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NEWS RELEASE

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Long Island Sound Study Report Highlights Improvements in the Health of Long Island Sound

Stamford, CT, March 5, 2001 - A new Long Island Sound Study (LISS) report issued today documents improvements in the Sound's water quality and in efforts to restore habitat.

Sound Health 2001: Status and Trends in the Health of Long Island Sound highlights the progress made in a number of areas:

- Upgrades to sewage treatment plants have decreased their discharge of nitrogen to the Sound by 19 percent since 1990.
- Severity of hypoxia (lack of oxygen) has decreased in the Sound since the late 1980s.
- Levels of copper, nickel, lead, and zinc as well as many organic compounds have declined in the monitored harbors of the Sound.
- Toxic industrial chemical releases in the Sound's watershed have declined 83.5

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percent between 1988 and 1998.

- In the past two years, 33.4 river miles have been opened to anadromous fish and 593 acres of coastal habitat have been restored.

Sound Health 2001 characterizes the health of Long Island Sound using 19 different indicators of environmental health. Environmental indicators are specific, measurable markers that help assess the condition of the environment and how it changes over time. Both sharp changes and general trends in the values of those markers can indicate improved or worsening environmental health.

The 16-page report documents trends in water quality conditions, living resources, and land use and development from available data. The LISS partners - the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and several other federal and state agencies, universities, and municipal programs - provided the data for the report. A more comprehensive report featuring some 40 indicators will appear on the LISS website later this year.

“It’s important to assess, on an ongoing basis, just how effective our efforts to restore Long Island Sound have been,” said Mark Tedesco, Director of the EPA Long Island Sound Office. “Is the water cleaner and safer to swim in? Are contaminant concentrations decreasing? Are habitats being protected and restored? Are the fish and shellfish more abundant and safe to eat?” Tedesco added, “This report shows that we’re making improvements in water quality and habitat restoration, but there’s still more work to be done.”

Although **Sound Health 2001** shows marked improvement in the water quality of the Sound, other trends indicate additional work is needed.

- A die-off of lobsters over the last two years, most severely in the western Sound,

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has greatly reduced the harvest.

- Since 1997, two parasitic diseases, MSX and Dermo, have decimated the oyster industry.
- Bluefish, winter flounder, and tautog stocks still remain far below the long-term average and have not yet responded to more stringent management measures that were recently implemented.
- Colonial bird populations, such as the piping plover and least tern, are still threatened by human intrusion into nesting areas, loss of habitat, and predators.

“Long Island Sound is a vital resource cherished by generations for its scenic shorelines and recreational and commercial opportunities,” New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner John P. Cahill said. “We are pleased with the progress that has been made in restoring the Sound, and will continue to work with neighboring states and the federal government to implement actions that will improve water quality and protect habitat in the Sound.”

“By providing a snapshot of current conditions and trends, **Sound Health 2001** helps to assess the effectiveness of efforts and hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in the Sound to deal with issues such as nitrogen pollution, sediment contamination, habitat degradation and loss, and the health and abundance of living resources,” said Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr.

More than 450,000 copies of the report will be published and inserted into coastal Sunday newspapers in Connecticut and New York. For more information or to receive a free copy of **Sound Health 2001**, call the EPA Long Island Sound Office at (203) 977-1541. For more

information about Long Island Sound, visit the Long Island Sound Study website at www.epa.gov/region01/eco/lis.

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