



NEWS from the DUNES

Deer Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area: A Unique and Intriguing Resource Enjoyed by All

By 2007 Dune Steward Tyler Kukko

Tucked away at the southern tip of the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes and Wetlands Area (ELODWA) lies Deer Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a place many people refer to as a little slice of heaven. This begs the question: "What makes Deer Creek Marsh WMA - 1,195 acres owned by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation that contains creek, wetland, and sand dune habitats - different from other public access sites along Eastern Lake Ontario?"

Look close - Deer Creek Marsh WMA is a unique and intriguing site because it is one of the only cobble beaches along ELODWA, is home to many rare plants and animals, and provides easy access recreational opportunities.

Cosmetically, Deer Creek Marsh WMA is different because of its cobble beach. The cobblestones on the beach are what is left of glacial till that remained when the last glaciers retreated about 12,000 years ago. The bulk of the till has either washed or blown away, leaving only the heavier stones. Most sand that is in the area of Deer Creek Marsh WMA is being swept to the north and is flowing into the Sandy Pond channel instead of landing on the beach.

Vegetated sand dunes are vital in helping to protect the local ecosystem at Deer Creek Marsh WMA. They provide a barrier, so blowing sand will not fill in the creek and marsh, thus helping to maintain the biodiversity of the various habitats. The dunes help to protect the wetlands, creeks, and local communities from harsh westerly winds and storm energy sweeping over the lake. If the mature dunes at Deer Creek Marsh WMA become damaged, it is unlikely that they would be able to return to their current healthy condition (<http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/ecopage/ELOSTS.PDF>) because no new sand is being added to the system here.

The wetlands, including Deer Creek, also help to maintain biodiversity, filter ground-water, and provide extraordinary beauty for nature lovers, bird watchers, hikers, fishermen, and paddlers.

An observant eye will see interesting and rare plant species that call Deer Creek Marsh WMA home. For example, Champlain Beachgrass is only found along the shores of Eastern Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River, and Lake Champlain, and is found at Deer Creek Marsh WMA. The beachgrass is essential to the dune ecosystem because it helps to anchor the sand in place and alters the condition of the sand the beachgrass grows on making it possible for other plants to live there.

Other endangered flora found at Deer Creek Marsh WMA include Sand Dune Willow, Sand Cherry, and the threatened Houghton's Sedge. (Endangered species are found in such low numbers that they are in danger of extinction. Threatened species are at risk of becoming endangered.)

Biologists at the Rice Creek Biological Field Station of State University of New York at Oswego rate Deer Creek Marsh as **the most important breeding and feeding area for birds in the Oswego County coastal zone**. Countless numbers of birds such as the Caspian Tern, Northern Harrier, Pied-billed Grebe - all threatened species in New York - can be found here. A lucky birder could spot a Black Tern - an endangered species in New York State - flying overhead.

Deer Creek Marsh WMA has a convenient parking area off Route 3 with a cartop launch area for those with kayaks and canoes. Anglers find good fishing here, especially for Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass. The parking area access off the Rainbow Shores Road access connects to .2 miles of path leading to the beach on Lake Ontario and a dune trail with string fencing designed to protect the dunes from damage by human traffic.

A fun educational program was held by Eastern Lake Ontario Dune Steward, Tyler Kukko, in August of 2007, on how to enjoy and help protect this great local resource and fragile ecosystem. For more information about the Steward Program please contact New York Sea Grant, 315-312-3042; or visit us on the web at www.nysgextension.org.

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.

