

STATEWIDE

Paterson fires DEC chief

BY JENNIFER SMITH
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Gov. David A. Paterson fired the state's top environmental official last night days after his agency sent a memo saying mandated staff cuts would cripple the state's ability to enforce environmental laws.

Pete Grannis said last night he was asked to resign as Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner Wednesday by Paterson aide Lawrence Schwartz and refused. Grannis said the call firing him came shortly before he was to speak at a ceremony in Saratoga Springs honoring his environmental achievements.

A Paterson spokeswoman confirmed Grannis "has been terminated effective immediately" and said the office had no further comment.

The governor's budget office had ordered the DEC to eliminate 209 positions by the end of the year. Earlier this week an internal DEC memo was leaked to the press that said "further staff reductions may result in potential serious risks to human health and safety and environmental quality."

The memo said the agency had been disproportionately hurt by cutbacks in the wake of the state's fiscal crisis. DEC staff accounts for 2.5 percent of the state workforce, it said, and the 209 positions the agency had been ordered to cut comprised "more than 10 percent of

the 2,000 positions that the governor plans to eliminate."

Grannis said his office did not leak the memo but that the attention made the governor's office "very uncomfortable. I think we were fairly forceful in the memo . . . obviously it resonated with the public."

Environmental advocates, who have long said the DEC is seriously understaffed, were outraged by news of Grannis' dismissal.

"Gov. Paterson has been dismantling the agency and tonight he cut off its head," said Robert Moore of the Albany-

based group Environmental Advocates of New York.

Grannis was appointed by Gov. Eliot Spitzer in 2007 and previously served for more than 30 years in the state Assembly representing the Upper East Side of Manhattan and Roosevelt Island.

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Police practice attack responses during drills at the Nassau County Fire Service Academy. newsday.com/bethpage

EVERY TOWN, EVERY MINUTE

PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

NORTHVILLE

Park designated a passive preserve

BY BILL BLEYER
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Undeveloped Jamesport State Park has been renamed Hallock State Park Preserve and will be used only for passive recreation and environmental education, under a master plan approved this week.

But Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson), who has obtained almost \$1 million to help construct an environmental education center at the park, says swimming should be allowed at its Long Island Sound beach.

He said he will try to block next year's budget for the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation unless it yields. "It runs against common sense to have a beach and water and not have swimming," LaValle said yesterday.

But parks regional director Ronald Foley said there's no money for lifeguards and facilities for swimming, which is available at an adjacent Riverhead town beach and at Wildwood and Orient Beach state parks. Parks officials also noted the agency is slated to

lose an additional 220 jobs by the end of the year.

The agency changed the name of the 220-acre park as part of the master plan because it is in Northville, not Jamesport. Hallock is the name of a large pond on the property as well as the family that once farmed the land.

The preserve designation will protect the natural features. Allowed uses will be hiking, bird-watching, fishing from shore, launching canoes and kayaks, scuba diving in the sound and horseback riding.

The plan calls for construction of a main park road and parking lot and, over 10 to 15 years, construction of a shore access road, park office and nature center and developing a trail system. Foley said "one of the first priorities will be to build the access road so people can get in to use the place."

The state bought 525 acres north of Sound Avenue from KeySpan in 2002 for \$16 million and in 2005 declared the northernmost 220 acres Jamesport State Park and Preserve and sold the rest as protected farmland.

IN BRIEF

HUNTINGTON

Parks to expand in Dix Hills and Huntington Station

The Town of Huntington recently acquired land that will expand parks in Huntington Station and Dix Hills.

In Huntington Station, the purchase of a $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre parcel will nearly double the size of Alfred Walker Park on West 11th Street. The community will help decide the use of a half-acre of the purchase, while the rest will be used as a natural buffer along the north and east edges. The property was purchased through the town's Environmental Open Space and Park Improvement Fund for \$260,000.

The second acquisition involves the donation of a 2.8-acre parcel to Otsego Park in Dix Hills. The property, which contains a pitch pine-scrub oak habitat rare in the state, has an existing trail that connects Otsego Park to the New York State Edgewood Oak Brush Plains Preserve.

The owners, Gus Schad and Steven Dubner, donated the land to the town and paid all closing costs. — DEBORAH S. MORRIS

ISLANDWIDE

Fewer on LI mailed back census forms than in 2000

Long Island's mail participation rate for the 2010 Census was 72 percent, up 2 points from the initial rate announced in April, the U.S. Census Bureau said yesterday.

But it still fell short of the 75 percent mailback rate in 2000, according to the bureau.

Nationally, the rate was 74 percent — matching the 2000 census final rate — 2 points higher than the rate announced in April, it said.

The final mailback rate for Nassau was 73 percent, up from the 71 percent the bureau reported in April. Suffolk's rate went from 69 percent in April to 71 percent, after additional mailed-back forms were tallied, according to the bureau.

The final mailback rate for New York State was 69 percent, up from 67 percent in April. That compares with 66 percent in 2000.

"We are very pleased with the public's response to the 2010 census, and these results demonstrate the public stepped up to be counted," Bureau director Robert Groves said. — OLIVIA WINSLOW

Islip sports complex endorsed

BY JENNIFER MALONEY
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Islip's planning board is recommending the town approve zoning changes to accommodate a proposed \$20-million sports complex in Central Islip, as well as new playing fields for the Central Islip Little League, which would be displaced by the project.

The proposed zoning changes will go before the town board at a public hearing Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at Islip Town Hall, town planning commissioner Gene Murphy said.

The town board already has approved leasing 36 acres of town-owned land on Carleton Avenue to developer Andy Borgia for the 205,000-square-foot Ultimate Game Sports Complex, which will include private indoor and outdoor fields for baseball, soccer, lacrosse and football.



Planners recommend the town OK zoning changes for this proposed sports complex in Central Islip.

Under the 50-year lease agreement, which has not yet been signed, Borgia is to build a new home for the Little League on nearby Eastview Drive.

Town officials said they have expedited the review process to help the developer meet a Dec. 31 application deadline for \$19 million in tax-exempt bonds offered through the federal stimu-

lus program and already approved by the town's Industrial Development Agency.

Borgia must still secure financing for the project, and the town must review the developer's site plan and issue construction permits.

Another point to be resolved: where the Central Islip Little League will play during the 2011

season, when both the complex and the league's new home would be under construction.

The town and developer are working with the Central Islip school district on a plan to have Borgia refurbish six of the district's ballfields and make them available to the Little League next year, town and school district officials said.

Cell tower in S. Huntington removed

BY DEBORAH S. MORRIS
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A T-Mobile cell phone tower constructed without town permission on the grounds of the South Huntington Water District has been taken down by the company, town officials said Friday.

Last month, the Huntington Town Board voted unanimously to take legal action against T-Mobile for illegally constructing and operating the cell tower.

Town officials said T-Mobile

received permission from the water district to erect the 150-foot tower on property on 17th Street.

But town code requires a permit from the town Zoning Board of Appeals to erect a cell tower and then a building permit from the town to actually construct it, a town official said.

Following court action, the town attorney's office met with attorneys for T-Mobile last month and reached a court-approved agreement to demolish

the tower and pay a \$2,500 fine for violating a stop-work order and for erecting the tower.

The town issued a demolition permit to T-Mobile on Tuesday and the company demolished the tower Friday.

T-Mobile still has to obtain permits from the state Department of Environmental Conservation before it can demolish the telephone cabinet and the concrete base. The land where the tower was erected is surrounded by protected wetlands.

Calls to the attorney representing T-Mobile, Robert Gaudio of Snyder and Snyder in upstate Tarrytown, and attorney Michael McCarthy of Huntington, who represents the water district, were not returned on Friday evening.

Town Supervisor Frank Petrone said the town was "pleased" T-Mobile had demolished the tower. "We fully expect that in the future T-Mobile will follow all town regulations regarding cell phone towers," he said.

Paterson criticized for firing DEC commissioner

BY JENNIFER SMITH
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Conservation groups and state legislators from both sides of the aisle condemned Gov. David A. Paterson on Friday for firing Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis after disagreements over ordered staff cuts.

Lawmakers and advocates called the governor's Thursday dismissal of Grannis a "wrong-headed move" and a "dark day for New York's environment."

They praised the former commissioner's environmental record and blasted Paterson, saying budget cuts had stretched the Department of Environmental Conservation so thin the agency could barely fulfill its mission. The agency is re-



Former DEC chief Pete Grannis

sponsible for the state's natural resources and wildlife, as well as cleaning up hazardous waste and monitoring pollution from power and sewage plants.

"They don't have enough money in the gas account so that people can go out and do inspec-

tions," said Assemb. Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), chairman of that body's environment committee. "Because of budget cuts, the state and some not-for-profit organizations and municipalities are not able to access federal grant money because DEC no longer has people on staff to do the paperwork."

Paterson spokeswoman Jessica Bassett said the governor was "working on behalf of the whole state" to close budget deficits and said critics were "advocating on a single special interest." "Sacrifice has to be shared," she added.

Grannis was fired the same week a DEC memo pushing back against staff cuts mandated by the end of year was leaked to the media. Grannis said Thursday he did not re-

lease the memo, which said the agency had borne a disproportionate brunt of budget cuts and that additional reductions could endanger human health and the environment.

Bassett called Grannis' termination a personnel matter. No acting commissioner has been named.

Grannis was allowed back into his office Friday to pack up his things, said Wayne Bayer, a board member of the New York State Public Employees Federation, which represents DEC and other state workers.

Bayer said DEC employees were shocked by the firing. "We all agree that he's been trying to do the best environmentally and protect our workforce," he said. "He understands how much our agency has been decimated."

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CORRECTIONS

Rep. Gary Ackerman is 67. His age was incorrect in a story Thursday.

"Frankenstein," the film being shown outdoors at dusk Saturday in Port Jefferson, celebrated its 75th anniversary four years ago. An item in Friday's Explore LI should not have suggested the film was being shown to mark an anniversary. See portjeff.com or call 631-802-2110 for more information.

The Bengals are at the Falcons and the Jaguars are at the Chiefs on Sunday. The home teams were reversed in Friday's Gridiron Guide.

THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1864 Forces led by Union Gen. Samuel R. Curtis repelled Confederate Gen. Sterling Price's army in the Civil War Battle of Westport in Missouri.

DEC harmed by budget cuts

★ **Speakers** at hearing paint a gloomy picture

■ **Environmental** agency has lost 800 employees

BY JENNIFER SMITH

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Budget cuts and staff reductions at the state Department of Environmental Conservation have slowed toxic clean-ups, limited sewage treatment plant inspections and sharply curtailed environmental enforcement, speakers at a hearing in Albany said yesterday.

DEC officials, environmental advocates and labor representa-

tives who spoke before the Assembly's environmental conservation committee painted a relatively gloomy picture of an agency in retrenchment. Most said the cuts had damaged DEC's ability to protect natural resources and public health.

"We're trying to do our best," said acting DEC commissioner Peter Iwanowicz. He said all state agencies had to work together to absorb a \$9-billion budget reduction. Still, he said conditions were unlikely to improve in 2011.

DEC is to eliminate 140 jobs by 2011; that will reduce staff to about 2,995, down 800 workers in the past two years.

"You cut corners. It's inevitable," said Adrienne Esposito, of the Farmingdale advocacy

group Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

Committee chair Assemb. Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst) pressed officials about federal grants that had not been disbursed because DEC lacks staff to process the paperwork. Others voiced concern about plans to pull state workers off federal Superfund sites.

Former DEC commissioner Pete Grannis called the latest staff cuts a "shell game" that would do little to improve state finances. Grannis was fired last month by Gov. David A. Paterson after a DEC memo criticizing the mandated cuts was leaked to the media.

"It cannot simply continue, to reduce agency size and spending to subsidize the inability to

achieve savings in other areas," Grannis said. "The result will be environmental backsliding. . . ."

DEC officials said the agency was working to streamline operations to try and fulfill its mission with fewer workers.

But they cautioned that New Yorkers could not expect the same level of service and protection enjoyed in better times. Residents will see continued backlogs for environmental permit applications, they said, and fewer inspections to ensure businesses and utilities obey state pollution regulations.

"With fewer staff it's going to be hard to do things the way we've always done them," said DEC executive deputy commissioner Stuart Gruskin.

SEC fines ex-czar

BY DAVID B. CARUSO

The Associated Press

Former Obama car czar Steven Rattner has agreed to pay \$6.2 million to settle federal charges over his role in a pay-to-play scandal, but said he won't be "bullied" by New York's attorney general into accepting a harsher penalty in a parallel state case.

The Securities and Exchange Commission announced yesterday that Rattner had accepted the fine and a two-year ban from the securities industry to resolve allegations that he paid illegal kickbacks to help his private equity firm land a lucrative investment from a state pension fund.

Similar settlement talks with state officials collapsed, however, and yesterday New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo filed two lawsuits seeking a much tougher punishment: at least \$26 million and a lifetime ban from the securities business.

Rattner expressed outrage over the severity of the demand in a statement e-mailed to reporters. The penalty sought by Cuomo would be far steeper than those paid by other financial executives involved in the case who were accused of similar conduct.

"While settling with the SEC begins the process of putting this matter behind me, I will not be bullied simply because the attorney general's office prefers political considerations instead of a reasoned assessment of the facts," he said.

Rattner admitted no wrongdoing in his deal with the SEC, and he said he did not violate the unusual state business law, called the Martin Act, that gives New York's attorney general the authority to intervene in regulatory issues usually left to the SEC.

Federal and state investigators have accused Rattner of greasing the palms of state officials and their associates to help his private equity firm, the Quadrangle Group, land about \$150 million in pension fund investments.

Tennis anyone?

With the help of a tennis racket, Abby Boskoff of Kings Point plays fetch with his energetic dog Nelly, a 5-year-old golden retriever-poodle mix, on a brisk afternoon in Kings Point yesterday. Today's forecast calls for sunny skies with highs in the 40s.



PHOTO BY DANIELLE FINKELSTEIN

Brookhaven Town OKs \$260M budget, layoffs

BY PATRICK WHITTLE

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Brookhaven Town approved a \$260-million 2011 budget last night that will hold the line on taxes while laying off six highway department workers.

Supervisor Mark Lesko had originally proposed 68 layoffs, and a host of service and facility cuts, to balance the cash-strapped town's budget. But the town reached agreements with its blue-collar and white-collar unions that saved all but a handful of

jobs.

The town's highway union voted down a proposed agreement with the town.

Town officials approved a plan to lay off six highway workers — four mechanics and two heavy equipment operators — late yesterday.

Lesko said town officials will "do right" by the workers who were laid off.

The statement was met with boos and catcalls at yesterday's tense town board meeting, which attracted about 350 people.

Highways Superintendent

John Rouse also said he "will do everything I can to bring those people back" when the town's financial picture is brighter.

Lesko proposed his original \$260-million spending plan in September and immediately encountered resistance from union officials who opposed the 68 proposed layoffs. He said at the time that the town's out-of-control debt and disappearing revenue necessitated layoffs.

Lesko has also cited an 18 percent increase in the size of the workforce from 2003 to

2010 and a debt service cost that has reached 24 percent of the general fund.

The original \$260-million budget proposal did not include a tax increase. It did include the closure of facilities such as the ecology site and pools in Centereach and Holtsville — all of which drew ire from the public at a series of town meetings.

Those facilities will remain open because of the union's concessions, Lesko said.

Without sacrifices, the town "will be flat broke in 2013," Lesko has said.