

# NJMC NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New Jersey  
Meadowlands  
Commission**

## **NJMC AWARDED \$215,000 EPA GRANT TO STUDY BENTHIC ORGANISMS IN WETLANDS SURROUNDING HACKENSACK RIVER**

*Research Will Help NJMC Assess Health of Wetlands, Food Web*

**LYNDHURST, N.J.** – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC) today announced that it has been awarded a \$215,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to research the biodiversity and pollutant levels in benthic organisms and the sediments in which they live. The small macroinvertebrates include crustaceans, snails, worms and clams that inhabit the bottom of wetlands and waterways within the Meadowlands region and provide food for fish and birds.

The study, “Benthic Biodiversity and Benthic Pollutant Loads in Emergent Marshes of the NJ Meadowlands,” will equip the NJMC with new knowledge about the ecological health of the Hackensack River system, its surrounding marshlands and the associated food web.

The study will for the first time measure contaminant levels in benthic organisms of the Meadowlands. Data collected will provide an assessment of the kinds and levels of contaminants that bird and fish species in the region may be ingesting that may negatively affect their physiology and behavior.

“This grant funds valuable research that will greatly assist the Meadowlands Commission in its ongoing commitment to protecting and enhancing the District’s critical wetlands and improving water quality in the Hackensack River,” said Marcia Karrow, Executive Director of the NJMC. “Even the smallest marsh dwellers play a big role in helping us understand the dynamics of the Meadowlands’ unique urban ecosystem.”

Benthic organisms are ecologically important because they provide nutrients to the birds and fish that eat them. Benthic organisms eat microorganisms and certain types of organic matter that settle on the bottom of the Hackensack River and its associated marshes.

Biodiversity data collected during this study will update NJMC benthic research conducted on the marshes in 2002 and complement NJMC work conducted on the river in 1987 and 2002. The

previous studies showed benthic organisms making significant gains in biodiversity and abundance, indicating that river system was getting cleaner.

Preparations for next year's field season will start this fall. Samples will be collected during the summer of 2015. The study should be completed by the end of 2016.

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