

HONOR AWARD

Environmental Land Solutions, LLC Norwalk

Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary Stamford

During the 1990s, the city of Stamford planned to remake Cove Island Park, an 11-acre wasteland used to store the city's landscape debris, into an area for active recreation. Yet the waterfront dump contained diverse habitats and was an important stop-over point for migrating birds. Birders feared that this valuable wildlife area would be destroyed.

In 1997, Environmental Land Solutions prepared a pro-bono sketch for a wildlife sanctuary on the site. The birders also produced a publication entitled "The Birds of Cove Island Park" and documented the presence of a breeding pair of brown thrashers, a "species of special concern." The area was also designated an "Important Bird Area (IBA)" by Audubon Connecticut.

In 2004 the city received \$400,000 from the state to restore the brush dump into a wildlife sanctuary and provide public access to Long Island Sound. Our firm was retained to prepare the site plans.

Key components of the design included capping the old dump with clean fill, a path, thickets of native shrubs with high wildlife value, and the transformation of shallow depression areas into a seasonal marsh bordered by dense native grasses.

The curvilinear path meanders through a meadow, thickets of fruiting shrubs, and groves of apple, pitch pine, birches, dogwood, shadblow, and oak trees. An undulating topography has

resulted in habitat niches, and a grove of American holly and white cedar provides wintering owl habitat. Also included is a butterfly garden, an annual flower bed for sparrows, a swallow perch, habitat signs, and a bike rack and bench located at the site entrance.

This sanctuary may contain the only coastal meadow with public access in lower Fairfield County and has attracted a wide range of common and uncommon shorebirds, grassland birds,

hawks, owls, and passerine birds.

A community organization was established to control invasive species, provide educational information, plant the butterfly garden, and maintain the trails and plantings. The group also organizes bird walks open to the public.



New site entrance.



Above: Indiangrass meadow. Below: New pond habitat.



Landscape Architects: Matthew J. Popp, ASLA, Kate Throckmorton, ASLA

Project Manager: Erin McKenna, Senior Planner, City of Stamford

Wildlife Consultant: Patrick Cumins, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Center at Bent of the River, Southbury

Volunteer Organization: David and Sue Sweeney and David Winston, Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary

Meadow Specialist: Larry Weaner, Glenside, Pennsylvania

Funding: State of Connecticut

Photography: Matthew J. Popp