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- NEWS RELEASE

Long Island Sound Water Quality Improves Sound Health 2006 Report Details Health of the Sound

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stamford, CT, April 20 — A new report on the health of Long Island Sound by the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) tracks for the first time the water quality of the Sound by its three distinct basins. The report shows that while progress is being made to clean up the Sound, there are still challenges ahead to restore and protect this valuable resource.

Sound Health 2006: A Report on Status and Trends in the Health of the Long Island Sound includes a water quality index that shows, on average, water quality in the Sound was good 54.3 percent of the time and fair 41.2 percent of the time from 1991-2004. As expected, the western basin, with its densely developed shoreline, is the most stressed, with fair water quality the majority of the time. Water quality improves in the central basin, and in the eastern basin water quality is good 86 percent of the time.

The water quality index, developed by the EPA Office of Research and Development for the National Coastal Assessment, includes five measures of water quality: dissolved oxygen levels, the amount of chlorophyll a (an indicator of planktonic algae), water clarity, and concentrations of two nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorous. These measures were evaluated from May to October, the time of year when pollution has the greatest effect on water quality.

The 16-page report also highlights progress made in a number of areas since a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan was developed by the Long Island Sound Study in 1994:

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- Sewage treatment upgrades have resulted in 47,000 fewer pounds of nitrogen a day entering the Sound since the peak year of 1994. Over the past three years, however, nitrogen discharges increased by about 8,000 pounds a day in the Sound, mainly as a result of nitrogen treatment being suspended while upgrades are under construction. Over-enrichment of nitrogen fuels the excessive growth of aquatic plants (a process called eutrophication) and leads to a harmful depletion of oxygen in the Sound.
- Emissions of heavy metals and other contaminants into the atmosphere and directly into the Sound and its tributaries continue to decline. As a result, concentrations of a number of contaminants in seafloor sediments have declined significantly in the past two decades.
- Populations of certain popular fish species, such as striped bass and scup, are increasing thanks to fishery management efforts.
- Since 1998, federal and state efforts have opened 90.2 miles of rivers draining to LIS to anadromous fish (fish that swim up river to spawn), nearing the LISS goal of 100 miles reopened by 2008.

The **Sound Health 2006** report characterizes the health of the Sound using more than 20 different indicators — specific, measurable markers that document trends in water quality, living resources, land use and development, and public awareness. Both sharp changes and general trends in the values of those markers can indicate improved or worsening environmental health. This year's report updates a report published in 2003, and is available online at www.longislandsoundstudy.net. The first issue of Sound Health was published in 2001.

The LISS partners — the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and several other federal and state agencies, universities, and municipal programs — provided the data for the report.

Robert W. Varney, Regional Administrator for EPA's New England region, and Alan J. Steinberg, Regional Administrator for EPA's Region 2 office, both praised the report for informing the public about the challenges to restoring the Sound.

"The Clean Water Act of 1972 focused America's attention on improving water quality, and in response, the public in this region fostered a partnership with the federal and state governments to clean up Long Island Sound," said Varney. "The new Sound Health report, published the day after Earth Day, is a good opportunity not only to reflect on the progress that has been made to improve water quality in the Sound, but also to look at the very important challenges ahead to fully restore and protect the Sound."

“The accomplishments detailed in **Sound Health 2006** reflect the seriousness with which the LISS partnership takes its stewardship of this remarkable natural resource.” said Steinberg. “The Sound is prized for its high recreational and commercial value amidst one of the most densely populated areas of the nation. Its health is key to the environmental and economic vitality of the region. We encourage the public to avail itself of this insightful report and join our efforts to restore and safeguard the Sound.”

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Denise M. Sheehan said: “By working together with our federal, state and local partners along all shores of the Long Island Sound, we’ve made significant investments in water quality and habitat improvements that are yielding positive results. With the completion of this report, New York State looks forward to continuing to learn more about the Sound and the progress we’ve made, and to continue working together on efforts to enhance the Sound’s natural resources.”

Connecticut’s Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Gina McCarthy said: “We are clearly making continued progress in our efforts to protect and restore Long Island Sound. As is documented in the latest Sound Health report, steps taken on both the Connecticut and New York sides of the Sound are helping to improve water quality, aquatic life, coastal habitat areas, tidal wetlands and other natural resources. Anyone who lives near the Sound, or who takes advantage of the Sound for fishing, boating, swimming and other outdoor activities, is a witness to the positive response we have made to a major environmental challenge we faced. The challenge now is to build on the success we have achieved—to make certain we view all that we have done as a starting point and not an end point. We are blessed with its presence but also obligated to do all in our power to make certain we leave a Sound that future generations are able to enjoy.”

While **Sound Health 2006** details many improvements to the health of Long Island Sound, other trends described in the report underscore the need for continued progress:

- An analysis of land use and population in the Sound’s watershed since the 1980s shows that in some areas development is outpacing population growth—an indicator of sprawl development.
- The Sound’s lobster harvest has not recovered from a die-off in the late 1990s. A research initiative pointed to a number of stress factors that contributed to the die-off, including rising water temperatures, low dissolved oxygen, and diseases.
- The pace of restoring shoreline habitats has slowed, as remaining restoration opportunities present more difficult and costly challenges.

- Oyster harvests also have not yet rebounded from the two parasitic diseases that decimated the oyster population off the Connecticut shore in the late 1990s. A recovery plan, however, is in place, to breed disease-resistant oysters and improve habitat.
- Some popular sport fish such as winter flounder are not responding as well to management efforts. It is believed that warming temperatures may be a factor in some of the species leaving the Sound.

Sound Health 2006 also included several features about the Sound to inform the public about the natural wonders in the Sound. A centerfold feature, for example, describes the efforts of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's Marine Fisheries Division in tracking fish populations and an illustrated food web of the Sound details the complex interactions of organisms from microscopic plants to majestic ospreys. This year's report also provides Web links to get more information about the Sound, including the new Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative.

On April 23, more than 425,000 copies of the report were made available as inserts in coastal Sunday newspapers in Connecticut and New York. An additional 40,000 copies are going to be distributed to schools, aquariums, non-profit groups, and citizens at their request.

To receive a free copy of **Sound Health 2006**, call the EPA Long Island Sound Office at (203) 977-1541 in Connecticut or (631) 632-9216 in New York or download it at www.longislandsoundstudy.net.