

# PEP Talk

The Newsletter of the Peconic Estuary Program

Volume 6, Issue 3.....SPECIAL EDITION.....Fall 2010

## PEP Call to Action Conference a Success!

The Call to Action Conference brought out over 200 people on September 20, 2010 to show their support for the Peconic Estuary Program. The morning began with an inspiring keynote speech, delivered by Assemblyman Fred Thiele Jr. He reminded listeners of how the Peconic Estuary Program was established in response to the impacts of the infamous brown tide; described how far we have come over the years in many of the objectives of the program; and most importantly, he urgently reminded all East Enders that there is still much to be done to restore and protect the Peconics, and called on us all to take action.

This PEP Talk is a special conference summary edition and contains information about the panel discussion topics and also includes the recommendations and actions identified at the conference. As you read this special edition of the PEP Talk, please give special attention to the action items listed in the "What Still Needs to be Done" sections. Keep in mind that all of us have a role to play in participating in our local government, making simple changes to our lifestyle, and being informed active, advocates for our local environment. For access to materials handed out to conference participants and for more information on the topics featured at the conference, please visit our website at: [www.PeconicEstuary.org](http://www.PeconicEstuary.org).



Enjoying lunch featuring produce donated by *Garden of Eve* and *Green Thumb* organic farms



Keynote Speaker Fred Thiele, Jr.



Ernie Fugina receiving Peconic Bay Outstanding Community Leader Award

### PEP Outstanding Community Leader Award Recipients

Riverhead - Ernie Fugina  
Southampton - Alex Gregor  
Shelter Island - Don Kornrumpf  
Southold -Lori Luscher  
East Hampton - Richard Mendelman  
Peconic Fish Restoration  
Commission - Jim Miller and Byron Young



# Nitrogen Management

## Background Information:

Nutrients are critical for sustaining the marine ecosystem, but can be harmful to an estuary at excessive levels. Nitrogen is the primary nutrient of concern in the marine waters of the Peconic Estuary System. When nutrients are added to the estuary at excessive rates from sources including fertilizer use, on-site disposal systems ("septic systems"), atmospheric deposition, sewage treatment plants and runoff, the excess nutrients stimulate aquatic plant growth, including production of algae (both microscopic and larger plants).



Excess algae can lead to decreased dissolved oxygen in estuary waters, leading to harmful conditions for fish and other marine life. The increased production of algae caused by nutrient enrichment results not only in low dissolved oxygen conditions, but also discolors the water, decreases water clarity and diminishes the amount of light received by beneficial rooted aquatic plants, such as eelgrass. The PEP is working both to improve water quality where it is impaired and prevent problems from occurring in other areas.

## What Is Currently Being Done?

- Establishment and implementation of a "Total Maximum Daily Load" for nitrogen in the western estuary
- Preservation of thousands of acres of open space through the Community Preservation Fund and other programs
- Applying special permit requirements in service areas of municipal separate storm sewer systems
- Implementation of Cornell Cooperative Extension's Agricultural Stewardship Program
- Vegetation preservation requirements for new development

## What Still Needs to be Done?

- Manage Turf Responsibly: Eliminate/reduce managed turf & landscapes at government properties; Develop/provide incentives for private properties
- Address New Development: Establish/revise requirements for: Development densities/minimum lot sizes; Existing vegetation preservation; Suitable soil base for lawns; Maximum (not to be exceeded) area of irrigated turf
- Upgrade Individual On-Site Disposal Systems: Require upgrades to on site systems upon property transfer or some date certain; Identify areas for sewer/microsewering; Establish OSDS management districts for upgrades/replacements/operation & maintenance

# Habitat Restoration

## Background Information:

The Peconic Estuary is home to many valuable and rare habitats, some of which have been severely degraded and disturbed. Access to migrating fish spawning habitat has been cut off by construction of dams, the placement of roads, and installation of undersized culverts. Historic

tidal wetlands have been filled with material from navigational dredging operations. Wetlands suffer from stormwater runoff, limited tidal flushing, and infiltration of invasive species. While it is better to protect these habitats and prevent disturbances in the first place, habitat restoration is an integral



part of protecting biodiversity and providing critical habitats for several ecologically and economically important species.

Habitat restoration is a very intensive process which involves setting restoration targets and goals, planning and designing the most effective restoration techniques, implementing on-the-ground construction, and monitoring the short and long term outcomes of the project. Monitoring is an essential component in evaluating the success of individual projects, and can also help to develop sound adaptive restoration strategies throughout the entire Peconic Estuary.

## What Is Currently Being Done?

- Since November 2009, \$1,075,312 of planning and implementation funds have been secured
- Habitat Restoration projects are currently underway in all five East End towns
- Conceptual Habitat Restoration Design Plans planned for 10 sites (2 in each Town)
- The Peconic Estuary Program Habitat Restoration Plan was updated in 2009 and now includes 71 sites and 9 different habitat types
- The PEP has developed an interactive web-based Google Map of Restoration Sites and a completed restoration project inventory

## What Still Needs to be Done?

- Funding to for Planning, Design, Implementation and Monitoring: Allocate 1% of annual Community Preservation Fund (CPF) revenue for restoration of CPF acquired sites; Create a sustainable long-term funding source; Municipalities provide in-kind resources
- Increase Involvement & Capabilities: Each municipality designates one elected official liaison to PEP; Consider grant management and technical assistance from non-profits and PEP

# Eelgrass Management

## Background Information:

Eelgrass is an ecologically important species of submerged aquatic vegetation which stabilizes bay bottom sediments, improves estuarine water quality and provides critical habitat for numerous species within the Peconic Estuary. Once bountiful throughout the waters of the Peconics, eelgrass abundance has fell victim to a downward trend. A “wasting disease” in the early 1930s was responsible for the disappearance of approximately 90% of eelgrass beds along the Atlantic seaboard. Extensive and prolonged brown tide blooms in the 1980s further decimated eelgrass populations. Historical analyses and



current inventories suggest since 1930 the Peconic Estuary has lost over 80% of its eelgrass. Only 1,552 acres of eelgrass remain in the Estuary, mainly east of Shelter Island. The absence of brown tide blooms and improved water quality has not triggered a natural rebounding population and restoration efforts have seen limited success. Despite ongoing research, monitoring, restoration and management efforts, eelgrass is still declining. Multiple simultaneous stressors (nutrient enrichment, algal blooms, fishing and shellfishing practices, recreational uses) are collectively affecting the health of our remaining eelgrass.

## What Is Currently Being Done?

- Several eelgrass sanctuaries have been designated to protect existing eelgrass beds (Napeague Harbor, Bullhead Bay)
- Educational brochures, radio spots, and guides have been distributed/ broadcast
- An Eelgrass Management Plan for the Peconic Estuary has been prepared, along with a 2010 Implementation Progress Report
- Peconic Estuary continues a Long-Term Eelgrass Monitoring Program (sentinel monitoring of 8 sites: Bullhead Bay, Southampton; Southold Bay, Southold; Hay Beach/Gardiners Bay, Shelter Island; Orient Harbor, Southold; Northwest Harbor, East Hampton; Three Mile Harbor, East Hampton; Cedar Point, East Hampton; Orient Point, Southold)

## What Still Needs to be Done?

- Limit Physical Disturbances: Establish additional eelgrass sanctuaries; Address known disturbance factors (navigation, groundings, propeller scars, moorings, clamming pressure) of meadows under stress; Review current uses of waters of other existing meadows for further action
- Address Potential Impacts from Pesticides: Eliminate use of herbicides/ pesticides on governmental/quasi-governmental turf and landscapes
- Educate: Provide outreach to citizens on the ecologic and economic value of eelgrass

# Stormwater Management

## Background Information:

Stormwater, or water left behind from rain, snow and irrigation can run off of roads, driveways, sidewalks and roofs, and pick up potentially

harmful pollutants as it flows over land and deposits them in surface waters. Stormwater is not only a threat to the water quality, but can also threaten the plants, animals and habitats of the Peconic. Pathogens in stormwater can lead

to closures or restrictions of shellfish harvesting and bathing beaches. As impervious surface areas increase, there is less area for water to infiltrate back into the ground. The more pollutants that are applied, produced

or used, the more contaminated the stormwater will become.

Effective stormwater management couples minimizing stormwater runoff volumes and decreasing pollutant loadings.

The PEP is working to ensure both of these goals are attained by providing support for infrastructure

improvements, recommendations for land use and planning, and by conducting extensive public education and outreach endeavors throughout the Peconic Estuary region.



## What Is Currently Being Done?

- Implementation of 4 PEP Subwatershed Management Plans: Reeves Bay, Hashamomuck Pond, West Neck Bay, and Meetinghouse Creek, including utilizing over \$2.6 million to install structural controls
- Development of 6 additional PEP Subwatershed Management Plans: Town and Jockey Creeks, Goose Creek, Richmond Creek, Accabonac Harbor, Sebonac Creek Complex, and Dering Harbor
- Implementation of the Peconic Nitrogen and Pathogen Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit (MS4) requirements
- Pilot homeowner stormwater management and pollution prevention incentive rebate programs in the Reeves Bay and Hashamomuck Pond watersheds
- Convening of a PEP Stormwater Workgroup, resulting in Intermunicipal Stormwater Planning Assistance project

## What Still Needs to be Done?

- Increase Awareness of Stormwater Issues: Fund stormwater education; Recognize bay-friendly property owners; Coordinate more volunteer efforts; Pair education with incentive programs.
- Increase Municipal Coordination: Seek joint funding; Prioritize ecosystem wide problems; Participate in PEP Stormwater Working Group.
- Funding: Establish a sustainable long-term funding mechanism
- Set a Positive Example: Eliminate fertilizer and pesticide use on municipal and special district properties; Preserve and restore native habitats and buffers on public properties
- Protect High Quality Waters: Develop plans to protect healthy waterbodies; Designate Harbor Protection Overlay (or equivalent) Districts; Reduce impervious surface allotments; Increase vegetation preservation requirements

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PEP Talk is published by the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP), a partnership of governments, environmental groups, businesses, industries, academic institutions, and citizens. The PEP's mission is to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary system. Learn more at [www.peconicestuary.org](http://www.peconicestuary.org). Edited by Emily A. Fogarty and all conference photos by Rory MacNish




PEP Talk is produced and printed by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS), in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under agreement CE-992002. The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the EPA or SCDHS.

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 Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with soy based ink.