

Dear _____:

Palmyra Cove Nature Park (PCNP), a 250-acre bird sanctuary, wildlife refuge, and outdoor science laboratory, is in danger of being transformed into a 90-acre dredge pit for the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE).

ACE has asserted that it has the legal right to use as much of the park as it sees fit for a dredge spoils retention basin. ACE argues that a 1998 agreement between the Burlington County Bridge Commission, the Burlington County Board of Freeholders, and the State of New Jersey authorizes this adverse modification of wetlands and forest habitats. If the deposit of dredge spoils is allowed to proceed, the park would be effectively divided. The park would be limited to a freshwater tidal cove, a wetland ACE would not be able to get the permits to destroy. The freshwater tidal cove is over a mile from the visitor center and parking lot. Due to its tidal nature, the cove could not be used to teach the thousands of school children who come to PCNP each year.

The expanded dredge spoil site would destroy PCNP's three non-tidal wetlands and mature upland forest habitats and with them the sanctuary for 216 observed resident and migratory bird species, including:

- 33 species of warblers that feed around the wetlands during their spring and fall migrations
- New Jersey endangered Peregrine Falcons that nest on the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge and use our grounds to feed
- New Jersey endangered breeding pied-billed grebes that nest in our wetlands
- New Jersey threatened Coopers Hawks that now have established a nest in Palmyra Cove Nature Park
- many New Jersey Special Concern breeding species
- a visiting juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker, a New Jersey endangered species

Nesting endangered and threatened species have not been enough to stop the dredge cell expansion from going forward. How many endangered and threatened species have to use/nest in a natural area before it becomes more valuable to New Jersey than a dredge retention basin?

Since 2002, Palmyra Cove Nature Park has not only served as a wildlife sanctuary, but also as an outdoor laboratory. Each year thousands of students come to PCNP as their field trip for outdoor environmental education. Students do hands-on field studies, collect wetland data, do biological assessments, re-discover the natural world and become environmental stewards.

The proposed dredge retention basin would destroy all that the park has become in the last five years, and it has come a long way.

I believe that the proposed use of PCNP for the planned dredge spoil retention basin must be stopped. I find the 2000 agreement with the state to be outdated for what the nature park has become. I find the park an important bird and wildlife habitat, passive recreational park, and outdoor laboratory. I find these public and natural services PCNP provides are more important to the residents of the area and the state than a dredge spoil retention basin. I urge those with the power to preserve PCNP to do so with these bases in mind and to consider revising any agreement that would harm PCNP in the future.