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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
ATTN: WEST POND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
210 New York Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10305

How to Comment

The National Park Service appreciates your input into this planning process and would like your comments. We would like to hear from you as to what activities you typically participate in at West Pond; how to improve your experience at the West Pond Trail; what experiences and elements of the area you value most; and what habitats are essential and why. What are the concepts to address West Pond breach?

You are invited to attend the upcoming public meeting/open house.

Location: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center
(Located on Cross Bay Boulevard)

Date: July 17, 2014

Time: 6 - 8 pm

You may enter comments directly through the Internet by directing your web browser to the following URL address:
<http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/gate>

OR

You may provide comments by mail:

National Park Service
Gateway National Recreation Area
Attn: West Pond Environmental Assessment
210 New York Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10305
Jennifer T. Nersesian, Superintendent

Schedule Milestones

- NPS Internal Planning Meetings -
Fall/Winter 2013/2014
- Public Meeting and Comment Period -
Summer 2014
- Alternatives Development -
Summer/Fall 2014
- Preparation of West Pond EA -
Summer/Fall 2014
- Public Meeting/Comment Period -
Spring 2015
- Final Decision Document -
Summer 2015

Gateway National Recreation Area

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
West Pond Environmental Assessment

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



July 2014



West Pond Environmental Assessment Newsletter #1

Planning Begins to Address the Breach at West Pond

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) at Gateway National Recreation Area has begun the development of an environmental assessment to address the damage done to West Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, by Superstorm Sandy. During the development of this environmental assessment, park staff, along with our neighbors, visitors, and interested agencies and organizations, will examine project objectives, issues, existing conditions, and impacts associated with a range of management concepts for West Pond.

I invite your participation in developing the concepts for managing West Pond and in the preparation of the environmental assessment. During this effort there will be a number of opportunities for you to contribute your ideas and concerns and help shape the future of West Pond. Newsletters will be distributed to the mailing list and posted on the Internet during the course of the project. Comment forms are provided to collect your ideas. There will be a public meeting on July 17, 2014 for early input, and again next year once we have completed the Draft environmental assessment. Your ideas and comments are crucial for the development of plans for West Pond at Gateway National Recreation Area. Preserving and conserving the resources through public communication and involvement are essential to the completion of successful planning. Thank you for your time and participation.

Jennifer T. Nersesian, Superintendent
Gateway National Recreation Area

Background

West Pond is located at Gateway National Recreation Area's Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Unit, NY. Jamaica Bay covers approximately 12,000 acres that range from brackish to saline conditions with an average depth of 13 feet and a tidal range of 4.9 feet. The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge spans approximately 9,000 acres of salt marsh, natural inlets, grassy hassocks, sand dunes, small beaches and uplands, and includes East Pond and West Pond, trails, and a visitor center. East Pond and West Pond and the surrounding landscape are manufactured landscapes that require regular maintenance to upkeep and they are attributed to Robert Moses. The New York infrastructural landscape was created from dredged materials in the early 1950's and were part of the New York City park system that was transferred to the National Park Service in 1972 as part of Gateway National Recreation Area.

The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge is a significant bird sanctuary located along the Atlantic flyway with over 300 species of songbirds, shorebirds and waterfowl sighted over the last 30 years. The Refuge provides opportunities for recreation, scenic vistas, birding, visitor orientation, environmental education, park maintenance and ranger operations.

In 2012, Superstorm Sandy caused significant damage to the region which was declared a federal disaster area in the aftermath of the storm. Damaging winds and storm surge caused the man-made berm along the southern portion of West Pond to be breached. The breach caused the pond to be inundated with sea water from Jamaica Bay increasing salinity and creating a tidally influenced lagoon. These changes altered habitat conditions that support fish and wildlife.

The National Park Service is in the early stages of the planning process to address storm damage to West Pond.

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We are preparing an environmental assessment that will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and other regulations and policies. This environmental assessment process includes opportunities for public input including this early stage when we are developing concepts for addressing the future of West Pond. This newsletter outlines the purpose, need and objectives of this project, planning concepts for addressing West Pond, information on how to comment, and schedule and process milestones.

- Promoting conditions for effective interpretation,
- Improving and maintaining the park's natural resources and historic character,
- Contributing toward a healthy, productive, and biologically diverse ecosystem,
- Providing the sound basis for adaptive management measures; and
- Provide for sustainable protective design elements to promote future desired resource conditions.



Breach at West Pond



Map of Jamaica Bay and West Pond

Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives

The purpose of this is to provide for resilient conditions along the environmentally sensitive West Pond Trail area, which will support a diversity of Jamaica Bay habitats and wildlife and enhanced visitor experiences.

Need for the Project:

- The area around the breach and the portion of the trail that crosses the embankment are not currently safe for public access.
- The existing breached condition is vulnerable to recurring storm activity and susceptible to future damage from erosion.
- To increase universal visitor access and provide the opportunity to view wildlife, enjoy the Jamaica Bay, and learn about the resources.
- To ensure that the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge provides habitat that supports a diversity of species, in a resilient and sustainable environment.

The objectives of the project are to improve existing conditions and visitor experience at West Pond by:

- Improving and maintaining a more resilient West Pond Trail area,
- Implementing a clear route finding system,

Preliminary Planning Concepts

Our planning team has met to discuss the information presented in this newsletter. We have collected existing information, researched the history of the site, and identified and mapped wetlands in the area of West Pond. These preliminary concepts will be further developed and refined with ideas that are collected during the public comment stage of the project. We want your input regarding these concepts and any other concepts you recommend.

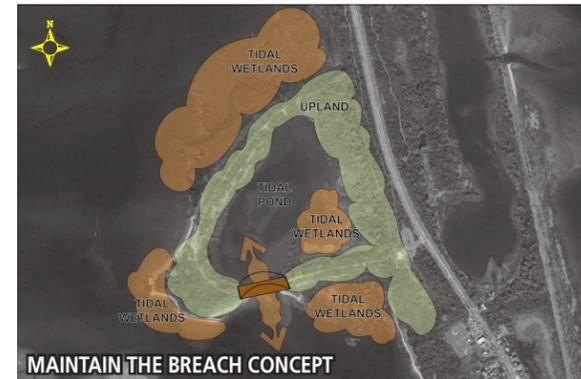
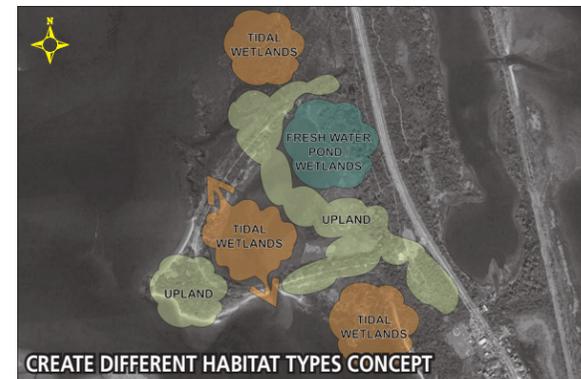
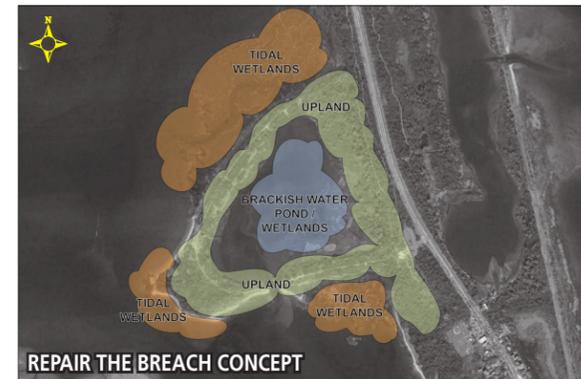
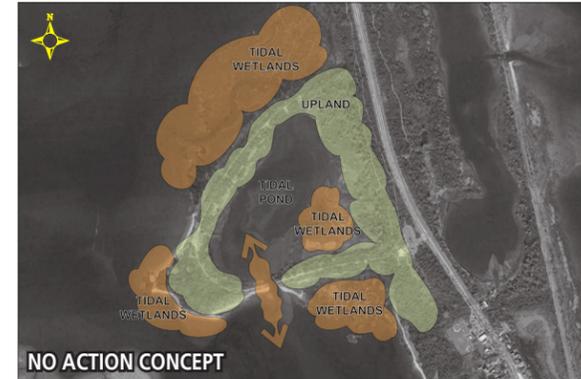
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No Action: This concept includes repairs to the trail (to include the erosion on the northwest side of West Pond), and replacement of benches (underway). The salinity of West Pond would be expected to continue to shift from a ponded, brackish condition to that of a saltwater influenced lagoon, with wetland conditions changing over time. With changes in salinity levels, species composition in the area would be expected to continue to change. Visitor use patterns may also shift over time.

Repair the Breach: Repairing the breach would mean that West Pond would be maintained in a semi-brackish condition, in its current location. The breach would be filled/repared. Additional engineering controls and treatment may also be necessary to address the banks opposite the breach that are vulnerable to collapse. West Pond Trail would be restored in its present location.

Create different types of habitat: Different habitat types would be created under this concept. Existing conditions would be re-configured and an enclosed freshwater pond would be created in a different location. Freshwater/saltwater wetlands would become more varied, and would be enhanced. This concept would involve new trail configurations, and would require intensive engineering and construction activity.

Maintain the Breach: The breach would be maintained and either bridged, or the breach area would be stabilized and not bridged. This would mean that West Pond would be maintained as an open lagoon system. Additional stabilization measures would be appropriate. West Pond Trail would either become a loop trail if not bridged, or the trail would continue over the bridge. What are your ideas for trail location?