

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Cedar Beach Point**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **Southold**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Southold, 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, undeveloped, salt marsh, beach, and dredged material deposits on the north fork of Long Island. 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. Black skimmer (SC) and common tern (T) have been seen, but importance of area to these species is not adequately documented. Calculation: $36 + (25/2) + (16/4) =$ 52.5

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: This area serves as an important natural area for research and education by the Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program; of regional significance. 9

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 concentrations of nesting least terns on the north fork, of county-level significance. 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: Irreplaceable. 1.2

Habitat Index = [ER + SV + HU + PL] = 65.5

Significance = HI x R = 78.6

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

CEDAR BEACH POINT

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Cedar Beach Point is located at the tip of Great Hog Neck, north of Little Peconic Bay, in the Town of Southold, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Southold, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat is approximately 85 acres in size, consisting of sparsely vegetated sand beach and dredged material deposits, a small protected bay (Cedar Beach Creek), mud flats, and salt marsh. The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented seabeach knotweed, a rare plant species, in this area. The area is owned by Suffolk County and houses the Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program. The habitat is generally bordered by low to medium density residential development. The mouth of the creek is subject to periodic maintenance dredging.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Cedar Beach Point is a small coastal wetland area, similar in nature to many other points around the Peconic Bays shoreline, but important as a habitat for various fish and wildlife species.

This area has served for many years as a nesting site for least terns (T). In 1982 and 1983, approximately 80-90 pairs of least terns nested in the area, making this colony one of the largest on the north fork of Long Island, of county-level significance. However, human disturbance of the area, including pedestrian traffic and recreational vehicle use, has been a serious problem for many years, and least tern populations have declined to around 5-6 pairs annually by the late 1980s. During the 1987-1996 period, however, the annual average number of pairs of least tern nesting at this site was 15; nesting populations appear to be on the rise in the late 1990s, with a peak number of 63 pairs observed in 1996. Common tern (T) nested at Cedar Beach Point in the mid-1990s, ranging from 1-14 pairs. More information about the importance of this site for common tern nesting is needed.

Piping plover (E, T-Fed) nest regularly at Cedar Beach, with an annual average of 1 pair observed during the 1987-1996 period. The peak number, 2 pairs, was observed in 1995. The appearance of this species has become more regular throughout the 1990s.

Osprey (SC) have nested in the area for many years, using man-made nesting platforms located in the habitat. The tidal wetlands at Cedar Beach Point serve as feeding areas for both least tern and osprey, as well as for many other wildlife species. Black skimmer (SC) have appeared at Cedar Beach Point in high concentrations (several hundred). Low marsh areas of these wetlands support healthy populations of fiddler crabs. Diamondback terrapin are also present here; more information is needed to determine importance of this population. Cedar Beach Point may provide important breeding habitat for horseshoe crab, but additional documentation is required.

In addition to its ecological values, Cedar Beach Point is an important area for marine sciences education and research. The Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program is located at Cedar Beach, and the area is heavily used by faculty and students as a "living laboratory".

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

It is essential that any potential impacts on Cedar Beach Point be evaluated with respect to the established science program here, and the need to maintain natural or controlled experimental conditions. Any activity that would substantially degrade the water quality in Cedar Beach Creek would adversely affect the biological productivity of this area. 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, stormwater runoff, and waste disposal. It is essential that high water quality be maintained in the area, primarily by controlling discharges of sewage and other pollutants from upland sources.

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.

Alteration of tidal patterns at Cedar Beach Point would have major impacts on the fish and wildlife communities present. Elimination of salt marsh and intertidal areas, through loss of tidal connection, excavation, ditching or filling, would result in a direct loss of valuable habitat area. Construction and maintenance of shoreline structures, such as docks, piers, bulkheads, or revetments, in any part of this area, may have a significant impact on the fish and wildlife resources of Cedar Beach Point. Alternative strategies for the protection of shoreline property should be examined, including innovative, vegetation-based approaches. 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.

Maintenance dredging in the Cedar Beach Point area should be scheduled between September 15 and December 15. Dredged material disposal in this area would be detrimental, but such activities may be designed to maintain or improve the habitat for certain species of wildlife, especially nesting birds. There is some indication, however, that as a result of the potential for overwash onto salt marshes, this site does not exhibit optimal conditions for dredged material placement.

Nesting shorebirds inhabiting Cedar Beach Point are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans, especially during the nesting and fledging 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, through beneficial use of dredged material or other means may improve the availability of nesting habitat in this area.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

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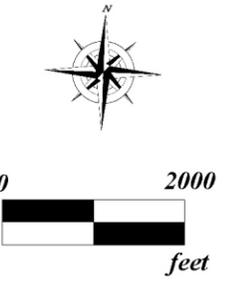
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Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats

Cutchogue Harbor and Wetlands (In part)
 Noyack Bay Beaches (In part)

Cedar Beach Point
 Corey Creek
 Jockey Creek Sandspit
 Little Creek and Beach
 Richmond Creek and Beach



MORTON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
 NOYACK BAY BEACHES

RICHMOND CREEK & BEACH

CEDAR BEACH POINT

LITTLE CREEK & BEACH

CUTCHOGUE HARBOR & WETLANDS

SHELTER ISLAND

ISLAND

SouJOCKEY CREEK SANDSPIT

SOUND

COREY CREEK

LITTLE PECONIC