



Summer 2001

Annual Newsletter

Issue No. 14

New Areas to Explore Along the Eastern Lake Ontario Shore

by Mark Wiggins, NYS-DEC

DEC Region 6 is proud to announce the completion of two new nature trails in Jefferson County. These trails offer an opportunity to appreciate nature and open space.

The new Lakeview Wildlife Management Area (WMA) trail is located off New York State Route 3, approximately 2.3 miles north of the Oswego - Jefferson County line. The trail starts at the DEC car top boat and canoe access parking area on South Sandy Creek. The trail weaves through wooded and wet meadow cover types, passes a constructed wetland pond and a vernal pool, parallels South Sandy Creek and ends at an observation deck overlooking the broad expanse of Lakeview's marsh and sand dune complex, some 3580' from the starting point. Interpretive signs highlighting the area's ecology will be placed at various points of interest and there are a number of benches installed along the trail for taking a rest or watching wildlife. The trail is 6' wide and is handicap accessible. The woodland portion of the trail is a good place to observe warblers, wrens, and other small birds skittering about the black willow and box elder, while the open marsh is home to a variety of waterfowl, marsh birds, and shorebirds. South Sandy Creek is home to a variety of panfish, pike, and bass and has seasonal runs of trout and salmon making it a popular fishing stream. You may also spot a muskrat or beaver creating a "V" shaped wake in the stream or a water snake! Look for deer and coyote tracks along the trail as you take a pleasant stroll.



Trailhead at South Sandy Creek

The second trail is reached by traveling approximately 3 miles south of Henderson Harbor on New York State Route 3 and then onto Bolton Road. At the end of Bolton Road is a newly constructed roadway that runs .75 miles to a trailhead parking area. The trail passes through a predominately Silver Maple woodland onto a 700' long

raised boardwalk. The boardwalk traverses a flooded maple wood-

land and open water marsh terminating on the back side of a high sand dune that separates the wetland from Lake Ontario. Continuing along the back of the sand dune, a compacted crushed limestone trail threads through large oak and pine forest a distance of 900' to an observation/fishing deck on Black Pond. From here a boardwalk traverses an old dune "blow out" a distance of about 600' to an observation deck overlooking Lake Ontario. This trail system provides the visitor a great variety of wildlife viewing opportunities, including songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors. Furbearers, such as muskrat, beaver, and mink may be seen. Deer are common in the area, as are gray squirrel, porcupine, red fox, and coyote. Painted turtles are common in the marsh and there is usually a Great Blue Heron or two wading the pond edge looking for frogs and small fish. The walk through the sand dune is spectacular due to its size, depth, and vegetative composition. Stay on the trail, as sand dunes are fragile. Upon reaching the beach, you will have a wonderful view of Lake Ontario, minus shoreline development. It's like stepping into the past.

Private Landowners' Committee

by Sally Sessler, *Private Landowners' Committee Chair*

The Private Landowners' Committee met on June 16 and may meet again later in the summer if needed. Please express any concerns that you would like discussed to your Association representative. One of the committee's goals for this year is to have more communication with individual landowners through the Associations.

The Private Landowners Committee has been gathering information on the regulation plan for Lake Ontario for several years. The committee chair, Sally Sessler, has been appointed to the Intl. Lake Ontario St. Lawrence River Public Interest Advisory Group (PIAG) for an 18-month term. The purpose of this group is to further public participation in a study to evaluate options for regulating levels and flows in the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system. A Study Board, also appointed by the IJC, is responsible for conducting the study of the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River system. If you would like to receive newsletters for this group by mail or email, please contact Molly Thompson (see below).

A short presentation has been developed by PIAG and is available for interested groups. Please contact Molly Thompson, NY Sea Grant, 315-312-3042, to arrange for presentation of this program to your group.

Lake Level Update

As of mid-June, Lake Ontario was just about at its long-term average of 246'. This is in contrast to last year at this time when the lake was about 7 inches above average. Outflows from Lake Ontario into the St. Lawrence River should stay near average for the summer.

For the most up-to-date information on lake level issues the following web pages provide a wealth of information. If you do not have access to the web, contact NY Sea Grant at 315.312.3042 for information.

International Joint Commission:

www.ijc.org

St. Lawrence River Board of Control:

www.islrbc.org

Lake Level Forecasts:

chswww.bur.dfo.ca/danp/wlgraphs.html

NY Sea Grant:

www.cce.cornell.edu/seagrant/gl-levels/levels.html

The Ontario Dune Coalition is comprised of organizations interested in the stabilization of Lake Ontario dunes. This coalition of state and local agencies, private landowner/resource associations, and federal agencies are working in concert to:

1. Assist in the stabilization of dunes as natural systems
2. Develop measures to maintain their stability
3. Achieve optimum public use in keeping with private property considerations and dune protection and restoration objectives

The following is a list of agencies and associations active in TODC:

Black River RC&D
Eastman Place Association
Friends of Sandy Pond Beach
Jefferson County Cooperative Extension
Jefferson County Environmental Management Council
Jefferson County Planning Department
Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District
Jefferson-Sunset Bluff Landowners Association
North Jefferson Park Landowners Association
North Rainbow Shores Landowners Association
North-South Sandy Pond Association
New York Sea Grant Extension
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
NYS Department of State
Onondaga Audubon Society
Oswego County Cooperative Extension
Oswego County Environmental Management Council
Oswego County Planning Department
Oswego County Soil and Water Conservation District
Renshaw Beach Association
Sandy Island Beach Property Owners Association
Seaway Trail, Inc.
Selkirk Beach Association
The Nature Conservancy
Town of Ellisburg
Town of Richland
Town of Sandy Creek
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

For further information on The Ontario Dune Coalition, contact:

*The Ontario Dune Coalition
C/O Jefferson County Planning
175 Arsenal Street
Watertown, NY 13601*

For additional information on the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands visit our web page at:

www.cce.cornell.edu/seagrant/dune/dune.html

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Feature Article: *Coalition Members Active in Bi-National Study of Lake Ontario Water Levels*

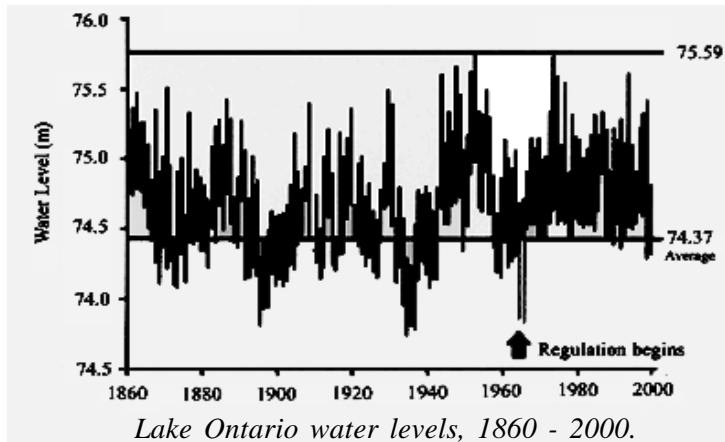
by Sandy Bonanno, *The Nature Conservancy*

Ebb and flow – for aquatic systems, that’s the rhythm of life. The pattern of natural variations in water level is a fundamental driving force that shapes rivers, lakes, and shorelines. Nowhere is this better illustrated than the Great Lakes. Since the 1860s, the federal government has measured water levels in Lake Ontario, documenting fluctuations over a 6.5-foot range. In most years, there is often a two-foot difference between the June high and December low water mark.

Of course, such dramatic fluctuations can cause trouble – for man and beast alike. Docks are drowned in high-water years; keels and boat prows are broken in low-water years. Water intakes are fouled in low water; dangerous currents in high water hamper shipping. In a dry spring, fish have trouble accessing their spawning marshes, while strong storms can flood out endangered black tern nests in the same marshes.

On the other hand, research has shown that the continual disturbance created by fluctuation maintains and renews shoreline habitats such as marshes and dunes, benefiting their inhabitants in the long run, even if certain species have hard years under high or low water.

Since 1960, Lake Ontario’s water levels have been regulated at the Moses Saunders Dam on the St. Lawrence River. Regulation is implemented by the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control, one of numerous boards that manage portions of the US/Canada border under the supervision of The International Joint Commission (IJC). The Board determines the amount of water to be released from the dam according to a



complex formula that attempts to balance the needs of power generation, shipping, shoreline communities, and shoreline landowners. In recent years, the Board has attempted to accommodate the needs of recreational boaters and natural resources as well.

The Board’s explicit goal is to reduce the fluctuation range from 6.5 feet to 4

feet. Many biologists have recognized serious impacts on natural resources resulting from 40 years of reduced variation in Lake Ontario water levels. Marsh habitat has become densely dominated by cattails, making it less valuable to waterfowl and black terns. Spring spawning runs of northern pike, muskellunge, and other sport fish have been interrupted. Shorebirds find narrower beaches for nesting and feeding.

These are just examples - the full range of environmental effects has never been systematically documented. To better understand the effects of Lake Ontario’s regulation on all stakeholders, the IJC has called for a five-year, \$40 million bi-national study to review the criteria for regulation. Both the U.S. and Canada have embraced the plan and provided first-year funding.

Members of The Ontario Dune Coalition will participate in the study process. Sally Sessler, Chair of the Coalition Private Landowners Committee has been appointed to the Public Interest Advisory Group, which will facilitate two-way communication between the study and all sectors of the public. NY Sea Grant’s Dave White will serve on the Recreational Boating Technical Work Group, while Sandy Bonanno, Nature Conservancy Stewardship Ecologist, will serve on both the Coastal Processes and Environmental Technical Work Groups. Moreover, Dr. Frank Sciremammano, River Board member who has spoken to the Coalition in the past, serves on the Study Board, which is overseeing the whole process.

TODC Member Profile:

by Doug Thompson, *The Nature Conservancy*

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) opened its doors in Pulaski in the early 1990's in recognition of the uniqueness of the eastern shore's barrier dune/wetland system. In committing to focused conservation work in this area, the Conservancy joined a host of strong partnerships already forged by The Ontario Dune Coalition. Although the Conservancy has become a very involved member of the Coalition, many members still inquire about exactly who we are, why we have established a local office and what are the everyday jobs of our Pulaski staff.

To answer the first question, The Conservancy is an international non-profit organization that protects plants, animals, and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. We have operated in the United States since 1951. The Conservancy currently has over 3,000 employees and maintains offices in every state and several countries. New York is unique in that it has five chapters: South Fork Shelter Island, Long Island, Eastern New York, Adirondacks, and Central and Western New York. The Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario Office is part of the Central and Western New York Chapter, which is based in Rochester.

As to how we do our work, the Conservancy uses non-confrontational and entrepreneurial approaches to protect habitat – a win-win approach to conservation. Partnerships are fundamental to our success: In carrying out our mission, The Nature Conservancy works closely with private landowners, businesses, government agencies, local communities, and other conservation organizations. To date, the Conservancy has taken part in the protection of more than 11 million acres in North America. It has also helped partner organizations to protect millions of acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Asia.

The Conservancy's approach is science driven. We work to achieve conservation results that are ecologically and economically compatible. This (science driven) approach is evidenced by the creation of a Natural Heritage program in every state that's purpose is to provide the most complete information about the existence and location of species and natural communities. One of the Conservancy's core strategies is land acquisition. However, we also creatively put science into play on the ground to take into account local community needs and realities. A prime example is the dune steward/intern partnership with DEC, OPRHP, NY Sea Grant and the Friends of Sandy Pond Beach that encourages beachgoers to enjoy their visit to Lake Ontario without impacting dunes and migratory birds. In other parts of the state and the country, we have provided technical and financial assistance to support, among other things, sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry, and ecotourism.



TNC opened an office in Pulaski because, as noted above, the eastern shore barrier dune system is a world-class resource that merits hands-on attention. The Conservancy has a goal of opening over 600 similar community-based offices by 2010.

With continued recognition of the importance of barrier dune system, the Conservancy has expanded the scope of the Pulaski office to include the Tug Hill Plateau. The Project's eastern boundary, which was generally New York Route 3, has been moved east to the Adirondack Blue Line in the Black River Valley. Tug Hill, an area of over 720,000 acres, is the third largest unfragmented landscape in New York behind the Adirondacks and the Catskills. It is the source of over 4,000 miles of rivers and streams – most of which feed the Eastern Lake Ontario Watershed. This expanded vision is in keeping with current scientific thinking that emphasizes the need to work at a landscape level to effectively protect conservation sites such as the barrier dune system that are embedded within the landscape.

The Pulaski office is currently staffed by four Conservancy employees – Doug Thompson, Gerry Smith, Sandy Bonanno, and Kathleen Conrad. Doug Thompson, formerly the Director of Protection for the Wisconsin Chapter of the Conservancy, serves as the Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario Project Director. Gerry Smith is the Conservancy's Land Steward. Gerry, who has been with the Conservancy over 20 years, is responsible for the on-the-ground management activities at all of the Conservancy's preserves in Central New York. Sandy Bonanno, formerly the Eastern Lake Ontario Project Director, is the Stewardship Ecologist for the Central and Western New York Chapter of the Conservancy. Sandy has over ten years academic and professional experience working directly on the ecology of the barrier dune system, and provides the science support that drives our conservation goals. With her new title, her responsibilities have been expanded to include all science matters, chapter-wide. Finally, we recently hired Kathleen Conrad as the Pulaski Office Manager. Kathleen is an 18-year Conservancy veteran who last served as the Director of Communications for the South Fork Shelter Island Chapter on Long Island.

The Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario office is located at 31 S. Jefferson St. in Pulaski. If you have any questions or would like to talk with us about our program, please call us at 315-298-2040. We look forward to meeting you.

Meet the Summer 2001 Dune Stewards

The Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward tradition continues this year with a few changes. Four interns were chosen from a pool of students at SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry, SUNY Oswego, Cornell University, and SUNY-Cobleskill. The interns are receiving college credit and a stipend instead of wages paid in previous years. NYS DEC Region 6, with headquarters in Watertown, and Region 7, Syracuse, will pay the stipend. The Nature Conservancy, which has overseen the dune steward program in past years, is funding the program coordinator's position. Molly Thompson, a Dune & Habitat Educator with NY Sea Grant, Oswego, is the program coordinator.

"This program is critical because the dunes are an important natural resource area that is fragile and attracts intense human use," says Doug Thompson, Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario Project Director of The Nature Conservancy, Pulaski.

"The internship program allows us to use an educational approach for a threat abatement program. The students will have a natural resource background and be able to interpret the dunes as a fragile resource while encouraging wise use of the beach areas. In this way, the resource can continue to contribute to the economics of the local communities."

NY Sea Grant Great Lakes Program Coordinator Dave White agrees. "The interns will benefit from the learning experience while the shoreline benefits from the students' contact with public regarding the value of the natural resource. The interns' project work may also produce significant data for future shoreline projects."

Each intern has been assigned one of four beaches, but don't be surprised if you see them at other sites. They introduce themselves below.



Hi, my name is Ginny Collins and I am the Dune Steward at Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area. I am a third year Engineering student at Cornell University. In my free time I enjoy running, swimming and of course, sleeping. I look forward to seeing many of you out at the beach!



Hi, my name is Dwight Moffett. I'm a student at SUNY Cobleskill. My major is Travel and Resort Marketing. I just finished my first year. I'm a Dune Steward this summer at Deer Creek Wildlife Management Area. I really enjoy the outdoors. Hiking, canoeing, skiing, and water sports are some of my hobbies. Stop down to the beach anytime and say hello.



Hi, my name is Garr Owens and I am the Dune Steward for El Dorado/Black Pond WMA. I have lived in Oswego most of my life and am currently attending SUNY Oswego in pursuit of a biology degree. I just finished my third year and my dream of becoming a biologist is fueled by a passion for birds. I like to backpack to remote spots and ride my bike, but most of all I like to go birding.



Hi, I'm Barry Mahar and I am the Dune Steward at Southwick State Park and Lakeview Wildlife Management Area. I am a bachelor's student at the State University of New York - Cobleskill. My major is Fisheries and Aquaculture. When I am not working, I enjoy fishing, boating, and relaxing.

Some of my other interests include going to garage sales and writing. I also like to spend time with my two granddaughters.

Summer 2001 Dune Field Trips

Southwick Beach and Lakeview WMA

Saturday July 28 & August 11 at 2 pm. Meet at the Southwick Beach concession stand.

Take a guided walk at Southwick Beach State Park and Lakeview WMA, through dunes, wetlands and forests. Dune Steward, Barry Mahar, will lead you on a walk through the variety of habitats along the Southwick/Lakeview nature trail. Along the way you may see deer, fox, a variety of songbirds, and possibly a rare black tern. This walk is approximately 2 miles over easy terrain.

Black Pond Wildlife Management Area

Sunday July 29 and August 5 at 8 am and 2 p.m.

Explore this newly accessible Wildlife Management Area with Garr Owens, Dune Steward. Garr will lead you along a boardwalk trail and over to the beach. Along the way you will experience the change in habitats from wetlands through dunes and to the shore. On the beach you are sure to see migrating shorebirds. This walk is approximately 1 mile and is easy. The trailhead parking lot is reached by traveling about 3 miles south of Henderson Harbor on NY State Rt 3 and then onto Bolton Road. At the end of Bolton Road is a roadway that runs .75 miles to the parking area.

Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area

Sunday, August 12 and Saturday, August 18 at 9 am

Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area is known for its great shorebird viewing. During this 3 hour trip, we'll take a boat ride out to the natural area and view shorebirds with the help of an Onondaga Audubon Society shorebird expert. Sign-up is limited, so leave a message for Molly Thompson at the Dune Steward office, 315- 846-5313 to make your reservation. Meeting site information will be provided when you make your reservation.

*Remember the Dunes throughout the year with the beautiful print,
"Beachcombers,"
by Robert McNamara*



*Available from The Nature Conservancy for \$100.
\$50 will be used for TODC dune education efforts.
Call 315-298-2040 to purchase your print today.*