

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Atlantic Double Dunes**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **East Hampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **East Hampton, 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: A large area of undeveloped barrier beach and backdune ecosystem, rare in New York State. 64

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), eastern spadefoot toad (SC), and eastern hognose snake (SC). Piping plover (E, T-Fed) may nest in the area, but importance in not known .
Calculation: $25 + (16/2) + (16/4) =$ 37

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: No significant human uses of the fish and wildlife resources of this area. 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: Populations of spadefoot toad and hognose snake are unusual on Long Island. 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] = 110

Significance = HI x R = 132.0

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

ATLANTIC DOUBLE DUNES

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Atlantic Double Dunes is located along the south shore of Long Island, in the Town of East Hampton, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: East Hampton, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat extends approximately two and one-half miles along the coast, from Old Beach Lane in the Village of East Hampton to Beach Avenue in Amagansett, and includes the Amagansett National Wildlife Refuge. This approximate 280 acre area consists of open sandy beach (the Maidstone Club Beach and Amagansett Beach) and a relatively undisturbed interdune area situated between the primary dune and residential development along the south side of Further Lane and Bluff Road. The primary dune zone is dominated by a simple plant community spreading inland for 200 to 300 feet. Extending north from the rear slope of the primary dune, large portions of the back beach interdune zone have support sporadic clusters of shrubs, as well as rare maritime freshwater interdunal swales. The inland portion of the interdune zone is more open and is dominated by grasses and sporadic clusters of shrubs. A succession of tree and shrub dominated communities occupy the most inland portions of the interdune zone and the upland transition zone of this site, forming dense stands of semi-woodland habitat. Atlantic Double Dunes encompasses The Nature Conservancy's Atlantic Double Dunes Preserve, which is comprised of over a dozen parcels totaling approximately 70 acres. The remainder of the area is privately owned. The open beach receives substantial recreational use by local residents, with pedestrian and vehicle access available from two municipal beach areas, at Atlantic Avenue and Indian Wells Highway, and from private boardwalks crossing through the habitat.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Atlantic Double Dunes is one of the largest remaining areas of undeveloped barrier beach and back dune ecosystem on Long Island, representing a rare ecosystem type in New York State. This outstanding natural area provides valuable opportunities for research on coastal wildlife species. The Atlantic Double Dunes area was investigated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1982 as one of four primary sites for baseline studies of natural coastal wildlife habitats on Long Island's south shore. These studies documented the presence of at least 21 species of breeding birds, 6 species of mammals, and 4 species of amphibians and reptiles in the area.

Atlantic Double Dunes has a substantial population of white-footed mouse and jumping mouse, which serve as an important prey base for raptors migrating through the area (falcons and accipiters, primarily). Northern harrier (T) hunt in the area during the fall and winter.

Atlantic Double Dunes provides valuable habitat for eastern hognose snake (SC) and eastern

spadefoot toad (SC), two species which are uncommon on Long Island. This area supports large breeding populations of Fowler's toads and black racers. In the spring and fall the dunes are important for song bird migration, and for butterfly and dragonfly migration in the fall.

Least tern (T) nested in the area in the early 1980s in a sparsely vegetated portion of the foredune between Old Beach Lane and Two Mile Hollow Road (the Maidstone Club Beach). An estimated 10-40 pairs of least terns were observed in the area each year. Since the mid-1980s, colonies of up to 25 pairs of least tern have been established on the beach in this habitat area, but most have been unsuccessful for breeding. This lack of success is attributed to extreme tides from tropical storm events as well as documented mortality from recreational vehicle traffic. Sporadically during the 1990s several breeding pairs of piping plover have occurred in conjunction with the Atlantic Double Dune tern colonies.

There are no significant recreational uses specifically associated with the wildlife of the Atlantic Double Dunes area. Portions of Amagansett Beach provide important access for mobile sports fishermen who use off-road vehicles to reach the valuable surf fishery at this site.

Many important plant species and communities are found in this habitat area. The primary dune zone is dominated by a simple plant community of American beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) and seaside goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens* var. *sempervirens*) that spreads inland for 200 to 300 feet. The back beach interdune zone has a dominant ground cover of beach heather (*Hudsonia tomentosa*) and bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), with sporadic clusters of shrubs such as beach plum (*Prunus maritima*) and bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*). Interdunal freshwater swales support stands of rushes, cranberry, highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), and wild rose (*Rosa virginiana*). The inland portion of the interdune area supports bearberry, beachgrass, domestic grasses, and sporadic clusters of red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), bayberry, beach plum (*Prunus maritima*), and pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*). The upland transition zone supports bayberry, shadbush (*Amelanchier canadensis*), arrowwoods (*Viburnum* spp.), bear oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), and pitch pine. Rare plants documented by the New York Natural Heritage Program in this habitat include: round-leaf boneset (*Eupatorium rotundifolium* var. *rotundifolium*), southern arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum* var. *venosum*), and the largest population of pine-barren sandwort (*Minuartia caroliniana*) in New York.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

The Atlantic Double Dunes habitat is potentially vulnerable to any land disturbance or increased human activity in the area. Habitat alterations, such as dredged material disposal, vegetation clearing, excavation, or ditching, would have significant adverse impacts on several unusual species inhabiting the area. Uncontrolled recreational vehicle use of the beach area can contribute to erosion and may result in loss of dune areas.

Encroachment by additional residential development, expansion of beach parking areas, and installation of trails or boardwalks would be likely to reduce the value of the habitat to wildlife. Uncontrolled human use of the area, including collection of amphibians and reptiles, would also

be highly detrimental to the wildlife resources at Atlantic Double Dunes.

Nesting shorebirds inhabiting the Atlantic Double Dunes are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans, especially during the nesting and fledgling period (March 15 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 should be provided to help protect these species. Control of vegetative succession, though beneficial use of dredged material or other means may improve the availability of nesting habitat in this area.

Although nesting sites may change from year to year, human disturbance of the upper beach and dunes (above the spring high tide line) in general must be avoided in order to preserve the habitat value of these sites. Traditional uses of the lower beach such as pedestrian traffic or mobile sportfishing are generally compatible with the use of the upper beach and dune area by nesting shorebirds and other wildlife.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

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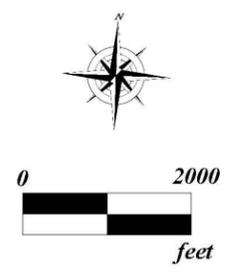
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Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats

- Atlantic Double Dunes
- Napeague Beach (In part)

New York State
Department of State
Division of
Coastal Resources

