

OUTCOME 5: OPEN SPACE PRESERVED



Human population growth and burgeoning development in the Reserve continue to have a dramatic effect on the estuary through loss of open space. Open space protection is perhaps the most effective mechanism for protecting living resources and preventing further degradation of water quality. Open space also preserves community character by ensuring variety and visual interest in the built environment, maintaining a sense of place, providing for passive public access and recreation opportunities, and safeguarding aesthetic qualities that benefit tourism and the quality of life. Measures to preserve open space include both development of strategic acquisition plans and actual acquisition of property.

Development of Reserve-wide Acquisition and Protection Strategy

A comprehensive strategy is needed to guide future open space preservation efforts in a manner that will achieve the Reserve Council's goals for water quality, living resource protection, and public use. Reserve partners have taken the following steps to advance development of such a strategy:

- The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), NYS Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), and NYS Department of State (DOS) worked cooperatively to update the *New York State Open Space Conservation Plan*. The revised plan includes for the first time a Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program developed by NYS DOS. The Reserve Office participated as a member of the Long Island Region Advisory Committee to assist with development of recommendations for open space projects and priorities in the Reserve that are consistent with the Reserve CMP open space protection recommended actions.
- NYS DOS completed development of a GIS-based open space analysis tool for use in focusing acquisition funds intended to protect and restore water quality in the Reserve. Building on an initial identification of 900 Reserve parcels that are greater than five acres, not currently in conservation ownership and with potential open space value, the tool provides a method to prioritize open space acquisition based on water quality benefits and allows for creation of a prioritized list for open space protection.

Use of Land Trusts to Assist Local Acquisition and Protection Efforts

In many areas throughout the state, land trusts facilitate open space protection by working with private land owners outside the government framework. In the Reserve, the Peconic Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Open Space Preservation Trust, and The Nature Conservancy have worked to identify and assess priority open space protection projects in the Reserve, particularly small parcels in tributary corridors, using the donation of lands and conservation easements.

THE LIDO BEACH PASSIVE NATURE AREA

Lido Beach Passive Nature Area opened to the public during the summer of 2005. It encompasses 40 acres of tidal wetlands and upland area in a region of the Reserve that is highly urbanized and where natural open space is now uncommon. The passive nature area provides new opportunities for birdwatching and scenic views of salt marshes characteristic of the Reserve's western bays. It was established through partnerships between the Town of Hempstead, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Department of State, non-profit organizations, and local community groups. The property was slated for development as single-family housing, but was acquired by the State. The upland area had formerly been used as a dump site and dirt bike track.



View of salt marsh from the trail at Lido Beach Passive Nature Area



Lido Beach Passive Nature Area ribbon cutting ceremony

The Town of Hempstead developed a phased management plan for the property to provide appropriate public access to the nature area. With significant investment of Town staffing and equipment resources and funding assistance from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), the Town implemented a number of improvements to enhance public enjoyment and safety at the site. In 2004, the Lido Beach Passive Nature Area was recognized by the Reserve Council as a Destination in the South Shore Bayway.

Implementation of Local Open Space Plans

In conjunction with county and state open space plans, as well as local waterfront revitalization programs, several local governments have developed and implemented their own plans to protect open space:

- Nassau County voters approved the Nassau County Environmental Bond Act Program, which includes open space preservation as a major component. Nominations of land suitable for acquisition were solicited from the public and forwarded to an advisory committee. The nominations will be voted on by the County Legislature for official approval, which will allow the future acquisition of lands to proceed.
- Suffolk County prepared Master Lists I and II, which identified 1,184 acres within the Reserve that are proposed for acquisition through County purchase. The lists include properties along or within many tributary corridors and watersheds in the Reserve as well as properties immediately adjacent to Great South Bay, Moriches Bay, and Shinnecock Bay.
- The City of Long Beach prepared a master plan for the City that includes an evaluation of existing land uses and zoning for all land abutting the bayfront and all vacant parcels.

- The Town of Oyster Bay approved its second Save Environmental Assets Fund, which will be used to fund open space acquisitions and parks improvements town-wide.
- The Town of Islip prepared a list of properties in each school district that would be considered sending sites to be preserved under the Suffolk County Department of Health Transfer of Development Rights Program.
- The Town of Brookhaven, in partnership with the Post-Morrow Foundation, participated in the Brookhaven Hamlet Study, which identified all open space and undeveloped parcels along Beaver Dam Creek and within Brookhaven Hamlet.

Acquisition of Open Space

Reserve partners continue to build upon the list of potential open space sites identified in the *South Shore Estuary Reserve Open Space Preservation Report* for acquisition and protection as follows:

- Suffolk County acquired 461 acres within the Reserve from 2003-2005. These acquisitions include parcels along the following tributaries and wetlands: Carlls River and Amityville Creek (Town of Babylon); Skookwams Creek, Scully Preserve, East Islip Wetlands, Pepperidge Hall wetlands, Brick Kiln Creek, and Homans Creek (Town of Islip); Tuthills Creek, Patchogue River watershed, Abets Creek, Peat Hole, Beaverdam Creek, Carmans River watershed, Mastic/Shirley Conservation Area, Forge River, and Tuthill Cove (Town of Brookhaven); Quogue barrier beach wetlands and Westhampton barrier beach wetlands (Town of Southampton).
- Since passage of the Open Space Bond Act, the Town of Brookhaven has preserved over 670 acres (as 143 parcels) of undeveloped land within the Reserve portions of the Town.
- The Town of Southampton acquired ecologically-critical wetlands, using Town Community Preservation land transfer tax funds, at Weesuck Creek, Tiana Bay, and Shinnecock Bay.
- TNC is working with several local governments, non-profit organizations, and landowners to protect significant coastal habitat, wetlands, buffer areas, and open woodlands in the Reserve. TNC also continues to promote voluntary buy-out programs for houses located in particularly sensitive coastal areas.
- The Post-Morrow Foundation has acquired approximately 300 acres in the Beaverdam Creek and Carmans River watersheds.

Next Steps for Preserving Open Space

Reserve Council partners will work cooperatively to advance priority open space projects identified in the *2005 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan*.

Development of a Reserve-wide strategy for open space protection will be advanced using a GIS-based open space inventory and prioritization analysis tool developed by NYS DOS.

Reserve Council partners will work cooperatively through an open space work group to establish new partnerships for open space protection.

