



## TODAY'S SUNBEAM

### Community divided over crab sanctuary proposal

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**By Jean Jones**  
**jeanjones@fast.net**

DOWNE TWP. - Opinions are divided over a proposal to establish a horseshoe crab sanctuary along Cumberland County's Delaware Bay shoreline at Fortescue.

The idea was again discussed before local officials at a Downe Township Committee meeting this week.

Michael Oates, who first introduced the idea in March, brought with him Glen Gauvry, founder and director of Ecological Resource and Development Group, an organization which has established the sanctuaries elsewhere.

New Jersey has none, he said, and is different from Delaware, where there are such sanctuaries, because New Jersey has a moratorium on harvesting the crabs, while Delaware still allows it.

New Jersey has protected the crabs, which are diminishing, because their eggs provide the primary food for northward migrating shorebirds, especially red knots, whose population has significantly diminished.

The reduced number of horseshoe crabs was said to be the result of overharvesting by watermen, who use them for bait for conch or eel fishing. Females are much larger and were targeted for harvest. The opposing view is that the reduction in the number of crabs is a cyclical event and not due to harvesting.

Gauvry said the sanctuary projects are to establish a connection between the community and its natural resources and would have no impact at all on property values or property use. The township would set the rules.

"At any point, you could have a community meeting and decide it was not something you want to do and pull up the sign and put it in somebody's garage," he said.

Asked about the urgency of making a decision on the sanctuary, Gauvry said there is a grant which must be applied for immediately to get funds for the colored informational sign, which would identify the area and have additional data on the crabs.

The state every year ropes off a portion of the Fortescue beach adjacent to Raybin's Beach along the bay and makes it off limits to people and dogs for a few weeks during the spring migration. This ban includes people who want to turn over crabs which have been overturned by receding waves and cannot upright themselves.

Fortescue resident Carol Mendell said the problem she has with a sanctuary is enforcement, and that every year one section of the beach already is roped off and posted and people will not stay off. She said when she tells them they are not supposed to be on that beach, they just laugh at her.

Karen Smith said people park their trucks, trample the dunes, drink beer, walk their dogs and leave their trash behind on the beach during the migration.

"I wouldn't want to encourage any more use than we already have," she said.

Mendell was angered that someone turning over crabs in a restricted area at Gandy's Beach was ticketed. "That should be looked into. Who was the officer? This is ugly. This is nasty. Why did they get (the summons)? Go after them!" she said.

Oates said the Gandy's Beach area was owned by The Nature Conservancy and they had determined that no one should go on the beach.

Resident Bernie Sayers said he had previously participated in a crab count and he didn't think a sanctuary was the way to go. He thought the question should go before the combined planning and zoning board. He was afraid that if the sanctuary was established to protect the crabs and red knots that red knots could be used as an excuse to oppose wind turbines that a property owner is investigating for the Newport area.

Gauvry said once you go before a planning and zoning board there would be rules and regulations.

"You'll be locked in," he said.

Barney Hollinger, chairman of the Delaware Bay Section of the state Shell Fisheries Council, said harvesting of horseshoe crabs could be permitted again if certain guidelines for population increases are met.

"I don't want to see a sanctuary. It's going to bring a whole bunch of other problems," he said.

Mayor Renee Blizzard said maybe the word "sanctuary" should not be used, something other township committee members agreed with. Downe Committeewoman Lisa Garrison said her concern had always been for local fishermen and watermen, but she didn't see where anything in a sanctuary by any name would interfere with their work, and it would be a tool to bring people to the area.

"Children could come from other areas to see what we have," she said.

The committee agreed to discuss the wording that would go on a sign before taking any action, even though it probably would be too late to get funding for the sign this year.