



**RIVER-  
FRIENDLY  
RESIDENT**

**The Watershed  
Institute**  
thewatershed.org

## 2026 MID-YEAR REPORT

# RIVER-FRIENDLY REFLECTIONS

Official Newsletter of the NJ River-Friendly  
Programs

## Mid-Year Report

### A NOTE FROM THE COORDINATORS...

It is stunning that 2026 is more than half over already so we wanted to share with you, what River-Friendly news has happened so far!

We appreciate the time you have invested towards this certification and have enjoyed getting to know you, your school, business, or golf course.

## The Numbers

- 23** new RF residents
- 2** new RF Certified Schools
- 1** new RF Business
- 12** pollinator projects installed



## Table of Contents

River-Friendly Action Alert  
PAGE 2-3

New Certifications  
PAGE 4-5

Featured Projects  
PAGE 6-10

Professional Development  
PAGE 11-12

Grants to support RF actions  
PAGE 13-14

# What's a HAB? What should I do if I spot one?

A Harmful Algal Bloom, HAB for short, is caused when **various species of cyanobacteria** grow out of control in waterbodies. These blooms **can kill fish, mammals, or birds** and can **be harmful or even fatal** to humans.

HABS are caused by many factors, including **excess nutrients** like nitrogen and phosphorus, **water temperature, salinity**, and more. HABs have increased greatly in our neighborhoods and favorite water recreation areas. While HABs are caused by multiple factors, human-caused pollution like **stormwater runoff** from farms and our neighborhoods, and **climate change extremes** contribute to these blooms.

By taking River-Friendly actions at home, at school, at work, and in your town, you can help reduce pollutants entering our waterways, harming wildlife, and causing HABs.

If you suspect a HAB is present, report it to NJDEP: <https://dep.nj.gov/hab/>



Information and photo source: <https://njwatershedwatch.org/habs/> and <https://dep.nj.gov/hab/>



# Annual Water Conservation PSA

NJDEP offers great seasonally relevant water conservation tool kits that you can share online or with your community!

## 10 SIMPLE STEPS TO SAVE WATER THIS SUMMER



Water flowers and landscaping with water harvested in a rain barrel connected to a downspout.

1



Avoid recreational toys that require a constant stream of water.

6



Use 30-50% less water with drip irrigation and micro-sprays compared to sprinklers.

2



Raise your lawnmower blade to at least 3 inches to promote deeper grass roots which hold water better.

7



Only water when needed; in NJ most landscapes need only 1 inch of water per week. This often comes from dew and rainfall.

3



Use water from dehumidifiers and air conditioners to water your plants.

8



If you have a pool purchase a water saving filter.

4



Use native plants that need less water.

9



Cover your pool when not in use to reduce evaporation rates.

5



Group plants together based on water needs.

10

<https://dep.nj.gov/conserve-water/toolkit/>

# Congratulations New 2026 River-Friendly Schools!



## Cedar Hill Prep School

### **Watershed Level River-Friendly School certified**

Students engaged with their local watershed by completing water testing at the New Jersey Institute of Nature, raising trout in the classroom, removing spotted lantern fly egg sacs, creating raised bed meadows, and planting a rain garden.

The school also started a green team to continue engaging students in environmental stewardship, and hosted a science fair where middle school projects were focused on soil and water issues.

## Hunterdon County Environmental Sustainability and Engineering Academy

### **River-Friendly School certified**

Students used handheld meters to test various water quality parameters of the waterbody on the school's property. Other actions included designing green spaces to improve water quality and create habitat for local wildlife; figuring out ways to reduce water usage at home; and forming a River-Friendly Committee to perform outreach and plan activities at the school.





# Congratulations New 2026 River-Friendly Businesses!

## Unionville Vineyards

### River-Friendly Business certified

Unionville Vineyards has begun a comprehensive process to create a healthier relationship with the land, through actions such as establishing a pollinator meadow, planting native herbaceous and woody plants in a riparian corridor, installing a rain garden and wildlife nest boxes, and reducing harmful chemical usage in its viticulture operations.



## Featured River-Friendly Projects

### Project Funding Sources

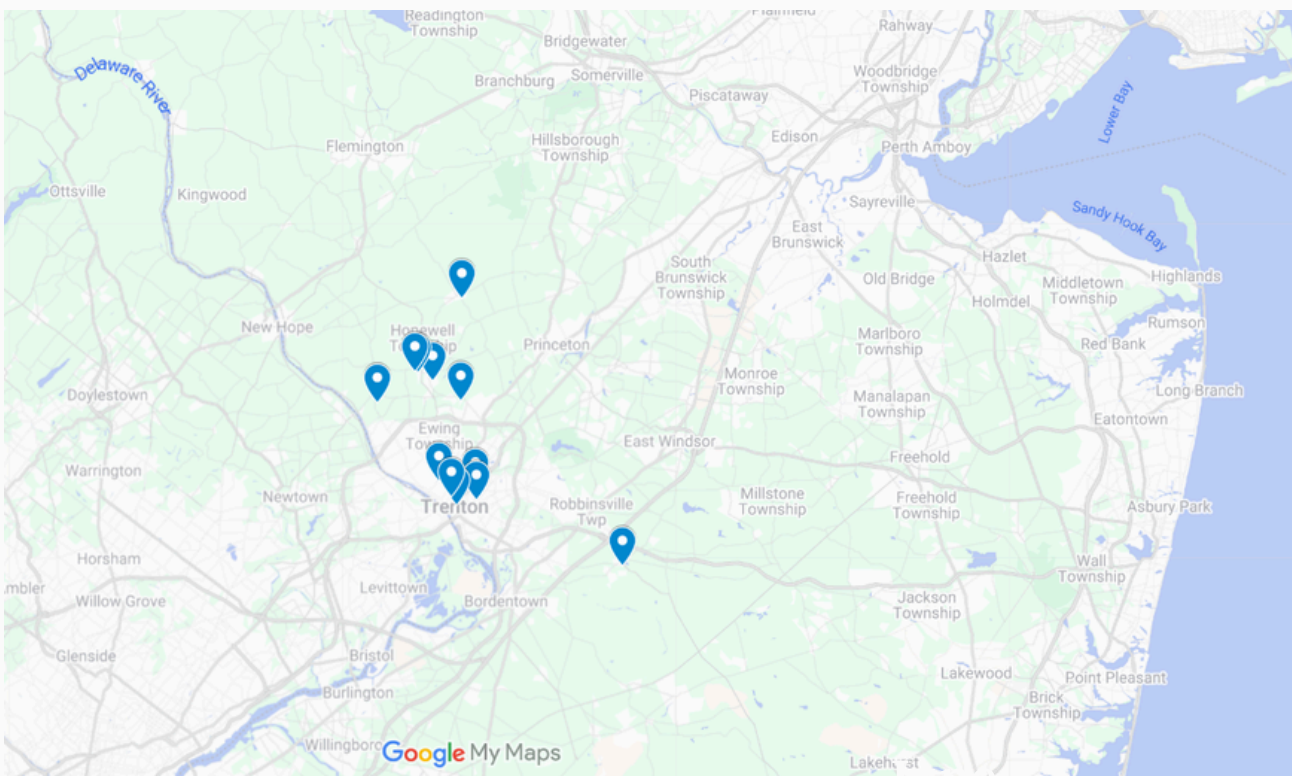


This April and May were a busy time for River-Friendly projects!

**Twelve native plant gardens** were installed with the help of over **500 students and volunteers**. Almost **7,000 plants** were put in the ground, and about 3,700 sq ft of new or replanted **garden space** was created!

The goal of these projects was to manage stormwater, enhance wildlife habitat, and create outdoor classroom space for students.

See the map below for the multi-watershed-wide scope of the projects.





## Featured River-Friendly Projects

### Trenton Public School District Projects

These projects created outdoor classrooms that provide students with valuable lessons in urban nature and gardening. Students learned how, even in the middle of a city like Trenton, plants and animals can be given a habitat and thrive.



P.J Hill Elementary



Stokes Elementary



McKnight Elementary



Monument Intermediate School



### Mercer County Community College - James Kerney Campus

In downtown Trenton, Mercer County Community College plant science students helped revitalize a rain garden at their James Kerney Campus. Students researched the plants and helped with the design of the alley way rain garden and courtyard garden. The students will help take care of and use this as an educational space to learn about native plants and stormwater mangement!





### Allentown High School

Allentown High School is located in an agriculturally dominant region of New Jersey. The school's green team, the Green Birds, worked this spring to expand their school's existing native plant meadow.





# Featured River-Friendly Projects

## Hopewell Valley Regional School District

Thanks to generous funding from the NJ Department of Education, Hopewell Valley Education Foundation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, gardens were installed at all six schools in the district. The goal of the gardens is to manage stormwater, create habitat, and be a living classroom for students. The gardens were personalized to each school and ranged in size from 150 - 450 sq ft!





## Annual River-Friendly Teacher Academy

In this free, annual workshop, teachers can gather at The Watershed Institute to gain Project WET certifications, go home with a book of lessons, and participate in fun, hands-on activities focused on water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat.

Last year, **9 teachers from pre-K to high school** participated in the workshop.

Sign up now for the 2026 workshop on August 17th!

<https://thewatershed.org/teachers/>





### Green Infrastructure Trainings and Certifications

If you'd like to increase your knowledge and hands-on skills regarding green infrastructure, keep an eye on the Watershed Institute's 2026 calendar [here](#).

There will be trainings for every skill level from beginners, to landscaping crews, to stormwater professionals.



### Native Plant Landscaping & Stormwater Solutions Certification

**Wednesday, October 21, 6-8pm (virtual)**  
and  
**Saturday, October 24, 9am-4pm (Ocean County College)**

Cost: Free!

**What you'll learn**

- Earn the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Associate Certification (learn more at [cblpro.org](http://cblpro.org)) that is recognized regionally
- Gain practical skills in site analysis and calculations, native and invasive plant identification, and soil by feel skills
- Learn ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change by designing native plant landscapes like rain gardens or pollinator meadows
- Meet mentors in green infrastructure, sustainable landscaping, and stormwater management careers

Sign Up Here



<https://forms.office.com/r/qbRkhJRM7B>



Contact: Olivia Spildooren, [ospildooren@thewatershed.org](mailto:ospildooren@thewatershed.org)



### Grants to Have on Your Radar

Support for River-Friendly projects comes from many sources. We want to share some grants that could help you make your ideas a reality! The resources listed are typically open annually for applications.



The Native Plant Society of New Jersey offers mini-grants of \$500-\$750 to local volunteer organizations, schools, individuals, and groups working to create native plant gardens and wildlife habitat in public spaces. To qualify you must be based in NJ, a current NPSNJ member, and the project must be based in NJ.



Monarch Watch has two grant programs that distribute free milkweed plants to groups. First, they have a Milkweeds for Schools and Non-Profits grant, which you can see [here](#). **The application opens in early October and is rolling until mid-February or whenever they run out of plants. Apply now!**

They also have a free milkweed for Restoration Projects grants, which you can view [here](#). This grant is intended for habitat restoration sites that must be a minimum of two acres to qualify. Gardens and landscaped areas do not qualify.



### Grants to Have on Your Radar continued...



The PSEG Foundation is contributing \$100,000 to support another cycle of the Sustainable Jersey Grants Program. With this contribution, the PSEG Foundation has provided over \$4.0 million dollars in funding to support local sustainability initiatives in municipalities and schools across the state.

To be eligible for this funding, applicants must be NJ public schools or school districts currently participating in the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program. Applicants must have an appointed green team that meets the standards in the [Green Team action](#).

The funding cycle will award \$10,000 project grants and \$2,000 project or green team support grants. The number of grants awarded will be determined by the number of quality applications received in the cycle, with an emphasis on funding more \$2,000 than \$10,000 grants. School applicants are encouraged to apply for both grant amounts to maximize chances of receiving funding for their project, noting that only one can be selected for funding.



Xerces Habitat Kit Program provides plants and resources to folks with the interest, experience, and land to make it happen. They offer carefully selected, native, and regionally appropriate plant material directly to partners for shovel-ready projects.

The kits are designed for projects that could include but are not limited to working lands, farms, restoration projects, tribal lands, public lands, parks, schools, and other educational sites. Kits are not for residential use or private homes.



Thanks for reading!

