

The Long Island Sound Office

of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



A Partnership to Restore and Protect the Sound

NEWS RELEASE

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Impact of Climate Change in Long Island Sound Featured at 16th Annual LIS Citizens Summit

Bridgeport, April 8, 2006—Water temperatures are increasing in Long Island Sound with many probable effects to aquatic life, including altering the types and abundance of fish in the Sound, scientists told a general audience today at the 16th annual Long Island Sound Citizens Summit conference.

This year's conference, entitled **Climate Change and Long Island Sound: The Heat is On**, was organized by Save the Sound, a program of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, with support from the Long Island Sound Study. It was held at the Holiday Inn in Bridgeport.

"Since its formation as a marine-influenced estuary about 10,000 years ago, Long Island Sound has undergone environmental changes through natural processes, but over the last few hundred years the human impact has become the dominant force," said Johan Varekamp, a professor at Wesleyan University. Varekamp, who along with his wife, Ellen Thomas, a professor at Yale University, gave a keynote speech at the conference on historical changes in Long Island Sound.

A review of sea surface temperatures in the southern shore of New England's coast and off Long Island reveals a 1.6 degree temperature increase from 1880 to 2001. Scientists believe the main cause of rising temperatures is an increase in heat trapping "greenhouse" gases such as carbon dioxide, which is a byproduct of burning oil, coal, gasoline, and other organic products.

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Varekamp and Thomas said that the many possible results of warmer waters include sea level rise, increased levels of low-oxygenated waters, decreases in cold-water adapted species such as winter flounder, and increases in warm-water species.

The other keynote speaker at the Summit was Connecticut Environmental Commissioner Gina McCarthy who discussed the state's Climate Change Action Plan and its role in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

"Climate change is real and it is happening – possibly at an even faster pace than we have realized," said McCarthy. "Events such as the Long Island Sound Citizens Summit on Climate Change offer important opportunities to share information on how this global issue will impact us right at home, to discuss initiatives the states of New York and Connecticut have taken and to encourage everyone concerned to redouble their efforts in further reducing human impacts to our Sound and our planet."

A morning panel at the Summit consisted of scientists discussing how global warming may be affecting current environmental conditions in Long Island Sound, and what the future holds. The panelists and their topics were:

- **Robert Whitlatch, PhD**, University of Connecticut—impact to benthic communities (the aquatic life living in the sea bottom);
- **David Conover, PhD**, Dean and Director of the Marine Sciences Research Center at Stony Brook University—fisheries;
- **Milan Keser, PhD**, Millstone Environmental Laboratory—long term monitoring trends; and
- **Lawrence Swanson, PhD**, Marine Sciences Research Center at Stony Brook University—impacts on water quality.

An afternoon panel of state and local leaders discussed what communities and individuals in New York and Connecticut can do to mitigate and adapt for the environmental changes that may occur as a result of warmer water temperatures. The panelists and their topics were:

- **Karin Jakubowski**, Clean Air-Cool Planet—public outreach and education efforts;
- **Charles Rothenberger**, Connecticut Fund for the Environment—the Connecticut Clean Cars Initiative;
- **Lynn Stoddard**, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection—the role of the states; and
- **Sidney Gale**, Integrated Management Controls—the need for local governments to be prepared for climate change.

Gale compared pictures of the Guilford shoreline under conditions of normal high tide and abnormal seasonal high tide to illustrate the impact of a one-foot rise in sea level on coastal wetlands, developed property and infrastructure. He discussed how sea level rise and other effects of climate change will impact towns.

"The possible impacts of climate change have been identified and, to a small degree, already experienced in Connecticut," said Gale. "The challenge for municipal officials is to begin applying these scenarios to their communities to anticipate impacts on regulations, public infrastructure, environment, local

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economy, emergency preparedness and funding requirements for mitigating activities as the effects of climate change steadily increase over time.”

The Long Island Sound Study is a partnership of federal, state, and local governments, community groups, and universities, with a mission to restore and protect the Sound. It was authorized by Congress in 1985, and operates out of the EPA Long Island Sound Office in Stamford.

Mark Tedesco, EPA Long Island Sound Office director, said “Conferences such as this one provide the public with a valuable opportunity to become better informed by learning the views of expert scientists and government and environmental leaders about the impact of climate change on the Sound.”

“It was great to hear about so many commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Connecticut,” said Robin Kriesberg, director of environmental projects for Save the Sound (www.savethesound.org). “Essential actions are underway that will benefit all of us as well as Long Island Sound. Protecting the Sound from the impacts of pollution and global warming is critical to our region, to preserve this resource so future generations can enjoy the ecological, recreational and economic riches it provides.”

Save the Sound, a program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment, was founded in 1972 as the Long Island Sound Taskforce. Save the Sound is dedicated to the restoration, protection and appreciation of Long Island Sound and its watersheds through advocacy, education and research.