Making Sound Decisions to Protect & Restore

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BLUE WATER, GREEN BOAT

Making Sound Decisions to Protect & Restore

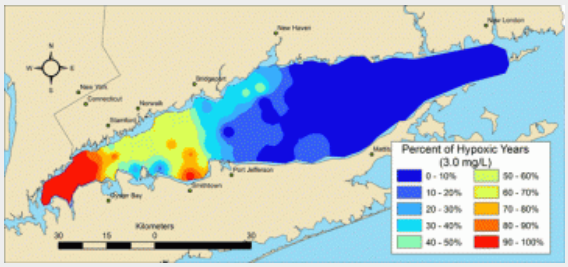
BY LARISSA GRAHAM

The nooks and crannies of the Long Island Sound's coastline stretch for 600 miles and include habitats such as tidal wetlands, coastal forests, grasslands, and rocky shorelines. These habitats are thriving with wildlife– juvenile striped bass and bluefish hide among the plants and ribbed mussels cling to the peat in wetlands, horseshoe crabs crawl along sandy beaches to lay their eggs, and osprey soar overhead looking for their next meal. Then there are all of us who visit our shoreline to swim, boat, or just enjoy the beauty of this precious resource.

The Long Island Sound coast is lined with many habitats; rocky shorelines and tidal wetlands provide homes to hundreds of animals. Credit: Larissa Graham, NY Sea Grant

Over 20 million people live within 50 miles of the Sound, which causes many problems. Pollutants such as pathogens, pesticides, fertilizer, oil, and trash accumulate on our paved parking lots, streets, driveways, and other hard surfaces. When it rains, these pollutants mix with rainwater that is not absorbed into the ground. The mixture washes into the Sound through the storm drains that pepper our neighborhoods. After a heavy rainfall, this polluted runoff makes our beaches unsafe for swimming and closes shellfish beds to harvesting

Excess nitrogen from sewage treatment plants, cesspools, and septic tanks travels to the Sound, causing algal blooms. When these algae die and decompose, they rob the water column of oxygen, leading to a serious condition called hypoxia (scientists now know that hypoxia occurs from many factors in addition to nitrogen loading— even wind direction and duration have an effect). Excess nutrients can also lead to other harmful algal blooms, such as red tide, which can make shellfish unsafe to eat.



Hypoxia, a condition of low dissolved oxygen troubles the waters in the Western Sound most every year. Credit: Long Island Sound Study

The problems facing the Long Island Sound are being addressed. The Long Island Sound Study, a bi-state partnership consisting of federal and state agencies, user groups, concerned organizations, and individuals, has been part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program since 1985. The partners of the Long Island Sound Study work towards common goals outlined in a *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* to improve water quality, restore and protect habitats and open spaces, and educate the public as to how they can help. This coming year, the Long Island Sound Study will receive $5 million dollars through this program to protect and restore the Sound.

The Long Island Sound Study partners have made great progress in cleaning up the Sound over the past 25 years. However, residents that live within the Sound's watershed (or areas of land that drain into the Sound) and use the Sound's coves, harbors, and open waters have the responsibility to make sure that we are also doing our part. We often think that "others" are the cause of the problems facing our coastal waters, but the truth is that each of us affects the Sound in some way. If you live in a house, drive a car, use polluting products, boat, or play in our coastal waters, you impact the Sound.

Students from Miller Place help Long Island Sound Study staff sort and identify fish in a local harbor. Credit: North Country Middle School

Each of us must learn how everyday actions negatively affect the Sound and then work to change these actions. Visit the Long Island Sound Study website for some easy tips on how you can help restore and protect the Sound: http://longislandsoundstudy.net/get-involved/what-you-can-do/.

Remember, no matter how small of a commitment you make to protecting the Long Island Sound, every bit helps. Together, many small changes will add up one big difference.

Larissa Graham works for New York Sea Grant at Stony Brook University as the Outreach Coordinator for the Long Island Sound Study.

By Larissa Graham

Watch this video from the New York Sea Grant

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