

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Little Creek and Beach**
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, creek and sand beach, unusual 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: Osprey (SC) and diamondback terrapin (SC) nesting. Piping plover (E, T-Fed) may nest, but not adequately documented. 24

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: Commercial and recreational crabbing, scalloping, and clamming of local importance. 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: No unusual concentration of any fish or wildlife species occur in the area. 0

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: Uncertain of ability of replace. 1.0

Habitat Index = [ER + SV + HU + PL] = 24

Significance = HI x R = 24

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

LITTLE CREEK AND BEACH

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

The Little Creek and Beach habitat area is located just north of Little Hog Neck facing Little Peconic Bay in the Town of Southold, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Southold, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat is approximately 45 acres in size, consisting of sparsely vegetated sand beach, a tidal inlet, a small protected bay and creek (Little Creek), mud flats and salt marsh. There is low density residential development, concentrated on the west side, bordering the area.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Little Creek and Beach is a small coastal beach/creek/wetland area, similar in nature to other creeks around the Peconic Bays shoreline, but unusual in that it is mostly undeveloped. The area is important as a habitat for various fish and wildlife species.

The habitat is a confirmed nesting area for diamondback terrapin which are relatively uncommon on the north fork. This species lays its eggs on the sand beaches bordering the marsh. The tidal creek and salt marsh provide feeding and cover for diamondback terrapin during this period (April 1 through August 15). This area may provide important breeding habitat for horseshoe crab, but additional documentation is required.

Piping plover (E, T-Fed) nested on the beach in 1983, and have been documented only once again (1996, one pair) in the 1986-1996 period. Osprey (SC) nesting has been confirmed on Little Creek Beach. The tidal marsh serves an important feeding area for the terrapin, osprey, shorebirds and other wildlife. The creek is also important for various species of marine shellfish and finfish. Fish species reported from this area include flounder, weakfish, and snappers. Little Creek is one of the better areas in the town for crabbing and is also locally important for clamming and scalloping.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Nesting shorebirds inhabiting Little Creek and Beach are highly vulnerable to disturbance by humans, especially during the nesting and fledging period (March 15 through August 15). Diamondback terrapin are vulnerable to disturbance by humans from April 1 and 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.

The creek is dredged annually; these activities should be scheduled to occur between September 15 and December 15 to minimize potential impacts on aquatic organisms and to allow for dredged material disposal when wildlife populations are least sensitive to disturbance. Dredged material disposal in this area would be detrimental but such activities may be designed to maintain or improve the habitat by setting back vegetative succession.

Elimination of salt marsh vegetation, through loss of tidal connection, ditching, shoreline hardening, landfilling, dredged material disposal or excavation would result in a direct loss of habitat area. Alternative strategies for the protection of shoreline property should be examined, including innovative, vegetation-based approaches. Alteration of tidal flow patterns in the marsh (*e.g.*, by modifying the inlet) could have major impacts on the fish and wildlife as well as the salt marsh. 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.

Any activity that would substantially degrade the water quality of Little Creek would adversely affect the biological productivity of this area. All species of fish and wildlife are affected by water pollution, such as chemical contamination (including food chain effects resulting from bioaccumulation), oil spills, excessive turbidity, stormwater or road runoff, and waste disposal. Barriers to fish migration, whether physical or chemical, would have a major impact on the fisheries in Little Creek.

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.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

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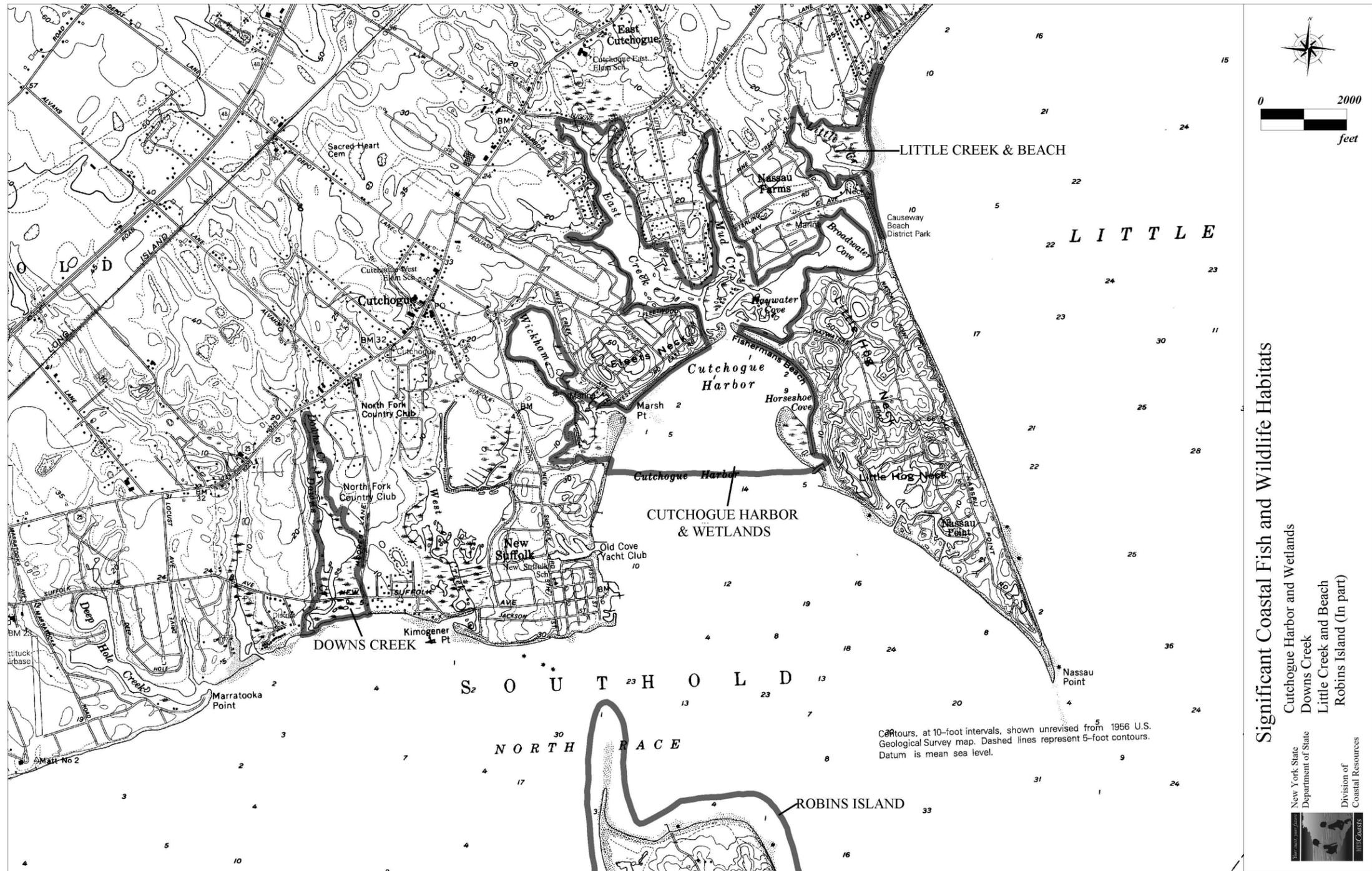
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