

Society and Enviro Partners Defeat Wal-Mart Development Plan



When we first learned of Wal-Mart's environmentally insensitive plan to build a Wal-Mart Supercenter inside the acquisition boundaries of the Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, we carefully weighed the potential impact of our not becoming involved, the resources we had available, and the size of the task. Some told us "you can't beat Wal-Mart" and said they wouldn't do it. Because the land in question, known as the Sinnickson tract was so important to the refuge and to the ecological health of the Delaware Bay watershed and the Bay and because our Delaware Bayshore Project Manager, Matt Blake, was ready to do whatever it took, we decided to proceed.

Matt spent two and a half years preparing testimony, speaking at hearings, advocating against the proposed development in the press, and strategizing with the many groups opposing the project. Matt spent hundreds of hours poring over Wal-Mart's site plan submissions, environmental impact studies, and writing and submitting comments, objections, and alternate scenarios. He worked with the Office of Smart Growth to get important changes to the growth designations for the area in question. He worked with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that when Wal-Mart's applied for permits, they were aware of all the implications and of the public groundswell of opposition.

By the end of the first year, local planning board meetings had to be moved to the local high school gym because the number of public opposing the project had outgrown Pennsville's municipal building. The first year passed, then the second and Wal-Mart still had not broken ground. Some of the naysayers joined the effort. In the end, everyone did the right thing and Wal-Mart backed down and let their option on the property expire.

This is an exceptional ending—but the story is not over yet. Now, a coalition of New Jersey conservation organizations is working to secure federal funds to acquire the Sinnickson Tract for the refuge. We will be supporting that effort in any way we can. In the meantime, we thank all of the individuals who attended hearings, wrote letters and supported this important effort. Finally, we recognize the contributions of the following groups that worked so hard to reach this happy ending:

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions
Citizens of Pennsville Against Sprawl
Concerned Pilesgrove Residents (CPR)
Congressman Frank Lo Biondo
Friends of Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
New Jersey Audubon
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
New Jersey Environmental Federation
Salem County Watershed Task Force

