

Getting nowhere fast. A young oarsman is just learning on Beaver Dam Creek on the South Shore of Long Island. Efforts are underway to restore the wetlands along the creek to improve fish and wildlife habitat. Photo by Barbara Branca



Restoring Beaver Dam Creek

The original channel of Beaver Dam creek in 1938 when engineers began work to straighten its curves.



The same area today shows the channel was dredged and straightened mainly to accommodate boats going out into Great South Bay. Photo courtesy of Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation

Restoring coastal ecosystems to better health is a priority of many groups and programs throughout New York and our nation. Restoration efforts attempt to improve the health of coastal areas by undoing some of the damage done over the years, and also strive to keep pollutants from entering coastal waters. One such project is the Beaver Dam Creek Restoration Project on Long Island's south shore.

When Beaver Dam Creek was dredged in the 1920s and 1960s, the dredged materials were placed in the wetlands. Dikes constructed along the Creek prevented the tides from reaching the wetlands. As a result, habitat was lost for many important fish species including winter and summer flounder, striped bass, bluefish, blackfish (tautog) and forage fish species. Also lost was habitat for the many waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds that live and feed in wetlands.

There are two primary aspects of this restoration project: first, to restore wetlands along the Creek; and second, to motivate everyone that lives in the watershed to become its stewards.

The emphasis of the actual restoration is removing the dredged spoils on the historical wetland areas, opening some of the dikes to allow regular tidal flow, and controlling invasive plant species, particularly common reed (*Phragmites australis*). These activities will allow for natural marsh functions to return, as well as the plants and animals dependent on wetlands. The work will be done on land owned by the Post-Morrow Foundation and the Suffolk County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department. A small-scale project on a three-acre piece of Post-Morrow Foundation land has already been successfully restored. The goal is to restore more acres in the future.



Restoration efforts will reduce the dominance of the common reed (*Phragmites australis*), found growing along the banks of Beaver Dam Creek. Photo by Barbara Branca

Watch

Another part of the project is to get people involved in the stewardship of the creek. Many day-to-day activities can lead to pollutants finding their way into Beaver Dam Creek and the adjoining wetlands. Educational materials about the project will inform the local population that lives in the watershed about the materials that can potentially cause pollution, such as fertilizers, automotive oil and other toxic products used around the home or place of business.

Partnerships are a key ingredient of habitat restoration. Many different organizations are contributing their own staff time and resources to complete this project as well as actively seeking grant money from the State and Federal governments to help pay for the restoration work. The project was recently awarded a \$60,000 grant from the NOAA Community-Based Restoration Program.

Some of the groups lending their expertise in this project include the Post-Morrow Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York Sea Grant, The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York State Department of State, the Town of Brookhaven, South Country Schools and several Suffolk County Agencies.

— Robert Kent
NYSG Marine District
Program Coordinator

Robert Kent worked with Oregon and Louisiana Sea Grant on the *National Ecosystem Restoration Manual*. See page 23 to order.

Photo by Barbara Branca



Cindy Patterson of Ducks Unlimited explains to Robert Kent how the common reed and dredged material were successfully removed from a three-acre site. Now in its place is smooth cordgrass (*Spartina*) that appears shorter and lighter green than the surrounding area. Boat courtesy of Joe Harder

Photo by Susan Hamill



As the channel was straightened, dredged spoils were dumped into the wetlands, covering native vegetation and destroying fish and wildlife habitat.

Captions by Barbara Branca