

WETLANDS

IX

Wetlands or wetland as defined by the State of New Jersey in its wetland regulations (NJAC 7:7A and NJAC 7:7E) is “an area that is inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and under normal circumstances does support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.”

In New Jersey, freshwater wetlands are delineated utilizing the three parameter approach of soils, vegetation and hydrology as outlined in the 1989 Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands. The NJDEP-Land Use Regulation Program (LURP) has produced freshwater wetland maps that show the generalized location of wetlands. These maps are for informational purposes only. Prior to any development activities on a site, all wetlands must be field delineated using the three (3) parameter approach. Any impacts to freshwater wetlands or associated transition area (buffers) are regulated by the NJDEP-LURP. The NJDEP will assign a buffer to all freshwater wetland areas. The buffer will be 0', 50' or 150' and is dependent upon the resource value classification of the wetland.

Coastal wetlands have been mapped by the NJDEP-Bureau of Tidelands Management. These maps have been promulgated and the mapped wetland boundaries are legal boundaries. Tidally influenced wetlands not shown on these maps are regulated pursuant to the freshwater wetland rules. Impacts to coastal wetlands are regulated by both the NJDEP-LURP and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE). The NJDEP-LURP applies up to a 300 foot buffer adjacent to coastal wetlands. The USACOE does not apply buffers to wetlands, freshwater or tidal.

Both freshwater and coastal wetlands are present within the Borough of West Cape May. Coastal wetlands are associated with areas of tidal inundation. The Borough is surrounded on three (3) sides by tidal marsh. These tidal areas are associated with Cape Island Creek on the eastern side of town, Pond Creek on the western side of town and Cape May Meadows on the southern side of town.

Various types of freshwater wetlands are found throughout the Borough. They range from palustrine forested and/or shrub/scrub wetlands to emergent wetlands to wetlands in agricultural production. Figure VII-3 in Section VII, Vegetation, presents a generalized wetland map of the Borough and surrounding area.

Of significant importance to the West Cape May wetland ecosystem is the “central corridor wetlands”. This is a series of ponds and vernal pools connected

by culverts that drain into the Cape May Meadows which are located south of Sunset Boulevard. This corridor is bounded to the west by Bayshore Road, to the north by Sixth Avenue, to the south by Sunset Boulevard and to the east by Columbia Avenue. The significance of the corridor is the presence of the southern gray treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*), a State listed endangered species. As discussed in the wildlife section of this report, West Cape May has been surveyed on various occasions for treefrogs. The most recent survey was performed by Herpetological Associates, Inc. for the New Jersey Audubon Society. The results of the study indicate that treefrogs are located within the central corridor wetlands. In addition, treefrogs were present along Stevens Street. For further information, the report entitled “Southern Gray Treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) Surveys in the Borough of West Cape May, Cape May County, New Jersey” can be viewed at the Borough offices.

Whitmer Stone provides the following description of one of the ponds located in the central wetlands corridor called Racetrack Pond. It got its name because it was excavated to provide fill for a horseracing track.

“Its dark waters were studded with white and gold pond lilies and bordered by bayberry bushes and wild roses. At one end was a dense cattail growth over which there were always to be found anxious Red-wings, the males flaunting their brilliant epaulets as they hovered overhead voicing their protests, and the females flushing with a frightened chatter from the waving sea of narrow dark green leaves sheltering nests and young.

This pond too, was visited by Green Herons, Killdeer and Spotted Sandpipers, and during late summer by various migrant shorebirds. Some years, a pair of King or Virginia Rails, and a pair of Bitterns nested in the shelter of the cattails and a bunch of Black Duck would drop down in passing to rest and feed among the lily pads.”

Stone reported that the County Mosquito Commission drained Racetrack Pond and two ponds to the north (called West Cape May Ponds) in the 1930s, destroying rare plants that had “attracted the attention of botanists throughout the East.” The ponds have since filled with water again, but today Phragmites form a high wall that blocks the view of the ponds.

In addition to providing habitat for the southern gray treefrog, the corridor is significant in that it stands as a possible link to connect the Cape May Meadows to Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. Protection of this corridor would in effect create an “Ocean to Bay Greenway” connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Delaware Bay through two (2) of the most significant ecological areas in North America. See Figure IX-1 for a Conceptual Map of the West Cape May Ocean to Bay Greenway.

Conceptual Map of the West Cape May Ocean to Bay Greenway

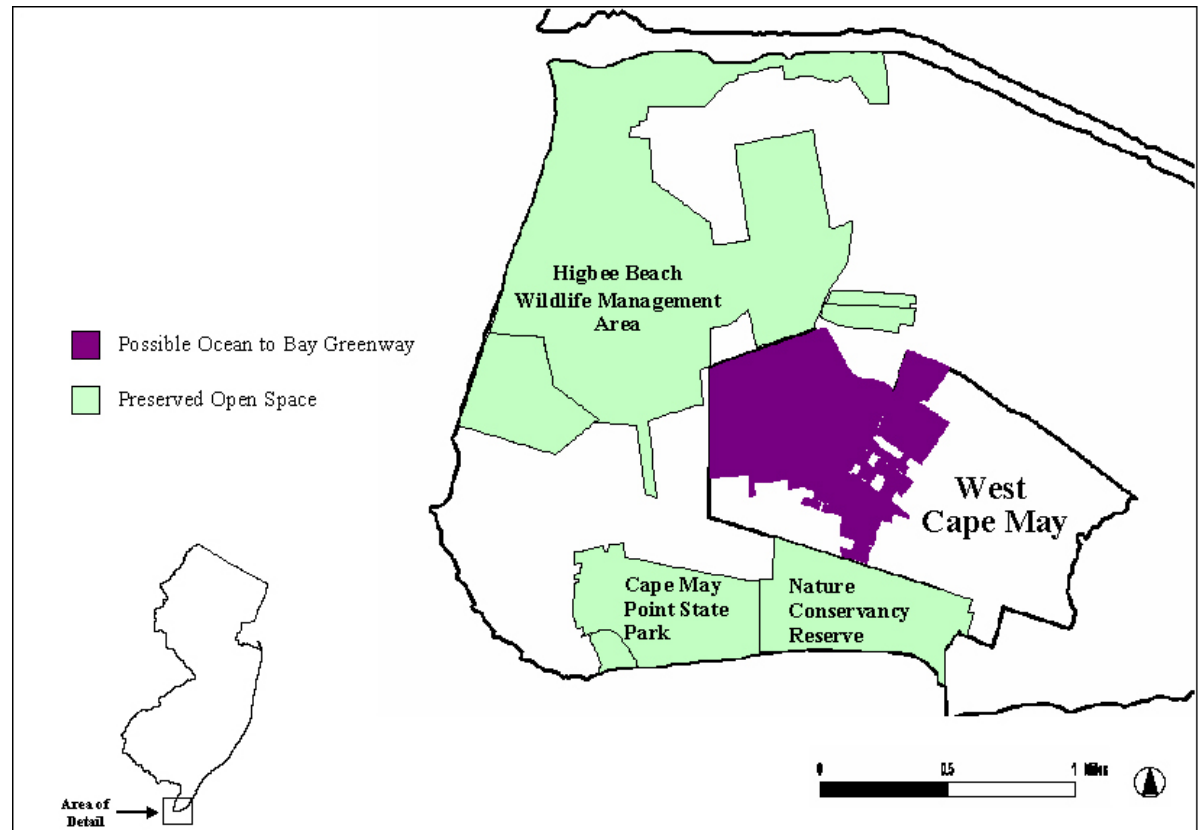


Figure IX-1. Open Space Areas Adjacent to West Cape May. These Areas Have Been Internationally Recognized for Their Importance to Migratory Birds.