

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO THE SOUTH SHORE ESTUARY RESERVE COUNCIL

Final CAC Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2021

7:00-8:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Judi Bird, League of Women Voters Brookhaven
Jeremy Campbell, NYS DOS/Reserve Coordinator
George Costa, Trout Unlimited/Art Flick Chapter
Alli DePerte, Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)
Maureen Dolan Murphy, Chair CAC/Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Maureen Dunn, Seatuck Environmental Association
Emily Hall, Seatuck Environmental Association
Jessie Hornstein, NYS DEC
Kaetlyn Jackson, National Park Service, Fire Island National Seashore
Sally Kellogg, NYS DOS/Reserve Office
Artie Kopelman, Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island (CRESLI)
Mark Murray, Save the Great South Bay
Chris Olijnyk, National Park Service (NPS), Fire Island National Seashore (FINS)
Arielle Santos, Seatuck Environmental Association
Lou Siegel, NYS Marine Education Association
Lane Smith, Chair TAC/NY Sea Grant
Rob Weltner, Operation SPLASH

1. Introductions

M. Dolan Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. M. Murray from SGSB introduced himself.

*** Minutes, January 12, 2021**

Motion by A. Kopelman, to approve the January 12, 2021 CAC meeting minutes; seconded by G. Costa; carried.

*** Minutes, March 9, 2021**

Motion by G. Costa, to approve the March 9, 2021 CAC meeting minutes; seconded by J. Bird; carried.

2. Fire Island National Seashore—Increased Usage

M. Dolan Murphy recapped previous CAC meetings focusing on an increased use of natural spaces in 2020 leading to human and nature-based conflicts. The recently given New York State Parks presentation was also referenced. C. Olijnyk was introduced as the Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services (Acting) at FINS. He has worked for NPS for 28 years and 11 years with FINS. Olijnyk provided some background on FINS, it is a medium sized National Park with about

20,000 acres and occupies areas in Patchogue, Mastic Beach and much of Fire Island itself. In 2020 237 million visitors went to National Parks which represents a 28% decrease which is most likely due to temporary park closures, capacity limits, and other pandemic protocols. FINS had about 250,000 visitors in 2020 but has had a general decreasing trend of visitors since Sandy. This could be because visitors were forced other places after multiyear closures due to Sandy and are now used to going to the other locations. Other factors that could have limited 2020 visitation: no public access into seashore facilities, limited in-person public engagement, no demonstration programs (canoeing, clamming, etc.), no staff present at local festivals/activities, reduced Ferry schedules and capacity limits, Robert Moses State Park was open only to NYS residents, and Smith Point County Park had reduced capacity and only open to Suffolk County residents.

To increase the reach of park staff, new educational programs/strategies were developed. To have socially distant guided tours areas were roped off and required a lot of advertising to get participants. Self-guided experiences were created including the Watch Hill expedition where visitors had to figure out clues along a trail to win a prize, and arts and crafts projects were also popular. Digital media was used including social media, short videos were created, and some existing educational programming was converted to distance learning programs. Libraries became the largest consumer of virtual programming.

FINS pandemic protocols are currently governed by national guidance and no longer by New York State policies. Visitor Centers are planned to be opened to the public with reduced occupancy. Ranger tours and demonstrations may occur in the future but with limited capacity. Talks with the Fire Island Ferries are ongoing regarding the number of trips and boat capacity. A NPS app was launched April 16 which shows virtual activities, local amenities, volunteer experiences, etc. can all be found there. When natural areas were closed in 2020 it was anecdotally noticed that there was an increase in use in non-regulated natural areas.

M. Dolan Murphy encouraged C. Olijnyk to send any FINS social media content with the CAC to help promote. K. Jackson contrasted the difference in visitation of FINS, wanting to engage more with the public, versus NYS Parks who had record high usage. C. Olijnyk noted that access seemed to be a large limitation, the edges of the park had more steady visitation levels. K. Jackson pointed out that the cost of getting to FINS can be cost prohibitive and that NPS does not financially benefit from the arrangement.

Question: J. Bird: Will the William Floyd Estate be open this year for tours?

Answer: C. Olijnyk: The grounds will be open, and the app will have a virtual tour, but the building is closed for repairs.

Question: G. Costa: How did the wildlife fair in 2020?

Answer: C. Olijnyk: While many national parks had a rebound in wildlife populations, generally speaking the wildlife activity at FINS was similar to previous years however, 2020 was a banner year for piping plover. There were increased numbers of fisherman and lots of hunters out in

2020.

K. Jackson: 2021 is on track for another great year for plovers despite increased human conflicts with people walking from the lighthouse. Fox populations are down from mangle which could be affecting plover populations.

3. NYS DEC, Menhaden Fish Kill

J. Hornstein was introduced as a Marine Biologist II in DEC's Division of Marine Resources.

*****SK missed beginning of presentation*****

He explained that the last menhaden population assessment found that they are not currently overfished, fishing rates are not faster than reproduction rates. There has been an increase in menhaden biomass over time (since 1960s to recent years). Fish kills are not an uncommon occurrence for Atlantic Menhaden and can happen for a variety of reasons: low dissolved oxygen (this can happen if predators corner a school in a small area and the menhaden consume the available oxygen), cold shock, rapid environmental changes, HABs, and pathogens/disease. The 2020-2021 fish kill was first noted in November 2020. In fall 2020 tissue was tested and the *vibrio* bacteria was found in NY and NJ but only in menhaden and is not known to effect other species. It is thought the bacteria could be affecting menhaden and not other species because they are cold blooded. Nothing is verified at this time but there are several potential reasons for why this is occurring now. Menhaden immunity response could be compromised, increasing susceptibility, this could be due to the environmental conditions like the changing temperatures, migratory patterns, or could be a combination of stressors. This could be a new strain, although it is not likely, or this could have been in the environment previously and was a factor in previous fish kills.

J. Hornstein summarized that the bacteria only effects menhaden, it is naturally occurring and is not known to effect humans. He encouraged CAC members to report fish kills and provide as much information as possible via fishkillmarine@dec.ny.gov or call 631-444-0718.

Question: A. Kopelman: Could this effect reproductive success?

Answer: J. Hornstein: No, these events are not large enough at this time.

Question: A. DePerte: Have any animals that have eaten the effected dead fish shown symptoms?

Answer: J. Hornstein: There are no reports at this time but keep pets away if possible.

Question: G. Costa: Was alewife effected?

Answer: J. Hornstein: No.

4. Caanan Lake Restoration

Topic moved to July meeting.

5. South Shore Estuary Reserve Office

J. Campbell announced the new DOS website and provided a walkthrough, then he asked the CAC to provide ideas and comments on the new SSER pages. He noted the eelgrass story went

live the previous week and informed the CAC that SSER staff would be monitoring for Horseshoe Crabs this spring.

Question: A. Kopelman: Are you looking for website content?

Answer: J. Campbell: Ideas for content.

L. Smith noted the next TAC meeting will be June 1st and the focus will be working on the SAV management plan.

6. Public Comment/Announcements

Question: L. Smith: Has there been any further discussion on a how to interact with wildlife guide?

Answer: M. Dolan Murphy: The last few meetings have focused on the background of this but this will be further discussed in the July meeting.

L. Siegel - NYSMEA is having a virtual conference this upcoming Saturday, May 15, 2021.

M. Murray – Save the Great South Bay has three main focus areas: Creek Defenders program which has completed 12 events removing 10,000 pounds of debris so far in 2021; habitat restoration; and the Great South Bay oyster project.

J. Campbell – Bay Park Conveyance Project construction has begun.

E. Hall – River Herring season is closing out, but runs were seen in several places including Mill River, Patchogue River, Terrell River – new run, and more. The Bellmore Creek fish passage project has 3 versions of conceptual designs and there will be a public meeting in the future.

R. Weltner – 6 out of 7 boats from Operation SPLASH are up and working. There has been an increase in trash this year, even more so than in 2020 at this time of year.

M. Dunn – Provided Half Shells for Habitat update, shells are being collected and 2,000 pounds of shell were sent to Shinnecock Bay this week. New procedures were created during the pandemic and were implemented. The Penataquit Creek project has planted 120 native shrubs and trees on over a 1 acre of property. The next planting and pull event is Saturday at 10 a.m.

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.