



Roadway Environmental Advancement Initiative (READI)

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Topic Area: Planning for Transportation Ecology

Event: [Poster Session and Reception \(Reception starts at 6pm\)](#)

The READI program was designed with the goal of putting wildlife management at the forefront. The SJTA is committed to providing a safe roadway for commuters as well as native plant and animal species. This program was instituted to help reestablish native wildlife species to southern New Jersey by providing them with a suitable habitat. Highways do not necessarily mix well with plant and animal species. With that understanding, the SJTA has created a plan that incorporates education along with a hands-on approach to meeting its environmental responsibilities. Each year the authority makes environmental stewardship a priority by visiting local schools to educate children about the importance of conservation. These events are centered around Arbor and Earth Day and include the planting of native tree species such as red maple, red oak, weeping willow, dogwood, and American holly. To help establish a healthy bird population, the SJTA gathered the proper permits and information and, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Stockton University, installed osprey nests along the shore portions of the Atlantic City Expressway. Additionally, the SJTA has partnered with and provided materials for the Gloucester County Institute of Technology and the Carpentry

Technology Class of Camden County College to construct bird nests. These partnerships have resulted in almost 100 bird nests and bat boxes being placed along the over 40 mile stretch of roadway the SJTA serves, including nests for blue birds, American kestrels, and screech owls. Since this region falls along the monarch butterfly's migration path, beginning in 2008 the SJTA began planting numerous fields of non-native wildflowers and trees, and began planting native wildflowers in 2016. To protect species such as the threatened pine snake, more than 10 miles of wildlife fencing have been installed along with built-in wildlife crossing areas. Together these efforts have contributed to educating hundreds of children about the importance of conservation, as well as bolstering the health of the local environment by providing displaced plant and animal species a chance to recover their habitat. The wildflowers have beautified the highway and helped with soil erosion, the nests have brought in mating pairs of osprey and other bird species, and carbon emissions have been reduced by limiting areas that need mowing. For these achievements, the SJTA was awarded the Governor's Environmental Excellence Award and the nationally recognized International Bridge, Tunnel, and Turnpike Association award. Today, the SJTA is more motivated than ever to take conservation efforts to the next level. The agency desires to maintain and expand its transportation ecology initiatives and do as much for the local environment as possible. Through hard work, the SJTA has enhanced its environmental knowledge and made the Garden State a destination that is beautiful for its travelers and wildlife alike.

Abstract Keywords

The READI Program

