



*A Partnership to Restore and Protect the Sound*

## The Long Island Sound Office

of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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# NEWS RELEASE

## Report on Long Island Sound Highlights Improvement in Water Quality; Cites Additional Needs

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Stamford, CT, September 24, 2003** — a new report published this week by the Long Island Sound Study indicates that progress has been made to restore the environmental health of the Sound, but efforts are still needed to protect the 110-mile long estuary. [Sound Health 2003: A Report on Status and Trends in the Health of the Long Island Sound](#) highlights the progress made in a number of areas:

- Sewage treatment upgrades have resulted in 55,000 fewer pounds of nitrogen a day entering the Sound since the peak year of 1994. Excess nitrogen results in over-enrichment of the Sound's waters, which leads to nuisance algal blooms and a harmful depletion of oxygen in the water (a process called "eutrophication").
- Emissions of heavy metals and other contaminants into the atmosphere and directly into the Sound continue to decline.
- Populations of certain popular fish species, such as summer flounder and striped bass, are increasing thanks to fishery management efforts.

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- Populations of osprey, a majestic coastal bird whose numbers fell sharply in the 1950s and 1960s due to the effects of certain pesticides such as DDT, are increasing again.
- Since 1998, federal and state efforts have opened 42.9 miles of rivers draining to LIS to anadromous fish (fish that swim up river to spawn) and restored 465 acres of coastal habitats.

The 16-page **Sound Health 2003** report characterizes the health of the Sound using nearly 30 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 first published in 2001, and is available online at the Long Island Sound Study's new website address: [www.longislandsoundstudy.net](http://www.longislandsoundstudy.net). The Long Island Sound Study (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. It was published this month to coincide with National Estuaries Day, to be held this year on September 27. The annual celebration highlights estuaries such as Long Island Sound, special places where fresh waters from rivers mix with salt water from the ocean.

Robert W. Varney, Regional Administrator for EPA's New England Region, and Jane M. Kenny, Regional Administrator for EPA's New York Region, both praised the report for informing the public about the challenges to restoring the Sound.

"The Long Island Sound is important to the entire region for commercial and recreational fishing, boating, swimming, and is a special place with diverse animal and plant life," said Kenny. "This report provides the public with a snapshot of the key environmental factors that are essential in the restoration and protection of the Sound. It gives us some very encouraging news, but confirms what we already know — that the Sound continues to need our utmost care and attention."

"The work done to improve the health of Long Island Sound is a testament to the dedication and cooperation of many individuals working together from local, state and federal governments, along with community members," said Varney. "We can be proud of our achievements so far, and together we will continue to protect this important ecosystem."

“New Yorkers will be pleased to read about the progress reported in **Sound Health 2003**,” said Erin M. Crotty, New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner. “They should also appreciate receiving a report that gives them an informed look at the progress made and challenges ahead in protecting and restoring the Sound.”

“The significant improvement in the overall health of Long Island Sound is appreciated by fishermen, boaters, and bathers, and can be measured in objective ways by a number of environmental indicators including the return of osprey and the amount of tidal wetland acreage restored,” said Arthur J. Rocque, Jr., Connecticut’s Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner. “The Sound Health report helps us appreciate the challenges that lie ahead as we build on our successes and continue to restore this critical estuary.”

While **Sound Health 2003** details many improvements to the health of Long Island Sound, other trends described in the report underscore the need for continued progress:

- High levels of nitrogen still cause eutrophication and require continued attention.
- A die-off of lobsters over the last three years, most severely in the western Sound, has greatly reduced the harvest.
- Oyster harvests have not yet rebounded from the two parasitic diseases that decimated the oyster population in the late 1990s.
- Some popular sport fish such as winter flounder are not responding as well to management efforts.
- Increasing population and development in coastal communities remains a constant threat to the Sound.

On September 28, more than 460,000 copies of the report will be available as inserts in coastal Sunday newspapers in Connecticut and New York.

For more information or to receive a free copy of **Sound Health 2003**, call the EPA Long Island Sound Office at (203) 977-1541 in Connecticut or (631) 632-9216 in New York.