



SAVE BARNEGAT BAY



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Contact: Britta Wenzel, 732-830-3600, mobile 732-899-1124
William deCamp Jr., 732-892-3465

SBB-supported First-in-Nation Native Plant Bill Becomes Law

In a first-in-the-nation victory for Barnegat Bay and water bodies throughout New Jersey, a bill requiring three major statewide transportation agencies to use only native plants when they do landscaping and other plantings was signed into law today by Governor Christie.

The agencies involved are the New Jersey Department of Transportation, the South Jersey Transportation Authority, and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which includes the Garden State Parkway. In total these agencies maintain over three thousand miles of roads.

“We believe this law to be the first in any jurisdiction nationally to require a public entity to use only native plantings,” said Britta Wenzel, Executive Director of Save Barnegat Bay. “We are proud to be leading the way on a water quality strategy whose time has most definitely come.”

The bill originated in the offices of Save Barnegat Bay and the 10th Legislative District (Senator Jim Holzapfel, Assemblyman Dave Wolfe, and Assemblyman Greg McGuckin) as a result of dissatisfaction surrounding the replanting of Route 35 following Superstorm Sandy.

Native plants are those that have always grown in the climate and soils of the region in which they are found. Because they require no fertilizer, they are not sources of the polluting excess nutrients that stormwater and groundwater carry to nearby rivers, lakes and bays.

Nutrient pollution from excess nitrogen and phosphorus—two principal ingredients in plant fertilizer—are by far the largest ecological problem for the preponderance of water bodies nationally, including Barnegat Bay. (over)

In addition to their water quality benefits, native plants save taxpayer dollars by eliminating the cost of fertilizing as well as the cost of watering struggling non-native plantings.

“We hope this action will inspire counties and municipalities statewide to enact similar requirements, thereby protecting clean water and saving taxpayer dollars in their home areas,” Wenzel said. “Requiring native plantings is an ecological and fiscal win-win.”

An instrumental step in moving this bill was a professional report on the replanting of Route 35 created by Bryce Bennett, a licensed landscape architect in Toms River. That report, which is available at www.savebarnegatbay.org, was commissioned by Save Barnegat Bay.

“If humanity is ever going to get its act together on this planet, there is going to have to be harmony, starting with harmony between man and nature,” said William deCamp Jr., president of Save Barnegat Bay. “This law is in the sweet spot of that concept.”

Save Barnegat Bay received meaningful assistance from the New Jersey Audubon Society and Kelly Mooij, Audubon’s vice president of Government Relations, in shepherding this bill through the legislature. The bill, which was numbered S227/A963, passed the Senate by a vote of 35-2 and the Assembly by a vote of 69-0.

“Most of the credit for passing this bill should go to the thousands of volunteers throughout New Jersey who have promoted the use of native plants at fairs and festivals for the last thirty years, including the Native Plant Society of New Jersey,” deCamp said. “When we brought this bill before the legislative committees, they already knew what native plants are. That is thanks to a generation of selfless volunteer workers.”

In addition to the 10th District legislators, the bill was cosponsored by Senators Tom Kean Jr., Christopher “Kip” Bateman, Diane Allen, and Linda Greenstein, as well as by Assemblymen Ron Dancer and John Rooney.

“We are very grateful to all of the legislators who helped achieve this victory for water quality and to Governor Christie for signing the bill,” said Wenzel.

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