

PEP Talk

The Newsletter of the Peconic Estuary Program

Volume 5, Issue 1.....Spring 2009

Bayscaping - Yard Management for Cleaner Bays and a Safer Environment

Bayscaping involves greening your landscape at home while protecting our local bays. What you do in your yard and around your home can impact the health of local waterbodies. Bayscaping teaches us a variety of yard management techniques that help reduce pollution and stormwater



Photo by: Diane Hewitt, DCH Graphics

runoff from getting into the estuary. Improving the water quality of the Peconic Estuary can benefit the entire community, from commercial fishermen to recreational swimmers. Bayscaping also helps reduce potential pollutants from contaminating drinking water, and from impacting friends, family members, wildlife, and pets that may use your yard. If done well, bayscaping leaves you with a great looking yard your neighbors will envy, especially when you tell them “it’s bay friendly!”

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Peconic Estuary Bathing Beaches

The marine waters surrounding Suffolk County are an important and unique resource, providing abundant recreational opportunities to citizens and visitors alike. There are currently 188 coastal bathing beaches in Suffolk County, 29 of them are located right here in the Peconic Estuary. The majority of these beaches are pollution free and provide a safe and healthy recreational environment for their patrons. Unfortunately, influences that can adversely affect water quality and potentially expose bathers to microbial pathogens do exist.

These influences include stormwater runoff, waterfowl and wildlife, poorly operating or malfunctioning septic tank systems, illegal discharges from boats and potential upsets from nearby sewage treatment plants, may also affect some beaches. Other common nuisances that may also affect some beaches include aquatic dermatitis (swimmers itch or sea-bathers eruption), algal blooms, stinging jellyfish, and the wash-up of garbage.

In an effort to protect public health in areas that are impacted by pathogens, the Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS)

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PEP Enlists Help of Residents to Re-open Shellfish Areas

The Peconic Estuary Program, in partnership with the Towns of Southold and Southampton, hosted two public meetings in April concerning improving water quality. The targeted watersheds were Hashamomuck Pond and Reeves Bay. These public meetings compliment a larger multi-million dollar effort lead by the PEP in partnership with USEPA, New York State, Suffolk County, and the East End Towns to implement highly focused subwatershed-based stormwater management to restore impaired waterbodies and re-open closed shellfish growing areas. With the implementation of significant resources around Hashamomuck Pond and Reeves Bay expected in the very near future, home and property owners must also do their part to reduce pollutant loads and stormwater runoff volumes.

Forty-five Hashamomuck Pond and seventy-two Reeves Bay watershed area residents learned about the impacts associated with polluted stormwater runoff and about the numerous road drainage improvements planned in their neighborhood. Residents then discussed ways in which they can reduce their stormwater footprint and help restore their subwatershed. These included simple and easy changes such as eliminating fertilizer/pesticide use, reducing turf areas, and avoiding feeding waterfowl, but also focused on more involved efforts such as redirecting rain gutters, and installing rain gardens and rain barrels.

Similar meetings and outreach efforts are planned for additional watersheds around the Peconic Estuary where Subwatershed Management Plans have been developed by the PEP. For more information on the Reeves Bay and Hashamomuck Pond watersheds, visit their dedicated webpages at <http://peconice.ipower.com/ReevesBay.html> and <http://peconice.ipower.com/Hashamomuck.html> respectively. Together, we must all do our part to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary!

~Laura Stephenson, NYSDEC/PEP



Photos By: Laura Stephenson, NYSDEC/PEP

Photo taken April 30th 2009 at Reeves Bay meeting which was held at the David W. Crohan Community Center in Flanders


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. Edited by Emily A. Fogarty



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



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

PEP Strategic Planning Meeting (2008)

In September of 2008, the Peconic Estuary Program Policy Committee recommended that the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP) convene a strategic planning meeting to guide future implementation of its Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP).

The Peconic Estuary Strategic Planning Meeting took place on December 8th and 9th 2008 at The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Mashomack Preserve Manor House on Shelter Island. Prior to the meeting date the invited participants were asked to provide input on their top PEP-related priorities and suggest what the PEP could be doing better.

In response to the feedback from the questions it was determined that three rotational breakout sessions would discuss three overarching topics: habitat restoration, funding and local land use improvement and innovations. During each session each group answered the following questions:

1. What additional activities should the PEP be doing or be doing differently to address this priority issue?

2. How can the PEP address and overcome various political, regulatory, administrative, knowledge and funding challenges related to this priority issue.

One (of many) important conclusions stressed the need for stakeholders, especially the residents, business owners and local municipal officials, to take a renewed interest in the long-term support of the PEP. Furthermore, conclusions drawn from the meeting indicate that it is necessary to identify the financial needs for areas such as Critical Land Protection Plan integration, Agricultural Stewardship, stormwater remediation projects, sewage treatment plant upgrades. Funding efforts also must be expanded for habitat and shellfish bed restoration. Ultimately, it was also agreed that a "State of the Bays" conference should be held in the near future in order to put into action the goals and objectives identified in the strategic planning meeting. The meeting summary can be found on the PEP website at <http://peconice.ipower.com/pdf/StratMeetingSummaryFinal.pdf>

~Emily A. Fogarty, SCDHS/PEP

Calendar of Events

July 11 & August 8, 2009 - "Paddle the River" 2009, in search of invasive *Ludwigia*. Meet at Peconic Lake Estates Civic Organization (PLECO), Calverton, NY. For more info and to register, contact: Laura Stephenson at 631.444.0871 or lbstephe@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

Please note: You MUST register at least 1 week prior to each event!

July 24, 2009 at 5:00PM - at Reeves Bay Beach - Please join us Friday July 24th at 5PM for a beach exploration, we will discuss the stories behind some of the shells and marine life you will find while strolling local beaches, and ways you can help to protect this amazing ecosystem. Families welcome.

Contact Jennifer Skilbred, Group for the East End/Peconic Estuary Program at (631) 765-6450 x212 for more information.

Editors Note: In the last issue of PEPTalk (Winter 2008) the wrong contributor was credited for the "Species Snapshot: Seahorse" article. **Ali Donargo** from CCE was the author of this article, not Kimberly Petersen. We apologize for the misprint.

Bayscaping from page 1

Whether you live on the bay or in town – you are never too far away from the water here on the East End, and because of this the daily decisions we make on our property can directly impact the health of the Peconic Bay. There are a variety of steps you can take, some of which you may already be doing, ranging from simple and inexpensive to a few that take a bit more time and effort, but remember wherever you start you will be helping to improve the health of our local bays!

A few techniques you may want to try include, eliminating or at least reducing fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide inputs. Overusing fertilizer can lead to harmful algal blooms in the bay and low dissolved oxygen levels causing an unhealthy environment for many marine organisms. Pesticides contain potentially hazardous chemicals, so by using natural alternatives to deal with pest problems when necessary, you can reduce the amount of contaminants added to the environment.



Photo by: Diane Hewitt, DCH Graphics

Another great bayscaping idea is to minimize your lawn area and return some portions of your yard to natural habitat. Natural areas are fun for children and pets to explore, and can attract interesting backyard birds, and other wildlife for you to enjoy! Using native plants, which naturally thrive in local conditions, requires less upkeep. Also learn to appreciate clover and dandelions, a lawn with a variety of species requires less maintenance and provides the same open area to enjoy.

Consider ways to prevent or reduce stormwater runoff from your property. A few ideas include redirecting rain gutters so that they do not drain to paved areas, installing rain gardens (depressions with water-loving plants) to soak up water in common puddling areas, or bring in rain barrels to trap and re-use water from your gutter. Remember the main idea behind “bayscaping” is to eliminate over-fertilization and the release of potential contaminants into our local environment, while minimizing the amount of water that runs off your property. For more information on these ideas as well as a variety of others please visit our website at: www.peconicestuary.org, or call Jennifer Skilbred at 631-765-6450. To view a copy of the Peconic Baykeeper/Group for the East End “Bayscaping” brochure, go to http://peconic.ipower.com/pdf/Bayscaping_Brochure.pdf.

It is important to remember many of these bayscaping techniques will save you time and money both in the short term and in the long run. As a start, this weekend, think about picking a few items from the list and implementing them around your home. No matter what your level of participation, bayscaping can help make a difference in protecting our local bays!

~Jennifer Skilbred, Group for the East End/PEP

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species, and their mode of feeding improves water clarity and recycles nutrients to benefit primary production – be it phytoplankton or eel grass (*Zostera marina*). To achieve such dense aggregations, oysters have evolved an amazing life cycle that begins with spawning events that take place during warmer months where each female may shed a million to more than 100 million eggs into the water column to be fertilized by the males. The resulting larvae are free-swimming, feeding upon plankton for a few weeks to a month until they ultimately settle as ‘spat’ and cement themselves permanently to a hard substrate, whether rock or the shells of the oysters from which they were derived.

Extensive commercial oyster fisheries have been underway for hundreds of years, especially along our Gulf and Mid-Atlantic coasts in towns like Apalachicola, FL and Blue Point, NY where the oyster company of the same name gained world renown with its harvest from the waters of Great South Bay. The severe depletion of wild stocks over time due to over-fishing and other anthropogenic pressures have led to the formation of numerous aquaculture operations whose oyster production has served to keep up with demand while taking some pressure off of the remaining natural populations. Coastal areas around these operations may see some of the same ecological benefits lost from natural populations through the suspension feeding and spat production of the cultured oysters. There is also a multitude of oyster restoration projects underway along our coastlines as the reestablishment of even a small percentage of the dense, wild populations lost to over-fishing, disease, and habitat degradation is seen as a worthy cause in the effort of improving the overall quality of our coastal environments.

~Wade E. Carden, NYSDEC

Future PEP Talk articles will expand on the successes of oyster restoration efforts in the Peconics.

Bathing Beaches, from Page 1

conducts a bathing beach water quality monitoring program during the summer bathing season. Sampling at area beaches is performed at least 1-2 times per week. To evaluate beach water quality, levels of the “indicator organisms” Enterococci are used as an estimate of fecal contamination for all coastal beaches (in accordance with recommendations from the USEPA and with requirements of the New York State Sanitary Code).

Unfortunately, beach closures are a reality. Decisions regarding the closing of a beach are based on sample results as well as various factors, including knowledge of potential sources of contamination in the beach watershed, historic water quality data, past criteria exceedances, weather, and area flushing characteristics. Under certain conditions, such as following unusually heavy rainfall or upon the onset of public health nuisances (i.e., episodes of swimmers itch, sea-bathers eruption, etc.) advisories recommending against bathing and other water contact are issued. You’d be happy to know that in the past 3 years no Peconic Estuary beaches were closed due to criteria exceedances of Enterococci bacteria. Only advisories have been issued, as a precaution, due to unusually heavy rains.

In 2008 an interactive map-based website was launched for the public to get current updates on beach closures/advisories, as well as educational material. Visit us on the web at www.suffolkcountyny.gov/health and in the popular links box click on 2009 Bathing Beach Monitoring. Notifications of all closures and advisories can also be obtained daily by calling our Department’s Beach Hotline at 631-852-5822. ~Nancy Panarese SCDHS

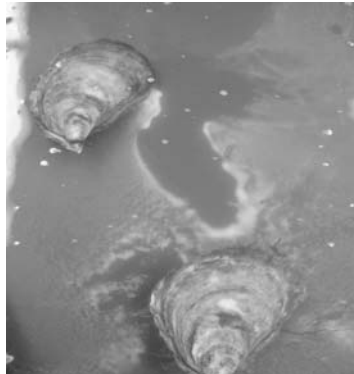
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Species Snapshot: Oysters

When one thinks of oysters, many images may come to mind. Those with a fondness for jewelry may envision a string of pearls where each lustrous sphere represents one oyster's lengthy effort to free itself from the irritation of a single grain of sand. Seafood lovers may see a basket of fried oysters, or a dozen raw on the half-shell with lemon wedges and hot sauce on the side. The importance of our American, or 'eastern' oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*), goes far beyond jewelry and seafood though.

Our native oysters can be viewed as ecosystem engineers, providing a host of critical services to estuarine environments throughout their range. These bivalve mollusks can be found as far north as the Canadian Maritime Provinces, and southward to the Gulf of Mexico and the northern waters of the Caribbean. Oysters are colonizers, and as such they form dense aggregations in areas where conditions are favorable, whether as subtidal 'beds' in the northern parts of their range, or sub- or intertidal 'reefs' to the south. They are also suspension-feeders, meaning that they actively filter suspended particles from the overlying water column, sieving out nutritious organic matter such as phytoplankton and rejecting indigestible detritus. An individual oyster is capable of filtering tens of gallons of seawater per day as it feeds, so a dense, thriving population of oysters in a given estuary is capable of processing the entire volume of their habitat on the order of weeks or even days! These aspects of oyster ecology make them keystone species in many coastal locations, where the three-dimensional structure of the beds or reefs they form provides critical habitat for hundreds of other marine



*Photo by: Wade E. Carden, NYSDEC
Hatchery-conditioned broodstock oysters
spawning at one of the local shellfish
hatcheries.*

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