

Narrative for the Hoyt Island slide show presentation, Annual Meeting, November 15, 2023  
By Mary Verel

### History:

The Norwalk Islands consist of 25 islands that form an archipelago off the coast of Norwalk. They are terminal moraines, material deposited by the retreating glaciers about 17,500 years ago. They were discovered by Adrian Block, a Dutch Navigator in 1640. Hoyt Island was owned by the Hoyt family, a founding family in Norwalk. Hoyt Island was part of the Hoyt family holdings from 1749 to 1876 when Caleb Hoyt sold it to Charles Smith and his family. The Smith family built a bungalow and lived and raised 12 children on the island.

Hoyt Island later became part of a large estate on Wilson Point and was most recently owned by Mrs. Andrew O. Czapski. She was the wife of Count Andrew Czapski, a World War 2 Polish Count and war hero. The bungalow became a caretaker's cottage and was continually lived in until the 1950's.

Countess Czapski, donated the Island to the newly formed Norwalk Land Trust in 1979, The Norwalk Land Trust was incorporated in 1973 , from the prior Preserve the Wetlands organization that preceded it.

The Norwalk Land Trust , maintained it as a bird sanctuary as Countess Czapski had wanted. The bungalow was left abandoned and in 2009, it was burned to the ground by vandals.

In 2013, as part of the NLT's 40th anniversary, the Connecticut Audubon was brought in to do a Conservation and Management Plan. The 56 page report detailed the flora and fauna on the Island . This included the diamondback terrapin, a species of special concern in this area. They had been hunted to almost extinction in this area and they found evidence of them in the burned out foundation of the bungalow.

A soil test indicated the presence of PCB's and asbestos. A full scale toxic waste cleanup was in order to make this into a Migrating and local bird and wildlife sanctuary.

In 2018, State Senator Bob Duff secured a \$100,000 State DEEP grant to do the remediation on the island. Many factors delayed the work, nesting seasons, weather, permitting, accessing firms to do the work, and the pandemic took its toll on the completion of the remediation.

In 2021, HRP environmental Consulting firm out of Farmington Connecticut, was chosen to complete the remediation of the affected acre of contamination on the 3 acre island. The cost by that time ballooned up to over \$300,000. As Forbes magazine called us in 2010, "the little land trust that could," as we raised \$4 million dollars to preserve the Charles Schoendorf Farm Creek preserve in Rowayton: we raised the remainder of the money to completely remediate the island. Special recognition must be given to Peggy Holton and her late husband Steve Holton who were more than generous in helping to complete the Island Bird Sanctuary Project.

In 2021, 50 tons of hazardous waste was removed and replaced with clean fill.

In 2023 we received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Grant. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Long Island Futures Fund Grant of \$50,000. This is to restore the health and living resources in the Long Island Sound.

Bill Kenny of William Kenny Associates LLC, Native, was chosen for site design and implantation of the restored bird sanctuary in October, 2023. The initial phase was completed in early November 2023.

Project:

Because Hoyt is an Island, this was a challenging project in many respects. Heavy equipment needed to be barged to the island in a complex remediation operation timed around the tides and mating seasons. The absence of a dock and the need for freshwater were just a few of the issues we had to deal with. We needed a boat to bring people out there and once we did secure a 3000 pound cube of water, we had to configure a way to get the fresh water from the beach up the embankment where the planting was taking place. We utilized a new technology in the form of "Tree Diapers", which we had to fill with water and place around each of the 100 trees and shrubs we planted. A & A Landscape service, led by Abel Amaya and his crew hauled the plants up the embankment and planted them. The newly remediated acre also included a native grass and wildflower mixture as well as a deer deterrent fence. Many volunteers and boat trips later, the first phase of the project was completed by the end of October, 2023. Many thanks to everyone who helped make this possible.

Ecological Value of the Island:

Hoyt is a Coastal Island Forest, complete with Oaks, Pine, Hickories, Maples, Birch, Beech and Hemlock. It is part of the Atlantic Flyway and is host to at least 165 species of birds: sea birds, migratory birds, shore birds (bald eagles, osprey, kestrels and more.) This remarkable saltwater marsh shoreline is home to the Diamondback terrapins, as well as Horseshoe crabs and many other saltmarsh dwellers.

Future:

We hope to continue the restoration and enhancement of this very vital parcel. Sea grasses and enhanced habitat for terrapins and horseshoe crabs is planned for spring. Additional native understory bushes and plants for the remaining two acres as well as bird boxes, bat boxes and perhaps Purple Martin Condos are also planned. Signage indicating that it is a sensitive wildlife habitat and naming it The Margaret and Steve Holton Bird Sanctuary at Hoyt Island, are in the works.

Under the protection of the Norwalk Land Trust, Hoyt Island's priority habitats will be managed to preserve the biodiversity and ecosystem health of this precious resource in perpetuity.