

Appendix P – Bird Conservation Area Management Guidance Summary

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New York State Bird Conservation Area Program Management Guidance Summary

Site Name: Sunken Meadow BCA

State Ownership and Managing Agency: Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation,

Location: Suffolk County, Town of Smithtown

Size of Area: 1,288 acres

DEC Region: 1

OPRHP Region: Long Island

General Site information: Sunken Meadow State Park is located on the north shore of Long Island, with 3 miles of beachfront along the Long Island Sound. The eastern boundary is the mouth of the Nissequogue River. The Sunken Meadow Creek, which had tidal flow restored in 2012 due to damage from Superstorm Sandy, is ~1.5 miles long. There are currently 89 acres of low salt marsh and 450 acres of upland woodlands that include successional and mature coastal oak-hickory. The 3/4 mile boardwalk along the beach is lined with shrubs. This site is part of the Long Island Greenbelt Trail, a larger trail that connects through many habitats and a migration corridor system. It is also part of the Nissequogue River Watershed and Smithtown Bay Important Bird Area (IBA), a 26,000 acre global IBA designated by the National Audubon Society.

Vision Statement: The Sunken Meadow State Park Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will continue to maintain the habitat variety and quality that supports the diversity of bird species present, while providing public access and recreational opportunities.

Key BCA Criteria: Diverse species concentration site; species at risk site (ECL §11-2001, 3.f and h). Breeding birds include Piping Plover (Federally threatened, NYS endangered) Least Tern (NYS threatened), Common Tern (NYS threatened), and Osprey (Special concern). State-listed birds known to utilize the park include Pied-billed grebe (NYS Threatened); Common Loon, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper's Hawk (Special Concern). Migratory shorebirds use shoreline habitats; migratory songbirds use woodlands and areas of shrub; wading birds and shorebirds utilize the creek; waterfowl feed in creek which also provides wintering grounds.

Critical Habitat Types: Tidal creek and vegetated shoreline, woodlands, beaches, open water, and salt marshes.

Operation and Management Considerations:

General Management Measures:

- In accordance with the OPRHP tree management policy (<http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/documents/OPRHPPolicyManagementOfTrees.pdf>), the protection of trees and forests is a core element of OPRHP's mission. Tree cutting and removal are appropriate as necessary for the construction, operation, maintenance, or restoration of buildings, structures, recreational or educational facilities, golf courses, roadways, utilities, firebreaks, or other infrastructure. All cutting and removals done in accordance with this policy will be conducted in a manner that minimizes impact on the surrounding visual and natural environment. Pruning or removal of trees and vegetation may also be performed to restore or improve habitat for significant wildlife species such as birds identified within the BCA criteria or ecosystems that support those birds.
- Development proposals should minimize removal of trees and retain as much natural vegetation as possible to continue to provide bird habitat throughout the park.
- As identified in the OPRHP native plant policy (<http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/documents/PolicyOnNativePlantPolicy.pdf>), native plants are the primary food source in natural systems and provide many ecosystem services including providing diverse wildlife habitats. They are critical sources of food, shelter, and habitat for BCA species. In accordance with the policy, to the extent feasible, native plants will be utilized in all landscaping, re-vegetation, erosion control, and habitat restoration projects. The planting or introduction of invasive plant or tree species is prohibited.
- The osprey platform at the eastern end of the park is currently located very close to the road. Park patrons have been observed approaching too close to the nest disturbing the birds. In addition summer mowing along the roadside is a potential disturbance. In situations where osprey nests are subject to constant high disturbance, the Department of Environmental Conservation recommends moving the nest to a more suitable location. When resources allow, it is recommended to relocate the platform to a site that will provide more of a buffer. This should be done from August 1 to February 28 outside the breeding season, with the new platform higher than the existing platform. The Regional DEC wildlife office should be consulted before moving the nest.

Seasonal Maintenance Activities:

- Maintain current Reduced Mowing Program.
- Time maintenance operations near the osprey platforms to avoid breeding season, March 1 through August 1. When possible a 500 foot buffer should be established to minimize disturbance and ongoing seasonal activities, such as mowing, should be evaluated to determine disturbance to nesting ospreys. All activities during the breeding season should be performed with caution.
- During the listed species nesting window (April 1- September 1):
 - Beach raking should not occur on beaches near listed species nesting areas.
 - Remove garbage on beaches by hand.
 - Empty garbage cans on beaches frequently to avoid attracting predators.

Seasonal Recreational Activities

- During the breeding season (March 1 – August 1), restrict recreational activities,

such as wildlife watching, kayaking and canoeing, near active osprey nests. This can be done by establishing up to a 500 foot buffer area around the nest to minimize disturbance.

Habitats - Management and Protection Measures:

- Woodlands
 - Maintain wooded areas and restore, as appropriate.
 - Evaluate wooded area for overabundant deer population.
 - Maintain trails to prevent side trails from developing. Such side trails potentially bisect intact tree stands and impact sensitive areas.

- Wetland Communities
 - Monitor recreational activities along creek, such as kayaking and fishing, and regulate as needed if disturbance is determined to be significant.
 - Where feasible, control invasive wetland plants such as *Phragmites australis* in order to favor native wetland flora, which provides a better food source for wetland birds.
 - Plant *Spartina* grasses along the creek to facilitate the restoration of the marsh areas, previously dominated by invasive *Phragmites*.
 - Create specific access points along creek for recreational activities to prevent loss of vegetation and/or erosion.
 - Evaluate the potential for salt marsh migration and encourage where possible.

- Beach - Endangered and Threatened Shorebird Nesting Areas
 - Continue protection protocols as outlined in the USFWS Piping Plover Atlantic Coast Revised Recovery Plan Management Guidelines.
 - Establish Symbolic Fencing around historic nesting areas by April 1st to protect site from recreational disturbance.
 - Place “Do Not Enter” and “Restricted Area” signs on symbolic fencing.
 - Monitor nesting areas for signs of predators to collect information on the type and number of predators in a given area.
 - Install predator exclosures around plover nests. Exclosures are made from 4’ tall, 10’ diameter circle of turkey wire. When possible the bottom is buried 12”. Bird netting is installed over the top of the exclosure to keep out avian predators including gulls and crows.
 - Take steps to control predation if it becomes a significant threat. Predators should preferably be controlled outside of their breeding season based on monitoring information from the previous plover nesting season, and during regular hunting or trapping seasons if possible. If predators become a threat during nesting season, measures should be taken to control them as soon as possible.
 - Continue Least and Common Tern protection and monitoring
 - Establish symbolic fencing around historic tern colony nest sites.
 - Monitor nesting to ensure all nests are within protected areas.
 - Collect data on nest and fledge success.

- Monitor nesting areas for signs of predators to collect information on the type and number of predators in a given area.

Education and Outreach:

- Continue to place educational signs with information regarding the endangered nesting shorebird during the breeding season.
- Develop interpretive materials, including displays and brochures, about herons and other colonial waterbirds, ospreys, wintering waterfowl and songbird migrations, and the habitats that support the populations.
- Provide interpretive programs to patrons and school groups regarding the various habitats and resources of the park, as feasible through regular and seasonal staff, volunteers and partnerships.
- Continue to work with partners, such as Audubon NY and Long Island Sound Study, to provide outreach.

Data Collection and Needs:

- Creek bird surveys (initiated for the tidal flow restoration project) which will help provide a long term census on use of the site.
- Inventory of flora and evaluate impact of invasive species on nesting songbirds.
- Continue threatened and endangered species data collection.
 - Begin monitoring for plover pairs, nests, and territories in late March and early April. The extent of such work is dependent upon availability of stewards and volunteers at this time.
 - Weekly surveys for nesting pairs begin in mid-April and continue until early July.
 - All daily monitoring is done from outside the string fencing. Stewards observe plovers' behaviors as clues to locate nests and foraging areas.
 - Sweeps of the dune areas are done weekly in a swift, but methodical manner to find nests that may be harder to find.
 - When possible, nests are observed prior to hatching, so that hatching behavior may be recorded.
 - Once the nests have hatched, the stewards monitor the broods. Plover sightings are recorded, including date, area seen, number of adults and number of chicks seen. This is important because some pairs with broods are quite mobile.
 - Areas outside of the fencing are surveyed for plovers and terns. If these species are found, those areas are afforded protection.
 - Nesting pairs of plovers are numbered in the order of when the first nest was found.
 - The first nesting attempt of a given breeding pair is designated as A, the second B, and so on.
 - Plover pairs, nests, and foraging areas that are identified are mapped out on a weekly basis.
 - Maps of these sightings are distributed to appropriate staff on the beach including Park Police, the beach crew, and lifeguards.
 - The Piping Plover Daily Site Visit sheet is used to record plover sighting during daily monitoring.
 - A Piping Plover Pair Exclosure Summary is required for each pair monitored for productivity.

- Nest locations are mapped for reference using GPS units.
- Necessary species conservation actions will be taken as needed based on information gathered in the park as well as the best available science.

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Sources:

US Department of the Interior, US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Piping Plover Atlantic Coast Population Recovery Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hadley, MA

Burger, M.F. and J.M. Liner, 2005. *Important Bird Areas of New York, 2nd Edition, Habitats Worth Protecting*. Audubon New York, Albany, NY

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Date BCA Designated: