

# Information meeting on Higbee Beach project Feb. 8

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

**VILLAS** — A public meeting has been scheduled to inform the public about the start of the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area Tidal Marsh/Upland Restoration Project.

The meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Feb. 8 at Lower Township Hall, 2600 Bayshore Road in Villas.

The project is scheduled to begin in March and be completed by the end of 2026.

The mission of the project is to restore tidal hydrology and function to Pond Creek in the wildlife management area (WMA) and to restore upland areas that were degraded by the manufacturing operations from the former magnesite factory to create and enhance habitat for migratory birds, fish and various threatened and endangered species.

The Higbee Beach WMA Restoration Project will result in more than 400 hundred acres of restored and enhanced wetland and upland maritime habitat. These acres fall within the known ranges of resident bird species and will be particularly important to annual spring/fall bird migrations since Cape May is an integral part of the Atlantic Flyway.

A large percentage of the entire Western Hemisphere's population of the red knot has been documented to utilize the Cape May peninsula in the vicinity of the project area during their annual migrations.

The restored wetland project area will provide foraging and loafing habitat for raptors, such as osprey, peregrine falcons, merlins, kestrels, cooper hawks, and sharp shinned hawks during their migratory season as well as increase food, shelter and general habitat for numerous species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals.

The state Division of Fish and Wildlife actively encourages the public to use Higbee WMA lands for a variety of recreational uses including bird watching, photography, hiking, fishing, and hunting. The project will

visually open up Pond Creek tidal and freshwater habitat and provide access for viewing via a bridge crossing over the new tidal channel, berms, and connecting trails that loop around the entire project area.

A portion of the magnesite property will be reserved for a future interpretive/education center that will be used to enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of the newly restored habitats and the wildlife drawn to them.

Throughout the design process, the Office of Natural Resource Restoration (ONRR) collaborated with various stakeholder agencies and organizations to develop a remarkable habitat restoration project that provides ample viewing opportunities to this globally renowned birding destination. Pond Creek Marsh was cut off from tidal influence, resulting in degraded habitat dominated by non-native phragmites.

To restore full tidal inundation to a majority of the marsh, the restored inlet was established through an iterative process of defining, modeling, and refining the inlet channel design.

Branching off this main channel, interior first, second, and third order channels were designed to convey full tidal inundation and drainage of the marsh within a daily tide cycle.

Additionally, the design aims to enhance habitat diversity by eradicating phragmites with the inundation of saltwater and through the incorporation of high marsh islands, habitat clusters, mud flats, open water features, and sand-shell islands throughout the Pond Creek marsh.

For managing flood risk from periodic storm surge events and future sea level rise, the project includes a 6,861-foot earthen berm system fitted with flow control structures designed to control tidal inundation of eastern portions of the Higbee WMA along an alignment within the marsh that balances stakeholder objectives for restoring as much salt marsh as possible within, while protecting freshwater habitat and ground-

water resources. The top of berm elevation was set is 7.5 feet which was deemed appropriate given the design goal of providing a reasonable level of tidal inundation protection to the upper watershed, considering the landscape context and regional flooding pathways.

To drain stormwater input from the watershed east of the tidal inundation control berm, five water control structures were incorporated into the berm design, including: three 4-foot-diameter corrugated metal pipes with dual check valves; one 4-foot-diameter reinforced concrete pipe with inline check-valve; and one 12-inch-diameter reinforced concrete pipe with inline check-valve and trash rack.

To provide targeted habitat control for migratory birds an 851-foot-long northern berm along a northern finger of the Pond Creek marsh was incorporated. This section of marsh will be restored through excavation and removal of Phragmites and planting of native salt marsh species. Water levels within the northern marsh will be managed by NJDEP during short periods of target bird migration using a water control structure consisting of a 6-foot corrugated metal pipe with flap gates. The structure can be set to allow tidal inundation ponding or drain the area behind the berm to provide tidal marsh, open water, and/or mudflat habitats.

Construction of the earthen berms will require suitable subgrade reinforcements along their alignments through the marsh plain. NJDEP collaborated with the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to obtain material from a local Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) as the source of granular fill for the project. This supported NJDOT's need to create capacity in the CDF for future dredging projects and provided a beneficial use for the dredge material.

Uplands within the project area are predominately covered with non-native species and patches of barren land where compacted, high pH material from the

former Harbison Walker Magnesite facility are exposed.

The proposed upland habitat consists of a mix of maritime forest and coastal successional/old field habitat. To manage costs, marsh material excavated to construct the proposed channels and habitat within Pond Creek marsh will be used to supplement the material required to construct this habitat. Maritime forest, a rare habitat in New Jersey that is primarily found within Cape May County, will be constructed between valleys of dune restoration areas within the former Harbison Walker Magnesite facility.

Dune restoration will be constructed by placing the excavated marsh material and capping it with 2-feet of clean sand from an off-site source. Additionally, portions of the former Harbison Walker Magnesite facility and the northern landfill within the project area will be re-graded and topped with a 6-inch layer of topsoil, which will be seeded and restored into coastal successional/old field habitat.

In addition to the upland habitat restoration, the project has incorporated dune restoration areas and channel reinforcement at localized points and low spots around a key freshwater habitat known as Davey's Lake located near the beach front of the project area.

Collaborating with multiple stakeholders, ONRR incorporated multiple wildlife viewing blind structures along an enhanced trail system to provide visitors with an array of visual opportunities that are rare and difficult to come by. The wildlife viewing structures include a bunker blind, a heron canopy viewing platform, two boardwalk systems with platforms, and seven 360° bird blind structures. Additional trail enhancements include a connective loop around the project area that utilizes the berm system to provide access through the marsh, a new pedestrian bridge spanning between the landfills on the project area and providing pedestrian benches and interpretive signs for public education

opportunities. For maintenance requirements, the design includes a ford crossing in the channel immediately downstream of the proposed pedestrian bridge to provide access for heavy equipment and vehicles exceeding allowable bridge loads (H-10 truck loading or 90 pounds per square foot).

Portions of Higbee Beach WMA closed Jan. 29 for the Pond Creek Restoration Project and will remain closed until completed approximately December

2026. This closure is for public safety reasons and to protect and preserve the land and water areas of Higbee Beach WMA.

This closure will not affect the parking lot behind Sunset Beach Gifts located on Sunset Boulevard. However, the parking lot across from the World War II Lookout Tower will be closed.

The meeting will also be viewable on Zoom. The link will be available at <https://www.nj.gov/dep/nrr/restoration/higbee-beach.html>

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## West Cape refines tree removal rules

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

**WEST CAPE MAY** — Borough Commission amended an ordinance covering the removal of trees, adding language to clarify the definition of a replacement tree.

The amendment states a replacement tree must be planted within one year of its removal and must be selected from the West Cape May Shade Tree Commission's list of approved trees.

At a Jan. 24 meeting, during public comment, resident Jim Kay said he recently had a tree removed from his property. He questioned the use of plywood fencing mentioned in the ordinance to create a tree protection zone when construction is taking place.

"As a builder, I can tell you right now that OSB (oriented strand board) is a wonderful product, it costs about \$8 a sheet, plywood is about \$35 a sheet," he said. "Is it possible to change that wording?"

Shade Tree Commission Chairman Wayne Hoffman said the reason plywood or wood fencing was required in the tree protection zone because some contractors put up police tape which was knocked down and tree bases were damaged. He said some contractors used wood pallets.

Hoffman said he had no objection to substituting the word "wood" for "plywood" in the ordinance.

Borough solicitor Frank Corrado said an agreement needed to be reached on what was a suitable barrier. He suggested the Shade Tree Commission further discuss the issue and return to Borough Commission in the future to amend the ordinance if necessary.

The tree protection zone is generally calculated by multiplying the diameter of the tree by 12. A tree with a 10-inch diameter, 12-inches by 10-inches equals 120 inches or 10 feet. Protective fencing must surround the tree at a distance of 10-feet from the trunk of the tree.

The borough can issue a stop work order if a tree protection zone is not in place prior to construction or if it does not conform to the standards of the ordinance.

Hoffman said each of

the 350 trees that had been planted as replacements in the past four years has been on the list of approved trees from the Shade Tree Commission.

The ordinance requires a homeowner or contractor to advise the code enforcement officer when a replacement tree has been planted. The

tree must be planted and maintained in such a manner that the tree can reasonably be expected to live for one year after planting.

A homeowner or contractor shall notify the zoning office within three days of a tree being removed for final inspection by the zoning officer.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
7	5:29	5:56	11:51	11:38
8	6:23	6:50		12:42
9	7:15	7:41	12:33	1:29
10	8:04	8:30	1:27	2:14
11	8:52	9:18	2:18	2:58
12	9:40	10:07	3:09	3:43
13	10:30	10:59	4:04	4:31
14	11:22	11:54	5:02	5:21

**MOON PHASES**

New moon, Feb. 9 • first quarter, Feb. 16

**Cape May Star & Wave**  
167 YEARS OLD • 1854-2022

CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE (ISSN 519-020)  
Volume 170 Number 6

Published weekly by Sample Media, Inc.,  
963 Lenape Drive, Lower Township, NJ 08204

**Published Weekly (52 times a year)**

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: By mail for \$42 a year; \$75 for two years; \$22 for six months. Periodical Postage at Cape May Court House, N.J., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to the Cape May Star and Wave, P.O. Box 2427, Cape May, N.J. 08204.



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