SoundMatters

NEWS FROM THE LONG ISLAND SOUND STUDY

Fall 2023

The Long Island Sound Study regularly issues reports and plans that show how federal funds are used to support the program and projects to restore the Sound. This issue of *Sound Matters* highlights three recently added documents to the LISS website that show the work being done, all performed under the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

LISS NEWS

EPA Work Plan Highlights How 2023 Budget Funds 2024 Projects for Long Island Sound

Sarah Crosby, a marine scientist at The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk and LaTina Steele, a marine scientist at Sacred Heart University, collect sedment cores to assess biomass for a project researching the impact of climate change on salt marshes at the Oyster River research site in Milford, CT. The project was funded in 2022 as part of the Long Island Sound Research Grant Program. The grant program is receiving funding in this year's work plan to continue to fund projects. *Photo courtesy of Sarah Crosby*

The Long Island Sound Study's budget has grown from $4.5 million in 2015 to $62.8 million in 2023, with the total number of projects increasing from 38 to 107. One of the best ways to find out who is doing what is by reading the annual EPA Long Island Sound Study work plan, which the EPA Long Island Sound Office submits to EPA every summer. The 2023 work plan was posted on the LISS website in August, and like every work plan, it provides a brief description of projects that are being funded in the upcoming fiscal year, which begins the first of October, and ends the last day of September in the following year. You can see every work plan submitted to EPA since 2010 in the LISS media center.

Some highlights of the new work plan are:

- $12.65 million to the Natiional Fish and Wildlife Foundation to fund the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant program. Since 2005, the LISFF has invested over $42 million in 570 projects for regional and local projects that (with a grantee funding match) have reconnected 115 river miles for fish passage, restored 842 acres of criti-

cal fish and wildlife habitat, treated 206 million gallons of pollution, and educated and engaged over 4.2 million people in protection and restoration of the Sound.

- $3 million to the Connecticut and New York Sea Grant Programs to fund the Long Island Sound Research Grant Program. Since 2001, LISS has funded over 60 projects for research that help resource managers in making make decisions on restoration projects for the Sound.
- $3 million to New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to support programs that provide grant assistance to Long Island homeowners to replace outdated septic tanks and cesspools with modern nitrogen-reducing septic systems.
- $2.75 million to Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to help fund projects to restore habitats along the shoreline, restore fish passage in rivers and streams, and to create resilient coastlines through living shoreline projects.
- $300,000 to USGS to continue participating in a new coastal acidification monitoring network with LISS partners CT DEEP, University of Connecticut, and Interstate Environmental Commission.
- $262,000 to CT Sea Grant for a new soundwide program to provide opportunities for schools to learn about the Sound, to learn about research being conducted on the Sound, and to develop skills to generate the next generation of environmental stewards.
- $250,000 to NYSDEC to develop a Community Based Social Marketing campaign to reduce fertilizer on Long Island, for the purpose of reducing nutrient discharges into the Sound.

LISS Progress in 2020-2021 Higlighted in "Returning the Urban Sea to Abundance"

Every two years Congress requires the Long Island Sound Study to produce a biennial report that summarizes the progress made through federal investments to restore the Sound. Last year, LISS compiled a report describing 2020-2021 efforts, which was submitted to Congress this

A diver conducting resarch in the Sound for the Long Island Sound seafloor mapping project. The image was used for the cover of the LISS 2020-2021 report to Congress. *Photo from LISMaRC Science Team*

year after being approved by EPA and the Office of Management and Budget. *Returning the Urban Sea (2020-2021): a two year review of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* is now available on the LISS website in the media center. Charts and tables detail how funds were allocated during the 2020-2021 period, what were the priority actions, and what was the progress made in achieving ecoystem targets. The report also highlights some of the projects, including feature articles on creating a living shorelline at the Hepburn Preserve in Old Saybrook, CT creating a green infrastructure schoolyard in Elmhurst, Queens, and the use of scientific models to provide resource managers with information to help reduce nutrient pollution into the Sound.

Year in Review Issue Features Accomplishments in 2022

Restoration of a coastal forest at Soundview Park in the Bronx in 2022 was highlighted in the Future Fund map in the *Sound Update Year in Review*. *Photo courtesy of the Bronx is Blooming*

In addition to the Congressional report, LISS provides subscribers to its *Sound Update* newsletter an issue highlighting annual restoration progress. The print newsletter includes a two-page map of the projects supported by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant program. The 2022 year in review issue was posted on the website in June, and includes stories on the expansion of the Sound Stewards educational program into New York City, the restoration of the Great Meadows Marsh in Connecticut, and the ongoing work to protect and restore eelgrass populations in the Sound. It's available in the newsletter section of the media center.

NOAA Website Highlights Oyster Disease Research Funded by the Long Island Sound

Study

Scientists count and measure oysters at Fence Creek in Madison, Connecticut. *Photo by Kristen Jabonoski/NOAA Fisheries*

Expanding natural oyster populations can benefit people and the environment. However, scientists do not know how unmanaged oyster populations affect the spread of oyster disease in Long Island Sound. To gain a better understanding, the Long Island Sound Study Management Committee, as detailed in its 2022 work plan, provided $1.27 million to the NOAA Milford Lab to collect baseline data for an assessment of disease dynamics of natural and restored oyster beds in Long Island Sound. Working with local partners, NOAA is taking a comprehensive look at oyster population health in natural and restored oyster populations.

NOAA is assessing the health of oysters at four sites monthly over multiple years. Two sites are in Connecticut, one at Ash Creek in Fairfield, and the other at Fence Creek in Madison. The other two sites are on the north shore of Long Island at Cold Spring Harbor and Huntington Harbor.

To learn more about the project, which is being led by Meghana P. Parikh, a veterinarian focused on animal production health, and Katie McFarland, a shellfish biologist, visit the NOAA website. Also, check out a blog post from Mariah Kachmar, a shellfish health and disease technician at the NOAA Milford Lab, who is on the project research team.

Long Islanders Plant Sustainably with Support of the Garden Rewards Program

LONG ISLAND
GARDEN REWARDS
PROGRAM

The **Long Island Garden Rewards Program** is off to a good start. As of Oct. 2, a total of 195 Long Island residents, including 80 residents in the Long Island Sound watershed, received up to $500 this summer to off-

set the expense of installing native plants, rain gardens, and rain barrels in their yards. The commitment from these homeowners benefits all Long Islanders by helping to reduce stormwater runoff, which is one of the leading causes of nitrogen pollution in local waterways. The program is expected to continue next year. The program is sponsored by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Long Island Regional Planning Council, and NEIWPCC, and includes funding support from the Long Island Sound Study. See article in the LISS media center for more information.

SOUND BYTES (LONG ISLAND SOUND STUDY NEWS BRIEFS)

Dana Dam being demolished in Wilton, CT. The dam removal will enable migratory fish to reconnect with 10 miles of upstream habitat. *Photo from Save the Sound*

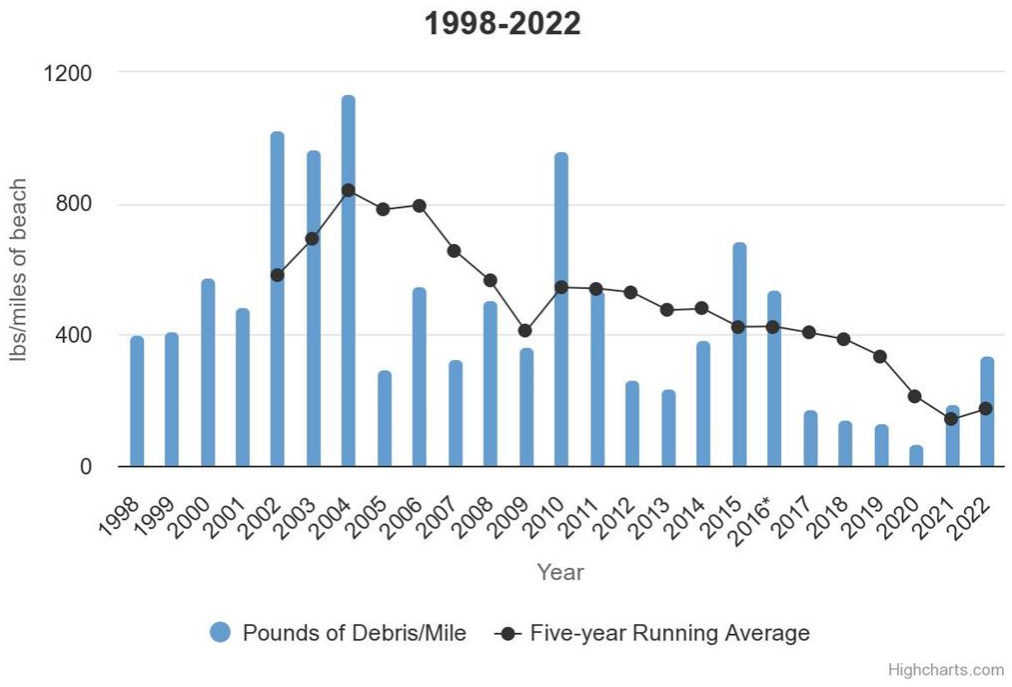
- On Sept. 11, the Dana Dam (or Strong Pond Dam) was demolished on the Norwalk River in Wilton CT, resulting in the restoration of 10 miles of fish passage for alewife, sea lamprey, and other migratory fish. The Long Island Sound Study provided more than $2.5 million for the project, including most recently with support from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. A fact sheet on the LISS website provides more information.
- Restore America's Estuaries announced on Sept. 27 that it is requesting applications for a new grant program, the **Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund**. Information on the program, which is intended to provide assistance for environmental projects in underserved and overburdened communities, and the request for applications, is available on the RAE website. The program is being funded by LISS with support from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- On Sept. 14, the Citizens Advisory Committee and the Science and Technical Advisory Committee of the Long Island Sound Study held their first joint meeting since 2015. They met at the new Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center in Stamford as well as virtually in a hybrid format. The chief topic on the agenda was a discussion of LISS's effort in fiscal year 2024 to revise the Comprehensive

Conservation and Management Plan. More information about the revision will appear in future issues of *Sound Matters*.

- In September, extension professional staff from the Connecticut and New York Sea Grant Programs held **a Steps to Resilience** webinar for Long Island Sound communities. The webinar is the first in a series of planned climate resilience trainings and workshops for the region. The programs are supported through the Long Island Sound Study Sustainable and Resilient Communities initative. Videos of the webinar are in the LISS media center.

FOCUS ON LISS INDICATORS

Marine Debris



(Chart/Long Island Sound Study Ecosystem Target and Supporting Indicators presentation)

The Long Island Sound Study Ecosystem Targets and Supporting Indicators microsite tracks indicators that measure the health of the Sound and whether the Study is meeting management targets to help achieve restoration goals. In each issue of Sound Matters we highlight the latest trends in one of the indicators or targets.

Every fall volunteers on both sides of Long Island Sound participate in beach and coastal park cleanups as part of the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup events. The overall trend has been a decline in trash collected by volunteers. The number of pounds of debris collected per mile at these events based on a five-year moving average (2016-2022) is 174 pounds/mile, a 63 percent decrease from the baseline. The data collection for this fall's cleanups won't be available for another few months.

This year, LISS has a new supporting indicator for the Marine Debis ecosystem target that highlights different categories of trash that are collected. For example New York and Connecticut have experienced a 96 and 88 percent reduction in plastic bags collected per mile.

Visit the Ecoystem Targets and Supporting Indicators microsite for more information on the Marine Debris ecoystem target and the Marine Debris by Category supporting indicator.

SOUND FACT

What's the Top Trash Item around the Sound?

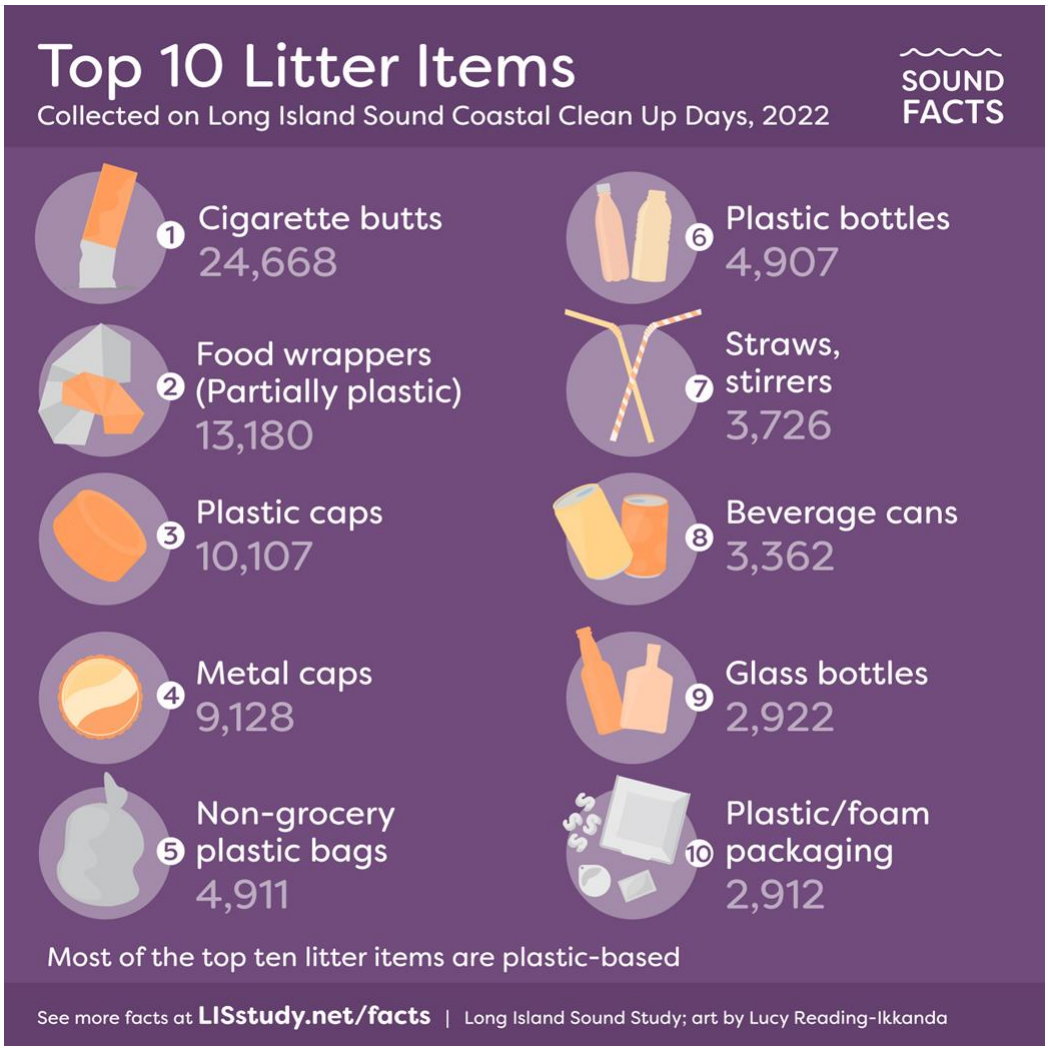


Illustration by Lucy Reading-Ikkanda for the Long Island Sound Study

It's cigarette butts.

As part of the annual #DontTrashLISound summer campaign, the Long Island Sound Study creates a Sound Facts social media post showing the top 10 litter items collected in both states by volunteers at Long Island Sound beaches and parks. Since 2015, cigarette butts have topped the list. Non-grocery plastic bags are also on the list, while plastic grocery bags, which are banned in New York and Connecticut, are not on it. Straws and stirrers are on the list, despite laws and campaigns to limit their use.

The cleanups around Long Island Sound are coordinated by the American Littoral Society in New York and Save the Sound in Connecticut.

Visit the LISS media center to see all of the Sound Facts.

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