

COASTAL FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT RATING FORM

Name of Area: **Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor**
Designated: **March 15, 1987**
County: **Suffolk**
Town(s): **East Hampton, Shelter Island, Southampton**
7½' Quadrangle(s): **Gardiners Island West, NY; Greenport, NY**

Score **Criterion**

- 20** Ecosystem Rarity (ER)
Moderately shallow open water bays; not unusual in Peconic Bays area, but relatively uncommon on Long Island. Geometric mean: $(16 \times 25)^{1/2} = 20$.
- 0** Species Vulnerability (SV)
No endangered, threatened or special concern species reside in the area.
- 27** Human Use (HU)
Commercial bay scallop shellfishery significant in the northeastern United States; recreational fishery of county-level significance. Additive division: $25 + 4/2 = 27$.
- 16** Population Level (PL)
One of five major concentration areas for harbor seals wintering in New York State.
- 1.2** Replaceability (R)
Irreplaceable.

SIGNIFICANCE VALUE = [(ER + SV + HU + PL) X R] = **76**

SIGNIFICANT COASTAL FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

SAG HARBOR AND NORTHWEST HARBOR

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT:

Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor are adjoining bays on the north shore of the south fork of Long Island. The bays are located between North Haven and Cedar Point, in the Towns of East Hampton, Southampton, and Shelter Island, Suffolk County (7.5 Quadrangles: Greenport, N.Y.; and Gardiners Island West, N.Y.). This area is approximately 3000 acres in size, consisting primarily of open water. However, the fish and wildlife habitat also includes the tidal wetlands associated with Little Northwest Creek, and exposed rocks located near the Sag Harbor Cove jetty. Water depths in most of Sag and Northwest Harbors range from 6 to 20 feet below mean low water. The bays are bordered by much undeveloped land, including Suffolk County parklands and The Nature Conservancy's Mashomack Preserve. The NYSDEC owns approximately 190 acres of land surrounding Little Northwest Creek. The only major developments along the entire shoreline of these bays are the boating facilities in Sag Harbor Cove.

FISH AND WILDLIFE VALUES :

Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor are generally representative of the Peconic Bays ecosystem, with broad expanses of moderately shallow water. This habitat type is unlike the very shallow bays on the south shore of Long Island or the relatively narrow bays on the north shore. Little Northwest Creek is an important component of this ecosystem, contributing to the biological productivity of the area.

Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor are important to fish and wildlife throughout the year. Least tern (E), piping plover (T), and osprey (T) feed in the harbor area. Diamondback terrapin are scattered along the harbor coastline and tidal creeks but the importance of the area to this species is not well documented. From November through March, Sag and Northwest Harbors support wintering water-fowl concentrations of county-level significance. Mid-winter aerial surveys of waterfowl abundance for the ten year period 1975-1984 indicate average concentrations of over 440 birds in the bays each year (1,082 in peak year), including scaup, black duck, common goldeneye, bufflehead, red-breasted merganser, canvasback, mallard, and Canada goose. During much of the same time period (December - early May), concentrations of harbor seals also occur in Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor. Exposed rocks near the Sag Harbor Cove jetty provide an important "haulout" area, which seals use for resting and sunning. This location is one of about five major haulouts around Long Island, serving as a focal point for seals feeding in the Sag Harbor area. Northwest Harbor may also be important feeding and resting habitat for juvenile Kemp's Ridley sea turtles (E) especially during the late summer and fall. More documentation is needed on the use of the area by this species as well as other sea turtle species.

Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor are productive habitats for marine finfish and shellfish. This area is one of the most important bay scallop producing areas on Long Island, supporting a commercial shellfishery significant in the north-eastern United States. Oysters are present in lesser numbers, providing limited recreational and commercial shellfishing opportunities. The bays serve as nursery and feeding areas (April-November, generally) for many estuarine fish species, such as weakfish, winter flounder, and scup. Northwest Harbor sustains a commercial and recreational winter flounder fishery of county-level significance. Fishing pressure in the area extends from spring through fall.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT :

Any activity that would substantially degrade the water quality in Sag Harbor or Northwest Harbor would affect the biological productivity of this area. All species of fish and wildlife would be adversely affected by water pollution, such as chemical contamination (including food chain effects), oil spills, excessive turbidity or sedimentation, and waste disposal. It is essential that high water quality be maintained in the area to protect the shellfishery. Efforts should be made to control discharges of sewage from recreational boats and upland sources. Thermal discharges,

depending on time of year, may have variable effects on use of the area by marine species and wintering waterfowl. Installation and operation of water intakes would have significant impacts on juvenile (and adult, in some cases) fish concentrations, through impingement or entrainment. Construction of shoreline structures, such as docks, piers, bulkheads, or revetments, in areas not previously disturbed by development (i.e., natural beach or salt marsh), may result in the loss of productive areas which support the fish and wildlife resources of Sag and Northwest Harbors. Undeveloped woodlands bordering Sag Harbor and Northwest Harbor are particularly important for maintaining the water quality and habitat value of the harbors and should be preserved as a buffer zone. Any permanent alteration or human disturbance of the harbor seal haulout area, or obstruction of seal migrations, would adversely affect this species. Significant underwater noise, from dredging or other activities, could also preclude harbor seals from using the area.

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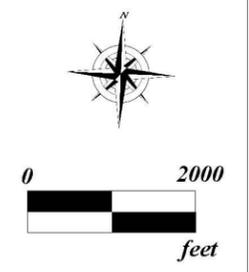
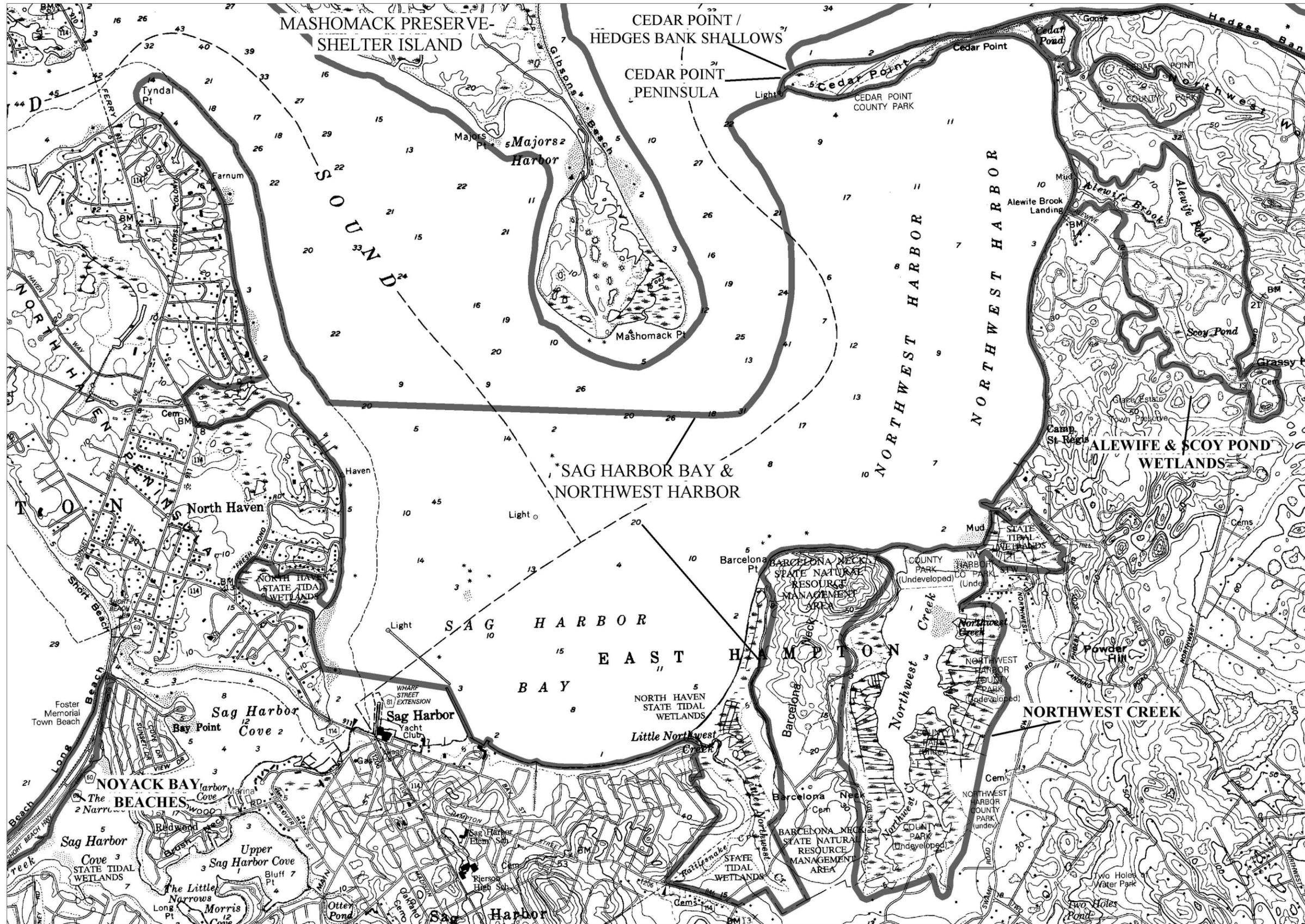
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Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats

- Cedar Point / Hedges Bank Shallows (In part)
- Mashomack Preserve - Shelter Island (In part)
- Noyack Bay Beaches (In part)

- Alewife and Scoy Pond Wetlands
- Cedar Point Peninsula
- Northwest Creek
- Sag Harbor Bay and Northwest Harbor

