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The Long Island Sound Fishery: Flourishing or Floundering? *Citizens Summit Explores Sustainability Issues*

Bridgeport - The survival of Long Island Sound's fishery depends on resource managers, scientists, environmental groups, and commercial and recreational fishers working together to manage fish harvests, improve water quality, and sustain fish habitats.

These were important themes of the 18th Annual Long Island Sound Citizens Summit, "*The Long Island Sound Fishery: Flourishing or Floundering*" held today at the Bridgeport Holiday Inn.

Providing millions of fish to sportsmen, the Long Island Sound has long been considered a recreational haven. However, environmentalists and fishermen alike harbor ongoing concerns regarding the stability of the fish population.

"It has been a difficult decade for Long Island Sound," said Curt Johnson, Program Director and Senior Attorney for Save the Sound. "Lobster and oyster die-offs have crippled the region's once thriving shellfishing industry and warming waters are changing fish populations. While certain contaminants have decreased, a cocktail of contaminants such as sewage and storm water runoff continue to be a concern."

The **Citizens Summit**, sponsored by Save the Sound and the Long Island Sound Study, provided some solutions for these and other issues. Maintaining fish habitats, controlling disease, and monitoring and abating water pollution are key to creating sustainability in fish populations. Also discussed was a key issue with no easy solution: rising temperatures that appear to be affecting the populations of colder-water species such as lobsters.

Keynote speaker Paul Greenberg, an author and New York Times magazine contributor on fishery issues, discussed local and global fishery issues, including how Long Island Sound can help meet the demand for fish as a food product, and what role aquaculture might play in meeting demands for fresh, local seafood.

Peter Auster, science director of the Science, Operations, and Technology Group at the National Undersea Research Center at the University of Connecticut at Groton, also provided a primer on ecosystem-based management, a concept where a variety of issues, including human impact to the environment, are addressed comprehensively rather than in isolation.

“Despite the number of people and level of development along its shores, Long Island Sound remains a valuable resource, with diverse populations of fish and shellfish providing commercial and recreational harvests,” said Mark Tedesco, director of the EPA Long Island Sound Office, which manages the Long Island Sound Study program. “But we also must be ready to respond to threats to the health of the fishery, including obstacles to fish spawning grounds, such as dams, and pollution from sewage that has helped to decrease oxygen in the water.”

A panel on oystering in Long Island described ongoing efforts to bring back the Long Island Sound commercial oyster industry after oyster populations were decimated in the 1990s by two diseases, Dermo and MSX. Gary Wikfors, a scientist at the National Marine Fisheries Service Laboratory in Milford, highlighted the importance of oysters as filter feeders and their impact on the undersea landscape. An adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day, and in the process absorbs, nitrogen, algae, and bacteria. Tom Maher of the Department of Environmental Coordination in Nassau County talked about the partnership effort to try to reestablish shellfishing in Hempstead Harbor.

Save the Sound’s Curt Johnson remarked, “We are thrilled to have cosponsored this gathering. It is great to see the best scientific experts discussing solutions with members of the general public because this is the type of partnership that will protect the Sound’s water quality, fisheries, and habitats for generations to come.”

Save the Sound (www.savethesound.org), a program of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment is dedicated to the restoration, protection and appreciation of Long Island Sound and its watersheds through advocacy, education and research. The Long Island Sound Study (www.longislandsoundstudy.net) is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the states of Connecticut and New York to analyze and correct the Sound’s most pressing environmental problems.