

Southold Conservation Advisory Council
Study to Determine Property Owner Environmental Compliance
with Southold Trustee Permit Stipulations
2002 Research Award

The publication of the Study to Determine Property Owner Environmental Compliance with Southold Trustee Permit Stipulations comes at a crucial time in the history of the Town of Southold. With Southold at a crossroads in terms of how it conducts its land use planning, zoning, and wetlands use planning, it has become essential to examine how past business regulating growth and the use of natural resources has been conducted in the Town.

Southold has very few codes or laws that give the Trustees sufficient power to prevent harmful development practices on the wetlands. In general, Trustees can only address these issues with recommendations and stipulations. Adherence presents another problem. Typically, enforcement has been weak. There has been little in the way of post permit inspection and enforcement as there are no meaningful fines or punishment for noncompliance with Trustees' stipulations.

Often, work is done in the wetlands without permits. If the developer is caught and given a stop order, application for a permit is then submitted. As the fine is so small, it is summarily figured as part of the cost of the project.

Following the CAC study, and subsequent media coverage, the Town Board was lobbied to address the issues associated with wetlands use. A six-month moratorium on subdivisions was enacted just three months after the report was published. The Trustees are currently considering a moratorium on all work in the wetlands so that the Town Board can focus on passing codes and setting substantial fines to ensure the Trustees have better parameters with which to regulate wetland use and have the ability to enforce compliance.

This study took 14 months to conduct from concept to report and was performed voluntarily by the members of the CAC along with support and guidance from the Trustee/CAC Secretary, Lauren Standish. Cost of the project was kept to a minimum and consisted of the purchase of a digital camera and software, secretarial time spent gathering and copying old permits and maps and the small stipend the CAC members get at their monthly meetings (where they also discuss inspections conducted for the Trustees). Total cost was approximately \$1500.00. All funding was from the Town of Southold CAC budget.