



Devonshire Marsh 2012

The Bermuda National Trust is committed to return 1.63 acres of marsh back into green space

In 1990, a 1.63 acre plot of land at the bottom of Barker's Hill on Parson's Road, Devonshire was voluntarily conveyed to the National Trust. The lot was conveyed from a charitable trust and was subject to an existing ongoing lease to Mr. Howard DeSilva for industrial use.

Once the National Trust became the beneficial owner it incorporated a remediation clause for the land so that at the end of the tenant's use of the site, they would restore the property to grade for the purpose of returning the site to green space.

The tenant surrendered the lease in March 2010, and to accommodate reasonable time to reinstate the property, the term of the current agreement expires December 31, 2011. Despite the difficult economic times, the Council of the National Trust has resolved that, effective January 2012, it will take back possession of the property and return it to green space in accordance with the Trust's core mission.

Devonshire Marsh's east and west basins are important wetland habitats that sit on top of Bermuda's largest aquifer (see Overview). The National Trust owns over 20 acres of land throughout the marsh (see aerial below). The two central portions of the marsh with existing industrial use along Parson's Road, link the two basins. The Trust owns one of these portions and believes that it provides an excellent opportunity for part of this valuable area to be returned to a natural and ecologically favourable land-use. This will lessen the fragmentation of the two basins and be a greater resource for the enjoyment, education and understanding of Bermuda's natural heritage.

The National Trust objected to a development application for the neighbouring lot, 79 Middle Road, as it does not believe that the three proposed warehouses would be sensitive to, or compatible with the environmental, visual and amenity value of the site or neighbouring undeveloped nature reserves.

Approval of this application on appeal is very concerning as the Planning Inspectorate, the Development Applications Board and the Department of Planning staff all recommended that it be refused / dismissed.

In addition, the Department of Planning and other Government technical officers consistently stated that the application provided minimal and inconsistent information and as a result was not complete enough to be properly assessed.

Devonshire Marsh is a vitally important wetland habitat on top of Bermuda's largest aquifer. Instead of intensifying industrial development within the marsh, the Bermuda National Trust feels that it would be in everyone's benefit if all efforts be made toward enforcing Bermuda's existing environmental legislation and policies, to stop creeping encroachment and degradation of scarce open space.

This matter highlights, yet again, the need for a comprehensive national plan that incorporates the appropriate placement of industrial and commercial activities on Bermuda's landscape in such a manner that supports the existing national plan to conserve our unique environment and community green spaces.

Devonshire Marsh Overview

Devonshire Marsh East and West Basins (74.48 acres) together with Ocean View Golf Course make up the largest area of Open Space in Bermuda, vitally important aesthetically and ecologically.

Due its size the Devonshire Marsh Basins provide a relatively unfragmented and diverse variety of habitats that enables the wetland areas to support a large variety of species, including species only recorded from these sites that contribute significantly to the biological diversity of the island. The basins accommodate Bermuda's largest peat marsh habitat and likewise, freshwater lens. The area is comprised predominantly of native vegetation and accommodates many rare / scarce species. It is important for passage and wintering birds with over 95 species of birds recorded in or over this area.

Locally, this area is very important for features such as size, naturalness, biological diversity, rarity (of habitat), typicalness and potential for education, public awareness and research, especially in light of its central location and ready access. As the largest open space on island the area provides a feeling of wildness, especially when combined with surrounding land-uses to the north.

Currently, most of the land is not readily accessible to the public and the space is undervalued and under-used leaving significant potential for education and enjoyment which is not currently realised. A vision for this area is to integrate the northern hillside and privately owned portions into the existing nature reserve and making walking trails and in doing so, provide access to the public to Bermuda's largest contiguous open space.

Threats to the area include alien species, industrial encroachment, fly-tipping and pollution and sea level rise.

Taken from: Dr. Mike Pienkowski 2004. Devonshire Marsh East and West Basins. pp 375-383 Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands. UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

