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PRESERVE PLUM ISLAND COALITION LAUDS NEW NY STATE LAW

Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area surrounds Plum, Great Gull, Little Gull Islands

Southold, New York – A new law designating a watery zone around three islands off the East End of Long Island’s North Fork for special protection is receiving praise from the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, a group of 109 organizations working to preserve Plum Island.

The Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area provides the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation authority to protect marine mammals and sea turtles in the protected area to the extent such species are not already protected under federal and state law.

The new protection area recognizes the biologically rich waters around the three islands and extends from mean high water seaward to 1,500 feet, or further in shallow areas—to the outermost limit of waters 15 feet in depth. The boundaries will be described and depicted on a map for the general public and for purposes of inventory, research, and reference. The law also states a bird conservation area may be designated.

The law lists harbor seals, gray seals, harbor porpoises, Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles, and green and leatherback sea turtles among the species using the protection area, which lies within the boundaries of two estuaries of national significance, the Peconic Estuary and Long Island Sound.

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition and its member organizations, notably Audubon New York and Save the Sound, have been advocating for the success of the legislation, which was introduced by Assemblyman Steve Englebright (4th District) and co-sponsored by Senator Monica Martinez (3rd District).

“The approval of this legislation represents a key moment in our efforts to protect Plum Island. Signing the legislation into law means the State of New York formally recognizes the rich ecological value of this archipelago of islands, of which Plum Island is a critical part, and that it is worthy of preservation,” **noted John Turner, spokesperson for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.** “Kudos to the sponsors of the

measure—Senator Monica Martinez and Assemblyman Steve Englebright—for introducing this important measure and to Governor Cuomo for signing it.”

“The waters around Plum Island, Great Gull Island, and Little Gull Island are home to 210 bird species, including breeding Roseate Terns, Common Terns, and Piping Plovers, and supports one of the largest fish habitats in the mid-Atlantic region. Audubon New York applauds New York State for taking this important step to ensure that we protect this unique habitat and important feeding area for birds,” **said Jillian Liner, Conservation Director for Audubon New York.**

“Plum Island is the biological linchpin of the archipelago that characterizes the eastern extent of Southold Town and Long Island Sound,” **said Louise Harrison, New York natural areas coordinator for Save the Sound.** “The diverse ecological communities, wildlife, and plant species we know use the terrestrial and wetland habitats there are impressive, and scientific divers we employed last fall confirmed the richness of the underwater communities around the island. Thank you to Governor Cuomo for showing the State of New York recognizes the importance of our state’s waterways and the many species that share them with us. We are grateful to Assemblyman Englebright for his conservation leadership in introducing this legislation and to Senator Martinez for her important co-sponsorship.”

Arthur Kopelman, President of the Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island (CRESLI) **said,** “We at CRESLI are overjoyed to see that the Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area Bill was signed into law today; for that we thank Governor Cuomo and congratulate Assemblyman Steve Englebright and Senator Monica Martinez. This legislation is an indicator of just how critically important the areas around Plum Island are for the marine mammals and sea turtles of the New York Bight. We are glad to see this area protected.”

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