



## ***NEWS from the DUNES***

### **Recreation by the Rules Protects Shoreline Dunes**

By 2007 Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward Sarah Verdoliva

Covering almost 17 miles of Lake Ontario shoreline, the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area (ELODWA) offers a variety of recreational activities. As activities at Lakeview Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and other natural areas of ELODWA become more widespread, risk of damage to these beautiful landmarks increases. Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward Sarah Verdoliva, guided walk in July 2007 at Lakeview WMA, one of three WMAs in the ELODWA. Walk participants learned how Lake Ontario's coastal dunes create an area unlike any other and how to protect them.

With beautiful natural beaches, ponds, marshes, and fens, the dunes provide protection for adjacent wetlands and the wildlife and plants that inhabit them. Although ATVs and other motorized vehicles are prohibited on the dunes, boats, kayaks, and canoes can access Lake Ontario through the many associated creeks and ponds. Boat-accessible areas are great for fishing. Many ponds, such as Floodwood Pond at Lakeview WMA, offer bird watching and the opportunity to see the endangered Black Tern. Excessive noise should be avoided to decrease wildlife disturbance. Noise can drive birds from nests, possibly breaking eggs and exposing young to harm.

Lakeview WMA is accessible by foot and has four trails for hiking, bird watching, and photography. The Lake Ontario Dune Trail starts at either the Southwick Beach State Park entrance or the Pierrepont Place boat launch. Along the Trail you can see the transition – called succession - from shoreline sandy dunes to inland woodland habitat. A dune walkover to the natural beach allows harmless crossover of the dunes.

Often, footpaths are seen through the dunes. To minimize erosion, use designated trails and dune walkovers. Beach grass can withstand sand burial or extreme weather but as few as 25 round trips on a path through the dune can reduce vegetation by half (New York Sea Grant). Once vegetation is depleted, the disturbed area is left open for erosion and wind scouring. Loss of vegetation opens the dunes to the force of the wind and can result in a dune blowout.

On its north side, the nearly-three-mile-long natural beach at Lakeview WMA presents a great place for dog walking, running, or bike riding on the hard-packed sand. When walking dogs adhere to the six-foot leash law for this WMA and other areas along the eastern Lake Ontario shore to keep dogs from entering the fragile dunes and disrupting wildlife like the Black Tern. Not only is a leashed dog invaluable to dune system protection; following this regulation can facilitate recreational enjoyment and prevent situations like an unleashed dog startling a bike rider.

Along the natural beaches in the ELODWA, driftwood traps sand and helps maintain stability of the dunes. Removing driftwood or starting campfires is not permitted. Fires not only remove driftwood, but create unappealing black pits in the sand and could become a threat to vegetation if flames were to spread. Building structures or erecting tents is also prohibited here. Approved campsites are available at Southwick Beach State Park - call 1-800-456-CAMP.

A common beach encounter is litter. For example, a plastic six-pack can holder can pose a tangling threat to birds. Thus regulations like Carry In, Carry Out are in place to protect flora and fauna and create a longstanding, aesthetically pleasing recreational area.

By being mindful of your surroundings and activities, you can help diminish human impact to this vital shoreline resource, allowing native wildlife to thrive in its natural environment.

For more information about the Steward Program please contact New York Sea Grant, 315-312-3042; or visit us on the web at <http://www.nysgextension.org>.

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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.

