

Sound Update



Message from the Director

This issue of the Sound Update is about public involvement in the Long Island Sound Study, most directly through our Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Often touted as a way to make government more responsive to the public will, citizen involvement *is* a vital part of many government institutions (think of the local school PTA) and our democracy. It can also be a source of frustration (think of the local school PTA) without clearly defined objectives and open, two-way communication. Public involvement doesn't work if agencies see it solely as an opportunity to educate citizens, or if citizens see it as forum to make demands or crowd out other points of view.

The use of formal, structured citizen involvement in environmental decision making has expanded as the issues have become more complex. The Long Island Sound Study created a CAC in 1987 to provide counsel on the priority issues facing the Sound and the action plan being developed to address them. The CAC was a vocal and active participant in the writing of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the Sound, and an advocate for specific targets and time frames for actions. With the approval of the CCMP in 1994, the CAC shifted emphasis to being a watchdog on implementation and advocate for funding. An integral part of the Long Island Sound Study, the CAC also promotes public awareness and understanding of the programs issues and goals.

The CAC is composed of individuals representing a cross section of groups that use the Sound or have concerns about its quality. The groups include environmental and conservation organizations, and watershed associations, environmental educators, academics, and user groups representing business, industry, boating, fishing, and recreation. CAC members reflect the broader interests of their own constituencies and

communicate within their organizations on Long Island Sound issues. CAC members educate each other, as well as program staff, and strive to reach a consensus before taking a position on an issue or making a recommendation to the program. As a result of its diverse membership, the CAC represents many of the interests within the larger community around the Sound. It is this very diversity that can make it a challenge to find a common reference point to discuss issues. But when it comes together on an issue, the CAC is likely to reflect common ground in the broader community.

In this newsletter, CAC members themselves describe the committee's history and role in the Long Island Sound Study, its initiatives and



The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut Attorney General, discussed Long Island Sound underwater cables with CAC members at the March 2003 meeting. Photo by Kimberly Zimmer.

accomplishments, and the results of strategic planning meetings to map out priorities for the future. The status of living resources, sediment quality and dredged material management, land use and watershed protection, and tracking progress will all be on the CAC's agenda. Do you have an interest in habitat restoration? Fishing or boating? Land conservation? If you do and want to get involved in protecting and restoring Long Island Sound, consider joining the CAC. We welcome your involvement.

Summer 2003

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The Long Island Sound Study Update is produced and printed by New York Sea Grant (NYSG) under a cooperative agreement with the US EPA #CE-982455-01. The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of NYSG, USEPA or the LISS Management Committee, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or causes constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

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History of the Long Island Sound Study CAC

The Long Island Sound Study began in 1985 when Congress appropriated funds for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the states of Connecticut and New York to research, monitor, and assess the water quality of the Sound. With the Clean Water Act Amendments in 1987, Section 320 of the Act officially established a National Estuary Program. At the request of the states of Connecticut and New York, Long Island Sound was officially designated an *Estuary of National Significance* under this new program, and a Management Conference of the Long Island Sound Study was convened in March of 1988. The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) has been a major player since the start of the Study and its accomplishments have contributed to the programs success.

So how did the CAC establish itself? Well, on October 24 – 25,

1986, Save the Sound, Inc. (formerly the Long Island Sound Taskforce) held a meeting with the Chesapeake Bay Program to discuss effective public participation techniques. This meeting brought attention to the idea of forming a CAC. Representatives from five organizations formed a steering committee and defined the CAC's composition and role. At this same time the EPA created a new Management Committee to direct the Study. The CAC developed a



CAC meeting June, 2003 at Pfizer in NYC. Photo by Kimberly Zimmer.

management structure with accountability and objectivity by establishing by-laws and subcommittee work plans. During these early days, the CAC steering committee traveled to Washington to brief the Long Island Sound Congressional Caucus, Project Oceanology provided very successful On-The-Water workshops, the early hypoxia monitoring work with Barbara Welsh began after a dense algal bloom followed by fish kills, and a video on Long Island Sound was filmed.

In 1987 the CAC expanded its membership to more completely represent all geographic areas and to coordinate efforts with public education staff in Connecticut and New York, Save the Sound, Inc., and the Long Island Sound legislative caucuses. With this added experience and expertise, the CAC hoped to become the nucleus of a strong network of groups dedicated to



The 1988 composition of the CAC:

- ACTION: For the Preservation and Conservation of the North Shore of LI
- City Island Preservation Association
- Coalition to Protect Long Island's Groundwater
- Connecticut Marine Trades Association
- Connecticut River Estuary
- Environmental Management Council
- Federated Conservationists of Westchester County
- Hommocks School
- JBE Associates
- Manhasset Bay Sportsmen Club
- Milford Harbor Marina
- National Audubon Society
- Northeast Utilities
- North Fork Environmental Council
- North Shore Baymen's Association
- Pfizer, Inc.
- Project Oceanology
- Sadsifter Beach Cleaning
- Save the Sound, Inc. (formerly Long Island Sound Taskforce)
- Suffolk County Department of Planning
- Suffolk County Executive
- The Sounds Conservancy, Inc.
- Town of Fairfield
- Village of Mamaroneck

The 2003 composition of the CAC:

- ACTION For the Preservation and Conservation of the North Shore of LI
- Adelphi University
- Audubon New York
- Citizens Campaign for the Environment
- Coalition For Protection of LI Groundwater
- Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor
- Connecticut Boating Advisory Council
- Connecticut Coastal Audubon Center
- Connecticut Fund for the Environment
- Connecticut Harbor Management Association
- Connecticut Maritime Association
- Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency
- Darien Coast Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters
- Daniel S Natchez and Associates
- Empire State Marine Trades Association
- Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, Inc.
- Fishers Island Conservancy
- Friends of the Bay
- JBE Associates
- Manhasset Bay Protection Committee
- Milford Harbor Marina
- Nassau County Department of Public Works
- New York Sportfishing Federation
- North Fork Environmental Council
- Pfizer, Inc.
- Project Oceanology
- PSEG Power CT LLC
- Save the Sound
- Saybrook Point Inn and Spa
- The Sound School Regional
- SoundWaters, Inc.
- Town of North Hempstead
- Village of Poquott
- Village of Port Jefferson

communicating and examining pollution problems affecting Long Island Sound.

During 1989 and 1990, the CAC advocated creating an EPA Long Island Sound Office, to coordinate implementation and provide funding beyond the completion of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. Members were actively involved in establishing water quality goals and testifying before Congressional and State Legislative hearings. They were also on the forefront of public education to increase awareness and advocacy as well as co-hosting the successful National Audubon Society's Listen to the Sound hearings. Specific accomplishments included: influencing the Policy Committee decision to implement the No Net Increase Policy; supporting development of a Land Use Work Group; and supporting creation of the Long Island Sound Watershed Alliance, which united 165 organizations around the Sound in a common goal to protect the Sound; supporting the habitat restoration initiative; establishing a sediment focus group to address dredging issues; briefing Congressional representatives and, of course, continuing efforts in public education and involvement.

The CAC continues today, involving organizations representing more than 120,000 constituents, with a strong voice shaping policy decisions. Active subcommittees are working on priority issues such as the health of living resources, environmental education, dredged material management, land use and runoff, and program accountability.

Five organizations represented the original 1986 Steering Committee to form a CAC:

- ACTION: For the Preservation and Conservation of the North Shore of Long Island
- Connecticut Audubon
- Huntington Audubon
- Save the Sound, Inc. (formerly Long Island Sound Taskforce)
- Project Oceanology

Article compiled by Kimberly Zimmer, New York Sea Grant Public Outreach Coordinator for the Long Island Sound Study.

No-Net Increase In Nitrogen: A CAC Success Story

By David Miller

In the early 1990s, the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was facing its most significant challenge to date. On the heels of Audubon's Listen to the Sound campaign and citizen hearings, there were many suggestions to strengthen the draft Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). However, one provision of the CCMP that was embraced by the CAC and the conservation community at large was to institute a no net increase policy for nitrogen pollution to the Sound.

Nitrogen pollution as we all know, robs the Sound of needed oxygen for critters to survive and to support a healthy ecosystem. The idea was that before we started reducing nitrogen pollution to the Sound, we needed to cap current levels so that things would not get worse. The phrase *Nitrogen Cap* was coined and everyone from Auduboners to League of Women Voters to Save the Sound folks could be seen with baseball caps with the word Nitrogen on them. The CAC was on the front line of this debate and stood strong to enact a nitrogen cap. Citizens, as a result of hard work of the CAC and Audubon's Listen to the Sound program, formed the Long Island Sound Watershed Alliance. Its purpose was to create a strong constituency that would promote the completion of the CCMP and the implementation of policies.

The *Nitrogen Cap* also resulted in fears from some sectors of communities along the Sound. The debate began from labor and the construction industry sector who thought a nitrogen cap would result in a building moratorium. If you could not increase any pollution to Sound and existing sewer plants were at capacity, what would be the result? With the construction industry sector already at 35 percent unemployment, this was clearly a serious concern.

On a cold January morning in Westchester County, eleven hundred teamsters appeared to protest the nitrogen cap at the second annual summit of the Long Island Sound Watershed Alliance. Many of the CAC members were part of the conference program. The Policy Committee of the Sound Study, which includes State Environmental Agency Commissioners and Regional Environmental Protection Agency Administrators, were also in attendance. Two hundred conference goers faced the realities of more than a thousand protesting workers. A Peekskill Assemblyman, who later became Governor, came to speak on behalf of the Workers and the Sound.



Photo obtained from Clean Water/Jobs Coalition Fall 1993 Newsletter.

After some quick maneuvering by both sides, a dialogue emerged where common ground was sought. It was clear that upgrading sewage treatment plants could handle reasonable growth in communities. It became clear that with political will, not only was a nitrogen cap possible, but also significant pollution reductions. I clearly remember to this day sitting down with labor and construction industry leaders and creating what is now known as the Clean Water/Jobs Coalition. Cleaning up the Sound creates jobs was our motto. Traditional barriers were broken and a strong economy and a clean environment went together as a joint goal. Officials at all levels of government listened to this new and exciting message and still do so today.

Since those days in the early 1990s, together we have generated hundreds of millions of dollars for Long Island Sound pollution control and reduced nitrogen loadings to the Sounds by tens of thousands of tons. New York's Clean Water Bond Act and Connecticut's Clean Water Fund as well as the passage of the federal Long Island Sound Restoration Act all were great achievements of this initial campaign. A campaign that began at the CAC level and then brought together the broadest coalition in the history of Long Island Sound. May we continue with its success for many years to come!

“Cleaning up the Sound creates jobs was our motto.”

David J. Miller, is the Executive Director, Audubon New York, and a past New York CAC Co-Chair

A New CAC Effort

By Margie Purnell

The 1994 *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP)* identified toxic substances as one of the areas of major concern for Long Island Sound, and subsequently made the following recommendations within four main action areas:

- “Continue and, where appropriate, enhance existing regulatory and pollution prevention programs to reduce toxic substance inputs to Long Island Sound;
- Further evaluate sediments where toxic contamination problems exist to determine the feasibility of remediation;
- Improve communication to the public of any legitimate health risks from consumption of seafood species from the Sound; and
- Coordinate and strengthen monitoring activities for toxic substances to improve understanding and management of toxic contamination problems.” (Long Island Sound Study CCMP, 1994)

Through the years, the sediment and dredge management focus group, a subcommittee of the Long Island Sound Study’s (LISS) Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), has wrestled with the complex issue of dredging and dredge material management especially as it relates to sediments contaminated with toxic substances, excess volumes of sediment entering rivers due to poor land use practices within the contributing watershed, and the potential introduction of these sediments into the fragile estuarine system of Long Island Sound.

In keeping with the key action areas outlined in the *CCMP*, the sediment and dredge management focus group initiated an effort to produce a white paper that was intended to address the inequities that presently exist for non-federal dredging projects. Interested stakeholders drawn from the CAC membership and representative of a broad range of interest groups worked together to craft a document that described the benefits of healthy waterfront facilities, the continuing need for maintenance dredging, the current regulatory framework, and, lastly, suggestions toward a general solution incorporating bi-state cost sharing implementation, pollution prevention, and source reduction actions.

The paper states that the federal and state agencies should undertake an ongoing Sound-wide effort to characterize harbor sediment quantities and quality. The results of such studies could then form the foundation of “an equitable and responsible dredged material management system” for Long Island Sound.

Despite the many different points of view held by the stakeholders, consensus was reached on a number of subjects; the most important conclusions are as follows:

- sedimentation is a naturally occurring process within a river system, but excess sedimentation or sediments contaminated by toxic substances due to anthropogenic activity are not;
- controlling the source (for both excess sedimentation and contamination) is more timely and cost effective than managing/mitigating it after it has reached the river or harbor;
- the regulatory agencies implement a system that strictly controls contaminants from point sources through discharge permits, but many diffuse sources like storm water runoff continue to contribute sediments and contaminants;
- downstream property owners are being impacted by activities taking place further up the watershed;
- an inequity exists as the financial responsibility for dredging (non-federal projects) falls to a particular property owner while the majority of the sediment and contaminants may have originated elsewhere and were transported downstream; and
- we (as a society) are all part of the problem, and thus we should all share in the cost of the solution.

The full CAC endorsed the sediment analysis and reduction paper, and it was sent for review to the members of the LISS Policy Committee representing the Environmental Protection Agency Regions I and II, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and New York Department of Environmental Conservation. While no changes in funding and finances have yet occurred, CAC members continue to highlight the issues the paper raised and continue to work toward implementing equitable solutions to dredged material management.

“downstream property owners are being impacted by activities taking place further up the watershed”

Margie Purnell is a Citizens Advisory Committee member representing the group, Fisher’s Island Conservancy.

Habitat Restoration: An Ongoing CAC Priority

By John Atkin

Protecting and restoring the habitat around Long Island Sound has been a priority of the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) since its inception. The CAC has helped with identifying restoration sites and assisting with public meetings on the restoration efforts. With the CAC's assistance, a dozen types of habitat have been identified by the Long Island Sound Study Habitat Restoration Initiative, with tidal wetlands (salt marshes), and migratory river corridors being two of the most prominent.

Why is there a need for restoration? In the past, dams built for energy, mills, and flood control have stopped the passage of anadromous fish, fish that migrate up rivers from the sea to breed in fresh water. Also, according to the Long Island Sound Study, "25-35% of the Sound's tidal wetlands...have been destroyed during the last century by filling, dredging, and development." Loss or damage to wetland habitats reduce the many key benefits these systems provide including: successful spawning and nesting for a wide variety of marine and bird life; removal of waterborne pathogens, heavy metals, and toxins before they enter the Sound; filtering of harmful algae, sediments, and other particulate matter that become suspended in the Sound water column; flood and erosion control; and preservation of residential property values and the appeal of recreational activities.

Fortunately, laws in both states have stopped most of the habitat loss, and now restoration is occurring. Tidal wetland restoration efforts are accomplished through removal of obstructions to tidal

flow, channel enlargement, and culvert installation. Another project tests the concept that coconut fiber can be used to help retain sediments on a "drowning" marsh. River restoration strategies include installation of fishways, so that fish can climb over a dam and spawn, and the preferred method of partial and full removal of existing dams.

The common factors to all salt marshes are tides, the periodic variation in the surface level of water. Tides are critical to plants and animals that live on the marsh as well as those in estuarine waters, providing for both nutrition and reproduction. A change in this hydrology (the properties, distribution, and effects of water on earth and in the atmosphere) can have significant detrimental effects on the composition of native plant and animal communities.

One such case is the salt marsh at Wilson Cove in Norwalk, which is threatened by a reduction in tidal flow due to a restricted tidal gut and a road crossing. Impeded tidal flushing results in lowered soil water salinity and reduced residence time of aquatic, marsh-dependent organisms. Together with excessive sedimentation caused by concentrated development in the area, the combined effect is a displacement of native plant communities by a common reed (*Phragmites australis*). This eliminates the habitat for the prey of both fishes and crabs, whose absence is followed by reduction in visits by waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds.

A different kind of problem has developed at Five Mile River in Darien where the coconut fiber is being installed. Here it is suspected that the marshes are not keeping up with accelerated sea level rise. This is corroborated by studies at Connecticut College suggesting that as sea level rises, marsh productivity decreases. In the western end of the Sound, with a tidal range of up to two meters, extensive areas of low marsh vegetation may have actually been "drowned."

Other potential habitat restoration types include beaches and dunes; cliffs and bluffs; coastal and island forests; coastal grasslands; freshwater wetlands; estuarine embayments; intertidal flats; rocky intertidal zones; shellfish reefs; and submerged aquatic vegetation restoration. You can find out more information about these efforts by visiting EPA's Long Island Sound website at: www.longislandsoundstudy.net.

"Fortunately, laws in both states have stopped most of the habitat loss, and now restoration is occurring."

John Atkin is the Vice President and Connecticut Director for the Regional Plan Association, and is the Connecticut Co-Chair for the Citizens Advisory Committee.

The Future of the CAC

By Nancy Seligson

The Long Island Sound Study (LISS) is nationally noted as a successful National Estuary Program with a strong Management Committee and an involved and active Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). During the past eight years, the CAC and the Management Committee have tackled the most obvious problems and issues concerning Long Island Sound. A second wave of focus and energy now needs to be defined and implemented for both.

During the last year, the LISS CAC has been working to determine its mission, purpose, and actions for this second wave. Beginning in December 2001, and throughout 2002, the CAC met with a professional facilitator. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an opportunity for the CAC to review its past effectiveness, to set goals, prioritize action and organize the CAC for its work over the next 3 to 5 years, and to renew CAC commitments and energy.

We had a record number of attendees at the meetings, and we accomplished much. Historically, the CAC played an important role in advising and directing the LISS in the study and analysis of the Sound. One of the major and long lasting accomplishments of the CAC is the strong language and ambitious goals of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management

Plan (CCMP) itself. CAC members spoke out loud and clear at every public hearing to ensure that the CCMP would be a document, with strong goals that would serve Long Island Sound.

The CAC also played a large part in communicating to the public the number one priority for the CCMP - nitrogen reduction targets. Through the Listen to the Sound campaigns in 1990 and 2000, CAC members continued to create a record of citizen concerns and desires for Long Island Sound.

The results of the facilitated meetings of the past year are a reorganization of CAC subcommittees and a better understanding of what the CAC needs to be an effective organization. The subcommittee changes affect structure, function, operations and work plans. There are now six subcommittees of the CAC: Membership, Communications, Living Marine Resources, Sediment/Dredge Management, Tracking and Monitoring, and Land Use/Watershed Protection. All committees have new work plans.

The CAC planning meetings made it clear that the CAC continues to need interested organizational members who are enthusiastic and willing to attend meetings to work with federal and state government agencies to restore, protect, and advocate for Long Island Sound's water quality, public access, biology, recreation, fisheries, and overall health.

The CAC Sub Committees:

- Communications
- Sediment/Dredge Management
- Land Use / Watershed Protection
- Living Marine Resources
- Membership
- Tracking and Monitoring

David Miller

On December 12, 2002 David Miller, Executive Director of New York Audubon, stepped down as the CAC New York co-chair. David Miller maintains a strong commitment to the Sound and the Sound has benefitted greatly from his 13 years of dedication. David Miller will remain a member of the CAC. Nancy Seligson, a seasoned advocate for the Sound, is David Miller's successor.



David Miller accepts EPA award for service to the CAC at the December 2002 Policy Committee Meeting. (Left to right: Robert W. Varney, Administrator, EPA New England; Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner, NYSDEC; David Miller; Jane M. Kenny, Administrator, EPA Region II; Arthur J. Rocque Jr. Commissioner, CTDEP.)

Nancy Seligson is a Town Councilwoman for the Town of Mamaroneck New York and the New York Co-Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Calendar

September 20, 2003

International Coastal
Clean Up

NY contact American
Littoral Society
www.alsnyc.org

CT Contact Save the
Sound
www.savethesound.org

General Information
www.coastalcleanup.org

September 23, 2003

CAC meeting Stamford
Government Center
Contact Edna Nolfi at
(203) 977-1541

September 25-26

Estuary Live!
www.estuarylive.org

September 27, 2003

National Estuaries Day
www.estuaries.gov

September 28, 2003

Look for Sound Health
2003 in your Sunday
newspaper

October 16, 2003

LISS Management
Committee Meeting
Contact Edna Nolfi at
(203) 977-1541

How Do I Get Involved?

The Long Island Sound Study's (LISS) Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) is a volunteer organization that provides ongoing advice to the federal, state, and local government Management Conference partners working on implementing the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the restoration and protection of Long Island Sound. The CAC is governed by its by-laws under the direction of its New York and Connecticut co-chairs.

The CAC communicates information about the LISS to the public, public officials, decision makers, and interest groups, and advises the LISS Management Committee of public reaction and comments. Membership on the CAC is open to individuals representing environmental organizations, business, industry, local governments, and other public and private organizations in Connecticut and New York with a demonstrable interest in the restoration and protection of the Sound and its ecosystems. The CAC has several subcommittees that address in more detail issues of concern to Long Island Sound: land use/watershed protection; sediment/dredge management;



CAC visits Norwalk Sewage Treatment Plant. Photo by Kimberly Zimmer.

communications; living marine resources; tracking and monitoring, and membership.

The CAC meets quarterly on the second Thursday of March, June, September, and December in New York City and Stamford, Connecticut. Meetings are open to the public. CAC membership is limited to 60 voting members, who are approved by the CAC. Members are committed to the restoration and protection of the Sound, and must abide by the CAC by laws to remain in good standing.

Are you interested in joining the CAC? Contact the Stamford Office at (203) 977-1541 or nolfi.edna@epa.gov for CAC membership application process guidance.

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