



News

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[HOME](#)
[NEWS](#)
[CLASSIFIEDS](#)
[ENTERTAINMENT](#)
[SHORE GUIDE](#)
[CASINO](#)

September 11, 2004

NATION

- [Top News](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Sports](#)

ARCHIVE

- [Press Stories](#)

REGION

- [Atlantic County](#)
- [Cape May County](#)
- [Cumberland Co.](#)
- [Ocean County](#)
- [New Jersey](#)

SECTIONS

- [Business/Casino](#)
- [Columns/Opinion](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Life](#)
- [N.J. Politics](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Sports](#)

SPECIALS

- [Public Records](#)
- [Special Reports](#)

CONTACT US

Use of herbicide on marsh reeds delayed until next week

By RICHARD DEGENER Staff Writer, (609) 463-6711, [E-Mail](#)

LOWER TOWNSHIP - Bruce Reibold studied the wind gauges set up here on the hawk watch platform at Cape May Point State Park on Friday morning. His mission was to see how strong the wind was.

The day's goal was to use a helicopter to spray 24 gallons of the herbicide Glypro on about 30 acres of marshy ground. Environmentalists oppose the project, but there was a bigger enemy on this day. It was blowing in from the north, northwest.

"Seven mph," Reibold said.

The enemy was weak, but getting stronger. Reibold, a senior environmental specialist with the state Department of Environmental Protection's Pesticide Control Program, would have to keep monitoring the wind to make sure the aerial spraying of herbicides did not lead to the one thing that is not allowed. Reibold calls it "drift."

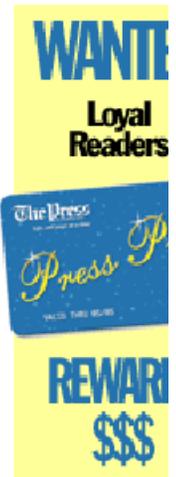
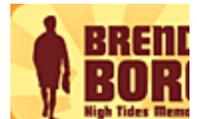
"Drift is a violation. We want to make it a good event with no drift," Reibold explained.

How much drift is too much drift? Reibold said any drifting of the glyphosate-based herbicides off the target area, a wetlands marsh reed known as phragmites, is too much.

Reibold set the gauge up at 6:30 a.m. at the exact level above the ground where the helicopter would release the pesticide. He checked the wind speed every five minutes to figure an average speed. That speed would help determine whether the job would be done Friday.

"We're looking for 10 mph or under. It's now settling in at 8 to 9 mph," Reibold said.

It looked like a go at 9:45 a.m. when the local schools and municipalities were called for notification purposes. The Army Corps had promised to give a one-hour notice before spraying. The helicopter swooped in to scope out the target area. The reconnaissance mission may have wasted some previous time. Winds can be fickle at the shore, and before long the window of opportunity was lost. The wind suddenly picked up and was exceeding 10 mph.



[• Newsroom](#)

So the controversial spraying of the phragmites reeds here at South Cape May Meadows was postponed until next week - Tuesday at the earliest. But if the public was worried about the safety of herbicide spraying - and some people had expressed concerns that the chemicals could blow off site into residential areas - they may not have known about the Pesticide Control Program's job.

"We're the watchdogs. If the wind is too high, we can call it off," Reibold said.

When the call was made to postpone the spray, workers with Northern Ecological Consultants, the Maryland-based company doing the job for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, had to go into the marsh and remove tarps placed over beneficial marsh plants. They want to kill the phragmites while not harming plants such as pennywort and blue boneset.

The postponement left time to talk about the project, including some new developments opponents of the spraying have brought forth. The opponents have hired a lawyer who says there may be significant Indian artifacts in the marsh. Merv Brokke, an Army Corps' spokesman, said the issue is being taken seriously. Army Corps archaeologist Robert Dunn is looking into the claims and talking to legal representatives of two Indian tribes, Brokke said. There will also be training on "cultural resources" for those working on the project.

"There is information that leads us to believe there are some artifacts out there," Brokke said.

Project Manager J. B. Smith released new information on the sand pumping part of the project that will rebuild beaches on the oceanfront side of the meadow. Smith said the dredge is set to begin moving sand on Sept. 20 in Cape May in front of the U.S. Coast Guard base. That is a separate project. When the 300,000 cubic yards are completed in Cape May, the dredge will move west to South Cape May Meadow.

Smith said the dredge would probably get to the meadow area in late October or early November. The goal is 700,000 cubic yards beginning at the old World War II concrete bunker and heading west to Central Avenue in Cape May Point. When the bunker was built in 1942, it was 900 feet from the water's edge, and now it is in the ocean. When the project is complete, most of the bunker will be back on dry land.

Smith said federal funding next year should include enough money to fill in from the bunker east towards Cape May, stopping about 800 feet from the Third Avenue jetty. He said there is a chance this money would be appropriated this year. If it happens, the job would be done while the dredge is here this year. He said there is no reason to go all the way to the Third Avenue jetty, because sand drifting from Cape May beach projects is already expanding that beach area, known locally as The Cove.

Smith said the project calls for adding 150 feet of width to the beach and building a new dune along it.

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