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Winter 2024-2025

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On Monday (Dec. 9), the Long Island Sound Study and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced grant awards for 31 projects totaling \$12 million for the 2024 round of the Long Island Sound Futures Fund. The Long Island Sound Futures Fund supports projects in local communities that aim to protect and restore Long Island Sound. It unites federal and state agencies, foundations, and corporations to achieve high-priority conservation objectives. Funded activities demonstrate a real, on-the-ground commitment to securing a healthy future for Long Island Sound. Some of this year's projects include:

- A coordinated inventory of coastal crossings across **eight community organizations** and agencies in Connecticut to evaluate and prioritize fish passage.
- An educational training program for Bronx communities to steward trails in Pelham Bay Park that will engage **155 community members**.
- A multi-state project to implement a perennial Clover Living Mulch System at fifteen farms that will prevent **1,020 pounds of nitrogen** from entering the Sound.

Learn more about the Futures Fund [in this press release](#).

## 2024 Futures Fund Grant Slate



Descriptions of all 31 grants totaling \$12 million awarded in 2024 are also available [in a fact sheet](#) on the LISS website. *Photo courtesy of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.*

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## READ ABOUT PAST FUTURES FUND PROJECTS

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### Buffers in Bridgeport Are Connecting Communities to the Environment



A natural buffer was planted next to the Boys and Girls Club in Bridgeport, CT. *Photo by Maya Ray for the Long Island Sound Study.*

Bridgeport, the most populous city in the state of Connecticut, boasts 24 miles of Long Island Sound waterfront. However, extensive urban development has encroached on its natural wetlands and intensified stormwater runoff, leading to local flooding during heavy rainfall and storm surges. To address this, permanent vegetative buffers are being planted along the city's waterways to prevent erosion, reduce flooding, and improve water quality. The project is funded by a \$236,000 Futures Fund grant to Aspetuck Land Trust. Read more in this [Sound Spotlight](#).

## Building Ladders to Conservation Careers



WildLife Guards use their binoculars to look for birds on Long Beach. *Photo by Maya Ray for the Long Island Sound Study.*

With support from a Futures Fund grant of \$249,989, Audubon Connecticut is spending summers encouraging young adults from schools in underserved areas to explore conservation careers. Through partnerships with local public school districts, students are employed as WildLife Guards, Salt Marsh Stewards, and college-level crew leaders. The program has been running yearly since 2016. Read more about

Audubon's Coastal Stewardship and Youth Conservation Training Program in this [Sound Spotlight](#).

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### STAFF HIGHLIGHT

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## Long Island Sound Futures Fund Welcomes New Face to Director Role



*Photo courtesy of Carrie Clingan/NFWF.*

In May, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation welcomed Carrie Clingan to the role of program director of the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, replacing long-time director Lynn Dwyer. Appointed Program Director of Northeast Watersheds with NFWF, an area that includes the Sound region, Clingan brings to the Futures Fund over a decade of experience in grantmaking and a passion for engaging communities in conservation.

Clingan, a native of New York, earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking from the Rochester Institute of Technology. In undergrad, Clingan minored in American politics which sparked an interest that led her to a master's degree in public policy from the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. However, the jump from fine arts to politics wasn't unexpected.

"I think I've always been interested in engagement, talking to people, getting to know why people do the things that they do and what policies can help them," said Clingan. "I was just really interested in how people think about their lives and how their lives can be made better and safer through policymaking."

Read more about Clingan in this [Sound Spotlight](#).

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## **LONG ISLAND SOUND COMMUNITY IMPACT FUND**

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### **What is LISCIF?**

The Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund (LISCIF), launched in partnership with Restore America's Estuaries, EPA, and the Long Island Sound Study, provides grants to help underserved communities address environmental and health risks. Funded by the EPA through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, LISCIF supports Justice40 goals by dedicating 40 percent of investments to disadvantaged areas. The program offers technical assistance and capacity-building support, aiming to reduce pollution impacts and improve community access to Long Island Sound.





The first round of subawardees was announced in May 2024. An RFA opened in September 2024 [for the second round of program funding](#). Read more on two LISCIF-funded projects below.

LISCIF Grant Announcement Press Conference, Concrete Plant Park, Bronx, NY. *Photo courtesy of Restore America's Estuaries.*

## Creating a Resilient Bronx River Community



The Bronx River runs through the restored Concrete Plant Park in the Bronx. *Photo by Maya Ray for the Long Island Sound Study.*

Through support from the inaugural round of the Community Impact Fund, the Bronx River Alliance was awarded \$48,951 to engage and educate the Bronx River community in the restoration and protection of Long Island Sound at Concrete Plant Park in the Bronx, New York. The park was once the site of a neglected and derelict concrete facility but is now a thriving green space complete with a public edible food forest. Read more about how the Bronx River Alliance is engaging with residents in this [Sound Spotlight](#).

## Food Scraps to Save the Sound Through Shell Recycling



CORR members unload shells at the curbing site. *Photo by Maya Ray for the Long Island Sound Study.*

A new initiative by the Collective Oyster Recycling and Restoration is transforming the way diners and local restaurants can help revitalize oyster populations. With a \$99,880 LISCIF grant, CORR is working with local restaurants to increase oyster populations along the shore. The collective has recycled over 500,000 pounds of shells since 2023 and is aiming for even more next year. Read more in this [Sound Spotlight](#).

## Breaking Down Barriers in Grantmaking



Shahela Begum, Program Director Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund with Restore America's Estuaries, speaks with attendees of the Annual Learning Exchange at CUNY Graduate Center. *Photo by Argenis Apolinario.*

Historically, there have always been concerns surrounding inequity in funding opportunities and how they get dispersed to communities. The

Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund seeks to bridge that gap by providing technical and financial assistance to communities with environmental justice concerns, to address environmental issues and improve the quality and accessibility of the Long Island Sound. [Hear from Program Director, Shahela Begum](#) on how the Community Impact Fund was built and RAE's plans for the program's future.

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## LONG ISLAND SOUND STUDY NEWS BRIEFS

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### Sound Bytes



Communications Intern Maya Ray

- All articles featuring grant projects in this issue of Sound Matters were written by **Maya Ray**, the summer 2024 Communications Intern at the EPA Long Island Sound Office in Stamford. The Connecticut resident attends the University of Connecticut for her master's in Biodiversity and Conservation Biology. Thank you Maya!

- In the largest award for Long Island Sound research in the history of the collaboration between the Connecticut and New York Sea Grant programs and the Long Island Sound Study, 13 projects have been selected that will improve understanding of factors impacting several fish species, shellfish, water quality and restoration of the estuary's salt marshes. Read more in this [press release](#).

- On December 6, the Sustainable and Resilient Communities team hosted [a press event](#) in Rye, New York announcing the awardees of the inaugural round of Planning Support Program funds. [See the full list of awardees](#).
- Up to \$1.5 million is available to fund projects and build capacity in under-resourced Connecticut and New York communities to help protect and restore Long Island Sound. The second round of the Long Island Sound Community Impact fund is accepting full proposals by March 14, 2025. For more information and access to the RFA, please go to [LISCIF25 RFA Page](#).

- The 2025 RFP for the Long Island Sound Stewardship Fund is now open. Sponsored by the Long Island Sound Funders Collaborative, grants can support capacity building, piloting new tools, and collaboration. An applicant webinar will be held December 16, 2024. [Register here.](#)
- In February, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County will run a hybrid coastal gardening course that is open to the public. The course will explore water-wise practices, native plants, soil solutions, and how to be a community steward of Long Island Sound. The program is funded by the Long Island Sound Study and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. If you are interested in participating, contact **Roxanne Zimmer** at [rz378@cornell.edu](mailto:rz378@cornell.edu).
- The Draft Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan was available for public comment from September 23–November 22, 2024. Feedback is being reviewed and will help LISS plan for the next decade of management on Long Island Sound. Thank you for contributing comments during this important process!

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## FOCUS ON LISS INDICATORS

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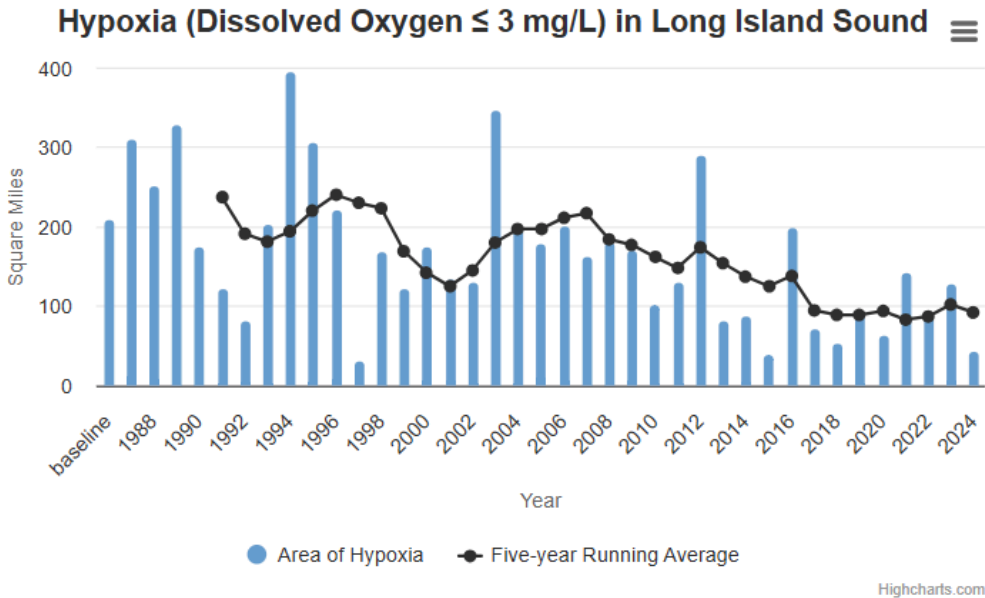
### Extent of Hypoxia



Area of Hypoxia

Percent to Target

Volume of Hypoxia



(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.

### Long Island Sound Records Third Smallest ‘Dead Zone’ Since Monitoring Began in 1987

Scientists from the Long Island Sound Study report the third smallest area of hypoxia—zones with low dissolved oxygen—since monitoring began in 1987. During the 2024 summer hypoxia monitoring season, the affected area measured 43.4 square miles, roughly the size of the Bronx, one of New York City’s five boroughs.

The duration of hypoxia measured 38 days, a decrease from 42 days reported for the summer of 2023. The minimum dissolved oxygen level observed during Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) open-water cruises reached 2.25 mg/L. In Long Island Sound, levels below 3 mg/L of oxygen have been considered the

threshold for measuring hypoxic area. Read more about 2024 Summer Season Hypoxia in this [news release](#).

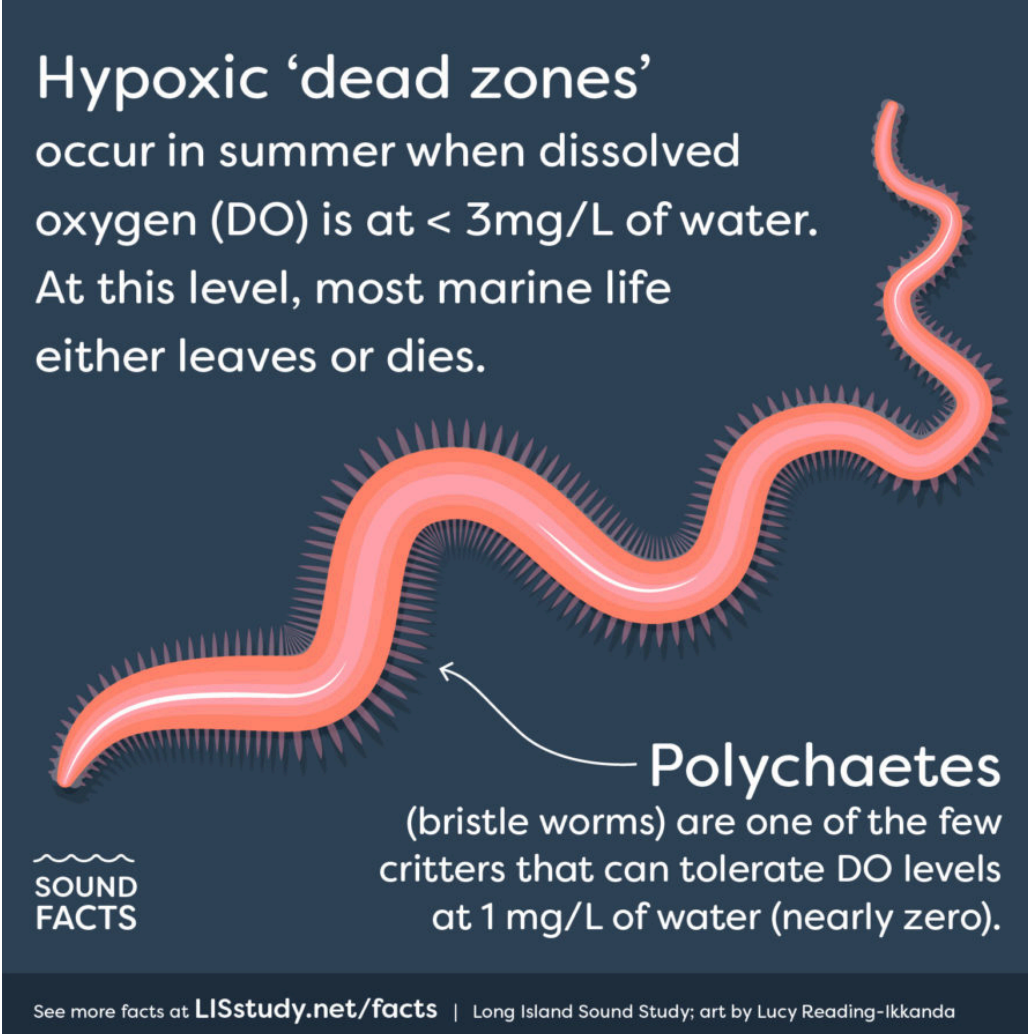
Learn more at the *Ecosystem Target and Supporting Indicators* [microsite](#).

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## SOUND FACT

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### Low Oxygen, No Problem for Polychaetes



The infographic features a dark blue background with a large, stylized illustration of a pinkish-orange polychaete worm with many small bristles along its length. The worm is curved in an S-shape. To the left of the worm, white text explains hypoxic 'dead zones'. To the right, a white arrow points from the text 'Polychaetes' to the worm. At the bottom left, there is a logo with wavy lines and the text 'SOUND FACTS'. At the bottom, there is a line of small white text providing a website and credit.

Hypoxic 'dead zones' occur in summer when dissolved oxygen (DO) is at  $< 3\text{mg/L}$  of water. At this level, most marine life either leaves or dies.

**Polychaetes** (bristle worms) are one of the few critters that can tolerate DO levels at  $1\text{ mg/L}$  of water (nearly zero).

**SOUND FACTS**

See more facts at [LISstudy.net/facts](https://lisstudy.net/facts) | Long Island Sound Study; art by Lucy Reading-Ikkanda

Of course, polychaetes can tolerate low dissolved oxygen levels. After all, they can live in oxygen-depleted areas in the mud and sand of the tidal flats. These marine-based worms, according to *Living Treasures: The Plants and Animals of Long Island Sound*, “work the sediments, bringing nutrients to the mud or sand surface layer and allowing oxygen to penetrate deeper in the mud or sand. They feed on decaying matter, algae and

bacteria, and they themselves are prey for larger animals, such as crabs.” They do breathe in oxygen through their skin or gills.

### Facts about Polychaetes

- Polychaetes, or bristle worms, are marine annelids, worms that have segmented, ringlike bodies. They are related to earthworms.
- Chaeta is derived from the Greek word chaite, meaning growth of hair or flowing locks. So polychaete means many hairs or many bristles, a reference to the bristles on the worms’ ringlike bodies.
- According to ScienceDirect, there are more than 15,000 described species of polychaetes. Marine Animals of Southern New England and New York, a guide to animals in Long Island Sound, identifies more than 80 species in the Sound. It’s not a comprehensive list, however. The guide did not include rare species.
- Polychaetes can tolerate levels of dissolved oxygen of 1 mg per liter of water, according to the Chesapeake Bay Program. In Long Island Sound, anoxic conditions, in which the environment has extremely little or no oxygen, begin at levels of less than 1 mg/L.
- In 1994, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection conducted research to investigate the lowest levels of dissolved oxygen that 16 common fish in Long Island Sound can tolerate. The fish that tolerated the most deoxygenated waters were butterfish with a tolerance of dissolved oxygen levels of <1.3 mg per liter of water followed by Atlantic herring with DO levels of 1.4 mg per liter.

Visit the LISS [media center](#) to see all of our Sound Facts.

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