



**Long Island Sound Study
Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting Notes
Pleasure Beach and Housatonic Community College
Thursday, June 7, 2018**



Field trip to Pleasure Beach, Bridgeport: 9:30am-12:00pm

Welcome and History:

Holly Drinkuth, Connecticut CAC Co-Chair, welcomed CAC members and introduced the morning's events as the group awaited arrival of the water taxi to Pleasure Beach. Steve Singh, City of Bridgeport Parks and Recreation met the group and provided an overview of the park's history.

Stewardship and Habitat Importance:

Harry Yamalis, CTDEEP and LISS Habitat Restoration & Stewardship Work Group co-chair, provided background on the habitat importance of Pleasure Beach, Long Beach and Great Meadows Salt Marsh in the towns of Stratford and Bridgeport. A detailed report of these natural areas is included at the end of the meeting summary.

Habitat/Stewardship Work Group Progress Updates:

Harry Yamalis and Dave Kozak, CT DEEP provided project and acquisition updates for Connecticut and shared a report on New York progress prepared by Vicky O'Neill, NYDEC.

Project highlights from 2017 include completion of the Beaver Lake Fish Passage project in Mill Neck NY, restoration of 100 acres of coastal forest through removal of mile-a-minute vine at Pelham Bay Park, Bronx NY and acquisition of second parcel expanding in Westbrook & Clinton, CT that expanded the Sciongay property to 161 acres, including a section of the Menunketesuck River and a dam with recently installed fishway and eelpass, which reconnects 4.4 stream miles to LIS. A detailed report of projects and acquisitions is included at the end of the meeting summary.

LISS Habitat Restoration Manual - 2 more chapters completed (still draft, but final versions expected soon). Both chapters will be added to the LISS website when the final version are ready.

LISS Habitat Restoration & Stewardship Work Group Meetings

The LISS HRSWG meets in person on a quarterly basis, alternating meetings in CT and NY. Since the October 2015 release of the LISS CCMP, the LISS HRSWG has met in person 9 times. The last meeting took place on May 1 in Westbrook, CT at the Stewart B. McKinney Refuge. 27 members attended that meeting. The next meeting will take place on June 20 at the Edith G. Reed Nature Park & Wildlife Sanctuary in Rye, NY.

Piping Plover Habitat/Wildlife Guards: Ewa Holland and Shelby Casas, Audubon Connecticut shorebird technicians provided information on efforts at Pleasure Beach to monitor and steward habitat for beach-nesting birds and shared viewing scopes for CAC members to observe area wildlife. Ewa provided information on Audubon Connecticut's collaboration with the City of Bridgeport to hire seasonal "Wildlife Guards" - high school students responsible for monitoring, stewardship and raising public awareness about how to share the beach with sensitive species like piping plover and least tern. More information about the Wildlife Guard program is available [here](#).

Don't Trash LIS Sound Campaign Update and Group Selfie:

Robert Burg, NEIWPC provided information about the Public Involvement and Education work group social media campaign slated for later this summer. Once again, the topic will be Plastics and Long Island Sound, with an emphasis on encouraging people to drop the single-use plastic habit. Robert asked for feedback on two color stickers that will be made available for distribution through CAC member groups. The intent of the campaign is to ask LIS area citizens to "take the pledge to protect LIS Wildlife" by curtailing single-use plastics - such as straws, water bottles and bags, apply the stickers to water bottles or reusable bags (among other things) and share a photograph of their sticker on social media to spread the word. CAC members with the co-chairs raising water bottles and attached stickers posed for the first campaign photo on Pleasure Beach (images included at the end of the meeting summary).

CAC members departed Pleasure Beach via water taxi at approximately 11:45 and drove to Housatonic Community College for lunch and remaining meeting business.

Housatonic Community College 12:00-2:30pm

Policy Committee Update & Washington Visit:

Adrienne Esposito, CCE and Tracy Brown, STS provided a committee update during lunch.

- An advocacy trip to Washington D.C. is planned for October 11th, when the senate and house will be in session. Agenda items will include Plum Island, the infrastructure bill (state revolving loan fund), and the LIS restoration and stewardship act. Holly, with assistance from Dave Miller, will put together a four-page informational piece highlighting successes and ongoing stewardship and management needs.
- Also discussed was reviving and planning a spring meeting of CT and NY state representatives to talk about collaborative issues for the Sound.
- Nancy Seligson is taking the lead to schedule a press event with Nita Lowey, from the 17th district in NY, this summer.
- Nancy and Holly are working with TNC and CAC chairs of the Peconic Estuary Program and South Shore Estuary Reserve to draft a sign on letter encouraging the NY governor to refill the NY DEC Seagrass Coordinator position. The letter will be circulated to LISS CAC members after it is approved by the other estuary programs.
- Nancy and Holly submitted thank you letters to delegates for LIS funding success.

New Business and Member Updates:

Nancy acknowledged the request from Denise Savageau for representation to the CAC from the Connecticut Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (she has retired from the town of Greenwich). Denise explained the background and purview of Conservation Districts and activities in Connecticut. Nancy recommended to the CAC that Denise be a CAC member representing the CASWCD: Dave Miller moved, Carl Harvey seconded, all voted in favor. Nancy noted the new membership will be effective as of the September CAC meeting to satisfy the 45-day notice requirement.

- Dave Hudson, from the Norwalk Aquarium, reported that the Aquarium is seeking a new CEO.
- Dave Miller announced that it is grant season for clean water in New York state, which means opportunities for water projects. Deadline is July 27; it's a great time to apply.
- Robert Burg requested estimates from CAC members about the numbers of *Don't Trash LIS* stickers they could distribute for the upcoming social media campaign. Contact Robert for more information.
- Adrienne talked about the Suffolk and Nassau county efforts to deal with plastic bags legislatively. Westchester is proposing a fee bill and Greenwich, CT recently passed legislation. Challenges remain, although a before and after survey in Suffolk county showed a dramatic increase in people bringing their own bags shopping, or opting not to use a bag.
- Eric Swenson, Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee, reported that there is currently a proposed bill regulating fertilizer use on LI; the fertilizer industry is opposed to this.
- Robert Burg talked about the current effort in Niantic Bay, canvassing local neighborhoods about their fertilizer practices and opportunities to participate in a pledge to practice sound fertilizer use for water quality. More information is available at <http://healthylawnshealthyriver.net>

- Holly mentioned The Nature Conservancy's Long Island Sound Clean Coastal Waters website to raise public awareness of nitrogen pollution and provide resources communities can use to plan and implement reduction can be visited at: www.LISwaterquality.org
- Phil Brencher, The Sound School, noted that plastic bags use waste oil from the processing plants and wondered how this material will be used if plastic bags go away. The point was made that the use of plastics is important in our society, however single use plastics have a big impact on oceans and marine life. It is also prudent to reduce total dependence on fossil fuels in general, which may contribute to reduced waste oil used in plastic bag production.

Connecticut Migratory Fish Passage Progress *Steve Gephard, CTDEEP*

Steve is a fisheries biologist working on migratory fish restoration with the CT DEEP. His presentation looked at historic fish migrations up to today, with the particular impacts to salmon, lamprey and herring. As our civil engineering skills increased and dams were built to provide power for industry, significant parts of the state waterways became blocked to migratory fish species. While some of these issues cannot be overcome (water reservoirs, floor control dams), fishways can effectively restore fish runs. Most fishways can't provide full passage for all species; they target only the strongest swimming fish. Dam removal is opportunistic. There are about 65 fishways in Connecticut, and three of these have been removed when dams were also subsequently removed. More than 250 miles of streams and 400 acres have been restored since the program began, with over 100 river miles connected. The cost of this has been over \$16 million dollars, with some projects as low as \$100 and others as high as \$5 million (contamination issues). Progress is still being made. The results are more than just fish passage: entire ecosystems are restored, including crayfish, otters, birds, etc. Questions and discussion covered shad restoration, the status of brown trout, and whether there is hope for the Atlantic salmon.

Membership Update and CAC Priorities, LISS CAC Member Survey. *Nancy Seligson, Co-Chair, NY, Holly Drinkuth, Co-Chair, CT.*

The Co-Chairs reached out CAC members to request participation in the member survey (four additional responses) and ask lapsed members to confirm their interest in continued participation. Kathleen Burns is the new representative from the CT Marine Trades Association. Erin McGrath is the new representative for Audubon New York. Audubon Connecticut is proposing a new representative. Several member organizations stated they are no longer able to participate regularly, but would like to remain informed about the CAC's efforts.

Holly presented the highest ranked CAC objectives based on results of the member survey and discussion at the April CAC meeting. Members were given six dots each and asked to indicate which priority objectives the CAC should focus on in the next 12-18 months.

Top ranked objectives include: Raise public awareness of LIS (21 votes); Engage more local governments (15); Diversify representation (14), Support public behavior and management changes (13), and Align CAC objectives with CCMP goals (12).

Members were asked to work in groups of 3-4 to choose one of the priority objectives; discuss and record one or two actions steps the CAC should take in the next 1-6 months to help accomplish the objective.

Groups reported on their discussions including ideas to inventory and update municipal government contacts, incentivize inter-municipal partnerships in LISSFF grants and develop targeted messaging for municipalities.

Next steps: Holly and Nancy will review and share results of group discussions and, if needed follow up short online polls to clarify priorities and activities.

A list of recommended actions will be drafted for review at the September 13, 2018 CAC meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm

Additional Information

Pleasure Beach History and Stewardship Importance:

Harry Yamalis, CT DEEP and Vicky O'Neill, NYDEC

Pleasure Beach is included in CTDEEP's habitat restoration database as a potential restoration site, but Harry did not think the site has been evaluated to determine the scope of work or calculate a budget. City of Bridgeport has a Pleasure Beach Master Plan but there are no immediate plans for habitat restoration work.

([http://www.bridgeportct.gov/filestorage/341650/341652/342204/Pleasure Beach Master Plan_06-27-2012 WEB.pdf](http://www.bridgeportct.gov/filestorage/341650/341652/342204/Pleasure_Beach_Master_Plan_06-27-2012_WEB.pdf))

Long Beach West(LBW) - Once a thriving summer beach community, with about 50 privately-owned summer cottages at its peak (barrier beach property is owned by Town of Stratford). With all the buildings and roads, the dune habitat was effectively converted to a small town. Impacts ranged from dune habitat loss, to smaller habitat impacts to beaches, dunes, tidal marshes, and estuarine embayment, to contamination from household chemicals and even PCBs.

The bridge connecting this community to the mainland in Bridgeport burned down in 1996. No longer accessible by emergency services, the area was closed off and the cottages were subsequently condemned by the Town. Cottages became frequented by squatters and subject to vandalism.

After years of planning and negotiating, and with over \$900,000 from the USFWS, the restoration work finally began in March 2010, when a temporary access road was built so that construction workers and vehicles could access the site from the Stratford side of the barrier beach. The cottages were inspected, contaminants were removed (household hazardous waste products), and the recyclable material was collected. One of the cottages had been painted with a coat of PCB-based paint, significantly increasing the time and cost to complete the cottage removal.

The cottages were demolished and removed after the plover nesting season ended, starting in the fall of 2010. Upon completion of the cottage removal, the sand was re-graded to minimize erosion within the project site, as well as underneath the footprint of the access road after it was removed.

As a part of the large-scale dune restoration project, the abandoned residential docks, floats, other associated structures and debris were also removed. Areas under the footprint of these structures were restored by the removal of the structures. Next steps included mapping the existing invasive weed patches, developing a plan for weed control/removal, and planting native dune vegetation to restore additional habitat and to minimize the potential for erosion.

With more than \$1.1million in funding, 17.7 acres of barrier beach and dune habitat were restored (+0.65 TW+EE). Partners and funding sources included the Town of Stratford, Trust for Public Land, USFWS-Coastal Program Office (RI), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

of 2009; CTDEEP-Coastal Management & License Plate program; LISS/NFWF LIS Futures Fund Program; Audubon, Save the Sound, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Soundkeeper, and many more.

LBW, phase 2 - invasive species removal: During the time that this beach community was active, residents had brought in ornamental plants to spruce up their yards. Some of these plants were invasive, and had been growing and expanding unchecked at least since the bridge had burned down. The disturbance to the dune from removal of the abandoned cottages just 2 years earlier had created large areas of bare sand - prime habitat for further expansion of invasive species. The Town of Stratford applied for and was awarded a grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Long Island Sound Futures Fund to design and implement a plan for invasive species removal, and planting native dune vegetation.

Targeted invasive species included trees such as Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*); shrubs such as Winged Euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*), Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*), Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), Asiatic Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), and Border Privet (*Ligustrum obtusifolium*); and herbaceous species like Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). Control was achieved primarily through application of chemical herbicides best suited to each individual species of weed. Work to restore 18 additional acres of barrier beach and dune habitat was completed in Sept 2014, with a much smaller price tag, \$65,000.

Great Meadows marsh complex – Hundreds of acres in size; was once much larger than it is today, but marsh was diked and drained; large areas filled and developed. Ownership includes USFWS McKinney Refuge, State of CT, Sikorsky Airport, City of Bridgeport, Town of Stratford, Stratford Land Development Corp.

Tidal flow restoration to some areas occurred when tide gates (or the dike itself) breached due to both age and storms. Additional restoration and enhancement activities have been going on here on a piecemeal basis since 1970s. Over 100 acres restored since 1998, and over 250 acres going back to 1980s due to intervention by various groups such as CTDEEP, USFWS, NOAA-Restoration Center, Town of Stratford, and others. There are still more marsh parcels left to restore as well, some in planning stages and others whose property owners are not yet interested in cooperating.

Habitat/Stewardship Work Group Project and Acquisition Progress:

2017-Beaver Lake Fish Passage-Mill Neck, NY

Beaver Lake was once an estuary open to Long Island Sound, but as the area developed, a dam was constructed to hold back water in the estuary and create what we now know as Beaver Lake. The dam was enough of a barrier that during most flows, migratory fish were unable to get over the dam. There is no freshwater for spawning below the dam. Initial efforts to restore fish passage at the dam began in 2003, with the NYSDEC applying for and receiving Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act funds for fish passage at the site. Unfortunately, the project was

never implemented. The Nature Conservancy-CT, using the NYSDEC Bond Act funds as match, secured a 2013 NFWF Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant for engineered plans and permitting. They received a second LISFF grant in 2015 for implementation. Additional support for the project was secured through Friends of the Bay and a grant secured through USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, and private donors. The fish passage was constructed in the summer of 2017. Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, Hofstra University, and NYSDEC stocked alewife into the pond in 2018 and monitored the passage via video camera. The camera captured images of alewife swimming up the ladder and into the pond for the first time in over 100 years. The fish passage opens 1.5 miles of stream corridor and 110 acres of wetlands to migratory fish.

2015-Caumsett State Park Preserve Coastal Grasslands Restoration Project-Lloyd Neck, NY
LISFF grant 2011. 25 acres of grassland restored through project lead NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, & Historic Preservation.

2015, 2016, & 2018 Sunken Meadow Salt Marsh Restoration-Kings Park, NY

Save the Sound/CT Fund for the Environment has completed three tidal wetland restoration projects under their DOI/NFWF Hurricane Sandy grant. The 2015 project resulted in 1 acre restored, 2016 resulted in 1 acre restored, and 2018 is currently restoring 2 acres.

2017-Tackling Mile-a-Minute Invasive Plant at Pelham Bay Park-Bronx, NY

NYC Parks restored 100 acres of coastal forest in Pelham Bay Park. This was a 2014 LISFF grant. NYC Parks exceeded their goal of 60 acres.

NY and CT Acquisition Sites

New York

2015-Gordon Aronson Acquisition, 1 acre, \$450,000 purchased with LISS funding, Addition to Stony Brook Harbor State Tidal Wetland Unit in the Village of Nissequoque

2015-Dyke Rd Acquisition, 1.2 acre, \$708,500 purchased with LISS funding, addition to Conscience Bay State Tidal Wetland Unit in Setauket

2018 (*pending*)-Besunder Property Acquisition, 7 acres, \$784,000 total (\$685,000 purchased with LISS funding; \$99,000 EPF), addition to Conscience Bay State Tidal Wetland Unit in Setauket

Connecticut

2015 - The Preserve, Old Saybrook, CT, 998.8 acres of mostly coastal forest habitat with streams and wetlands, \$8.09million. Ownership is shared/divided up between State of CT, and Towns of Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Essex.

2017 - Sciongay property acquisition, part 2 - purchase of additional property (6 acres) from Sciongay family in Westbrook & Clinton, CT (first purchase was 155ac in 2013). Property includes a section of the Menunketesuck River and a dam with recently installed fishway and eelpass, which reconnects 4.4 stream miles to LIS.

2018 (*pending*) - Quinnipiac River Preserve - a new 26-acre parcel will be added to the Q-River Preserve when The New Haven Land Trust completes its purchase of this property, which contains tidal marsh habitat and ~1500 feet of frontage on the Q-River & Little River. Preserve will nearly double in size after this purchase, funded by the ACOE/Audubon-CT In Lieu Fee program.

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One of the stickers that will be made available in the upcoming *Plastics and Long Island Sound* social media campaign, with an emphasis on encouraging people to drop the single-use plastic habit.



CAC members gather for a photo on Pleasure Beach