



March 3, 2007

For Immediate Release

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Sound Stewardship is Focus of the 17th Annual LIS Citizens Summit

Oyster Bay, NY—Preserving coastal habitats, protecting wildlife, and ensuring there are still natural areas for the public to enjoy in the highly-developed Long Island Sound region can be achieved through effective “stewardship” collaborations, speakers told an audience at the 17th annual Long Island Sound Citizens Summit, held today at the Planting Fields Arboretum.

Case studies were presented by speakers to show how stewardship of lands can be achieved when a variety of interests work together. For example, panelists from the New York and Connecticut Audubon chapters highlighted how different groups participating in Audubon-designated “Important Bird Areas”, such as at Orient Point and federally-owned Plum Island in Southold, Long Island and at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven, are reaching consensus in creating science-based plans for conservation, and strategies to increase public involvement and access without compromising the protection of wildlife. The groups involved include municipal, state, and federal agencies, and local conservation groups.

This year’s Summit, **Sound Stewardship: Preserving Long Island Sound’s Special Places**, was sponsored by Save the Sound with support from the Long Island Sound Study. In addition to the case studies, the Summit provided an opportunity to learn how the Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative, a regional partnership initiated by the Long Island Sound Study, can complement ongoing land conservation efforts, from the perspective of local and regional land use experts.

“The Stewardship Initiative provides an opportunity for meeting conservation goals through better management and protection of stewardship areas around the Sound that are recognized for their recreational or ecological values,” said Mark Tedesco, Director of the EPA Long Island Sound Office, who provided the update on stewardship activities at the conference.

The Stewardship Initiative achieved two important milestones last year. In September, the Long Island Sound Study adopted 33 Inaugural Coastal Stewardship Areas (see www.longislandsoundstudy.net/stewardship). Also in September, Congress passed the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2006, which was signed into law by President Bush (Public Law 109-359) in October. The bill authorizes up to \$25 million per year for stewardship projects, including acquisitions of environmentally-sensitive lands from willing owners, through 2011.

"As a Member of the House Appropriations Committee, I will be fighting to ensure that funds authorized in the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act and Long Island Sound Restoration Act are included in FY2008 Appropriations bills," said Rep. Steve Israel of NY, Co-Chair of the

Long Island Sound Caucus. "Along with my Co-Chair Congressman Shays, the Long Island Sound Caucus will continue to fight to protect our region's national treasure."

"Long Island Sound is our Yellowstone," said Rep. Shays of CT. "The Long Island Sound Stewardship Act gives those most familiar with the Sound's precious and diverse resources the tools necessary to continue their conservation efforts, and applies the most effective methods available to identify, protect, and enhance sites with ecological, educational, and recreation value in Connecticut and New York."

Besides Israel and Shays, speakers at the conference included: Tim Profeta, director of the Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy, who discussed ecosystem-based management and its application for the protection and restoration of Long Island Sound; John Flicker, President of National Audubon, who talked about the importance of conserving Long Island Sound for wildlife and human recreation; and New York's Acting Secretary of State, Lorraine Cortés-Vásquez.

"The passage of the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act is an important milestone for this Estuary of National Significance," said Robin Kriesberg, Interim Director of Restoration and Stewardship at Save the Sound. "We look forward to working together to protect these critical Stewardship Areas and improve public access to the jewels of the Sound."

Save the Sound (www.savethesound.org) is dedicated to the restoration, protection and appreciation of Long Island Sound and its watersheds through advocacy, education and research. The Long Island Sound Study (www.longislandsoundstudy.net) is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the states of Connecticut and New York to analyze and correct the Sound's most pressing environmental problems.

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