

Rutgers professor to speak on Meadowlands, marshes

BY JIM WRIGHT
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For many Lyndhurst residents, it's easy to overlook the most abundant nature nearby: the marshes of the Meadowlands.

If you haven't been to DeKorte Park or taken an eco-cruise along the Hackensack River to see the wet-

lands, you don't know what

you're missing.

Over the past four decades, the so-called swamps of this region have undergone an amazing transformation.

Just listen to Rutgers Professor Judith Weis, who wrote the excellent new book "Salt Marshes" - which includes an entire chapter on the Meadowlands.

"If someone had said to me, back in the 1970s, that they are going to have eco-tours in the Meadowlands, I would have probably rolled off my chair and onto the floor laughing, because it would have seemed like such an absurd idea," Weis recalled recently.

"The changes here have been absolutely wonderful," she added. "When so many parts of environment are in such bad shape, and everything is so depressing, the changes in the Meadowlands are a ray of sunshine amid all the clouds."

Weis will speak about marshes and her new book on Sunday, Oct. 4 at DeKorte Park's Meadowlands Environment Center. Her free talk, at noon, will help visitors - and residents - appreciate the rebounding wetlands of Lyndhurst and the Meadowlands region.

To give *South Bergenite* readers a sneak preview of her talk, I recently interviewed this nationally recognized wetlands expert. I love marshes, and I learned much during the interview - including new insights on why they matter so much.

"One of the most amazing

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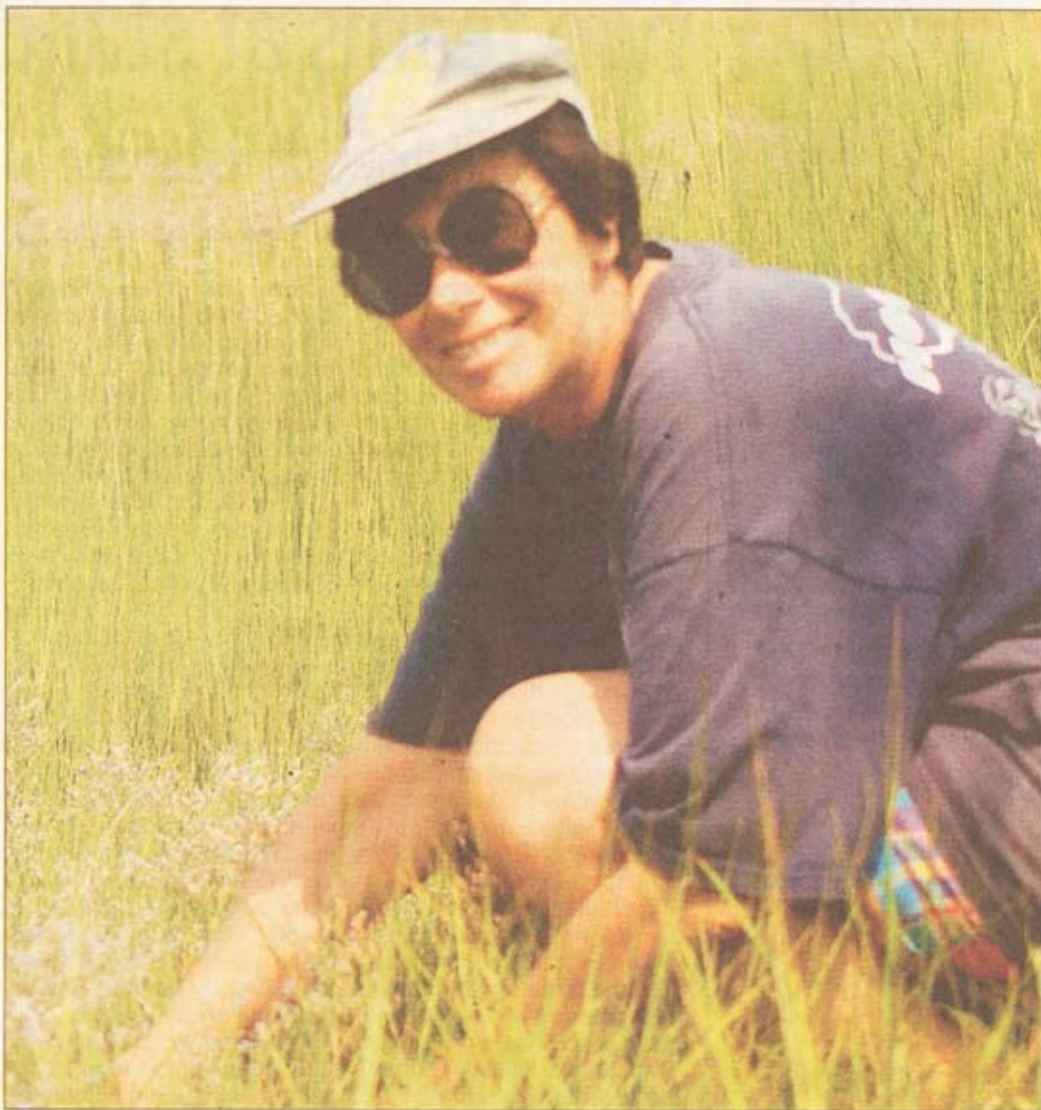


PHOTO COURTESY/ JIM WRIGHT

Judith Weis author of "Salt Marshes" will be at the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission on Oct. 4.

things I've learned about salt marshes is how productive they are," Weis said. "When people think of highly productive systems, they may think about rainforests or coral reefs. Salt marshes are about as productive as those tropical systems, and I don't think many people are aware of that."

As an example, Weis pointed to commercially important fish like bluefish and striped bass, which rely on those marshes when they're young. (And those fish are returning to the Hackensack River and the Meadowlands in great

numbers. An NJMC Hackensack River fish study counted just 85 striped bass in 1987 and 1988; a similar study in 2001 and 2002 counted 1,123.)

Weis says that when she started researching marshes, she never went to the Meadowlands, "probably because I assumed there was nothing there."

"In the early Seventies they were pretty stinky places, and as I write in that one chapter, it has been a remarkable and wonderful change that has taken place."

But don't take Weis' word for

it. Come down to DeKorte Park on Oct. 4. Hear her speak. And then see the wonders of these wetlands for yourself.

Copies of "Salt Marshes" are on sale at the Meadowlands Environment Center gift shop.

NJMC Communications Officer Jim Wright maintains the Commission's daily nature blog, meadowblog.net -- featuring beautiful photography and the latest info on the region's abundant natural wonders.