

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

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Name of Area: **Richmond Creek and Beach**  
Designated: **March 15, 1987**  
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**  
County: **Suffolk**  
Town(s): **Southold**  
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Southold, NY**

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**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: Tidal creek, undeveloped sand peninsula, and salt marsh unusual in Suffolk County, but rarity diminished by dredging and development along the creek. 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) nest in the area. Piping plover (E, T-Fed) have nested in the area, but the importance of the colony is not adequately documented. 25

**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: Crabbing 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 concentrations 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 to replace. 1.0

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**Habitat Index = [ER + SV + HU + PL] = 25.0**

**Significance = HI x R = 25.0**

NEW YORK STATE  
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT  
NARRATIVE

**RICHMOND CREEK AND BEACH**

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Richmond Creek and Beach is located just west of Great Hog Neck with an inlet into Little Peconic Bay, Town of Southold, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Southold, NY). The fish and wildlife habitat is approximately 135 acres in size consisting of a sand peninsula, salt marsh, and tidal creek. The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented the occurrence of seaside plantain, a rare plant species, at Richmond Creek. There is moderate residential development along the borders of the creek, portions of which have been dredged and bulkheaded. Much of the creek is lined by *Spartina alterniflora* (smooth cordgrass). The creek itself tends to be muddy.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

The creek/beach/marsh ecosystem at Richmond Creek is similar to other creeks in the area but serves as an important habitat to several vulnerable wildlife species.

Diamondback terrapin nest on the beach. The tidal creek and salt marshes provide feeding areas and cover for terrapins during this period (April - July). This area may provide important breeding habitat for horseshoe crab, but additional documentation is required.

The beach has historically been a nesting area for least terns (T) and piping plover (E, T-Fed). Least tern nested annually at this site between 1987 and 1996 in variable abundances. A peak number of 52 nesting pairs occurred in 1989, and numbers have declined during the 1990s. Piping plover nested in small numbers at Richmond Beach during the late 1980s, but have been documented only twice since that time (in 1995 and 1997). Further information on the importance of this beach to the piping plover population is needed. Two pairs of common tern (T) nested on Richmond Creek Beach in 1988. Waterfowl species observed overwintering in the Richmond Creek area include Canada goose, American black duck, mallard, oldsquaw, bufflehead, red-breasted merganser, surf scoter, and common goldeneye.

Richmond Creek is also a productive habitat for finfish, shellfish and crustaceans, including blue claw crabs, clams and scallops. The creek is one of the top two creeks for crabbing in the town and is also important for clamming. Richmond Creek is seasonally closed to shellfishing from April 1 through October 31.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Diamondback terrapin are vulnerable to disturbance by humans from April 1 through August 15. Nesting shorebirds inhabiting Richmond Creek and Beach 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.

Elimination of salt marsh vegetation, through loss of tidal connection, landfilling, dredged material disposal or excavation would result in a direct loss of habitat area. Alterations of tidal patterns in the marsh (*e.g.*, by modifying the inlet) could have major impacts on the fish and wildlife species present. Construction of bulkheads, breakwaters, revetments, and other “hard” shoreline structures negatively impact tidal wetland habitats. 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.

Any activity that would substantially degrade the water quality of Richmond 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 as a result of bioaccumulation), oil spills, sedimentation, excessive turbidity, stormwater runoff, and waste disposal (including boat wastes). Impacts to water quality in the creek should be minimized or eliminated to enhance locally important shellfish and crustacean populations. Barriers to fish migration, whether physical or chemical would have a major impact on the fisheries in Richmond 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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- Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats**
- Cedar Beach Point
  - Corey Creek
  - Jockey Creek Sandspit
  - Little Creek and Beach
  - Richmond Creek and Beach
  - Cutchogue Harbor and Wetlands (In part)
  - Noyack Bay Beaches (In part)
- New York State  
Department of State  
Division of  
Coastal Resources
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