

## Called to Action: Students Meet Need for Environmental Restoration

**N**atural habitats are disappearing quickly in New York's marine district's coastal zone as natural areas are developed for other uses. Many agencies and programs are working together to preserve existing natural areas, while at the same time restoring suitable altered ecosystems. Citizen involvement in habitat restoration is critical, even at the home landscape level. Encouraging people to leave some of their home landscapes natural and to install native plants in their landscapes promotes biodiversity and helps preserve and create important habitats.

In 2007, New York Sea Grant (NYSG) recruited 60 students at Westhampton Beach Middle School to become involved in a small scale habitat restoration project, and used funds from the Allan Overton Endowment to NYSG to purchase the plants and horticultural materials needed for the project.

Working closely with landscape artist Bill Meyer, and school representatives, the students learned about native plants and created a mini-native plant landscape at Art Sites art gallery in Riverhead. Some of the species used in the garden are beach grass, Eastern red cedar, inkberry, little blue stem grass, mountain laurel, winterberry, bearberry, and prickly pear cactus. The effort was part of a larger show at the gallery by landscape artists involved in habitat restoration.



*New York Sea Grant specialist Robert Kent (left) and landscape artist Bill Meyer admire a native "plantscape" created by students at the Art Sites Gallery in Riverhead, NY.  
Photo: Margery Daughtrey, Cornell University.*

The students also toured the native plant nursery at Peconic Herb Farm in Calverton, NY, and were given native plants to use in their home landscapes. One student described the project experience this way:

*"Learning about the native plants really helped me to create my own gardens with my family at my own house."*

Another student wrote:

*"It was very interesting to learn about plants native to Long Island and how they help repair some of the damage done by development."*

The show at Art Sites received wide attention, including an article in *The New York Times*.

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*New York Sea Grant is a cooperative program of the State University of New York and Cornell University.  
Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.*

*This project summary was written by Robert Kent, Sr. Extension Associate,  
631-727-3910, rjk13@cornell.edu, www.nyseagrant.org.*