

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Big and Little Reed Ponds**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **East Hampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Montauk Point, NY**

Assessment Criteria

Ecosystem Rarity (ER)--the uniqueness of the plant and animal community in the area and the physical, structural, and chemical features supporting this community.

ER assessment: Relatively large wetland complex containing a transition from brackish to freshwater communities; rare on Long Island. 16

Species Vulnerability (SV)--the degree of vulnerability throughout its range in New York State of a species residing in the ecosystem or utilizing the ecosystem for its survival.

SV assessment: Northern harrier (T) and least bittern (SC) nesting; blue-spotted salamander (SC) and spotted turtle (SC) breeding; bald eagle (T), short-eared owl (E), and osprey (SC) feed and overwinter in the area. Calculation: $36 + (25/2) + (25/4) + (16/8) + (16/16) =$ 57.8

Human Use (HU)-- the conduct of significant, demonstrable commercial, recreational, or educational wildlife-related human uses, either consumptive or non-consumptive, in the area or directly dependent upon the area.

HU assessment: Recreational fishing use of regional significance. 9

Population Level (PL)--the concentration of a species in the area during its normal, recurring period of occurrence, regardless of the length of that period of occurrence.

PL assessment: One of only 4 major documented alewife spawning streams in Peconics region. Concentrations of blue-spotted salamanders are also unusual in the region. 9

Replaceability (R)--ability to replace the area, either on or off site, with an equivalent replacement for the same fish and wildlife and uses of those same fish and wildlife, for the same users of those fish and wildlife.

R assessment: Irreplaceable 1.2

Habitat Index = [ER + SV + HU + PL] = 91.8

Significance = HI x R = 110.2

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

BIG AND LITTLE REED PONDS

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Big and Little Reed Ponds are located northeast of Montauk Harbor, on the south fork of Long Island, in the Town of East Hampton, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Montauk Point, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat is approximately 200 acres in size, and includes a large freshwater pond (Big Reed Pond), extensive cattail marsh, a brackish pond and marsh (Little Reed Pond), and surrounding wetlands and woodlands. Big Reed Pond supports a rich population of submerged aquatic vegetation, and Little Reed Pond supports beds of widgeon grass. A small stream flows from Big Reed into Little Reed Pond, which is connected to Lake Montauk by a tidal creek channel. Most of the habitat is located within undeveloped County parkland. The area is bordered on the west side by a landing strip for small aircraft.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Big and Little Reed Ponds comprise a relatively uncommon ecosystem type on Long Island. Big Reed Pond is one of only three areas on Long Island that have been designated as National Natural Landmarks by the National Park Service. The cattail marsh adjoining Big Reed Pond is one of the largest contiguous areas of emergent freshwater wetland in the region, whereas Little Reed Pond is an undeveloped brackish wetland area. Together, Big and Little Reed Ponds represent an unusual example of the natural transition between these habitat types, and contain a relatively diverse assemblage of fish and wildlife species.

Bird species breeding in this area include northern harrier (T), least bittern (SC), Canada goose, mallard, and American black duck. Red-shouldered hawk (SC) historically bred in this area, but has not been documented recently. Immature bald eagles (T) use the area, and short-eared owls (E) frequently overwinter here. Big and Little Reed Ponds serve as valuable feeding areas for these species, as well as for osprey (SC), redhead, hooded merganser, herons, egrets, and many passerine birds.

Blue-spotted salamanders (SC) have been reported breeding in the moist wooded swales draining into Big Reed Pond. This is one of the few locations on Long Island where this species is known to occur. The populations of this species in Montauk are unique because they are comprised of non-hybridized, sexually-reproducing animals. Most mainland populations of blue-spotted salamander have hybridized with Jefferson salamander. Spotted turtles (SC) are found in the ponds and adjacent wetlands. The adjacent wetland and upland areas are valuable as hunting areas for northern harrier and red-shouldered hawk. In addition, the rare coastal heathland cutworm moth (*Abagotis crumbi benjamini*) is found at this site.

Big and Little Reed Ponds also comprise a significant warmwater fisheries habitat. This area contains one of only four major documented spawning streams in the Peconics region for alewives, which migrate from the ocean to spawn in shallow freshwater in spring. Recreational fishing opportunities in Big Reed Pond, primarily for largemouth bass, attract residents from throughout Long Island to the area.

The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented several rare plant species in this area, including clustered bluets (*Hedyotis uniflora*, T), sandplain wild flax (*Linum intercursum*, T), pine-barren sandwort (*Minuartia caroliniana*), southern arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), and the best example of water-pennywort (*Hydrocotyle verticillata*, E) in New York State.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Any activities that would degrade water quality, increase turbidity, or alter water depths would have a significant impact on fish and wildlife species inhabiting Big and Little Reed Ponds. All species may be affected by water pollution, such as chemical contamination (including food chain effects resulting from bioaccumulation), oil spills, excessive turbidity, waste disposal (including boat wastes), and stormwater runoff. Warmwater fish species would be most sensitive from April 1 through July 30, when spawning takes place. Barriers to fish migration, whether physical or chemical, would have a significant effect on the biological resources of this area. Passage into Big Reed Pond is difficult and intermittent, and removal of debris and other impediments should be considered for enhancement of migratory fish habitat.

Wildlife species would be most sensitive during the breeding season, which generally extends from April 1 through August 30. Collection of amphibians and reptiles from this area or adjacent areas could have a significant impact on an important population of blue-spotted salamanders. The introduction of exotic, non-native fish, wildlife or plant species should be prohibited.

Any substantial alteration or human disturbance of the wetland and upland vegetative communities, such as changes to wetland or stream hydrology or configuration, filling, introduction of invasive or exotic species, and/or reduction or fragmentation of woodland buffer areas within or adjacent to the habitat may adversely affect wildlife species in the area. The cattail marsh in this habitat area is the largest on the South Fork and is notable in being largely free of *Phragmites australis*. Control of invasive nuisance plant species, through a variety of means, may improve fish and wildlife species use of the area and enhance overall wetland values. Expansions or alterations to the existing air strip could impact wildlife species and their habitat at this site.

Access to the area during appropriate time periods for compatible recreational uses of fish and wildlife should be maintained.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

Habitat Unit
NYS Department of State
Division of Coastal Resources
41 State Street
Albany, NY 12231
Phone: (518) 474-6000

NYSDEC—Region 1
State University of New York, Building 40
Stony Brook, NY 11790-2356
Phone: (631) 444-0354

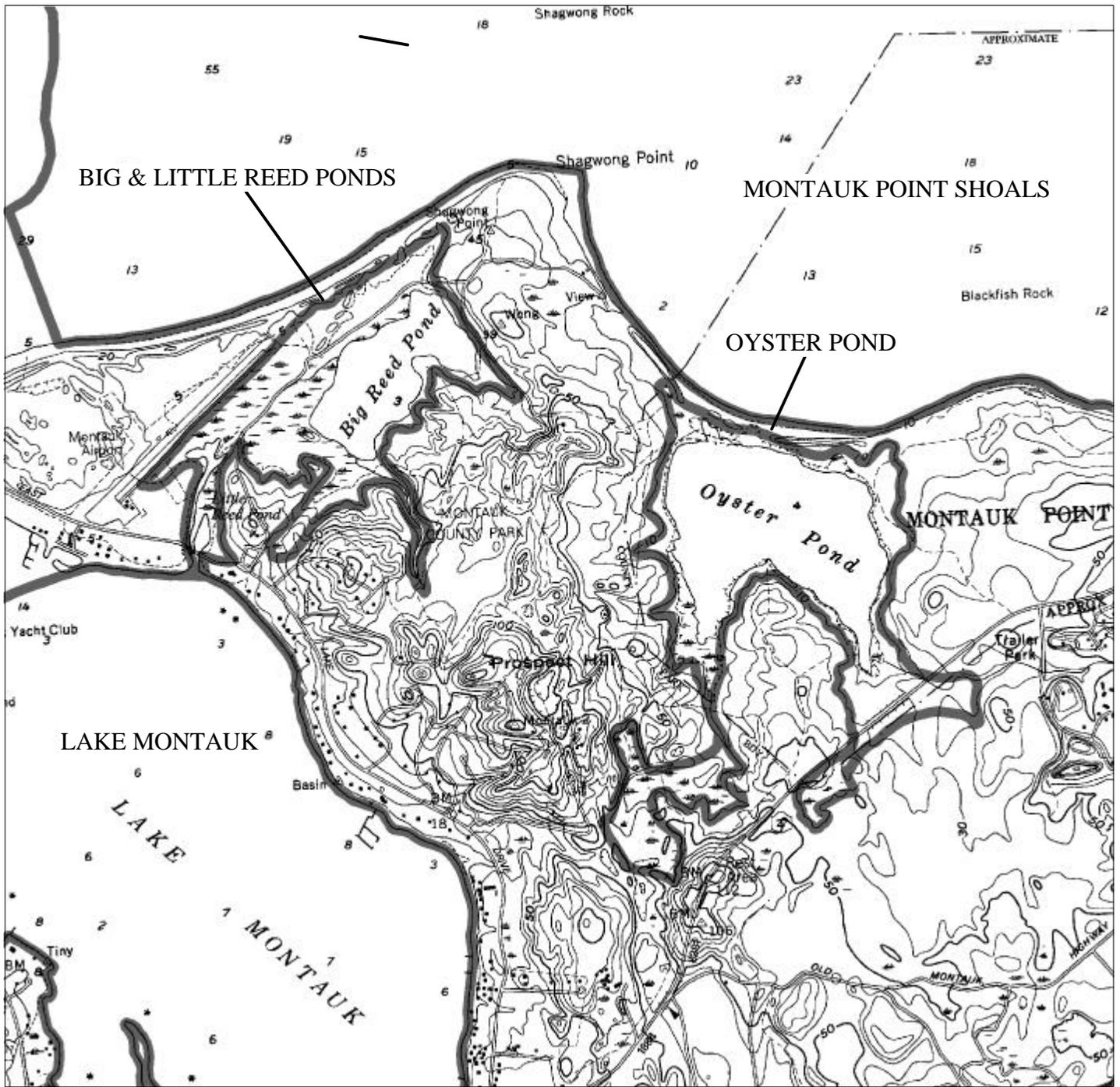
New York Natural Heritage Program
Wildlife Resources Center
700 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110
Phone: (518) 783-3932

Bureau of Marine Resources
NYSDEC
205 N. Belle Meade Road, Suite 1
East Setauket, NY 11733
Phone: (631) 444-0430

Wildlife Manager
NYSDEC—Region 1
State University of New York, Building 40
Stony Brook, NY 11790
Phone: (631) 444-0310

East Hampton Dept. of Natural Resources
Town of East Hampton
300 Pantigo Place, Suite 105
East Hampton, NY 11937-2684
Phone: (631) 324-0496

Office of Ecology
Suffolk County Dept. of Health Services
Bureau of Environmental Management
County Center
Riverhead, NY 11901
Phone: (631) 852-2077



Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats



New York State
Department of State
Division of
Coastal Resources

Big and Little Reed Ponds
Oyster Pond
Lake Montauk (In part)
Montauk Point Shoals (In part)

