



15 July 2011

Stephanie Wojtowicz
NYS Department of State
Division of Coastal Resources
99 Washington Avenue, Suite 1010
Albany, NY 12231

Re: Letter of Support for the designation of South Bay as a “Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat”

Dear Ms. Wojtowicz,

We are writing in support of Hudson’s South Bay designation as a “Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat”. The Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program has been conducting research and outreach designed to help Columbia County residents connect with their cultural and ecological landscape since 2003. Our two professional ecologists and one cultural anthropologist have been exploring native species and human ecology, and sharing those findings with the general public through various media. By building greater knowledge and empathy, we hope to encourage more considerate stewardship of the land.

In keeping with this mission, we strongly support South Bay’s designation as a “Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat”, because:

- (1) South Bay contains freshwater tidal wetlands, which are globally rare habitats.** In New York these habitats occur only along the Hudson between Newburgh and Troy. Unfortunately, freshwater tidal wetlands are left along this stretch of river, because large areas of former freshwater tidal marsh have been filled in with dredge spoils.
- (2) The entire wetland complex of South Bay provides invaluable ecological services.** These include sediment stabilization, water filtration, floodwater storage, and temporary habitat for spawning fish and roosting birds.
- (3) Several rare or uncommon plant and animal species have been shown to occur in South Bay.** These include state-listed rare plants, such as Long’s bittercress (*Cardamine longii*), strap-leaf arrowhead (*Sagittaria subulata*), kidneyleaf mud-plantain (*Heteranthera reniformis*), goldenclub (*Orontium aquaticum*), and heart-leaf plantain (*Platanus cordata*). It is also significant that river otters (*Lontra canadensis*) utilize an area so close to the city of Hudson and that muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*), who are declining in many other wetland areas, thrive here. The wetland complex of South Bay provides breeding habitat for regionally rare birds, such as the marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*), Carolina wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) and Virginia rail (*Rallus limicola*) breed, as well as roosting areas for large flocks of birds, some of which, such as red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), are declining at a national level. More extensive inventories are expected to document additional rare and uncommon species in the area.

The Farmscape Ecology Program is part of Hawthorne Valley Association, a 501(c)3, tax-exempt organization.

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(4) South Bay has potential for ecological restoration, which might reclaim habitat for native plants and animals, increase hydrological connectivity to the Hudson River, and improve its value for fish spawning. However, any proposal for restoration should be based on in-depth studies of the existing ecological communities, their hydrological characteristics and functions, as well as their inhabitants. It should carefully weigh the possible beneficial and negative ecological consequences of any restoration attempt.

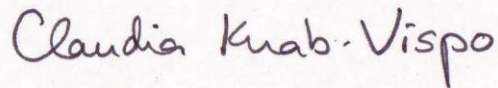
(5) South Bay has the potential to become an important recreational and scenic resource for the residents of Hudson and the County, as well as for visitors to the area. In some ways, Hudson is a city looking for an identity; a valued and highlighted wetland area just on its periphery could make a positive contribution to its future self-definition, if it can become an area of local pride and appreciation. The designation as a “Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat”, accompanied by a detailed analysis of ecological status and human use, could be an important step in creating the groundwork for such a role.

In sum, we urge the DEC to continue the designation process in the hope that this will not only help to maintain and eventually improve the ecological value of South Bay, but also be a first step towards making it a valuable and cherished asset for the local community.

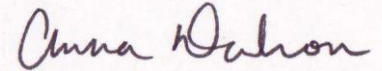
Sincerely,



Conrad Vispo (PhD)



Claudia Knab-Vispo (PhD)



Anna Duhon (MS)

Coordinators, Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program



Martin Ping
Executive Director
Hawthorne Valley Association