

## **Liberty State Park's Interior Ecosystem Restoration**

**251 acre Natural area with nature trails, including 50 acre open space perimeter**

### **Milestone Authorization Approved**

**It will be one of our nation's largest urban nature restoration projects.**

In 5/07, Senator Robert Menendez, a longtime LSP champion, who had obtained millions for the Army Corps' Interior studies, hailed the Senate's passage of the Water Resources Development Act. WRDA, now also passed by the House, authorized, among other national and NJ projects, LSP's ecosystem restoration with an estimated federal cost of \$22 million. The Interior is the former RR freight yards, where nature has made a dramatic comeback. A public meeting will be held by the LSP Public Advisory Committee in the fall on the landscape architecture plan.

NJ's funding commitments for construction include 10 million dollars from the Natural Resource Damages Program, which the NY/NJ Baykeeper advocated for, and 1.5 million dollars from the Freshwater Wetlands Mitigation Council, the latter thanks specifically to LSP Administrator Frank Gallagher and NY/NJ Baykeeper Conservation Director Greg Remaud. The next step for the WRDA projects is to get the actual money appropriation (update – first stage to begin in Spring, 2011).

**The General Management Plan, approved after many public meetings, includes:**

- A 40 acre salt marsh will be added to the park's Interior by creating a tidal channel of the Hudson River which will flow into the park from the North Cove. It will go under Freedom Way and go into the NE corner of the Interior diversifying its vegetation.
- This habitat restoration project will create salt marshes, enhance freshwater wetlands and enhance the 100 acre urban forest and tall grass habitat.
- Interior natural area will have nature trails which will bring visitors for education and enjoyment of passive recreation of walking and bird watching.

With more than five million visitors annually, the park's development continues to be an extraordinary successful example of the reuse of a former urban industrial area. The Division of Parks and Forestry, guided by public input and grassroots citizen battles that were regularly needed, has spent over 31 years since its acquisition, planning and building a park for the free use of open space for a variety of unstructured uses (and an athletic field is planned in SW corner).

Much of the area has been re-colonized by various plant communities. These communities represent unique associations of both endemic and non-native species that can be considered the by-product of the cultural events that have taken place during the past several centuries.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District has been working in partnership with the NJDEP to assess the feasibility of restoring selected habitats within the New York-New Jersey Harbor Complex. Known as the Hudson-Raritan Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Project, 13 sites within the harbor have been targeted for restoration work. LSP is the highest priority site. The environmental impact statement and feasibility for the LSP project have been completed. The project has been subdivided into three phases, freshwater wetland, salt water wetland, and upland improvements. The first phase, the freshwater wetlands component, is expected to go to bid this fall with construction to follow in the late fall or early spring. It's exciting that LSP's Interior will be a special natural area that will serve as an international model for urban nature restoration.