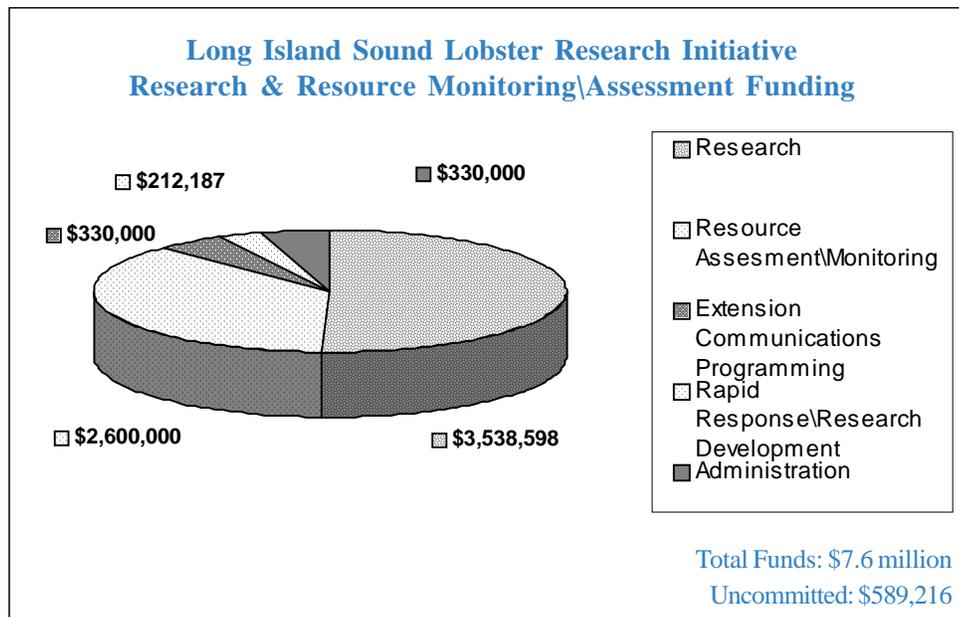


Long Island Sound Lobster Disaster Response



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Sea Grant College Program, and Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection announced the awarding of over \$3.5 million in research grants to 17 science research teams in seven states, to determine the causes behind the 1999-2000 winter die-off in Long Island Sound's lobster fishery. The research is funded jointly under [Long Island Sound Lobster Research Initiative](#), an endeavor of the Sea Grant programs in Connecticut and New York, along with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center. The Initiative is being overseen by the *ad hoc* [Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission \(ASMFC\) Lobster Steering Committee](#), which was appointed under ASMFC American Lobster Management Board.

Long Island Sound Lobster Research Initiative was established after a July 2000 Congressional allocation of \$6.6 million in federal funds to NOAA for scientific research into the causes of the die-off, and monitor stock recovery. The State of Connecticut's Long Island Sound Research Fund that is being administered by Connecticut State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) also contributed one million dollars to the research initiative, bringing the total disaster response budget to \$7.6 million. Approximately \$840,000 of the federal research funds will support three projects administered by NMFS, and two projects have already been selected. New York and Connecticut Sea Grant Programs each identified six research projects that they

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Long Island Sound Lobster Research Initiative is a research collaboration of National Oceanic Atmosphere Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and the Sea Grant Programs in New York and Connecticut.



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will sponsor. These federal research funds also include \$165,000 to each Program, to communicate the research findings to lobster fishermen, resource managers, and the public. These research projects are in addition to three projects announced previously, by Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. The awards resulted from a national competition of research projects to investigate the causes of mortality and shell disease in Long Island Sound lobsters. The funded research will investigate many different factors on an ecosystem-wide basis. These include disease-causing organisms, pesticides, pollution, lobster crowding, water quality conditions including elevated temperatures and changes in salinity, and environmental conditions such as storm events.

The federal funds also include \$2.6 million that was awarded to the States of Connecticut and New York to assess the status and recovery of the lobster stocks. Other collaborators include representatives of Long Island Sound lobster fishing organizations and the US Environmental Protection Agency. An additional \$7.3 million in federal funds was also allocated for economic assistance to the affected lobster fishermen. Lobsters are the most economically important marine species harvested in New York, while in Connecticut, lobsters are second only to bivalve shellfish. Landings declined in the fall of 1999 by as much as 90 percent, forcing many of the Sound's more than 300 lobstermen to cease their lobster fishing operations. Lobsters continue to be harvested from Long Island Sound in reduced numbers, mainly from central and eastern areas, but officials still don't know what caused the die-off.

Responding to requests from the governors of both Connecticut and New York, then Secretary of Commerce William M. Daley declared the lobster resource in Long Island Sound a commercial fishing failure using the "resource disaster" clauses of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act on January 26, 2000. Lobsters, seawater, and sediments were tested for toxins, but nothing unusual was found. Pathologists from the University of Connecticut conducting necropsies on sick lobsters discovered parasitic paramoebae in their nervous tissues. It was unclear, however, whether the paramoeba was the primary cause of the lobster deaths, or whether other stressors were also involved.

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