



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

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EPA Takes Action to Control Nitrogen Pollution in Long Island Sound

Stamford, CT, April 5, 2001 - Long Island Sound came one step closer to recovery today with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval of a limit on the amount of nitrogen that the Sound can safely handle. Nitrogen levels are directly linked to low levels of dissolved oxygen, a condition called hypoxia, which is the most serious water quality problem affecting the Sound.

This limit, called a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), will allow the Sound to meet water quality standards for dissolved oxygen, which is crucial for marine life to thrive. The TMDL allocates portions of the allowable level of nitrogen to pipe-in-the-water point sources, such as sewage treatment plants, and nonpoint sources, such as stormwater runoff. The TMDL, developed by the states of New York and Connecticut, builds on the 1998 agreement between

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EPA and the states to cut the amount of nitrogen pouring into the Sound by 58.5 percent by 2014.

TMDLs are required by the federal Clean Water Act for all impaired waterbodies in order to reverse the impairment. They are developed by states and approved by EPA once it determines that the TMDL will indeed allow the waterbody to achieve water quality standards. EPA has now determined that the controls identified in the Long Island Sound nitrogen TMDL will allow the Sound to meet the water quality standard for dissolved oxygen.

“This approval represents a major milestone in our joint effort to improve water quality in Long Island Sound to fully support marine life and recreation,” said Ira W. Leighton, Jr., Acting Regional Administrator, EPA New England. “I applaud the work of the Long Island Sound program for its continued dedication to this important effort.”

“The Sound is a precious resource - of vital importance environmentally and economically - and we must continue to take effective actions to restore and protect it,” William J. Muszynski, P.E., Acting Regional Administrator, EPA Region 2, said. “This nitrogen limit we are approving is key to our efforts because it guides the states as they establish permit limits for point sources of nitrogen and address nonpoint sources of nitrogen.”

Nitrogen, the primary pollutant causing hypoxia in Long Island Sound, originates from many natural and human sources. Sewage treatment plants, atmospheric deposition of automobile and stack emissions, and stormwater runoff from urban and residential areas are examples of major sources of nitrogen in Long Island Sound. Modeling and monitoring results have shown that widespread nitrogen control is necessary to return Long Island Sound to a healthy state and achieve water quality standards for dissolved oxygen.

Hypoxia affects the bottom waters of the Sound each summer. Inadequate oxygen levels render immense areas of the Sound’s bottom waters - extending at its maximum extent from New

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York City to New Haven, Connecticut and Port Jefferson, New York - unfit for many marine species. Nitrogen loading stimulates excessive algae growth throughout the Sound.

Decomposition of the organic matter produced by the algae blooms consumes oxygen from the water in the Sound.

“Connecticut has made a long-term commitment to enhancing water quality in Long Island Sound. We’ve made remarkable progress over the past decade, but the job is far from complete,” said Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr. “This TMDL will be instrumental in allowing Connecticut to meet water quality goals for Long Island Sound.”

“New York State is committed to the protection and restoration of Long Island Sound,” New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Erin M. Crotty said. “The EPA’s approval of our TMDL shows that we are making progress toward achieving our cleanup goals and preserving this important resource for future generations.”

The TMDL will be implemented in phases. Phases 1 and 2, mostly complete, involved a “freeze” on 1990 nitrogen loading levels, followed by low-cost treatment improvements at a select group of coastal sewage treatment plants. Phase 3 calls for the 58.5 percent cut in nitrogen from New York and Connecticut sources. Phase 4 further identifies nitrogen reductions from atmospheric deposition and point and nonpoint sources within upstream states. Phase 5 determines what other actions may still be necessary to meet water quality standards. The TMDL also includes a comprehensive strategy to adapt the management program to new information from monitoring data, modeling studies, and technology improvements.

For more information about the TMDL or the nitrogen reduction plan, call the EPA Long Island Sound Office at (203) 977-1541. For more information about Long Island Sound, visit the Long Island Sound Study Web site at www.epa.gov/region01/eco/lis.