

ALBANY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from a letter written by Erin Crotty, the new Executive Director of Audubon New York, that was e-mailed to chapter leaders on July 9.

The legislative session in Albany has come to a close and I wanted to provide you with an update on how our priorities fared this session. I extend deep thanks to Sean Mahar, our Director of Government Relations & Communications, as well as to many of you, for hard work and leadership on many of our priorities. Overall, as many of you know, environmental funding in the state budget fared well, we secured passage of a bill to get an aggressive invasive species [Eurasian boar] out of New York, and made progress on a number of other initiatives.

Increased Funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). On the 20th anniversary of the EPF, the Governor and Legislature increased the EPF by \$19 million to \$153 million, ensuring that investments in open space protection, water restoration, and other vital environmental programs that put people to work are enhanced. In addition to reinvesting in a number of programs cut in recent budgets and supporting important categories to Audubon, including the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquaria program (ZBGA), and the Biodiversity Research Institute, the budget also provides \$4 million in new funding for the protection of natural infrastructure in storm recovery and sea level rise adaptation, and a larger focus on this theme in other parts of the budget.

New Investments in State Parks and Clean Water Infrastructure Improvements. The Governor and Legislature also enacted another significant investment through the NY Works program to address the infrastructure needs facing our State Parks and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) facilities. This year, a \$90 million capital investment in the State Parks system and a \$40 million one in DEC infrastructure, including grants for wastewater infrastructure upgrades, were made to help create and retain jobs while saving the state money in the long run. In particular, the State Parks funding includes \$1.5 million for habitat enhancements, supporting (and inspired by) a number of projects linked to our Audubon in the Parks initiative, which many of you are involved in.

Spurring the Clean Energy Economy. Through renewed investments in the NY-Sun Initiative; the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program; and the development of a new \$1 billion Green Bank program, the Governor and Legislature took important steps to combat climate change by helping consumers and municipalities bring new renewable energy onto the grid and curb our reliance on fossil fuels.

Legislation Left Unfinished. While there are hundreds of bills that were passed by one house and not the other, one notable bill, a measure to provide greater incentives for solar energy development in New York by enacting a

long-term strategy for solar expansion and investment, was widely supported by the environmental community but failed to reach consensus before the Senate and Assembly adjourned.

BIRD WALKS
Steve Schellenger

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains. Any questions? Call Steve at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

- Aug. 25 Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
- Sep. 1 Labor Day Weekend — No Walk
- Sep. 8 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Sep. 15 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Sep. 22 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Sep. 29 Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
- Oct. 6 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)

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SSAS Mission Statement — *The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.*

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GATEWAY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Don Riepe

Editor's note: This proposed plan concerns the various parts of Gateway National Recreation Area, including Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Sandy Hook, and Floyd Bennett Field. Don Riepe, a former manager of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, is the Jamaica Bay Guardian and the director of the American Littoral Society's Northeast Chapter.

Gateway National Recreation Area has released its final draft of the General Management Plan (GMP) that is to guide the park's development over the next 20 years. Please review it and send in your comments; the deadline is September 30. Below is the park's "Preferred Alternative," which is all about active recreation and stuffing people into the park without fully understanding the implications

PLAN on significant resources. *It says very little about protecting and enhancing natural and cultural resources — which flies in the face of the original National Park Service Mission.* It's all about access, promotion, and window dressing — "being everything to everybody" but without any real substance in terms of restoring park infrastructure.

Alternative B: Discovering Gateway — NPS Preferred Alternative. Concept: "This alternative provides the widest range of activities and most recreational opportunities in dispersed locations throughout the park. New connections would be forged with park lands and communities adjacent to Gateway and nearby. This alternative offers the most instructional programming and skills development, and draws people into the park to increase awareness and enjoyment of Gateway's historic resources and the natural environment. Under alternative B, more convenient and affordable park access would be developed through trail connections, bicycle infrastructure, public transit, and waterborne transportation. This alternative prioritizes joint management and operations for visitor services, orientation, programs, and facilities with New York City and other partners."

What the park really needs is to hire an outside "Efficiency Expert" to examine the organization's productivity and accountability. They also need to hire more qualified resource management rangers who understand habitat needs and do actual work in the field. The resource work is supposed to be done by maintenance workers who have no supervision or knowledge of habitat needs. The refuge is overgrown and much open habitat has been lost. Species diversity has suffered as a result and the visitor experience is diminished.

The park needs to resolve the East and West Pond issues at the wildlife refuge and repair or replace pipelines, fill the breach, clear trails, put in benches (even if temporary), and focus on removal of invasive species, marsh restoration, illegal trapping, shoreline cleanups, etc. Currently,

nothing has been done; it's been 9 months since the "Sandy" storm and there are no benches at the wildlife refuge. The so-called "Jewel of Gateway" is severely tarnished and needs more professional attention.

General Management Plan Open House: Tuesday, September 10, from 4 to 8 p.m. at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge (and at other locations on other dates).

The draft GMP can be downloaded at <http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/planning.htm>. Copies are also available on compact disc; call 718-354-4568 to request one. Comments should be mailed to: Superintendent, Gateway National Recreation Area, 210 New York Ave., Staten Island, NY 10305.

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II

Welcome back! I hope you all had a relaxing summer and caught up on your unread "books for birders." As we begin our next season, I am reviewing a somewhat controversial book, *Green Birding: How to See More Birds and Protect the Environment at the Same Time* by Richard Gregson. In this book the author attempts to justify keeping birders close to home! For many of us, that just won't work. What about that trip to Texas, Costa Rica, or Panama?

I'll try to explain. To the author, green birding implies avoiding the use of an internal combustion engine to get to your birding site. Easier said than done! He continues: green birding is satisfying, educational, and fun. On the other hand, for many of us birding and getting to see "good" birds mean traveling long distances in order to see these birds. So, he adds, leave your car in the garage! You don't need it to see "good" birds. He contends that there are good places to view birds close to home, often-overlooked places in cities and suburban neighborhoods that are bird magnets, especially during spring and fall migration.



His vision combines seeing birds close to home with "citizen science" and conservation projects. He also offers advice on how to adapt your equipment to this new style of birding, as well as how to attract more birds to your backyard. The author has been a birder in Great Britain and Canada for over 50 years. He lives in a rural area near the city of Montreal. He doesn't seem to understand what birding in our part of the universe, namely, the Northeast, on the Atlantic flyway, really means.

I wondered, as I was reading this book, what his purpose was in writing such a book — is he trying to convince new birders to forego travel in order to see more bird species close to home? I don't think that will work. This is only my opinion. I can't believe that an experienced or even a beginning birder would only desire to walk or bike to a nature preserve or park to see more birds. Traveling is part of the adventure and passion of the birding experience.

Would we want to confine ourselves to only birding locally? Let the discussion begin!

His chapter on creating a bird-friendly backyard has already been written about in far better terms; he is not breaking any new ground there. I think he makes the most sense when he discusses our commitment to citizen science. Yes, we can help ornithologists get a handle on bird counts and the like. I don't believe that the two — traveling far and wide to see more birds, and acting as an earnest citizen scientist — are mutually exclusive. Mr. Gregson does challenge us birders in ways that make for interesting discussion. So, let's read this book and further discuss the author's opinion. It can't hurt to open a dialogue on the topic of being a green birder and whether that's the only way to go.

LIQUID NATURAL GAS PORT STILL THREATENED!

Jim Brown

Below are the comments that I sent on behalf of the South Shore Audubon Society to the U.S. Department of Transportation on August 8 regarding Liberty Natural Gas's Port Ambrose project. By the time you receive this



copy of the *Skimmer*, the deadline will have passed to register citizen comments on the ill-advised proposal. Everyone should now direct their attention to Albany and call Governor Cuomo (518-474-8390) and urge him to **veto** the project. Since the deepwater port, if constructed, would be located in New York waters (17 miles southeast of Jones Beach), he has the power to halt the project.

The South Shore Audubon Society is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society and represents approximately 1700 households on Long Island. We offer the following comments on the current LNG proposal submitted by Liberty Natural Gas:

LNG projects have been proposed for Long Island for years and the South Shore Audubon Society has fought them all. This one, which was vetoed by Governor Christie of New Jersey in 2011, has unfortunately risen from the dead! The plan was rejected once, for a whole host of reasons, and should be rejected again.

Since the rejection of the original Liberty proposal, New York and Long Island have become intensely threatened by hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" — an extremely damaging and dangerous process for obtaining natural gas found in the Marcellus Shale region of New York. The South Shore Audubon Society has repeatedly urged Governor Cuomo to ban fracking and we hope he eventually does. A ban on fracking would be good for New York, indeed necessary for the health of our state — the health of our people, our wildlife, and our physical environment.

This proposed LNG facility will have a number of negative impacts — the most important one perhaps

being that this Port Ambrose project will foster increased fracking, in New York and elsewhere. More LNG will mean, quite simply, more fracking. Fracking brings damage to precious water supplies and harms air quality, environmental integrity, and people's health.

Even if Port Ambrose is used only for imports — and we believe the proposed facility will not confine itself to merely *importing* natural gas — we would still oppose it. Liquefied Natural Gas is just another fossil fuel, of which we should be using less, not more. Long Islanders, especially after experiencing the effects of Hurricane Sandy, are very cognizant of the dangers posed by excess carbon emissions, global warming, sea level rise, and extreme and rapid climate change. As a society we need more renewable energy projects, energy conservation, and a rapid movement away from dependency on fossil fuels. Permitting the Port Ambrose project to advance would be to follow a tragically mistaken path.

28TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP

When: September 21, 2013 (mostly)

Where: All beaches of New York State, including Jamaica Bay, Long Island Sound, the Hudson River, Atlantic Ocean, the Great Lakes, Finger Lakes, and NY creeks and bays.

Who: You and thousands of other volunteers, led by Beach Captains from local environmental groups, schools, scout leaders, corporate public service directors, divers, civic associations, and faith-based groups.

Why:

- To clean our beaches and document what litters our shores
- To compile data to devise strategies to combat pollution
- To increase public participation in solving the problem of pollution
- To increase public awareness and appreciation of the coastal environment

How: To organize or find a cleanup in your area, contact Natalie Grant, NY State Beach Cleanup Coordinator, at NYSBeachCleanup@gmail.com; American Littoral Society, 26A W. 9th Rd., Broad Channel, NY 11693; or (718) 869-3488.

The American Littoral Society Northeast Chapter has coordinated the beach cleanup in New York State for the past 27 years. Last year, 5,645 volunteers cleaned and documented 62,633 pounds of debris along 244.13 miles of New York State's shoreline. For a list of 2013's cleanup sites, check www.littoralsociety.org.

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