

Wildflower areas to expand on Atlantic City Expressway

MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST Staff Writer

The South Jersey Transportation Authority is planting 35 acres of native wildflowers at more than 50 locations along the Atlantic City Expressway this year, an increase of about five acres over last year.

More than 20 indigenous species are in the seed mix, said SJTA Communications Manager Mark Amorosi, including milkweed, goldenrod and several varieties of aster.

There are also plans to plant an additional five to 10 acres in flowers in the fall, said Amorosi.

The flowers provide nectar for pollinators like bees and butterflies, which are suffering from habitat loss and pesticide use, said SJTA Operations Project Manager Nick Marchese. Their root systems also reduce storm-water runoff, remove pollutants, and prevent topsoil from eroding into streams and other waterways, he said.

The flower planting is part of SJTA's Roadway Environmental Advancement Initiative, which also includes installing bird houses, bat boxes and osprey platforms within the 1,200 acres of the Expressway's right-of-way. Birds and bats naturally control insect populations.

"The Authority has reduced its dependence on petroleum-based, fossil fuels ... and the wildflowers help ... by removing 35 acres that need to be mowed regularly during the summer, saving time, money and carbon emissions released into the air," said SJTA Executive Director Stephen F. Dougherty.

The Authority got advice from federal and state agencies about which wildflowers to plant, officials said.