

News

AT OLD REMINGTON GUN CLUB SITE

Stratford Point project hopes to restore coastal environment

By John Burgeson
Staff Writer

STRATFORD — Until the end of the 1800s, the area around Short Beach and Stratford Point looked more like the shoreline of Cape Cod with sand dunes, beach grass and salt marsh.

But because of human intervention, it now has a decidedly more urban appearance, with gravel and stones replacing the soft sands and invasive plants taking the place of the beach grass.

An Audubon Society mapping, research and restoration project taking place this summer hopes to at least begin the long process of returning this outcrop of land to its former appearance, and it's hoped that this will bring back some of the native shoreline species of plants and animals as well.

2,400 TONS OF LEAD SHOT

The project, called the Stratford Point Coastal Restoration Plan, is centered at the former Remington Gun Club, where skeet shooting took place between about 1910 and 1986. Now it's owned by Remington's parent company, DuPont, which has appointed the Connecticut Audubon Society as caretakers of the 28-acre stretch of shoreline.

Since 1986, DuPont has cleaned up the worst of the estimated 2,400 tons of lead shot that work continues to this day.

"Because of this clean-up program, all we have left is rocks," said Twan Leenders, a conservation biologist for the Connecticut Audubon Society. He said now that most of the lead is gone and the removal effort has been scaled back, work can now begin on restoring the shoreline.

"When there was heavy machinery out here, there was really no point in trying to restore the coastline," he said. "Now it's cleaned up to the point that we don't have to run heavy equipment on it anymore. We can use just a shovel and a bucket."

Removing the lead shot with heavy equipment, he said, destroyed the shoreline peat mass and marsh that used to stabilize the cove between Stratford Point and Long Beach. Still, this was necessary — the lesser of two evils.

"The shoreline has been exposed to wave action, and we've lost easily 100 feet of shoreline," Leenders said. "So we want to



BRIAN A. POUNDS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Audubon conservation technician Scott Kruitbosch, left, and conservation biologist Twan Leenders use GPS to map the locations of plant species on the former Remington Gun Club property on Stratford Point on Thursday.



In 1935, hundreds of people attended the Great Eastern Skeet Shooting Championships held at the Remington Gun Club at Stratford Point. The club closed in the 1980s. Decades of using lead shot heavily contaminated the property.

stop the erosion and we want to bring back the habitat that was here before the settlers arrived."

RETURN OF THE DUNES

He said that historical records show there used to be a coastal bluff covered with beach grass situated not far from where the Stratford Point lighthouse is now sits. "That was removed in about 1914 so the people living down here could get a better view of the Sound," he said. This was one of the

many "improvements" that took place along the shoreline near the point that conspired to chase away the natural habitat.

"This is a place where we used to have sand dunes and beach grass," he said.

The first phase of the project is to map the area between Short Beach and the Stratford Point light. This will include taking stock of the plant and animal species there, as well as the geology and geography of the site.

The next step will be to

restore the dunes, which, he said, will be easier said than done. The is because the shoreline, by nature, is constantly changing.

"We'll be installing soft erosion-control structures along the shoreline — essentially giant tube socks filled with sand and rocks — that will absorb wave energy and allow the dunes to establish themselves," Leenders said.

He added that the era of building "hard" structures, like sea walls and jetties, is over. "The Army

Corps of Engineers is issuing no more permits for that type of structure," he said, "unless it's an emergency."

NATURE PRESERVE

The mapping, which is the research phase of the project, is being carried out by graduate students. Meanwhile, the Audubon Society is securing the necessary permits from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and other agencies for the "giant

tube socks." Next year, an effort will be made to rebuild the salt marsh and fringe of beach grass that used to protect the cove, he said.

Also as part of the project, a controlled burn is being planned for the gun club's shoreline meadow. This will be to reduce the fuel that have been building up for decades, which would avert a much larger brush fire later on.

Eventually, the former gun club will become a nature preserve, he said. The wide-ranging project doesn't have an exact price tag as yet. It's being paid in part by DuPont and in part by the Audubon Society.

"This is really one of the most important stop-over sites and overwintering site for a raft of bird species on the endangered species, so it's a great opportunity to restore one of the most important habitats in the state — and one the used to be a disaster area."

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Above, thousands of balls of lead shot continue to appear amongst the sand and stones on the shore of the former Remington Gun Club property on Stratford Point. The DuPont Corp., which owns the property, has spent more than \$14 million on the continuing cleanup of the site.

Left, a prickly pear cactus, Connecticut's only native cactus, grows at the site.



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Audubon conservation technician Scott Kruitbosch uses binoculars to look for shore birds on the property.