



NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS
Member of Assembly 64th District

THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE



DIANE SAVINO
Member of Senate 23rd District

August 30, 2013

Hon. Joseph Martens
Commissioner
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233

Dear Commissioner Martens:

We write to you regarding the transfer of 239 Fingerboard Road in Staten Island (Richmond County, Block 3019, Lot 120), property currently occupied by the Mount Manresa Jesuit Retreat House (“Mount Manresa”). If unaddressed, redevelopment of this site could result in significant long-term repercussions for thousands of Staten Island residents. More importantly, we have received new information that warrants immediate action by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Mount Manresa is a non-profit institution owned by the Society of Jesus that has offered religious instruction and spiritual reflection since 1911. Prior to its use as a retreat house, the land was a private estate of Mr. Louis H. Meyer. In developing his property Mr. Meyer imported trees from Europe, some of which survive on the grounds to this day. Among those trees are a Large Black Oak estimated at 200 years old, a Large Tulip Tree estimated at 200 years old, two Large White Oaks estimated at 200 years old, a Black Tupelo Tree estimated between 200 and 300 years old, and another Black Tupelo Tree estimated between 300 and 400 years old making it one of the oldest trees in the City of New York.

Furthermore, Staten Island lies in the middle of the Atlantic Flyway. Millions of migrant birds use Mount Manresa as an oasis on their journey to and from their breeding grounds. Threatened birds such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and Cerulean Warbler have been observed using the large deciduous trees on the property to rest and refuel. These ancient deciduous trees supply the food necessary for these birds to keep up their high-energy requirements for their long distance journeys. Mount Manresa is also vital to many species of raptor including Red-tailed, Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks, as well as Great-horned, Long-eared, and Snowy Owls, species that use this property as a hunting ground to sustain them during the colder months.

We now request immediate intercession by your agency as the removal of these trees and destruction of an important haven along the Atlantic Flyway appear imminent. In May 2011, the Department of Environmental Conservation halted construction of homes in Lancaster, New York due to the potential existence of a rare bird on the property. We find it well within your agency's mission, and consistent with preceding actions, to protect the Mount Manresa site and its trees predating the American Revolution.

Please advise us of your determination on this matter as soon as possible, as the developer will soon commence clearing of the land.

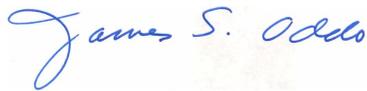
Very truly yours,



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Assembly



Diane J. Savino
Senator



James S. Oddo
Council Minority Leader



Deborah Rose
Councilmember