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## From Bare Sands to Beach Grasses, Bulldozers to Boardwalks: Website Shows Lake Ontario Student Dune Steward Program Works

Submitted by New York Sea Grant  
7/30/2004

Sandy beaches and dunes may look like perfect summer playgrounds for hiking, biking and other recreation, but "no way" say this year's Lake Ontario student Dune Stewards. A photo monitoring website supported by the five students from colleges in New York State shows the program to protect the fragile dune ecosystem is working.

Students from SUNY-Oswego, the College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, and SUNY-Cobleskill are photographing sensitive dune areas and educating visitors to Sandy Island Beach, Sandy Pond Beach and Deer Creek Wildlife Management Area in Oswego County, and Southwick Beach and Lakeview and Black Pond Wildlife Management Areas in Jefferson County.

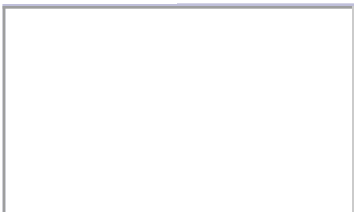
The stewards' photos are posted to the Eastern Lake Ontario section of the website at [www.nysgdunes.org](http://www.nysgdunes.org) and show how the dunes are being restored over time.

Dune Steward Program Coordinator Molly Thompson, a Dune and Habitat Specialist with New York Sea Grant, Oswego says, "The photo monitoring program is a great visual way to show how the dunes can be restored when the proper protective measures are taken."

The stewards take photos at several points at each site every two to three years. Photos from 1989 to today of Sandy Island Beach, Sandy Pond Beach, Southwick Beach and the Black Pond-El Dorado Wildlife Management Area show a progression of bare sands to beach grasses, from bulldozers to boardwalks. Photos of Sandy Island Beach show bulldozers correcting a dune "blowout" - a blowout occurs when repeated use by walkers, ATVs or other machines creates a tunnel through which sand blows inland. Bulldozers relocated the sand back toward the



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beach.

Photos of Southwick Beach, Sandy Pond and Black Pond show how protective dune walkovers, or boardwalks, allow visitors to enjoy the beach and public areas without disturbing the dunes.

Thompson credits this year's stewards for strong backgrounds in Natural Resources and an understanding of the unique natural history of the area. In addition to photographing the dunes, the stewards talk one-on-one with visitors, lead nature walks, string protective fencing, pick up trash, and conduct visitor survey data that is provided to site managers for decision making assistance. A partnership of New York Sea Grant, The Nature Conservancy, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and New York State Parks makes the 2004 steward program possible.

The photo monitoring program is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. New York Sea Grant's program partners include The Nature Conservancy, which initiated the program, the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation, and the Oswego County Soil & Water Conservation District.

To view the photos, go to [www.nysgdunes.org](http://www.nysgdunes.org), click on the Eastern Lake Ontario Dunes tab, and then click on the Photo Monitoring tab.

The stewards: Rob Venczel, South Salem, NY, SUNY-Oswego; Gabrielle Wheeler, Dundee, NY, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse; Terri Wren, Sodus, NY, SUNY-Oswego; John Merchant, Schenevus, NY, SUNY-Oswego, and Mark Evertz, Camillus, NY, SUNY-Cobleskill - are on the dunes now through Labor Day weekend.

For more information on the Lake Ontario Dune Program, contact New York Sea Grant, SUNY-Oswego, 62B Mackin Hall, Oswego, NY 13126, 315-312-3042, [www.nysgextension.org](http://www.nysgextension.org) or [www.nysgdunes.org](http://www.nysgdunes.org).

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