

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

**MEETING SUMMARY
October 14, 2009
Meeting Number 3**

Location: Southaven County Park Lodge, Victory Avenue, Brookhaven, New York

Start/End: 2:00 p.m. /4:15 p.m.

Attending: *Work Group/Participating Staff*
Thomas Isles, DeWitt Davies, Laretta Fischer, Michael Mulé, Susan Filipowich, John Pavacic, Nick Gibbons, Diana Sanford, Terry Maccarone, Ralph Borkowski, Emily Fogarty, Timothy Rothang, Monica Williams, Anthony Graves, Claire Goad, Thomas Williams

Consultants/County Staff
Robert Grover, Keith Holley, Steven Handel, Kristen Ross, Bryan Devaux, Barbara DelGiudice

Others
Robert Kessler

Materials

Distributed: Meeting Agenda; June 17, 2009 Meeting Summary; Final Task 1 Report – Inventory and Map Site Conditions; Draft Task 2 Report – Inventory of Environmental Conditions; Draft Task 3 Report – Phase II Environmental Site Analysis; Draft Task 4 Report – Past and Current Management Activities at Robinson Duck Farm County Park and Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge.

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, began the meeting with the welcoming statement and introductory remarks.

Review of June 17, 2009 Work Group Meeting Summary

T. Isles went over the summary from the June 17 meeting and reviewed the meeting packet handouts. T. Isles also discussed the website and how all agendas, reports, meeting summaries and other pertinent information could be found on the website.

Final Task 1 – Inventory and Map Site Conditions

Robert Grover discussed the Final Task 1 Report.

1. All comments received during the comment period have been incorporated into the report.
2. Base map has been simplified by splitting it into 3 maps:
 - a. Base Map
 - b. Topographic Map
 - c. Habitat Map
 - i. Significant changes that were made to the map:
 - Maritime Heathland switched to Heathland;
 - Freshwater Wetland line changed to match DEC maps.
3. Reserved Areas Map:
 - d. A fourth map was discussed, though not included in the Final Task 1 Report:
 - i. Map showed preservation of cultural and historic areas (about 15 acres) that are not to be included in the final native restoration areas.

Comments:

DeWitt Davies questioned the ownership of the out parcels as shown on the Base Map in the Task 1 Report.

Michael Mulé stated that the ownership shown on the map is correct.

Lauretta Fischer commented on the classification of the Pitch Pine-Oak Forest. She was concerned that Pitch Pine was not included in the species list. She wanted the reclassification of the forest to be considered.

R. Grover responded that this forest as a whole does have Pine but that the sections of the Pitch Pine-Oak Forest found on the property do not. However, it would still be classified as a Pitch Pine-Oak Forest. Kristen Ross stated that this is a restoration classification, and that these areas are to be restored to this classification, which would be the Pitch Pine-Oak Forest.

Thomas Williams questioned the concern about the classification, and asked if not reclassifying this area would preclude restoration from moving forward in that location.

Review Draft Task 2 and 3 – Identify Recognized Environmental Conditions (Phase 1 hazmat findings) and Phase II Environmental Site Analysis

Brian Devaux, P.W. Grosser Consulting, presented a PowerPoint presentation on the progress of the Phase I and Phase II studies being conducted on the site.

Tasks 2 and 3 have been combined for this part of the project:

1. Based on the Task 2 Report that identified the environmental issues on the site:
 - a. Prior sampling of the duck pond area sediments showed increased levels of Semi-Volatile Organic Compounds (SVOC's), metals, nitrogen and phosphorus.
 - b. The three residential buildings have fuel oil aboveground storage tanks (ASTs) located in the basement.
 - c. The southern farm building was identified to potentially have a former garage/maintenance use. Potential underground storage tank (UST) piping was also identified.
 - d. Suspected leaching structures were identified northwest of the north farm building. These structures appeared partially collapsed and pose a potential safety hazard.
 - e. Former leaching structures were identified east of the former aircraft hangar. These structures are open and pose a potential safety hazard.
 - f. The field located on the western portion of the subject area historically was used as a farm field.

The next three sites were identified, but not sampled, as they will not affect the habitat restoration feasibility study:

- g. A trash/debris pile was located in the wooded area between the residential homes and the former farm field.
 - h. The northern farm building was identified to potentially have an onsite sanitary system.
 - i. A former coal storage area was identified.
2. Findings
 - a. Excavation of the suspected leaching structures, northwest of the north farm building revealed that this was not a leach basin but a foundation of a former building. No further action recommended.
 - b. The southern farm building revealed no indications of staining and the piping observed was not from an oil tank. No further recommendations required.
 - c. The oil tanks associated with the three residential buildings were found to be in good condition with no leaks. No further action recommended.

- d. The former leaching structures east of the hanger were found to be within allowable levels. No further sampling or action needed.
- e. Two test pits were performed in the former agricultural field. Samples from these showed elevated levels of arsenic, nitrate, nitrogen and phosphorus. Further assessment will be required.
- f. Four samples were taken from the former duck swim ponds. They showed elevated levels of several metals and nitrate, nitrogen and phosphorus.

3. Conclusion

- a. Farm Field- further assessment needed of the arsenic levels, as well as the nitrate, nitrogen and phosphorus levels. These levels will need to be considered during the restoration.
- b. Former Swim Ponds- elevated levels of metals, nitrate, nitrogen and phosphorus will need to be considered during restoration. Care will be needed to not release any of the sediments into the Carmans River, and if the soils in this area are removed they may require special handling.

Comments:

T. Williams expressed a general concern about the two residential structures and their septic systems, and what potential impact they could have on the river. Also, he was concerned that the systems could be below groundwater.

B. Devaux stated that these are residential homes, and due to their size and the fact they are isolated, they would not appreciably affect the river.

T. Williams stated that septic systems have been a huge concern along the entire Carman's River, and suggested some kind of assessment be done.

R. Grover clarified that, though the impacts on the river are a concern, they were not part of the scope of this project. The systems could be closed if the structures are to be abandoned.

Anthony Graves stated that he read the Army Corp of Engineers (ACoE) report that showed high levels of SVOC's in the farm field.

B. Devaux stated that the ACoE report did show levels over the standards. However, there were many mistakes with the standards in the report and that the levels were not as bad as shown. D. Davies stated that the ACoE report had several inconsistencies, and that B. Devaux's results should be used. D. Davies also asked if any GPS coordinates were recorded where sampling had taken place. B. Devaux stated that there were no GPS coordinates recorded at the time sampling occurred, but that he would go out and record them at a later date.

Review Task 4 – Describe Past and Current Management Activities and Options for Task 5 – Management Goals and Restoration Priorities:

Steven Handel and K. Ross, Green Shield Ecology, presented a PowerPoint presentation on their findings on the Robinson Duck Farm during site visits and options for the control of the invasive species present.

1. Successional Old Field – was found to have a dominant cover of mugwort with a smattering of native grasses.
 - a. Option 1:
 - i. Mow, treat with herbicides, burn and seed old field. Possibly remove topsoil containing rhizomes.
 - ii. Add soil amendments to decrease pH and limit nitrogen availability.
 - iii. Restore native meadow vegetation.
 - iv. Establish shrubland near eastern edges.
 - b. Option 2:
 - i. Continue mowing but change schedule to decrease mugwort.
 - ii. Add grassland seed mixes to enhance native meadow vegetation.
 - c. Option 3:
 - i. Allow areas to revert to successional forest (continue to monitor for invasive species).
2. Tidal and Freshwater Wetlands – Artificial berms with Common Reed
 - a. Option 1:
 - i. Remove some or all of dikes.
 - ii. Dredge to remove common reed rhizomes.
 - iii. Cut and treat with herbicides and/or fire.
 - iv. Restore native vegetation and stabilize banks.
 - b. Option 2:
 - i. Maintain and restore dikes to create resting ponds.
 - ii. Create connections among smaller ponds.
 - iii. Cut and treat with herbicides and/or fire.
 - iv. Restore native vegetation and stabilize banks.
 - c. Option 3:
 - i. Remove common reed by excavation.
 - d. Option 4:
 - i. Remove common reed by repeated mowing.
3. Pitch Pine-Oak Forest - very degraded and little of original character is present. Invasive species are predominant. Dense heavy invasive vines, dominated by black locust and tree of heaven.
 - a. Option 1:

- i. Remove invasive species.
 - ii. Plant shrubs and canopy trees native to pitch pine oak forest.
 - b. Option 2:
 - i. Remove invasive species in degraded forests.
 - c. Option 3:
 - i. Along southwest border of RDF adjacent to federal land remove invasives and install native shrubs and seedlings.
- 4. Heathland
 - a. Option 1:
 - i. Facilitate further establishment of beach heather.
 - ii. Limit disturbance.
 - iii. Remove encroaching invasive species.
 - iv. Plant surrounding areas with natives.
 - b. Option 2:
 - i. Remove sandy dune areas as necessary during wetland restoration.
 - ii. Regrade sandy areas.
 - iii. Restore riparian zone.
 - c. Option 3:
 - i. No management except limiting disturbance.

Successional Old Field Management Comments:

John Pavacic asked if the report will be more specific in terms of cost, time, and schedule.

S. Handel stated that cost estimates will be included in the final report.

Nick Gibbons asked about mowing in the summer season and the possibility of using prescribed burns. He requested closer look and examination of conflicts that may occur with wildlife (birds, turtles) when implementing these management methods.

S. Handel stated that mowing would need to be scheduled around nesting.

R. Grover stated that if the mowing is done correctly, the area would be kept short and the site could be scouted for wildlife before mowing is to occur.

N. Gibbons stated that they would need to further explain the management options for mugwort. He noted the repeated mention of a seed source, but stated that most of the mugwort comes from the rhizomes not from seeds. He asked if mowing was really necessary.

S. Handel explained that the mowing limits the starch production that the rhizomes utilize for new plant production.

J. Pavacic mentioned that prescribed burns could harm wildlife and that they would need to be scheduled around specific species.

K. Ross recommended a thorough biodiversity survey be conducted prior to any mowing or burning on the property.

T. Williams asked if there is any indication of a natural seed bank on the site.

S. Handel stated that due to the many years of farming that the native seed bank is most likely no longer there.

A. Graves asked about the possibility of planting shade trees to help eliminate the mugwort and then removing trees in future to reestablish the field.

S. Handel stated that this would need to be a very dense planting that would have a high cost.

Tidal and Freshwater Wetland Management Comments:

T. Isles asked what S. Handel meant by the partial removal of the berms.

S. Handel stated that this meant the removal of sections of the berm to allow water to flow through.

L. Fischer asked what the positives of the partial removal of the berm would be.

S. Handel stated that this would be less expensive to do than full removal, and that this area has now become a habitat.

L. Fischer stated that keeping the berms could allow for the return of the phragmites by not changing the hydrology enough.

N. Gibbons stated that cost should not be a limiting factor, and if removal of the entire berm was the best solution, we should plan on that.

K. Ross stated that they would give alternatives with both costs.

D. Davies questioned the use of the word "dredge." Would they really use dredging as a management option to remove phragmites?

K. Ross responded that they would probably excavate rather than dredge to remove soil and common reed rhizomes.

D. Davies asked at what depth is groundwater is found.

B. Devaux stated that depth to groundwater was approximately 1 foot in the pond areas.

K. Ross stated a she would separate Option 1 to have an alternative for total removal of berms with a cost estimate, and also have an option for partial removal of berms with another cost estimate; these new options would be included in the Draft Task 5.

Pitch Pine-Oak Forest Management Comments:

T. Isles stated that the Pitch Pine-Oak Forest areas of the site are very different in terms of species and should be dealt with differently

T. Williams asked if any protection would be used for the newly planted native species, i.e., deer fencing.

S. Handel recommended fencing the area for a time period of ten years or more, or the use of tree guards.

Claire Goad stated that the Friends of Wertheim are concerned about the proposed dog park. They feel it does not fit in with the habitat restoration of this property. She also stated that she spoke to the NYSDEC and they told her they would rather not see a dog park at this location.

J. Pavacic stated that this is not a pristine site; this site is degraded and presents opportunities for other uses besides restoration. John agreed that the majority of this park is suitable for restoration, but Parks is a multiuse department and must also look at all uses of the area. Parks has looked into the reuse/restoration of buildings and houses that are located on the property. The original concept was to have the dog park in the middle of the park, but after hearing people's concerns, it was decided that the dog park should be located on the northernmost section of the property along Montauk Highway, and the farthest from Wertheim Refuge boundaries. He also stated that this site would also help in the mandate that Parks build 5 dog parks throughout Suffolk County utilizing natural borders instead of fences. This is a pilot program and can be adjusted.

K. Ross asked what "natural border" means.

J. Pavacic explained that natural border parks are areas surrounded by vegetation or natural features that act as a natural boundary. In this particular site, Parks is considering the use of snow fencing, but in the future if the field was to grow that could serve as a border. John also stated natural borders parks differs from standard dog parks in that no permanent fences will be installed; water fountains, garbage receptacles and removal would not be in place and that if park users don't abide by the rules, they have the authority to close the dog park at this location.

Ralph Borkowski asked if there will be a development plan for the site.

S. Handel stated that this was not in the scope of work.

A. Graves stated that mowing seemed to be a common management theme, and suggested a mowing map and plan be put into place, along with monitoring and supervision of the proposed mowing. He also suggested that the feasibility study look at the surrounding USFWS area and take into account the different usages. Anthony asked if there are any plans for a visitor center at this location.

T. Williams stated that he had heard the Town of Brookhaven bought the Glacier Bay site to the north, and could be a potential location for a visitor center.

T. Williams asked if budgetary implications are being taken into account, and if there was a budget in place for following years.

Project and Meeting Schedule

October 28th is the stated date for receipt of all comments on the reports that were distributed.

The next meeting will be in January; date to be determined. The draft Task 5 report will be sent out for review before the draft project report is completed.

There were no comments from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.