
Endangered Bird Habitat Planned Near Barnegat Lighthouse

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A 42-acre beach nesting bird habitat with a 5.5-acre tidal pond would be created southwest of the jetty and inlet near Barnegat Lighthouse, under current plans. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with the N.J. Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, Rutgers University and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restore habitat there that piping plovers and other endangered beach nesting birds had used in the past.

The proposal came before Barnegat Light Borough Council at its July 11 meeting because paperwork states that the borough owns the property, even though borough officials said they could not get a clear answer to that question before.

Council approved a Landowner Agreement for the project on July 11 after determining that the borough will have no financial requirements associated with it.

The location is described as “bounded to the northwest by Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, to the northeast by the Barnegat Jetty and Inlet, and to the southeast by the Atlantic Ocean.”

Councilwoman Dottie Reynolds, who chairs the beaches and parks committee, said after the meeting that the project looks like “a win-win.” The birds will have a safer habitat, and people on borough beaches will hopefully have more room if the piping plovers go back to nesting on the far north end, she said.

This summer has been strained for beachgoers and borough crews as the nesting birds claimed ground on some of the most populated beaches toward the south end of town. Where birds were nesting, or even exploring the ground for possible nesting, government agencies fenced the areas off.

The nesting bird species of piping plover, black skimmer, least tern and American oystercatcher are among birds on the endangered species list in New Jersey, according to the state Division of Fish and Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

The Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey has partnered with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to develop the specific habitat restoration plan.

“Restoration of Barnegat Light is a critical project for the recovery of piping plover in New Jersey, which is still below Recovery Unit goals due to a lack of suitable nesting habitat (concentrated primarily in only two primary areas of New Jersey – Sandy Hook and Holgate),” describes the Project Objectives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The project would re-establish a small shallow pond for foraging, “re-create highly suitable habitat for nesting” and “reduce invasive species that are encroaching on best-nesting bird habitat.”

The invasive plant species that the plan is referring to are the Japanese sand sedge and the common reed (*Phragmites australis*).

After speaking with officials involved with the project, Reynolds said after the meeting that a specific start date for the proposed project had not been set as of this week.

— **Maria Scandale**

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Comments (0)
