

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SUFFOLK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS,  
RECREATION AND CONSERVATION  
MINUTES OF JULY 16, 2015  
SEARS BELLOWS COUNTY PARK  
HAMPTON BAYS, NEW YORK**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Miles Borden	Trustee, Town of Smithtown
Kathleen Gooding	Vice Chair, Town of Shelter Island
Dawn Hopkins	Chair, Trustee, Town of Brookhaven
Peter Leis	Trustee, Town of Islip
Arthur Leudesdorf	Trustee, Town of Southold
Alexander McKay	Trustee, Town of Huntington
William B. Sickles	Trustee, Town of Southampton
Richard F. White, Jr.	Trustee, Town of East Hampton

**ABSENT**

Gilbert Cardillo	Trustee, Town of Riverhead
Debra Kolyer	Member of the Board
Terence McSweeney	Trustee, Town of Babylon
Terrence Pearsall	Member of the Board
VACANT	Member at Large

**PARKS DEPARTMENT**

Greg Dawson	Commissioner
Nick Gibbons	Principal Environmental Analyst
Terry Maccarrone	Coordinator of Community Based Programs
Barbara Rittman	Senior Clerk Typist

**GUESTS**

Jason Hann	Legislative Aide to Dep. Presiding Officer Jay Schneiderman
Lawrence J. Hynes	Central Pine Barrens Commission
Hon. Al Krupski	Legislator, District 1
John W. Pavacic	Executive Director, Central Pine Barrens Commission
Peter Sproul	NYS DEC, Regional Operational Supervisor

**PUBLIC PORTION**

**Central Pine Barrens Commission Executive Director John Pavacic gave a presentation on the proposed Wildfire Mitigation and Ecological Management Plan for the NYS DEC Sarnoff-Suffolk County Pleasure Drive West Complex in Flanders.**

Four major sites throughout the Central Pine Barrens have been narrowed down and are being considered for stewardship activities. These activities include wildfire mitigation (including the re-introduction of prescribed fires), ecological management, ecological inventory, grassland management and invasive plant species eradication. The Sarnoff property in Flanders, the DEC's property in Rocky Point (former RCA property), grasslands located on both the east and west sides of County Road 51 in Eastport (at the south end of 51 and north of Sunrise Highway), and the County's Maple Swamp Preserve area to the east of Pleasure Drive were selected.

The Commission issued an RFP in 2012 and a contract was awarded to Land Use Ecological Associates located in Medford. The contract was executed in 2013 and a team of staff from the Pine Barrens Commission, Suffolk County Parks and the NYS DEC was formed and have been working on various proposals. There are several consultants and sub-contractors also working on the project, one of whom specializes in wildfire management and prescribed fires.

The project is proposed to help with mitigating potential wildfires, minimizing some of the potential impact on wildfires in this area, and completing some ecological work as well. The Pine Barrens are a fire dependent ecosystem and pitch pine trees thrive in a fire prone environment. These trees have a thick bark that is fire resistant, deep roots and they are able to withstand the harsh conditions found in the Pine Barrens. Within a 400-500 foot swath, the plan is to perform a mechanical thinning of trees, primarily the pitch pine trees which are more flammable because they contain natural resins and pine sap and certain scrub oaks would also be included in the same area. There would be areas of temporary mowing, cutting and chipping of some of the brush, leaving the roots to eventually re-sprout, and elimination of lower growing branches. During the months of mid-March through mid-May, specific areas would receive prescribed fires, depending on the types and amount of vegetation, density of pines and the degrees of flammability. A written plan (prescription) would be proposed for a prescribed fire. The relative humidity needs to be low enough to sustain a fire, the optimum being about 30%. The fuel moisture (natural vegetation that falls from the trees) also needs to be such that it can sustain a fire for a specific length of time. Finally, the wind speed and direction is critical for a prescribed fire and sustained winds need to be less than 10 miles per hour. If wind conditions change, the fire must be shut down.

A 12-15 foot wide dirt road and 15 feet of clearing is also proposed to allow prescribed fire teams access to specific areas between residences and the management units of land. Volunteer firefighters have reported that fire trucks have had to disturb existing vegetation at times and this plan is designed to minimize this by establishing roads to use so that driving into the woods won't be necessary. In the future, these roads would then be available for access by local fire departments.

A meeting was held with the Flanders Civic Association and the CEQ, and there is a community forum that has been scheduled for August 18<sup>th</sup> in the evening at the Crohan Community Center in Flanders for residents living north and east of the proposed areas. The plan is to get through the review process, the environmental review and then to get all required permits in place by the fall of this year. Then the mechanical portion of the plan can move forward in the November/December timeframe and again in late winter, allowing for favorable weather conditions. If all goes according to plan, the re-introduction of prescribed fires could be possible in these areas by next spring. The contractor would do the initial mechanical work and include public agency forces that are certified in wildfire response and are qualified chain saw operators to supplement the contracted crews.

Legislator Krupski added that FRES is setting up a permanent brush truck training course in Yaphank which will be located on the property between the FRES facility and the Suffolk County Fire Academy, and firefighters will be able to train using their own trucks. The County Legislature and the Pine Barrens Commission passed a resolution to enter into an agreement to begin offering the course this fall.

**Regional Operations Supervisor for the DEC, Peter Sproul reported on the proposed replacement of the radio tower at Jayne's Hill in West Hills County Park.**

The original radio tower was built in 1967-68 when the property was not yet County-owned. Peter provided a photo of the existing radio tower and a rendering of the proposed new tower. The biggest difference with the new tower is its girth which will enable it to easily withstand variable wind changes. There is an additional antenna located on top of a telephone pole there which belongs to the fire district and it would be moved to the new tower. Commissioner Dawson noted that with the agreement that is in place, the tower is strictly to be used

for radio communication public safety purposes for the DEC, the fire department, law enforcement and forest rangers, and not for cell phone use.

Nick Gibbons added that the tower is completely contained by chain link fencing and covers an approximately 25' x 40' disturbed area. The DEC has been working closely with the Parks Department on the proposal. The replacement tower will be no taller than the original, will not be used commercially in any way and there would be no potential environmental impact.

Both the Parks Trustees' and the CEQ's determination are requested to contribute to finalizing the agreement between the County Attorney and the State Attorney.

**A motion to endorse the replacement of the communication tower on Jayne's Hill at the existing site was made by Trustee McKay and seconded by Trustee Borden. It was unanimously approved by a vote of 8-0-0.**

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JUNE 18, 2015**

Page 3, last paragraph, first line – Trustee Bill Sickles requested a follow-up on the member of the public, Kristin White, who spoke at the last trustee meeting.....

**A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Trustee White and seconded by Trustee McKay. The minutes were unanimously approved by a vote of 8-0-0.**

### **COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Dawson thanked John Pavacic for his presentation, and Parks Trustee Bill Sickles and his wife Joyce for their hospitality at Sears Bellows CP.

At the last meeting, Trustee Cardillo had questioned the condition of the restrooms at Indian Island CP. They have been inspected and the tree canopy has been trimmed back to allow more sunlight to expose the solar panels. If that doesn't help, batteries will be checked and the electrician will be called in to locate what is causing the problem.

At a prior meeting, Trustee White had suggested the possibility of having identification cards that the Parks Trustees could carry to use for park inspections. Commissioner Dawson requested that cards be printed with Trustee names and dates of term in office and they were distributed to the Trustees at the meeting.

Nick Gibbons provided an update on the piping plover season thus far. Smith Point historically has the most activity and has had the most problems this year. There have been 23 nest attempts and 21 have been lost. The last remaining nests have both hatched with three chicks each. Staff is there daily to log and confirm that the birds are still there and whether they are on the ocean or bay side.

The final numbers data on piping plover nesting at all of the other sites for this season will be provided at the August meeting. There have been some good successes at several other sites so far this year.

The second phase of the dredging project, which is only at 40% completion, is scheduled to resume on September 15<sup>th</sup>. Work will start where the breach was and continue west, down past the pavilion and up to the FINS boundary. Parks has requested allowing public access during the construction until right after Thanksgiving weekend. After that, the beach will be completely closed down to public access so that work can be completed more expeditiously and construction sites will not have to be secured.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Chair Hopkins thanked John Pavacic for his presentation on the proposed wildfire mitigation/ecological management plan.

Chair Hopkins inquired on how Suffolk County Parks Day went. Commissioner Dawson reported that it was an over cast and drizzly day. It was advertised by the Parks Department and Legislator Schneiderman but the weather definitely had an impact on its overall success.

Commissioner Dawson added that the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend was very busy. Timber Point Golf Course reported over 600 rounds, Bergen Point GC reported 380 rounds and over 350 rounds were reported at West Sayville Golf Course.

## **ROUND TABLE**

Trustee Gooding thanked Joyce and Trustee Bill Sickles for their hospitality.

Trustee White thanked Joyce and Trustee Bill Sickles for lunch and also Commissioner Dawson for providing the Parks Trustee IDs. He was glad to see John Pavacic back again at the Parks Trustees meeting, as well as Larry Hynes since recovering from a serious illness over the past three years.

Trustee Leudesdorf reported on a letter he received about the deteriorating condition of the parking lot at Cedar Beach CP in Southold. He was glad to hear that the County was able to repair the potholes this season and is hopeful that more funds will become available to pave the entire area.

Another local issue in Southold was also resolved thanks to Town Supervisor Russell who was able to have a local property in need of paving completed.

Trustee McKay commented that he was glad to see Larry Hynes and thanked John Pavacic for his presentation.

Trustee Leis thanked Joyce and Trustee Bill Sickles for their hospitality and also the guest speakers.

John Pavacic thanked all for having him at the meeting. He reported that there had been some inquiries about the status of the southern pine beetle infestation and offered some of the latest information about it. The DEC is continuing to provide aerial reconnaissance and with the severe winter we had, there was a significant amount of southern pine beetle mortality from the very cold temperatures. A -8 degree Fahrenheit temperature was recorded one night in the dwarf pines. In spite of this, there have been areas found where the infestation has expanded and it has been found in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, upstate New York going up to Albany and also in Connecticut. The DEC has completed suppression activities at Henry's Hollow Pine Barrens State Forest and also at Munns Pond County Park. This beetle prefers mostly pitch pine trees but has been found in white pine trees, Norway spruce and certain other evergreens as well. Once it is in a tree, there is no way to save it and it will die in two to four months. There is a preventative insecticide that must be applied to the bark of each individual tree trunk from the base all the way up to the crown prior to any infestation. It cannot be aerielly sprayed by a helicopter so it is cost prohibitive to do. The best way is to cut down the infested trees in winter. If suppression is done in the warmer months with above 50 degree temperatures, you then have to kill the infested trees and also a swath of healthy, un-infested trees in order to try to minimize the beetles from spreading in any particular hot spot. No more suppression areas are planned at this time, other than the ones done in the Hampton Bays area by the DEC this past winter.

A network of traps were set up across Suffolk County and monitored by Pine Barrens Commission staff, as well as Cornell Cooperative Extension staff and the DEC. Samples of several different types of insects were taken

from the traps, including some that are predators on the southern pine beetle and sent up to DEC to be analyzed for trends, population numbers, etc. The traps are set to determine whether the southern pine beetle is present in particular areas of Suffolk County, and if so, what the densities are that are being seen. This helps to determine what to expect in the future. The other option is to do thinning in specific areas where you selectively cut pitch pines to reduce the square footage of pitch pines per acre to a certain level. When you thin out trees that are not already infested, the remaining pitch pines are then able to become healthier, produce much more pine sap to smother the southern pine beetles and withstand an infestation. Although it has also been found in Nassau County and the East End, the greatest density of southern pine beetle infestation is currently found in the Central Pine Barrens.

The Central Pine Barrens Commission has been working closely with the Federal Government, the U.S. Forest Service, the Fire Island National Seashore, the DEC, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U. S. National Park Service and Cornell Cooperative Extension personnel. The Flanders wildfire project will also help mitigate the southern pine beetle infestation because the tree thinning that will go on there will create stronger and healthier trees. The preferred method to dispose of the trees is to cut the trees up into sections which exposes the beetle larvae to the elements, especially in the winter time when there are freezing temperatures which leads to increased mortality. Leaving the cut up trees in place allows for it to decompose and provides new habitat for other species. More sunlight comes in and re-sprouting occurs. These areas continue to be monitored.

John Pavacic added that the Commission has been working very closely with Suffolk County Park staff on the southern pine beetle issue, particularly Nick, Diana and the Commissioner who have been an integral part of the entire response effort.

Larry Hynes thanked everyone for all of their well wishes and cards during his illness. He reported that he has returned to work for the Pine Barrens Commission overseeing law enforcement and compliance in the Pine Barrens. He works with all of the agencies that have jurisdiction in and around the Pine Barrens, including the Park Rangers for the Suffolk County Department of Parks. His role is to oversee over 800 conservation easement parcels to make certain that there is no dumping, no tree clearing and no development on those parcels. He works with staff to make sure that all development is in compliance of Commission regulations. He also works closely with state, county and town agencies and attorneys for those agencies. The Commission has a partnership with staff from the 106 Rescue Wing of the Air National Guard at Gabreski Airport, and the U.S. Army Aviation out of MacArthur Airport that provides civil air patrols. There is cooperation between all of the agencies to coordinate with law enforcement, the DEC and the Sheriff's Office to actively and aggressively protect public land.

Legislator Krupski thanked John Pavacic for his presentation on the wildfire mitigation plan. He reported that he meets four times a year with the North Fork Volunteer Fire Departments and that the brush truck training course is very important for the safety of the fire fighters.

Legislator Krupski reported on an issue that he was made aware of by the Medical Examiner who has a number of human remains that have been stored for decades and are in need of a proper burial. There was some action taken and one proposal was to give them a resting place in a graveyard in Yaphank but that proposal has not worked out. It was also suggested that there is County Parkland in Manorville that has a small church and graveyard which could be a possibility. Three or four gravesites would be a large enough area to give the remains a dignified resting place. Commissioner Dawson has presented the proposal to the County Attorney's Office to review what is permissible on County Parkland.

The next Parks Trustee meeting will be held at Gardiner County Park in West Bay Shore on Thursday, August 20, 2015.

**A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Trustee White and was seconded by Trustee McKay. The motion was unanimously approved by a vote of 8-0-0.**