

SAVING LONG ISLAND SOUND: REGIONAL SOLUTIONS FOR LONG-TERM BIODIVERSITY

Jon Kachmar, The Nature Conservancy

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Long Island Sound is a highly developed and urbanized estuary in the densely populated Northeast Corridor from Washington, DC to Boston, MA. The Sound is surrounded by three states and its waters are subject to a myriad of laws and regulations. There are numerous government and non-profit entities working to conserve and restore this biologically important embayment, which also provides significant recreational and commercial opportunities.

The Nature Conservancy is working with regional partners on developing implementation teams for the long-term sustainability of the Sound for both a biologically diverse natural system as well as maintaining a good quality of life for people living, working and recreating on the Sound. This approach to marine conservation and restoration will develop a marine spatial planning framework for “sea use planning” efforts and develop and implement strategies for coastal climate change adaptation, including land acquisition and restoration of natural coastal processes, habitats, and the species that inhabit coastal areas.

The Conservancy’s Long Island Sound Program has identified biologically diverse “hot spots” within the Sound based on coastal watershed assessments and a ranking index. The assessments cover 77 catchment basins within the region and cover nearly 6,000 square kilometers. Ecological integrity of each watershed is ranked on land use/land cover, impervious surface area, aquatic barriers/transportation crossings, riparian buffer land use, water quality, atmospheric deposition, open space designations (federal, state, private).

The watershed index rankings will be used as science-based guidance for future land acquisition and habitat restoration within the prioritized watersheds based on ecological value. It is anticipated that this watershed approach will enhance local, state and federal investments to protect and restore the Sound.

Jon Kachmar
The Nature Conservancy
55 High Street
Middletown, CT 06457
jkachmar@tnc.org
(860) 344-0716