

Forest Fire 'Trail' On Pancoast Road Softens Timber Cut

Fuel Break Needed in Barnegat

In May 2007, a forest fire started by an errant bomb dropped over the Warren Grove Gunnery Range raced across thousands of acres of pygmy pine forest, to Route 72. It destroyed a number of trailers in a senior park and threatened to burn through to Barnegat. Hundreds of folks in Ocean Acres were evacuated and lived in fear they would lose all.

Forest fires this large are not a yearly occurrence, but forest fires in the pines are. After this dangerous

conflagration, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service went into overdrive to educate residents in newly constructed developments in the Pinelands that they had bought into a Pinelands area prone to forest fires and needed to take drastic measures.

One of these measures was the decision to cut a 200-foot fuel or fire-break following the existing dirt Pancoast Road, which backs up to at least three of the developments: Horizons at Barnegat, Heritage Bay and Four Seasons, Mirage. The road would be a last defensive stand between a fire and the homes. The road is right in the back yards of many of the homeowners, said Michael Drake, the division forest fire warden responsible for hazard fuel reduction, law enforcement and planning for the state Forest Fire Service.

"It's a Jeep trail now and serves as the dividing line between Barnegat and Ocean townships (Waretown)," said Drake. "We'll be creating a fuel break that is also ideal for a trail. It's an additional feature for local residents to enjoy."

In order to assist the homeowners in defense of their homes, the Forest Fire Service applied for and recently was awarded a \$25,000 federal recreation trail grant that will be used to make the fire cut less attractive to vehicles and more attractive to low-impact recreational uses.

Larry Miller of the state Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Parks and Forestry said the 2.9-mile fire cut and trail will run from a trailhead on West Bay Avenue, follow Pancoast Road behind the developments and continue east almost to the Garden State Parkway. Hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing would all be encouraged, but no motorized sports would be allowed, said Miller.

"The Pancoast Road follows an old Indian trail that went all the way to Barnegat Bay," he said. "Eventually, Ocean County would like to connect the trail with their Wells Mills Park and Cloverdale Farms, for a 4.9-mile trail."

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SOC Nonprofit Groups Unite to Share Ideas On Drawing Support

Dozens of representatives of groups from the Southern Ocean County region attended the bi-annual nonprofit forum hosted at Southern Ocean Medical Center, formerly Southern Ocean County Hospital, on Nov. 4.

"We had 20 organizations represented, from churches to Girl Scouts," said Lori Peppenella, destination marketing director for the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce and organizer for the forums.

The group began convening two years ago when Peppenella had a eureka moment. "I saw that our event calendars were filled with nonprofit-sponsored programs," she said. "I knew then that we had to help them stay strong and healthy to continue to draw people to their programs."

Nonprofit groups in the area are a diverse mix of staffed and unstaffed organizations with goals and objectives that vary but often overlap. "We have answered a need and have had a great response at the forums," said Peppenella.

The forum is a casual way for the groups to share ideas, synchronize calendars and establish a supportive network to further goals.

"Each group has different needs," Peppenella said. "They connect at the meetings and form partnerships."

There is no fee to join the forum. "It is just a great way to network and keep your group strong."

There is a different host each time the group meets, and no set format. This forum had a guest speaker. "We had a terrific fundraising presentation from Chris Rollins of the SOMC Foundation," said Peppenella. "If you are interested in finding out more about Chris's new book and some of his tips, please visit his web site at christianrollins.com."

The group is ever growing and evolving. "We are looking for a host for our winter forum, possibly in February," said Peppenella. Anyone interested in joining the group or hosting a forum may contact her at 609-494-7211, extension 101, and go to visitlbiregion.com for more information. —A.A.



File Photo by Ryan Morrill

SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT: The numbers of mating osprey pairs have been increasing since the population was endangered in the 1970s. Their recovery is due in large part to the ban of DDT as a pesticide.

Banner Year for Osprey as Census Of Mating Pairs Nears Historic Levels

This year was a landmark year for osprey in New Jersey. The population of this majestic raptor has been on a steady rise from the brink of endangerment in the early 1970s. This year it is reported nests produced 607 young, topping any other year on record in the state.

Healthy populations have been documented statewide through surveys performed by volunteers and biologists with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey and the Endangered and Nongame Species program. Numbers reported in late June and early July showed New Jersey had a healthy and growing number of nesting pairs, topping 355.

"Of the 355 active nests, we knew the outcome of 308," said Ben Wurst, habitat program manager for the Conserve Wildlife Foundation. "A total of 607 young were produced, and 393 young were banded with federal bird bands for future tracking."

The population bottomed out in the '70s due to weak shell conditions resulting from the birds' assimilation of the pesticide DDT, which was in wide use at the time. The data from those years reported approximately 53 nests

in New Jersey. "Today there are more than 485 that return to New Jersey each spring to breed, thanks in large part to the Endangered and Nongame Species Project," said Wurst.

"One tool that is used to help determine the health of the population is the productivity rate, or the rate of reproduction," he said. "To calculate the productivity rate, we divide the number of young that were produced, 607, by the number of known outcome nests, 308. This year the productivity rate was 1.97 young/active (known-outcome) nests, another record in the project's history."

The osprey was listed as state-endangered in 1974. Recovery began after the use of DDT was banned in this country and the integrity of the eggshells began to rebound. A natural nesting spot for an osprey is a dead or dying tree near the coast, in proximity to prime fish hunting waters. With these sites diminishing statewide, the species relies greatly on the man-made platforms installed by biologists and volunteers statewide.

"These new artificial nest platforms replaced the snags and trees that were lost as the barrier islands became more developed,"

said Wurst.

In the mid 1980s, the osprey population had surpassed 100 pairs, and the decision was made to upgrade their status to threatened in the state. "Since that time, the Endangered and Nongame Species Program staff has worked to monitor and manage the population, tracking their nest success every year with a core group of volunteers, and censusing the population every three years," said Wurst. "This year many new records were set as ospreys had a banner year."

Survey results from this year have indicated that this was the most productive year for ospreys in the project's history. "All areas had excellent results, a good sign that the population is rebounding," said Wurst. "Over the past six years I've witnessed the population increase."

"In 2009, the population reached an all-time high of 485 nesting pairs, which was close to historic estimates of over 500 pre-DDT," he said. "This year, warm weather and little precipitation helped create optimal conditions for the most successful reproduction."

—Angela Andersen
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All Saints School Students Study Sedges on the Edge

For four years running, student teams from All Saints Regional Catholic School in Manahawkin have competed in a national web-based academic competition and won in several categories.

eCYBERMISSION is a web-based math, science and technology competition offered nationally by the U.S. Army to children in grades six through nine.

The objective of the project is to identify a problem in the community and, through research and experimentation, come up with a viable solution.

For the 2010 competition, mem-

bers of one of the teams, self-titled the "Marsh Mellows," are putting their academic skill set on researching how to stop erosion that is occurring on the sedge islands that poke above the surface of the Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor estuary.

The four team members include Christine Suddeth and Nicholas Stefanoni of Long Beach Township and Alex Henderson and Matthew Bruinooge of Stafford Township.

"We wanted to keep one eye on the animals on the marsh," said Stefanoni, "as well as the marsh grass."

When asked what they may have discovered that was maybe not ex-

pected, Henderson said, "The sedge islands are getting smaller; they are not disappearing."

The team is focusing on Mordecai Island off of Beach Haven as a working example of the sedges in the bay. "There is a lot of study on that island which helps us," said Bruinooge.

Historic documents recorded by the team indicate that Mordecai has lost 26 acres since 1931.

In June, the team installed stakes on the eastern Marshelder sedge island a couple miles to the north of Mordecai off of Spray Beach. "We are measuring erosion through the summer months, from June through

October," said Stefanoni. "The team intends to go out to take a measurement of the sedge from the stakes later in the month."

The team has been charting public knowledge through community surveys and performed a boat count in the bay to get an idea of how boat wakes could affect the sedges. "One person even thought a sedge was a breed of dog," said Suddeth.

The team first identified reasons why erosion may be occurring at the pace it is, including boat wakes, storms, sea level rise and coastal development. "We are looking to

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