

# Kiptopeke State Park CZM/Taylor Tract Habitat Restoration Final Report FY 2008 Task 13

Submitted by:  
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**Virginia Coastal Zone**  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



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## **Introduction**

This project resulted in restoration of a 26 acre addition (CZM/Taylor Tract) to Kiptopeke State Park in Northampton County on Virginia's Eastern Shore. The CZM/Taylor Tract included a four-acre pond, two acres of sloped bank surrounding the pond, and 18 acres of agriculture fields. Six tasks under this project focused on: restoring migratory songbird habitat; improving the pond habitat for birds by removal of *Phragmites* along the pond's perimeter; installing a Plant ES Natives campaign demonstration garden promoting the use of native species; installing interpretive signs highlighting the significance of the Southern Tip of the lower Delmarva Peninsula as a migratory songbird stop-over habitat; and installing two wildlife viewing blinds for use by the public to encourage wildlife watching and ecotourism.

## **Staffing**

Kiptopeke State Park's Manager, Sam Sweeney, served as the Project Manager for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Multiple agencies provided expertise and assistance during the various projects that were completed including Joe Scalf (The Nature Conservancy), Jack Humphries (Master Gardener with Eastern Shore Master Gardeners), Erik Molleen (District 1 Resource Coordinator-Virginia State Parks), Laura McKay (Virginia CZM Program Manager), Virginia Witmer (CZM Outreach Coordinator), Staci Martin (District 1 Volunteer Services Specialist-Virginia State Parks), and members of Kiptopeke State Park's staff and volunteer programs.

## **Habitat Restoration and Wildlife Initiatives**

In December 2008, the Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Conservation and Recreation acquired the CZM/Taylor Tract through a cooperative effort lead by the Southern Tip Partnership, with funding from the Virginia CZM Program (under FY07 Task 11 and FY08 Task 10), and a donation from singer-song writer James Taylor and his wife, Kim Taylor. The CZM/Taylor tract consisted of 26 acres adjacent to Kiptopeke Park on the lower Delmarva Peninsula. This area has been well documented as a hemispherically important migratory bird stopover area and this parcel was identified by the Southern Tip Partnership as a priority for conservation and habitat restoration. After reviewing the condition of the property and creating a restoration plan, members of the Southern Tip Partnership, recommended a series of six projects, the results of which are highlighted in this report.

**Project 1: Songbird Habitat Restoration.** Reforesting 13 acres into songbird and wildlife habitat was the primary focus of the group. This site was prepared for planting by park staff and Wagner Brothers Landscaping, Inc. in early April 2010 by planting a cover crop of warm and cool season grasses. These grasses protected the bare soils from erosion and the newly planted trees while providing habitat for wildlife. Conservation Services Inc. was then hired, completing restoration plantings in late April 2010. A mixture of native canopy trees (910), mid-story trees (455) and shrubs (455) were scattered throughout the 13 acres to create the best wildlife habitat. Protective tubes and matting were placed around each plant and tree to ensure growth while minimizing damage from animals and rodents. This area will be mowed each year for 3 years, giving these trees and shrubs opportunity to establish themselves without having to compete with other vegetation.



*Views of the 1,800 trees and shrubs planted  
Planted along the Route 13 border of the  
CZM/Taylor tract.*



**Project 2: Eastern Shore Native Plant Demonstration Garden.** Sixteen Eastern Shore Master Gardeners worked over 550 hours designing and installing a Plant ES Natives© demonstration garden on the property. The Plant ES Natives© campaign, initiated and coordinated by the Virginia CZM Program, is a community-based social marketing campaign (for more information on the campaign visit: <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/go-native.html> ) to create a social norm for use of plants native to Accomack and Northampton counties to increase native plant vegetative cover . Over 900 native plants, shrubs, vines and small trees were planted along the garden’s walkway. A pergola and bench were installed that provide visitors with a view of the garden and the pond. Fencing and border edging were added, assisting with vine growth and protecting the garden from grass infestations. Work started in May 2010 and was completed in July 2010.



*Eastern Shore Native Plant Garden installed by the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners, who also constructed the pergola and bench (shown above left).*

**Project 3: Native Grasses Walking Trail and Pond Buffer.** The agricultural fields and surrounding pond slopes were planted with warm and cool season grasses, protecting the bare soils and pond areas from erosion while providing wildlife habitat. Wagner Brothers Landscaping, Inc. was hired to complete planting of native grasses in these 18 acres of former agricultural fields. The site was divided into 3 distinctive areas, the reforested tract (13 acres), the pond slopes (2 acres) and a 3-acre grassland parcel. Each area was planted with warm and cool season grasses and will be maintained in various stages of successional growth over time. The three acre plot will remain as open grassland and mowed each year to support grassland bird species; the area around the pond will remain in grasses, but will not be mowed; the 13 acre reforestation area will be mowed for 3 years to ensure the newly planted trees and shrubs have adequate time to establish themselves. Seeding was completed in late April 2010 and mowing was completed in September 2010.



*The three acre grassland in late September 2010.*

**Project 4: Phragmites Removal.** Two state park employees treated the property for *Phragmites*, a non-native invasive reed that has choked out the native vegetation around the 4 acre pond. This is the first stage of re-establishing native vegetation around the perimeter of the pond. This project was completed in late September 2010.



*Treated Phragmites along the perimeter of the pond.*

**Project 5: Interpretive Signage.** Interpretative signs were designed and erected along the Taylor Pond Trail. These signs educate the park guests on the reforestation process, the importance of fresh water to migratory birds as they fly south in the fall to the tropics, the Southern Tip Partnership's and NOAA's assistance in purchasing the property, the importance of controlling Phragmites and the Plant ES Natives campaign. This project was completed in December 2010.



Above – Migratory Songbird sign along the Taylor Pond Trail. Below (l to r) – Southern Tip Partnership sign at the entrance to the parcel and trail, forest succession sign overlooking reforestation area, and freshwater oasis sign next to wildlife viewing blind over looking pond.



**Project 6: Wildlife Viewing Blinds.** Two wildlife viewing blinds were built and installed around the pond. Both are wheel chair accessible, and allow users of various heights to comfortably view and photograph birds and other wildlife without disturbing them. Work was completed by park staff, members of Virginia State Park's Youth Conservation Corps, Virginia State Park's camp host program and a volunteer church group.



*Wildlife viewing blind overlooking pond.*