

SJTA Continues its Commitment to the Environment

Roadway Environmental Advancement Initiative grows and evolves

Started as part of its Roadway Environmental Advancement Initiative, the SJTA initially erected 20 bat boxes last year to support local species of bats that play a critical role as both pollinators and predators that help to control insect populations in South Jersey.

In 2018, the Operations Department added new bat boxes and nesting boxes for species such as the American kestrel, blue bird, osprey and butterfly habitats that brought the total number to 110, along the Atlantic City Expressway at locations recommended by the NJ Fish and Wildlife Services, Endangered and Nongame Species Program. The Department also established butterfly habitats within the roadway's right-of-way as part of the initiative.

The new bat boxes are larger and feature an even better design to attract and shelter up to 80 bats per box. A single brown bat can consume up to 3,000 mosquito-sized flying insects a night, and a nursing mother bat can eat up to 4,500 insects a night. The bat boxes were constructed in a shared service initiative by students of the Gloucester County Institute of Technology, and the Carpentry Technology Program of Camden County College with the assistance of SJTA craftsmen through an arrangement with the school. All materials were provided by the SJTA.

In addition to mosquitos, bats consume (many) different insect pests including cucumber beetles, leaf hoppers, termites, ants, roaches, corn earworms and grasshoppers, which benefits local farms situated along the Expressway's right-of-way.

Beyond its support of threatened and endangered species (like) such as bats and (some) species of owls, READI includes an important educational component. Every year (around) throughout the month of April, to include Arbor/Earth Day, the Operations Department visits local elementary and middle schools to plant trees and present assemblies that (impress) support the schools environmental curriculum and endorses the practice of effective environmental strategies. (on (students) (the importance of practicing good environmental stewardship). The SJTA has visited more than 25 schools since 2011 and planted at least one native tree at each of the selected schools.

The Atlantic City Expressway occupies a significant environmental footprint in South Jersey that includes over 1,200 acres along its 44-mile span; consequently, the SJTA is proud to offer the READI program to encourage environmental stewardship while its roadway serves as a vital transportation artery that supports commerce, tourism and economic growth throughout South Jersey.

The initiative also includes reintroducing native and non-native perennial wildflowers across 35 acres of the Expressway's right-of-way. The wildflowers attract and support important pollinators (like) such as bees and butterflies that are suffering from habitat loss and pesticide use. The goal is to reverse the population decline of these crucial pollinators in South Jersey.

Of significant importance is the development of the "SJTA Environmental Internship Program". In 2019 the Authority entered into an agreement with Stockton University to accept (which will provide) an intern to (who will) work with the SJTA Operations Project Managers and receive college credit for their work toward a degree in environmental sciences from Stockton University.

Our employees recognize the importance our efforts to live with the land, as Joe Carter, a Maintenance worker phrased it very well- "...Environmental initiatives are set in place to give back to the land which was altered by man and modernization..."

The SJTA plans to continue and expand the (many facets of) the READI Program as it works to exert a positive impact on the local environment.