

PEP Talk

The Newsletter of the Peconic Estuary Program

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CMEE Family Fun Day

On May 8th, the First Annual Peconic Family Fun Day was held at the Children's Museum of the East End (CMEE) in Bridgehampton, NY. Uncooperative weather forced the event to be held indoors, but this did not stop the 250+ children and their families from attending the event and experiencing a morning of learning and fun. Several local organizations, in addition to the PEP, were integral in the success of the event including the Peconic Land Trust; Group for the East End; Cornell Cooperative Extension; Peconic Baykeeper; and of course, the Children's museum of the East End who kindly hosted the event at their site. All groups involved expressed the common interest of educating children of the East End (and their parents) on the key ecological functions our local waters provide and the importance of practicing environmental stewardship to protect our natural resources. Topics such as stormwater management, local agriculture, groundwater resources, and native ecology were all adapted into interactive hands-on lessons offered to the children in the form of planting demonstrations, carnival games, groundwater models, touch tanks, and fish printing. The talented Bridgehampton High School Marimba Band provided the perfect touch through their upbeat musical performances throughout the day and a good time was had by all! ~Kimberly Paulsen, PEP

Nitrogen, Farming and the Environment

Many people are surprised when they discover that Suffolk County is home to the most profitable agricultural industry in all of New York State. Vineyards, specialty vegetable crops, sod, tree fruit, berries and greenhouse and nursery crops provide the region with an abundance of locally grown produce, wine and horticultural products. Commercial agriculture greatly benefits the region's economy, yet the down side is that agriculture has negatively impacted the environment. The rich sandy soils so conducive to producing our beautiful fruits and vegetables are porous, which leads to non-point source leaching of agricultural inputs into the groundwater and sole source aquifer. Cornell Cooperative Extension's Agricultural Stewardship Program was established in 2004 to coordinate the development of an educational program focused on agricultural best management practices to address these water quality issues.

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PEP Releases 2010 Eelgrass Implementation Progress Report

The “Eelgrass Management Plan for the Peconic Estuary” was adopted and finalized in June 2009. In an effort to ensure objectives and management actions and action steps detailed in the Plan are effectively and efficiently implemented, the PEP Natural Resources Subcommittee (NRS) has committed to track and report on implementation progress on an annual basis in Implementation Progress Reports (IPRs). These reports will ensure proper accounting and tracking of implementation progress and will provide an adaptive and timely mechanism for notifying the Management Committee of new priorities, needs, and recommendations.

PEP and our partners have made significant strides since the plan was adopted just last year. These include:

- Southampton Town Trustees establishing an eelgrass sanctuary in Bullhead Bay.
- The New York State Legislature introducing a Seagrass Protection Act Bill.
- The Association of Marine Industries including eelgrass information into their annual Boater’s Guide.
- PEP selecting The Group for the East End and Southampton Town Trustees to receive a PEP Mini Grant to develop an eelgrass educational brochure to be distributed at access sites/points, sent to license and permit holders, and made available at other public venues.
- PEP releasing a radio spot about eelgrass.
- Several entities funding research to investigate submerged groundwater discharge and eelgrass interactions and herbicide toxicity.
- PEP funding the deployment of light and temperature loggers.

The 2010 IPR, in addition to identifying successes, also outlines some needs and recommends conducting a new eelgrass inventory and posting all PEP Long-Term Eelgrass Monitoring Reports to the PEP website. The 2010 Eelgrass Implementation Report is accessible at www.peconicestuary.org

~Laura Stephenson, NYSDEC/PEP

PEPTalk is published by the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP), a partnership of governments, environmental groups, businesses, industries, academic institutions, and citizens. The PEP’s mission is to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary system. Learn more at www.peconicestuary.org. Edited by Emily A. Fogarty




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Nitrogen, Farming & the Environment, from Page 1

It is important to remember that nitrogen in the form of organic fertilizers and/or chemical fertilizers is necessary for the development of all agricultural and horticultural crops. A plant deficient in nitrogen will suffer damage to the root systems, plant growth will be stunted and it will begin to turn yellow and die. However, if too much nitrogen is applied and chemicals and/or manures exceed levels that a plant needs, then the plant can also be harmed in addition to the excess nitrogen leaching into groundwater. There are two basic facts a farmer considers when applying fertilizers: it is



Photo By: Becky Wiseman, Newly Plowed Farm Field

expensive to purchase and using it in excess can be harmful to aquatic life. The key is knowing how much nitrogen a plant needs, what kind of nitrogen is needed and when is the best time to apply the nutrients.

The Peconic Estuary Program has provided funding for the Agricultural Stewardship Program to proactively work with farmers located in areas of the Peconic Estuary System that have been identified as not meeting dissolved oxygen standards. There are several components to the Peconic Estuary Initiative including on-farm demonstration projects and educational programs all targeted toward proper fertilizer application to maximize its effectiveness and minimize nutrient loss. Our goal is to encourage management practices that promote a viable agricultural industry while protecting our ground water and the Peconic Estuary.

Many new technologies are being implemented that until very recently have not been available to the agricultural and horticultural industries. Controlled or slow release fertilizers have been used in greenhouse production for years, but were not available for vegetable production until two years ago. Row crop farmers can now use a fertilizer that slowly releases its nutrients depending on the need of the individual plant. It is widely used with potatoes and research at Cornell Cooperative Extension, Suffolk County is continuing to evaluate yield and crop quality when using controlled release fertilizer in sweet corn and tomatoes. Through the Peconic Estuary Initiative we are able to take these and other new technologies onto the farm and work directly with the farmer in adapting them to their specific needs.

~Becky Wiseman, Coordinator CCE's Agricultural Stewardship Program

Calendar of Events

July 21, 2010 - Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (6:30PM - 9:30PM),
Hampton Bays Community Center, Hampton Bays, NY.

August 3, 2010 - Peconic Estuary Program Natural Resources Subcommittee
Meeting (9:30AM), CCE Extension Education Center, 1st
Floor Conference Room. Located at 432 Griffing Avenue,
Suite 100 Riverhead, NY.

2010 PEP Mini-Grant Recipients

The Peconic Estuary Program (PEP) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2010 PEP Mini-Grants. Grants of up to and including \$5,000 will be awarded to the following projects for increasing public awareness of the estuarine environment and/or encouraging active public participation in protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary.

2010 PEP Mini-Grant Recipients:

- **Group for the East End - Peconic Estuary Spring Planting Program:** The Group's annual spring planting program will be expanded to include several Peconic Estuary sites. The program will educate students and community volunteers about the Peconic Estuary and also focus on community based hands-on habitat restoration projects within the Peconic Estuary watershed.
- **Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County: Marine Education - FISH HAWKS program:** CCE will further their Marine Education endeavors with a Peconic Estuary Habitat Restoration and Eelgrass Protection Field Studies program for public school students. The program will provide a 6-session afterschool program for 5th – 7th grade students in three schools within the towns of East Hampton, Southampton and Southold. The project will work directly with the three schools and 180 students (60 per school) and their 3 teachers, totaling 183 direct participants (with another 600 students receiving educational presentations). The public education component is estimated to reach 20,000 people in the broadcast audience and 10,000 people via the web. This project will serve as a resource to the schools within the Peconic Estuary watershed and is designed to be a replicable model.
- **Southampton Town Trustees/Group for the East End – Educational Eelgrass Brochures:** The development of these brochures as a public education component is listed as a high priority action step (Action Step 2.1.) in the PEP's Eelgrass Management Plan. The brochure will contain information on the importance of eelgrass; the threats to eelgrass; and most importantly how and why everyone must do their part to help protect the remaining Peconic Estuary eelgrass populations and make water quality more habitable for eelgrass restoration efforts throughout the Peconics. The brochure will be widely distributed and available on the PEP website upon completion.
- **Seatuck Environmental Association - Peconic River Video Fish Counter:** Underwater video equipment will be deployed to monitor diadromous fish migration through the Grangebel Park rock ramp fishway on the Peconic River. This documentation will provide useful information as to the effectiveness of the rock ramp and also provide an estimate of diadromous fish population size. Video footage will also be use for various public education and outreach efforts.

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The population slowly recovered, reaching an estimated high of 500 pairs on Long Island's shores by the late 1940's. This "recovery" was short-lived, for as our human population increased, so did our desire to live near the shore. The development and the ever-increasing recreational pressure on the species' essential habitat—open, sandy beaches—resulted in a serious decline in plover numbers.

In 1986, the federal government listed the piping plover as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, the species is protected by New York State Environmental Conservation Law as an endangered species. With laws in place to provide legal protection, on-the-ground management is the next crucial step.

Piping plover protection is undertaken by a whole host of agencies and organizations. Seasonal stewards and volunteers locate, fence, post, and monitor piping plover nesting areas across Long Island. All of this hard work has paid off. On Long Island, the number of nesting piping plover nesting pairs has increased from 106 pairs when the species was listed, to a preliminary estimate of 437 pairs in 2009.

How you can help protect piping plovers:

- Respect all fenced and posted nesting areas.
- If pets are permitted on the beach, keep your pet leashed at all times.
- Keep your cat indoors.
- Don't leave food or trash on the beach; the garbage will attract predators that may prey upon plover eggs, chicks, and adults.
- Observe birds for a distance.
- Get involved become a volunteer steward.

For additional information on piping plovers, please contact Joseph Janssen, Coastal Resources Manager for The Nature Conservancy on Long Island at (631) 367-3225.

~ Joseph Janssen, TNC

Mini Grant Recipients from Page 4

- **Group for the East End - Spring Pond Boat Ramp:** This project will positively impact and fulfill numerous goals and objectives outlined in the PEP CCMP. The restoration element of this project calls for the alteration of the existing ramp at Spring Pond in East Marion, NY to mitigate stormwater runoff and replace existing impervious surfaces with pervious surfaces. One of the primary project goals includes restoration of a portion of the property surrounding the ramp by creating naturally vegetated swales using native plants. This project will include ongoing education and outreach programs that will benefit the approximated 100+ homes within the surrounding residences and those who utilize the boat ramp.
- **The Children's Museum of the East End - Peconic Walking Tour:** On the grounds of CMEE in Bridgehampton an educational walking trail, to be fully accessible to the public, will be created. The trail will be designed by staff and with the help of volunteers and students. Upon completion, children and their parents will be able to walk through the Museum's six acres of preserved property while learning about the Peconic Estuary. The trail will feature permanent outreach and educational signage for the benefit of CMEE's 42,000 annual visitors. ~Emily A. Fogarty, PEP

Congratulations to the 2010 Mini Grant Recipients!!

Peconic Estuary Program
SCDHS - Office of Ecology
360 Yaphank Avenue, Suite 2B
Yaphank, NY 11980

Species Snapshot: Piping Plover

The piping plover is a plump, sand-colored shorebird found throughout the Peconic Estuary and across Long Island's shores. Because their color matches that of the pale-dry sand, they blend remarkably well into the background of open beach environments. Though you may not see one right away, you may hear one. Piping plovers are named for their clear, bell-like whistles.



*Photo by: David Mizrahi
Nesting Plover*

In late March or early April, plovers return from their southern winter home to their Long Island breeding grounds. A mating pair scratches a depression in the sand on the high beach and often lines it with shells and pebbles. Four speckled, sandy-colored eggs are laid and both adults share equally in the incubation duties. The eggs hatch after approximately 27 days. Piping plover chicks are precocial, meaning they leave the nest often within hours of hatching and are led by their parents to the intertidal zone or along the wrack-line where they pluck marine worms, fly larvae, beetles, and other small invertebrates from the sand. Chicks are considered fledged (able to fly) at 25 days of age.

At the turn of the 20th century, this imperiled shorebird was nearly eliminated from our shores, as it was hunted for both sport and for its feathers. In 1918, the passing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act protected the species from the guns of the sportsman.

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