

The Jersey Journal

\$20.8M to regreen LSP

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The chance to hike through woods, wetlands and salt marshes without leaving Jersey City just got one step closer with the authorization of \$20.8 million in federal funds to spend on restoration of 234 acres of Liberty State Park.

"Nature is not something that should only be preserved in the national parks," U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez said at a news conference yesterday. "It is imperative that our urban families have access to forests, wildlife and outdoor recreational opportunities."

The \$32 million project will restore an area at the center of the park's 1,100 acres, making it a contiguous whole.

The design calls for creation of three freshwater wetlands, a 40-acre salt marsh created by cutting a channel from the Hudson River, and 110 acres of evolving forests.

It will restore tidal and freshwater wetlands, a moss mat community, coastal grasslands and woodlands. The plan also includes hiking paths, bird blinds, viewing decks and a 30-foot high mound for picnicking and sledding.

Ethel Pesin, whose late husband Morris, a former Jersey City councilman who started the movement to create Liberty State Park in 1958 with his famed eight-minute canoe ride from Jersey City to Liberty Island, said he would have been pleased to see the plan move forward.

"He would have been delighted. Everything he hoped for is happening," she said.

The area to be restored is currently fenced off due to concerns about toxic materials that built up during the decades when the area was filled with industrial waste.

But future hikers need not fear, said Greg Remaud, the conservation director of the NY/NJ Baykeeper, an environmental agency. "Hot spots" with dangerous levels of toxins will be cleaned out. The rest of the areas have levels that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA consider safe, and that are

similar to levels across much of the rest of the county.

"Anything that's a threat will be removed," he said.

Groundbreaking is planned for the fall, and construction should take about three years to complete, said Col. Nello Tortola, commander of the New York District of the Army Corps of Engineers, which is carrying out the project in conjunction with the New Jersey DEP and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

In addition to the federal funds, \$11.2 million in state funds have been secured for the project.

A public hearing on the plan was slated for last night. Sam Pesin, president of Friends of Liberty State Park and Ethel and Morris' son, said he expected strong support for the plan.