

MEMORANDUM

TO: Noel Knille, Commissioner of Public Works

FROM: Steve Olsen, Director of Parks

RE: Wilcox Park Forestry management

DATE: November 12, 2015

In response to a phone message request from Legislator Tyner regarding Forestry Management at Wilcox Park, I have put together a brief description of the program.

In 2012, I became aware that the first condition listed in the Wilcox Park deed requires that “portions of the property shall be managed in accordance with well-established and recognized forest management practices”. In order to satisfy that condition I called the DEC, who had performed an assessment in 1997 at Wilcox Park.

I met with Barbara Lucas-Wilson from DEC in May 2012, to implement updating the 1997 Wilcox Park Forest Stewardship plan.

This updated report was completed in December 2012. The report states that several areas of the park were in need of removing old growth trees in order to improve the long term health of the forest as well as promote wildlife habitat improvement. Removing the older trees was necessary to promote new growth and promote safety conditions for both staff and public users.

In 2013 an RFP was put out requesting a professional Forestry Consultant to oversee this endeavor. Doug Ramey of East-West Forestry was selected to be the consultant. While Mr. Ramey was conducting his preliminary assessment, he was able to coordinate with Ted Kendziora from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and Paul Novak , a DEC biologist. This group then

met at Wilcox Park to study the forestry conditions as well as the current habitat for the New England Cottontail Rabbit, which is a threatened species that lives in this area. After this preliminary meeting Scot Williamson from WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE, INCORPORATED also joined the team in order to work toward helping to create more open spaces in Wilcox Park to make more conducive habitat areas for the cottontail

Their main interest was in developing early successional habitat to provide food, shelter and cover for the cottontails. This habitat consists of land with a thick shrubby understory. This can be developed by cutting in stands of trees and allowing them to regenerate, or by allowing open field areas to revert to woody growth by ceasing mowing. Clearing the red pine stands and possibly some of the adjacent white pine and spruce plantations and allowing them to grow back to hardwood trees could accomplish this. An agreement was made between the US Fish and Wildlife, NYS DEC and the N Y State National Wild Turkey Federation which would result in a grant allowing several areas of dead Red Pine to be removed at no cost to the county, and to allow new open spaces for habitat creation for the Cottontail rabbit. Concurrently, several areas of older mature trees will be harvested in order to make way for new growth, which is essential to forest health in the park. This harvest will also generate some revenue for the county.

The projects are slated to begin on or around December 1, 2015.