

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



KATE BROWNING
County Legislator, 3rd District
Public Safety Committee, Chair

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COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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Call for Detrimental Federal Policies to be Nixed *Suffolk Officials, Mastic Beach Residents, Fishermen and Campers Fight for Life, Property and Beach Access at Smith Point*



(Legislator Kate Browning, center, Legislator Rob Calarco, center right, S.C. Parks Commissioner Phil Berdolt, center left, Browning's Chief of Staff Josh Slaughter, second from right, representatives from LIBBA and Mastic Beach residents call on the federal government to remove detrimental regulations at Smith Point County Park.)

Smith Point, NY – In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, millions of federal dollars were secured to rebuild the barrier beach and protect mainland communities from the next storm. Reconstructing dunes across from Mastic Beach Village at Smith Point County Park was a priority because several wash overs were endangering life and property in the area. A plan was put in place to address the dune system while protecting piping plover habitats. That plan has led to longer outer beach closures and is leaving Mastic Beach Village more vulnerable to the next storm. Today, Suffolk County Legislators Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) and Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue) were joined by Suffolk County Parks Department officials, campers, fisherman and Mastic Beach residents to request that federal representatives intervene to reverse detrimental policies being mandated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

In particular, the federal regulations allow for USFWS to require the de-vegetation of dunes, a vegetated dune is an important function in maintaining and growing a strong dune system, and the reduction of dune heights, which is critical to protecting life and property in south shore communities. The reason

USFWS wants to progress with these controversial policies is to create and protect piping plover habitats that did not exist before Hurricane Sandy. Suffolk County officials pointed out that they have already complied with an agreement to set aside 100 acres at Smith Point County Park to accommodate the protected birds.

“We have done everything we can as a County to allow for piping plovers and residents to coexist on the beach,” stated Legislator Browning. “These additional mandates make it impossible to improve beach access and further jeopardize life and property for residents in Mastic Beach. We need our elected officials at the federal level to stand with our residents and end these policies.”

“For those of us that live in Mastic Beach it's not only that we enjoy the beach, we count on it,” stated Frank Delustro, President of the Mastic Beach Property Owner’s Association. “We count on it to protect us from storms, such as Super Storm Sandy. Without the barrier beach being intact prior to Sandy, Mastic Beach and the neighboring waterfront communities would have been devastated. We at the MBPOA are behind the fight not only to maintain the current dune height, but to raise them to offer maximum protection to life and property on the mainland.”

Outer beach permit holders experienced one of the longest closures ever during the 2016 summer season, and flooding continues to worsen in Mastic Beach. In the fall of 2016, Suffolk County officials met with Congressman Lee Zeldin’s staff and representatives of USFWS to work on improving access at Smith Point. Suffolk County was told to petition USFWS to develop an alternative management plan at great cost to Suffolk County taxpayers with no guarantee it would be approved. If approved, implementation of the plan would be an unfunded mandate on the County. The Biological Opinion issued by USFWS on the Fire Island to Montauk Point (FIMI) plan asserted that the presence of Burma Road, the only access point for residents to the outer beach, segments habitat and degrades the carrying capacity for plovers at Smith Point, further highlighting the inherent conflict. Without relief from these federal regulations it would be impossible to implement an alternative management plan.

“Suffolk County is committed to protecting our natural resources and those homeowners who live on the mainland,” stated Deputy Presiding Officer Rob Calarco. “The mitigation plan suggested by USFWS to de-vegetate and lower our dunes runs counter to the current efforts by the Federal government, who are spending millions to build up the dunes along the South Shore of Long Island. I call upon our Federal representatives to halt this land grab by the USFWS that puts our residents at risk.”

Suffolk County officials and residents are demanding a shift in federal policy in order to properly plant vegetation on the dune system, build dune heights to appropriate levels to protect mainland properties and to effectively maintain Burma Road so access to outer beach permit holders is achievable during the summer season.

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