This estuary, as for others, is a location where freshwaters from the land meet and mix with the salty waters from the ocean. The Mullica River – Great Bay estuary is an exceptional body of water, not just by New Jersey, but also by east coast of the US, standards. This drowned river valley, which was formed over the last 1,000 years is unusual and unique for several reasons. The greatest overwhelming influence is that it has relatively few people living in the watershed. Further, this watershed is likely to remain that way into the future because of numerous federal and state holdings that provide protection from development. Much of the upstream portion, both land and water, is part of the Pinelands National Reserve. As you come downstream, and the water becomes saltier, there are state protected properties such as the Wharton and Bass River state forests (Fig. 1). Further downstream, near the mouth of the Mullica River where it joins Great Bay, the salinity is even higher and many of the surrounding marshes are part of the Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. These holdings in the Refuge, and the Great Bay Boulevard Wildlife Management Area, continue down to the saltiest part of the estuary where water from the ocean comes into Little Egg Inlet.

This estuary and its watershed is a moderately large system, about 365,000 acres, and of this, approximately 115,000 acres are protected as part of the above holdings. This combination of protected watershed, low human population density and general lack of extensive development makes this the cleanest estuary in the northeastern U.S. and one of the cleanest estuaries along the east coast of the U.S. This is often hard for many people to believe because it is embedded in the most densely populated state in the U.S. This estuary is also exceptional because of the diversity of its aquatic habitats. A bird flying over the watershed can see that the watershed is dominated by numerous tributaries from Hammonton Creek, Nescochague Creek, Sleeper Branch and Atsion River. Subsequently, many have contributed to our understanding of this estuary, but the focus has often been on the forests and marshes. Less is known about events beneath the surface of the waters of the estuary.

One of the other unique features beneath the surface of this estuary is that it has naturally low pH (acidic) waters in much of the Mullica River. This results from leaching of tannins from the oaks and pines in the upper watershed that, when mixed with the water, creates tannic acid and give the system its acidic, tea-colored water. In addition, these waters are unique because they typically have very high levels of dissolved oxygen that many animals such as fishes and crabs rely on, yet are lacking in many other estuaries. This estuary is also known about events beneath the surface of the estuary. Much of the unique attributes of this estuary were first generally realized in John McPhee’s book on the Pine Barrens. Subsequently, many have contributed to our understanding of this estuary.

The decoy used as a model for the 2015 Decoy Show collector’s Pin was carved by Steve Tarnow. Steve, a welder by trade, has been carving decoys from his West Tuckerton residence since 1997, and has won over 50 ribbons for his decoys. He served as the Secretary on the Board of Trustees during the formative stages of the Tuckerton Seaport, and has since taught several carving classes there. He has also volunteered as a member of the Ocean County Decoy & Gunning Show Committee since 1999, fine-tuning contest rules, developing improvements to the show and serving as a judge for the Art and Photography Contests. Steve’s Ring-necked decoy won ribbons in the 2003 Ocean County Decoy & Gunning Show at 1st place Ring-neck Duck and 3rd place Best Diving Duck. At the 2004 Ocean County Wildfowl Art & Decoy Show, it won ribbons as 1st place Ring-neck Duck, 1st place Diving Duck and 2nd place Best Barnegat Bay Traditional Decoy.

The 2015 commemorative pin features this year’s “Bird of the Year” – the Ring-necked Duck – Aythya collaris.

Look for this cloisonne pin on sale at the Ocean County Parks & Recreation show booth, show gate and the Tuckerton Seaport.

For order information call Wells Mills County Park: 609-971-3085

Add To Your Collection

- the Ring-necked Duck ~ Aythya collaris

- Each year the show highlights one species of waterfowl.

- The 2015 commemorative pin features this year’s “Bird of the Year” – the Ring-necked Duck – Aythya collaris.

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Only $5
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In addition to passing on the tradition students also work at home on projects and nationally recognized through competi- tion, and pattern making. 2015 marks the 10th

The Tuckerton Seaport Youth Carving Club partners young people ages 11-17 with master decoy carvers to learn the traditional art of decoy carving, painting, and pattern making. 2015 marks the 10th year of this popular program. We turn children who have never picked up a carving knife into world champion carvers, while mentoring them in life skills and providing them with positive role models. We are not just preserving a traditional art, but keeping it alive by empowering our community and inspiring our young people.

Here in Tuckerton, the most influential carver was Harry V. Shourds. His great-grandson, Malcolm Robinson, was one of the first demonstrators at Tuckerton Seaport and an early member of our Board of Trustees. In addition to teaching carving for adults, Malcolm began teaching the Woodcarving Merit Badge for the Boy Scouts, and he found that he was able to spark an interest for learning more in the boys who participated. Malcolm thought this would be a great opportunity to finally start something he had been dreaming about for years. Since then, working with the youth has been his passion, and he is joined by Nancee Jo Luciani who jointly runs the club with him. In addition, Dick Zaengle assisted Malcolm for the first seven years of the club and was instrumental in its inception. Malcolm primarily teaches knife safety and carving, while Nancee Jo focuses on painting. Students generally stay with the club for 5-6 years.

The students produce art pieces that are recognized through competition. We believe this program is a model that other organizations can emulate. In addition to working with the master carvers, students also work at home on projects and are encouraged to keep their skills alive by keeping traditional arts alive through our community. Tuckerton Seaport with other artists as part of our scholarship program.

In addition to passing on the tradition- al art of decoy carving to another genera- tion and keeping the art alive and dynamic, the students also learn about the culture of carving, the history of our area, the ability to work on both short and long term goals, public speaking skills, and the need to be reliable and devote yourself to a project and to the other members of the group. We’re especially proud of Andrew’s “First in Cate- gory” award for his Contemporary Antique bow at the Ward World Competition, as he competed against some of the best carvers in the world, and came in first place, in his first adult competition.

Deep relationships have been forged be- tween both students and from students and their mentors. Seventeen year old Scott joined the club at 12. He says, “For me, carving is about connec- tion. I’ve grown up surrounded by decoys and the people who created them, most of whom are relatives are mine…Now when my own knife slowly shapes a block of white cedar, transforming it into something entirely new, I gain a deeper connection- not only with my grandfather, but with my wonderful mentors Malcolm Robinson and Nancee Jo Luciani, and with the other kids in the Youth Carvers Program.”

The mentoring students receive in the club translates to success in the rest of their lives. As Sarah’s mom Desiree states, “[Sar- ah] has gained a special kind of confidence from carving as well. When you know you have these special skills to make a beauti- ful creature out of wood you pretty much know you can face any challenge that comes your way.”

The Tuckerton Seaport’s Board of Trustees and Executive Director, Paul Hart, consider keeping traditional arts alive through our young people to be one of the most important things that we do as a museum. If you are interested in joining, more about par- ticipating in the club, please contact Jaclyn Wood at: jaclynw@tuckertonseaport.org or call 609-296-8868 x122

These unique combinations of diverse, clean habitats are reflected in the diversi- ty of plants and animals that are resident or seasonal occupants of this estuary. The extensive and productive salt marshes, which provide for the overall productiv- ity of the system, are central. These are supplemented by extensive macroalgae for long periods of time (marine mammals such as harbor seals in the winter, bottlenose dolphins in the summer and, an occasional river otter). A diverse array of fishes are found in this estuary. Many of these occur most commonly along certain salinities (white perch in fresh or low salinity water, bluefish, weakfish and summer flounder or fluke from the inlet to the lower river, and tautog which are most typically found in the lower por- tion of the estuary near the inlet). Oth- ers such as striped bass use all portions of the estuary from the inlet to tidal fresh- waters up in the Mullica River. Crabs also use the system in different ways. Rock crabs come into the lower estu- ary in the winter but leave as the waters warm in the spring. Blue crabs are found throughout the estuary, but where they are found differs somewhat by sex, with males more abundant upstream, in the lower salinity waters, and females more abundant downstream near the inlet, es- pecially in the winter.

One of the reasons so much is known about this estuary is that it is home to several institutions whose job it is to under- stand it as much as possible. Several academic institutions (Rutgers University-

Fig. 1. Aerial photo of extensive sand flats at marsh islands near abandoned fish factory

Fig. 2. Aerial photo of Mullica River where it is crossed by the Garden State Parkway

Fig. 3. Aerial photo of extensive sand flats at marsh islands near abandoned fish factory

Fig. 4. Aerial photo of extensive marshes around Great Bay Boulevard at Little Egg Inlet

Fig. 5. Aerial photo of extensive estuaries within the estuary, from the inlet to tidal fresh- waters up in the Mullica River. Crabs also use the system in different ways. Rock crabs come into the lower estu- ary in the winter but leave as the waters warm in the spring. Blue crabs are found throughout the estuary, but where they are found differs somewhat by sex, with males more abundant upstream, in the lower salinity waters, and females more abundant downstream near the inlet, especially in the winter.

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