



NEW JERSEY
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SOCIETY

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NJ's Forest Health Is Threatened; Immediate Action Needed

New Jersey Audubon Society Outlines Dangers to Natural Ecosystems, Plants and Wildlife Species; Offers Solutions

New Jersey's healthy forests and beneficial natural ecosystems, including native plant and wildlife species and habitats, are under severe threat from sprawl development and human disruption that warrants immediate intervention, New Jersey Audubon Society said in a study released today.

The integrity of New Jersey's ecological communities is being threatened by foreign invaders that include habitat loss and fragmentation; overabundant deer populations; exotic invasive organisms such as plants, insects and disease; global warming; and pollution.

"We believe that ignoring or neglecting these human-induced threats is both an unacceptable and irresponsible course with dire consequences for New Jersey's beautiful natural landscape," said New Jersey Audubon President Thomas J. Gilmore.

Eric Stiles, New Jersey Audubon vice president for Conservation and Stewardship, said, "We need action now to restore ecosystem health and balance. Natural processes in our forests have been altered by human activity and direct intervention to address these threats is necessary."

"A dramatic change in New Jersey's native ecosystems is already well under way, and the survival and integrity of the state's natural ecosystems, native species and populations are at stake," the report says.

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Healthy forests and ecosystems provide essential environmental, social and economic benefits to human health and quality of life. Healthy forests play a major role in providing clean, potable water for us all. Degraded forests result in undrinkable water; dirty air that leads to asthma and cancer; and lost recreational opportunities including lands to hike and wildlife to view. More than 1.64 million residents plus 680,000 visitors participated in wildlife-related recreation in New Jersey in 2001, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

New Jersey Audubon urged the following:

- Legislative leaders need to re-establish a stable, permanent source of funding for acquisition and preservation of natural lands and complete funding to manage state-owned lands. Funding overwhelmingly approved by the state's voters in 1998 and 2003 to preserve and protect natural, agricultural and historic treasures is running out.
- Acting Governor Codey should call for state legislation outlawing the sale, transportation and planting of non-native invasive plants. For instance, purple loosestrife, which destroys native wetlands, is readily sold while Norway maple trees, which take over areas, are frequently planted as street trees.
- The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the state Fish and Game Council need to adopt deer-management policies protective of ecological integrity that takes wildlife, water quality and biodiversity conservation into account and that focus the issue on ecosystem health.

“The forests of New Jersey are subject to many constant threats. Spring is nearly here and with that comes another ripe opportunity for exotic invasive plants like Japanese barberry and multiflora rose to take over more and more land and in the process, crowd out nutritious native plant species that are the healthy, life-sustaining food source for native wildlife,” Stiles said.

“To make matters worse, overabundant deer herds eat native species, creating greater opportunities for invasive plants to spread like cancer throughout the landscape,” he added.

“Our natural areas are out of balance and we humans will eventually pay the price for this natural destruction as we try to repair or reverse the ecological damage and the health impact on our daily lives as we strive for clean water to drink and clean air to breathe,” said Stiles.

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New Jersey Audubon said the state cannot afford to allow another season to go by without direct management and specific action to combat these threats to our state's natural heritage.

A Governor's Executive Order signed in February 2004 created an invasive species plant council that has until this June to write a comprehensive management plan. It accompanied release of an invasive-plant report that was six years in the making. *The Final Report of the New Jersey Comparative Risk Project*, released in July 2003 after four years of study, outlined problems associated with many ecological, health and socioeconomic stressors including invasive species, deer and land-use change including fragmentation.

"Our children and grandchildren and future generations are being robbed of New Jersey's natural heritage unless we act now to employ sound practices and strong public policies," Stiles noted.

"State officials, biologists and academics are well aware of the general nature and extent of the problems. Yet the citizens of New Jersey and the rich natural heritage of the Garden State wait for action while native plant and animal species decline and their sources of food, rest, shelter and safety from predators also decline," he added.

New Jersey Audubon Society's research, findings and conclusions are detailed in "*New Jersey Audubon Society's Forest Health and Ecological Integrity Stressors and Solutions Concept White Paper*."

Copies of the full report are available on the New Jersey Audubon Web site at: <http://www.njaudubon.org>

New Jersey Audubon Society, with more than 22,000 members, is the state's largest and most respected authority on conservation in New Jersey with a 107-year history of conservation, stewardship, research and education.

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