



The Fight to Save the Oswegatchie Hills Gains New Steam

The battle to preserve the last acres of the Oswegatchie Hills, a fragile coastal forest bordering the lower reaches of the Niantic River, is gaining new steam. This land conservation battle, now in process for well over a decade, will determine the future of 236 acres of wild coastal forest, wetlands, and shoreline that support diverse wildlife.

While a developer pushes to deforest much of the area and level delicate terrain to build high-density housing units and parking lots for over 1,700 vehicles, the Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition—founded by the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, Save the River-Save the Hills, and Connecticut Fund for the Environment—continues to defend this crucial segment of vulnerable land adjacent to the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.

Long-awaited rulings in the legal fight to protect the remaining third of the forest are expected to come this year, but the Oswegatchie Hills are earning even more public attention thanks to a new documentary that helps tell the story of the forest's social, economic, and environmental benefits.



Ayla Fox on the job.

"To have a place big enough that you can feel you've stepped into wilderness—that's huge," says Ayla Fox, the Rhode Island-based filmmaker who produced the new Oswegatchie documentary, while speaking about the importance of preserving natural space in our densely developed region.

"If that land becomes developed and we now have runoff going into the Sound from the Niantic River, it's more pollution, it's more taxing on the shellfishing community... it's all connected," Ayla says.

As a filmmaker with a dual background in wildlife conservation biology and film media, Ayla specializes in telling stories to benefit the natural world. The new Oswegatchie Hills documentary marks Ayla's fifth project for CFE/Save the Sound, and features interviews with passionate advocates offering fresh perspectives on the importance of protecting this unique parcel of undeveloped land.

"The bigger the forest is, the greater the diversity is, and the more resilient it is," Al Burchsted, a retired biology professor, explains in the documentary. "Once you start

cutting up a forest, even by housing, you're changing the diversity—drastically."

When it comes to land conservation and land acquisition, patience and persistence are key.

"It's truly a marathon," Ayla says, recalling her experiences with other organizations working for land conservation. "It requires a lot of effort and energy from a huge team of people to keep the pressure on."

Keep up the pressure to save the last acres of the Oswegatchie Hills! Watch and share the new Save the Oswegatchie Hills documentary available at www.youtube.com/SavetheSoundCT.



The CFE team hiking the Oswegatchie Hills. (Left to right: Suzanne Thompson, Save the Oswegatchie Hills Coalition coordinator; Curt Johnson, president of CFE/Save the Sound; Chris Cryder, land campaign manager; Roger Reynolds, chief legal officer.)

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Engaging Events

St. Patrick's Day Plunge for Plum Island – Saturday, March 17

The second annual Plunge for Plum Island is scheduled for Saturday, March 17, at Old Saybrook Town Beach. Originally led by students from the Old Saybrook High School Ecology and Interact clubs, all CFE/Save the Sound members are welcome to participate and help achieve our ambitious fundraising goal of \$5,000. Come out and cheer from the shoreline, or take a stand for Plum Island by taking a quick (but chilly) dip in Long Island Sound. Register and set up your own fundraising page at www.bit.ly/plungeforplum and ask your friends to donate! Raise \$50 and receive a free event T-shirt from our friends at Coastal Crab.

Earth Day – Sunday, April 22

Earth Day is just around the corner! During the third weekend of April, join CFE/Save the Sound for an Earth Day event near you. After a long winter, we're hosting engaging events to help you reconnect with the natural places you love across Connecticut and the Long Island Sound region. Save the date and keep an eye on your inbox for details!

HOST YOUR OWN EVENT

As a CFE/Save the Sound member, one of the best ways to amplify your impact is by hosting an event that promotes awareness of an issue you care about, or raises funds to power up our ability to address that issue. You can host a film screening of the new Oswegatchie Hills documentary, a meet and greet with the Soundkeeper, a virtual tour of Plum Island, or something new that's important to you.

Contact Director of Member Engagement Joseph DiMaggio at jdimaggio@savethesound.org to get started.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT:

Evan Heller's Soundkeeper House Party

Want to support CFE/Save the Sound? Consider hosting a party at your home! In October 2017, Board member Evan Heller hosted 35 guests at his Rye, New York, home, offering an opportunity for members to meet and raise funds for the new Long Island Soundkeeper. Just by opening his home to his neighbors and friends, Evan raised close to \$1,000 to support the relaunched Soundkeeper. Thank you for your generosity, Evan!



CFE/Save the Sound President Curt Johnson addresses Evan's party attendees at sunset on the coast of Long Island Sound.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Joe Dolce

In each newsletter, we'll shine a spotlight on a member who finds creative ways to turn their passion into action.

Joe Dolce, sommelier and General Manager at Madison Wine Exchange, has found creative ways to bring together his expertise in fine wine and spirits and his interest in protecting the Long Island Sound waters where his patrons live and play.

In 2017, Joe organized two unique events to support CFE/Save the Sound by raising funds and broadening membership: a pairing of locally sourced Long Island Sound oysters with fine wines grown in complimentary soils, and a tasting expo featuring over 40 varieties of whiskey.

"We feel that as a business, it is important to give back to the community and support organizations that enrich the lives of our local residents," Joe says. "Being part of a coastal community, we are particularly happy to support Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound and the important work they do to sustain our local environment and the Long Island Sound."

Thanks for your support, Joe!



Joe Dolce leads guests through an oyster and wine pairing.

"We feel that as a business, it is important to give back to the community and support organizations that enrich the lives of our local residents"

— Joe Dolce

MONTHLY GIVING

Your gym membership. Your Netflix account. Undisruptive monthly costs can positively shape the way you spend your days. Fortunately, protecting the natural resources your family enjoys is just as affordable. A monthly gift of \$5, \$10, \$20, or more is a small addition to your household budget and a big contribution to the environmental work you care about most. Contact Michelle at mlemere@ctenvironment.org for more information.

On the Ground Impact

Your membership supports real on the ground impact and action! Take a look at the Green Projects team's big achievements from 2017 and exciting projects planned for 2018.

Freeing Rivers

Back in 2016, we successfully removed four dams from rivers in Connecticut, freeing over 23 miles for migratory fish to swim upstream and safely spawn. This year, we're excited to move forward with two new river projects, including our first fish passage project in New York.

The Noroton River, which separates Stamford and Darien, will soon see the installation of a new fishway that will open upstream habitat to migratory species in the Western Sound in time for the river herring run this spring. Opening this man-made barrier for the first time in over 50 years will improve the health of the river and the overall Long Island Sound ecosystem.

Thanks to a new grant from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, this year we'll also be able to develop an engineered plan to restore native migratory fish runs from the Sound to upstream spawning habitat on Long Island's Nissequogue River for the first time in 300 years.



Cleanup at Westport's Compo Beach.

kayak, and paddleboard. This season, volunteers removed 7,928 pounds of trash, cleaning 57 miles of Connecticut coastline.

Protecting Urban Watersheds

Our work to improve the health of New Haven's West River started with the improvement of tide gates and the development of a full West River Watershed Management Plan. This led to the removal of the Pond Lily Dam and most recently sparked a collaboration with Neighborhood Housing Services of

New Haven, which fueled the installations of seven new residential rain gardens. The gardens will help filter polluted stormwater before it flows into the West River and on to Long Island Sound.

In 2017, we launched a new phase of green infrastructure projects at the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport, where our Pequonnock River Watershed Management plan has helped

bring about new rain gardens, porous pavement, and fish passage projects in recent years. This spring, local students will help plant two new rain-loving gardens at the Zoo while learning about the importance of managing stormwater where it falls.



A restored segment of wetland at Sunken Meadow State Park.

The Green Projects crew is also excited to start working on a watershed management plan and restoration strategy for New Haven's Mill River. If you'd like to join the planning committee, write to reducerunoff@savethesound.org.

Restoring Long Island's Sunken Meadow State Park

This year, we'll return to Long Island to launch the latest phase of our multi-year, multimillion-dollar effort to restore the long-compromised marsh ecosystem at Sunken Meadow State Park. This restoration effort will begin in late winter with the removal of two acres of phragmites, an invasive wetland reed, and end with the planting of 20,000 new native cordgrass seedlings across two acres of recovering saltwater marshland.

The team will also redesign an 18-acre parking lot at Sunken Meadow, converting a portion of the paved lot to green space and installing porous pavement to more effectively manage stormwater runoff.



Overlooking Phillips Mill Pond Dam on the Nissequogue River. Photo courtesy of NYSDEC.

Cleaning Beaches

With 60 cleanups at beaches, rivers, and ponds, more than 1,500 volunteers turned out for Connecticut's International Coastal Cleanup events in 2017 to pull trash from the treasured places where you fish, swim,



Planting a rain garden with NHS in New Haven.



Connecticut's 2018 Climate Agenda

The 2018 Connecticut legislative session started on February 7 and will run through May 9. That isn't much time to fight for the clean energy reforms necessary to ensure Connecticut meets its greenhouse gas reduction promises and re-establishes its role as a regional leader in the fight against climate change. Fortunately, our dedicated Climate and Energy Attorney, Claire Coleman, will hold a presence in Hartford all session, meeting with policymakers and elected officials, delivering testimony, and organizing coalitions to help move forward the most critical climate-based legislative actions of the year.

Here are a few of our major priorities for this year's session:

PRIORITY #1

Ramping up renewable energy use in Connecticut

This session, the climate team is fighting to increase Connecticut's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard, a policy that requires state electricity providers to obtain a certain percentage of energy from renewable sources. With current targets set to plateau in 2020, the team is advocating for a new 50 percent renewable energy target for 2030.

"A strong Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard lets renewable energy companies know it's safe to come to Connecticut to invest in solar or wind projects,"

Claire explains, "since the Standard assures there will be demand for the clean energy they produce."

In Connecticut, most residents can't put solar panels on their own roofs. That's why the team is also fighting to allow folks to purchase solar power from community solar projects.

"Just like you pick up your share of community supported agriculture vegetables at the farm if you can't grow them at home, you can get your share of solar from a community solar garden," Claire says.

PRIORITY #2

Driving down emissions

To address climate change in Connecticut, CFE helped pass the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2008, which sets strict targets for the state to reduce its total greenhouse gas emissions.

"The Global Warming Solutions Act is a framework for driving down emissions—the key tool to fighting climate change,"

Claire says. "It's crucial that we meet both our 2020 and 2050 goals, but recent data suggests we're in danger of missing our 2020 target."

While Connecticut came close to hitting its 2020 emission level target back in early 2012, emissions have unfortunately increased in recent years. This is in part due to falling oil and gas prices, bringing more gas guzzlers back to the roads. This session CFE will be pushing for strong interim emissions reduction targets in 2030 and 2040 to help the state stay on track to meet its 2050 goals.

PRIORITY #3

Fighting for energy efficiency and clean energy funds

The 2017 budget passed by the Connecticut legislature stole \$175 million from clean energy and efficiency programs to plug unrelated budget holes, including funding from the Green Bank, which creates renewable energy industry jobs and revenue for the state. The team will be fighting to ensure raids like this can't happen again, in order to keep Connecticut ahead of the curve with clean energy innovation, and save families money on their energy bills.

"These funds support programs that make homes more energy efficient by offering assistance with everything from conducting energy audits, to installing insulation or replacing old thermostats or furnaces with more efficient equipment,"

Claire says. "This makes a big difference in reducing heating and cooling costs, especially for lower income customers who are often forced to put too much of their limited income towards paying for energy bills."

Keep an eye on your email inbox for information on the progress of our 2018 legislative agenda.



Save the Sound®

SoundBites

Save the Sound Calls on New York City to Further Reduce Nitrogen Pollution

On a chilly but sunny morning in November, Save the Sound staffers and supporters gathered on the steps of New York City Hall to announce the findings of a new nitrogen report addressing New York City's impact on the current health of Long Island Sound. Save the Sound Director Tracy Brown stood before a backdrop of activists, at a podium flanked with press microphones, and led the call for local leaders to commit to further reducing the overwhelming amount of nitrogen pollution the city flushes into the Sound on an annual basis. Other local organizations, like the Billion Oyster Project, Waterfront Alliance, Guardians of Flushing Bay, and New York Community Trust, were present, underscoring the significance of this mission.

The report, which focused primarily on excess nitrogen flowing into the Sound from the East River, contained long-awaited good news, but also raised significant red flags.

New York City remains one of the top contributors of nitrogen to the Sound, accountable for almost one-fifth of the nitrogen waste sucking oxygen from the water and fueling a host of ecological problems. The main source of this nitrogen pollution is six wastewater treatment plants that discharge into the East River, four of which were recently upgraded to remove more nitrogen. We were glad to report that New York City's investments in new sewage treatment technology, upgrades required to meet targets set by the EPA in 2000, appear to have the intended effect of shrinking low-oxygen dead zones in the East River and Long Island Sound.

But the report also highlighted that these dead zones—areas of hypoxia that contribute to fish kills and toxic algae blooms—remain a dangerous and persistent impediment to the health of the Sound. In fact, the dead zone stretching from the East River into the western Long Island Sound narrows was approximately 95 square miles in the summer of 2017. Further steps must be taken in order to ensure the Sound is safe for people and wildlife, every day.

Save the Sound has called on New York City to commit to another 10 percent reduction in nitrogen through increased use of the new technology now installed



Save the Sound Director Tracy Brown points out areas of hypoxia in Long Island Sound during a press conference on steps of New York City Hall in November 2017.

at four East River plants, and to consider installing the same technology at the massive Newtown Creek plant, which accounts for 30 percent of the remaining nitrogen reaching Long Island Sound from the East River. In December, we brought this message to a public hearing of the City Council, and later to Mayor de Blasio, along with letters of support from more than 30 organizations that stand behind this action for the future health of Long Island Sound and the East River.

To view the full report, visit the blog at greencitiesbluewaters.wordpress.com.



Thanks to the generous gifts of Save the Sound supporters like you, the Terry Backer has a new engine! Soundkeeper Bill Lucey will be back on the water, patrolling for pollution, by early May.

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Staff Spotlight: Karina Krul, Policy Intern

Get to know the team fighting for your environment!

CFE/Save the Sound policy intern Karina Krul has been making waves with her work on the campaign to preserve Plum Island since joining the team in January 2017. Now in her junior year as a marine biology major at the University of New Haven, Karina says her future career goals have taken new shape since encountering CFE/Save the Sound Chief Program Officer Leah Schmalz during a freshman year seminar presentation on opportunities for marine biology graduates.

For much of her academic career, Karina had planned to pursue a PhD in paleontology. But everything changed after Leah's presentation, when Karina reached out and landed herself an internship at CFE/Save the Sound.

"I came in excited that I would get some experience with policy in the marine world, because my degree is very hard-science based," Karina says. "I work on the Plum Island team mostly, but I've also done climate

change research for Claire, and Leah's had me write amendments to the Global Warming Solutions Act legislation."

Karina became increasingly more interested in the political fight to save Plum Island, and applied for the international Millennium Oceans Prize in 2017 to support her own Plum Island outreach campaign. Her proposal made it all the way into the top five. Now, Karina's even considering pursuing a degree in environmental law, and recently applied for a summer internship with a national environmental law firm.



Karina outside the U.S. Capitol building during a Plum Island lobbying trip with Save the Sound and other members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition in September 2017.

"I felt like I was experienced enough just from this internship to be competitive with law students," Karina says. "I don't think I would have the long term plans that I have without this internship."

*Karina has been a great asset to the CFE/Save the Sound team. **If you're interested in a summer internship with CFE/Save the Sound, contact Valerie Wormely-Radford at vwormely-radford@ctenvironment.org.***

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