

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Hither Hills Uplands**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **East Hampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Gardiners Island East, NY; Montauk Point, 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: One of the largest undeveloped tracts of coastal uplands, dominated by deciduous forest, on Long Island. Maritime interdunal swales of regional significance. 16

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: Blue spotted salamander (SC) reside in the area; northern harrier (T), red shouldered hawk (SC), whip-poor-will (SC), eastern hognose snake (SC), box turtle (SC) and spotted turtle (SC) use the area. Calculation: $25 + (16/2) + (16/4) + (16/8) + (16/16) =$ 40

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: Opportunities for hunting and freshwater fishing attract residents from throughout Long Island. 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: Only significant wild turkey population on the South Fork, one of only 3 populations 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] = 74

Significance = HI x R = 88.8

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

HITHER HILLS UPLANDS

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Hither Hills Uplands is located between Napeague Harbor and the hamlet of Montauk, on the south fork of Long Island, in the Town of East Hampton, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangles: Gardiners Island East, NY; and Montauk Point, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat consists of approximately 2,700 acres of undeveloped coastal land, bounded generally by Napeague State Park to the west, Napeague Bay to the west and north, the Montauk landfill to the east, and the Montauk Highway (NYS Route 27) to the south. Vegetative communities within the area include second growth and mature hardwood (oak-hickory) forest, maritime moorlands, dunelands (including the Walking Dunes), freshwater wetlands, old field ("downs"), shrublands, and an approximate 25 acre, shallow, freshwater pond (Fresh Pond). The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented high quality examples of several rare communities in the Park, including coastal oak-heath forest, coastal oak-laurel forest, globally rare maritime oak-holly forest, maritime interdunal swales, and maritime pitch pine dune woodlands. The only human developments within the area are the Long Island Railroad, a power transmission line corridor, and a network of unpaved roads and trails providing public access. Hither Hills Uplands includes nearly all of the undeveloped portion of Hither Hills State Park north of the Montauk Highway, a contiguous area of privately owned land to the east of the park, the County-owned Lee Koppelman Preserve, and the State-, County-, and Town-owned Hither Woods Preserve. Portions of the Hither Hills State Park area of this site were disturbed by fire in 1987.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Hither Hills Uplands represents one of the largest undeveloped tracts of coastal upland area on Long Island, including one of the largest deciduous forests in the region. The Walking Dunes contain maritime interdunal swales of regional significance. Globally rare maritime oak-holly forest is also found in the Park.

The area provides much suitable habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including white-tailed deer, red fox, striped skunk, raccoon, gray squirrel, eastern cottontail, ruffed grouse, broad-winged hawk, mallard, wood duck, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk (SC), northern harrier (T), eastern bluebird, bobwhite quail, American woodcock, great-horned owl, Acadian flycatcher, blue-gray gnatcatcher, red-eyed vireo, eastern hognose snake (SC), spotted turtle (SC), eastern box turtle (SC), four-toed salamander and Fowler's toad. Several of these species are dependent on relatively large tracts of undeveloped forestland for their survival. A 1993-1994 breeding bird survey recorded high nest densities of black-and-white warbler, prairie warbler, blue-winged warbler, rufous-sided towhee, and whip-poor-will (SC). In 1993, the NYS DEC selected Hither Hills State Park as one of only two sites on Long Island for reintroduction of wild turkeys.

Spotted salamanders and blue spotted salamanders (SC) are common in the area around Fresh Pond. The populations of blue spotted salamander in Montauk are unique because they are comprised of non-hybridized animals. Most mainland populations of this species have hybridized with Jefferson salamander. Fresh Pond contains a warmwater fish community, dominated by largemouth bass, yellow perch, and banded killifish. Pumpkinseed, bluegill, black crappie, brown bullhead, and smallmouth bass were stocked in Fresh Pond prior to 1994, and are now established and support a relatively productive recreational fishery. The acid nature of the pond may limit fish species diversity and production.

The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented a number of rare plant species in the Park, including Nantucket juneberry (*Amelanchier nantucketensis*, E), pine-barren sandwort (*Minuartia caroliniana*), and bushy rockrose (*Helianthemum dumosum*; T). The Walking Dunes area on the western side of this site contains excellent examples of a maritime interdunal swales community, and is of regional significance. The rare noctuid moth, *Euxoa pleuritica*, is found in the Walking Dunes.

The Hither Hills Uplands area provides significant opportunities for human use and enjoyment of fish and wildlife resources. Hunting is allowed throughout much of the area, and sportsmen from throughout Long Island come here to pursue a variety of game species, especially white-tailed deer. Relatively few public deer hunting areas exist in this region. Fresh Pond, because it is accessible to the public, is an important freshwater fishing area for residents of Long Island. Hither Hills Uplands is also locally popular for birdwatchers seeking hawks, owls, woodpeckers, and a variety of passerine bird species.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

The fish and wildlife resources of Hither Hills Uplands would be affected primarily by major habitat alterations, or modification of public access to the area. Habitat modifications which substantially change the natural character of the area, such as residential, commercial, industrial, or public utility developments, would have a significant impact on many wildlife species in the area. Fragmentation of, or development within, large areas of mature woodland or wetlands would be especially detrimental, particularly to forest interior bird species that rely on large, undisturbed blocks of woodland for habitat. Any substantial habitat alterations, if other than for fish and wildlife management purposes, should be avoided in interior areas of Hither Hills Uplands.

Phragmites australis has invaded the interdunal swales in this area. 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.

Proposed development of drinking water wells to serve Montauk could lead to a lowered water table, adversely affecting area wetlands and reducing flow in Flaggy Hole and other water table dependent areas.

Activities designed to enhance human access to the area for fish and wildlife related recreation may be compatible with protection of the existing resources. The addition of trails through the area, however, may promote the invasion of nuisance and exotic species. Uncontrolled recreational

vehicle use of the area can contribute to erosion and may result in loss of habitat in Hither Hills Uplands, and should be carefully monitored and managed.

Fresh Pond and a buffer area around it should be maintained as an important component of the Hither Hills Uplands fish and wildlife habitat. Prescribed burning within the Hither Hills Uplands site may be beneficial in maintaining rare vegetation communities and their associated wildlife species. The Town of East Hampton recommends the development of a coordinated fire management plan for state, county, town and The Nature Conservancy holdings in this area.

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