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Preserve
Plum Island
Coalition

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Preserve Plum Island Coalition Calls on Congress and New York State to Save National Treasure; Unveil Stakeholder Report, *Envision Plum Island*

Report details vision and plan to protect jobs, endangered wildlife, Native American history, and historic landmarks

Long Island, NY (July 22, 2020) – Today, Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy unveiled [*Envision Plum Island*](#), a new report detailing a vision and a plan for the future of Plum Island, an 822-acre island poised for the auction block. In a press conference earlier today, stakeholders and the Preserve Plum Island Coalition called on Congress and New York State to save the island. Elected officials in attendance included U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, CT, sponsor of [S. 519](#), the Plum Island Conservation Act; Representative Lee Zeldin (NY-1), sponsor of [H.R. 1578](#), the Plum Island Preservation Act; and U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, CT.

Plum Island, located at the eastern end of Long Island Sound, is home to nationally significant natural and cultural resources including lands traditionally used by Indigenous nations; a historic, decommissioned Army post; and more than 500 plant and animal species, 111 of which are rare. It is at risk of being sold to private developers, which would deprive the public of all the island has to offer. The sale would also cause irreversible harm to wildlife, including seals and endangered roseate terns, and threaten Native American artifacts and important, historical buildings.

The *Envision* report charts a different path. It recommends sanctuary areas for wildlife; preservation of historic Fort Terry and the Plum Island Lighthouse; a small educational facility; and a campus for research. This would bring back jobs and allow local residents and tourists to take guided tours of the island. The report also lays out how Congress and New York State can save the island.

“Congress has made it clear that if we want to save Plum Island from the auction block, we need specificity and unanimity in our vision—and feasibility in a plan. Through regional workshops and numerous meetings over the last two years on Long Island, in Albany, and

back in Washington, we have heard great ideas, researched stakeholders' questions, and found alignment," **said Louise Harrison, New York Natural Areas Coordinator for Save the Sound.** "We now present a unified vision for Plum Island Preserve. With Congressional action and New York State's help, we can make this a reality, protecting and restoring precious natural resources, celebrating history and culture, and maintaining vitally important high-quality jobs on Plum Island."

"Now more than ever people need and deserve access to the outdoors. Plum Island is a crown jewel of the Atlantic, home to extraordinary and diverse wildlife, rich history, and great beauty, **said Bill Ulfelder, New York executive director of The Nature Conservancy.** "Presenting a unified vision and plan, the *Envision* report details how we can build upon Plum Island's unique legacy; open the island to the benefit of the public; protect its land, waters, and wildlife; and bring back much-needed jobs for New York workers. The Nature Conservancy thanks the New York and Connecticut Congressional delegations for their ongoing leadership, and calls on Congress and New York State to save Plum Island before it's too late."

Additional quotes below.

In addition to Senators Blumenthal and Murphy, Representative Zeldin, and Louise Harrison, speakers at the press conference included the office of NYS Senator Monica Martinez (SD-3), NYS Assemblymember Steve Englebright (AD-4), Suffolk County Legislator Al Krupski, Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell, Steve Resler of InnerSpace Scientific Diving, and John Turner of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

Due to a 2009 federal law, the island is not going through the standard federal process to transfer ownership of the island. Instead, it is poised for private sale despite its significant historical, conservation, and economic value. The Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC), composed of 110 organizations from across the region, works to save the island in close partnership with the region's U.S. senators and representatives.

At the request of Congressional offices, the PPIC convened a diverse group of stakeholders to identify viable alternatives to development. Over the course of two years, Native American nations, business owners, ecologists, conservationists, historical preservationists, archaeologists, and local and state officials studied possibilities for the island. The *Envision* report is the result of that process. To see a map of the vision concept, [click here](#).

On July 15, The Nature Conservancy and Save the Sound briefed congressional staff on how Congress can help make the vision a reality. Congress can stop the sale of Plum Island by repealing the laws that bypassed the normal federal disposition process, or by proactively restoring the normal process. The next opportunity to do this is through the FY2021 appropriations process. The repeal language needed is currently in the House appropriations bill, but not yet in the Senate appropriations bill. Votes on the appropriations bills may occur as soon as the end of July.

An [electronic press packet](#) provides further detail, maps, and photographs of Plum Island.

What elected officials, stakeholders, and subject matter experts are saying:

“We need to do everything possible to preserve Plum Island. It would be a mistake to sell Plum Island to a developer who would rip apart the 840-acres of habitat that hosts great beauty and many endangered species. This Envision Plum Island Report makes it clear that the only future for the island is as a wildlife preserve and charts a path towards making it a reality. That’s why I’m proud to cosponsor S. 519, the Plum Island Conservation Act and I will continue to fight tooth and nail in Washington to pass this bill.”

- **U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer, Minority Leader (D-NY)**

“This powerful report redoubles my determination to stop Plum Island’s sale to the highest bidder. Plum Island is a pristine, precious treasure that will be lost forever if it is sold to private developers. Preservation—not profits—should be the priority. I will fight to conserve it.”

- **U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), sponsor of [S. 519](#), Plum Island Conservation Act**

“Not only does Plum Island offer Long Island a diverse wildlife and ecosystem and critical habitat for migratory birds, marine mammals, and rare plants, but it is also an essential cultural and historical resource. The current law, which mandates the sale of the island to the highest bidder, is the wrong path forward, because it does not provide for public access and permanent preservation of the island, or the continued use of the research infrastructure. The state-of-the-art research facility at Plum Island must not go to waste, and preserving this island’s natural beauty while maintaining a research mission will continue to provide important economic and environmental benefits to Long Island. I’m honored to fight alongside my colleagues in a bicameral, bipartisan fashion to build on short term victories and permanently protect the island.”

- **U.S. Representative Lee Zeldin (NY-1), sponsor of [H.R. 1578](#), Plum Island Preservation Act**

“Plum Island’s natural habitat is a national treasure. The *Envision Plum Island* report lays out a powerful roadmap for how we can best preserve the island as a sanctuary for wildlife, conservation, and historic preservation. I applaud all of the advocates who worked hard to put this report together, and I won’t stop fighting until we make sure that Plum Island is protected for future generations.”

- **U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)**

“Preserve Plum Island’s vision for the reuse of Plum Island in their new Envision Plum Island report is further confirmation of the importance of preserving the island. Plum Island is an ecological gem and home to hundreds of species of wildlife. Preserving the island’s rich history and natural resources has been a top priority. I’ll continue to work with my colleagues in the Connecticut and New York delegations

and partners across Connecticut to permanently protect this treasured island, and make sure it isn't sold to the highest bidder."

- **U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT)**

"The members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition have worked diligently to develop an alternative vision and plan that illustrates the benefits of keeping this land public far outweigh selling it to the highest bidder, clearly demonstrating that there is a better future for Plum Island. The creation of jobs, historical preservation, and increased tourism and revenue would be of great benefit for generations to come. Plum Island is home to a rare natural ecosystem that Congress must protect. That is why I fought to include language in the fiscal year 2021 spending bills to help preserve Plum Island and prohibit the sale of this ecological treasure, and I urge my colleagues to vote in support of final passage of this legislation. I want to thank the Preserve Plum Island Coalition for their steadfast commitment to this effort, and I look forward to continuing to stand shoulder to shoulder to ensure that Plum Island and its rich environmental splendors are protected well into the future."

- **U.S. Representative Rose DeLauro (CT-3)**

"The Preserve Plum Island Coalition has done a truly outstanding job in bringing to life a vision for Plum Island that conserves its beauty, culture, and history, protects its ecosystems for both research and recreation, and that will create jobs and economic opportunities for our region. For years, Congressman Zeldin and I have worked together with our state delegations to pass legislation in the House to prevent the sale of Plum Island to the highest bidder, and to ensure that this vision can come to life. In both Connecticut and New York, residents and conservationists on either side of the Long Island Sound have worked to protect the island for future generations, and to capture its enormous research, educational, and recreational potential. It's an exciting time to be part of the effort to save Plum Island, and the credit belongs with the grassroots support in eastern Connecticut and New York. Rep. Zeldin and I will keep working on our bipartisan effort to preserve the island's potential and enable this vision to become a reality."

- **U.S. Representative Joe Courtney (CT-2)**

"Because it is where the waters of the Long Island Sound and The Great Peconic Bay join, Plum Island is the spectacular fulcrum of two National Estuaries. As part of a glacial archipelago its land is significant as a seabird and wildlife sanctuary and its surrounding waters support abundant and varied fishes as well as rare marine reptiles and mammals. Along with the island's culturally significant structures it is clearly a museum-quality site that deserves continued public ownership.

"To auction this national treasure to the highest bidder would be both a severe departure from the standard federal disposition process for surplus property and an exercise in public policy malpractice. New York State and its local governmental jurisdictions have invested heavily into protecting the Peconic Estuary's open spaces and water chemistry. Within this context it is important and appropriate for Congress to reconcile the House and Senate bills so that they match; repeal the existing statutory instruction for what would amount to a foolish 'fire sale;' and

advance the possibility of preservation by restoring tradition in offering Plum Island to New York State or local government as the primary mode of disposition of this priceless federal property.”

- **Assemblyman Steve Englebright, New York’s 4th District**

“Save The Sound has taken the leadership role in the fight to protect Plum Island. Envision Plum Island provides a clear blueprint for the protection and preservation of this unique jewel that will serve as a guide for future generations. This is an astonishing achievement created by the hard work and dedication of the organization and its partners. Now we must do all we can to make this vision a reality.”

- **Supervisor Scott Russell, Town of Southold**

“A few years ago Congress gave the Preserve Plum Island Coalition a homework assignment—to come up with a recommended vision to guide the future of Plum Island and the protection of its unparalleled natural, historical, and cultural resources. Like any good student we took that Congressional assignment seriously and this Vision document is the result. But this homework assignment, unlike most, wasn't the work of only one student. Several hundred caring Long Islanders provided insightful recommendations, and by so doing helped to shape a better product. This is homework which the PPIC and so many Long Islanders are proud to present.”

- **John Turner, spokesman, Preserve Plum Island Coalition**

“As we continue to develop a Research Corridor on Long Island and into Manhattan, it should commence with Plum Island, which is a significant ecological laboratory that could also become the home of new life sciences research jobs that could spur economic growth for our region.”

- **Kevin S. Law, President & CEO, Long Island Association**

“The spectacularly unique marine environment surrounding Plum Island influences every element of the island’s terrestrial and aquatic natural and cultural resources and values. The opportunity to keep a resource such as Plum Island in public hands, and protect, preserve, and manage it—and its amazingly biodiverse underwater environment—for appropriate public uses, most likely will never present itself again.”

- **Steven C. Resler, InnerSpace Scientific Diving; and Retired Deputy Bureau and Section Chief, New York Coastal Management Program**

“The Coast Defense Study Group is a strong advocate that Fort Terry’s batteries and garrison be protected and preserved for future generations to view and learn about this important part both of Long Island Sound’s history and our nation’s defenses.”

- **Terry McGovern, secretary/treasurer of the Coast Defense Study Group**

“Especially given the triple threat of climate change, habitat loss and species loss, now is exactly the right time to preserve biodiverse habitat and Plum Island is exactly the right place to do it.”

- **Rebecca R. Rubin, President and CEO, Marstel-Day, LLC**

***Envision Plum Island* report, brochure, and action steps can be found at www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report.**

[Electronic press packet](#) is available for media and includes report materials, background documents, maps, and photographs of Plum Island.

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The mission of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC) is to secure the permanent protection of the significant natural and cultural resources of Plum Island.