



East Lyme's Overlook Park Progress Report #48

Robert S. De Santo, Ph.D., East Lyme Public Trust Foundation

On April 9, 2016, the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation, Inc. started its beach stabilization demonstration project along the Niantic Bay Boardwalk. Planning for this important project began in November 2015, when the Foundation appointed a committee to study and monitor this new eleven acre beach that was created as a direct consequence of building the 230 foot long stone groin (i.e. a small jetty extending from a shore to protect a beach against erosion and to trap shifting sands) at the eastern terminus of the beach where it meets the Niantic River channel. With the groin built, Mother Nature washes sand eastward around McCook Point Park to ultimately collect on the beach where it is caught by the groin. That process was jumpstarted by 76,000 cubic yards of 15-20,000 year old outwash plain deposits from a quarry in Canterbury, Connecticut trucked to Niantic and spread on the beach to create the new beach relatively instantaneously. No waiting for Mother Nature.

In addition to a seasonal task of surveying and comparing the changing topography of the beach, the committee will experiment with American beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata* Fern.) among other species. American beachgrass is a native species to Connecticut and is being planted by the Foundation along the upper beach to help stabilize moving sand. It is the best species for the initial stabilizations of primary frontal dunes (PFDs). These are defined by the National Flood Insurance Program as a continuous or nearly continuous mound or ridge of sand with relatively steep seaward and landward slopes immediately landward of and adjacent to a beach. In particular, the plantings will help trap and hold sand and protect the beach against the unavoidable erosion that storms and ocean currents produce over time.

The photograph seen here was taken April 9, 2016, at 12:10 pm shortly after planting was completed. This view overlooks one of the four test plots, each 21 x 5 ft., that hold approximately 50 pairs of American beachgrass seedlings that were grown at a specialized conservation stock nursery on Cape Cod. The 400 seedlings, each about eight inches high, were planted by a team of eight students from East Lyme High School, and six college students from the Sea Grant Program at the University of Connecticut, Avery Point.

Drs. Juliana Barret and W. Frank Bohlen, both of the University of Connecticut's prestigious Sea Grant Program, have graciously served as science advisors to the project. Mr. Jim Gallagher is a Member of the Foundation's Board of Directors and serves as the Project Director and its Manager.

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