels and energy-efficient light bulbs to biomass furnaces and xeriscaping, each center is moving toward a *greener* future.

Not only is New Jersey Audubon reducing its collective carbon footprint but, by utilizing our centers and sanctuaries as models for conservation stewardship and management practices, we are building on the efficiency of our educational programming. Visitors to our nature centers discover, first hand, the benefits of gardening for wildlife; they note the extraordinary distinction between healthy and degraded forest; and they marvel at the diversity of wildlife returning to our restored grassland meadows. We are also working to adopt the North America Association for Environmental Education guidelines for all our educational programs. **Our objectives are to:**

- Expand and improve model practices at our facilities, properties, and in our programs and activities, making our *greening* initiatives more visible and understandable to the general public.
- Increase the effectiveness of New Jersey Audubon programming, focused on exemplifying sound practices to inspire an environmentally literate citizenry and meet our conservation objectives.

By making *green living* more visible and understandable to the general public, New Jersey Audubon's conservation philosophy will carry over to private homes, schools, farms, corporations, small businesses and municipalities throughout the state. Like a magnificent, richly textured patchwork quilt, piece by piece our Garden State landscape will be restored and cared for by enlightened residents who are committed to thinking globally and acting locally. Success will be measured by our ability to communicate this message effectively.



Goal #5: Ensure that mission area departments, centers and sanctuaries work together effectively to achieve New Jersey Audubon's mission.



What distinguishes New Jersey Audubon from other organizations is its threefold mission of conservation, research and education. We cover all bases to achieve our goals. First we ask important questions, such as “Where have all the shorebirds gone?” Then we conduct the research to answer them. New Jersey Audubon advocates for solutions, based on sound scientific principles, while our educators raise public awareness and support for our cause. This has been our recipe for success for more than a century. Now, as we look toward the future of this organization, we work to hone each of our mission areas, enhance efficiency within each department, and improve collaboration to provide unified messages and service to New Jersey residents. **Our objectives are to:**

- Ensure that New Jersey Audubon's mission statement accurately reflects the work of the entire organization.
- Increase collaboration among New Jersey Audubon's mission area departments, centers and sanctuaries to support our overall mission through programs, projects and campaigns.
- Increase the impact of New Jersey Audubon's advocacy efforts through enhanced organization-wide efforts.

Programming at our centers will be cohesive, and will reinforce the work of our mission area departments. Research activities like Citizen Science, for instance, offer ideal opportunities for staff training and modeling at our centers; these model programs can then be expanded into local communities. Stewardship is another

example of a mission goal that can benefit from a holistic approach, using our centers to model and promote new attitudes towards land management, and then carrying these principles over into backyards, schoolyards, businesses and corporations. New and successful collaborations within our organizational structure, and enhanced advocacy efforts that leverage the strengths of each mission area department will be our measures of success.

Governance and Leadership

Development

Finance

Merchandising

Human Resources

External Communications

The comprehensive nature of this strategic planning process led to close examination of both New Jersey Audubon's mission and the internal structures that enable us to achieve it. Every aspect of our organization was reviewed for opportunities to enhance capacity, hone efficiency and ensure long-term sustainability. In short, this plan provides clear direction and attainable steps that will enable the Society to carry out its mission and expand its legacy of quality conservation through the next decade.

New Jersey Audubon's dedicated board members have been actively involved in setting the strategic direction of the organization and ensuring the continuance of its leadership. Staff from all departments has considered ways to improve collaboration, expand the impact of its education, research, and conservation efforts, and increase effective communications to our members and communities at large. Development and finance committees have created plans to ensure diverse and adequate funding streams that will maintain this organization's effectiveness and facilitate its continued growth. And a newly centralized Human Resources department is in place to support New Jersey Audubon's greatest asset – its staff and volunteers.

As effective as New Jersey Audubon has been throughout the past century, and as exciting and promising a future as this strategic plan envisions for it, all that this organization is and can be is a reflection of the commitment of our members and friends. Thank you for your trust, loyalty and ongoing investment in New Jersey Audubon's vision.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Gilmore
President

