

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

June 2021



Jennifer Feltis Cortese, AICP

Regional Environmental Planner, Director's Office of the Division of Water Quality; New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

For nearly 14 years, Jennifer Feltis Cortese has served at the [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection \(DEP\)](#) and is currently working in the Director's Office of the Division of Water Quality overseeing programs that regulate and protect New Jersey's surface and ground waters from pollution.



Named "Most Likely to Save the Environment" in her Northwest Guilford High School yearbook, Jennifer is right on track with this prediction. With over a decade of environmental and sustainable planning experience, Jennifer is always willing to share her extensive knowledge and work collaboratively on issues. She is a sustainability leader known for her passionate approach and clear focus in working toward solutions for New Jersey's most pressing environmental issues. Sustainable Jersey is lucky to have worked with Jennifer since 2008, when the municipal certification program was first being developed. Jennifer is the chair of the Sustainable Jersey Natural Resources Task Force (since 2008) and the chair of the Sustainable Jersey Water Gold Committee that has just released the [Sustainable Jersey Gold Star Standard for Water](#).

Jennifer said, "Sustainable Jersey has played a large part in my career. It has been an honor and a privilege to have been entrusted with the "task" of leading the Natural Resources Task Force for so many years and now the Water Gold Committee. The volunteers who take part in these task forces have not only provided valuable input into actions but are a great inspiration about what can be accomplished in New Jersey."

Jennifer provides leadership for several organizations and is a regular speaker at conferences and events. She is a new member of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commission Board of Trustees and she has served as a committee co-chair for the Hazard Mitigation and Recovery Planning Committee for the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association since 2005. She participates in Jersey Water Works and is a member of the American Planning Association.

As a dedicated mother to two boys, Jennifer said she works as hard as she does because securing the wellbeing of future generations is important. She explained, "I am always aware of minimizing my impact. I want to leave the Earth in a better condition than how I found it. Everything I do might not be perfect, but I have seen firsthand how a number of small sustainability victories can add up to make a big impact."



New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Jennifer’s work at DEP covers a large array of topics including water, land use, trees, conservation and habitat. She has primarily been involved in regional and state planning initiatives, water resources management coordination activities, environmental justice and planning for electric vehicles. For the Office of Environmental Justice, she helped develop guidance for state agencies and conducted stakeholder meetings. Jennifer is the co-coordinator for key performance indicators; she coordinates development and selection of the DEP-wide key performance indicators and provides monthly reports to the Governor’s Office.



Gold Star Standard for Water

Recognizing that municipalities needed direction on water issues, in 2018, Sustainable Jersey formed a Water Gold Star Task Force made up of New Jersey’s best and brightest from academics, watershed associations, conservation minded non-profits, utilities and foundations. Jennifer serves as the Task Force Chair for this group.

The Water Gold Star Task Force developed a group of actions and strategies to assist municipalities in developing a holistic approach to improving local water—its quality, its quantity and its use. Jennifer noted, “Municipalities face a multitude of water issues and the Gold Star Standard in Water was established as a guide for tackling them.”



The task force collectively developed the [Gold Star Standard in Water](#) that includes actions and levels of performance that municipalities can complete to contribute to the goal of a sustainable New Jersey. A few of the actions include: [Natural Resource Inventory](#); [Municipal Water Story](#); [Green Infrastructure Implementation](#); [Enhanced Stormwater Management Control Ordinance](#); [Removing Lead in Drinking Water](#); and [Private Well Outreach and Testing](#).

When asked where municipalities should start, Jennifer said, “I encourage towns to start with the Municipal Water Story action. Each municipality has its own individual water story. Shaped by its geography, services and concerns, every town has its own system of water governance. It’s challenging to understand how that system fits within water resources, supply, management and associated regulatory controls that extend across municipal boundaries.” She added, “Most people don’t know where their water starts, where it goes or how it works. By learning from data and engaging in dialogue, shared themes and understandings can emerge.” The themes provide information and enhance the description of how a municipality fits within the connectivity of its water resources and the various layers of water governance. Identification of challenges rooted in a thorough identification of water supply, water quality and water resources, as well as local values, is a first step in determining effective municipal action to resolve a range of water issues.

The Water Gold Star Task Force includes members from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Committees, Clean Ocean Action, The Nature Conservancy, New Jersey Future, New Jersey Utilities Association, Raritan Headwaters Association, Rowan University, Rutgers University, The Watershed Institute and more. Jennifer and Sustainable

Jersey's Anne Heasley presented at the 2021 New Jersey Sustainability Summit; watch the recorded event here: [Enhance Community Water Resources Through Water Gold](#).

Sustainable Jersey Natural Resources Task Force

Jennifer has led the 15-member Sustainable Jersey Natural Resources Task Force since its launch. This group developed guidance for many actions that are widely implemented by municipalities throughout New Jersey including: [Natural Resource Inventory](#), [Open Space Plans](#) and [Habitat Conservation Ordinance](#).



Make Your Town Electric Vehicle Friendly

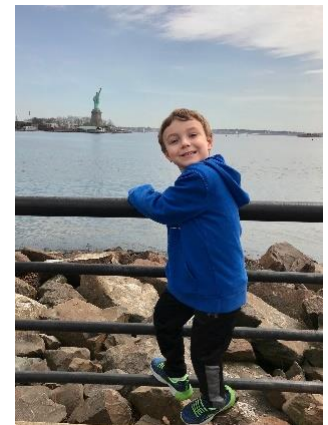
Jennifer is a member of an electric vehicle working group comprised of representatives of DEP, Sustainable Jersey, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities and regional transportation organizations. This group was formed to support municipalities in the transition to electrified transportation. The working group is integrating new policies into best practices, including supporting the update of Sustainable Jersey's action: [Make You Town Electric Vehicle Friendly](#). Jennifer said, "Municipalities are in a unique position to foster widespread Plug-in Electric Vehicles adoption. This action has the potential to increase consumer involvement by removing barriers and creating awareness.

The Sustainable Jersey action addresses initiatives by the municipality to accelerate and facilitate the adoption of Plug-in Electric Vehicles (PEVs). Research indicates that most commuter PEVs will primarily be charged at home, during the evening hours. Municipal efforts to encourage and support residential charging infrastructure, coupled with other actions that encourage secondary charger access and awareness, can directly increase PEV use by consumers, especially commuters.



More About Jennifer

Jennifer grew up in North Carolina. As a child, she had an early connection to the environment and hoped to be a marine biologist. She attended Campbell University, located in Buies Creek North Carolina, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government/Public Administration and a Master of Business Administration. At Campbell, Jennifer played for five seasons as a member of the Campbell University women's soccer team, served on the Student Government Association and did an internship at the Harnett County Planning Office which is where she got her interest in planning. In addition to spending many hours on the soccer field, Jennifer also coached swimming at local swim clubs in the summer.



Jennifer came to New Jersey to attend Rutgers University where she received a Master of City and Regional Planning from the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. Jennifer lives in Hamilton, New Jersey with her husband Anthony and their two sons, Sean and Donovan. In her spare time, she has coached with the Eastern Express Swim Team which is a member club of USA Swimming and provides a year-round competitive swim team program as well as coaching her two boys' soccer teams. She also enjoys adventures with her family, taking a run with friends, hiking, swimming and skiing.

