LONG ISLAND SOUND STUDY
A Partnership to Restore and Protect the Sound

The Long Island Sound Office
of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Website: http://www.longislandsoundstudy.net

- N E W S R E L E A S E

Sound Health Report Highlights Differing Conditions in Long Island Sound's Three Basins

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Mark Tedesco, EPA LIS Office, (203) 977-1541

Stamford, CT, July 24, 2008— A new report on Long Island Sound by the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) details how the health of the Sound varies widely, with conditions improving from the western Sound to the eastern Sound. The report shows that while progress is being made to clean up the Sound, there are still challenges ahead to restore and protect this valuable resource.

Sound Health 2008: ***Status and Trends in the Health of Long Island Sound*** describes conditions by basin, grading water quality, contaminants in the sediment, and aquatic life in the benthos (sea floor). It also tracks trends in hypoxia (low dissolved oxygen levels), the populations of finfish and shellfish, the amount of natural habitats, and the impact of development in the watershed. The report also has a special section on climate change with local scientists discussing how warming temperatures are affecting the Sound's environment.

This Sunday and Thursday, more than 440,000 copies of **Sound Health 2008** will be distributed in Connecticut and New York as inserts in daily and weekly newspapers. An additional 40,000 copies are available for distribution to schools, aquariums, non-profit groups, and citizens upon request.

Among the major findings in the report:

- PCB concentrations in striped bass in the Sound have declined from about 2.5 parts per million in the 1980s to less than 0.5 parts per million. The populations of striped bass also have rebounded dramatically from historic lows in the 1980s.
- While emissions of chemical into the atmosphere and into the water have declined dramatically since the 1980s and contaminants in the sea floor such as mercury have declined by more than a third since the mid 20th century, toxic contaminants lodged in the

sediments of the Sound still pose a threat. According to a sediment quality index developed by the EPA, sediment quality is poor over 46 percent of the basin in the western Sound. Conditions are better in the central basin, where 74 percent of the basin has good sediment quality, and the eastern Sound, where 69 percent of the basin has good sediment quality.

- Hypoxia is a concern in the Sound, but mainly in the western Sound, where water quality is stressed by development on the shoreline and limited water mixing. Based on summer conditions from 1991 to 2007, water quality in the western Sound was rated fair 69 percent of the time. Water quality improves in the central basin, and in the eastern basin water quality was good 82 percent of the time.
- More than 40 percent of local watersheds that drain into the tributaries of the western Sound are covered with impervious surfaces such as roads, rooftops, and parking lots at levels that result in poor water quality. The condition improves in the central Sound where 8 percent of local watersheds exceed the impervious surface threshold for poor water quality, and improves further in the eastern Sound where 3 percent of local watersheds exceed the threshold.
- Between 1979 and 2002, sea surface temperatures have increased by about 1.8°F in the eastern Sound. Over the same period, species that favor warmer temperatures such as scup and blue crabs have been increasing, while species that favor colder temperatures such as winter flounder and lobster have been declining.
- Several large tidal wetland areas in Connecticut and New York are losing salt marsh grasses. These areas are turning into mudflats. Scientists are uncertain about the cause. Sea level rise may be one of the reasons.
- Eelgrass, rooted aquatic vegetation found in coastal eastern Long Island Sound, increased from 1,559 acres in 2002 to 1,905 acres in 2006. Eelgrass, an important habitat for many fish and other wildlife, was once common throughout the Sound before it was nearly wiped out because of a fungal disease and by poor water quality.

Sound Health 2008 characterizes the health of the Sound using more than 25 different indicators — specific, measurable markers that document trends in water quality, living resources, land use and development. 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 published in 2006, and is available online at www.longislandsoundstudy.net.

The LISS partners — the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and several other federal and state agencies, universities, and municipal programs — provided the data for the report.

Robert W. Varney, Regional Administrator for EPA's New England region, and Alan J. Steinberg, Regional Administrator for EPA's Region 2 office, both praised the report for informing the public about the challenges to restoring the Sound.

"Long Island Sound is such an important recreational and economic resource for the millions of people who live within a few miles of the Sound," said Varney. "The Sound Health report helps us to confirm that we have made solid progress to protect this waterbody, even as significant issues remain that require our attention to keep improving the ecological condition of the Sound."

"The better we understand the challenges facing Long Island Sound, the more effective we can be in restoring and protecting it," said Steinberg. "The Long Island Sound plays a unique role in the social, environmental, and economic quality of life for millions of Americans."

CT DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy said: "As this report documents, Connecticut has made a strong commitment to the health of Long Island Sound. We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in modern sewage treatment plants to reduce pollution and nitrogen discharges that cause hypoxia. We have invested funds to protect habitat, wildlife, aquatic life and sensitive tidal areas and vegetation. We have developed programs to better manage economic growth along the Sound in order to safeguard natural resources. Finally, we are also moving aggressively to address additional issues such as reducing nonpoint source pollution and the impact of climate change on the Sound. It's great to see the progress we and all our partners in the LISS have made so wonderfully displayed in this document as an encouragement for people to get out and enjoy the Sound!"

NYSDEC Commissioner Pete Grannis said: "It is encouraging that progress in some key indicators for the health of the Long Island Sound is being made, but much more still must be done. New York State is committed to restoring the Sound's natural resources and with the support from partnering agencies and communities along the Sound, we will continue to see positive changes in critical habitats, water quality and marine life."

To receive a free copy of **Sound Health 2008**, call the EPA Long Island Sound Office at (203) 977-1541 in Connecticut or (631) 632-9216 in New York or download it at www.longislandsoundstudy.net.

-30-