

**Robinson Duck Farm County Park Habitat Restoration Work Group
Public Meeting**

**MEETING SUMMARY
January 28, 2010
Meeting Number 4**

Location: Southaven County Park Lodge, Victory Avenue, Brookhaven, NY

Start/End: 2:00 p.m./3:45 p.m.

Attending: *Work Group/Participating Staff*
Thomas Isles, DeWitt Davies, Laretta Fischer, Michael Mulé, Susan Filipowich,
John Pavacic, Diana Sanford, Terry Maccarrone, Daniel Lewis, Emily Fogarty,
Timothy Rothang, Azucena Ponce, Elyse O'Brien, Ralph Borkowski, Anthony
Graves, Claire Goad, Thomas Williams, Barbara DelGiudice

Consultants
Robert Grover, Steven Handel

Materials

Distributed: Meeting Agenda; October 14, 2009 Meeting Summary; Comments received on
Task Reports 1 – 4; Draft Task 5 Report – Management Goals and Restoration
Priorities for Robinson Duck Farm County Park.

Note: Copies of above materials are available and can be obtained by request from Ms.
Barbara DelGiudice (Barbara.Delgiudice@suffolkcountyny.gov/631-853-5111).

Welcome and Introductions

County Planning Department Director, Thomas Isles opened the meeting with welcoming and introductory remarks.

Review of October 14, 2009 Work Group Meeting Summary

T. Isles went over the summary from the October 14th meeting and reviewed the meeting packet handouts.

Update – Establishment of Dog Park on Site

Michael Mulé presented slides of the established Dog Park and gave a description of the site location and established dog run boundaries.

Claire Goad expressed concern about the location of the entrance to the dog park with respect to traffic safety. She suggested the County have hidden driveway signs installed on Montauk HWY.

Daniel Lewis stated that there may be outstanding regulatory issues with the dog park due to the Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers regulations. He also stated “parks” are prohibited in the WSRR Corridor, but that the County could apply for a variance from the state. He stated the County will need a Wild, Scenic and Recreational River Act permit and the plan should reflect this.

John Pavacic stated this was a preexisting park and the WSRR may not apply.

D. Lewis stated the Carmans River was placed in the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Corridor in the 70’s and the regulations do apply. He also mentioned that any signage within the WSRR would be restricted in size and that no signage could be within 250’ of the riverbank.

Timothy Rothang asked what the parking lot capacity was for the dog park.

J. Pavacic responded that about 10 cars could fit in the enclosed parking area.

C. Goad stated she usually sees over 10 cars in that parking area on the weekends; she questioned if this dog park was still considered temporary.

J. Pavacic explained that they are still considering this a pilot area, and would be evaluating this dog park in six months to a year to see if any additional adjustments need to be made.

D. Lewis commented that the snow fencing makes this seem more permanent than the original plan proposed, and thought this park was to be “natural borders.”

Thomas Williams stated that if the snow fencing was not in place the dogs might be running all over the property.

D. Lewis commented that this is where the County may agree that the fencing makes this a “park” and should apply for a variance.

Anthony Graves asked if there were any plans to expand the dog park based on public use.

J. Pavacic said that there are no plans to expand the dog park, but the Parks Dept. is on track to establish other dog parks around the County.

Steven Handel noted to the group that there is additional information in Appendix D of the Task 5.0 report that discusses the various impacts of dog parks.

Subsequent to this meeting, Nick Gibbons, Principal Environmental Analyst, Suffolk County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation prepared the following response to the comments made regarding the Dog Run Area on the Robinson Duck Farm County Park.

- 1) Parks disagrees with the suggestion by NYSDEC that the dog run requires a WSRR permit. We believe this to be a non-motorized recreational use, which is permitted under their regs. The commissioner and I have been over this issue several times and agree that all of the dog run facilities are temporary in nature and, therefore, a pilot program. We are confident that any of the signage and/or other temporary improvements (fencing, crushed stone) are located a significant distance from the river and, therefore, not likely to exceed any of the WSRR thresholds.*
- 2) Parks position regarding the dog park is that it is a pilot project and that the snowfencing is a temporary, symbolic fencing that was installed in order to limit the dog use to the authorized dog area. The installation of said snowfence does not make it any more a “park;” the park existed before snowfence and continues to exist as a park. A “variance” from NYSDEC is not warranted, nor will one be sought.*
- 3) Parks questions how the dog park is a fragmenting feature between habitats. Given that the site location was chosen for its proximity to Montauk Highway, and that it is contained within the old field habitat, it seems the ideal location within the property. The attempted (and failed) grassland restoration area included a portion of the dog run area. However, at this point in time, it is appropriate to treat the entire old field as one unit, whatever efforts were made at warm-season grass establishment are largely lost at this time, unfortunately.*

Review of Final Tasks 2, 3, & 4 – Identify Recognized Environmental Conditions, Phase II Environmental Site Assessment, and Describe Past and Current Management Activities

DeWitt Davies discussed corrections for Tasks 2, 3, and 4. He also reviewed the comments that have been submitted over the duration of this project.

C. Goad asked if it would be possible to add canoe/kayak rentals on Robinson.

J. Pavacic pointed out that the County does not actually own the river bank and there would be no access for this type of activity.

T. Isles made mention to the Glacier Bay site owned by the Town of Brookhaven; he asked if this site could be used as an alternative launch location.

A. Graves stated that Town of Brookhaven acquired the Glacier Bay site using Open Space funds, and a vendor would not be permitted to operate at this location, but this did not preclude the public from bringing in their own kayaks and launching there.

T. Williams stated that there is potential for access on the Post Morrow Foundation property down by the Maritime Center.

Review Draft Task 5 Report – Management Goals and Restoration Priorities

S. Handel from Green Shield Ecology presented a PowerPoint presentation on the Robinson Duck Farm Task 5 Draft Report.

- Value of diverse habitat
 - Support complex life histories
 - Feeding sites through time
 - Protection from predators and storms
 - Change through the years
 - Varied experiences for people
- Grassland/Meadow Habitat
 - Remove invasive species (i.e. mugwort)
 - Restore native grasses and wildflowers
 - Increase grassland bird and insect species
 - Establish shrublands near eastern edges
 - Install clusters of rocks and old logs near habitat edge.
- Oak-Pitch Pine Forest
 - Remove invasive species (i.e. vines, shrubs, herbs and most trees)
 - Plant shrubs and canopy trees native to oak-pitch pine forests
 - Install deer fencing around planted native species
- Heathland
 - Facilitate further establishment of beach heather
 - Limit disturbance to heather presently found there

- Remove encroaching invasive species
- Plant surrounding areas with native grasses and shrubs that compliment this already established habitat
- Tidal and Freshwater Wetlands
 - Remove some/all dikes
 - Excavate to remove common reed (Phragmites) rhizomes
 - Cut and treat with herbicide and/or fire
 - Restore native vegetation and stabilize banks
 - Coordinate with USFWS staff on management of Phragmites
- Additional Recommendation
 - Create either an on site nursery or refuge zone for native plant collection
 - Designate an area on the site near area used for maintenance equipment storage for dead wood and other restoration materials
- Ecological Opportunities
 - Restore natural heritage of the land
 - Restore ecological functions
 - Minimize, but not eliminate, management needs and costs
 - Improve biodiversity in surrounding areas
 - Add ecological resiliency for the future

Comments

T. Williams asked if the plan concept called for connecting the RDF grassland with the Wertheim grassland to the west.

S. Handel recommended the removal of the invasive species that separate the two grasslands, and that there will be one contiguous area of grassland as this step of the project is completed. He stated this is one habitat regardless of who owns it and coordination between the County and the Werthiem will be essential.

T. Williams stated that he liked the idea of taking climate change into consideration and that it had been incorporated in the future plans for the park. He also asked if this was the “ideal” restoration plan, or one developed based on budgetary considerations.

Robert Grover answered that it is a very good plan from a technical feasibility aspect, but that final costs and regulatory constraints need to be worked out during preliminary design.

S. Handel added that, given the high level of habitat degradation and modifications, this complex of restored habitats is feasible in this disturbed environment.

Azucena Ponce asked how many miles of trails there would be and expressed concern for the proposed trails through the grasslands. She felt these trails would interfere with wildlife nesting during the breeding season.

R. Grover replied that these trails are indicated on the plans to be for only seasonal use for that reason.

D. Davies asked about restoration time frames, and asked how long will “active management” be necessary?

S. Handel listed the following probable time frames:

Meadow	5-7 years
Woodlands	3 years
Heathlands	1 year
Shrubland	2-3 years
Wetland	3+/- years (depending on Wertheim)

T. Isles asked the work group to express any further concerns or thoughts on this project.

J. Pavacic stated that this is an ambitious proposal, but the County is committed to the restoration of the grasslands, wetlands, and woodland habitats. He added that the next step would be securing funding and that SC Parks is actively looking to move into the next stage of restoration.

A. Graves noted that the dog park separates habitats and asked if it could be reshaped to act as a buffer between the restored areas and the HWY, rather than between the various habitats.

D. Lewis stated that NYSDEC supports the RDF habitat restoration subject to obtaining necessary permits.

Ralph Borkowski asked if the trails would be surfaced.

R. Grover said that would be a design consideration.

T. Isles said that the next phase would be actual design.

D. Davies noted a comparison between the RDF concept plan and the Avalon Park Preserve in Stony Brook. He also asked if there are similar grasslands in other County Parks.

J. Pavacic stated that there were probably 6 grassland meadows in other SC Parks.

Terry Maccarrone stated that this is an ambitious, but promising plan.

C. Goad expressed concerns about vandalism in the cemeteries and also extended her appreciation to the County for all that they have done in helping to restore and maintain some of the cemeteries.

A. Ponce stated that she is very excited about the proposed grassland and shrubland restoration and that Wertheim is on board to coordinate with the County on restoration of the wetland areas that buffer the refuge. She also mentioned opportunities to use local seed sources.

T. Isles asked where the proposed seed nurseries would be located on the property.

S. Handel stated there is potential to have the nurseries located in the cultural areas.

A. Graves noted that RDF might be a good dark skies astronomy site. He also noted the ecological importance of leaving standing dead trees.

D. Davies discussed the schedule for completion of the project. All comments from the work group in regards to the Draft Task 5 report should be submitted to Susan Filipowich, by February 4. SC will then prepare and submit one set of comments on Draft Task 5 to GPI. GPI will then incorporate all comments into a Final Task 5 Report, which will appear as a chapter in the draft Task 6 – Park Management and Habitat Restoration Report.

Comments

T. Williams asked if this would be the last meeting of the work group, and if so what would be expected from the group once they have reviewed the Task 6 Report. He stated that he would like to be able to express his support for this project and would like see this project keep moving forward.

Tom Isles stated that this would be the last meeting of the work group, but would like to get final review of the Task 6 report from the group.

T. Rothang asked what would happen to the current dog park location if the dog park was discontinued or relocated.

R. Grover said that it would most likely be added to the grassland restoration area.

T. Williams asked what type of management activities are going to take place within the dog run area to make sure that invasives don't creep back into the restored grassland areas.

R. Grover stated that the dog park area would require frequent mowing.

S. Handel added that a cedar border would help protect against a spread and also reduce any odors coming from the dog run area.

There were no members of the public present.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.