

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT FORM

Name of Area: **Robins Island**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
Date Revised: **May 15, 2002**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **Southold**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Southampton, 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: Undeveloped marine island is rare in New York State. 64

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: Eastern mud turtle (E) found here. Osprey (SC) nesting. Piping plover (E, T-Fed) and least tern (T) also nest periodically.
Calculation: $36 + (36/2) + (25/4) + (16/8) =$ 62.25

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: Access to this island is restricted and, therefore, there is no recreational or commercial fish and wildlife related human use. 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: The concentration of nesting ospreys is unusual in the State of New York. 16

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] = 142.3

Significance = HI x R = 170.7

NEW YORK STATE
SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
NARRATIVE

ROBINS ISLAND

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Robins Island is situated between Great and Little Peconic Bays, Long Island. This island lies approximately one and one-quarter miles southwest of Little Hog Neck, in the Town of Southold, Suffolk County (7.5' Quadrangle: Southampton, NY). Robins Island is an undeveloped marine island, approximately 450 acres in size. It includes approximately four miles of stony beach, several freshwater and tidal saltwater marshes, an island pond and bog, mature wooded areas, grassland and maritime shrublands. The island is privately owned with a protective easement on all land except pre-existing built areas, and one new single family house.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES:

Undeveloped marine islands of this size are rare in New York State. Robins Island provides a secluded habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including several endangered and threatened species. The New York Natural Heritage Program has documented occurrences of a number of rare plants and ecological communities on the island, including salt-marsh spikerush, purple everlasting, seabeach knotweed, and the coastal salt pond community.

Osprey (SC) nests have often been observed on the shores of the island with 8 active nest sites currently documented. Robins Island is the only area on Long Island where osprey are known to nest on natural structures rather than man-made platforms.

Least terns (T), roseate terns (E), and common terns (T) were reported nesting on the island's beaches in 1976; however, only least tern have been documented since then. Small numbers of least tern nested here on two occasions in the late 1980s. In 1996, 206 pairs of this species were documented. Piping plover (E, T-Fed) have nested sporadically and in small numbers (1-2 pairs) since the mid-1980s.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, black-crowned night herons, snowy egrets, yellow-crowned night herons, and green herons nested in an extensive heronry which is no longer present. These species still feed in and around the marshes located at the northwestern end of Robins Island. Red-tailed hawks and great-horned owls may also nest on the island. Shorebirds utilize the shores and marshes as feeding grounds during migration, including black-bellied plover, ruddy turnstone, lesser yellowlegs, greater yellowlegs, sanderling, and semi-palmated sandpiper. The Robins Island nearshore area is an important overwintering area for populations of American black duck, and for sea ducks such as white-winged scoter, surf scoter, and black scoter. A colony of bank swallows nest in the sandy bluffs located on the western shoreline of the island. Approximately 400 acres of upland oak-hickory woods provide habitat for a variety of passerine birds and a population of white-tailed deer.

Wetlands on the island support one of the best populations of eastern mud turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum*, E) in New York State. Spotted salamander are also found on Robin's Island.

The waters in the vicinity of Robins Island provide an important recreational fishery and lobster harvest, as well as some scallop harvesting opportunities. However, because access is restricted, there is currently no recreational use of the island itself.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Human disturbance of any part of Robins Island, including the beaches, marshes or woodlands would adversely affect the wildlife species which nest and feed on and around this almost uninhabited island. Any activity affecting the water quality in this area would adversely impact the bay scallop and other fisheries here.

Any alteration of hydrology on the island, such as artificial openings to the bay or water diversions for construction or other activities, could negatively impact the rare coastal salt pond habitat. Elimination of open water or wetland areas, through excavation, filling, or shoreline hardening, would result in a direct loss of valuable habitat in coastal ponds and other habitats on the island. 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.

Nesting shorebirds inhabiting Robins Island 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.

The feasibility of restoring historical nesting bird populations on the island, such as common tern and roseate tern populations and the diverse heronry should be studied.

KNOWLEDGEABLE CONTACTS:

Habitat Unit
NYS Department of State
Division of Coastal Resources
41 State Street
Albany, NY 12231
Phone: (518) 474-6000

NYSDEC—Region 1
State University of New York, Building 40
Stony Brook, NY 11790-2356
Phone: (631) 444-0354

Wildlife Manager
NYSDEC—Region 1
State University of New York, Building 40
Stony Brook, NY 11790
Phone: (631) 444-0310

Bureau of Marine Resources
NYSDEC
205 N. Belle Meade Road, Suite 1
East Setauket, NY 11733
Phone: (631) 444-0430

New York Natural Heritage Program
Wildlife Resources Center
700 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110
Phone: (518) 783-3932

Town of Southold
Town Hall
53095 Main Road; P.O. Box 1179
Southold, NY 11971
Phone: (631) 765-1801

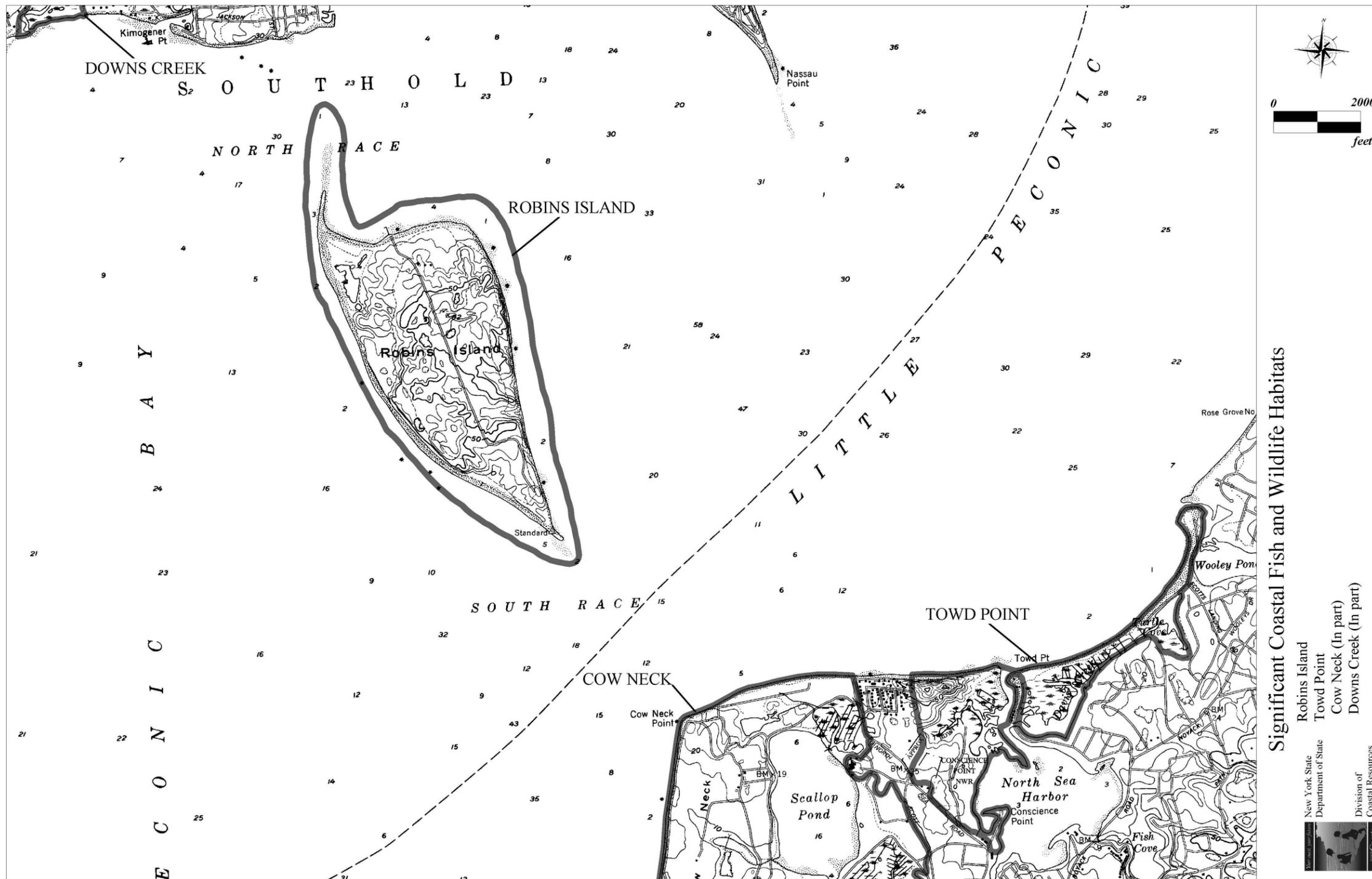
Office of Ecology
Suffolk County Dept. of Health Services
Bureau of Environmental Management
County Center
Riverhead, NY 11901
Phone: (631) 852-2077

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Marine Program
3690 Cedar Beach Road
Southold, NY 11971
Phone: (631) 852-8660

Mike Scheibel
The Nature Conservancy
Mashomack Preserve
79 South Ferry Road
Shelter Island, NY 11964
Phone: (631) 749-1637

Norman Soule
Cold Spring Harbor Fish Hatchery
P.O. Box 535
Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724
Phone: (631) 692-6768

Paul Stoutenburgh
4015 Skunk Lane
Cutchogue, NY 11935
Phone: (631) 734-6605



Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats

- Robins Island
- Towd Point
- Cow Neck (In part)
- Downs Creek (In part)



To print on 8.5 x 11 set printer to Fit to Print or reduce by 64%