

NEW JERSEY

N.J. Audubon Society closes two nature centers

December 24, 2012

Budget concerns are causing the New Jersey Audubon Society to make some cutbacks.

The Rancocas Nature Center in Mount Holly and the Weis Ecology Center in Ringwood will close Jan. 1. Except for some special events, the Nature Center of Cape May and the Cape May Bird Observatory will be closed to the public from January through mid-April.

New Jersey Audubon Society President Eric Stiles says other nature centers around the state will remain open.

“We still have a suite of places that people can come and connect with nature,” he said Monday. “Our programs that we run year round are also throughout the state. So even though we don’t open those centers per se, we’ll still be doing programs in those communities.”

Stiles says the nonprofit society could no longer justify funding nature centers that were operating at a deficit.

“As I was driving around Cape May just two weeks ago, many of the hotels, motels, restaurants, and so forth are closed for the winter months,” he said. “One of the few places that was open was our Nature Center of Cape May — and on a busy day it may have had one or two visitors.”

The Audubon Society is seeking funding for a program called ECO Schools to provide online environmental studies.



**DECEMBER 27, 2012
HOLLY STEWART
NORTHJERSEY.COM**

NJ Audubon president explains reasons behind closing Weis Ecology Center in Ringwood

Despite a series of steps taken by its governing body in recent years to stave off such drastic measures, the Weis Ecology Center will close permanently on Dec. 31.

The New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) has owned the 100-plus acre property located on Snake Den Road since 1994. Many area families are familiar with the ways in which Weis made the Great Outdoors accessible for residents of all ages. Local children have attended summer camp, learned to make maple syrup, and gotten up close and personal with the likes of

hawks, snakes, and butterflies thanks to the educational programs presented at Weis over the years. Nature lovers bought bird seed and Christmas trees from fundraisers held there. Hikers enjoyed miles of remote trails and breathtaking views in Norvin Green State Forest from Weis' parking lot.

And although NJAS President Eric Stiles has assured Suburban Trends that the parking lot and trailheads buffering the northern border of Norvin Green will remain accessible to visitors as long as the nonprofit owns the land, he explicitly stated that every other function of the facility will end with 2012.

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Greetings!

The Weis Ecology Center has been a valuable resource to our community for decades. Sadly, the NJ Audubon Society (NJAS) has announced the permanent closure of Weis Ecology Center effective Dec.31, 2012. However, NJAS has agreed to hold a Town Meeting to discuss this closure.

By NJAS announcement dated December 29, 2012: "You are invited to attend a meeting on Monday, January 14, 7pm at the Weis Ecology Center. NJAS President Eric Stiles and Board Chair Mark Levy will be discussing the decision to close the Weis Ecology Center and other financial sustainability measures at NJAS."

Those interested in attending the meeting will be able to dialogue and share ideas to work to keep the Weis Center open.

When: January 14, 7pm,

Where: Weis Ecology Center, 150 Snake Den Road, Ringwood, NJ

RSVP: Phaedra Demers, Director of the Weis Ecology Center, 973 835 2160 or phaedra.demers@njudubon.org

IF YOU CANNOT MAKE THE MEETING - Make your opinion known, write, phone or email: Eric Stiles, President and CEO, NJAudubon Society, 11 Hardscrabble Road, Bernardsville, NJ 07924 phone: 908 766 5104

Website: www.njudubon.org email: hq@njudubon.org fax: 908 204 8960

NJAS has announced its intent to reorganize and place emphasis on internet programs and birding rather than on-site classes, camps and education. The Weis Center is our Ecology Center - our resource - our programs. Is it a financial imperative to close Weis? Is it all ABOUT THE MONEY?
 Come to the MEETING and FIND OUT.

You Don't
Know Jersey

New Jersey Audubon Society Holding a Town Hall Meeting in Ringwood on Monday, January 14th, to Discuss Weis Ecology Center Closing

BY ALICE MAGDZIAK • JANUARY 11, 2013 • GARDEN STATE, GREEN JERSEY • COMMENTS (0) • 769



photo courtesy of njaudubon.org

A Facebook group devoted to Ringwood posted an urgent call to attend a town meeting on Monday, January 14th, and we'd like to second that call to action. On December 31, 2012, The New Jersey Audubon Society had to close Weis Ecology Center due to funding issues. Most of the buildings at Weis are from the 1930s and need pretty extensive renovations. A change in a public funding policy for school field trips essentially closed off a major source of dollars that came in to the Ecology Center so funding for those needed building renovations (estimated at around \$2 million) became hopelessly out of reach.

New Jersey Audubon agreed to hold a Town Meeting on Monday, January 14th, at 7:00pm at Weis Ecology Center after Ringwood citizens and nature lovers from all over began to wonder what they could do to help.

The official word from New Jersey Audubon is that they are looking for another environmental interest group to take over the property. For now, the trails and land are open for hikers but all the buildings are closed and unavailable for use.

If you have happy childhood memories of exploring nature and earning scout badges or even if you just love Ringwood and it's beautiful outdoors spaces, get up to Weis Ecology Center on Monday night and see what you can do to help.

No excuses, here are directions!

Ramapo Lookout

Sunday, May 12, 2013

The Fate of Weis Ecology Center

By Ben Reuter

The Weis Ecology Center in Ringwood, New Jersey has been an amazing wildlife learning center for thousands of children and adults. But abruptly, as of December 31, the center closed its doors.

The Ecology Center is a 100-acre area in the forests of Ringwood off Snake Den Road and has been under the wing of the New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) in recent years. The reasons behind the closing are related to financial shortages. School-funded programs have not been sufficient in recent years to help pay the bills. The buildings on site date back to the 1930's and are in dire need of rehabilitation. And economic pressure on the NJAS caused the need for downsizing of their various operations, which included the Weis Ecology Center.

The president of the NJAS, Eric Stiles, said he is very regretful about the closing of Weis and implored residents to understand the need for the NJAS to save money and cut some programs.

"This isn't a reflection on the hard work done by the staff and the volunteers. We've had a great relationship with the Ringwood community, but we have to make some hard decisions in this economy," Siles said.

In 2010, NJAS closed Weis during the winter months in order to save money in heating costs. Even with the savings, the center has been operating at a deficit for the past 15 years, at a cost on average of \$30,000-\$60,000 each year.

I remember going to Weis with different educational programs through my Cub Scout Troup as well as various school functions. I remember following the many trails through the woods as well as learning about the wildlife that thrives in the forests around Weis in my childhood and I still frequent the area in search of connecting with the wildlife.

The many trails that link up with the center's land are part of the Norvin Green State Forest and connect with regional trails that provide numerous stunning viewpoints of the Wanaque Reservoir and Appalachian ridges of the New Jersey Highlands.

Along nearby trails are two old iron mines. The Roomy Mine is open and you are able to enter the cave and experience what the iron miners' lives were like in the dark hole. Blue Mine is submerged by water from the Blue Mine Brook, which flows through the Norvin Green State Forest into the Wanaque Reservoir through lush stream banks and waterfalls.

The education gained through the experiences I have had here will forever stick with me as well as the thousands of other people who have explored through these woods.

The closing of the Weis Ecology Center is not the first of its kind for the area. Before the

Weis Ecology Center existed, the area was under another name, Camp Midvale, which opened in 1921. In 1935 a group of nature enthusiasts called Nature Friends built an Olympic sized, stream fed pool, the Highlands Natural Pool. The pool became part of Weis and its environmental learning center when the camp was bought by Walter and May Weis in 1974, and Weis Ecology Center was born.

Highlands Pool Closed by Weis, Reopened by Community Group

In 1994 there were economic problems at the Ecology Center which forced the closing of the Highlands Pool. However, in 1995 residents in the surrounding community of Ringwood and Wanaque offered to take it upon themselves to reopen the pool. The Community Association of the Highlands Inc. was formed to maintain the Highlands Natural Pool. The pool is still under the control of the local community association and is able to run on seasonal memberships and donations.

The question arises: Will the Weis Ecology Center become a community run program just as happened with the Highlands Pool?

On January 14, there was a public meeting in Ringwood to address the situation at Weis. Many people had written letters and called NJAS President Eric Stiles to voice their opinion not to close the center. Stiles explained that it is not possible for the NJAS to open the center without a bottom line of \$40,000 and that he wishes he could change what has happened.

"Weis is so important to so many wonderful people, but even if we were to secure the funds necessary to operate this year, plus the shortfall for next year, and then we were to close at the end of this season, I think people would be off put by that," Stiles said.

He also hinted at the possibility that if someone could foot the bill he would be able to open the center back up. "We're always open to angels," he said.

New Campaign to Reopen Ecology Center

With the help of the Passaic River Coalition and support of community members, there is hope the center will reopen. Michael Reinhart, Environmental Specialist at Passaic River Coalition, sent out a public message that, "The Passaic River Coalition is interested in finding ways to keep the Weis Ecology Center open and available to the public" and "Once we have a good understanding of how much support is available, we will assess our options."

The Passaic River Coalition has preserved 1,600 acres of open space land in New Jersey since the Passaic River Coalition Land Trust was created in 1993. Now they're looking into adding the acres of Weis Ecology Center to that number.

So the latest fight to save Weis is under way! To join with the Passaic River Coalition (PRC) and local community to save the Weis Ecology Center, hop on the mailing list for updates and information by contacting PRCWeis@gmail.com.

Ben Reuter is a junior at Ramapo College of New Jersey majoring in Communications: Writing with a minor in Environmental Studies. He is also an avid hiker and outdoorsman of the New Jersey Highlands Region.

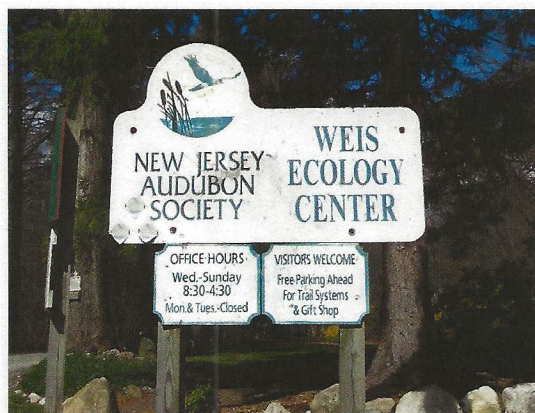


NJ Audubon to give Weis Ecology Center to DEP

OCTOBER 30, 2013 [LEAVE A COMMENT](#) / [HIKING NEWS](#)

[from northjersey.com](#)

The New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) and the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have decided that the Weis Ecology Center property located off Snake Den Road will be allowed to return to its natural state. NJAS has formally applied to make a gift of the 160-acre parcel to the DEP's Division of Parks and Forestry, which the state is prepared to accept, contingent upon the decommissioning of facilities on the site.



0:00 / 2:03

NJAS' Weis Ecology Center | Photo: njhiking.com

DEP spokesman Larry

Hajna told Suburban Trends that the decision to accept the property from NJAS on those terms was made "sometime in the spring," although he didn't offer a specific date.

Hajna's Oct. 3 statement confirmed that the officials from NJAS and the DEP had been on a walk-through of the property several months ago.

"Following a thorough site inspection," Hajna said, "we determined that the buildings and related infrastructure were not safe for continued visitor use. The area will be restored to natural habitat."

Hikers and outdoor enthusiasts will still be able to access trails in Norvin Green

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Petition Closed



Issue an IMMEDIATE MORATORIUM on the destruction of any infrastructure or buildings at the former Weis Ecology Center in Ringwood, NJ

This petition had 900 supporters



Nature Friends for Preserving Weis started this petition to New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin and 5 others

The Weis Ecology Center, formerly known as Camp Midvale, has been around for almost a century. It is located in Ringwood, which is in the Highlands of northwestern New Jersey, on approximately 150 acres. The buildings and setting have played a role in several important movements of the 20th century; the labor movement, the civil rights movement and the ecology movement; and are of historic importance both locally and to the State of New Jersey. They represent a legacy left by the European immigrants who founded the facility as a camp in 1920, a legacy of respect and love for nature, appreciation of outdoor recreation, access by ordinary folks, and working together as a community. And it was the first, and for the longest time the only, interracial facility in the entire region. The Nature Friends group that built Camp Midvale is at the heart of environmental stewardship history in New Jersey. Without them, the surrounding woods would not be intact. As the Weis Ecology Center it has served as a center of environmental education for several generations.

The current owners, the New Jersey Audubon Society, have closed Weis Ecology Center and made plans to transfer ownership of the property to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP). Because the DEP is demanding, as part of a pre-requisite for

them to accept the property, that first the water and septic systems be destroyed, and then the historic buildings be destroyed, the New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) plans to carry out this destruction in the very near future in order to transfer the property to DEP.

There is an ongoing effort by the community and the supporters of the Weis Ecology Center to form the partnerships necessary to manage and upgrade this site, and re-establish educational programming. We are asking the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the NJAS Board of Directors, for an immediate moratorium on any plan to engage in the destruction of any part of this historic site. Its destruction will mean both the loss of a place of historic significance, and the inability to ever bring back the educational programs valued by the community. In addition, the value of this site will be greatly diminished if the buildings and cultural landscape are destroyed.