Petition to Reduce Speed Limit on Great Bay Boulevard

Conservationists Want to End Carnage

S
o far, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey has collected 240 names on a petition to reduce the Speed Limit on Great Bay Boulevard in Little Egg Harbor in an attempt to protect northern diamondback terrapins and other wildlife.

There are no posted speed limits on the road from Sea Isle Drive to the terminus, and the average road speed limit of 35 mph applies. A straightaway interrupted by wooden bridges and inlets, the road is unique in that it runs through a nature preserve, the Brigantine Wildlife Refuge. The area also comes under the protection of the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve.

During the spring and early summer, terrapins cross the road to get to nesting sites on the shoulders and many are run over and killed. According to the Conserve Wildlife Foundation, during peak nesting season, up to 30 terrapins can cross the road in one hour. Studies have indicated that up to 90% are killed.

Executive Director Mary O’Gorman said the issue of the traffic is a primary concern to her attendance at the foundation’s wildlife biologist Ben Wurst, who monitors the colony platform at the refuge, and has instituted measures to protect the terrapins by fencing the sides of some sections of the road and installing signs warning motorists of the terrapin migration.

These signs only go so far,” said O’Gorman, “the reality is you see drivers slow down, I think because it is a very straight and flat road, there is a tendency to speed. She hopes township leaders will react favorably to the petition if they see many people are concerned about the issue.

“In the past, the township has said it’s difficult to reduce the speed limit because they have to do a traffic survey and that costs money. They said they would look at other ways to cut down the turtle mortality. They have been helpful in the past by allowing us to install ‘Terrapin Crossing’ signs and the fencing, but we can’t afford to install fencing for the whole road’”

O’Gorman pointed out that reducing the speed limit would also protect cyclists, runners and walkers who increasingly are using the road as recreation.

Great Bay Boulevard is a national park because it was built in the 1930s as a Works Project Administration project. It was intended to connect Little Egg Harbor with Brigantine and ultimately serve as another tourist route to Atlantic City. But the bottom of Little Egg Harbor Inlet proved too unstable to support the last two wooden bridges and the project was abandoned after building five bridges — hence the local name “Seven Bridges Road.”

A Coast Guard Station was built at the end of the road and now serves as the home of the Rutgers Marine Field Station. These marines also do business from Great Bay Boulevard and have been there since the Great Depression.

“There is no reason for the speed limit on this road to be so high,” said O’Gorman. “There’s nothing much out there; it’s a dead end!”

The scenery is some of the most picturesque in New Jersey, notes the organization’s web site. “Everyone would be better off if we all slowed down and enjoyed it.”

Great Bay Boulevard will only get more popular as it will be visited by hundreds of runners on April 28 as the Second Annual Seven Bridges Half Marathon and 5K is planned for the entire length of the road during the height of terrapin breeding season.

“Let’s hope they don’t step on any turtles,” said Little Egg Harbor Committeeman Ed Nuttal at a recent municipal meeting.

To sign the petition, go to info@conservewildlife.org.

— Pat Johnson

Petition for Speed Limit Reduction

Group Wants Beach Day for Special Needs Children

Special needs children can look forward to a fun day on the beach in Harvey Cedars this summer as the Best Day Foundation is planning an event on the Hudson Street beach.

John Henkes, a New Jersey representative of the California-based organization, told the Harvey Cedars Borough Commission at its meeting last Friday the young people will be involved in surfing and bodyboarding and, if surf conditions permit, kayaking.

“We have these activities to build their self-confidence and self-esteem,” said Henkes. “We have been in Brick Township but have not yet been on Long Beach Island. We hope we can have a program here.”

The commission approved the tentative dates of July 21-22.

“It seems like a worthwhile event,” said Mayor Jonathan Othman, “It gives the kids an opportunity to enjoy beach activities. We just have to go over safety issues and other logistics before we can give it formal approval.”

Henkes said he hopes they can draw people from LBI to serve as volunteers.

“We will need quite a few people to work with the youngsters,” he said. “They will be in the water so they will be closely supervised. We know the event should brighten the day for the children.” — E.E.