

EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY



Black-crowned night heron, Lincroft, Saturday, June 7.

SCOTT LONGFIELD

IT'S YOUR TURN

Commentary

A Banner Year for the Great Swamp

By Michele S. Byers

Less than 30 miles from New York City, surrounded by suburbia, lie 12 square miles of wetlands and wildlife known as the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge's forests, grasslands and marshes are home to an amazing diversity of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl and endangered bog turtles and Indiana bats. Visitors to its dense wilderness feel truly removed from civilization, while being within a few miles of the most modern shopping malls and office parks!

The refuge, located in Morris County, is celebrating a big anniversary year – and bidding farewell to longtime manager Bill Koch, who just retired after 34 years in the Great Swamp.

"We're calling this our 50-50-15 celebration," said Steve Henry, acting refuge manager. "It's the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the refuge, the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act and the 15th anniversary of our Friends group. We've got a lot in the hopper."

On May 31, Great Swamp staff and friends celebrated Koch, whose career with the national wildlife refuge system spanned 43 years.

After earning a degree in wildlife management in 1971, Bill began work at the Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, researching bird life, vegetation and public use. When that seasonal position ended, he volunteered at the Great Swamp and was subsequently hired to conduct deer research.

As his career took off, Bill moved to other national wildlife refuges in Massachusetts, New York and Maryland. When he returned to the Great Swamp in 1984, he was expecting a five-year assignment. But five quickly turned into 30 as Bill

immersed himself in management programs, land acquisition and habitat restoration at the Great Swamp.

Under his watch, the Great Swamp became a national model and was chosen for a U.S. Department of Interior Achievement Award. Bill was also instrumental in building the refuge's new visitor center.

Although Bill is officially retired, he still comes in part-time as a refuge volunteer. "I just couldn't go cold turkey," he joked. "There's so much good stuff here, it's not just a job."

Bill's retirement celebration coincided with one of the refuge's big milestones: The 50th anniversary of the dedication, marking the triumphant end of a fierce, four-and-a-half-year grassroots battle to save the Great Swamp from being paved over for a 10,000-acre international airport.

The "jetport" was the idea of the powerful Port Authority, which kept its plans under wraps. But information was leaked in late 1959 and opposition quickly mobilized. The swamp's defenders concluded that the best strategy would be to secretly buy up as much as much land as possible and donate it as a national wildlife refuge.

Against all odds, the plan worked! On May 29, 1964, the first 2,600 acres of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge were officially dedicated at a large ceremony attended by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, Gov. Richard Hughes, Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen and other dignitaries.

Later this year, the Great Swamp will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, which was signed in September 1964 by President Lyndon Johnson. The eastern part of Great Swamp was the nation's first protected wilderness!

As the Great Swamp celebrates historic milestones, it's also looking toward the future. Recent legislation requires all national wildlife refuges to have a 15-year comprehensive conservation plan,

and the Great Swamp's is now out for public comment.

Have a say in the Great Swamp's future! Read the conservation plan alternatives and submit your comments by June 27. A summary can be found at www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/GRSDraftCCPNewsletter.pdf. The website includes information on how to view the full plan.

Celebrate the Great Swamp's "50-50-15" year with a visit to the refuge, a true New Jersey treasure!

And to learn more about preserving New Jersey's land and natural resources, visit the New Jersey Conservation Foundation website at www.njconservation.org or contact me at info@njconservation.org.

Michele S. Byers is the executive director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

Hike in Tobacco Age Requirement Will Hurt Small Businesses

By Sal Risalvato

I've always believed (state Sen.) Dick Codey to be a respected statesman and a gifted legislator. I still believe that.

The senator's ultimate aim for Senate Bill 602, which would raise the minimum age for purchase and sale of tobacco products and electronic smoking devices from 19 to 21, is good: Reducing the number of young people who smoke. Sen. Codey's goal is one that all parents, teachers, and common-sense individuals should embrace.

Despite my enthusiasm for the bill's ultimate objective, however, I find that I simply cannot embrace yet another radical proposal infringing upon the rights and freedoms of adults in New Jersey and denying adults the ability to purchase legal products, while placing additional burdens on small businesses.

The current laws have already turned service station owners and convenience store clerks into police officers, checking the ID of anyone they suspect to be under 19. In an age where young people can easily obtain fake driver's licenses and other false identification, my members have already morphed from store clerks and gas attendants into untrained detectives and police officers, trying to stop illegal purchases.

Do we really want to further burden them by extending this gambit to people who can currently purchase tobacco products legally?

I cannot remain silent because this legislation would make it incumbent upon the owners and employees of New Jersey's convenience stores to vigilantly police their customers to ensure that the law is being upheld. Our members have consistently partnered with legislators and local law enforcement to comply with rules and regulations aimed at taking dangerous mind-altering bath salts and synthetic marijuana off the streets, but this proposal burdens the small business owners who make a living selling the coffee, drinks, snacks and newspapers that tend to accompany tobacco purchases.

My members offer legal products and services to the public. But for every necessary law, my organization has had to combat countless others

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that would impose an unnecessary burden on their establishments. Just in the last few years we've had to fight legislation that would make them enforce vehicle idling laws outside their stores, turn their shops into plastic and glass bottle recycling centers and impose a fee on their patrons for the use of plastic bags. And now, this measure would go a step further to impose penalties on the small businesses that sell legal products to legal adults over 19 years of age.

Sen. Codey's bill proposes only penalties for the seller of the tobacco product, not the purchaser. It takes two to tango. Why doesn't Sen. Codey propose penalties for those who violate the law and purchase cigarettes?

Answer: Because the outcry from citizens of legal age to purchase legal products would be deafening. If an individual attempts to manipulate a convenience store employee to unlawfully dispense a tobacco product, that individual should be held accountable for their actions.

Looking at this issue from a broader standpoint, however, I find it distressing that a respected New Jersey legislator, who has always exerted leadership, is now following-the-leader and is embracing another nanny-state measure from across the Hudson. New Jerseyans have no desire to live in the "Nanny State" that New York is becoming – where people are told what to eat and drink and how to eat it and drink it. That kind of social engineering may pass as good government in New York, but not in New Jersey!

Besides which, can the legislature truly embrace this idea with a straight face? If our young men and women are old enough to vote, get married, serve their nation in the armed forces and be legally adult members of society at 18, then there is no reason to delay their decision to purchase or not purchase tobacco products until 21 years of age. The 26th Amendment demands nothing less, and neither should the citizens of New Jersey.

Many of us deplore the use of tobacco products. I am one of them. Yet it is the right of every adult consumer to decide which products to indulge in, and from which to abstain.

Only through education and awareness can the use of tobacco be combated. Failing that, it won't matter if the legal age to purchase tobacco products is 21, 25 or 30 – grown men and women have a right to make choices without Trenton's interference.

Does anyone really believe that raising the legal age which allows a person to buy cigarettes will stop them from smoking?

Senator Codey's intent is admirable; I stand with him to vocally assert that young people should learn about the very real dangers smoking imposes on one's health. Yet I also recognize the people he's trying to protect are lawful adults, who have a right to make any number of decisions for themselves, including the foolish choice to smoke.

In the process, it must be acknowledged that my members are not police officers, and should not be burdened with guarding our youth from making foolish choices.

Sal Risalvato is the executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience, Automotive Association (NJGCA).



COURTESY DORN'S CLASSIC IMAGES

Two River Moment

The Gooseneck Point Bridge, spanning the Shrewsbury River, connects Little Silver and Oceanport. This aerial photo of the bridge is from 1962.