SOAK HIDES NATURE PRESERVE: MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepared by the Management Plan Subcommittee of the Town's Nature Preserve Committee

(The attached is a management plan for the Soak Hides Nature Preserve located around the southern end of Three Mile Harbor.)

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August 28, 2001

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I. INTRODUCTION

Name and Ownership

This preserve is called Soak Hides Nature Preserve. All parcels making up this preserve are owned by the Town of East Hampton. They were acquired individually or in small groups over the past few years, with the two center pieces of the assemblage (see first two parcels on list below) purchased from the Jehovah's Witnesses Church in July 1997. Prior to that, they were owned by Mildred Osborn and her family for approximately 50 years. When the Town acquired the property the house was removed.

Location and Size

This preserve is an assemblage of 11 tax map parcels along the southern end of Three Mile Harbor and flanking Soak Hides Dreen (Tanbark Creek) on the west and east. The various parcels of the preserve abut Spring Banks Road, Soak Hides Road, Three Mile Harbor Road and Gardiner Cove Road (see copy of composite tax map in Appendix).

The parcels contained in the Soak Hides Nature Preserve are as follows:

SCTM #	300-119-2-2	7.9 acres
	300-119-2-3	17.6 acres
	300-119-2-4	6.5 acres
	300-120-2-2.3	2.6 acres
	300-120-2-2.4	1.5 acres
	300-120-2-11	.36 acres
	300-120-2-12	.29 acres
	300-122-5-16	1.8 acres
	300-122-5-17	.7 acres
	300-122-5-20	.2 acres
	300-122-5-21	.3 acres

The total acreage of the preserve is 39.75 acres

Reasons for Nature Preserve Designation

Soak Hides is a very important and sensitive area. There are several reasons that it merits designation as a nature preserve. Chapter 103-10 of the Town Code stipulates conditions that should exist to warrant nature preserve designation. It lays out 8 possible criteria for inclusion, any one of which is sufficient, for consideration for this designation. The Soak Hides Nature Preserve meets five of those criteria:

- First and foremost, it protects watershed areas critical to maintaining good water quality in Three Mile Harbor. The 11 parcels in this assemblage border and protect nearly the entire southern end of the harbor, as well as a major portion of Soak Hides Dreen (Tanbark Creek), a major tributary into the harbor.

- It contains freshwater and saltwater wetlands. Nine of the 11 parcels in this preserve contain obvious wetlands with at least two discernible streams running through them.
- It contains habitat for breeding, feeding and resting wildlife.
- It contains examples of rare and unusual plant life.
- The preserve is particularly suited to and appropriate for environmental education programs.

History

The Three Mile Harbor area has had an interesting and varied history, although intense settlement there, especially on the western shore and southern shore (where the Soak Hides Nature Preserve is located), is a fairly recent phenomenon. There is ample evidence that Native Americans frequented the harbor for centuries before the English settlers arrived in the early 1600's. The local Indians established a settlement near Hands Creek, which they called "Ashawagh", meaning "between the branches of the creek." They named the creek "Copeces", which translates from Algonquin to "little place of shelter." When it disappeared, the settlement left behind a large shell heap that has been the object of much archaeological speculation, most of which points to an intense wampum manufacturing industry in the area. Another area of know Native American activity is along Soak Hides Dreen (Tanbark Creek), which took its name from the use of the stream to soak hides in the tanning process. In addition, there have been many other Indian artifacts found along the western and southern shore of the harbor indicating its popularity as a hunting-fishing-camping location, though for reasons unknown, there were apparently no other permanent Native American settlements there.

Interest in the Native American influence on the western and southern shores was revived in 1944 with an Indian pow-wow sponsored by the Long Island Council of the Federated Eastern Indian League. The event proved so popular that it was repeated each year in late August or early September into the early 1950's. At the 1945 pow-wow, in addition to the colorful Native songs, dances and stories usually presented, the Montauketts and the Narrangansetts signed a peace treaty officially ending a war between the two tribes that started in 1656, possibly the longest war in recorded history. The tradition of a late summer Indian pow-wow has been taken over by the Southampton Shinnecock tribe, which participated in the Three Mile Harbor event for years.

For nearly 250 years after European settlement the appearance of Three Mile Harbor changed very little. As late as 1883, on a sunny August morning, in what would be the height of the boating season today, a couple of latter day explorers sailed into the harbor and described it in terms that indicated how little had changed:

> *"Quiet and Arcadian seclusion reign about this harbor. On the west side, high bluffs slope abruptly down, covered for the most part, with tall woods while on the east side the slope is less steep. Half a dozen houses are scattered around the banks, and as many small craft make up the whole fleet of sail. Seldom a stranger prow cut these waters, and on this day not another sail was spread. Round and round the harbor we coursed, our spirits the while steeping themselves in the delicious quiet and repose."*

The two adventurers landed on the eastern shore and eventually found a local who answered their question about where the houses and people were with the information that, "Well there's the Springs over back here three miles an' then there's the Hook three miles below." (He was probably referring to the area on North Main Street where Springs-Fireplace Road and Three Mile Harbor Road converge.

As the 19th century ended, many residents of East Hampton and its wealthy summer visitors were eager to trade the "Quiet and Arcadian seclusion" of Three Mile Harbor for a more efficient port for fishermen, sportsmen and commercial users. As reported in a historical article appearing in the East Hampton Star on September 9, 1937:

> *"...the first agitation for any improvement upon the natural beauty of the harbor in the form of facilities for protection and use came in the early summer of 1902. At that particular time the shifting sands had so worked to almost completely fill in the natural inlet to the harbor."*

Shortly thereafter, the first breakwater was built and dredging was done in the entrance channel to the harbor. Over the next 30 years work was done, in fits and starts, to further improve access to the harbor and provide services for boats within the harbor. These efforts culminated in a 1931 Town appropriation of the then munificent sum of $55,000 to complete the work. At that time, the breakwaters on both sides of the entrance were improved and extended and the channel was dredged the entire length of the harbor from entrance to head. Continued maintenance of this channel in the second half of the 20th century opened the entire harbor to commercial development on the eastern shore, at the same time that the western shore developed residentially.

In the past two decades, as we have come to realize that protection should accompany development, some impressive steps have been taken to assure that the ecological importance of Three Mile Harbor is not overlooked. A Harbor Protection Overlay District has been established for the harbor, new private docks have been banned and stricter pump out regulations have been adopted. We hope to take a further step in protecting this important watershed area by implementing this management plan for the preserve.

Existing Planning Studies

The land that makes up the Soak Hides Preserve is included prominently in two recent Town of East Hampton planning studies. Along with all of the land bordering Three Mile Harbor, this preserve is part of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (February,

1999) and its recommended use is as "recreational open space". In addition, the preserve is included in the Harbor Protection Overlay District (October, 1995), for which a special set of ordinances was added to the Town Code:

> "The purpose of the Harbor Protection Overlay District is to maintain or improve surface water quality in East Hampton's major harbors, creeks and ponds... . The district is also intended to maintain or improve wildlife habitat in these areas and to maintain or restore these waterways as closely as possible to their natural condition, so that the town's citizens and visitors can continue to enjoy and appreciate their natural values." (Section 255-3-71 of the East Hampton Town Code)

II. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Habitat type:
Soak Hides Preserve is a wooded area with slopes and wetlands. The wetlands consist of fresh water wetlands and tidal wetlands.

Topography:
The terrain is flat, gently sloping towards Three Mile Harbor.

Geology and soils:
Soak Hides Preserve is flat, hilly and contains gullies; the soil is poorly drained.

Key Features:
There are two access roads, two streams, a hiking trail, a bridge over Tanbark Creek (SCTM #119-2-3 to 120-2-2.3) a foundation remaining from a house and a chimney close to the foundation. It also has the only non-planted sweet bay magnolia in East Hampton, a rare diminutive sedge, a low juniper 90-foot wide in diameter (SCTM #119-2-3) and a low juniper 50-foot wide in diameter.

III. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND ISSUES

Although there are no buildings or historic structures on this Preserve, there is a stone fireplace/chimney with a partial foundation (remains of an old building) and an antique hand operated water pump. There is also a wooden footbridge constructed in 2000, which is part of the Paumanok Path hiking trail and connects two adjacent sections of the Preserve. The main focus for this Preserve is to protect its open space, groundwater, flora, fauna and adjacent fresh and salt water shoreline and wetlands, while allowing public access for reasonable use. Since much of this Preserve forms the shoreline for Three Mile Harbor and Tanbark Creek, it is critical to insure runoff contaminants are kept to a minimum. This property also falls within the Harbor Protection Overlay District (Section 255-3-70 of the Town Code passed into law on October 6, 1995). The purpose of this law, "...is to maintain or improve surface water quality in East Hampton's major harbors, creeks and ponds." Specifically, the district is intended to:

- "...help prevent the entry of storm water runoff..."
- "...preserve important indigenous vegetation..."
- "...maintain or improve wildlife habitat..."
- "...maintain or restore these waterways as closely as possible to their natural condition..."

Therefore, suggested uses and activities need to take this into consideration.

As discussed in the Introduction section, this Preserve takes advantage of eleven separate town-owned parcels, which form a natural continuous tract. Because of its relatively large size (39.75 acres) and sensitive environment, it offers wonderful opportunities for public use in a wooded shoreline environment practically within walking distance of the East Hampton Village.

Since this preserve is located less than two miles from the Cedar Street fire/police headquarters and is bounded on two sides by paved roads, emergency access is easily obtainable.

The issues that need to be addressed are discussed in the remaining sections of this management plan. One significant concern is the dumping of building materials, tires, a boat trailer, trash, etc. on this site over the past years and is still going on. There are also signs of saplings with their bark scraped off, being pushed to the ground, apparently by vehicles. Shovel digging has taken place since the Town acquired this property. It will be the Nature Preserve Committee's responsibility to see that the Preserve is cleaned up and protected in accordance with this management plan and to report any violations to the proper authorities and/or the Town Board.

IV. ACCESS

Existing Access:

Land – Main access is via a dirt road (SCTM #119-2-3) at the corner of Soak Hides Road and Springy Banks Road.

There is another road (SCTM #119-2-2) access further north off Springy Banks Road.

Trail access occurs at the corner of Soak Hides Road and Springy Banks Road where the Paumanok Path enters the Preserve. This trail exits the Preserve at Gardiner's Cove Road to the east.

There is another trail off Soak Hides Road that enters the southern portion of the Preserve.

Water – The Preserve is accessed via the beach on Three Mile Harbor and the boat launch at the end of Gardiner's Cove Road.

Existing Parking:

The main parking area currently utilized is the northeasterly corner of Soak Hides Road and Springy Banks Road. There is additional parking along Springy Banks Road and at the end of Gardiner's Cove Road.

Vehicles that access the Preserve via the main dirt road park at the end of the road at the beach area.

It is proposed that the secondary access road (SCTM #119-2-2) off Spring Banks Road be closed to vehicular traffic. It is obvious upon inspection that the road is being used solely for dumping. There are remains of cars, boat trailers, glass bottles and other detritus. The road doesn't go anywhere that would give it an excuse for existing.

Proposal for Parking at the Preserve:

Existing parking should be maintained. It is further recommended that the area at the southeasterly corner of Soak Hides Road and Springy Banks Road be used for parking. The area is cleared of brush and is level.

The south side of Soak Hides Road can be used for overflow parking (highly unlikely) because it is a one-way street with an ample shoulder to accommodate parked cars.

V. USAGE

Suggested activities in this Preserve include:

Hiking
Family recreation
Bird watching
Canoe and Kayak launching
Bicycling
Fishing
Nature study
Big game bow hunting as per DEC regulations
Small game hunting as per DEC regulations
Trap stake cutting subject to oversight by the Natural Resources Department

The following list are activities that are inappropriate at the Preserve:

Digging and artifact recovery
Woodcutting
Removal of vegetation
Abandonment of pets and other domesticated animals
Dumping

Signage and enforcement of restrictions:

East Hampton Nature Preserve signs, as designed by the Nature Preserve Committee, shall be placed about the perimeter of the Preserve to notify the public of its Nature Preserve status. Signage shall be placed at the designated parking area and at the primary trail access points identifying the Preserve for public education.

Fines and penalties:

All existing sections of the Town Code apply to this Preserve.
All fines and penalties should be assessed at the maximum amount.

VI. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

Survey:

The Town should have all the parcels making up the Preserve surveyed, showing accurate boundary lines and ownership.

Signage:

It is recommended that the selection and approval of "Soak Hides Nature Preserve" be the accepted name for the designated properties.

It is also recommended that the signs be posted signs along the boundary of the Nature Preserve and at the parking and trailhead access points.

Access:

The access to the head of Three Mile Harbor at the end of Gardiner's Cove Road should be improved by cleaning up some of the vegetation, which has grown thick over the years. This is a good place to launch a small boat or kayak.

The trail access should be maintained and properly posted.

One unimproved road located north off Springy Banks Road (SCTM #119-2-2) should be closed to all motorized vehicles.

Access via Three Mile Harbor by boat should be maintained with properly posted signs.

The access road through property SCTM # 119-2-3 should remain open. A buffer of natural grasses should be created (250 feet) to protect the seep zone (water's edge vegetation) but allows Baymen the ability to launch boats.

Other:

The Town should schedule regular clean-up of all Nature Preserves (quarterly or more) and continue to maintain the existing garbage pail pick-ups.

Parts of the Nature Preserve border the Town-owned trailer park. Monitoring of encroachment onto this Nature Preserve should be continued. This should include monitoring of the "cat houses", which are currently on Nature Preserve land.

The Town should remove the utility poles and lines, as well as an old transformer from the parcel of land SCTM #119-2-3.

The Town should initiate a program for the removal of phragmites from Tanbark Creek that is impeding the flow of water into the creek.

The Town should install a catch basin (dry well) on Soak Hides Road just east of Tanbark Creek to catch groundwater runoff from the road.

APPENDIX

FLORA: DESCRIPTION AND LIST

The only sweet bay magnolia existing in East Hampton Town is situated on the west bank of Tanbark Creek. The Soak Hides watershed is predominantly flooded deciduous, i.e., swampy, in nature. Its riparian woody vegetation is dominated by red maple, tupelo, sweet pepperbush, swamp azalea, lyonia, and highbush blueberry. Its upland edges are dominated by oaks (black and scarlet, as well as a few white oaks), pignut and mockernut hickories, and flowering dogwood. Some of the wetland trees and upland trees would probably qualify as "old growth". Several are close to a hundred years old or older. Wild lily-of-the-valley is the dominant ground cover herb in season. The only non-planted sweet bay magnolia growing in East Hampton Town is found here on the stream's west bank.

The herbaceous vegetation along the stream is dominated by ferns, namely cinnamon ferns, various sedges and rushes, wetland grasses, skunk cabbage, sphagnum and pincushion mosses. There are also a handful of marsh violets situated in the mosses. In the past, there have been such spectacular bloomers as Turk's-cap lily and cardinal flower. (These may have been picked out, but could easily be reintroduced.) Other than the sweet bay magnolia, the rarest plant in the Tanbark Creek assemblage is *Carex seorsa,* a diminutive sedge.

Inasmuch as the watershed north of Springy Banks Road does not contain any ponds, Tanbark Creek is not an important breeding area for pond-breeding amphibians such as spring peepers, gray tree frogs, Fowler's toads, spotted salamanders or marbled salamanders. However, the stream is populated with green frogs and occasionally with spring peepers. The stream and its environs are also used by eastern garter snakes, eastern ribbon snakes, spotted turtles, box turtles, as well as gray-phased red-backed salamanders. Birds and mammals using the stream and its watershed are the same as those using the area of the Preserve north of Soak Hides Road.

The tidal cove north of Soak Hides Road was once dominated by topographically arranged zones of low marsh, high marsh and fresh marsh. However, in the last twenty years (since the writer has been keeping records), phragmites has invaded the tidal wetland zones and almost completely obliterated the low and high marsh species. The fresh wetland edge (primarily, swampy in composition) is also being invaded by phragmites; but, nevertheless, is still in relatively good shape. The swamp wetlands dominate the western edge of Three Mile Harbor in two places, along Soak Hides Cove to where it opens out on the north, and to the west, along the intermittent stream and swale. The swamp vegetation is dominated by the same species that occur south of Soak Hides Road along the stream, except that it is richer in species and includes more ferns.

The shore edge in between these two areas is of a particularly interesting "seep zone" type, occupied by marshy grasses and sedges. The groundwater seeps onto the shore and creates a fresh*ish* zone in the inter-tidal zone. Here one finds sweet grass, *Hierochloe odorata,* (an important grass in aboriginal basket-making), slender blue flag,

Iris prismatica, and lilaeopsis, a very tiny plant that grows on oozing silts, all of which are on the state's Natural Heritage List.

The upland trees and shrubs include a few more species than south of Soak Hides Road, including beech, maple-leaf viburnum, dangleberry and nannyberry. There's a stand of eastern cottonwood on the extreme northeastern border of the site. Wild-lily-of-the-valley, but also Solomons's seal, wild strawberry, and cinquefoil provides some of the herbaceous carpeting under the trees. Several of the trees are older than 100 years old and so qualify for "old growth" status.

Perhaps, the most interesting plants in the upland portion of the site are the two shrub-form common junipers, *Juniperus communis,* that are just west of the cove (north of the trail). They measure about 90' and 50' in diameter and are among the biggest that the writer has ever seen in the eastern United States. It takes several hundred years for one of these to get to be 90' in diameter. (There are no more than 10 common junipers more than three feet in diameter in all of East Hampton.)

List of Flora:

Sweet bay magnolia	red maple tupelo	sweet pepperbush	swamp azalea
Lyonia	highbush blueberry	black oak	white oak
Hickory	dogwood	lily-of-the-valley	ferns
Sedges	moss	violets	skunk cabbage
Grasses	iris	lilaeopsis	beech
Viburnum	cottonwood	cinquefoil	strawberry
Black cherry	white pine	red cedar	inkberry
Wild grape	honeysuckle	may apple	spirea
Olive	Spartina Patens	Spartina alterna	Bacharis
Smilex	phragmites	low bush blueberry	wintergreen
Marsh rose	muleen	oregano	white penny
Barberry			

FAUNA: DESCRIPTION AND LIST

All matter of songbirds regularly breed in this area, including scarlet tanager, song sparrow, rufous-sided towhee, chipping sparrow, goldfinch, cedar waxwing, blue-winged warbler, ovenbird, wood thrush, bobwhite, northern oriole, white-breasted nuthatch, black-capped chickadee, green heron, common crow, blue jay, red-eyed vireo, yellow warbler, tufted titmouse, cardinal, house finch, red-winged blackbird, cowbird, grackle, yellow-billed and black-billed cuckoos, vireo, mourning dove, common yellowthroat, wood pewee, flicker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, eastern bluebird, tree swallow, house wren, Carolina wren, gray catbird, brown thrasher, starling, robin, great crested flycatcher, red-tailed hawk, ring-necked pheasant, screech owl, Canada goose, mute swan and mallard. Black-crowned night herons, whippoorwill and black ducks have bred here in the past.

Mammals using or residing on the site include white-tailed deer, red fox, long-tailed weasel, opossum, raccoon, feral cat, pine vole, meadow mouse, white-footed mouse, masked shrew, short-tailed shrew, common mole, gray squirrel, eastern cottontail rabbit, eastern chipmunk, muskrat, Norway rat, house mouse and little brown bat. It is conceivable that a mink or two is still found in this area from time to time.

Several butterflies breed in the site area including mourning cloak, spring azure, eastern painted lady, monarch, cabbage white, yellow sulphur, wood nymph, wood satyr, tiger swallowtail, spicebush swallowtail, black swallowtail, questionmark, pearly crescent and a great number of skippers and other nondescript species. The area has been infested by gypsy moths in the past, but not lately. It is thickly populated with dog ticks and deer ticks, and is not free from gnats and mosquitoes, especially after dark in the summer.

A number of fish are in the area along the shore where they often breed, including Atlantic silverside, sheepshead minnow, mummichog, threespine stickleback, fourspine stickleback, striped killifish and northern pipefish. Nine-spine stickleback and mummichogs have been found in Tanbark Creek from time to time.

List of Fauna:

Ticks	butterflies	deer	fox
Weasel	opossum	raccoon	feral cat
Vole	mice	shrew	mole
Squirrel	rabbit	chipmunk	muskrat
Rat	brown bat	woodpecker	heron
Duck	whippoorwill	owl	pheasant
Hawk	finch	dove	flycatcher
Chickadee	nuthatch	vireo	titmouse
Cardinal	cuckoos	bluebird	thrasher
Robin	oriole	towhee	tanager
Blue jay	sparrow	goose	waxwing
Ovenbird	thrush	bobwhite	crow
Warbler	wren		

REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS

The reptiles and amphibians are the same as are found south of the road with the addition of northern diamondback terrapins which live in Three Mile Harbor and breed along its shores, sometimes going hundreds of feet upland to deposit their eggs. Snapping turtles are liable to show up here as well. Black racers, milk snakes, ring-necked snakes, and, perhaps, the eastern hognose snake are found here as well. There are some anecdotal records of southern leopard frogs breeding in the swale are associated with the intermittent stream on the northern part of the property. (cf. Brad Loewen, personal communication.)

List of Reptiles/Amphibians:

Terrapins	snakes	snapping turtles
Frogs	toads	turtles
Salamanders		

SOAK HIDES NATURE PRESERVE

119-2-2	7.8 acres
119-2-3	17.6
119-2-4	6.5
120-2-2.4	1.5
120-2-2.3	2.6
120-2-11	.36
120-2-12	.29
122-5-16	1.8
122-5-17	.7
122-5-20	.2
122-5-21	.3

11 Parcels - 39.75 acres

SOAK HIDES NATURE PRESERVE PROPOSAL

1" = 355'

1999 Aerial