

Stewardship Initiative Progress

By Jane MacLellan

The Long Island Sound Study's (LISS) Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) calls for the conservation of natural resources and increased public access to the Sound. LISS began implementing the CCMP in 1994, and considerable progress has been made in improving the Sound's water quality over the past 10 years. However, critical elements of the Long Island Sound Study CCMP, including open space and natural resource protection, still need attention.

To bring attention to these needs, Audubon, the Regional Plan Association (RPA), and Save the Sound (STS) organized the Listen to the Sound 2000 Campaign. The Campaign was an initiative to gain citizen input on strategies to advance the ecological resource and land-use goals outlined in the CCMP. There was strong public sentiment regarding the urgent need to focus on restoring and protecting the Sound's



Nissequogue River, NY, photo by Kimberly Graff.

coastal habitats, which sustain its fisheries and other wildlife, and on preserving the few unprotected natural areas remaining along the shore, which are under intense development pressure. The public supported the development of a strategy connecting people to the Sound while protecting the remaining outstanding sites. Development of this strategy was adopted as a commitment of the LISS in the 2003 Long Island Sound Agreement, which builds upon the goals of the CCMP.

With this mandate in hand, the LISS formed the Stewardship Work Group to coordinate efforts to identify sites with ecological and/or recreational resources and to develop a strategy to protect and enhance those important areas. The Stewardship Work Group is a collaborative effort among a broad range of agencies and organizations interested in protecting the Sound.

As a basis for identifying the high value areas throughout the Sound, a comprehensive analysis of the Sound's coastal resources was conducted. The inventory of coastal recreational resources was led by RPA, and the ecological inventory was conducted by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Program. The Stewardship Initiative Workgroup used these inventories to identify areas with significant recreational and ecological values. A total of 32 areas were identified (see map on pages four and five) as the Inaugural Stewardship Areas, elevating their visibility and the potential for prioritized funding. For more information, on the Stewardship areas see www.longislandsoundstudy.net/stewardship/stewardship_sites.htm.

The Stewardship Initiative Workgroup hosted six public forums in June 2005 to discuss the Stewardship Initiative and, specifically, to solicit public input on the draft list of proposed Inaugural Stewardship Areas. Based on the input received at these meetings, a 33rd Stewardship area was added to the list. At its September 28, 2006 meeting, the LISS Policy Committee formally adopted these inaugural areas. This issue of *UPDATE* includes two example stewardship sites, the Nissequogue River in New York and Hammonasset State Park in Connecticut, on pages six and seven. For more information on the Stewardship Initiative see www.longislandsoundstudy.net/stewardship

Jane MacLellan is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Liaison to the Long Island Sound Study.

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New Staff and Policy Committee Meeting

Sound Update is published by the public outreach program to inform the public about issues pertaining to the Long Island Sound Study.

Message from the Director

Now that 33 inaugural Stewardship Areas around the Sound with special ecological and recreational values have been identified, the obvious challenge is how to best preserve and enhance those values. As publicly owned sites, some activity will be underway on the properties themselves. But as areas connected to a larger watershed, part of the answer will come from improved local land use planning and conservation in neighboring sites.

One local example of how to make that happen is the Massachusetts Coastal Smart Growth program. Launched in 2004, the priorities for the program are to work with communities, developers, related businesses, and environmental groups to maintain open space in new subdivisions to protect conservation values, and to use an integrated approach to site design, stormwater management, and water conservation that protects the natural terrain and hydrology. A low impact development (or LID) work group now has more than 100 members, connecting those with funds and expertise with local community and business leaders.

A similar program in Connecticut is Focus on the Coast, a multimedia education project that educates local decision makers about the priority coastal resources of the Connecticut coastline, and ways to protect and restore them. The project is a collaboration of the University of Connecticut NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials) Program, the Connecticut Sea Grant College Program, The Nature Conservancy Connecticut Chapter, and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. The Focus on the Coast website (<http://nemo.uconn.edu/tools/fotc/index.htm>) includes a tutorial on conducting a coastal resource inventory, access to digital maps and information on priority coastal resource areas and land cover, and links to a variety of other sites on protection of coastal habitat areas.

An opportunity for the Stewardship Initiative is to take these tools and apply them tailored to the specific watershed conditions within each Stewardship Area. The value of the Stewardship Areas provides a focus for coastal resource protection objectives. The advantage of this approach is that it integrates the Stewardship Initiative within the watershed protection, low impact development, and smart growth approaches.

On another note, in August, the Long Island Sound region was honored to receive a visit from the EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, who was joined by the Regional Administrator for EPA New England, Robert Varney. Administrator Johnson was hosted by the Business Council of Fairfield County and spoke about energy and the environment to business leaders. During a visit to the recently upgraded Stamford, CT wastewater treatment facility, he lauded the success of the nitrogen trading program in Connecticut, praised restoration efforts for the Sound, and took time to pose for a photograph.



From left to right, Mark Tedesco, Director of the Stamford Water Pollution Control Authority Jeannette Brown, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, and Regional Administrator for EPA New England, Robert Varney at Stamford Wastewater Treatment Plant. Photo by Tanya Court, The Business Council of Fairfield.

Stewarding Our CLAM Resources

By Dave Kozak

It is clear that we must be good stewards of our coastal landscape, especially our coastal shoreline, if we wish to preserve our coastal resources for the enjoyment of future generations. We need to conserve open space to protect the scenic qualities that help define the cultural heritage of our shoreline towns, maintain the biodiversity of our environment by protecting sensitive habitats such as river corridors and ridgetops and expand opportunities for public use and enjoyment of our coastal waters.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's (CTDEP) Office of Long Island Sound

Programs is conducting the Coastal Land Assessment Methodology (CLAM) project to do just that. CLAM is a coastal land conservation planning tool to identify large unprotected parcels with significant conservation value. To date, 82 parcels larger than 25 acres with significant coastal resource value have been identified within Connecticut's coastal boundary, defined by a line approximately 1,000 feet inland of coastal waters. The majority of these parcels, believed to have conservation value of potential statewide significance, are located east of the Connecticut River. Only 31 of these parcels are greater than 50 acres, indicating few very large undeveloped parcels near coastal waters with conservation value remain in Connecticut. CLAM

used a GIS-based analysis system to evaluate more than 28,000 tax parcels using parcel evaluation criteria such as parcel size, presence of coastal resources such as coastal waters or tidal wetlands, and proximity to existing protected open space.

Subsequent staff work was conducted to further evaluate the ecological significance of parcels initially identified by GIS analysis, including inspection of aerial photography and interviewing agency experts. The evaluation criteria and the expert opinions of CTDEP staff ecologists were used to preliminarily classify parcels into one of three conservation priority "tiers" according to their potential conservation value. These parcels are being further assessed to identify owners of parcels with high conservation value that may be interested in developing conservation strategies

Stewardship Act Signed by the President

By Al Caccese

Great news from inside the Beltway! The Long Island Sound Stewardship Act, which was first introduced on June 20th, 2004, passed the House of Representatives on September 28, the Senate during the early morning hours of September 30, 2006 and was signed by the President on October 16, 2006. There has been a remarkable amount of excitement for this bi-state, bi-partisan, and bi-cameral measure, which authorizes \$25 million annually through 2011 to protect important recreational and ecological areas around the Sound and to improve access to this nationally significant estuary.

In the House, the bill was championed by the Co-chairs of the Long Island Sound Congressional Caucus, Representative Robert Simmons from Connecticut and Representative Steve Israel from New York.

The entire Connecticut Delegation co-sponsored the bill as did the vast majority of the New York Delegation. In the Senate, where the bill was previously passed upon unanimous consent in 2004, the bill continued to enjoy the steadfast support of Senators Lieberman, Clinton, Schumer, and Dodd.

The bill had a number of changes from the initial version. These resulted from numerous meetings and briefings had by Audubon New York, Audubon Connecticut, the Regional Plan Association and Save the Sound with the New York and Connecticut Congressional delegations and with the House Resource Committee during the first half of 2005. Additionally, a number of public meetings were held around the Sound to ensure continued public input into the process. In June of 2005, the Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries held a field hearing in Groton, Connecticut, and based on

testimony presented therein, the language of the bill was amended in various ways.

In an attempt to achieve consensus, difficult accommodations were made, including one involving underwater lands. It was generally believed however, that although the bill was not perfect, it would still be very useful to achieve the upland goals and objectives of the Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative. The amendments and accommodations resulted in a consensus measure that enabled it to be moved out of the oceans and Fisheries Subcommittee and ultimately out of the House Resource Committee. For more information on the legislation please visit www.longislandsoundstudy.net/stewardship/

Long Island Sound is a national treasure and, in the view of Audubon New York, we are delighted that the federal government is willing to financially partner with the states and their municipalities for the restoration and protection of this vital resource.

Al Caccese is the Director of Conservation and Government Relations for Audubon New York.

New York's Open Space Assessment to Complement CLAM

By Kimberly Graff

To complement the work being done in Connecticut under CLAM, the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) has provided a grant to Columbia University to assess undeveloped parcels in Long Island Sound coastal areas of New York. The Center of International Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University will assemble existing parcel data from coastal counties in NY that will be used by LISS and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) officials to identify opportunities to conserve the most significant remaining unprotected and undeveloped parcels in the NY Long Island Sound watershed.

for their lands. CTDEP will work with land trusts and municipal commissions to identify possible conservation opportunities for properties with owners interested in conserving their land. For example, project partners may develop acquisition strategies in cooperation with willing sellers.

These types of programs can enable state and local resource managers to protect both our vital landscapes and the economic well-being of our citizens. For information about the CLAM project, contact Dave Kozak at 860-424-3034 or by email at dave.kozak@po.state.ct.us.

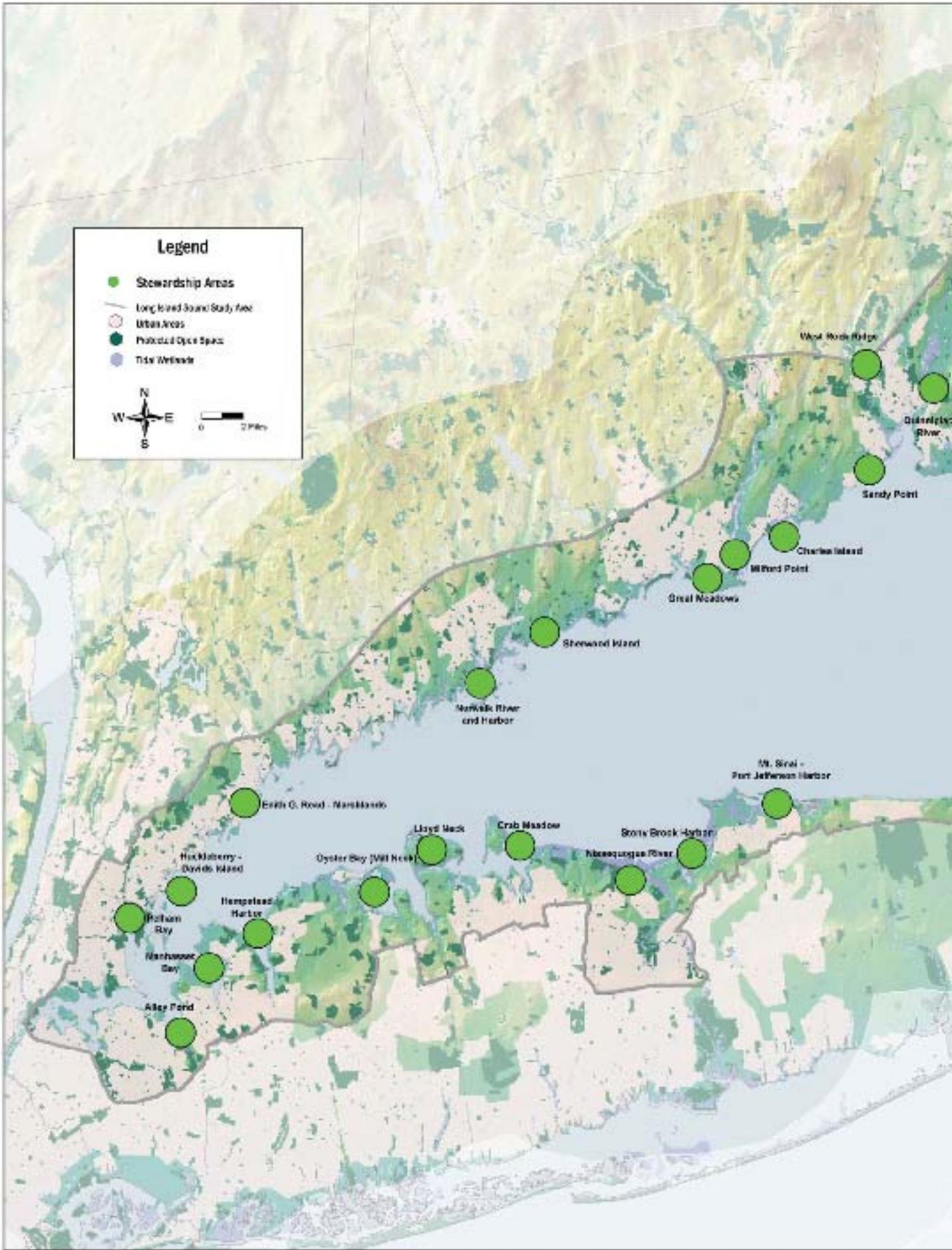
GIS data will be used to identify parcels greater than five acres, publicly owned, and protected open space. Additional data collected for the Stewardship Initiative will be included in the database. The data will be checked using aerial photos and field visits. The outcome of this project will be a GIS data set containing undeveloped coastal parcel information and associated documentation.

Ultimately, this database will help NYSDEC to improve their current coastal management and assessment practices, and will assist the state in updating its Open Space Management Plan, thereby promoting conservation of open space, landscapes, and ecosystems; improving access to the Sound; prioritizing property types for natural resource conservation; and reducing nonpoint source pollution. The project is expected to be completed by October 2007. For more information on this effort please contact Karen Chytalo at (631) 444-0431.

Kimberly Graff works for New York Sea Grant and is the Long Island Sound Study Outreach Coordinator in NY.

Futures Fund Projects Announced

The Long Island Sound Futures Fund announced nearly \$900,000 in grant awards to 38 local community organizations and governments on September 15, 2006 at the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center in Oyster Bay, NY. For more information on the announcement visit *Futures Fund Awards* at www.longislandsoundstudy.net.

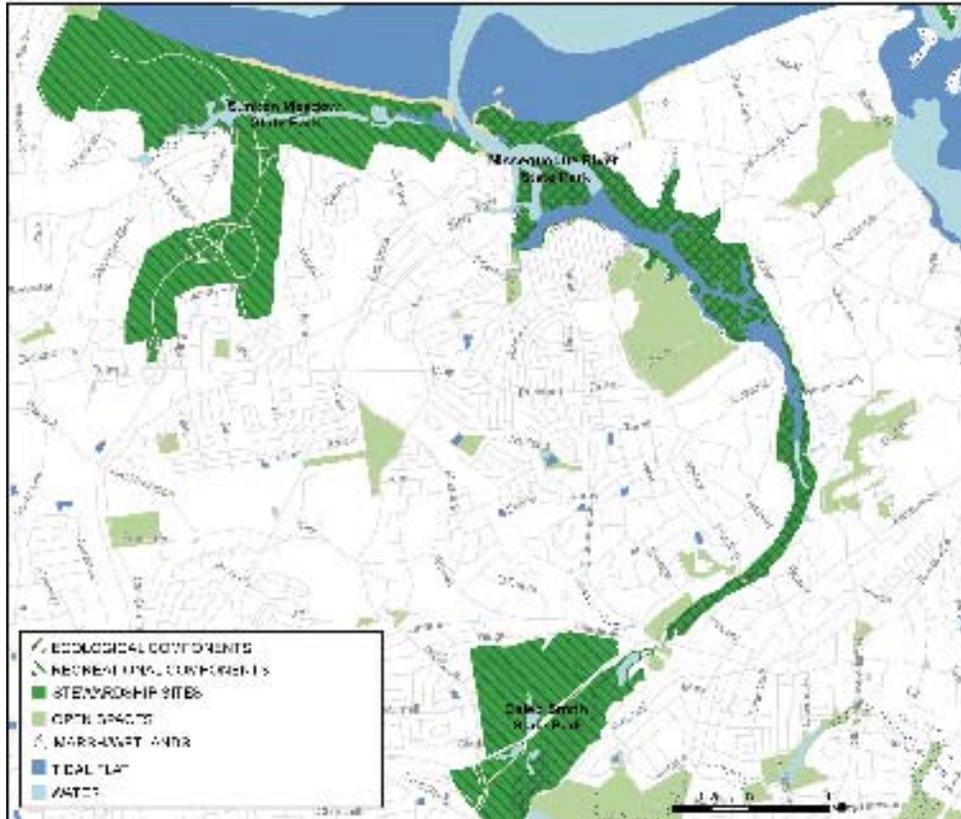




Stewardship Planning in the Nissequogue River Watershed

By Robert Freudenberg

Located on the north shore of Long Island in the Town of Smithtown, the Nissequogue River flows nearly 9 miles from its source of freshwater springs to its mouth on Long Island Sound at Smithtown Bay. Along the way, the river passes through a number of diverse terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. It is home to a variety of species including osprey, the endangered piping plover, menhaden, brown and brook trout, and striped bass. In addition to its ecological diversity, the watershed offers recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, and swimming and education opportunities at local nature centers and museums.



Nissequogue River watershed map produced by the Regional Plan Association.

Because of these ecological and recreational values, in 2005 the Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative (LISSI) named the river and its 40 square-mile watershed one of the 33 inaugural Stewardship Areas. With its established network of committed stakeholders, the area was also identified as an ideal location to initiate a pilot program to implement the general principles of LISSI. This is currently being done through development of a plan to ensure the long-term management and protection of the watershed. The two-year project is being coordinated by Regional Plan Association (RPA) and is modeled after successful watershed plans developed in the Norwalk and Saugatuck watersheds in Connecticut. It has received funding from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, and in-kind funding from RPA. In the project's first year, RPA has assembled

a Steering Committee composed of a cross section of local stakeholders including representatives from State and County parks, local Towns and Villages, Suffolk County, State and Federal agencies, residents, public and private marinas, developers, and civic and environmental groups to analyze natural resource data in

the watershed and to identify issues and partnership opportunities for managing resources.

Drawing upon the diverse talents and interests of its members, the Steering Committee has branched into four subcommittees - habitat, water quality, land use/open space and outreach. Each subcommittee has its own Chair and set of goals and objectives. Additionally, the Steering Committee has incorporated public input by convening public meetings, producing outreach materials and coordinating public events, including the recent cleanup at Short Beach for International Coastal Cleanup Day where 60 volunteers removed 250 pounds of debris.

The second year of the project will result in a Stewardship Action Plan, developed by members of the Steering Committee. The Plan will lay out a comprehensive framework for addressing the issues and opportunities recognized in the project's first year. It will also identify and prioritize management activities, restoration opportunities, open space

acquisition and planning strategies. It is anticipated that the Steering Committee will remain a lasting forum for continued coordination in the Nissequogue River watershed and be responsible for implementing the Stewardship Action Plan.

In addition to the Plan, a report will be published that contains guidelines for developing a Stewardship Action Plan. The report will be made available to the public so that other coastal communities, including the other 32 Stewardship

Areas, may look to the Nissequogue River watershed as a model for creating their own successful stewardship program.

Robert Freudenberg is an Associate Planner for the Regional Plan Association.



John Atkin opens Nissequogue River Public Meeting on October 10, 2006 at Smithtown High School West. Photo by Kimberly Graff.

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Hammonasset Beach State Park and Natural Area Preserve Stewardship Area

By Robin Kriesberg

The Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative works to preserve and protect unique, exemplary, rare and endangered habitats, along with sites that are critical for long-term scientific research and education. At Hammonasset Beach State Park and Natural Area Preserve in Madison, Connecticut, partners are working together to restore the health of degraded habitats. Hammonasset State Park is the largest shoreline park in Connecticut, consisting of 919 acres including 2 miles of shoreline. Over one million visitors enjoy the park each year, for active as well as passive recreation, and this heavy use has had an impact on the park's habitat.

Opened to the public on July 18, 1920, Hammonasset means "where we dig holes in the ground", a reference to the farming done by local eastern woodland Indians who settled there. As the park was developed and improved, some of the wetland areas were used as sediment disposal sites for beach improvements and road construction, effectively destroying the marsh habitat. Because the fill raises the surface elevations beyond the range of tidal habitat, such areas cannot be restored without removing the fill and reconfiguring the surface topography.

Save the Sound collaborated with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) to remove the fill and reconfigure the surface elevations to support high marsh vegetation. At the completion of the project, a total of 6.3 acres of diverse coastal habitat, including low marsh, high marsh, ponds, and channels, will be restored to their ecosystem function. The newly configured 6.3 acres will include 2.7 acres of low marsh, 1.3 acres of high marsh, 0.2 acres of large pond

habitat, 0.05 acres of small pond habitat and 15,600 square feet of open channel habitat as a result of the removal of more than 6,840 total cubic yards of sandy fill material. This restoration site is adjacent to an area that has been under restoration since 2000, consisting of filled and non-filled marsh that required improved tidal flow. Connecticut College faculty and students will be conducting monitoring of vegetation and animals at the site for a long-term assessment of the project, and CTDEP will continue to monitor sediment movement and channel configurations.

Healthy habitats contribute valuable ecosystem functions to the Long Island Sound watershed, such as absorbing and filtering polluted stormwater runoff and reducing impacts on water quality. This is critically important in our highly developed region, where polluted runoff contributes to the degradation of our local rivers and streams that drain directly into Long Island Sound.



*Hammonasset marsh restoration.
Photo courtesy of Save the Sound.*

Save the Sound, a Program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment, is a member of Restore America's Estuaries, a partnership of eleven member

organizations and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Community-Based Restoration Program, working with local communities to restore one million acres of estuary habitat nationwide. Our work around the Sound and its watersheds is accomplished through collaborative efforts with landowners, public and private organizations, and the general public. The restoration work at Hammonasset State Park demonstrates successful on-the-ground collaboration to improve and enhance habitat at a site recognized by the Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative for its tremendous ecological, recreational, and educational and research value.

Robin Kriesberg is the Director of Environmental Projects for Save the Sound, a program of CT Fund for the Environment.

Stewardship Area Hosts Policy Committee Meeting

The Policy Committee met on September 28, 2006 at the John Jay Heritage Center in Rye, NY, adjacent to the Marshlands Conservancy, one of the designated Stewardship Areas, to sign agreements that support ongoing efforts to protect and restore the Sound. The officials adopted a stewardship initiative focused on 33 areas of the Sound with significant ecological and recreational value; approved a Memorandum of Understanding to restore, by 2011, 300 acres of coastal habitats and 50 river miles for fish passage to spawning sites; signed a directive calling for an evaluation of the management plan for hypoxia; and authorized the Cross Sound Cable fund that will disburse \$6 million for research and restoration. The meeting concluded with a walk at Marshlands.



Policy Committee signing documents on September 28, 2006. From left to right, EPA Region II Administrator Alan J. Steinberg, NYSDEC Commissioner Denise M. Sheehan, CTDEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy, and EPA Region I Administrator Robert W. Varney. Photo by Robert Burg.

Long Island Sound Study Welcomes Corey Garza

Since change is the only certainty (besides death and taxes), Long Island Sound Study is right in form with two recent staffing changes. After three years as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Liaison to the Long Island Sound Study, Jane MacLellan is relocating to Santa Barbara, California. Jane has made lasting contributions to the protection and restoration of Long Island Sound through her work on habitat restoration, stewardship, invasive species, and coordinating research. She also wins an award for planning her wedding, renovating and selling her house, and moving across the country all within a four month period. Her skills, fine judgment, good humor, and dedication will be missed and we wish her the very best in the new chapter of her life. Our only solace is that a large pool of candidates for refilling the position is being reviewed with the hope of filling the position before the end of the year.

Even better than refilling a position is hiring someone for a new one. Corey Garza was selected as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Liaison to the Long Island Sound Study. Corey completed his Ph.D. at the University of California at Santa Barbara and held post-doc positions with the EPA Office of Research and Development and California State University, Los Angeles. Corey will be working on a variety of issues, including environmental indicators, underwater habitat classification and mapping, food web structure changes, potential expressions of climate change on Long Island Sound, and coordinating research. Corey officially started on October 2 and will be co-located in the Milford NOAA-Fisheries lab and the EPA LIS Office in Stamford.

While not planned, we're happy to report that the net staffing flux between California and the Long Island Sound Study remains at zero.



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