Spring 2016

Connecticut Fund for the Environment
Save the Sound®

SoundBites

Save the Sound water quality program manager, Peter Linderoth (far right), with students from Pelham Memorial High School who studied with AP Environmental Science teacher, Robert Leiber.

Young Sound Stewards

One of our priorities is to make western Long Island Sound coastal waters safe for families by identifying, tracking down, and eliminating sources of bacterial pollution. So it was especially inspiring to meet up with Robert Lieber's AP environmental science class at Pelham Memorial High School in Pelham, NY. Following a presentation by Save the Sound's water quality manager, Peter Linderoth, 20 intrepid teens donned protective and waterproof gear and joined Peter for a water-quality sampling activity. "I realized many of my students were barely aware of the Hutchinson River, even though it runs within a block of their school," said Leiber. "This helped them better understand what we mean when we talk about fresh water as a resource and also that what goes into the river ends up in Long Island Sound. It was also useful for them to see that there are people who work to protect water resources."

Students were surprised at the extent of the safety protocols and astonished to learn that the river has shown some of the highest levels of fecal-contaminated water of all the waterways we've tested. They measured fecal indicator bacteria, dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity and salinity, and conducted a survey of leaf-litter macroinvertebrates.

You Can Help...

…by becoming a volunteer citizen scientist and joining our water quality monitoring team. Or, help plant a rain garden in New Haven or Bridgeport, Connecticut. To help monitor water quality, contact us at 914-381-3140 or email plinderoth@savethesound.org. To join one of our volunteer plantings, see the events calendar on our website: **ctenvironment.org.**

Clean Water Collaborations

Save the Sound has been hard at work on other initiatives, too. The first Long Island Sound Report Card, published online last May, gave the western Sound's waters failing grades. Save the Sound will produce the next round of Report Cards. "As part of the process, we will be collaborating with groups that conduct citizen science around the Sound," said Tracy Brown, director of Save the Sound's Western Long Island Sound program, "to develop a uniform study for monitoring water quality in local bays and harbors. The data collected will be used in future Report Cards to show conditions on a more local scale."

For 25 years, the Long Island Sound Citizens Summit has brought together scientists, activists, and concerned residents to share ideas and better address pollution and hypoxia in the Sound. This year's Summit on June 3 at Stony Brook University, provides a great tie-in to the Report Card with its focus on citizen scientists, workshops on citizen-science monitoring and strategies for communicating science with clarity and impact.

Last fall, we filed a Clean Water Act case to enforce the law in Westchester County and 11 municipalities—seeking to clean up bacterial contamination caused by leaking and decrepit sewage collection systems. That case is ongoing. We also continue to organize our citizen-science water quality monitoring program. See "You Can Help…" to left.

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Green Grantmaker: Jeniam Foundation

Families in our region deserve a clean and healthy Long Island Sound where fish and wildlife can thrive again. Since 2012, the Jeniam Foundation, a family foundation based in Connecticut that has a strong focus on conservation issues, has been a vital partner in Save the Sound's work of caring for and restoring the western Sound.

"Long Island Sound is one of our area's most critical natural resources," said Tripp Killin, executive director of the Jeniam Foundation. "The Jeniam Foundation is interested in and supports Connecticut Fund for the Environment and Save the Sound because we want to make sure we are making a difference in our environment where most of the trustees reside. It was always important to our founder and lead trustee, Andrew Clarkson, that we were engaged in smart, sophisticated grantmaking where our funding would be leveraged. Through the work that is being done, we hope that others will be inspired to get involved in helping to protect Long Island Sound."

The Jeniam Foundation has supported Save the Sound's efforts to build our Western Sound water quality monitoring program, improve fish passage on the Pequonnock River, and design green infrastructure projects in Bridgeport. It is currently helping to fuel our Living Shoreline Initiative, our work to protect Plum Island, and the Long Island Sound Report Card.

The Jeniam Foundation has been a generous supporter of Save the Sound, underwriting projects like our Pequonnock River restoration effort, the planting portion of which is pictured here.

Our New Haven office has moved!

As of April 1, our new address is 900 Chapel St, Suite 2202, New Haven, CT 06510. Also, we hope you like our new unified logo. Visit our website to learn more about it.

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GreenSheet

Robert Lorenz

The Benefits of Shared Solar

Everyone shares the sun. Why can't you share solar energy too? In Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and many other states, you can. But, not in Connecticut. Why not? All of those other states have laws allowing shared solar, while Connecticut has nothing but a tiny pilot program, which is already delayed and back in the legislature for more "clarification" work this session.

What does shared solar look like? An example would be a large solar array that provides power for many "subscribers," each of whom buys a portion of the energy produced. Anyone with an electric bill could participate as a subscriber.

So why do so many states already have successful shared solar programs, while Connecticut is stuck in the shade?

Share the Sun
Harness your power. Demand solar access for all.

CFE Energy Attorney Shannon Laun has been asking herself the same question. "Shared solar is a great policy for Connecticut," she says, "but approximately 75-80 percent of Connecticut residents can't put solar panels on their roofs because they rent their home or have a roof that is too shady or otherwise unsuitable. Shared solar is the solution that can enable all Connecticut residents to access clean energy and its benefits."

Legislative bills that would have enabled wide-spread shared solar in Connecticut were defeated in 2014 and 2015. While a small pilot program finally passed in 2015, it's already slipping—and is so small that even once it's up and running, opportunities to participate will be severely limited. Meanwhile, other states have passed shared solar laws and are reaping the benefits. Those states have the potential to attract substantial investment in solar projects that create jobs and strengthen their economies.

Thanks to generous support from the Common Sense Fund, we're collaborating on a grassroots effort with other solar advocates to build public awareness and support for the issue. Education and citizen action are the keys to shared solar success in Connecticut. At CFE, we're working to make sure the little guy—the one who stands to benefit most from shared solar—gets heard. We are calling for legislators to authorize a full-scale shared solar program. You can help. It's easy! Send an email to slaun@ctenvironment.org or call Shannon at 203-787-0646 x122 and let her know if you'd be willing to sign a petition or contact your elected officials.

CFE Energy and Environment Attorney Shannon Laun testified recently at a legislative hearing on shared solar, advocating for Connecticut residents to have the same opportunity to benefit from shared solar projects as their counterparts in neighboring states.

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A Report Card for the Sound

Last summer, the first Long Island Sound Report Card was published online by the Long Island Sound Funders Collaborative. It raised awareness of the serious environmental challenges facing the Sound. Thanks to funding from the Collaborative, Save the Sound has been given the exciting task of coordinating, publishing, and publicizing the next two Report Cards over three years.

Save the Sound will publish the next two Long Island Sound Report Cards, making the work of our water quality monitoring volunteers more critical than ever.

This online tool provides comprehensive, yet concise, accurate information about the health of different areas in the Sound in a standard format that is easy to understand, allows meaningful comparisons to be made among regions, and shows progress from year to year.

Much of Long Island Sound's pollution derives from "nonpoint" or diffuse sources: stormwater runoff, fertilizer, and septic systems. The Report Card can help public officials address those sources more effectively. The public can also play a role by maintaining the sewage infrastructure on their property, and minimizing the amount of runoff from their land into the Sound carrying fertilizer and other pollutants.

"The real value of the Long Island Sound Report Card lies in inspiring local actions to improve water quality in the Sound. When scientific data drives the pollution argument, it is easier for public officials and citizens to understand the need for investment," said Curt Johnson, executive director of the Save the Sound program.

As part of the process, we will be hosting a series of workshops with groups that conduct citizen science on the Sound, Long Island Sound Study representatives, and science advisors with the goal of identifying a uniform, achievable set of parameters for monitoring water quality in the Sound. We want the Report Card to support collaboration and for its results to represent a consensus of the scientists involved—not simply the individual views of any one group or entity.

Trash Talk

On average, Americans throw away seven pounds of trash per person every day. It's no wonder that some of that garbage ends up along our coastline and in Long Island Sound.

Each year, Save the Sound serves as Connecticut Coordinator for the International Coastal Cleanup in September. This year, more than 1,500 volunteers cleaned 6,500 pounds of trash from 45 miles of beaches, removing 651 bags of debris. Sallie Sperling and her husband Peter Goldberg, longtime board members of the Friends of Hammonasset State Park, have served as cleanup captains for our Hammonasset Beach cleanup event in Madison, Connecticut for the past seven years.

This year, a group of volunteers came from the Rumsey Hall School in Washington, Connecticut, whose students hail from as many as 15 U.S. states and 15 countries.

Trash along our shoreline is unsightly, harms tourism and the economy, and can make the water unsafe for people and marine animals. "Before we got started," said Sallie Sperling, "I talked with everyone about what makes this event so important. I went over the different kinds of trash they were likely to find, the life of that trash, the animals that can be harmed by it, and how long it can last in the environment if we don't do something about it."

Beach Cleanup Captain Sallie Sperling talks to volunteers about how trash impacts people and wildlife, and the importance of their beach cleanup effort.

Armed with gloves, plastic bags, and charts for recording the kinds of trash collected, the 26 adults and 27 youth participants worked for several hours to clean two miles of beachfront, removing 51 large garbage bags full.

"I enjoy being a Cleanup Captain," said Sallie. "My husband and I came here from Arizona. The first thing we noticed was how being by the Sound reminds us of Arizona's Big Sky. It feels great to help protect the natural beauty of Long Island Sound right here in our corner of the world."

COP21: The Paris Climate Agreement

by Sarah Ganong

Ed. Note: This past December, CFE Communications Coordinator Sarah Ganong attended the conference as an NGO observer representing her alma mater, Dickinson College. She spent 14 days in the former-airport-turned-conference space attending negotiation sessions and press conferences, and participating in demonstrations.

It's done. We have a Paris Climate Agreement—32 pages of blood, sweat, and tears that have been in the works for 23 years. The 40,000+ conference attendees came together for two intense weeks with the same goal—to leave with a global agreement to fight climate change.

The biggest takeaway from Paris is an agreement to hold warming below 2 degrees Celsius over pre-Industrial times, with the goal of staying below 1.5 degrees. While both of these temperature rises are still unsafe, advocates didn't think any sort of ambitious target would even be present in the final agreement. Small Island nations and other especially vulnerable countries kick-started a "High Ambition Coalition" of major players, including the U.S., that ultimately agreed to aim for 1.5 degrees.

Other important components of the Paris Agreement include progress on providing climate finance to the countries that have little historic responsibility for emissions of greenhouse gases, but are already being hit hard by climate change. They'll need money to adapt to climate change effects, but also deserve compensation for loss and damages—the inevitable destruction caused by climate change that we're going to be unable to prevent, like sea level rise and severe storms.

President Obama called the Paris Agreement the "best chance we have" to save the planet. Personally, I disagree. While an international plan is crucial, the real best hope is the people around the world—just like all of us—working in their home towns to save the places that they love. The international process has been happening nearly as long as I've been alive, and in that time we've seen global emissions rise by 60 percent.

So for me, the biggest victory from COP21 is my new relationships with activists from Brazil to Switzerland. During the other 50 weeks a year, all of us are taking on major new fossil fuel infrastructure projects—and winning. We're working on the local and regional levels to push for strong emissions reduction targets, including here in Connecticut through the Governor's Council on Climate Change. So we leave Paris with a lot of work still to be done, but with knowledge of what lies before us, and perhaps a little bit more hope.

While an international plan is crucial, the real best hope is the people around the world—just like all of us—working in their hometowns to save the places that they love.

CFE Communications Coordinator Sarah Ganong attended the 2015 Paris Climate Conference as an NGO observer, helping to shape her perspective on the value of local and regional efforts to advocate for strong emissions reduction targets.

JOIN THE GREEN TEAM

When you become a member of our monthly giving society, The Green Team, you save paperwork and help us make the most of your membership donation to CFE or Save the Sound. Find out more at www.ctenvironment.org by clicking on the red "Donate" button.

LEAVE A LEGACY

A planned gift from your estate to CFE and its bi-state program Save the Sound can help protect public health and the endangered places you care about far into the future. Please consider a lasting gift to the environmental heritage of Connecticut and Long Island Sound. For more information, contact Heidi Green at 203-787-0646, ext. 109.

Pipeline Imperils Clean Drinking Water

For generations, healthy, intact forests are the first line of defense in cleaning rainfall, filtering out pollution, and keeping Connecticut drinking water reservoirs pure and safe. Now, a Tennessee-based power company wants to expand its fracked gas pipeline throughout the northeast. The proposed pipeline would pass through Connecticut, with one section crossing nearly six miles of watershed lands belonging to MDC (Metropolitan District Commission)—the lands that filter drinking water for more than 400,000 residents of the greater Hartford area.

Allowing this construction would set a terrible precedent that could threaten drinking water lands all over the state. What's more, standard procedure for testing such pipelines involves sending radioactive material through the pipes, which presents a problem if the pipeline were sited close to a reservoir.

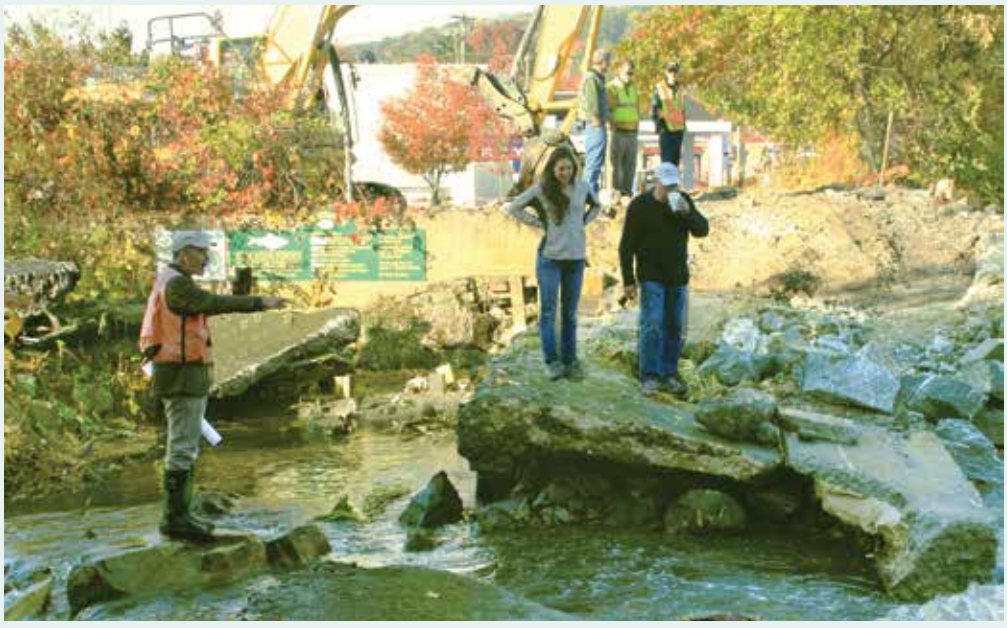
CFE testified that the pipeline expansion project will threaten drinking water supplies and intervened as a party in the administrative proceeding before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to oppose sending the pipeline through this sensitive land.

"There's always alternative routes for gas pipelines but there's no alternative to clean drinking water for the population in Hartford," said Jack Looney, attorney for CFE/Save the Sound. You can help by joining our Pipeline Activist Alert list: email Sarah at sganong@ctenvironment.org.

CFE/Save the Sound Board members Barbara David and Sara Bronin recently hosted a gathering at the Town and County Club in Hartford about the threats to Connecticut drinking water lands.

Little Fish, Big Deal

Although relatively small in size, river herring play a major role in coastal and marine ecosystems. The health of the ocean depends on the availability of small "feeder" fish for larger fish and other predators to eat. River herring are anadromous fish that spend most of their lives in the ocean. Each spring, they migrate to the freshwater pond or waterway where they were born, finding their way by their sense of smell. Then they return to the sea. Sadly, their numbers have plummeted in recent years, in part, because of habitat degradation and dams that block them from accessing their traditional spawning grounds.



Director of Habitat Restoration Gwen MacDonald (center) and Green Projects Coordinator John Champion (right) monitored the removal of Pond Lily Dam, along with Michael Chelminski, Stantec Project Engineer (far left). These projects were led by Save the Sound, administered in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and funded in part by the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 through the Department of the Interior, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Trout Unlimited, the State of Connecticut and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Just as winter was about to set in, Save the Sound celebrated the official start of its Pond Lily dam removal project located along the West River in New Haven, Connecticut. The completed project restores fish passage and habitat on 2.6 stream miles and 76 acres of Konold's Pond habitat for herring, American eel, and shad. The project is also designed to restore natural river flow, improve water quality, and eliminate the hazard posed by the potentially catastrophic failure of an old dam in poor condition.

After a year and a half of planning, permitting and design, Hyde Pond Dam on Whitford Brook (a tributary of the Mystic River) was removed in less than a month. The free-flowing Whitford Brook provides fish passage to 4.1 stream miles and improves habitat for alewife, blueback herring, and American eel—species that have experienced significant population declines—as well as for other wildlife. Please join us on May 7, 2016 to complete the final piece of this project and plant native shrubs and grasses along the river bank in Mystic. Check out the calendar page of our website at www.ctenvironment.org for more information.