



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Murphy sows seeds for Croton grassland restoration in state budget

TERRENCE MURPHY April 7, 2016

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CROTON-ON-HUDSON, NY - A major conservation project will soon be underway in Westchester. In addition to securing a historic \$300 million funding level for the Environmental Protection Fund in this year's budget, State Senator Terrence Murphy further secured a \$500,000 appropriation for a critical meadow restoration project at Croton Point Park, he announced today.

The funding will be used for grasslands design and management specifications on the constructed meadow cap of the old Croton landfill and comes from state Department of Environmental Conservation's Aid to Localities program.

"Funding this project is key to the ecological health of the capped Croton landfill for both the park itself and its year-round habitat for our Hudson River bald eagles," Senator Murphy said. "I worked hard to get this into the budget so we can keep Croton Point Park beautiful for future generations, expand recreation opportunities, support key economic drivers like Eagle Fest and protect our Hudson River Estuary from invasive species with this money. I'm proud to partner and fund one of largest conservation projects in the history of Westchester County."

Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino said, "When Croton landfill was originally capped, the idea was to utilize it as a habitat for grassland birds. We recognize that vision is now threatened, and by partnering with Senator Murphy, together we continue to deliver for our parks and the environment. Westchester County will now be able to undertake restoration of the largest meadow in the lower Hudson flyway."

Dr. Greg Schmidt, mayor of the village of Croton-on-Hudson, said "The Village of Croton and its residents have long valued and protected the ecological resources within our community. The restoration of the grasslands at Croton Point Park will further this priority by providing enhanced habitats for nesting birds in the Lower Hudson Valley flyway corridor, while also protecting the area from invasive plant species like phragmites, which continue to threaten the delicate balance of our local environment. I thank Senator Murphy and the Westchester County Soil & Water Conservation District for this important investment."

The project was only recently conceived by Larry Weaner, a nationally renowned landscape architect, in a report on potential grassland design and management specifications for the area that was funded by Friends of Westchester County Parks. Senator Murphy was successfully able to fund roughly eighty percent of the project costs in the state budget passed last week, and the Westchester County Soil & Water Conservation District is expected to provide the rest of the funding.

"Grassland habitat is disappearing throughout the northeast, making the grassland on the former landfill at Croton Point Park a critical breeding site and migratory stopover point for grassland nesting birds, many of which have special conservation status," Weaner said. "Our challenge was to develop practical strategies for addressing invasive exotic plant growth threatening the grassland's integrity while causing as few habitat disturbances as possible during that process. Implementation of these strategies will serve as an important precedent for other sites facing comparable challenges. The Croton grassland, as a former landfill, is also a symbolic landscape, a 100-acre manifestation of humanity's potential to restore habitat and create something of lasting value and beauty. Thanks to Senator Murphy for making this happen."

Joseph Stout, executive director of Friends of Westchester County Parks said, "Friends are thrilled that our contribution has helped spur interest and funding for this incredible project. This improvement to the ecology of Croton Point and northern Westchester will last forever. Thank You to Senator Murphy for his leadership and to the Soil and Water Board for making it a priority."

Jan Blaire, chair of the Board of Directors of the Westchester County Soil & Water Conservation District, said "Thanks to Senator Terrence Murphy, five hundred thousand dollars has been awarded for the Grasslands Design and Management of Croton Point Park.

The area was once a tidal wetland then a landfill from the 1920s through 1996 when it was capped. This is great news! Restoration of the area, as grassland, will provide wildlife habitat for nesting birds and wildlife. The Park will be a model for other communities and provide educational opportunities for students and birders. This will be a true asset for Westchester County Parks."

Anne Swaim, executive director of the Saw Mill River Audubon, said, "Restoration of the Croton Point grasslands will support birds like American kestrels, eastern meadowlarks and grasshopper sparrows. Given the past history of Croton Point Park, this project is a welcome affirmation of the high value of Croton Point for migrating and nesting birds. Saw Mill River Audubon offers our thanks to Senator Murphy for supporting this important project."

Kevin Carter, executive director of Teatown Lake Reservation, said "Teatown is incredibly pleased to hear the news that the funding has been secured for the grassland design and management program at Croton Point Park put forth by Larry Weaner. Many thanks to the Westchester County Soil & Water Conservation District and Senator Murphy for helping make this a reality. Croton Point Park is a real treasure in the county and will be deeply enriched by the project."

The funds will be used for grassland design and management specifications to restore the 100-acre constructed grassland within the 508-acre Croton Point Park, which houses the methane wells, vacuums and fans on the capped Croton landfill. In addition to enhancing the overall aesthetics of the park, the project will eradicate invasive species and improve the ecological health of the park and the Hudson River Estuary bald eagle habitat, the largest in the lower Hudson flyway.

Andy Mason, conservation chair of the New York State Ornithological Association said, "This

restoration is a rare, but important act for bird habitat-actually creating valuable grassland rather than destroying it. The decline of the species that depend on these areas for nesting and feeding is well-documented and ongoing. To have a contiguous parcel maintained in this way has value beyond simply setting aside 100 acres as protected land. It provides crucial habitat for a set of at-risk birds that are already considered threatened, and headed toward endangered status. This forward-looking action is an example of the protection and management that is necessary to reverse these trends. We commend all involved in this worthy achievement."

The grassland was established in the mid-to-late 1990s on a capped landfill that operated from the late 1920s through 1986. The grassland is now managed by the Westchester County Department of Environmental Facilities, which also monitors and manages methane emissions for the capped landfill.