

NJDEP FISH & WILDLIFE LAUNCHES SUMMER OF CHANJ CAMPAIGN TO HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANCE OF ENHANCING HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

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(24/P23) TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection today launched [Summer of CHANJ](#), a multiplatform public outreach campaign that highlights the importance of protecting habitat connectivity for wildlife.

CHANJ – or Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey – is a longstanding project administered by NJDEP Fish & Wildlife’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program that works to make the landscape easier for a wide variety of wildlife – from bobcats and bears to salamanders and turtles, to name just a few – to move through as they seek food and shelter, mate, and meet other habitat and biological needs. CHANJ accomplishes this by protecting important habitats, restoring movement corridors, and making roads safer for animals to cross.



“Urbanization and roads have fragmented many of our natural lands, putting the connectedness of habitats and wildlife populations in jeopardy. Without the ability to move, healthy populations simply will not persist over the long term,” **Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette said.** “Making

matters even more challenging, the impacts of climate change are further degrading critical wetland and forest habitats. The goal of Summer of CHANJ is to help the public better understand the importance of habitat connectivity and to take steps, whenever possible, to support and enhance connectivity in their own communities.”

The Campaign

The Summer of CHANJ campaign features a series of social media posts, online materials and email blasts about various facets of habitat protection and species needs that will be issued throughout the summer to the public, stakeholders, local officials, planning agencies and others.

Messages will spotlight featured species that are highly dependent on habitat connectivity such as swallowtails, bobcats, bog turtles, river otters, monarch butterflies and spotted salamanders.

These spotlighted species will help members of the public better appreciate the diversity of wildlife New Jersey supports while helping them understand how diverse habitats provide essential services to these animals.

The campaign will be supported by Facebook and Instagram posts tailored to the public, NGOs, land protection managers, and transportation planners.

Building Upon a Solid Open Space Foundation

New Jersey has a good foundation for achieving measurable success in habitat connectivity by protecting open space for people and nature. More than 1.5 million acres – more than a third of the state’s land mass – is now permanently preserved as a result of proactive local governments and land trusts, the state Green Acres program, farmland preservation programs – and residents who have consistently voted in favor of open space funding.



“New Jersey has done an excellent job protecting and preserving natural spaces thanks to strong conservation partnerships and steadfast public support,” **NJDEP Fish & Wildlife Assistant Commissioner Dave Golden said.** “CHANJ gives us a roadmap for focusing our efforts moving forward, filling in the gaps, and securing a legacy of healthy, connected ecosystems for the future.”

To maximize investments for wildlife and ecosystems, it is important to make sure that preserved lands aren’t isolated and that they are instead part of a functionally connected network of habitats. The state is working to be strategic about future open space acquisitions, considering how each piece of land fits into the broader landscape context, as well as being cognizant of how roads may be fragmenting or limiting wildlife access to protected lands. The challenge is great because New Jersey is the most densely populated state and has a very dense network of roads.

Tools for CHANJ

An important aspect of CHANJ over the years has been to work with various partners to provide safe ways for animals to move about in their habitats, such as construction of tunnels and bridges to facilitate wildlife crossings. The DEP and its partners are also strategic about purchases of open space to establish protected corridors between larger pieces of open space.



CHANJ offers tools and resources to the public and to land and transportation managers to make New Jersey’s landscape and roadways friendlier to wildlife movement. An interactive map and guidance document shows where and how to best support habitat



connectivity in our highly fragmented state. The NJ Wildlife Tracker allows the public to report wildlife sightings to help NJDEP Fish and Wildlife biologists map and monitor populations, manage rare wildlife species, and inform habitat connectivity projects.

In a highly urbanized state like New Jersey, healthy “backyard” habitats can make a big difference for wildlife living in or traveling through neighborhoods. Residents can support the CHANJ initiative at home by:

- Adding native plants and trees to the home landscape
- Maintaining wide natural buffers around streams
- Encouraging local towns to consider habitat connectivity in their planning
- Using the [NJ Wildlife Tracker](#) to report sightings of rare wildlife species, or wildlife (of any kind) on roadways

For More Information

Look for information and updates about the CHANJ program on NJDEP Fish & Wildlife’s website, Facebook and Instagram pages. Learn more about CHANJ and its related tools such as the CHANJ mapping and guidance documents and the NJ Wildlife Tracker at [CHANJ.nj.gov](https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/education/email-lists/). Sign up to receive email updates about the CHANJ project at <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/education/email-lists/> Like NJDEP Fish & Wildlife’s Facebook page at facebook.com/NewJerseyFishandWildlife

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