



# Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward Program

*Resource Appreciation through Public Education*

The dunes and wetlands along Eastern Lake Ontario provide habitat for a diversity of plants, fishes and animals. They also protect shoreline property from the storm energy of the lake, and are part of a 17-mile system of shoreline beaches, bays, public campgrounds, private cottages and natural areas. The system includes Wildlife Management Areas at Deer Creek, Lakeview Marsh, and Black Pond; Sandy Island Beach; Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area; Southwick Beach State Park; and El Dorado Nature Preserve.

To encourage public appreciation and proper recreational enjoyment, New York Sea Grant, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy and New York State Parks formed the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward Program. May through Labor Day, college undergrad and graduate students walk the dunes and wildlife management areas, serving as goodwill ambassadors promoting environmentally-sound use of New York's natural resources through public education. The stewards interact with visitors, offer public walks and programs, and lead by example



as they install and maintain beachgrass plantings, protective fencing, and dune walkovers; and conduct shoreline/beach cleanup. Walking up to 8 miles a day, the stewards also monitor visitor usage, and assist state and federal fish, wildlife and forestry staff.

Programs offered may include a wetlands walk at Black Pond, a talk on bird adaptations, a tour of the cobble beach at Deer Creek, and discussions on invasive species and how to balance human recreation with personal watercraft, boats, camping and hiking with environmental protection.

Steward Program Coordinator Mary Penney of New York Sea Grant says, "The stewards are the first line of communication, talking with people about the importance of maintaining strong habitats not only for rare and endangered species, but for the everyday plants and wildlife that are vital to ecosystem biodiversity."

"Continual monitoring and education of visitors is needed throughout the Dunes and Wetlands Area in order to ensure the continued protection of this fragile ecosystem and enjoyment of visitors," say Diane Kuehn and Rachel Habig in "Monitoring Recreational Use in the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area" (SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry, 2005).

**More info:**

[www.nysgextension.org/glhabitat/dune/dune.html](http://www.nysgextension.org/glhabitat/dune/dune.html)



*Dune Steward John Koltz (left) talks with visitors about shorebirds that frequent the Eastern Lake Ontario dunes.*

*Photos by Mary Penney*

# Do You Know...?

## Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Stewards Share Interesting Facts & Figures

Do you know...

... that the 17-mile-long Eastern Lake Ontario dunes system contains the largest freshwater and most extensive freshwater sand dune formations in New York state.

... the dune crossover boardwalk at Black Pond Wildlife Management Area is ADA- (Americans with Disability Act) compliant.

... El Dorado Nature Preserve includes a bird sanctuary offering a critical rest stop for migratory birds.

... American Beachgrass is a hardy plant that can thrive in dry, sandy conditions, and helps sand dunes to form and remain stable. Driftwood also helps secure the dunes.

... walking or playing on the sand dunes can cause dune blowouts and erosion.

... one of the most common ways invasive species have entered Lake Ontario is from foreign ships dumping ballast water.

... not to touch giant hogweed (described by some as Queen Anne's lace with an attitude) - the plant can cause harm to human health as well as crowding out desirable native plants.

... Derby Hill Bird Observatory sits on a drumlin shaped by ancient glaciers.

... Deer Creek Wildlife Management Area has one of the few cobble beaches on Eastern Lake Ontario.

... the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward Program is a collaborative program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, New York State Parks and New York Sea Grant.

