

Stewardship Spreads

For six years now, college students have served as stewards along several public areas of Lake Ontario's shoreline, educating visitors about the value of its beaches, dunes and wetlands. This past summer, the stewards program – managed by NYSG in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation – expanded to cover public access points along the Salmon River corridor through the fall fishing season (see map below).

Signs and snowfencing, like those pictured here at Southwick Beach State Park, help to inform beach goers about the fragility of dunes along Lake Ontario's eastern shoreline.

Photo by Paul C. Focazio



At the start of this year's season, NYSG hired **Mary Penney** as its new Stewards Program Coordinator. Penney, a former DEC River Steward, environmental educator and angler census technician, supervised this year's 10 stewards.

Serving as goodwill ambassadors, the stewards helped promote environmentally-sound recreational use of areas along the Salmon River and Lake Ontario. "They're the first line of communication between the public and agency partners," says Penney. "Not only do the stewards have the opportunity to educate lake and river users on responsible use, but they also provide land managers with insight on potential issues. They can talk about the importance of maintaining strong habitats not only for rare and endangered species, but for everyday backyard wildlife."

New York's 16.5 stretch of sand dunes, wetlands, woodlands, ponds, and creeks along the Eastern Lake



NYSG's Stewards Program Coordinator **Mary Penney** (far left) with dune and Salmon River stewards (back row, l to r) **Alex Studdert, Kyle McCahey, Mike Riegler, John Koltz, Norman Jones, Ryan Collins** (front row, l to r) **Charlotte Gay, Theresa Eveans, Joe Stredny** (kneeling) and **Ashley Quarella**.
Photo courtesy of Mary Penney

Ontario shoreline consists of roughly 9.8 miles of private and 6.7 miles of public land. Reaching from the mouth of the Salmon River north to the outlet of Black Pond, the area includes seven properties that are open to the public for outdoor recreation. These areas, most monitored by the dune stewards, include: Deer Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Sandy Island Beach State Park, Sandy Pond Beach Natural Area, Lakeview Marsh WMA, Southwick State Park, Black Pond WMA, and El Dorado Nature Preserve. One of this year's six dune stewards, SUNY ESF junior **Norman Jones**, spent 30 hours a week in the vicinity of Black Pond, one of the lakeshore areas most in need of public respect.

"It was my job to ask people to follow the simple rules that apply to this fragile dune area," he says. "A steward's

The 173,000-acre Salmon River watershed, located in Oswego, Lewis, Jefferson, and Oneida counties, includes 26 NYSDEC-monitored public access points for fishing and recreation. In addition to rainfall, water comes to the Salmon River via natural springs, tributaries such as the Trout, Orwell, and Beaver Dam Brooks, and the Salmon River Reservoir.

Artwork by Lorian Cody



presence on the beach is needed to deter violators 95 percent of the time. Our goal, though, was to create that level of compliance all the time, even when stewards aren't present. Through public education we prompt people to respect the environments that they use and enjoy and to help preserve the dune areas as a unique area of northern New York."

Sure, the dune stewards repaired snow fencing to preserve habitat along the lakeshore at Lakeview WHA, Sandy Pond Beach, and Deer Creek WHA. They also monitored visitor usage, engaged others in beach and shoreline cleanups, and walked many miles daily along Lake Ontario beaches in Jefferson and Oswego counties. And river stewards assisted state fish, wildlife and forestry staff on a variety of important tasks as well as helped with tours and maintenance at the Salmon River Fish Hatchery in Altmar. But, a number of the stewards went above and beyond these responsibilities, leaving behind somewhat of a legacy for those who would fill their shoes in future years.

"The management of the Salmon River stewards program really shows the importance of the overall watershed," says **Fran Verdoliva**, NYSDEC Salmon River Program Coordinator.

Salmon River Steward **Mike Riegler**, a 2006 SUNY ESF Natural Resource Management graduate, spread the word on a "leave no trace" program, one in a series of informative steward sessions planned through the summer and fall months. In preparation for his talk, Riegler wrote, "A recent NYSDEC angler survey indicated that more than 28,000 out-of-state anglers spent an average of \$43 per day in the area. Socially, the Salmon River corridor also provides a venue for the outdoor activities of camping, hiking, and hunting. Ecologically, the area is home to a diverse ecosystem filled

with flora and fauna. For these reasons, we need to enjoy the River while at the same time protecting its health."

Riegler cited seven key principles to support a "Leave No Trace outdoor ethics code," including leaving behind what you find, respecting wildlife, and minimizing campfire impacts. Riegler and the other stewards penned a series of articles to impact what they learned from their experiences this past summer and fall.

Here's a sample of some of the facts you'll find in this series, written by the stewards and printed in several local publications, including the *Jefferson County Journal*, *Lure of the Lake*, *Oswego County Weeklies*, and *Watertown Times*:

- ▶ Visitors to the Salmon River Falls in Altmar are standing on 110 feet of rock that holds millions of years of geologic history. Abundant marine fossils and rare fossils such as Eurypterids (water scorpions) and Trilobites (huge primordial water insects) can be found in our Oswego County bedrock. (**Charlotte Gay**, Salmon River Steward and a 2005 SUNY ESF graduate)
- ▶ The coastal and wetland habitats associated with Lake Ontario provide essential staging areas where migrating birds can stop to rest, feed, and be sheltered during long travels. Designated conservation sites and sanctuaries, such as El Dorado Nature Preserve, Derby Hill Bird Observatory, and the northern spit of Sandy Pond Beach, provide essential habitat for a variety of

birds. (**John Koltz**, Dune Steward and a Cornell freshman majoring in Earth Systems)

- ▶ At least 55 birds along with a dozen each mammal, fish, reptile and amphibian species call Deer Creek's marsh, cobble beach and surrounding waters their home. The area, known for its mature dunes with stands of anchoring trees, is also an important spot for certain fish species to spawn and migrating birds to stop on their journeys north and south. (**Joe Stredny**, Dune Steward and a SUNY Maritime College junior majoring in Marine Environmental Science)

— **Paul C. Focazio**
with additional information from
Kara Lynn Dunn



Theresa Evans, a dune steward and SUNY ESF freshman majoring in Environmental Studies, was involved in an invasive plant control project that included the release of biological agents at various locations along the eastern Lake Ontario shore's dune system. She's pictured here amongst some purple loosestrife, a very aggressive, non-native, water loving perennial with no natural predators in the U.S., where it was first introduced in the 1800s.

Photo courtesy of Mary Penney



... for more tips from the dune and salmon river stewards, Q and As, printable maps, and more.