



LONG ISLAND  
PINE BARRENS  
SOCIETY



# today

PRESERVATION: NOW OR NEVER

## PINE BARRENS WILDFIRES SPARK BURNING ISSUE How Can Future Fires be Prevented or Better Managed?

A Pine Barrens wildfire that scorched 1124 acres in Ridge and Manorville last April has caused scientists and emergency planners to re-think their wildfire prevention and fighting strategy. The seventh largest wildfire in New York State history destroyed three homes and a business. The largest wildfire was the 1995 "Sunrise Fire" that burned 5,050 acres of Pine Barrens in Brookhaven and Southampton towns.

Dry weather and high winds created "a perfect storm" for the fire that investigators termed "intentionally set." It took some 24 hours to extinguish. The fire — actually two blazes — suggested that recommendations resulting

from the 1995 fire had not been implemented to reduce the potential for large fires and to fight them effectively when they occur.

The Pine Barrens is a "fire climax ecosystem," meaning that periodic, naturally-occurring fires are needed to re-generate the pitch pine-scrub oak forest. A plan developed in 1999 by a Wildfire Task Force of the New York State Pine Barrens Commission called for "prescribed burning" of small sections of Pine Barrens under controlled conditions to mimic the natural cycle and avoid conflagrations that result from ignition of dry



**BARRENS BLAZE:** Wildfires raged through 1800 acres of Pine Barrens in April, prompting a fresh look at controlled burns and fire management.

Credit: Chief Timothy Shea

grasses or leaves and needles that accumulate on the forest floor.

Over the past five years, an average of only 80 acres were burned. Scientists say an average of 1500 acres per year is needed. "If we don't conduct controlled fires, we're going to face more uncontrolled conflagrations," said PBS Executive Director Richard Amper.

An after action report prepared by Suffolk County Fire Rescue and Emergency Services also said that firefighting lessons learned after the 1995 fire were not consistently applied in the latest outbreak. Principal among the findings were that command and control procedures were not followed,

increasing confusion made worse by incompatible radio equipment and independent firefighting by individual firefighting units — not controlled by the fire command.

The report also called for better training for forest fire fighting and steps homeowners in wooded areas can take to protect their homes. These include keeping wood piles and brush away from the house, trimming trees away from chimneys and keeping roofs clear of pine needles and leaf litter.

### Time Running Out On Carmans Plan

Nearly two years after Brookhaven Town commenced a process for protecting the Carmans River, the project remains stalled. A panel of Long Island leaders produced a Carmans River Watershed Preservation & Management Plan last year, but the Town Board declined to accept it for consideration.

The plan's opponents, Republicans Dan Panico and Tim Mazzei and Democrats Connie Kepert and Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld, cited different reasons for opposing the plan and proposed no alternatives. The plan calls for protection of 1800 acres of land that lies between parcels already preserved in the watershed. Some land would be purchased and other development transferred to non-residential areas in Brookhaven

Credit: File Photo



**BAD GUY:** Brookhaven Town Councilman Daniel Panico has repeatedly blocked preservation of the Carmans River for political reasons.

away from the watershed. "If there were bona fide objections to the Carmans Plan, the Town Board opponents would and should have corrected them, but because the opposition results from petty political bickering, the Town Board remains at an impasse," said PBS Executive Director Richard Amper. He called for immediate remedial action in the face of three major development projects currently being considered in the Carmans corridor. "If a resolution is not found soon, the opportunity to save the river will be lost," he said.

### Pine Barrens Society Celebrates 35 Years

The Long Island Pine Barrens Society will celebrate its 35th birthday at its Environmental Awards Gala on October 18 at Oheka Castle in Huntington. The Long Island Press will receive the Society's award for "Outstanding Contribution to Long Island's Environment" for its coverage of the environment and health. Robert DeLuca, president of Group for the East End, will receive the Dennis Puleston Environmental Achievement Award.

The Pine Barrens Society was founded in 1977 by John Cryan, Bob McGrath and John Turner to protect New York's oldest forest. The environmental education and advocacy group led the campaign to approve the Pine Barrens Protection Act which has jurisdiction over more than 100,000 acres of Pine Barrens across Brookhaven, Riverhead and Southampton Town.

Alec Baldwin will serve as Honorary Chairman of this year's event with Ross Ain of Caithness Long Island and Gary Melius of Oheka Castle serving as Co-chairs. Sponsorship, journal advertising and tickets can be obtained by calling the Society at (631) 369-3300.

Credit: Mary Ellen Matthews



**GOOD GUY:** Actor Alec Baldwin is a fierce fighter for Long Island's environment. He will serve as Honorary Chairman for PBS's 35th Anniversary Gala.



# the thicket

## Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Challenge of Source Water Protection for Groundwater

by Carrie Meek Gallagher

*Ms. Gallagher is Chief Sustainability Officer for the Suffolk County Water Authority.*

Here on Long Island, we get 100% of our drinking water from an underground aquifer system — making the protection of groundwater of utmost importance. Nationally, we have witnessed disturbing news of extreme droughts in the Midwest — agricultural crops drying up, diminished livestock production and wildfires damaging and threatening communities. By 2013, thirty-six states are anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages. Gratuitous



Credit: Jean Held

**PURE, FRESH DRINKING WATER:** Protection of the source of Groundwater, much of it beneath the Pine Barrens, will assure this critical resource for our children and grandchildren.

amounts of precipitation in the northeastern United States ensure that we have more than enough volume to meet our water use levels and continue to recharge the aquifer system. Although Long Islanders are not facing water shortages, we must not take our water for granted. Despite the fact that we may not have to worry about the volume of water available in the short term, we still have to worry about its quality. All the water we use comes from the aquifers right under our feet. What we do as individuals, businesses, and policymakers impacts the quality and quantity of our groundwater. We need to be good stewards of this essential resource and do our part to protect and preserve it.

Because the aquifer system is underground and therefore unseen, most Long Islanders never think about the source of their drinking water. They fail to realize that human activities on the surface can, and do, have serious negative impacts on groundwater quality. A large variety of everyday activities have negative impacts on groundwater quality including agricultural pesticide use, automobile use, dry cleaning, flushing of medications, wastewater discharges, and common household cleaners and personal care products. Thankfully, the aquifer system acts as a giant filter, which leaves us with high quality, fresh drinking water. However, this does not mean that trace amounts of contaminants are completely filtered out. Public water suppliers still spend millions of dollars in testing and treatment per year in order to ensure that our water stays fresh, clean, and contaminant free.

That is why implementing a comprehensive Source Water Protection Program (SWPP) in Suffolk County is so critical. Source water protection is the overall concept of protecting or improving the quality of our groundwater used as a supply for drinking water, or a specific activity or management practice directly contributing toward achieving that goal. The purpose of a Suffolk County SWPP is to help improve and protect water quality through a series of action items each targeted at specific activities harmful to the groundwater system:

- Create a detailed assessment of current threats to our public supply wells, using SWAP maps and GIS.
- Work in conjunction with local, state, and federal governments as well as the environmental community, universities and private companies to share data and improve program results.
- Promote future legislation that will help preserve groundwater quality.
- Address the issue of groundwater protection at its origin: the surface.
- Work towards removing the pollution at its source, rather than remediating it after the fact.
- Implement action items that will help reduce or stop contaminants from seeping into our aquifer system.
- Decrease costs for both supplier and consumer through a reduced need for water treatment.

But you, the consumer, don't have to wait until an official source water protection program is adopted and implemented. You can take steps today, in your home and business, to help protect the quality of our groundwater — our only source of drinking water.

### Become a groundwater guardian today.

1. Don't pour any hazardous or toxic household materials down the drain or toilet — old paint, cleaners, degreasers, oils, etc. Check with NYSDEC for proper disposal locations.  
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8780.html>
2. Properly dispose of all expired or unused medications by dropping them off at your local Suffolk County police department precinct's drop box, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.  
<http://apps.suffolkcountyny.gov/police/documents/Operation%20Medicine%20Cabinet%20Flier.jpg>
3. Avoid using fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides on your lawn and gardens. If you choose to use them, do so sparingly.
4. Rainwater is often sufficient to keep your lawn healthy throughout the summer because a typical lawn needs about an inch of water a week to stay healthy. If you do feel a need to water your lawn, do so in the morning to avoid wasteful evaporation, and keep your water nozzle aimed at your lawn rather than your driveway or sidewalk.
5. Support open space preservation initiatives in your community.

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS NOTES

### In and Out of Court

The Pine Barrens Society remains locked in litigation with Suffolk County over what it charges are violations of law in the conduct of two, voter-approved preservation programs.

Credit: Wayne Cook



**LEGAL ADVOCATES:** Society attorneys Jennifer Juengst and Regina Seltzer are fighting Suffolk's violations of public environmental referenda.

The Society is suing the Suffolk County legislature for raiding \$20 million from the Drinking Water Protection Program which uses a quarter-cent sales tax to purchase land that sits atop Long Island's purest drinking water. The funds were taken to balance the county's budget. The referendum that approved the funding said explicitly that no change in the program could be made without voter approval.

In a related lawsuit, also against the Suffolk Legislature, the Society charges that a recently-adopted Agriculture law permits development on land from which the development rights have been purchased by the public. "Once the public has paid a landowner not to develop his property, he may not go out and develop it anyway," said PBS president, Alan Singer, "He can't have his cake and eat it too. Both cases were filed in New York State Supreme Court in 2009 while Steve Levy was still County Executive.

## State Legislature Gets Failing Marks

The New York State Legislature failed to approve any of environmentalists' top environmental bills during the 2012 session, making this year one of the worst ever for environmental protection.

**The Environmental Protection Fund Enhancement Super Bill** was not passed by both houses, but both houses did pass a similar bill that would give the EPF about half as much money over a longer period of time.

**Solar Industry Development & Jobs Act** would have created thousands of new solar jobs and jumpstarted investment in New York's growing solar energy industry by requiring state utilities and energy service companies to supply an increasing percentage of their electricity from solar, ultimately resulting in 5000 MW on the grid by 2026 — enough to power more than 500,000 homes and reduce as much carbon pollution as taking nearly three million cars off the road.

**Global Warming Pollution Cap** would have required that climate-altering pollution from all sources be cut by 80 percent by the year 2050. Scientists say that these reductions in greenhouse gas emissions would help us avert the worst impacts of climate change.

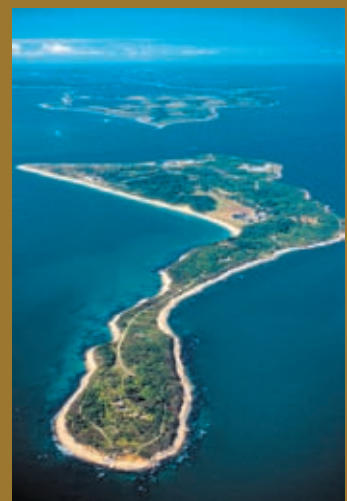
**Hazardous Waste Loophole** would have ended special exemptions that allow the gas industry to circumvent requirements for hazardous waste disposal. This bill would have updated state law so that all waste resulting from gas drilling that meets the definition of hazardous waste, be treated as such and subject to all regulations related to its generation, transportation, treatment, storage and disposal.

The State Assembly approved all the Super Bills but the State Senate passed none of them.

## Press Plum Protection Plan

A Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement has been prepared that will shape the future of Plum Island, off the North Fork of Long Island. At present, Congress is poised to sell the Island if and when the government transfers its animal disease research function to the State of Kansas. Environmentalists want to see the land preserved, preferably in the form of a National Wildlife Preserve.

Credit: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture



A unique wildlife haven, Plum Island is the largest haul-out site for wintering seals in the northeast, as well as breeding grounds for bank swallows (a bird species in decline in New York), ospreys and federally threatened piping plovers. Plum Island is also a vital feeding area for federally endangered roseate terns. An Audubon-designated "Important Bird Area," approximately 190 species of birds have been documented nesting or using the island as a critical migratory stopover site. It also hosts approximately 40 rare and protected plant species.

**PLUM CRAZY:** The General Service Administration is trying to sell Plum Island, off Long Island, for development while environmentalists want to preserve this natural treasure.





# The Executive Director's Point of View

## ABCO: A Civic Coalition's Fall from Grace

by Richard Amper

*The President's Point of View will appear again in the next edition.*

More than a quarter century ago, dozens of individual civic associations in Brookhaven — a town larger in land mass than all of Nassau County — banded together to form a coalition known as the Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization. The purpose was to increase their collective impact on public policy-making in the town — especially regarding land use matters. The thought was that while an individual civic association might not get the town's attention, a coalition might.

ABCO, as it was known, worked with the town to benefit communities and pressed the town not to take actions the civics thought harmful to the environment or community character. Early leaders included historic civic activists such as Jane Gombeski who helped organize support for the Pine Barrens Protection Act, and the First Lady of civic activism, the late Grace Vander Voort.

Over the years ABCO has struggled against the juggernaut of over-development in a town that became known as "Crookhaven." As subdivisions and strip malls sprung up seemingly everywhere, the Brookhaven civic community became more and more embattled as the country-like ambience they fought for increasingly disappeared.

Development project after development project blighted the landscape, compromised water quality and increased taxes to

pay for new government services. ABCO was increasingly embattled. It is entirely understandable why ABCO became the organization of "No!"

In the process, ABCO began losing its perspective. It became more and more difficult to get the organization to draw distinctions between Town Board actions that had benefits from those that undermined

**"The surly ABCO leadership became more and more angry and less and less effective."**

Brookhaven. The positive, pro-active volunteers who attended ABCO and Town Hall meetings to press their agenda drifted away, leaving the organization with a small cadre of unhappy people — no longer representative of the communities they claimed to represent.

The effort to preserve the Carmans River brought the decline of ABCO to a head. The surly ABCO leadership became more and more angry and less and less effective.

During the process of trying to protect the Carmans River watershed, they lied, attacked and undermined the work of respected community leaders, losing civic member participation and leaving ABCO in the hands of an extreme few who seemed to oppose everything and would not advance a practical, positive plan to protect the river.

Despite 36 public meetings at which ABCO attended and spoke, they charged that the Carmans preservation efforts denied public participation. They turned out angry mobs of citizens to oppose developments that were not being considered. And they persuaded a Town Board majority to refuse even to consider a detailed preservation plan for the river, produced by some of Long Island's most accomplished experts in land use.

The result: no preservation, and a looming onslaught of the very over-development ABCO has historically resisted. Today, fewer than a dozen civic members are calling the shot at ABCO as though they truly represent the good people of Brookhaven and without contributing any constructive alternatives to the current plan to save the river.

Today ABCO makes a distant memory of the effective civic activism of the ABCO of Grace Vander Voort and leaves Brookhaven without the positive and effective leadership the town and the river need.

## Water Quality Improvement Action Plan Produced

Long Island environmental and civic leaders have produced a Case Statement for a wide-ranging agenda aimed at restoring drinking water and surface waters in the face of increasing scientific evidence of serious degradation.

Triggered by the release of a report by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services last year, groups in Nassau and Suffolk County have come together to advance a series of actions involving government, business and industry and citizens to dramatically reduce contaminants of all kinds that are showing up at increased levels in drinking and surface water.

A range of options was discussed in May at a conference entitled "Water We Going To Do," held at the Hilton Huntington Hotel. Joint

Credit: Wayne Cook



**WATER WARRIORS:** Dr. Christopher Gobler of Stony Brook University, Dr. Marci Bortman of the Nature Conservancy and Robert DeLuca of Group for the East End are panelists at the "Water We Going To Do?" conference on water quality.

public hearings by the Nassau and Suffolk Legislatures have been convened over the past two months and new state legislation to improve groundwater protection on Long Island will be introduced when the Legislature re-convenes in January.

The Case Statement explains the Island's system of underground aquifers on which a

population approaching tree million people rely. Groundwater degradation impairs the Island's lakes, rivers, streams, bays and other water bodies, as well.

The document calls for federal infrastructure funding, state legislation to establish both a stricter water quality standard and a unified regulatory authority for water protection, county preservation of land above pure groundwater sources and town limits on density and improved wastewater management.

The Case Statement also calls for a major public education campaign because polling shows Long Islanders are not well informed about the source of their water or the degree to which it has become degraded. Citizens must modify their behavior in terms of household products including fertilizers, pesticides, toxic or caustic solvents, petroleum products cleaning chemicals, certain personal care products and pharmaceuticals.

"Long Island must commit itself to a paradigm shift in the way we manage water and waste," said PBS Executive Director Richard Amper at a recent hearing on groundwater protection.

Credit: Wayne Cook



**OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATE:** Pine Barrens Society Executive Director, Richard Amper enumerates actions that must be taken if the downward trend in Long Island's groundwater, which impacts both drinking and surface water, is to be reversed.



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A copy of the last annual report filed with the New York State Department of Law may be obtained by writing to NYS Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY, 10271 or may be obtained directly from the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, 547 East Main Street, Riverhead, NY 11901

 Printed on recycled paper.

Credit: Captain Timothy Byrnes



**FIRE WHEN YOU ARE READY: New York State Rangers conduct "prescribed fire" in Long Island Pine Barrens. This ecosystem requires periodic burning to re-generate. Scientists say controlled burns will limit uncontrolled wildfires, reduce threat to life and property and make for a healthier Pine Barrens.**

The Pine Barrens Society's television program airs on Cablevision Channel 20 in the following areas. If your region is not listed here, please call our office at 631-369-3300 to find out how you can help us get it aired on your local Cablevision network. The program can also be viewed on the Society's web site, [www.pinebarrens.org](http://www.pinebarrens.org) by selecting TV Show on the home page. The air times below are effective from October 1st through March 30th.

Town of East Hampton

Wednesdays 6pm  
Thursdays 9pm  
Fridays 3:30pm

Town of Riverhead, Town of Southold  
and Town of Southampton

Tuesdays 7pm  
Sundays 9pm

Town of Brookhaven, Town of Smithtown  
and portions of Town of Islip

Thursdays 4:30pm  
Thursdays 9:30pm  
Sundays 11am

Town of Babylon, Town of Huntington,  
portions of Town of Islip, and  
all of Nassau County

Mondays 9pm  
Tuesdays 7pm (Channel 115)  
Wednesdays 11am