

INDIGENOUS FOODWAYS

in the Mahicannitukw/Hudson Estuary Bioregion

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge that Native Americans in this bioregion acquired and applied over thousands of years allowed them to sustainably manage, harvest, and share the abundant wealth of natural resources found here.

OYSTER BANKS

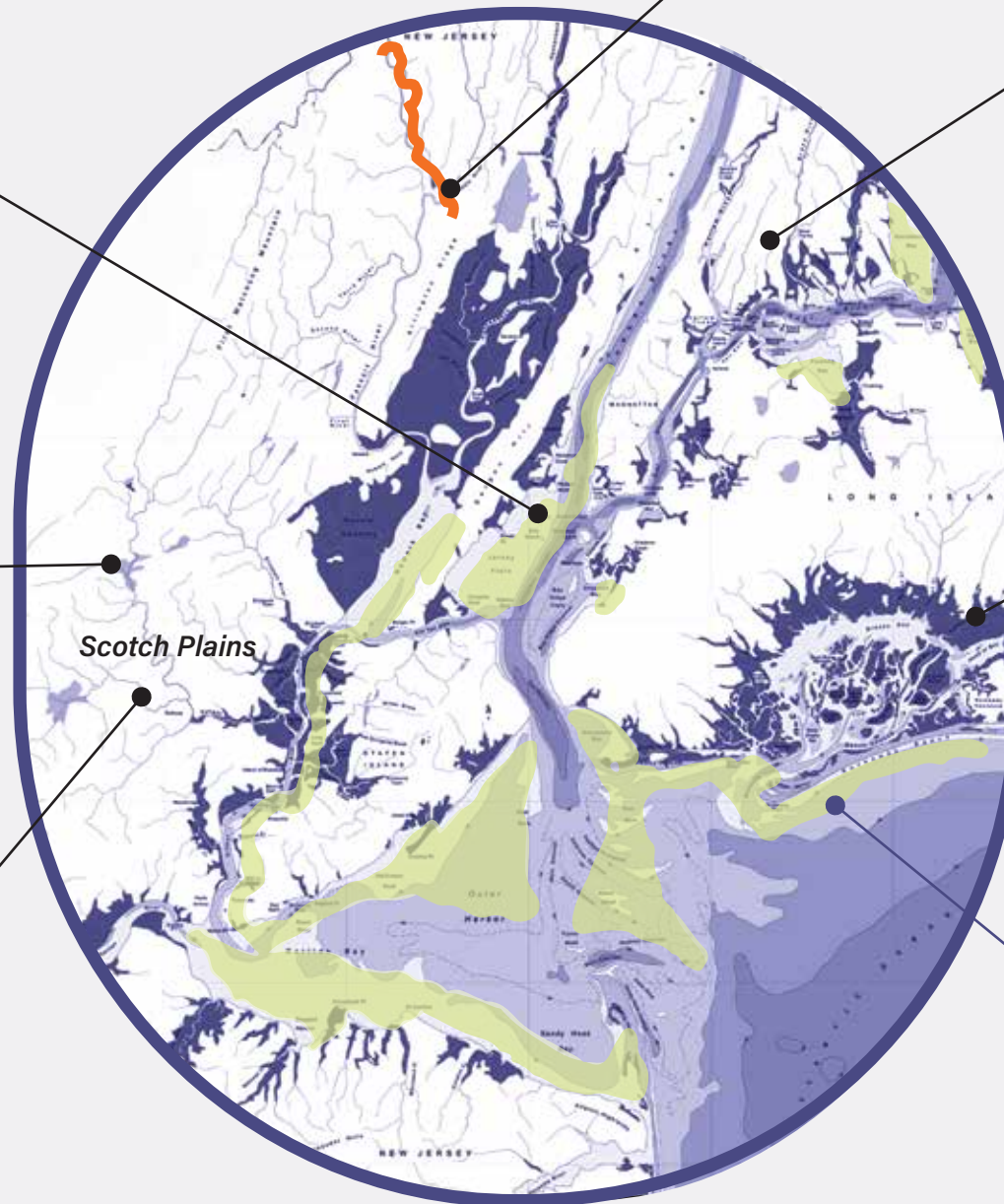
Oysters were probably the single most important food species in the estuarial bioregion. Indigenous people would gather them in the late summer through the fall and preserve them for the winter season. In addition, Native Americans hunted and fished for the many species that ate oysters including drum fish, skates, and rays, and many different kinds of waterfowl.

FRESHWATER WETLANDS

Beavers, muskrats, turtles, waterfowl and edible tubers such as groundnuts and water lilies were harvested in wetlands and along streams.

SAND PLAINS AND BURNED LANDS

Native Americans used fire to keep large areas of land in an open condition. This annual practice fostered many fruit-bearing shrubs, which in turn encouraged the populations of deer and turkeys. Of particular importance were the massive annual crops of wild strawberries produced in the large open areas. Examples include Hempstead and Shinnecock Plains on Long Island, and the Scotch Plains in New Jersey.



FISH WEIRS

Though Indigenous people took some fish with hook and line, they took even more through the use of stone weirs. Atlantic shad, striped bass, alewife, eels, and even 300 lb sturgeons, were the most important species caught at the weirs.

INTERIOR FORESTS

Mixed forests provided an abundance of edible nut trees including oaks, hickories, walnuts, and beeches that in turn supported game species such as deer, bears, turkeys, grouse, and squirrels. The wooded hills of the interior of this region were also visited by massive flocks of passenger pigeons that provided a large source of protein.




INTERTIDAL ZONE

Clams, mussels, and other species of edible shellfish found along the shore provided not just food, but also the shells needed to make the wampum beads used in Lenape/Lunaape culture. Nesting ledges provided the eggs and young of many species of seabirds, ducks, and geese. The tidal inlets offered fishing for eels.

COASTAL STRAND

In addition to shellfish, the vast sand beaches along the shore of this bioregion provided two other important resources: beached whales, and hundreds of thousands of menhaden that had been driven ashore by larger fish. The whales were eaten, and the menhaden were used to manure the Native American cornfields.

MAHICANNITUKW/ HUDSON ESTUARY BIOREGION

-  Oyster Banks
-  Saltmarsh/Tidal Flats
-  Aquakanonk Weir Complex



IMPORTANT FOOD SPECIES

Oysters*
Quahogs and Soft-shell Clams

Shad and Alewife*
Striped Bass
Atlantic Sturgeon
Mackerel
Drum fish
Skates and Rays
Eels*

Ducks and Geese (both migratory and resident)
Passenger Pigeons
Nesting Seabirds and Eggs
Turkeys

Deer
Bears
Seals
Stranded Whales

Strawberries*
Three Sisters agriculture (beans, squash and corn)*

**Indicates key food source*

FOODWAYS AT DIFFERENT ELEVATION LEVELS

UPLAND MIXED FOREST

Deer, bears, turkeys, passenger pigeons, firewood

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL SHRUBLANDS

Grouse, rabbits, deer, woodchucks
Assorted berries, fibers, medicinal plants

FIRE-MAINTAINED MEADOWS

Strawberries, large nut trees, edible tubers,
Three Sisters agriculture

FRESH OR SALTWATER WETLANDS

Ducks, geese, swans, turtles, medicinal plants,
Beavers, otters, minks, muskrats for meat and furs

TIDAL FLATS, RIVERS, AND BAYS

Clams, oysters, anadromous fish
Trade with other Native peoples

