

Minutes
Peconic Estuary Program
Natural Resources Subcommittee (NRS) Meeting
Thursday, October 13, 2011
10:00am- 12:00noon

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County
Second Floor Conference Room
423 Griffing Ave Riverhead, NY

Welcome & Introductions (Julie Nace)

Introductions around the table. The new Director of the Peconic Estuary Program, Alison Branco, gave a few words about herself.

Presentation: Coastal Resilience – Nicole Maher, *The Nature Conservancy*. This tool can be used for long range planning for land use professionals, emergency management and “pro-active risk reduction through land acquisition.” For more information, contact Nicole (nmaher@tnc.org) or go to www.coastalresilience.org

Comments:

Dawn McReynolds: Collaborate, especially with new LIDAR data (accuracy to 1 foot), instead of starting new projects.

Matt Sclefani: What is happening to existing marshes? Elevations and growth rate compared to sea level rise. Nicole explains a TNC marsh elevation monitoring program from NYS to the east end of LI. Those marshes not building mass from underground are more vulnerable. Tide gauges indicate we are in the upward trend of a spike pattern in sea level rise.

Rick Balla: Solutions? Nicole states need to identify specific threat and then make plans. Cites a bulkhead removal project.

Wayne Grothe: Describes PACE Law projects – legal changes in policy. Contact Wayne for reports or the TNC website has links. Also, 10 communities in coastal CT used the Coastal Resilience Tool to plan evacuation for Hurricane Irene and found it very accurate.

Updates:

1. Land Use Conceptual Designs: Will Bowman, *Land Use Ecological Services*. Waiting for the QAPP to be approved from the EPA. Will reach out to municipalities for data needed for each of the projects. He will also coordinate a kick-off meeting with Inter-Fluve, most likely in Riverhead.

- Moore’s Drain/Silver Lake Alewife Access (preliminary research shows no evidence of alewife presence, will also research water levels)
- Ligonee Brook Diadromous Fish Passage (preliminary research shows evidence of alewives)
- Napeague Harbor Circulation Enhancement (would like to start this project as soon as possible)
- Shell Beach Revegetation
- Forge Road/Peconic Lake Diadromous Fish Passage

Comments:

Byron Young: Water levels appeared to be low in spring 2011. Look at USGS data.

Wayne Grothe: Should look at historical water levels.

2. Piping Plover Update – Adam Starke, *The Nature Conservancy*. Habitat identification phase is done. Adam had 4 maps available to review. Next phase of the study is a quantitative assessment of piping plover population.

Comments:

Wayne Grothe: Historical background of project. Endangered species recovery plans suggest this area should support 115 pairs. No evidence that this area could ever support that many

birds. There are 45 to 55 pairs in the Peconic Estuary today. This project is meant to revisit these target numbers with an in-depth analysis. Also looking at low cost methods for towns to improve piping plover habitat.

Matt Sclefani: Is there any bird banding being done? Adam and Suzanne Paton – not allowed because the birds are federally endangered.

Kevin McDonald: What are the trends? Adam - The area might be at its carrying capacity.

3. Homeowner Rebate Program (Southold and Southampton) – Julie Nace/Kim Shaw, *PEP*. Julie Nace gave a brief description – a program meant to give homeowners an incentive to reduce stormwater run-off in targeted areas with impaired water bodies. Homeowners can earn rebates for installing projects like rain gardens, rain barrels, re-direction of gutters, dry wells and conservation plantings. Kim Shaw gave a more detailed description of the program, including administration and funding. Pilot project will have \$100,000, followed by \$60,000 the following year.

Comments:

Dawn McReynolds: Once the administration of the program is figured out, we can expand the program.

Rick Balla: Program modeled on Montgomery County, MD program. We will be looking for more money. Have applied for grants but not selected. Impaired water bodies based on closed shellfish beds in Reeves Bay and Hashamomuck.

Glynis Berry: Can businesses (church) apply? Rick Balla – target is homeowners in impaired subwatersheds but potential for houses of worship. Glynis – Instead of emphasis on impaired waters, it would be cheaper and more effective to protect non-impaired waters.

Kevin McDonald: If this model works, make it part of the town budgets and self sustaining.

Rick Balla: Spoke of healthy watersheds initiative and protection for those.

Brian Frank: It would be good to alert municipalities to trends in water quality so they can know before a water body is classified as impaired and be pro-active. Need a GIS water quality program.

Wayne Grothe: Example – As coliform counts increased (DEC data), officials were lobbied for stormwater abatement projects. As a result, North Sea is now open yearly.

***Comments from Lisa Tettlebach (NYSDEC) -**

I wanted to make a comment on something Wayne Grothe said. He mentions increased coliforms in North Sea, which initiated water abatement projects. Over time shellfish classifications have changed in this area, but North Sea is not entirely open as he suggests. And there are sections that are closed year-round and during the warmer season.

Mike Jensen: What are the boundaries and targets?

Alison Branco: Peconic Estuary Program boundaries.

Kevin McDonald/Kim Shaw: Alert homeowners to this program with targeting mailings, educate the Town Boards and community groups.

4. Eelgrass priorities – Julie Nace/Dawn McReynolds, *NYSDEC/PEP*. Dawn gave an update on priorities within the habitat restoration goals of the Peconic Estuary Program. The priorities were:

- Talk with the towns about eelgrass management plans
- Mapping, last done in 2000. Better protocol for aerial surveys.
- Habitat Suitability Index (CCE work – Chris Pickerell)
- Education
- Updates on contracts and research (ie – Brad Peterson work.)

Comments:

Kevin McDonald: Do we have money for mapping? Dawn – no. Suzanne Paton – finally got funding for Rhode Island and partnered with CT to get mapping done for both states. She also said they have updated their protocols for aerial surveys and ground truthing.

Camilo Salazar: Discussed SC eelgrass initiative.

Rick Balla/Kim Shaw: New York Seagrass and PEP funded projects.

Wayne Grothe: TNC is studying eelgrass from Cape Cod to the south shore of LI. Lead is Fred Short from University of New Hampshire. He has hired CCE as a subcontractor. Creating a new restoration modeling tool. Identifying why the eelgrass is dying. Phase I ends in Jan 2012. Reports available from Wayne. Phase II starts in Jan 2012, fill in holes in research.

Brian Frank: Need to know patterns of eelgrass loss for planning.

Wayne Grothe: Notes that eelgrass beds appear to be not as thick anymore.

Dawn McReynolds: Suggest looking at smaller projects, as per conversation with Julie Nace, for habitat restoration projects with PEP.

Brian Frank/Kevin McDonald: Partnerships on simple projects, less expensive.

Dawn McReynolds: Gives an example of partnerships – DEC and SC DPW on mosquito ditching restoration projects – south shore marshes.

Suggestions – Ask Chris Pickerell, Brad Peterson and TNC lead researcher to present at our next meeting.

5. Ludwigia Pull – Julie Nace, *PEP*. Program has been in effect since 2006. Levels of Ludwigia are controlled by yearly maintenance. This year 42 volunteers donated 227 hours and pulled 8 cubic yards of Ludwigia.

Adjourn