

EEB 4261 ORNITHOLOGY LABORATORY
SPRING 2010
CLASS SURVEY PROJECT: Hillside Environmental Educational Park

History of the Survey Site:

For many years the University ran a landfill (dump) on the northwest end of campus. At the time of its inception, it was typical to dispose of a variety of garbage in this way, and knowing less than we know now, to dump chemicals we now know to be contaminants. The State Department of Environmental Protection approved a plan in 1998 to close the landfill and former chemical pits and remove contaminated sediments from wetlands located along the landfill perimeter. The landfill site itself is being turned into a parking lot. The landfill was capped, compacted, and various devices installed to contain materials, and to collect and treat any contaminated fluids leaching from the landfill.

In addition to the Landfill Remediation taking place, the project also requires a wetlands mitigation project. Cleanup of areas where chemicals had been dumped involved removing contaminated sediments from wetland areas to the north and south of the landfill. To compensate for the permanent alteration of some of the wetland areas, additional wetlands were constructed. Other areas could be restored to their original topography, and replanted. Some of these wetland areas drain into a larger wetland to the north, surrounded by woods, which has been set aside as open space by the University, as further compensation for wetland loss. This area has been designated at the *Hillside Environmental Education Park (HEEP)*. An aerial view of the HEEP is attached. (More information is at: www.ecohusky.uconn.edu/LandfillRemediationProject.htm).

Why survey here?

What birds use the HEEP? Do birds use the landscape the same ways in each of the different areas on the site? What long-term changes in bird life can be observed? Twenty years from now, how can we tell if the restoration and construction of wetland actually created habitat for the birds? And finally, what can be learned from this construction project that can be applied when designing other projects? Data to start answering some of these questions need to be collected consistently, in every season, each year, for many years. Fortunately, each successive year's ornithology class, while learning field research skills, can collect observations, which, when compiled over a long-term, will create a dataset that can make a real ecological contribution. After the semester ends, opportunities will exist for independent and honors projects for interested students.

The survey plan and your part in it:

This year's class is the third to participate in this project and our primary focus is to build a reliable, comprehensive inventory of all the species of birds using the site in the late winter-to-early spring. To that end, we will teach you survey methods, ensure that you are a reliable observer, and then empower you to make independent observations at the site, after you have "qualified" by demonstrating that you are a competent birder and

reliable data collector. You will enter your observations into a databasing tool called eBird. We will teach you to use eBird; you can also investigate it yourself at: <http://ebird.org>. Learning to use eBird will benefit you after the class ends, in that it provides a web-accessible, free database for keeping your personal bird lists and records into the future.

Grading

If you have read your syllabus, you know that 35 points of your final grade will depend on you completing independent observations. **You will earn 7 points, up to the maximum of 35, for every observation you enter in the database, thus you will need to provide 5 observations in order to receive full credit.** (Additional observations above 5 will be valued as a contribution to the long-term data set, and may improve our general opinion of you --- relevant if you hope to obtain letters of recommendation at a later date --- but will not garner additional points.)

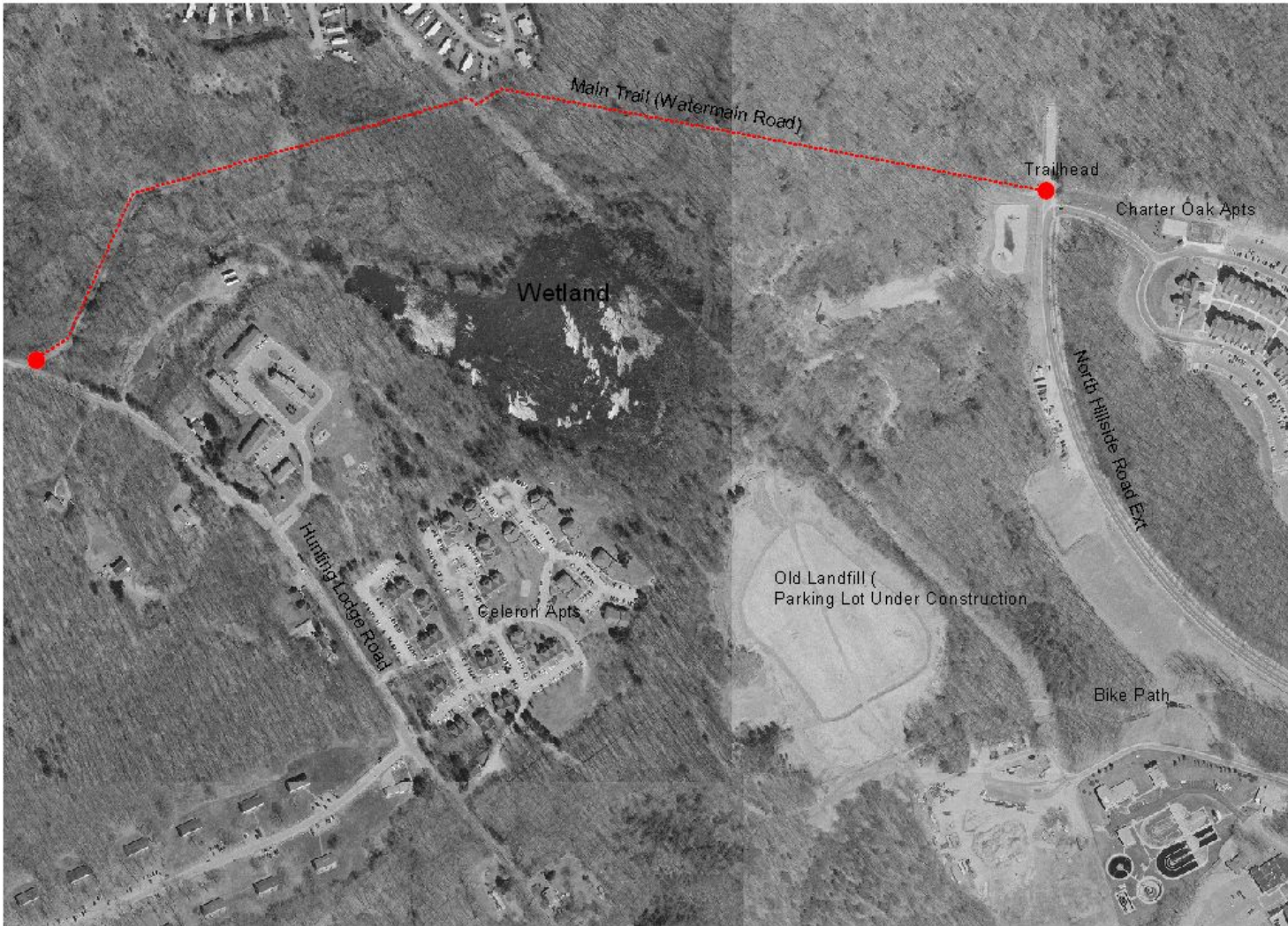
We will be monitoring your work on the site (through eBird) as the semester progresses, however you will be required to provide us at the end of the semester with a report, easily produced in and printed out of eBird, of all your entries for the semester.

Mechanics of getting observations done:

The HEEP can be easily accessed from one of two places: the northern end of North Hillside Rd., and from a trailhead on Hunting Lodge Rd., north of Celeron Apts between Zygmunt Drive and Hunting Heights Dr. We will visit the HEEP as a class before independent observations begin and will provide trail maps and markers; if you wish to visit it on your own, you can walk in off North Hillside Road on a trail immediately opposite the Charter Oak Apartments driveway. There is ample parking on the road; you can also take the campus shuttle bus to get there. The trail runs west through the parcel to Hunting Lodge Road, and there is limited parking on Hunting Lodge Rd.

Safety issues:

Please use common sense: dress appropriately, and take the time of day and weather into consideration. Carry a cell phone. We do not require, are not seeking, and discourage nighttime visits. For the purposes of this exercise, **the term “independent observation” means independent of us; we encourage you to do your site visits in groups** to the extent that is practical for you. Traveling with someone else provides a margin of safety, as well as giving you a peer to work through bird identifications with. If you feel uncomfortable visiting the HEEP on your own, but also feel uncomfortable asking a classmate to join you, talk to us, and we will work to facilitate meet-ups.



Hillside Environmental Education Project Site