



Protecting the Fragile Dune Ecosystem by Promoting Proper Recreational Usage

Along a 17-mile stretch of Eastern Lake Ontario shoreline, El Dorado Nature Preserve/Black Pond Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Lakeview WMA, Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area, and Deer Creek WMA belong to the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area (ELODWA) and are in protected ownership by New York State and The Nature Conservancy.



At these sites the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Stewards are responsible for public education, site maintenance, and monitoring. The goals of the Steward Program (managed by New York Sea Grant in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Parks, and The Nature Conservancy) are to promote proper recreational usage of these public areas, to protect the fragile dune ecosystem, and to reduce negative impacts to the natural habitat.

Public education regarding the significance of the dunes and wetlands as well as the importance of regulation compliance are conducted through discussions, information fliers, presentations, and a steward media project that includes a newspaper article, project summary sheet, and a public education program. Stewards provide information on current topics affecting the dunes and wetlands area, direct the public to additional educational resources, and introduce the public to the multitude of accessible recreation locations provided by the diversity of habitats in the ELODWA.



Dune steward Sarah Verdoliva leads a public education tour through the diverse habitats at Lakeview Wildlife Management Area. Pgl Photos: Mary Penney, NY Sea Grant

However, as recreational activity along the shoreline increases, the risk of negative human impacts to the fragile resource also increases. Human activities with harmful impacts include human traffic through the dunes, unleashed dogs, litter, fires and removal of driftwood. Through various educational efforts, the Stewards aim to increase regulation compliance to facilitate the preservation of the dunes and wetlands area. Public outreach programs include guided tours along one of the many trails in the ELODWA or an educational presentation on methods to prevent or correct adverse impacts of human activity in the fragile areas.

The Role of the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes

The dunes buffer adjacent wetland and inland areas from high water, strong winds, and severe coastal storms. The wetlands are important for protecting water quality and reducing flood and storm damage by storing water during high water periods and releasing it during droughts. Thus, this vital resource creates a diverse habitat for flora and fauna. Although much of the vegetation is able to withstand unstable conditions, its fragility is exposed when introduced to human impact.

Regulations Protect Native Habitat

Regulations in Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands are in place to protect native flora and fauna and to promote a longstanding, aesthetically pleasing recreational area.



Use Designated Dune Trails and Walkovers

Footpaths through the dunes accelerate the possibility of a dune blowout - a U-shaped area of sand in areas where the primary dune vegetation, beachgrass, has been destroyed. These areas are subjected to unusually strong winds that can scour and widen the newly created paths and carry sand inland filling the forest and wetlands, the effects of which can take many years to reverse. To reduce dune erosion and potential dune blowouts, use designated trails and dune walkovers.

No Open Fires and Please Leave Driftwood to Protect the Dunes

Open fires are prohibited in Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area. Ground fires can burn below the soil's surface. Surface fires remove vegetation and leave soil exposed. Other consequences of open fires include weakened tree roots, soil erosion, and, at the hottest temperatures, the altered chemical composition of the soil. Using driftwood from the natural beach areas for fires removes a valuable sand-trapping and dune-stabilizing resource.



Leash Your Dog

In the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area, 6-foot leashes are required when bringing your dog to the area. Leashing dogs keeps them from entering the fragile dunes or disturbing wildlife inhabiting the area, and ensures the enjoyment of other visitors in the area.



Carry-In, Carry-Out Controls Litter, Protects Wildlife

Litter is commonly encountered within the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area. Not only do some inorganic materials such as plastic take many years to decompose, but items such as balloon ribbons and plastic six-pack canholders pose a tangling or choking threat to birds and wildlife. Please be sure to follow the carry in, carry-out regulation to help protect nesting birds and other wildlife.



*For More Info on the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune & Salmon River
Steward Program: 315-312-3042*

The Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward & Salmon River Steward Program is managed by New York Sea Grant in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Parks, and The Nature Conservancy.

