

# The Star-Ledger

## EDITORIAL

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

### A green rebirth for the park

For decades, a large swath of land in the center of Liberty State Park has been off limits, guarded by a fence bearing signs warning of toxic contamination. The 234-acre heart of the park went unused, an unwelcome reminder of the region's industrial past.

Visitors will find a more attractive view in a few years. A promising state plan will resurrect the tainted area over the next decade, restoring it to woods, grassland and marsh, with opportunities for hiking and nature study. As a bonus, the estimated \$32 million bill will be paid by the federal government and the companies responsible for the pollution.

Some critics (only critic was head of NJ Sierra Club who didn't go to any meetings or make any calls of inquiry, and didn't know any of the comprehensive scientific research or plans regarding the contamination in the emerging natural area -note by Sam) are upset because that \$32 million won't produce a pristine landscape. Although tainted soil may be removed from pollution "hot spots," much of the rest of the acreage may not get the same treatment. Some areas might be capped with clean soil, some simply left to allow trees, grass and other species to grow and help hold low-level contamination in place.

Cleaning up the entire swath would indeed be ideal (actually it wouldn't have been ideal as capping the 234 acres site would have killed all the vegetation that has grown since train yard was closed - as nature on its own has been making a dramatic recovery with an evolving forest and the establishment of a moss mat community, etc. - note by Sam). But it would require covering the entire 234 acres with several feet of clean fill, a project that would carry an astronomical cost. The government doesn't have the money.

And unlike, for example, the EnCap golf course property a few miles away in the Meadowlands, exhaustively cleaning every square foot of land at Liberty State Park's

center isn't necessary to make the area safe for casual public use.

The center of the park won't be pure, but the Department of Environmental Protection promises it won't be dangerous, either. Areas of heavy public use, such as places for picnicking, will get more treatment than spots deep in the woods far from hiking paths. This approach is fine so long as the state errs on the side of caution as it moves forward with more detailed plans for renovation work at the site. That will require doing more extensive work in any area where there is a chance of public exposure to heavy metals and other toxic contaminants.

In a sense, the state wants to let nature do its own renovation on much of the land. That plan, with the resulting natural preserve, is far better than keeping the park center fenced off and unavailable for public enjoyment. It also is a major improvement on earlier proposals that would have overly commercialized the park by building a golf course or a water park on the tainted land.

State parks were created to provide a green escape from city and suburban life. Liberty State Park has long offered an open waterfront with stunning views of the Statue of Liberty and the New York skyline. A natural preserve in the park's interior will mean it also will be a green escape of its own.