

As we enter another green-head fly season ... 7/9/2025

This June's early arrival of a 2-day swarm of biting green-head flies led to a lot of discussion, all well-intended although some comments were based on misinformation, and we wanted to share with everyone the facts as we know them.

There will likely be more days of green-head fly activity this Summer, so we want to review the state of our preparedness and recap the work that has been done to date.

Where we were 2 years ago

At that time, we lost some of the people who maintained the traps to health concerns. Calls for additional volunteers were not well-answered by the community. As a result, traps were left outside all year and some were further damaged when the Township helped store the traps in the water tower yard. Between 2018 and 2022, the HTA invested nearly \$10,000 for repairs and baiting of the traps. We also invested close to another \$10,000 in creating an inventory of bait as the supplier was experiencing business problems and our bait costs could have tripled.

The strength of the trap program, despite the continuing efforts of our HTA trustees who had successfully run the program for many years - Bill Hutson and Ted Stiles - was in jeopardy. Some neighbors questioned if deteriorating traps were working and why did they have to see them all year near their homes if they were not functional. Other people questioned whether the traps work at all (they do and we have plenty of proof). An effort to create an adopt-a-trap program faltered, particularly on the south end. Fortunately, 2023 and 2024 were unusually good years with low green-head fly infestation but new solutions were needed.

Solutions begin to emerge

A couple of volunteers in central and north Holgate, John Prochazka and Joe Chieffo, started taking over the program in their neighborhoods. Working together, traps were repaired, placed, baited, and stored. Both were able to get sufficient volunteers among their neighbors.

Knowing we were becoming critically short of working traps and that it would take time to refurbish the traps that could be salvaged, the HTA invested \$6,900 in 36 new traps that were expertly built by another Holgate neighbor, Tom Beaty.

We also reviewed the state of the traps in the southern marsh since residents described them as being in poor condition and asked for them to be removed.

In the Fall of 2024, John organized a bunch of volunteers to take all of the traps out of the marsh. Approximately 50 traps were removed, many of which were falling apart with rotted wood and rusty, damaged screens. 3 had to be dug or sawed out of the

sand to get at them. When John and Jeff Lipman evaluated them for repair, they determined that no more than 5 were working properly and several were beyond any repair. Over the winter of 2024-2025, John and Jeff repaired approximately 50 traps, including many that had come from other areas in Holgate. Traps were repainted and numbered.

John and Joe also successfully established the adopt-a-trap program in central and north Holgate. All traps are stored by homeowners and the Marine Field Station, close to where they go into the marshes. This greatly reduces the work required to move traps around. While a few people have stepped forward, more volunteers are still needed on the south end to make adopt-a-trap work there.

John and I then worked with the neighbors to get them to welcome traps back into the marshes and store some traps over the Winter under their decks.

As John invested more time in the trap program, he also studied the science of green heads and the traps, learning how the green heads were controlled by Massachusetts. He has worked very hard to follow the guidelines used in Massachusetts. And he is tracking the performance of our traps to see which traps and locations work the best.

Based on the above, I asked John to assume the chair position for the green head traps committee throughout Holgate at the end of 2024 while responsibility for other biting insects that currently have no solution (e.g., biting black flies, noseemums) and test trap design would continue under Bill and Ted.

2025 and beyond

Counting the refurbishment work over the Winter and our purchases, we have approximately 100 fully functional traps in place, split nearly evenly in the marshes in south, central and north Holgate, as of early June. We believe this is significantly more working traps in all areas of Holgate than in previous years.

After the first green head appearance last week, we purchased an additional 4 traps from Tom Beaty and put them on the southern dunes near the Refuge. Bill, Dan and Kathy Macone and a couple of volunteers also moved several traps that were deemed to be at least somewhat functional to Cleveland, West, McKinley, and the McKinley dock.

The HTA has also initiated discussions with the Ocean County Commissioners to see if a trap program could be instituted on the mainland (where most of the flies come from). The fly problem is horrific there and John is testing 2 traps there to give us data to report to Ocean County. This may be a long-term project as we have not been able to discover if there is anyone in charge of something like this right now. But Holgate sends a lot of tax money to the County and would appreciate their investment in a program similar to ours.

It is important to note that we continue to be well short of volunteers on the south end to place traps in/out of the marshes and to store traps under their decks over the winter. *We will not put out more traps than we have volunteers to bring in and store in the Fall.*

If you have any questions, please let us know. But be sure to first read the Q&A below which anticipates some of the common questions about the program.

Rand Pearsall

Questions that have arisen

1. What can I do to help?
 - a. The following volunteers are needed
 1. Get traps out in Spring and bring back in Fall (1 hour on a Saturday each time, or 2 hours a year)
 2. Store traps under your deck (if you are close to where the traps are being stationed so we don't need trucks or have to carry them long distances). This protects them during the Winter. Traps are taken out by Memorial Day and are brought back in Sept/Oct. You provide the deck and have to do nothing.
2. Should we be putting out even more traps?
 - a. This question depends on 3 things: Funding (which we have), Volunteers (which we need) and Strategy (Massachusetts recommends placing traps 25 yards apart and uses far fewer traps per defined area than we already do). Regarding volunteers, if we can't store the traps every year, we will not buy more traps which then also can't be stored.
 - b. Importantly, we need to recognize that a bad fly day is made a better by having all of our traps in place. But those who have been here for decades will tell you no trap program (or topical spray) will be fully effective against a strong west wind.
3. Should we be spending more money to build more traps?
 - a. We are closely studying this. Our understanding is that Massachusetts uses fewer traps per mile. But we will gradually expand trap locations as long as we can determine that a) an incremental trap will actively catch flies and b) we have the volunteers to move the traps each season.
4. If we can't get volunteers, can we pay someone to do the work?

- a. No. There is no reason why people in our community can't invest a few hours a year. In fact, what would it say about Holgate if we can't? Further, the dune planting committee tested using a professional landscaper a few years ago when it was having trouble getting volunteers. I believe we spent twice as much money getting half the plants – and most of them died.
5. Should I put a trap on my personal property?
 - a. That's a personal decision. If you are interested, please contact Tom Beaty to purchase a trap.
6. Should there be more traps on beach entrances?
 - a. Our goal is always to first cover the marshes and key flyways where the flies spawn and enter Holgate. We do put traps on many beach entrances as a last defense but these typically do not catch as many flies and we are monitoring if this is the best location.
7. Can we put traps in the Refuge?
 - a. As ideal as this would be (here and on the mainland), it is against Federal law to place man-made objects in a Refuge.
8. How do the traps work?
 - a. Essentially, they mimic a large animal that would be a food source for a biting fly. They are large, dark and warm in the sun so it would be accurate to say the fly thinks this could be a meal. There are screens in the box and the flies enter through the bottom and become trapped. It has always been a bit of a mystery as to how they can figure out to get in but not out. They die in the trap.
9. Do we bait the traps and if so, what do we use?
 - a. Yes, we bait with Octenol which is considered safe for other wildlife but will attract the flies to the box. One bait should last for a season.
10. Can the traps be made to look more attractive?
 - a. We have been so busy getting them built, maintained, placed and stored that frankly we never thought about this. But our neighbors Carol Foster and Catherine Florimont recently asked if the traps could actually be made to look like cows. In this case, plain black boxes might start to look like a herd or a sculpture park. We are going to work on this.
11. What has happened with the smaller, barrel traps?
 - a. They are in place in the marshes. While they have a few practical advantages, they don't seem to attract flies as well as the bigger boxes.

12. If Massachusetts has a government commission in charge of their traps, why doesn't LBT or Ocean County run this program?
- a. Right now, the HTA has determined that we are doing the best possible job for Holgate. We own the traps, treat them well and can be flexible in our approach. We would definitely like Ocean County to address the problem on the mainland and are in discussions with them about how to get a test project started. We also know, and this should be important to taxpayers, that not having the Township spend more time with fly traps in the offseason means they can save a substantial amount of money (hundreds of thousands of dollars) using Public Works staff to repair water pipes, construct small buildings and even re-side Town Hall.
13. If the County sprays for mosquitoes why can't it spray for green-head flies?
- a. Our understanding is that any spray that would be effective on green heads would also destroy many beneficial insects.
14. Where can I get more information?
- a. <https://www.ccmcp.net/greenhead-fly-control/pages/greenhead-biology>
 - b. <https://www.nemassmosquito.org/north-shore-greenhead-fly-program>