

The Summer of CHANJ 🌞 continues!

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How YOU Can Be Part of the CHANJ!

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's goal of [Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey \(CHANJ\)](#) depends on many different people filling in their piece of the puzzle. Here are some ways you can be part of the CHANJ:

- **Backyards** – Add more native plants and trees to your home landscape. Even small spaces count! Visit sites like [Jersey-Friendly Yards](#), [Homegrown National Park](#), and NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's [Backyard Habitats](#) page for inspiration.
- **Larger lands** – See how your property "connects" to the [CHANJ Mapping](#). Lands within CHANJ-mapped cores and corridors are especially important for wildlife movement, so setting aside space for habitat in those areas is a great way to boost your connectivity value. Maybe even consider a conservation easement, or eventually preserving your lot for all it has to offer wildlife. Our CHANJ Guidance Document ([Chapter 4](#)) has a list of land preservation contacts.
- **Streamside** – Create and maintain wide natural buffers around streams, since riparian corridors are critical for wildlife movement (notice that many CHANJ corridors follow waterways). Funding may be available through a local watershed association or USDA office; our CHANJ Guidance Document ([Chapter 4](#)) lists some habitat restoration contacts.
- **Get involved** – See how your town intersects with [CHANJ Mapping](#), and encourage your local government to consider habitat connectivity in their master plans and zoning. Our [CHANJ Guidance Document](#) can help them through the process.
- **Report wildlife** – Use the [NJ Wildlife Tracker](#) to report sightings of rare wildlife species, or wildlife (of any kind) on roadways. These sightings can help us pinpoint roadkill hotspots as well as areas where threatened or endangered land animals are active, which can lead to road crossing enhancement projects.

CHANJ Featured Species – Part II

North American River Otters are a webbed-footed, deep diving, semi-aquatic mammal that live in forested riparian habitats along both freshwater and brackish streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and marshes. They're at the top of the food chain in waterways, with fish making up most of their diet. River otters do best in unpolluted, food-rich waters apart from human activity, so they're a good indicator of healthy aquatic systems.



photo courtesy of Blaine Rothausen

River otters are also movers – with home ranges 20 to 30 miles wide – so habitat connectivity is incredibly important for them. Encountering under-sized stream culverts on their travels can force otters to attempt crossing roads, often with unfortunate results. The good news is that "Road Wildlife Mitigation Projects" are happening more and more across New Jersey ([explore some in our CHANJ Mapping!](#)). Many of these wildlife crossings are simply scaled-up stream culverts with enough breadth and dry ground for animals to pass through them, rather than going up and over the roadway to reach the other side. In time, a lot more culverts will double as animal underpasses in NJ, with the CHANJ Mapping being used to pinpoint places where they're most needed.

Bog Turtles are semi-aquatic, too, but they live in highly specialized groundwater-fed, freshwater wetlands called fens, which occur mostly in the northwestern and southwestern parts of New Jersey. They're one of the smallest turtles in the world and can live an impressive 60 years or more in the wild. Like many "niche" species, bog turtles are very rare; they're on NJ's endangered list and are threatened throughout their range. They are also New Jersey's official State Reptile.



Though small, bog turtles need to move between areas to disperse their genes, or to find new habitats as invasive plants, forest succession, surrounding land use practices and climate change alter the unique wetlands they call home. A more connected network of conserved lands, well-managed habitats and safe road crossings is needed to help sustain this little turtle's future.

As the [Summer of CHANJ](#) rolls on, we'll share more project updates, tips and tools to support habitat connectivity for NJ's wildlife. Thanks for tuning in!

[Learn more about CHANJ](#)

[Report wildlife sightings](#) to NJDEP Fish & Wildlife



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