

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**GRANT PROGRAM:** Traditional Green Acres

**APPLICANT:** Hudson County

**PROJECT:** Picnic Improvements at J.J. Braddock Park – North Bergen, NJ 07047

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

*a. Briefly describe the total development project*

The proposed project includes the construction of eight picnic areas, each including three concrete picnic tables, grill tables, trash, recycling, and charcoal disposal. The proposed picnic areas will be semi-circles build of concrete pavers adjacent to park pathways. This is a County-owned public park which offers approximately 167 acres of parkland and recreational amenities including tennis courts, basketball courts, bocce ball courts, handball courts, ball fields, volleyball courts, and an exercise/cross country course. The scope of work for this project includes demolition of the existing picnic area, installation and sitework. The new picnic area will be designed with semi-circles build of concrete pavers adjacent to park pathways.

*b. State objectives of the project*

The objective of this project is to improve park goers experience within Hudson County's J.J. Braddock Park. The proposed facility will be designed to meet the demand for additional and improved picnic seating within the park.

*c. Fully describe multi-phase projects*

Not applicable; this is not a multi-phase project.

### 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

**Describe existing environmental features:**

*a. vegetation*

There is a wide variety of tree, shrub, flower, and grass species that can be found through the region including oak, maple, sumac and other species. Some of the common invasive or non-native plant species found in this region that might be present near the Project Site include common mugwort (*Aremisia vulgaris*), common reed (*phragmites australis*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), white mulberry (*Morus alba*) and many more.

Endangered or threatened vegetation which are native to the area, though none have been specifically observed on the Project Site, include:

- New Jersey status of Critically Imperiled
  - o Large White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)
  - o American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*)
  - o White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*)
  - o Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*)
- New Jersey status of Imperiled:
  - o Tall boneset (*Eupatorium altissimum*)
  - o American elm (*Ulmus americana*) - Observed in J.J. Braddock Park (North Bergen), Lincoln Park (Jersey City), and Laurel Hill Park (Secaucus)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature status of Near Threatened
  - o Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)
  - o Closed bottle gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*)
- Internation Union for Conservation of Nature status of Vulnerable
  - o Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

*b. wildlife, including State and federal threatened and endangered species and critical habitats*

This project is not expected to reduce or impact the habitat of existing wildlife. However, it will also not increase habitat. According to the species list provided by iNaturalist, this region is home to a variety of mammals, reptiles, birds, and aquatic species. Hudson County as a whole provides a large habitat range for these species. Some of the wildlife indicated are endangered, threatened, or vulnerable, though none of these have been specifically spotted on the project site. Furthermore, some wildlife present was introduced to the area, and some are even considered invasive. The following includes example species but is not an extensive list:

- **Mammals:** Small mammals introduced by humans include house mice (*Mus musculus*), Brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), and feral dogs (*Canis familiaris*) and cats (*Felis catus*) (iNaturalist 2022). A variety of urban-adapted mammals are likely to occur in this area based on their habitat ranges and individual reporting. These mammals include but are not limited to the eastern gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), groundhog (*Marmota monax*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), common raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), American beaver (*Castor canadensis*), meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*), white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*), American red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), north American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), short-tail shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*), among many other mammals (iNaturalist 2022). Migrating bat species in the area include the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subglavus*), silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivans*), red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*), Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*). There are several species of endangered and threatened mammal whose habitat ranges overlap with this site, though no observations have been made. These include the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), and Eastern small-footed myotis (*Myotis leibii*). The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is classified as critically endangered, and its historic habitat range includes all of Hudson County. Finally, the Northern Myotis (*Myotis septentrionalis*) is classified as threatened.
- **Reptiles:** Introduced species of reptiles found in the area: pond slider (*Trachemys scripta*), Italian wall lizard (*Podarcis siculus*). Reptiles found in the area include but are not limited to the common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*), common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), Eastern milksnake (*Lampropeltis Triangulum*), Eastern musk turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*), Dekay's brownsnake (*Storeria dekayi*). Vulnerable reptiles in the region include the Common box turtle (*Terrapene Carolina*), Eastern copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*), Eastern hognose snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*), Smooth green snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*), and diamondback terrapin (Malaclemys terrapin). Critically endangered reptiles in the region include the Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) and the Timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*).
- **Amphibians:** Amphibians live on both land and in the water, they are an important part of the ecosystem, however they are typically very small and often undetected. This project site is not ideal habitat for most amphibians, so it is likely there are few to none living on the exact project site. However, the surrounding area includes two ponds which might provide habitat to many local amphibians. Common amphibians to this area include Eastern red-backed salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*), American Toad (*Anaxyrus americanus*), Eastern Newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens*), Green Frog (*Lithobates clamitans*), American, Bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*), Wood Frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*), Spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), Pickerel Frog (*Lithobates palustris*), and the Southern leopard frog (*Lithobates sphenoccephalus*), among others. Threatened or endangered amphibians that may live in the surrounding area – none of these species have been specifically observed on the project site though the site is located in their habitat range:
  - o New Jersey status of Critically Imperiled
    - Cope's gray treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*)
    - Blue spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*)

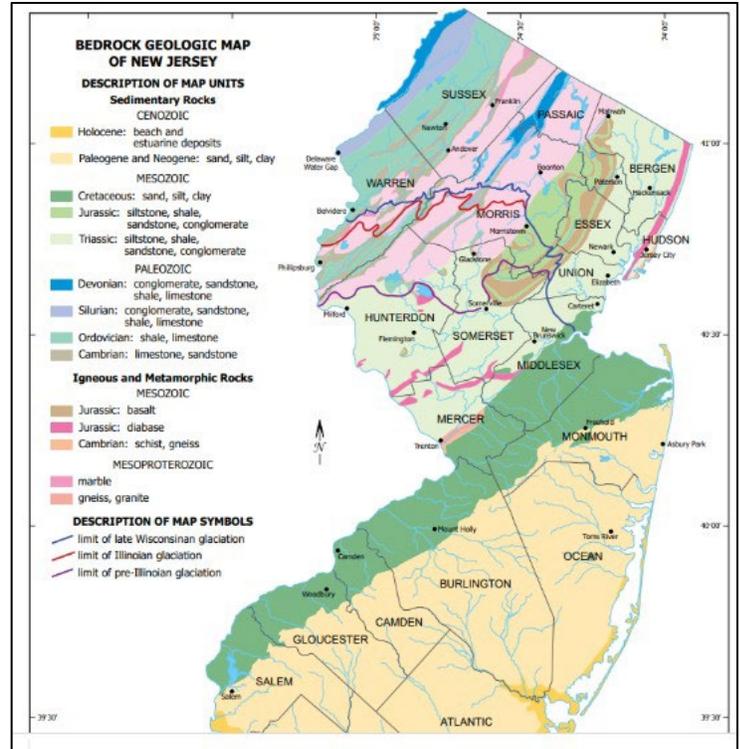
- New Jersey status of Imperiled
  - Long-tailed salamander (*Eurycea longicauda*)
- New Jersey status of Vulnerable
  - Fowler's Toad (*Anaxyrus fowleri*)
  - Spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*)
  - Marbled Salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*)
  - Eastern spadefoot (*Scaphiopus holbrookii*)
  - Spring salamander (*Gyrinophilus porphyriticus*)
  - Jefferson salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*)
  - New Jersey chorus frog (*Pseudacris kalmi*)
- New Jersey status of Apparently Secure or Near Threatened
  - Northern dusky salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*)
- **Insects:** Hudson County is home to many native and some invasive insects and hexapods. None of which appear on the endangered or threatened species list. Some of the insects likely found on the project sites include Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), common eastern bumble bee (*Bombus impatiens*), eastern carpenter bee (*Xylocopa virginica*), black swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*), along with many other species of butterflies, dragonflies, ants, bees, beetles and many more. Some invasive insects in the area include the spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*), brown marmorated stink bug (*Halyomorpha halys*), and European hornet (*Vespa crabro*) among others.
- **Molluscs:** There are some species of molluscs found in the region, though none are endangered or threatened.
- **Fungi including lichens:** Many species of fungi and lichen are native to this region. Some that have been specifically observed in J.J. Braddock Park include *Ganoderma sessile*, Eastern American Jack-O'-Lantern (*Omphalotus illudens*), Scarletina bolete (*Neoboletus luridiformis*), and the White button mushroom (*Agaricus bisporus*).
- **Birds:** J.J. Braddock Park provides important habitat to many bird species, though the picnic area itself does not provide nesting habitat, the surrounding trees and grassy areas contributes to the nesting, feed, and landing areas within a bird's habitat needs. Some of the bird species in this area include: Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*), brant (*Branta bernicla*), American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), great Egret (*Ardea alba*), bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*), red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), gadwall (*Mareca strepera*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) among many others.
  - New Jersey status of Critically Imperiled
    - Double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auratus*) has been spotted in Bayonne, Jersey City, and Secaucus
    - Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has been observed in Bayonne and Secaucus, including in Stephen R. Gregg Park
    - Pied-billed grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) has been observed in Bayonne and Jersey City, including in Stephen R. Gregg Park and Lincoln Park.
    - Other critically imperiled species with no observations reported:
      - Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*)
      - Red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)
      - Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)
      - American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)
      - Upland sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)
  - New Jersey status of Imperiled
    - Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – this endangered species has been spotted in Lincoln Park in Jersey City and in Stephen R. Gregg Park in Bayonne by several different observers in 2022 (iNaturalist 2022).

- Black-crowned night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Has been observed throughout the county, specifically at Lincoln Park and J.J. Braddock Park.
  - Cooper’s hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – has been observed throughout Hudson County, including Stephen R. Gregg Park and Lincoln Park.
  - Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – has been observed in Bayonne, Jersey City, and Secaucus – specifically in Laurel Park and Lincoln Park.
  - Long-eared owl (*Asio otus*)
  - Saltmarsh sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacuta*)
- National conservation status of Near Threatened
  - Common grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – has been seen in Secaucus, Bayonne, and Jersey City. Specifically, spotted at the Skyway Golf Course and Duncan Ave in Lincoln Park in Jersey City.
- New Jersey status of Vulnerable:
  - Black-throated green warbler (*Setophaga virens*)
  - Horned grebe (*Podiceps auratus*), snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*)
  - Northern parula (*Setophaga Americana*)
  - Hooded merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)
  - Long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*)
  - Evening grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)
  - Littler blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*)
  - Eurasian wigeon (*Mareca Penelope*)
  - Sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)
  - Sora (*Porzana Carolina*)
- New Jersey status of Near Threatened
  - Peregrin Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)
  - Semipalmated sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*)
  - Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)
  - King rail (*Rallus elegans*)
  - Black tern (*Chlidonias niger*)
  - Blackpoll warbler (*Setophaga striata*)
  - Red knot (*Calidris canutus*)

*c. geology, topography, and soils*

According to the Bedrock Geologic Map of New Jersey, provided by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and NJ Geological and Water Survey, the Project Site sits on top of a historic bedrock from the Mesozoic period. Part of the park is Jurassic: Diabase bedrock, shown in bright pink on the map, which is a mixture of igneous and metamorphic rocks. The eastern edge of the park sits on Triassic rock, a sedimentary mix of siltstone, shale, sandstone, and conglomerate. Today, the area is covered by a soil and grass, with trees and other vegetation growing throughout the surrounding area.

The 2019 US Topography map shows the elevation of this site is about 200 feet above sea level. The project site is currently covered with a layer of soil and grass. This soil will be disturbed during the renovation of the picnic area.



*d. water resources/hydrology*

J.J. Braddock Park is home to the 16-acre Woodcliff Lake. The proposed picnic area will be located approximately 510 feet from the lake from its closest location, and about 3,015 feet from the Hudson River.

*e. historic/archeological resources*

According to the NJDEP's mapping tool, the Project Site is not within a historic district. The Project Site does not contain any historic or archaeological resources. The southeast portion of J.J. Braddock Park is located on the FF79 archaeological grid.

*f. transportation/access to site*

Nearby bus stops are serviced by NJ Transit bus lines including #159, #156, #22, #84, #89, #128, and #23. The park also has various pedestrian pathways connecting it to nearby neighborhoods. There are multiple on-street parking spots throughout the park and several parking lots to accommodate visitors traveling by car.

*g. adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood*

The surrounding area consists of dense urban development. The land use surrounding the park is primarily residential. Bergenline Avenue runs along the western border of the park and is a business corridor. The east side of the park is on Boulevard East, a major roadway in the area.

### 3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

*a. Discuss all affected resources and the significance of each impact.*

Given the small scope of this project, there are minimal impacts to the surrounding environment. No additional traffic or noise issues are expected. This project is merely to upgrade existing infrastructure so there will be no additional disturbance to the surrounding park or neighborhood. No trees or other vegetation will be removed, and no wildlife habitat will be impacted.

*b. Discuss short-term and long-term project impacts.*

As mentioned above, the scope of this project are upgrades to existing infrastructure. The expected short-term impacts include less litter and disruption to the grass. The long-term impact is that the picnic areas will be more easily maintained and have longer longevity.

*c. Discuss anticipated increase in recreation and overall use of site over time.*

The anticipated increase in recreation is minimal and will likely remain in the level it currently is at. The new picnic areas will serve the current demand.

*d. Identify adjacent environmental features that may be affected by the proposal.*

Adjacent environmental features include the surrounding park area, and the Hudson River to the east. J.J. Braddock Park includes both a lake and urban forest ecosystem which provide habitat for a variety of plants and animals. The park is within the Hudson River Watershed, so run off will make its way into the river. The project is not expected to impact the surrounding trees, soil, or recreational facilities in the park or extended surrounding residential areas.

*e. List any permits required for project and brief status (i.e., waterfront development)*

The proposed project will require a soil conservation permit from the Hudson Essex Passaic Soil Conservation District. The County will apply for this permit following the completion of final design plans.

*f. Natural Heritage Data Request Form*

Not applicable; this project does not impact any undisturbed areas.

*g. Discuss if/how the project may be impacted by sea level rise and any related design considerations.*

This site is located far enough inland that it is not subject to sea level rise risks given its elevation of about 200 feet above sea level. According to the FEMA National Flood Hazard Layer FIRMette, a section of the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), this site is in a floodplain Zone X designation. This means that the site is not subject to coastal flooding and is also not susceptible to flooding during storm events.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

*a. Identify alternate sites.*

Because this is a renovation to existing infrastructure, no alternative sites were considered.

*b. Discuss alternate levels and types of development.*

The no-action alternative would result in the current picnic area design and equipment remaining with no improvements or additional picnic seating added to the site. This no-action alternative may adversely affect the parks vegetation as there is unmet demand for picnic tables and related infrastructure, which is currently scattered on park grounds.

*c. Compare environmental impacts of each alternative.*

The improvement project alternative will reduce the environmental impact caused by picnic users and provide better litter control and charcoal disposal, thus reducing fire risk.

The construction phase may cause temporary noise pollution, and there may be a change to the landscaping, with the planting of new vegetation for aesthetic purposes, but no long-term environmental impacts are expected.

## **5. MITIGATING MEASURES**

*Describe the measures that will be undertaken to mitigate adverse impacts.*

The County of Hudson is dedicated to ensuring that all of its properties are diligently cared for to ensure that our park facilities are clean, well-maintained, and welcoming to all visitors. In this spirit, the County resolves to take all proper measures and precautions necessary both during and after this renovation project to ensure that the surrounding environment, and natural resources as documented in this Environmental Impact Assessment, are not adversely impacted. These measures include, but are not limited to, erecting silt fencing during and after construction and scheduling and staging efforts to minimize overall disturbance. Additionally, the County is committed to continued compliance with any and all rules and regulations promulgated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and/or any other regulatory agencies and to retain all necessary permits as required by these agencies.

## **6. AUTHOR(S) AND QUALIFICATIONS**

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