

Attachment B:

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Far Pond and Middle Pond Inlets**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **December 15, 2008**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **Southampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Southampton, NY**

Assessment Criteria

Score

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: Small, undeveloped, barrier beaches and tidal inlets; unusual in Suffolk County. **9**

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. (E = Endangered, T = Threatened, SC = Special concern)

SV assessment: Piping plover (E, T-Fed) and least tern (T) foraging and nesting. Additive division: $36 + 25/2 = 48.5$. **48.5**

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: No significant fish or wildlife related human uses of the 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 least tern (T) are 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) = 61.5

Significance: (HI x R) = 73.8

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

FAR POND AND MIDDLE POND INLETS

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Far Pond and Middle Pond are located in the northeast corner of Shinnecock Bay, approximately one mile southeast of the hamlet of Shinnecock Hills, in the Town of Southampton, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Southampton, N.Y.). The fish and wildlife habitat consists of the undeveloped barrier peninsulas and inlets associated with these two ponds, encompassing approximately 20 acres. The peninsulas contain areas of dense vegetative cover, bare sand and pebble beach, salt marsh (near Middle Pond Inlet), and sparsely vegetated dredged material. A maritime dunes community exists in Far Pond and Middle Pond. The maritime dune community is comprised of grasses and low shrubs in a mosaic of vegetated patches dominated by beach grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) and seaside goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*). Tidal fluctuations in the inlets are approximately 2.5 feet. Middle Pond is bordered by much suburban residential development, while the shoreline of Far Pond remains largely undisturbed. Dredging of the inlets and subsequent dredged material has resulted in considerable degradation of the natural wetland and littoral communities in Far Pond and Middle Pond.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Far Pond and Middle Pond Inlets are adjoining undeveloped barrier peninsulas and tidal inlets, which are a relatively uncommon ecosystem type in Suffolk County. Although these areas have been heavily disturbed by dredging operations, they provide favorable habitat conditions for nesting by piping plover (E, T-Fed) and least tern (T). Shorebird surveys from 1991-1999, and for 2004-2005, indicate average annual concentrations of 17 least tern (T) breeding pairs (61 in peak year) and 1 piping plover (E, T-Fed) breeding pair (2 in peak year). In recent years average annual concentrations of least tern (T) have diminished. The cause may be attributed to vegetative succession, which on these peninsulas may be reducing the amount of suitable habitat for both least tern and piping plover by increasing the vegetative cover of the inlets. Previous shorebird surveys indicated average concentrations for the years 1982-1985 of 25 least tern (T) pairs (40 in peak year) and 2 piping plover (E, T-Fed) breeding pairs (2 in peak year). The inlets to Far Pond and Middle Pond are important feeding areas for least tern (T) and other shorebird species because of the concentrations of fish which occur in those locations. Least tern (T) nest in large colonies located in sand, gravel, shells, and seaweed above the high tide mark. Piping plovers (E, T-Fed) nest well above the high tide mark in generally grassless sand beaches. Both ponds serve as nursery areas for winter flounder. There are no significant human use activities associated with the fish and wildlife resources of Far Pond and Middle Pond Inlets.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Nesting shorebird species inhabiting the beaches of Long Island are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans from March 15 through August 15. Significant pedestrian traffic or recreational use of Far and Middle Pond Inlet and adjacent areas (e.g., boat and personal watercraft landing, off-road vehicle use,

picnicking) could easily eliminate the use of this site as a nesting area and should be minimized during this period. Reduction, or loss of the area presently utilized by nesting colonies could significantly affect the bird populations in this vicinity. 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 annual posting of the bird nesting area should be provided to help protect the nesting bird species. Elimination or significant disturbance of salt marsh and littoral areas in Far Pond or Middle Pond would adversely affect the biological productivity of these areas, reducing available food resources for the populations of terns and other fish and wildlife species. Unregulated dredged material placement in this area would be detrimental to the habitat area, but such activities may be designed to maintain or improve the habitat, by setting back vegetative succession.

Construction of adjacent recreational facilities should be designed to minimize impacts to the nesting areas. Construction of new or maintenance of existing erosion control structures which interfere with natural coastal process should be carefully evaluated for need and where possible, non-structural solutions should be utilized.

HABITAT IMPAIRMENT TEST:

A **habitat impairment test** must be applied to any activity that is subject to consistency review under federal and State laws, or under applicable local laws contained in an approved local waterfront revitalization program. If the proposed action is subject to consistency review, then the habitat protection policy applies, whether the proposed action is to occur within or outside the designated area.

The specific **habitat impairment test** is as follows.

In order to protect and preserve a significant habitat, land and water uses or development shall not be undertaken if such actions would:

- destroy the habitat; or,
- significantly impair the viability of a habitat.

Habitat destruction is defined as the loss of fish or wildlife use through direct physical alteration, disturbance, or pollution of a designated area or through the indirect effects of these actions on a designated area. Habitat destruction may be indicated by changes in vegetation, substrate, or hydrology, or increases in runoff, erosion, sedimentation, or pollutants.

Significant impairment is defined as reduction in vital resources (e.g., food, shelter, living space) or change in environmental conditions (e.g., temperature, substrate, salinity) beyond the tolerance range of an organism. Indicators of a significantly impaired habitat focus on ecological alterations and may include but are not limited to reduced carrying capacity, changes in community structure (food chain relationships, species diversity), reduced productivity and/or increased incidence of disease and mortality.

The *tolerance range* of an organism is not defined as the physiological range of conditions beyond which a species will not survive at all, but as the ecological range of conditions that supports the species population or has the potential to support a restored population, where practical. Either the loss of individuals through an increase in emigration or an increase in death rate indicates that the tolerance range of an organism has been exceeded. An abrupt increase in death rate may occur as an

environmental factor falls beyond a tolerance limit (a range has both upper and lower limits). Many environmental factors, however, do not have a sharply defined tolerance limit, but produce increasing emigration or death rates with increasing departure from conditions that are optimal for the species.

The range of parameters which should be considered in applying the habitat impairment test include but are not limited to the following:

1. physical parameters such as living space, circulation, flushing rates, tidal amplitude, turbidity, water temperature, depth (including loss of littoral zone), morphology, substrate type, vegetation, structure, erosion and sedimentation rates;
2. biological parameters such as community structure, food chain relationships, species diversity, predator/prey relationships, population size, mortality rates, reproductive rates, meristic features, behavioral patterns and migratory patterns; and,
3. chemical parameters such as dissolved oxygen, carbon dioxide, acidity, dissolved solids, nutrients, organics, salinity, and pollutants (heavy metals, toxics and hazardous materials).

Although not comprehensive, examples of generic activities and impacts which could destroy or significantly impair the habitat are listed in the Impact Assessment section to assist in applying the habitat impairment test to a proposed activity.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

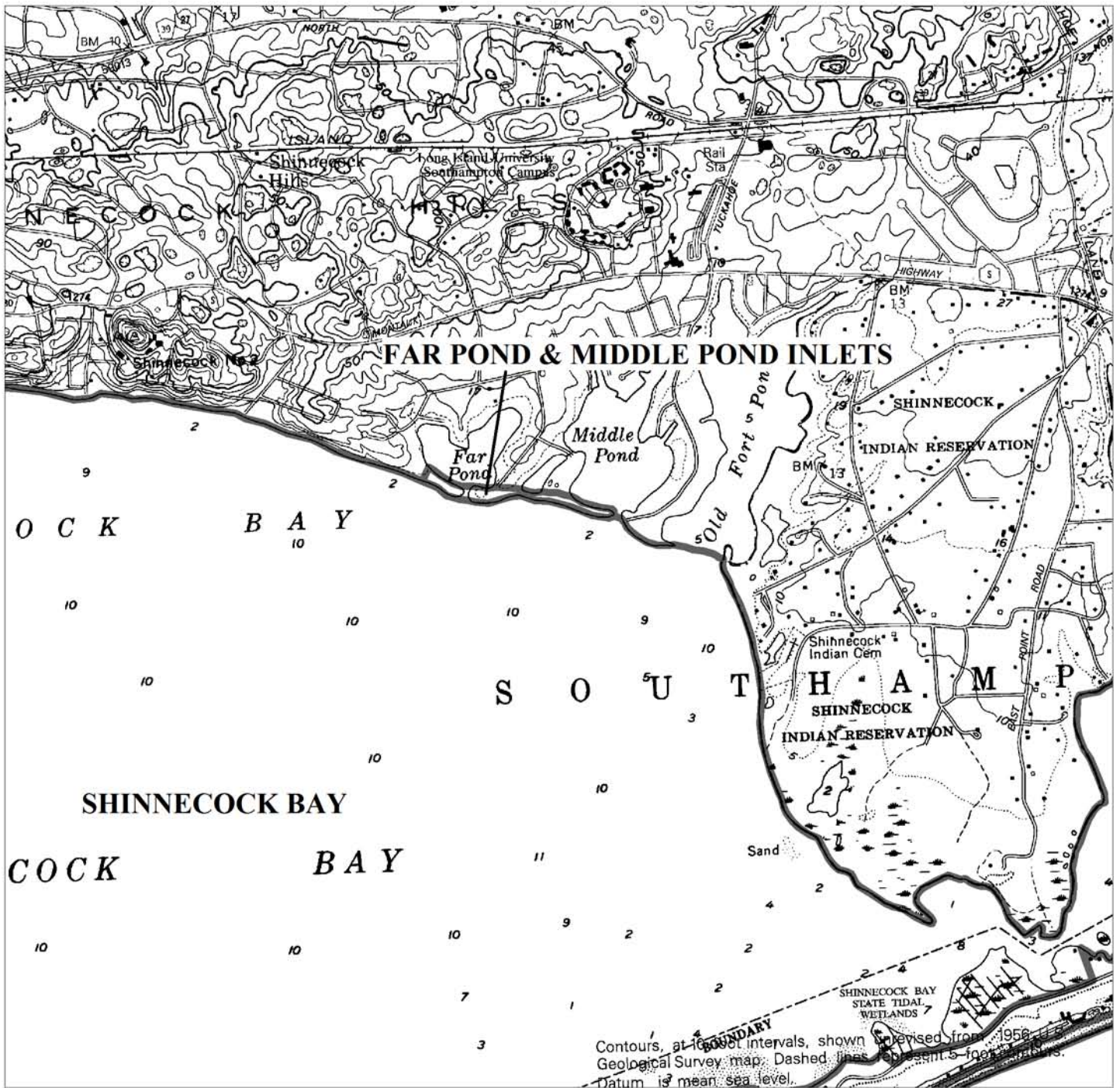
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Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats



Far Pond & Middle Pond Inlets
Shinnecock Bay (In Part)

