




ACCABONAC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



2012 Calendar of Events

FISHERMAN'S FAIR
AUGUST 11 (SAT) AT 10 AM-3 PM
Play our quiz game: GO FISH

ANNUAL PARTY
SEPTEMBER 9 (SUN) AT 3-5 PM
At Cile Downs' house
956 Springs Fireplace Road

INTERNATIONAL BEACH CLEANUP
SEPTEMBER 15 (SAT) AT 10 AM-NOON
Meet at Louse Point or Gerard Point

Monthly meetings are usually held at 9am the first Monday of each month. Check papers or call us for locations:
631-324-2435
email: info@accabonac.org



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956 Springs Fireplace Road
East Hampton, NY 11937
324-2435



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Newsletter • Volume 22

Spring 2012

Editor • Jorie Latham

WATER AND WASTE

by Nick Bryan

APC invited Bob DeLuca, President of Group for the East End, to speak to our Steering Committee about our groundwater and our harbor waters. He feels that the East End's focus now desperately needs to be:

- **WATER PROTECTION.**
- **WATER DISTRIBUTION.**
- **WASTE MANAGEMENT.**

He said that, at best, 25-40% of nitrogen in our septics goes into the ground and therefore our water. It's a town, county, statewide problem. There are 350,000 systems in Suffolk. There has been a 200% increase in nitrogen in our aquifer.

The State has mandated that 12 towns upstate that are in water trouble do regular inspections and pump outs.

The Green Committee of Southampton, which Bob serves on, has a draft proposal for a bill that would require inspection of septics every five years and upon transfer of ownership. Septics moderately used can last five years without clean out, so inspection wouldn't necessarily result in a pump out. Inspection could also discover conditions that would lead to imminent failure of the system, so an owner would be prepared. Cost for inspection is minimal. The homeowner and Town would both receive a record of the inspection.

We are all accustomed to having other home fixtures inspected regularly, such as our oil burners. We ignore what's underground because we aren't faced with it regularly. Also, the life of a septic system could be extended for years with proper maintenance.

Asked about our waste treatment plant, Bob believes it would need a lot of work to bring it to a safe operational level. He pointed out that the company bidding to run it is insisting on a "hold harmless"

It is our hope that the Town Board will"

1. Address ways in which inspection of the systems can be implemented.*
2. Find a way to begin reducing the overcrowding in Springs. It is, day after day, infecting our beautiful Accabonac Harbor and our drinking water. It enriches a few landlords who make large sums on the backs of poor working people while destroying the quality of life of long-time middle class Springs residents.

**Southampton is working on a bill for septic system inspections to insure that they "operate and are maintained in a manner which will prevent hazards to the public health, to protect the drinking water supply and to protect the integrity of the town's fragile and diverse array of freshwater and marine ecosystems."*

clause, meaning that if anything went wrong due to problems that existed before they took over, they would not be held responsible. This would make it easy for them to claim almost any problem was the result of an existing condition. Bob thinks "Hold and Haul" would be the best solution for now – use the plant as a holding system and have a hauler hired to move waste to another treatment plant possibly Riverhead, which seems to be working well.

WE ARE IN DEEP DOO DOO

by Arlene Coulter

There has been a great deal of concern expressed lately about

East Hampton's Solid Waste Treatment Facility on Springs Fireplace Road. There has not been nearly as much discussion, although there should be, regarding the problems produced by over-burdened septic systems, and the impact of an ever-increasing number of septic systems on our fragile ecosystem.

The members of the Accabonac Protection Committee believe that East Hampton needs a two-pronged approach to protect our drinking water and our harbors.

Because of the prolonged overpopulation of Springs, our septic systems are dangerously over-used and, in addition, we have no prescribed inspection of them or any means of pinpointing those that should be replaced.

Our septic systems are out of sight and so, as is said, out of mind. Too few of us know how they work and, as long as they "seem" to be working, don't bother checking them. Our committee will be exploring ways to educate the community about septics and the harm that inputting too much waste can do to our ecosystem.

UPS AND DOWNS ON HALE REFUGE

by Jorie Latham

This year may well be the “make or break” year for the Barbara Barnes Hale Refuge meadow restoration. It has certainly been an uphill battle to have the grasslands brought back in at least some portions of the Refuge. Lately, it has been more of a roller coaster... In spite of APC obtaining broad consensus from all members of the last two Town Boards, all of whom pledged to support the clearing as specified in the DEC permit obtained in 2010, the actual work only got started last spring, and it came to an abrupt halt when it was revealed that trees had been removed that were not consistent with the approved plan. The County, co-owner with the Town, was adamant that no further clearing be performed.

Finally, after assurances to DEC that the permit's specifications would be honored, the County also agreed; we had hope once again that the clearing might commence. About that time, Larry Penny, then Director of Natural Resources, who was in charge of the project for the Town, stepped down.

Time was running out for any further work to be done before the April 15 cutoff required to protect nesting birds. After another round of lobbying by APC, Andy Gaites, of the Land Management Department, was given the go-ahead. With his small crew, the work — which had taken so many years to get started — was finished in a matter of days!

Unfortunately, this limited clearing does little to really help re-establish a meadow. The DEC permit only allows the removal, by cutting, of certain plant species in certain parts of the refuge. Much of what grows there now are native trees and shrubs. Since mowing stopped in the 1980s, these have become large and abundant enough to prevent the annual mowing needed (and permitted) to maintain a meadow.

Our next thought was to get the County and Town together onsite, to see how futile this effort would be without a more comprehensive permit from DEC. That meeting took place, and the representatives of both owners, the Town and the County, all agreed that additional clearing should be done, and that a new permit should be sought from DEC.

So we'll be continuing our efforts to get the meadow restored. We are encouraged that the first steps have finally been taken. But we will need to maintain our relentless pursuit of completion if not perfection!

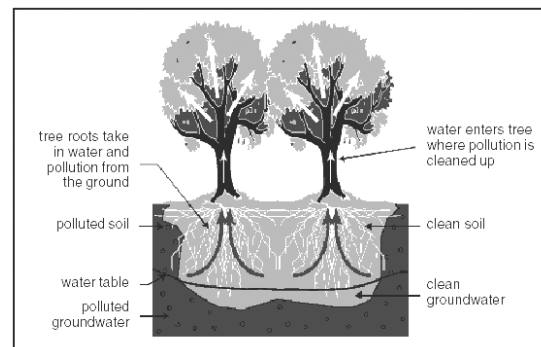
PHYTOREMEDIATION

by Cile Downs

In case you haven't heard of it, this is a good time to learn about phytoremediation: from *phyto* (plant) and *remediate* (fix or cure) — it means using plants to clean up pollution.

The most amazing things can be accomplished by green, growing plants, which can collect or even actually *digest* a great variety of pollutants, from radioactive substances, petroleum and heavy metals to elements like nitrogen that are normal food for plants. New ways to apply these biotechnological methods to various pollution sites are constantly being discovered; for instance, radioactivity at Chernobyl is being absorbed by growing sunflowers.

Our groundwater is increasingly polluted in Long Island, famously with agricultural chemicals where there are farmfields, or lawn fertilizer and pesticides wherever citizens misguidedly try to achieve the perfect lawn. The inevitable consequence is pollution of our creeks and bays. Accabonac Creek has deteriorated alarmingly in recent years, probably more from nitrates leached into groundwater from septic systems than anything else. The nitrates are known to encourage algae blooms that have more or less eliminated the eelgrass that is an indicator of the healthy conditions necessary for shellfish. It behooves us to campaign energetically for the development of solutions, especially in absence of any really successful, and affordable, new septic tank devices.



We'd like to see some experiments in the use of plantations of willows and poplars, which have been used effectively around areas where pigs or cattle have produced massive nitrate pollution. These plants willingly grow right into water to collect their nitrates. Or, has anybody tried wild grasses, whose roots are said to reach incredibly deep? It is hard to believe that the buffer areas favored by the DEC between lawns and salt marsh could not be doing a fine cleanup on groundwater on its way to the marsh. And salt marsh itself is said to be one of the world's finest pollution cleaners, its only drawback being that the polluted run-off has to flow onto the marsh and not seep into the Creek at a deeper level.

Speaking of levels, it has been suggested that leaching fields for septic systems may be superior to the customary rings, due to being set higher in the ground, thus giving tree, shrub or grass roots more chance for grabbing nitrates from effluent as it makes its way down to groundwater.

Last year this newsletter carried a complete run-down on good septic system function and how to

promote it, by Nick Bryan. We all need to know as much as possible about this subject, and it is important to encourage research into remediation for the unavoidable pollution that happens even with perfectly functioning systems. Stay tuned.

ACCABONAC MEMORIES AND MUSINGS

by Ralph Carpentier

I've lived in Springs for over fifty years and learned much history and lore about this place from friends and neighbors and from my own experiences and observations. Springs is, in my view, the most interesting hamlet – primarily because of the marine environment that surrounds it on the north and Gardiners Bay on its eastern side. But mostly it's because the hamlet has Accabonac Creek at its center.

The Creek's contribution to the economic history and life of the people was essential before its geography became altered and impacted by humans. Dear old Nat Smith once told me that there really was a shipyard on Shipyard Lane – there must have been deep water there to support that commercial industry.

And Accabonac Creek was a most important nursery of fin and shellfish as well as a good breeding ground for the mosquito larvae essential to finfish sprat growth. Northeasterly storms would flush saltwater through the flats of Gerard into the Creek; fish and shellfish deposited in Gardiners Bay were also flushed into the brackish waters of Accabonac. "Accabonac kept Springs alive during the Great Depression" is a major saying among baymen I've known. I don't doubt it, given the Creek's undisturbed riches at this earlier time.

The appeal of waterfront property on Gardiners Bay was the beginning of the end. The new causeway to Gerard Point made it possible for speculators to establish 50-foot lots on Gardiners Bay, and that ended the saltwater flush of fin and shellfish, eggs and spawn into Accabonac.



The next problem? Mosquitoes. This important finfish nursery food source didn't suit a "waterfront paradise." My old friend Bob Vetault told me that his uncle worked at the bunker factory at Deep Hole and had to row to work draped under mosquito netting to get to Gerard Park. But it wasn't long before people found the "solution" to the problem – drain off the

brackish waters by trenching all the wetlands in the entire township, combined with annual spraying of insecticides.

All the trenching caused runoff of a dense silt that devastated clam beds. I used to moor a Sharpie at the north end of the Creek. Since it was shallow there, my plan was to wade out to my boat when necessary – but my boots sank into a foot or two of black silt. It wasn't a great bottom for marine life to spawn and grow.

Relocating this channel produced another example of "solutions" that have harmed the ecology of the Creek and created problems that are too expensive or difficult to solve. Some locals saw and objected to what was happening to Accabonac back then but, regrettably, didn't unify in time to overcome speculator greed and the regional power structure of the times.

I confess – I miss catching a mess of blue claw crabs and scallops from the past riches of Accabonac. Even more, I regret seeing again and again – in the Creek's demise – the ignored message that we truly must live in harmony with nature.



STUDENTS PROTECTING ACCABONAC HARBOR

by Anita Wright

Students from Project MOST, an after-school program at Springs School, took water protection into their own hands this past fall. Using an interactive stormwater model, Group for the East End educators helped students see how pollutants enter our waterways and pointed out the dangers of dumping chemicals and other hazardous materials into storm drains, many of which lead directly to Accabonac Harbor.

Guided by Group for the East End educators Jennifer Skilbred and Anita Wright, students then participated in a storm-drain stenciling project within walking distance of their school. Six storm drains were marked with the message "**NO DUMPING, DRAINS TO BAY,**" reminding people not to throw toxic materials into the drain.



2011 ROUNDUP

A quick look at what went on in the past year

FILM FEST II • “The American Lawn” and “Organic Lawn Care,” from the original LTV series “Long Live Accabonac,” were shown at our second annual “Film Fest” on April 13 at Ashawagh Hall. The first examines the impact on the environment of our national obsession with lawns. The second explains and illustrates in detail how to begin and maintain an organic lawn. In October, we had a lively turnout for a showing of our latest film “Dark Skies,” which explores in depth the need for better lighting policy to protect the health of birds, marine creatures and ourselves, as well as the magnificence of the night sky.

DREDGING • In January at a meeting with Jay Schneiderman, our County Legislator, we were told that Accabonac is finally on the County list for dredging, but won’t be dredged until the fall of 2012.

FORUM • On May 13 at the Springs Firehouse, “The Rising Tide” How Will Sea Level Rise Affect You?” presented detailed information and discussion of the impact of coastal storms, erosion and sea level rise on the shorelines of our local harbors, bays and creeks with speakers Joseph Tanski, Coastal Processes Specialist, New York Sea Grant and Kevin McAllister, Peconic Baykeeper

FISHERMAN’S FAIR • “GO FISH” was the new theme of our Accabonac Game, featuring photos and amazing information about fish from the new book *Do Fish Sleep?* by Dr. Judith Weis, which was available for signing. (They do, but they don’t close their eyes!)

PARTY • Our annual gathering was held on September 18 at the gracious, spacious and art-filled home of John and Anne Mullen, featuring sweeping views of Gardiners Bay. Judith Weis gave a fascinating talk with illustrations from her book.

POWER IN NUMBERS • We joined forces with several other East End environmental organizations to form East Hampton Environmental Coalition, creating a significant impact on the local elections by getting environmental concerns to the forefront of the political discussions and debates. We’re also joining several local organizations to support Clean Ocean Action (COA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the degraded water quality of the marine waters off the New Jersey/New York coast (known as the NY/NJ Bight, which includes 8 dump sites) and protecting the ocean from new sources of pollution by promoting legislation to create a Clean Ocean Zone. For more information go to www.CleanOceanAction.org

SPEAKING OF WEBSITES...Ours is long overdue for an overhaul, which is being performed by Brook Ellis, and will be vastly improved...start checking in late June, at accabonac.org. And, if you haven’t sent us your email address yet, please do. Send to info@accabonac.org. We would be so much more efficient at getting news to you that way!



Photo by Rameshwar Das

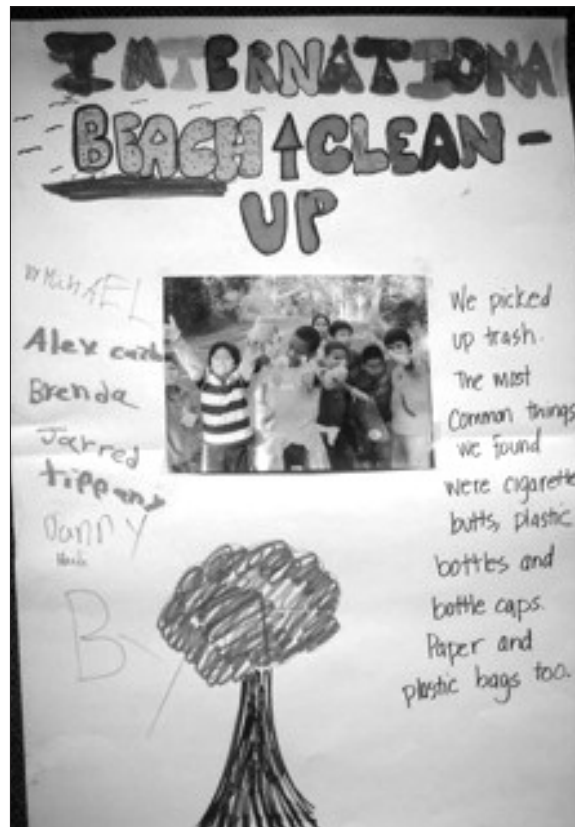


THANK YOU, ANITA

For many years **ANITA WRIGHT** has been our stalwart and valued consultant from Group for the East End. Unfortunately for us, the demands of her other duties there, which include the outstanding TERN program in local schools (see her article on Project MOST), require that she no longer participate in our meetings and activities. She has been an invaluable resource to and committed member of our group. Her quiet passion for the protection of our beautiful town and bay is evident in all that she does for APC and the Group for the East End. She is an exemplary citizen-activist and, as such, a powerful role model for the children whose lives she touches in her work... and for us at APC.



That she continues to do the work she has been doing on behalf of our precious environment offers some solace even though she has announced her departure from APC. We know we can and will continue to rely on her for her knowledge and wisdom.



One of the posters made by Project Most Students

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