

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Noyack Bay Beaches**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **Southampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Sag Harbor, NY; Greenport, 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 small areas of undeveloped sand beach and dredged materials; not rare in Suffolk County. 0

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: Least tern (T), piping plover (E, T-Fed), and osprey (SC) nesting. Horned lark (SC) present. Short-eared owl (E) overwintering, but importance of this area to the species not well documented. Calculation: $36 + (25/2) + (16/4) + (16/8) =$ 54.5

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 fishery of local significance. 0

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 the largest least tern colonies in eastern Long Island. 4

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: Uncertain of ability to replace. 1.0

Habitat Index = [ER + SV + HU + PL] = 58.5

Significance = HI x R = 58.5

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

NOYACK BAY BEACHES

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Noyack Bay Beaches are located on the south shore of Noyack Bay, between Jessup Neck and North Haven, in the Town of Southampton, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangles: Greenport, NY; and Sag Harbor, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat consists of three distinct areas of sparsely vegetated sand and pebble beach and dredged material areas, located at Pine Neck, Jessup Neck/Clam Island, and Long Beach. The Pine Neck area is an approximate 10 acre peninsula which extends into Mill Creek. This area receives considerable recreation disturbance by pedestrians, off-road vehicles, and boat landings. Mill Creek is bordered by much residential development and contains marina facilities along the east and south sides. The Pine Neck area historically has been posted as a bird nesting area. Jessup Neck extends north into Noyack Bay and together with Clam Island, forms the inlet to Noyack Creek, and the area of this creek/peninsula complex totals approximately 238 acres. Jessup Neck is the site of the Morton National Wildlife Refuge. Clam Island is located west of Pine Neck and east of the Morton National Wildlife Refuge. This 20 acre area contains salt marsh and upland as well as sand and pebble beach. The Long Beach area is an approximate 30 acre stretch of sandy dredged material located east and west of County Route 60, between Noyack Bay and Sag Harbor Cove. This area has also been fenced and posted as a bird nesting area, and generally receives relatively little human disturbance. Long Beach itself is a heavily used Town beach located just west of Route 60, on Noyack Bay.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Noyack Bay Beaches are relatively small segments of disturbed beach ecosystems, similar in nature to many other areas around the Peconic Bays. However, Pine Neck, Jessups Neck/Clam Island, and Long Beach are important nesting sites for least tern (T) and piping plover (E, T-Fed).

A colony of nesting least tern has been present at Pine Neck since at least 1982. An estimated 225 least terns were present at Pine Neck in 1985 and this colony was thought to be the most productive least tern colony on Long Island in that year, of statewide significance. Long Beach has also historically had nesting colonies of both least tern and piping plover, with a population of least tern of county significance in 1983; however usage is sporadic. Due to the proximity of the Pine Neck, Jessups Neck, and Long Beach nesting areas, it is likely that the birds inhabiting them are part of the same local population, and will utilize one or several of these habitats in any given year. During the 1987-1996 period, an annual average of 76 pairs of least tern occurred on the Noyack Bay Beaches; a peak number of 554 pairs were documented in 1986, and 311 pairs

the following year, but numbers have declined substantially since that time. Piping plover, by contrast, appear to be increasing in numbers during breeding season, reaching a peak of 6-7 pairs in 1995 and 1996; over the 1987-1996 period the average annual concentration of this species was 3 pairs. At least one pair of piping plover nested at Pine Neck every year since at least 1983. Clam Island has also historically served as a tern and plover nesting site, but not as consistently. Short Beach, in the Village of North Haven, may also occasionally serve as nesting area for this population.

Thirty-six pairs of common tern (T) mated at Jessups Neck in 1984; forty-one pairs in 1990. However, these populations did not remain to nest. Similarly, thirty-six pairs of roseate tern (E) mated at Jessups Neck in 1990, but did not remain to nest.

Osprey (SC) have nested in a tree on the edge of the uplands at Clam Island, and a population of diamondback terrapin nest along the spit. Short-eared owl (E) has over-wintered in the uplands at Clam Island but the importance of this area to the species is not well documented. Other bird species which have used the area include northern oriole, yellow-shafted flicker, common grackle, yellow warbler, prairie warbler, American black duck, mallard, horned lark (SC), ruddy turnstone, semi-palmated sandpiper, sharp-tailed sparrow, red-breasted merganser, and oldsquaw.

The adjacent waters of Noyack Creek and the Paynes Creek/Sag Harbor Cove complex contained eelgrass beds prior to 1994. Noyack Creek is seasonally certified for shellfishing from December 1 through April 30. Several sea turtle species, including Kemp's Ridley (E), loggerhead (T), and green (T) turtles, have been documented in the waters around Jessups Neck. There are no significant human use activities associated with the wildlife resources of the Noyack Bay Beaches proper. Mill Creek is closed to shellfishing between April 1 and December 14. Most of Noyack Creek is closed to shellfishing between May 1 and November 30. Jessups Neck supports a recreational fishery of local importance.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Any activity that would substantially degrade the water quality in the Noyack Bay Beaches area would adversely affect its biological productivity. All species of fish and wildlife would be affected by water pollution, such as chemical contamination (including food chain effects resulting from bioaccumulation), oil spills, excessive turbidity, and waste disposal (including boat wastes). The Town of Southampton has conducted extensive road drainage improvement projects in the area to help mitigate problems associated with road runoff.

Unrestricted use of motorized vessels including personal watercraft in the protected, shallow waters of bays, harbors, and tidal creeks can have adverse effects on aquatic vegetation and fish and wildlife populations. Use of motorized vessels should be controlled (*e.g.*, no wake zones, speed zones, zones of exclusion) in and adjacent to shallow waters and vegetated wetlands.

Nesting shorebirds inhabiting the Noyack Bay Beaches are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans, especially during the nesting and fledging period (March 15 through August 15).

Diamondback terrapin inhabiting the beach are vulnerable to disturbance by humans from April 1 through August 15. Significant pedestrian traffic or recreational vehicle use of the beach could easily eliminate the use of this site as a breeding area and should be minimized during this period. Recreational activities (*e.g.*, boat and personal watercraft landing, off-road vehicle use, picnicking) in the vicinity of bird nesting areas should be minimized during this period. Predation of chicks and destruction of eggs or nests by unleashed pets (*e.g.*, dogs, cats) and natural predators may also occur, and predator control should be implemented where feasible. Fencing and/or continued annual posting of shorebird nesting areas at the Pine Neck, Long Beach, Jessups Neck and Clam Island areas should be provided to help protect these species. Control of vegetative succession, through beneficial use of dredged material or other means may improve the availability of nesting habitat in this area.

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. Common reed dominated dredged disposal areas on the eastern side of the Clam Island and Noyack Creek area are a good candidate for restoration. The Town of Southampton developed a project that will excavate the common reed, regrade the area, and reestablish tidal marsh vegetation. Other wetlands restoration projects in the Noyack Bay Beaches area have been developed by the Town for the Paynes Creek/Sag Harbor Cove complex.

Docks may be detrimental to nearshore eelgrass beds because of shading, and review of any proposed new docks in the area should be conducted with potential impacts to eelgrass beds fully considered. Restoration opportunities for eelgrass may exist in the Noyack Bay Beaches area if water quality parameters are appropriate.

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

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

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

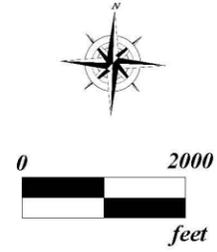
Finfish and Crustaceans
NYSDEC
205 N. Belle Meade Road, Suite 1
East Setauket, NY 11733
Phone: (631) 444-0436

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

Department of Land Management
Town of Southampton
116 Hampton Road
Southampton, NY 11968
Phone: (631) 287-5710
Group for the South Fork
P.O. Box 569
Bridgehampton, NY 11932
Phone: (631) 537-1400

Seatuck Research Program
Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology
P.O. Box 31
Islip, NY 11751
Phone: (631) 581-6908

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

- Noyack Bay Beaches
- Cedar Beach Point (In part)
- Long Pond Greenbelt (In part)
- Sag Harbor Bay & Northwest Harbor (In part)

