

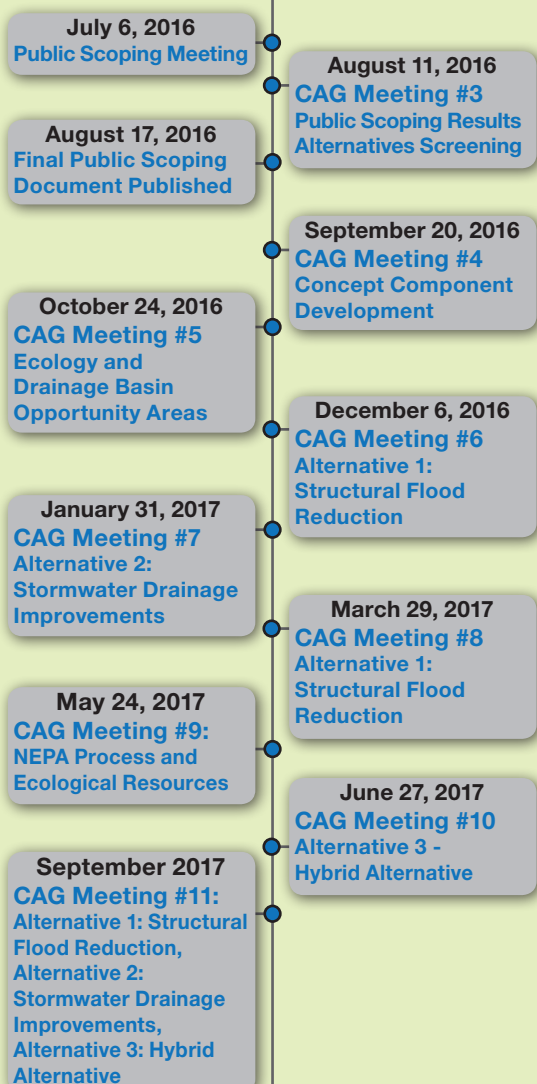


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Please visit www.rbd-meadowlands.nj.gov to obtain current Proposed Project information and data, including confirmation of the above meeting dates.

NEWS

June 2017

Report from May's CAG Meeting

The May Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) meeting for the Rebuild by Design Meadowlands (RBDM) Flood Protection Project was held on Wednesday, May 24, 2017 at One Bergen County Plaza in the City of Hackensack. The meeting included a refresher of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process and an update on the ecological resources surveys.



NEPA Process Refresher

NEPA applies to all Federal projects. The purpose of NEPA is to inform the public and the decision-maker of the potential environmental effects of a proposed action, before a decision is made, and to evaluate alternative courses of action in an effort to reduce environmental effects.

The NEPA process involves the public and the regulatory community in Federal-decision making. This process formally began for RBDM with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the *Federal Register* on June 20, 2016. The Draft EIS is the first formal step in documenting the environmental analysis of the Proposed Project. The Draft EIS, anticipated to be published by the end of 2017, will be available for a 45-day public review and comment period.

An EIS is the highest level of NEPA analysis and is required for those "major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." Defining and examining the "significance" of impacts is a basis for all NEPA analyses. Significance is defined in terms of context (the geographic area being impacted) and intensity (the strength of the impact in that context). Significance can be defined using a variety of thresholds set forth under law (e.g., Endangered Species Act [ESA], Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act), as well as the opinions of expert regulatory agencies and the Federal decision-making agency. Ultimately, significance is determined most often on a case-by-case basis.



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Ecological Resources Update

The President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), established under the NEPA, provides guidance on factors that should be considered when examining the intensity of an impact. The magnitude of potential effects on ecological resources is one of those considerations. Significant ecological resources are protected under several different Federal, state, and/or local laws; the RBDM Project must comply with these laws.

Early in the NEPA process, the Project Team consulted with key ecological resource regulatory agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and NJDEP Natural Heritage Program. These agencies identified 10 state-listed bird species with the potential to occur in the Project Area. No Federal ESA-listed species or critical habitats are known to occur within the Project Area.

From September 2016 to February 2017, the Project Team conducted ecological field surveys of the entire 5,405-acre Project Area. The data gathered during this initial phase was used to inform the concept development process to avoid ecologically sensitive areas to the extent possible. In March 2017, the Project Team started refining the surveys (e.g., adding new sampling/observation points) to focus on areas potentially affected by the Proposed Project's Build Alternatives.

To date, the Project Team has gathered a tremendous amount of data, beyond what is typically performed in support of a NEPA analysis. The team has spent approximately 2,900 hours in the field collecting data, and has identified over 300 plant species and more than 120 bird species in the Project Area. Surveys also remain ongoing for mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and benthic invertebrates. In addition to species surveys, the team is evaluating the quality of existing stream and wetland habitats. By the end of August 2017, the Project Team will have one full year of ecological data.



Red-tailed hawk photographed during avian survey

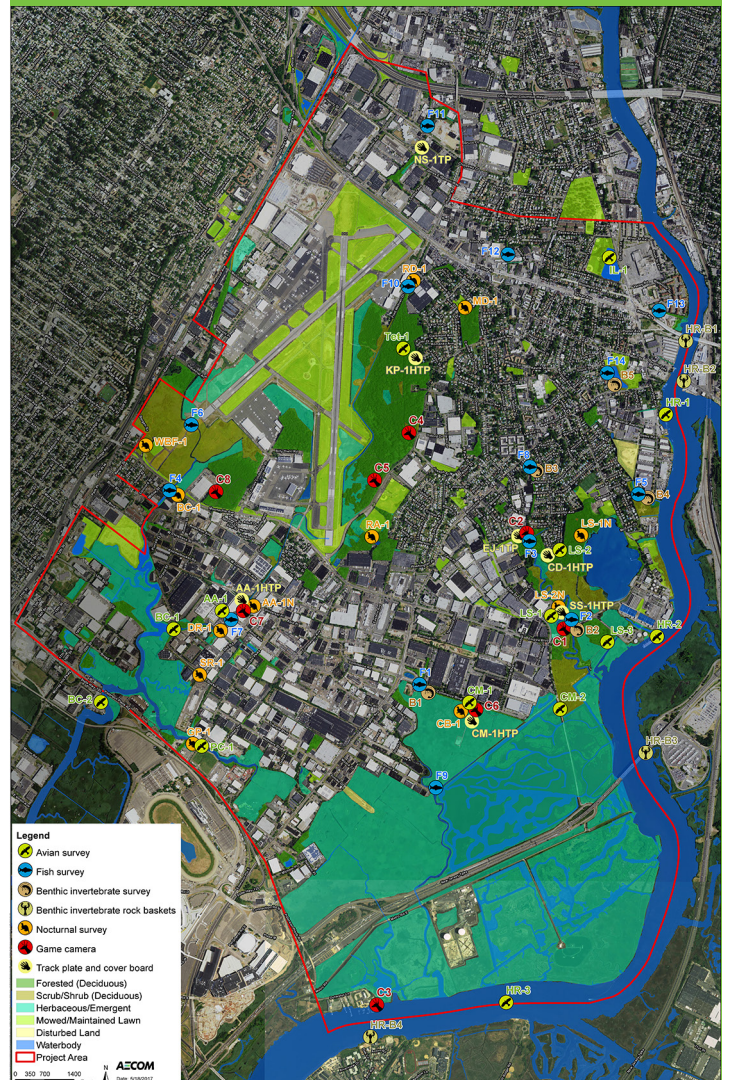
Based on the ecological data collected to date, the Project Team is actively seeking methods to provide

“ecological uplift” in association with the Proposed Project. Ecological uplift could be realized through green infrastructure (water quality improvements); invasive species removal; and habitat creation, restoration, and/or enhancement. However, any ecological uplift efforts would be subject to existing constraints in the Project Area, such as environmental contamination, existing wetland mitigation banks, and the proximity of Teterboro Airport.

The Project Team presented examples to the CAG of potential opportunities to integrate ecological restoration with the engineering aspects of the Proposed Project, which can be viewed in the May CAG Meeting Presentation on the Project website (www.rbd-meadowlands.nj.gov). These restoration opportunities generally include creating or enhancing native habitats, incorporating public access, and improving flood protection/water storage capabilities.

Did you know...

The Project Team has identified 19 distinct ecological habitat types in the Project Area. These diverse communities account for approximately 2,074 acres, or 39 percent, of the Project Area.



Get involved!

- ✓ If you would like to become a member of the CAG, please contact Alexis Taylor at rbd-meadowlands@dep.nj.gov. NJDEP welcomes your participation and input into this process!
- ✓ Share information from this newsletter with friends and neighbors.
- ✓ Educate your friends and colleagues on the Proposed Project and NEPA process.
- ✓ Continue to build interest in the Proposed Project.
- ✓ Subscribe to receive email updates on the Proposed Project at: www.rbd-meadowlands.nj.gov



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