



Save the Sound®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 16, 2019

Contact: Anthony Allen, 860-604-7207
Laura McMillan, 540-292-8429

Save the Sound and NYS Parks complete transformational project at Sunken Meadow State Park

Restoration efforts have spanned more than 7 years and 135 acres of salt marsh

Smithtown, N.Y.—Save the Sound and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYS Parks) have completed the final phase of improvements designed to restore and protect 135 acres of salt marsh in Sunken Meadow State Park, which is visited by more than 3 million New Yorkers a year. The project was laid out in the **Sunken Meadow Comprehensive Resilience and Restoration Plan**, a multi-million-dollar effort to restore the park's long-compromised marsh ecosystem and enhance its ability to deal with coastal storms.

"This project broke new ground for us as an organization, and for restoration practices in the region," **said Gwen Macdonald, director of ecological restoration for Save the Sound.** "This was a complex endeavor that required close cross-sector collaboration over many years to ensure that our interventions were appropriate to encourage restoration of this threatened ecosystem. The way Sunken Meadow Creek and the salt marsh have responded is a testament to the resilience of nature, and the impact that competent, decisive, unified action can have on the ability of natural systems to restore themselves."

In addition to continuing efforts to control the invasive *Phragmites australis* reed and restore native grasses to dominance, the final phase of work included the retrofit of 16.6 acres of parking lot with green infrastructure (GI). These improvements included two constructed wetlands, eight bioswales, and several tree filter strips—totaling about 8.6 acres of permeable, green infrastructure that will capture and treat approximately 8.5 million gallons of stormwater each year. The entire parking area (known as Field 2) is now under Best Management Practices for stormwater.

Sunken Meadow Creek and adjoining saltwater wetlands were cut off from the tidal flow of Long Island Sound in the 1950s by a man-made barrier, turning the area into a freshwater marsh. This caused marsh die-off while drastically altering its ecosystem and species composition. After Hurricane Sandy breached the barrier and re-opened the

channel to saltwater flow in 2012, Save the Sound began work to aid the marsh in its recovery, with support from federal grants.

Since then, more than 4.3 acres of marsh have been directly restored by engaging hundreds of volunteers in planting native grasses at carefully chosen places throughout the marsh, and/or regrading certain areas to create better habitat for those grasses. The parking lot retrofits will help to protect the restored marsh from harmful pollutants as native species return and begin to thrive.



Volunteers removing invasive Phragmites australis and planting native Spartina alterniflora



Post-construction photo of Field 2 at Sunken Meadow | Photo © Rebecca Grella 2019

Now that the parking lot transformation is complete, there is only one thing left to do—celebrate. NYS Parks will be installing educational signage around the Field 2 parking area ahead of a celebratory event next spring.

Meanwhile, Save the Sound is looking ahead to the next project in the area. Where Sunken Meadow Creek meets Long Island Sound, it also meets the mouth of the Nissequogue River. A little ways upstream on that river, the Phillips Millpond Dam blocks the passage of migratory fish. In the coming months, many of the same partners from the Sunken Meadow State Park project will begin work on a project to restore access to spawning habitat upstream of that dam.

Funding for the Sunken Meadow State Park restoration project was provided by the U.S. Department of the Interior and administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as part of the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program, with additional funding provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

###

More information on the Sunken Meadow Comprehensive Resilience and Restoration Plan:

- <https://greencitiesbluewaters.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/resiliency-restoration-at-sunken-meadow-park/>
- <https://greencitiesbluewaters.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/resiliency-restoration-at-sunken-meadow-park-part-ii/>

- <https://greencitiesbluewaters.wordpress.com/2016/06/15/sunken-meadow-restoration-saga-continues/>
- <https://www.ctenvironment.org/2018/11/26/balancing-water-levels-at-sunken-meadow>