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OUR P.A.P.E.R

Parks Are for People & Environmental Resources

A publication of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Environmental Management Bureau

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Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of *Our Paper*. This newsletter celebrates the accomplishments of staff within the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) that are working primarily through the Natural Resource Stewardship (NRS) and Environmental Education (EE) Initiative.



NRS staff come together for the 1st NRS Biologist meeting at Peebles Island, July 2008

NRS biologists, scientists and other staff within EMB will contribute to each issue by providing program highlights from their natural resource projects including, habitat restoration, invasive species, wildlife, and public outreach.

In addition, each issue will more formally introduce a member of the NRS staff through a spotlight column entitled “*Meet the Biologist.*”

Our hope is that we may continue to produce these newsletters after each field season to reinforce NYS Parks’ ongoing commitment to natural resources and demonstrate how vital a role the biologists, scientists and



NRS Biologist Ariana Breisch and an intern remove wineberry at Connetquot River State Park

educators have in connecting the Parks’ environmental resources with park patrons. Thus, we believe the spirit and mission of the NRS & EE Initiative is embodied within the name of this newsletter—*Our Paper*, which stands for **Parks Are for People and Environmental Resources**.

Inside this issue:

<i>Invasive Species</i>	2
<i>Wildlife</i>	2, 4
<i>Public Outreach</i>	3, 4
<i>Habitat Restoration</i>	3, 5
<i>Meet the Biologist</i>	6

OPRHP rolls out Natural Resource Stewardship Initiative

New York State’s parks are home to an incredible diversity of plants, animals, and ecosystems, many of which are rare or endangered. OPRHP, under the leadership of Commissioner Carol Ash, has launched the Natural Resource Stewardship

and Interpretation Initiative. Through this initiative, OPRHP demonstrates its commitment to the environment by providing leadership for protecting and restoring important plant and animal habitats across the State Parks system through

comprehensive programs, including Environmental Education, Natural Heritage, Water Quality Monitoring, Biodiversity Conservation, Invasive Species Control, and Ecosystem-based Management.



Japanese Knotweed Removal

Invasive species control is one component of the natural resource stewardship initiative. These nonnative, invasive species reduce biodiversity and decrease the quality of habitat for wildlife and other native plants. By controlling existing invasive plants, we will be restoring areas to support more diverse populations and also preventing new infestations by removing the seed source.

During the 2008 field season, Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*), a nonnative invasive plant, was located and mapped during site assessments in parks of the Allegany, Genesee and Niagara regions. This plant had encroached upon nearly 1000 m² total in Wilson-Tuscarora, De Veaux Woods, and Woodlawn Beach State Parks. This plant is usually found in riparian



Site -pre-removal



The crew on site - post-removal

areas in dense stands that can reach heights of 12 ft replacing native vegetation.

Thanks to workers from all three parks, including everyone from lifeguards to managers, everybody pitched in to help with the removal process. The plants were chopped down with weed-wackers, machetes, pruners and later taken to an incinerator. The next steps include a secondary removal of plant shoots and/or roots, placement of fresh topsoil on the area along with weed barrier and grass seed.

Interpretative signage will be posted to alert patrons to the habitat restoration in progress at these removal sites.

Meg Janis, NRS

Western District Regions

Bird Monitoring after Forest Fire

The landscape of Minnewaska State Park has been shaped by fire, and the forests within the park have adapted to periodic fires. However, fire has largely been excluded from the park in recent years. As a result, biologists have been unable to study the role that fire plays in shaping plant and animal distributions throughout the park. The 3000 acre wildfire that burned through Minnewaska this past April provided an unparalleled opportunity to study the importance of fire in these forests. In coordination with staff from the Nature Conservancy and the Mohonk Preserve,

biologists from OPRHP have begun monitoring the response of the bird community to last April's fire.

In June, Matt Medler and Tray Biasioli conducted multiple bird surveys within the burn, as well as in unburned "control" plots. As expected, the abundance of certain species that require dense canopy or understory for nesting, such as Red-eyed Vireo and Prairie Warbler, were much lower in the burned forest. However, the fire also appeared to create habitat for species that favor an open understory for forag-

ing or nesting, including Chipping Sparrow and Veery. These species were found in much greater densities in the burned forest, and their populations may flourish in the years immediately following the fire. Future monitoring will be required to determine long-term population responses to the fire. Hopefully, the results of this research will help guide OPRHP's future prescribed fire and wildfire management strategies.

Tray Biasioli, Bird Conservation Area Program Assistant



While this spring's wildfire at Minnewaska State Park burned intensely in some areas (above left), many other sites experienced relatively moderate fire impacts (above right). OPRHP biologists are conducting long-term research to determine the importance of wildfires to the bird community at Minnewaska.

SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry (ESF) helps out State Park

On August 23, 2008, incoming freshmen from SUNY-ESF participated in



SUNY-ESF freshmen remove invasive swallow-wort seed pods as part of their "Saturday of Service"

an invasive plant removal project at Chittenango Falls State Park. NRS

Biologist and ESF alumnus Tom Hughes recruited the students to remove swallow-wort seed pods from a portion of the park that was in close proximity to the habitat of the rare Chittenango Ovate Amber Snail.

In addition, Katie Miles, Julie Smith, and Morgan Dair, all who are both OPRHP employees and ESF students, participated in the event.

Kimberly May, Park Naturalist and ESF alumnus, provided a brief interpretive talk about Chittenango Falls State Park prior to the removal.

Park Manager Stephanie Chapin treated the ESF extended family to a celebratory lunch afterwards.



Over 25 students from SUNY-ESF and several staff from OPRHP removed swallow-wort at Chittenango Falls on August 23, 2008

*Tom Hughes, NRS
Finger Lakes and Central Regions*

Park patrons spot NRS biologists in NYS Parks



Ecologist Lynn Schnurr and Biologist Danielle Dewey assist youth with creating bug masks at the NYS Fair, August 2008



Youth from Syracuse City Parks & Recreation proudly display their Asian longhorned and emerald ash-borer beetle masks created as part of an invasive insect outreach program from the NYSDEC & OPRHP



NRS Biologist Tom Hughes gives a pond ecology presentation as part of celebrating National Public Lands Day at Glimmerglass State Park

Sunken Meadow State Park Habitat Restoration Pre-monitoring

OPRHP is working with the Open Space Stewardship Program (OSSP) on Long Island to enable students to become stewards of public land. Parks



Sunken Meadow State Park study

partnered with Hauppauge High School's A.P. Environmental Science classes, NYSDEC, Sea Grant and OSSP to develop a long-term habitat monitoring program along a tidal creek at Sunken Meadow State Park. This is the site of a proposed project to increase tidal flow to the creek to restore a degraded salt marsh and re-establish anadromous fish runs. Students have started to monitor water quality, macro-invertebrates, fish and plants each month during the school year to gather pre-restoration data which will be useful to us and other agencies.

*Ariana Breisch, NRS
NYC and Long Island Regions*



Students and DEC personnel sampling fish.

Ecosystem-Based Management Literacy

Four large educational kiosks are to be installed in Long Island and New York City Parks this October. The kiosks are part of our Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) Literacy project that is

material on several topics, yet they display how everything – ecosystems, wildlife, people, our actions, and our wellbeing – is interconnected (see panels 1 & 2). Many people helped create these kiosks

created an excellent product that will educate people for years to come.

Look for Great Lakes-focused kiosks in the future. These will also educate peo-



EBM Literacy Panel 1



EBM Literacy Panel 2

funded by NY's Environmental Protection Fund under the state's Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council. These kiosks provide educational mate-

rial from OPRHP, DEC, DOS, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Riverhead Foundation and the Council Agencies. We would like to extend our sincere thanks for all of their hard work which has

ple on our coastal ecosystems, how we impact them, why they are important, and what we can do to conserve them.

Lynn Schnurr, EBM Ecologist

Surveys for Rare Reptiles and Amphibians in NYS Parks

During the summer of 2008, three surveys were conducted for worm snakes in Clarence Fahnestock State Park and separate sections of Hudson Highlands State Park. A single adult worm snake was found on one of these surveys in Hudson Highlands. This is a new location for this species and adds to our knowledge of the distribution of this rare and elusive snake in the park system, as well as within NY State.



Worm snake at Hudson Highlands SP

Also in 2008, several surveys were conducted for timber rattlesnakes in the vicinity of reported, but unconfirmed, rattlesnake sightings in Hudson Highlands, Bear Mountain, Harriman, and Taconic State Parks. Six rattlesnakes were located, along with several NY species of Greatest Conservation Need (northern copperhead, black rat snake, five-lined skink and eastern box turtle).



Northern cricket frog at Sterling Forest

Several visits were made to Little Dam Lake in Sterling Forest to examine issues related to potential threats and habitat restoration for the New York State Endangered northern cricket frog, a species that occupies this lake. An on-site experts meeting was held that included NYS OPRHP and NYS DEC staff, as well as a biologist from a local consulting firm that has expertise with this species. The meeting's results have evolved into a draft restoration plan for the protection and restoration of cricket frog habitat.

Further survey efforts have found more frogs and a potential upland overwintering site. If an overwintering location is confirmed in Sterling Forest, it will be a very significant find for NYS OPRHP, as well as for the scientific community in general, as this would be the first site in New York State.

Jesse Jaycox, NRS

Taconic—Palisades Regions

Reduced Mowing

As Natural Resource Stewards, it's important to consider a broad range of natural resource issues including not only wildlife and habitat, but also clean air and water resources, sustainability and visitor enjoyment and education. To this effect, the reduced mowing program begun in the Saratoga-Capital District Region is a natural resource project that has had benefits across the board including improved wildlife habitat, decreased habitat fragmentation, decreased stormwater runoff and erosion, a more cohesive trails network, increased environmental educational opportunities, decreased use of gasoline and diesel fuel, reduced carbon emissions, reduced noise pollution, decreased cost of equipment upkeep and maintenance, and increased availability of mowing staff for other park facility needs. Although original comments about the program were mixed, all comments received after the program was initiated were positive with the public appreciating our effort to reduce



Reduced mowing areas in Saratoga Spa State Park providing habitat for flora and fauna, wetland buffers from stormwater impacts, and potential for endangered butterfly habitat restoration.



Program

well as enjoying the new aesthetics of the more natural areas.

This program is also important considering our current fiscal climate and austerity goals. Although the cost savings from this program in terms of reduced maintenance costs is difficult to assess, the fuel savings are easy to calculate. This year, Saratoga Spa State Park, by reducing mowing to once a year on approximately 20 acres, will save roughly \$1,500 in fuel costs alone. Although this figure is relatively small, particularly given the size of the Agency's budget, to date, this program has been partially initiated in six State

Parks in the Saratoga-Capital District Region. If utilized on a statewide basis, this program could result in significant savings. This program is a good example of implementing cost-saving sustainable practices that provide many operational and environmental benefits.

Casey Holzworth, NRS

The Use of Deer Exclosures in Parks

White-tailed deer are an important part of the biodiversity of our state parks. Park visitors will always stop to admire the sight of a deer in a forest or field. But deer are also having a negative impact on our parks at both at a small scale, damaging landscapes and gardens, and at a large scale, impacting forest biodiversity and sustainability.

In many of our parks an overabundant deer population has resulted in the loss of wildflowers, ferns and shrubs. Deer have also eliminated tree seedlings and saplings reducing the ability of the forest to regenerate. The end result is a much more open forest that is being invaded by non-native plants such as Japanese barberry, multiflora

rose and garlic mustard.

At parks in the Finger Lakes, Thousand Islands and Genesee regions we will fence off areas approximately 15 by 15 meters in size to prevent deer from entering inside. These deer exclosures are



Tulip tree sapling in exclosure



Exclosure gate

being set up with three purposes in mind. First is to document the impacts deer are having on our forest resources.

We will be recording the vegetation both inside the exclosure and in a control plot outside the exclosure to see how the vegetation responds when deer are removed.

The second object of the exclosure is to demonstrate to the public the impacts deer are having on our forests. Many of the changes that deer have caused have taken place gradually and over a long period of time. Many people no longer know what a healthy forest should look like.

And lastly, as we work to manage the deer in our parks to reduce these impacts, the exclosures will serve as a means of evaluating the recovery of the forest vegetation.

Mark Rogers, Wildlife NRS

Meet the Biologist -Meg Janis (Western District Regions)

Growing up on my family's fruit and vegetable farm, implanted in me a love for the natural world at a young age. I knew by the time I was in high school that I wanted to pursue a career in the natural sciences. I went on to receive my BS in Biological Sciences from SUNY Brockport in 2003 where I had developed a background in water chemistry. In 2004, I started my career with NYS Parks at Letchworth State Park as a water system operator. In this position, I was responsible for monitoring the water quality of the drinking water systems, pools, beaches and wastewater in the region.

I also worked for NYS DEC in region 9 for six months in 2007-2008 as a State Wildlife Grant Biologist. This position allowed me to work with rare and endangered animals and have a role in the drafting of a water shed action plan for both Lake Erie and the Upper Allegheny River Basin.

Currently I am working on a spoils field reclamation project in Allegany State Park, and proposing to do shrubland management at Joseph Davis State Park and a biodiversity and deer impact assessment at Letchworth State Park.



Meg climbing the Genesee River gorge in Letchworth State Park as part of a radio-telemetry study



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EMB Mission Statement

The mission of the Environmental Management Bureau is to assist OPRHP in the responsible stewardship of its valuable natural, historic and cultural resources, as well as in providing safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors.