

Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank, **Woodbridge, Virginia (Prince William County)**



Nestled against the extensive natural wetlands along Neabsco Creek in Woodbridge, the Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank provides an excellent example not only of the high quality and success of WSSI's wetland mitigation projects, but also of the benefits that WSSI's projects confer to a wide variety of public interest groups. WSSI designed and obtained approval for the Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank as the first entrepreneurial wetlands mitigation bank in Virginia. The

Norfolk District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved the 227-acre project in 1994, and by the end of 1997, a total of 19.1 credits of nontidal freshwater wetlands had been constructed. The remainder of the site consists of upland buffers and existing wetlands that will be preserved in perpetuity. The created wetlands consist of forested wetlands with several sub-communities defined by elevation and species composition, and pockets of emergent marsh and shrub wetlands to maximize wildlife values. This diversity of habitats (including 217 acres of created and preserved wetlands) provided by the Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank complements the extensive tidal freshwater wetlands along adjacent Neabsco Creek, and this complex as a whole is used by thousands of wetland-dependent birds and other animals on a daily basis.

The Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank provides mitigation for wetland impacts from 16 projects. In gaining approval for, and successfully establishing, the first private wetlands mitigation bank in northern Virginia, WSSI demonstrated not only the value of this mitigation alternative to builders and developers, but also the ecological benefits of pooling mitigation resources into larger wetland complexes, as opposed to a more piecemeal approach.

This wetlands bank is heavily used by, and provides a number of amenities for the enjoyment of, the public as well. WSSI constructed nearly two miles of wood chip trails and boardwalks around the created wetland pods



and built an observation blind at the edge of the existing tidal marsh to allow the public to experience the ecological value of these wetlands first-hand. A nature trail brochure available at the park entrance and a series of interpretive stations along the trail describe the history of the wetlands bank and the ecology of the area. In April 2000, WSSI donated this mitigation site to Prince William County for use as a county park, and it is heavily used by local residents. Birdwatchers have embraced this park and visit it frequently, year-round. More than 160 species of birds have been recorded here by the Fairfax Audubon Society and other groups, and in 2001, the park was included as a stop on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.



In September 1995, Wetland Studies & Solutions, Inc. and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dedicated this project in honor of Julie J. Metz, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers biologist who led the inter-Agency Mitigation Bank Agreement Task Force, and who passed away from breast cancer at age 38. Her ashes were spread in the wetlands near her memorial. For its work

on the Julie J. Metz Wetland Bank, WSSI received the 1995 Northern Virginia National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP) Energy and Environment Award. A number of lawmakers, government agencies, and civic groups have visited the Julie J. Metz Wetlands Bank due to its importance as the first private bank in Virginia and its reputation as the industry standard in mitigation banking. These visitors include delegations from Vietnam and Japan, the Terrene Institute, House of Representatives Staff, former U.S. Senators Lincoln Chafee and Senator Lauch Faircloth, the National Association of Home Builders, the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and numerous personnel from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and Virginia Department of Transportation.

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