

HORIZON

Newsletter from the Assunpink Environmental Institute (AEI)



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District to Help Communities Address Wildfire Risks

The Mercer County Soil Conservation District and the New Jersey Forest Fire Service just signed a two-year agreement to assist wildfire-prone municipalities throughout New Jersey in preparing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP). These plans, completed in cooperation with Municipal Offices of Emergency Management and local officials, will help towns identify wildfire-prone areas, establish prevention priorities and provide funding to implement the highest priority actions.

The New Jersey Forest Fire Service applied for a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture-Forest Service (USDA-FS) for funding to implement the CWPP planning process. Once the grant was approved, the NJ Forest Fire Service approached the Mercer District to assist in writing the plans. "We needed a knowledgeable partner to help write these plans and the Mercer District was the logical partner," said project leader and Division Firewarden Greg McLaughlin. "The CWPP's require local collaboration to be successful, and we needed a partner to increase our ability to work more directly with the communities in need. The District brings forestry, wildfire and planning expertise to the partnership," added McLaughlin.

Mercer District Chairperson Peggy McNeill was enthusiastic about the new agreement. "We have been a long term supporter of forestry and natural resource protection in New Jersey and we're excited about partnering with the Forest Fire Service on this very worthwhile project."

While California and other western states receive much of the media attention about wildfires, New Jersey also has vast wildfire-prone areas. Municipalities in these areas can benefit significantly from the completion of the Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Towns with completed CWPP's are eligible for funds to implement priorities, and when these plans are coordinated with larger county and statewide *Hazard Mitigation Plans*, towns become eligible for additional mitigation funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



NJ Forest Fire personnel "fight fire with fire" by lighting a backfire to reduce forest fire fuels and help suppress a wildfire in Pemberton Township last summer.

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Resources Available to Help Livestock Owners Meet New Jersey's New Animal Waste Management Rules

Whether you view it as a waste product or a valuable resource, animal waste is a natural part of the livestock farming process. Tim Dunne, State Resource Conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in New Jersey calls livestock waste "black gold". *"It contains valuable nutrients that can be recycled as a free natural fertilizer right on the farm,"* says Dunne. *"Many creative and resourceful producers use the excess manure as a source of income rather than viewing it solely as a waste product and disposal expense."*

Management makes a difference: When properly managed, manure leachate is contained, and the manure is applied to fields according to the needs of the soil and crops. When improperly managed, it has the potential to harm natural resources, in particular, the aquatic environment. Over-application of manure, or storing it too close to a stream, creates the potential for excess nutrients to enter waterways during storm events. Excess nutrients have been linked to a number of environmental concerns. For example, they may fuel the growth of thick algal blooms which block sunlight needed by aquatic organisms. Decomposition of this algae often depletes available oxygen, which may lead to degraded fish and wildlife habitat.

In 2009, the New Jersey Legislature authorized the Department of Agriculture to develop criteria and standards for animal waste management. The resulting rules stated that by March 2010, all farms must comply with the General Requirements. Animal Waste Management Plans (AWMP) were to have been developed by livestock operators by September 2010, and must be implemented by March 2012. Unfortunately, many livestock owners in New Jersey have not yet developed their plans.

"A self-certification process was designed to allow producers to gain a greater understanding of sound management practices and take a more active role in what takes place on their farm without the need to hire a consultant," says Frank Minch, Acting Executive Secretary of the NJDA State Soil Conservation Committee. *"Even though the plan development deadline has passed, it is vital that eligible producers evaluate their operation and file their declaration pages with their local Rutgers Extension office or contact the local Soil Conservation District for assistance."*

Animal Waste Management planning tools are available in a variety of formats to aid landowners in the development of their management plans (see next page).

What is an Animal Waste Management Plan?

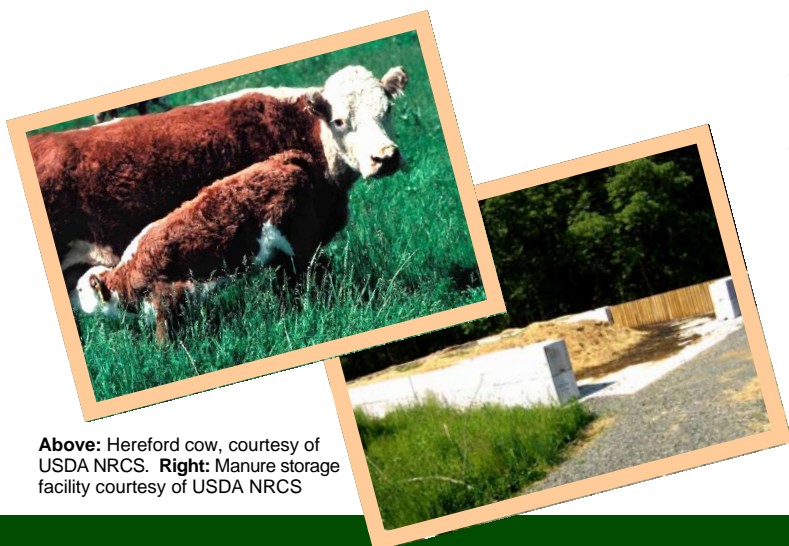
An Animal Waste Management Plan consists of information about manure production, storage, and use. While some manure is often disposed off site, all manure remaining on the farm should be spread according to a plan that distributes manure nutrients on land according to the uptake rate of the various crops or grasses on the farm.

Who needs an Animal Waste Management Plan?

- **1-7 Animal Units (AU*)** - A self-certified AWMP is encouraged but not required
- **8-299 AUs with densities < 1AU/acre** - A self-certified AWMP is required
- **8-299 AUs with densities > 1AU/acre** - An AWMP must be reviewed by a conservation professional
- **300+ AUs, regardless of density** - A Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) must be certified by NJDA
- **Receiving Manure less than 142 tons of manure/year**
- A self-certified AWMP is encouraged, but not required
- **Receiving Manure \geq 142 tons of manure/year**
- A self-certified AWMP is required

* 1 AU = 1,000 pounds of live animal weight

See Page 3 for valuable resources to help you prepare your AWMP.



Above: Hereford cow, courtesy of USDA NRCS. Right: Manure storage facility courtesy of USDA NRCS

Where do I go for Help Creating my Animal Waste Management Plan?

- For information about the criteria and standards for animal waste management, visit the New Jersey Department of Agriculture Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources at: www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/anr/agriassist/animalwaste.html
- For technical assistance in developing Animal Waste Management Plans, contact your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension office at: njaes.rutgers.edu/county or view the extensive information provided at <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/animal-waste-management/>. The section titled “preparing your animal waste management plan” offers start-up resources, a farm map template, an operator declaration of self-certification, and much more.
- You may also visit the Mercer County Soil Conservation District or your local Soil Conservation District office at: www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/anr/nrc/conservdistricts.html

PASTURE MANAGEMENT GUIDE

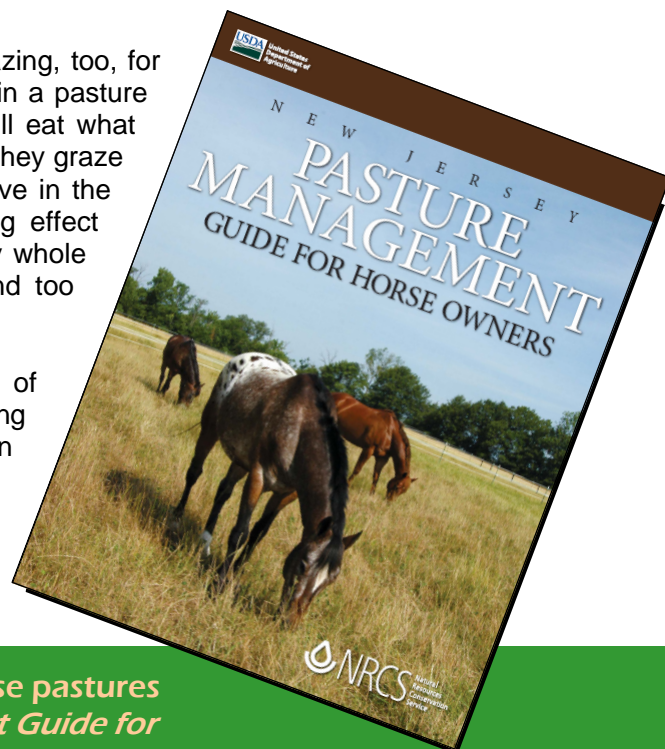
Now Available Online for Horse Owners in New Jersey

Good pastures provide one of the best and least-expensive means of feeding horses because they provide adequate fiber as well as protein, minerals and vitamins. Horses appear to be healthier when kept outside on pasture with shelter because they get sunshine, fresh air and exercise. Grazing may also improve reproduction. Mares placed on spring pasture have been shown to ovulate up to seven days earlier than mares of similar age that are kept on dry lots and fed hay.

Without proper management, there can be drawbacks to grazing, too, for both horses and the environment. It is ideal if all the plants in a pasture are grazed evenly to the same height. Horses, however, will eat what they like best until it is no longer available, and only then will they graze on other plants in the pasture. The more options horses have in the pasture, the more selective they become. This spot-grazing effect can be so intense and extensive that large spots, and finally whole pastures, are destroyed by grazing too short, too often and too much over an extended period of time.

Horses are large, heavy animals, and the negative effects of their spot grazing are compounded by trampling damage, leaving the pasture at risk for compaction and/or erosion concerns. In addition, they tend to leave their manure in certain areas without distributing the nutrients and damage over the whole pasture. They will then avoid grazing these areas, wasting valuable forage.

- adapted from “New Jersey Pasture Management Guide for Horse Owners”



More information and guidance for managing horse pastures can be found in “New Jersey Pasture Management Guide for Horse Owners,” available for download at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/documents/Pasture2010.pdf>

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Attention Teachers and Students in Mercer County!

New Jersey Conservation Poster Contest

There's still time to submit entries for the 2010 New Jersey Conservation Poster Contest; however, the deadline is approaching quickly and we need your help to spread the word! Students in grades 2 through 12 may submit entries from home or through their classroom teachers. Prizes are available at both the local and state levels. Local entries are due to the Mercer County Soil Conservation District by Friday, October 22, 2010.

The contest brochure, including rules, entry form and a list of prizes, is posted on the MCSCD website at <http://www.mercerscd.org/education/contest.htm>

The theme of the 2010 Poster Contest is **"Conservation Habits = Healthy Habitats"**.



Apply for a free Plants for Pollinators resource kit!
www.mercerscd.org/education/pollinators.htm

New Jersey Envirothon for High School Students

Do you know any high school students with an interest in the environment and conservation? If so, the New Jersey Envirothon is an opportunity they won't want to miss! The NJ Envirothon is a natural resources problem-solving competition that challenges students to expand their knowledge of forestry, soils, aquatics, wildlife and a current environmental issue. It's also much more than just a competition! It's a fun opportunity for students to work in teams throughout the school year to learn about the environment. Study guides and training workshops are provided, and students have opportunities to interact with other students and natural resource professionals from across the state. Camping is a favorite part of the Envirothon weekend too!

The 2011 NJ Envirothon will be held at Camp Glen Gray in Bergen County on Saturday, May 7, 2011. Registration will close on March 1, 2011. Visit <http://www.njenvirothon.org/> for more information.



Students participate in an Envirothon training session at the Forest Resource Education Center in Jackson, NJ.

Best wishes to Erin Bice as she moves on to her new position as Soil Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service!