

ADDITIONAL BENSON FAQs

Q. Is the purpose of the Benson Reserve project to create a habitat that will replenish the depleted number of Monarch Butterflies?

A. The purpose of the project is not to just create a habitat for Monarch butterflies. There are other valid reasons for doing the project: 1) dune resiliency, 2) creating a more natural habitat that would attract other fauna; coastal birds and the insects they feast on that are not as prevalent due to the lack of native vegetation and 3) forming improved open views of the ocean, which is now completely obscured. David is correct that for the caterpillars of monarchs, the host plant is the Milkweed. However, he's mistaken in stating that its abundant on the East End. On the contrary, it is deficient.

Q. Aren't the most stable of our beaches on the South Shore of Long Island those anchored to the sand by so-called INVASIVE flora?

A. No the most secure beaches are anchored by the NATIVE dune grasses near the beach, which is why the project does not involve the lower sections near the beach. However, the upper portions have invasive species primarily with shallow roots of 9-12 inches that are not as secure as our native grasses that drive roots to 6-15 feet.

Q. Why should state environmental grant funding be given to a venture that appears to yield no discernible water-quality benefits?

A. The NYS grant application is for water quality and for dune restoration. The best water quality along any waterbody is created with a healthy buffer of deep-rooted plants to direct more water through the cleansing process of healthy soils with plant roots. The deeper the roots the more water quality is possible. As for the grant requested, it is part of the Water Quality grant process, but is designed for Marine Habitat Improvement.

Q. At Benson there are paths that traverse the reserve toward the ocean and the thicket that serves is a remarkable stabilizer."

A. The thickets are not stable. Those thickets have roots only 6-9 inches deep and will come out with a tug, where native grasses will not.

Q. Uprooting these invasives, some of which boast horizontal root structures extending up to an astonishing 30 feet, would cause significant damage or compromise native vegetation.

A. The only invasive species with significant horizontal roots is Japanese Knotweed and this invasive is only present in 2 very small areas at Benson comprising less than 0.1% of the property. For other invasive species some minor roots may extend out, but when those are removed, it will likely be only 18 to 30 inches of disturbed soil. The native vegetation will not be harmed around it and will hold the soils. The disturbed area will be raked smooth, seed will be sprinkled over the top, incorporated with a light rake, then covered with a little straw mulch or blanket to protect from rain. The area will be green and stable in about 2 weeks.

Q. It will take three to five years for the new native plants roots to establish themselves and this will render the area resistant to erosion.

A. That is not correct, native plants at the surface do not grow fast but have deep roots. The site will be protected within two to three weeks after the seed has germinated, very quickly. However, the plants may only be a foot tall or shorter for the first year as the plants drive their roots deep into the soil. Within a year, the roots will be 4-12 feet deep in the soil and start growing tall. Native grasses establish quickly and put all of their initial energy into root production and then the above ground leaf and seed production.

Q. Where will the funding for this ongoing effort come from for the maintenance needed to prevent the invasives from returning?

A. The majority of the estimated \$865k budget is for the initial removal and planting. Ongoing maintenance and monitoring to prevent the return of the invasives over 10 years is included in this budget at approximately \$22k/year. If grant funding is not obtained, the project will be funded by the adjacent homeowners and fundraising.

Q. Over the course of three to five years, the result could be a destabilized ecosystem leading to pronounced erosion and potential degradation of beach grass and the dune itself, particularly given the increasing severity of weather events.

A. That is not expected based on the comprehensive analysis of the site and the proposed remediation. The site would be protected in a few weeks, and be even more stable within one year. No degradation will happen and especially for the beach grass or lower dunes. There are proven examples of it working that way in Kings Point, LI after doing the same process. In addition the Benson Reserve dunes stand to benefit indirectly from the approved FIMP project that will bring 450k cubic yards of sand to the downtown beach immediately adjacent to Benson in 2024.

Q. This ecosystem may not truly harbor invasives, as our environment has evolved significantly, and what was considered native 50 years ago may no longer thrive today.

A. This is not correct and is not what a native is. It is instead, a plant and animal that has coevolved over millennia to work together with the balance of nature. An ecosystem truly develops over thousands of years and invasive species do not participate in the ecosystem. They do not provide habitat and food, which are the resources for the most important portion of the food chain of insects. Our local insects have not evolved with these invasive plants. Non-native plants are not host species to our insects, resulting in the insects having declined populations, which then decreases food and habitat for the birds, bats, mammals, and the rest.

Q. Placing excessive reliance on any one expert, even those with honorable intentions, especially if they stand to gain financially from executing the project. Such a scenario could represent a conflict of interest.

A. The technical expert referred to has stated publicly that the budget includes approximately \$6,000 per year for his services, that does not meet the definition of "gain financially". Moreover, Rusty Schmidt is not the only expert. The project has been reviewed by the Long Island Invasive Species Management

Area (LIISMA), the Partnerships of Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM), and the state of NY Natural Heritage Program. It has been also been assessed by the Town's environmental and planning department.

Q. MBPOA rejected a similar project on a portion of OMH because of concerns it would destabilize the dune?

A. MBPOA is not opposed to the Benson Reserve project but has taken a wait and see position on results of this project before deciding whether to implement a similar project on their property to the west of Benson.

Q. Is hiring a landscape contractor with a cherry picker and trimming the vegetation from the road without disturbing the root structures an option?

A. Cutting doesn't remove the invasive plants. It has been done year on year by the overlook and is not replacing problem plants with better plants, nor is it a long-term solution. It will actually be a more costly maintenance to be cutting annually, and for some species like the vines of Japanese honeysuckle and multiflora rose, it will encourage additional plant development.

Q. Is there merit to the timeless principle of do no harm and not look for a problem?

A. Restoration and Restoration Biology/Ecology is a long-tested and approved science with academic graduate degrees. The invasive species ARE causing harm and there has been exponential growth of invasive species in Benson over the past 15 years. It is our duty to protect the planet by providing biodiversity and to limit the damage that has and continues to occur. The State of NY has an entire program for the invasive species management called PRISM, (Partnerships of Regional Invasive Species Management) where the entire state has been broken into 8 regions to help manage invasive species.