

ENVISION PLUM ISLAND

*A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE OF
HISTORY, NATURE, RESEARCH*



Envision Plum Island Report
July 2020



Save the Sound®
Action for our region's environment.



**Preserve
Plum Island
Coalition**

The Nature
Conservancy
New York



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Save the Sound leads environmental action in the Long Island Sound region. We fight climate change, save endangered lands, protect the Sound and its rivers, and work with nature to restore ecosystems.

What makes us unique among regional nonprofits is the breadth of our toolkit and results. We work in many ways, from legislative advocacy and legal action to engineering, environmental monitoring, and hands-on volunteer efforts. Together, we restore and protect all that impacts the Long Island Sound region's environment, from rivers and shorelines to wetlands and forests, from the air we breathe to the waters of the Sound itself. For more than 40 years we've been ensuring people and wildlife can enjoy the healthy, clean, and thriving environment they deserve—today and for generations to come.

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The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, the Conservancy strives to create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to the world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. Key priorities are tackling climate change; conserving lands, waters and ocean habitats at an unprecedented scale; providing food and water sustainably; and helping make cities more sustainable. The Conservancy, which now works in 79 countries and has been active on Long Island for 65 years, uses a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

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The Preserve Plum Island Coalition, comprised of 110 organizations, works to secure the permanent protection of the significant natural and cultural resources of Plum Island and supports a continuation of high-skilled jobs on the island.

Plum Island Stakeholder Workshop Participants

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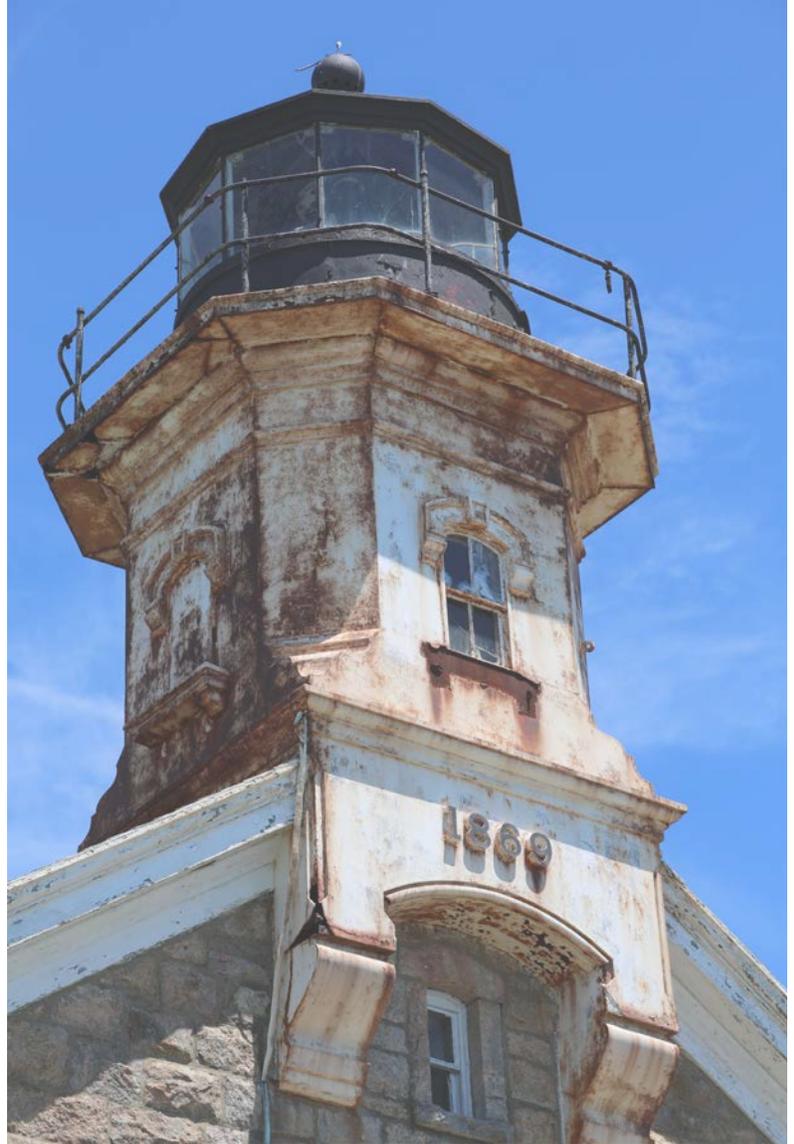
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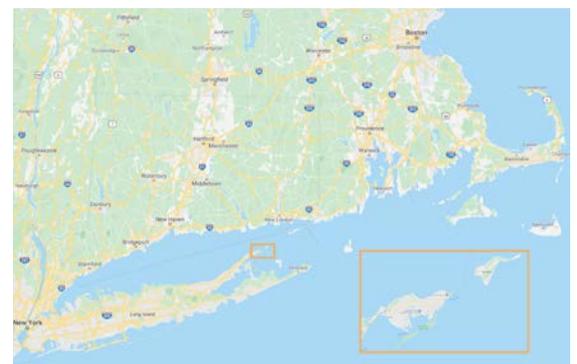
Plum Island, view toward Orient Point.

Executive Summary

“Few publicly owned islands are as poorly known, misunderstood, and shrouded in mystery as Plum Island, New York,” wrote New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) scientists in 2012.¹ Eight years later, the opposite is true: Plum Island, in Southold, New York, and home of the federal government’s Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC), which is slated to relocate to Kansas in 2023,² is now particularly well understood. And the more people learn about the island, the more they want to preserve its critical, natural habitats and its unique history.

Yet these critical habitats, wildlife, and historic structures of Plum Island are at risk of being degraded and possibly lost forever. To help prevent that from happening, the Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC), comprised of 110 organizations, is pleased to present a vision for Plum Island Preserve. This report offers a means to preserve the 822-acre island³ for its remarkable ecosystems, cultural heritage, and history—and for the benefit, enjoyment, and edification of the public, whose federal tax dollars have supported the island for well over a century. We also support a continuation of high-skilled jobs on the island.

Residents of New York and New England, elected officials, business leaders, tribal representatives, and academics have come together to articulate a plan for Plum Island. This process, called *Envision Plum Island*, was led by two of the organizations in the PPIC: Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy. Hundreds of stakeholders met in small and large groups over the course of nearly two years, aided by consulting firm Marstel-Day, LLC. This report is the culmination of that effort.⁴



This is PPIC’s joint vision—***Plum Island Preserve***, incorporating:

CONSERVATION

640-acre preserve supported by public-purpose partnerships—federal, state, local governments, nonprofits, volunteers

RESEARCH

125-acre academic/industry campus of repurposed buildings and approximately 80 undeveloped acres, for high quality jobs

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Fort Terry, Plum Island Lighthouse

MUSEUM

Natural and cultural heritage, history, sited at the ferry terminal parcel

FERRY

From Orient Point, NY, using the PIADC’s present ferry site

SUSTAINABILITY

Controlled ecotourism, connections to trail system

FRIENDS

Partnerships for security and support

We envision a place to explore Native American cultural heritage, undertake research, conserve and study the island’s rich biological diversity and significant ecological communities, and bring families and veterans to explore military and natural heritage.

We anticipate visitors enjoying tours of historic Fort Terry, the Plum Island Light, wildlife observation, guided walks, and other forms of passive recreation in the central portion of the island.

We support the Town of Southhold’s goal of job retention—particularly in research—and reuse of the PIADC complex, at the western end of the island, in a manner compatible with wildlife preservation, and public use on the eastern portion. For example, research could be undertaken in the fields of renewable

energy, biotech, health, electric-grid cyber-security, climate science, or ecology.

Researchers will study natural ecosystems left untrammled for decades; land managers will plan and undertake careful restoration efforts in disturbed areas. Archaeologists and Native Americans together will undertake studies to reveal people’s use of the island for the thousands of years prior to European colonization.

Visitors will learn about Plum Island’s historical, ecological, and cultural riches—of national and regional importance—at a museum established at the Orient Point ferry parcel. Steps away from the confluence of two National Estuaries, Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary, tourists will visit exhibits, attend lectures, purchase souvenirs, or board a ferry to visit Plum Island for a day.

We imagine New York State, local governments, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and not-for-profit organizations creating and taking care of Plum Island Preserve, together.

ZONING

In 2014, the Town of Southhold enacted zoning that created a logical division of reuse options between the island’s western section, where the PIADC is located (zoned as the Plum Island Research District, 182.4 acres), and the large natural areas and remains of Fort Terry to the east (zoned as the Plum Island Conservation District, 640 acres). The zoning resulted from a thorough process by the Southhold Planning Department, ratified by the Suffolk County Planning Commission and the Southhold Planning Board, and enacted by the Town Board.

Stakeholders request the Town to (a) change the Plum Island Lighthouse zoning from Research District to Conservation District, or create a special lighthouse zone with appropriate protections; (b) ensure that natural communities on the border of

the districts are not inappropriately divided; and (c) diminish the likelihood that solar energy installations would harm important ecological or historical areas. In addition, although conversion of a Fort Terry building into a dormitory for educational use appears to be allowed under the existing zoning, the Southold Town Board may wish to remove any ambiguity concerning this potential use. We support the new Marine III District zoning category created by the Town Board and support its application to the 9-acre Orient Point parcel, the primary purpose of which is ferry travel to and from Plum Island.

PLUM ISLAND'S RESOURCES

Plum Island is unique in its ability to sustain numerous, distinct ecological communities in a relatively small area; host endangered, threatened, and rare species; serve as a biological link to other islands in an archipelago that reaches from Long Island's North Fork toward Rhode Island; provide a haul-out area for New York's largest winter population of harbor seals; offer freshwater resources in a salt-water environment; serve as a home to 280 plant species; and attract at least 227 bird species.

Among stakeholders there is widespread sentiment that public access, *if carefully controlled*, can benefit these resources in the long run.

Native Americans participated in the visioning process and expressed strong interest in having a say in the island's future use. We recommend sensitively undertaken, noninvasive archaeological research to get a fuller understanding of people's lives on Plum Island prior to European arrivals.

The best physical evidence of Plum Island's use after European exploration and settlement and before the building of PIADC exists in the remaining buildings and fortifications of Fort Terry, the Plum Island Lighthouse, and the land and scenic

views themselves. We recommend that the significant Fort Terry buildings be stabilized to prevent further deterioration and that applications be completed to list these structures on the National Register of Historic Places. Further, we recommend reuse of either Fort Terry's Fireman's Quarters or

Our overall vision for Plum Island is to celebrate Plum Island's past; protect its ecological values; promote economic sustainability; and unite people with park, research, and educational opportunities.

the former Guardhouse as a small dorm for researchers and their students. The lighthouse, already listed on the National Register, should be restored and considered for bed-and-breakfast lodging to bring in revenue.

The PIADC structures reflect the island's more recent history. The Research District, of which they are a part, offers considerable potential for economically beneficial reuse of some or all of the PIADC buildings and supporting infrastructure to retain jobs and contribute resources for the general operation of Plum Island. We urge the New York's Empire State Development office and its Long Island Regional Economic Development Council to continue investigating potential users for which the offshore location would be advantageous, and also note approvingly that the Long Island Association made the beneficial reuse of Plum Island one of its 2020 priorities: "Support continued state funding for the creation of a Research Corridor from Brookhaven National Laboratory to the New York Genome Center in Manhattan and expand the corridor east to include research activities on Plum Island." Ideally, the Plum

Island Research District would serve as a center for innovation, conservation, and interpretation.

Stakeholders recognize the significance of the PIADC Orient Point parcel to Plum Island access and strongly encourage Southold to apply its new MIII District zoning to the parcel. This would designate the parcel primarily “for ferry service to and from Plum Island,” but would also allow a “museum” as an accessory use, which stakeholders support. A small museum could also serve as an assembly area or visitor center for people going to the island. Attendance would need to be managed so as not to generate additional traffic on the North Fork’s limited and seasonally congested travel corridors.

MECHANISMS FOR TRANSFER

To achieve the Plum Island Preserve vision, the standard federal property disposal law should be followed. The options best suited to the Conservation District, Research District, and Orient Point ferry parcel are one or more Public Benefit Conveyances (PBC) and/or a Negotiated Sale, which could result in revenue for the federal government under certain scenarios. These options are in stark contrast to the Public Sale the GSA decided upon in its Record of Decision issued in 2013. A Public Sale would result in Plum Island being sold to the highest bidder, a person or entity that might challenge Southold’s zoning and seek uses of Plum Island that would threaten its precious natural, historical, and cultural resources. A Public Sale is least likely to result in protection of the island’s unique features.

Consultant Marstel-Day has produced a separate report entitled *Plum Island Disposal and Beneficial Reuse Strategy*⁵ detailing how the standard federal process would provide New York State and local governments the right to request (a) a PBC for some or all of Plum Island at no cost or reduced cost for park, historic monument, conservation, or

educational uses; or (b) a Negotiated Sale option for other public purposes.

There are pros and cons of each course of action, but the options demonstrate that a *Public Sale is not the only practical means for the GSA to dispose of Plum Island or obtain sale revenue.*

The PPIC, with full regional support, calls on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), GSA, and Congress to stop the planned sale of Plum Island in favor of consideration of one or more PBC conveyances and/or negotiated sale transfer.

ACTIONS

Congress could direct DHS and GSA to adhere to the standard federal property disposition process for the transfer of Plum Island. Congress also could approve a disposition plan based on the standard provisions, arrived at through discussions PPIC or New York State would have with DHS and GSA.

In addition, Congress should direct the agencies to stabilize the historic Fort Terry structures; compel DHS to complete National Register of Historic Places listing for Fort Terry; and request a Special Resource Study of Plum Island by the National Park Service.

Other recommended actions include:

New York State should become Plum Island’s public champion. We ask Governor Cuomo to announce the State’s intentions to lead in the creation of a Plum Island Preserve; continue cooperative agency efforts with PPIC, local governments, and the business community, with the goal of developing a Plum Island acquisition and reuse plan; and convey the State’s interest in Plum Island to GSA, DHS, and Congress.

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition should continue to call on Congress to repeal the Plum Island laws enacted in 2008 and 2012; advocate for Southold zoning adjustments that promote Plum Island Preserve implementation; assist in creating a Friends of Plum Island group; and organize all stakeholders in scoping for and reviewing the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), should it occur.





Introduction

Beautiful and mysterious Plum Island is an 822-acre⁶ landscape in Southold, New York, about a mile and a half off the eastern tip of Orient Point and eight miles off the coast of Connecticut. There, Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary mix with each other and with Atlantic Ocean waters. The water quality is some of the best in the region. The island, part of a large and vibrant coastal ecosystem near densely populated portions of New York and Connecticut, connects history, nature, and scientific research.

Over the past few decades, scientists have documented the high biodiversity on the island and in its surrounding waters, as well as the island's role in an ecological complex made up of an archipelago and coasts to the north and south. In this important ecological complex, much land has been preserved using public and private funds. Historians and archaeologists are interested in further investigation of the island's earliest human uses. It is nearly impossible to discuss Plum Island with a member of the public without hearing how much the individual would like to visit this remarkable place.

“Plum Island’s biodiversity is highly significant for New York State, exemplified by its high-quality shoreline communities, remaining populations of rare plants, extensive use by at-risk birds for breeding, and habitat for rare insects. However, we believe that the island has the potential to house even more extraordinary biodiversity with appropriate management.”

—Schlesinger et al. (2016), p. 49.

Notwithstanding Southold’s strong zoning rules, the future for Plum Island that we collectively envision—a combined preserve, research center, and interpretive historical site—is threatened by the prospect of inappropriate development. Federal laws enacted in 2008 and 2012 exempted Plum Island from the federal government’s normal process for transferring surplus property.⁷ That process would have required the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to give other federal agencies, such as the USFWS, or state entities, such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), a chance to preserve Plum Island. Instead, Congress directed the limited sale of the PIADC and the “assets” that support it. GSA and DHS have, however, interpreted this directive as applying to the entire island. This approach is likely to result in the entire island being sold to the highest bidder, who could seek to overturn Southold’s zoning in court. Such an effort would leave the critical habitats open to rampant development instead of conservation.

“Further development on Plum Island would likely result in habitat loss for many rare species.” —Schlesinger et al. (2016), p. vii

This outcome is not what regional residents, elected officials, tribal representatives, and business leaders want, as revealed in the planning process known as *Envision Plum Island*. In this report, we show that a preserved Plum Island, connecting conservation, research, and economic opportunities, is not only broadly desired, but feasible.

WHY ENVISION PLUM ISLAND?

In 2017, members of Congress and their staff asked the PPIC the pertinent question, “*What do you see instead?*” and recommended that a plan for Plum Island be articulated. *Envision Plum Island* is the result, led by two PPIC steering committee members, Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy-New York, with participation by other members of the steering committee and many stakeholders in New York and Connecticut.⁸ Marstel-Day LLC provided its expertise in federal property disposition. A series of stakeholder meetings took place between November 2018 and November 2019.

VISION: Plum Island Preserve

Plum Island connects our country's history with unique and critical habitats that allow wildlife to thrive—all near densely populated areas. That makes it a model location to be recast as “Plum Island Preserve,” a nature preserve, research center, and museum/cultural center.

“What do you see, instead?”

—Congress

By 2023, we envision that Plum Island will:

- join New York State's park system (with possible co-ownership with Suffolk County);
- maintain a conservation area and nature preserve where at least 600 acres are co-managed by federal, state, and local governments along with not-for-profit organizations and volunteers for a variety of public purposes;
- host an academic and/or industry research campus on 125 acres where local jobs are created by repurposing the existing facility for a living, learning laboratory;
- promote a museum experience that highlights the island's Native American, cultural, scientific, military, and natural heritage;
- help satisfy a demand for public access to open space and New York's trail system, while carefully managing the public's use of Plum Island to give priority to ecological protection;
- offer auditorium space for meetings related to on-island efforts, and pre-arranged gatherings;
- arrange ferry services from Orient Point parcel for academic, industry, or public access uses;
- preserve Plum Island Lighthouse and Fort Terry for potential, partial reuse; and
- include a Friends of Plum Island organization that can support the island's acquisition and maintenance.



We envision New York State agencies, along with local governments, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and not-for-profit organizations, working together to co-manage 600+ acres of Plum Island habitat for environmental conservation and research, archaeological investigations, and historical preservation.

At Plum Island Preserve, the eastern part of Plum Island will host a small field station/dormitory for ecological studies, tours of historic Fort Terry and the Plum Island Lighthouse, and opportunities for passive recreation, such as walking and wildlife observation. The general public will visit Plum Island by arrangement and under supervision of guides. Access will be more limited with regard to designated nature reserve areas, where restoration and management work may be undertaken with the help of students and volunteers.

At the western end of the island, we support Southold's goal to reuse the PIADC complex, in a manner compatible with wildlife preservation, and support public use of the eastern section. For example, research could be undertaken in the fields of renewable energy, biotech, health, electricity grid cyber-security, climate science, or ecology. Depending on the type of use, the occupant(s) may be able to contribute resources toward

the management of conservation zones, the lighthouse, and transportation services to and from the island. Easements may be appropriate to allow access from the Conservation Zone to the harbor and dock, and any other facilities to be shared.

At the Orient Point ferry property, visitors would be able to attend an informative pre-visit presentation at a small interpretive center, and, post-trip, could take a lasting memento home, such as an individualized photograph or souvenir from the gift shop. The Plum Island ferry, launching from this site, would provide transportation to and from the island.

Plum Island is a world unto itself, a world where Fort Terry whispers our country's past; seals rest, whales and harbor porpoises swim by, and birds feed their young; wild landscapes remain untouched; and research and education experiences could provide "Eureka!" moments to students and visitors alike. This is a world that could provide an unparalleled understanding of our region and our history, in addition to unique recreation and scenic opportunities.

Plum Island Preserve Vision Concept

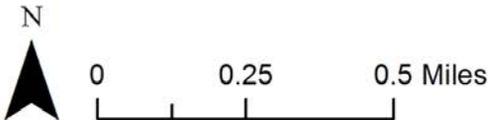
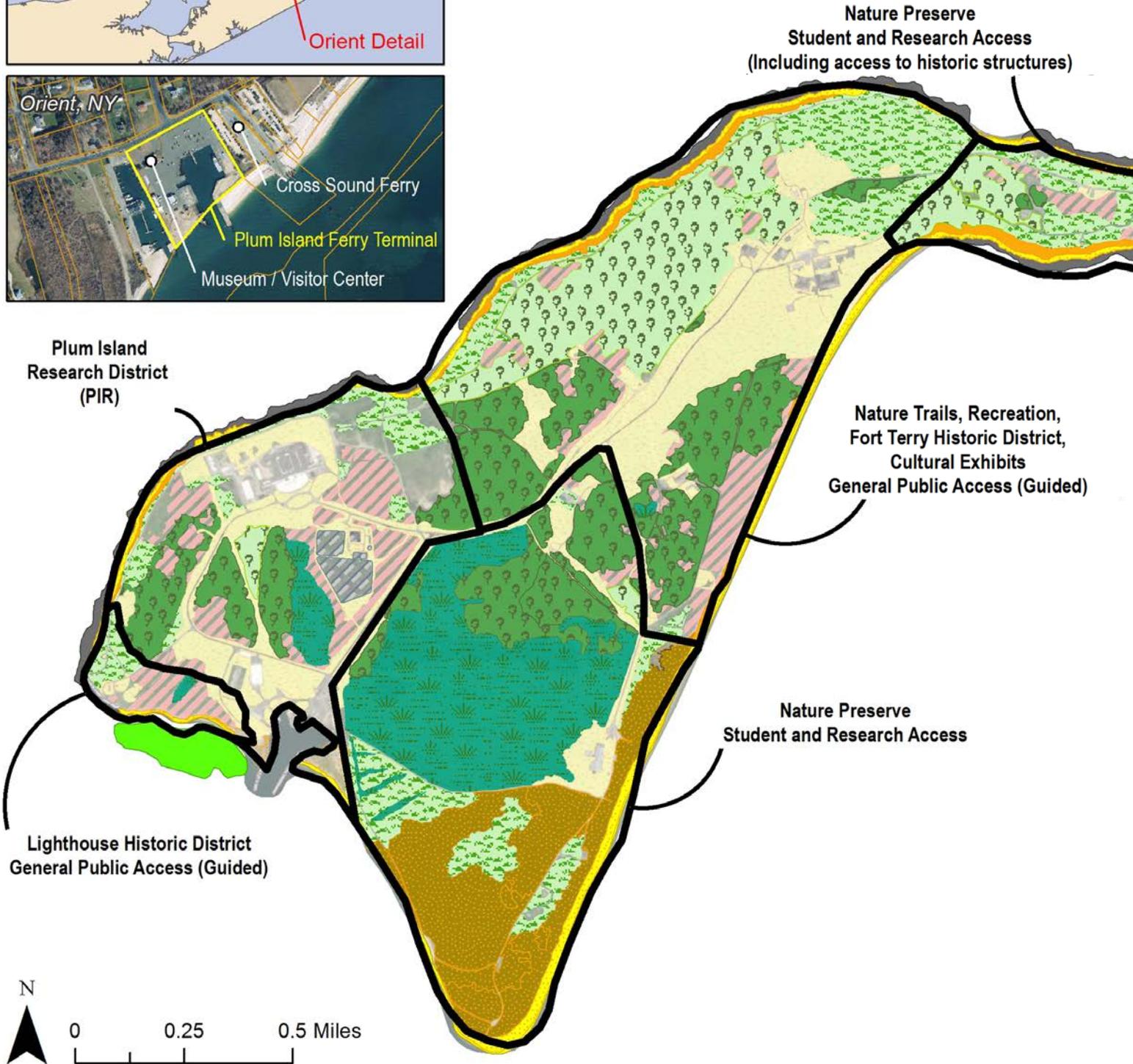
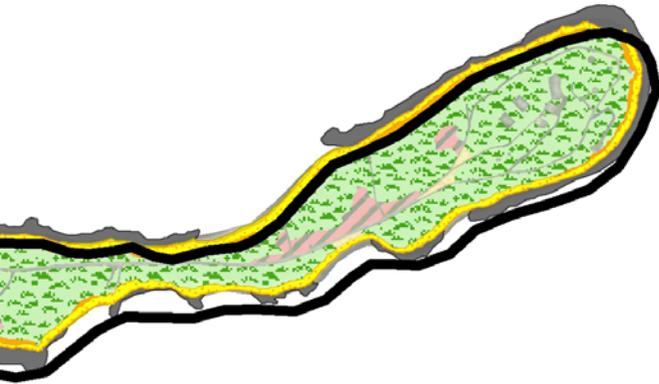


Figure 1.
Plum Island Preserve Vision Concept.



Significant Natural Communities:

-  Marine eelgrass meadow
-  Marine rocky intertidal
-  Maritime beach
-  Maritime bluff
-  Maritime dunes

Natural Communities*:

-  Marsh
-  Maritime forest
-  Maritime forest/Shrubland mix
-  Shrubland
-  Old field/grassland
-  Invasive/Mix
-  Dunes and beach
-  Erosion control/artificial beach
-  Sewage treatment pond

* Natural communities condensed from 25 classes - See NYNHP report for details.

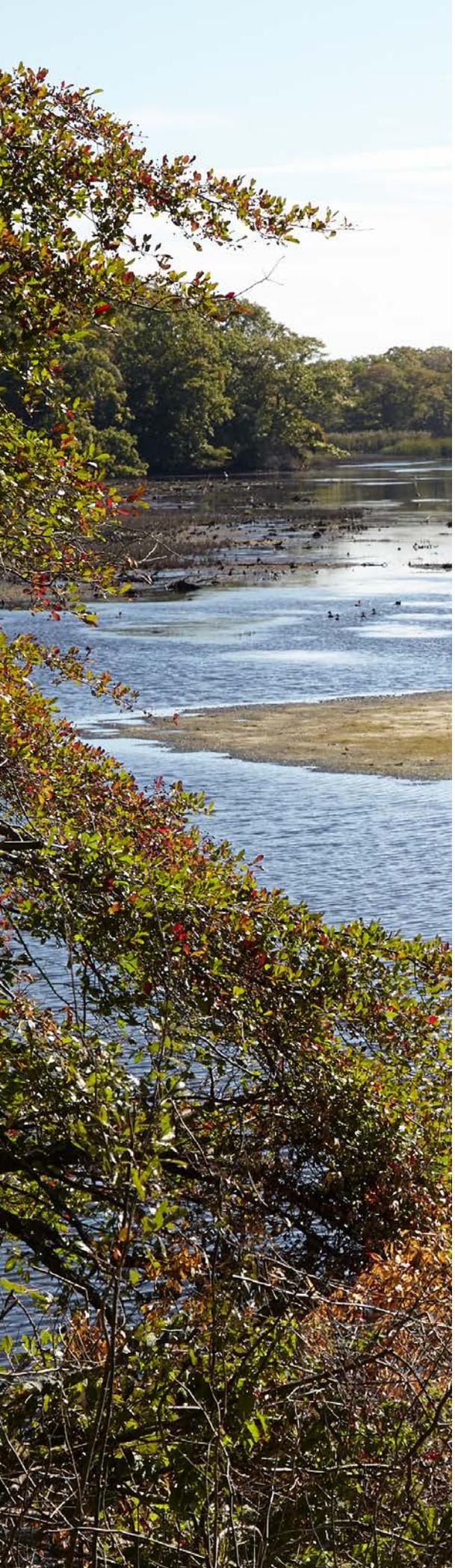
Data Sources:

NYNHP Natural Community Map - Schlesinger et al. 2012

NYNHP Element Occurrence Communities 2018

Aerial imagery from Esri

Map updated July 2020



CHAPTER 1

Envision Plum Island: A Connecting Landscape

A Town with Vision: Southold's Plum Island Zoning

As we began the *Envision Plum Island* process, the Town of Southold's zoning⁹ of Plum Island into a Conservation District and Research District provided a logical starting point. (See Figure 2.) Stakeholders reviewed the district boundaries, the permitted uses in each district, maps of the island's natural resources by the New York Natural Heritage Program, the locations of structures, topographical maps and maps of former landfill sites, among other documents. Based on this review, it was evident that the zoning presents a logical delineation and division of potential uses on Plum Island.

This conclusion was not surprising given the careful research and discussion that Southold and Suffolk County put into the zoning.

The Town's planning department reacted quickly to Congress' 2008 law directing sale of Plum Island, advising that zoning should be applied to protect the Town's interests.¹⁰ Although local zoning does not apply to federal or state lands, the Town "found it prudent to zone the island in the event the island is sold into private hands. The new zoning designations accomplish the multiple goals for the island of protecting its exceptional resources, while also providing for future economic opportunities."¹¹ The zoning requirements would take effect upon conveyance of Plum Island land to a non-federal or non-state recipient.

PLUM ISLAND ZONING DISTRICTS

There is a slight discrepancy between the total acreage of the island as determined using GIS by Southold (816 acres) and TNC (822 acres). We use TNC's GIS calculations of the island's and districts' areas in this report.¹²

NOTE: The following summarizes elements of the Plum Island zoning districts and should not be used as regulatory guidance. See Appendix A for full description of Local Law No. 6 of 2013 or Chapter 280 of the Southold Town Code. Consult the Town of Southold Planning Board or Planning Department for further information.

Plum Island Conservation District

(PIC). The purpose of the 640-acre PIC is “to preserve the integrity of the regionally significant natural, scenic, and historic resources of Plum Island for the benefit of the residents of the Town of Southold.” The district includes undeveloped land that is rich in ecological resources, as well as the remains of historic Fort Terry.

In the Conservation District, the following uses are permitted subject to approval by the Southold Town Planning Board:

- Nature Preserve
- Public Park
- Educational facility related to the study of natural resources conservation.
- Museums

The minimum lot size is 350 acres and buildings may be no higher than 35 feet. Lot coverage restrictions apply, and all sewage must be treated.

Another permitted use, requiring special approval by the Zoning Board of Appeals, is “[s]olar energy generation in excess of that needed to provide power to permitted uses.”

Accessory uses could include structures “customarily incidental to the principal use,” and “sleeping quarters, apartments or

dormitories providing accommodations solely for personnel associated with the permitted or special exception uses.”

Plum Island Research District (PIR).

The purpose of the 182.4-acre PIR is “to encourage the use of land for research and educational opportunities, to provide quality employment opportunities, and to preserve Plum Island’s regionally significant natural,

“We tried to create zoning that ... achieves protection and preservation of that stunning ecosystem and tries to save Plum Island as a research facility.”

—Russell (2013)

historic, scenic, and cultural resources.” The PIR District applies to the PIADC complex and the land on which it is located, although there are about 80 acres of undeveloped land in the PIR District.

In the Research District, the following are permitted uses, requiring site plan approval by the Planning Board, and appropriate sewage treatment facilities:

- Research laboratories with multiple buildings allowed in a campus-style development, subject to conditions listed that prohibit explosives, offensive noises, gases, fumes, smoke and other waste products or vibrations from being discharged in a manner that causes a nuisance or is injurious to health or surface- or groundwater quality.
- Educational facilities with multiple buildings allowed in a campus-style development.
- Museums housed in a designated historic landmark.

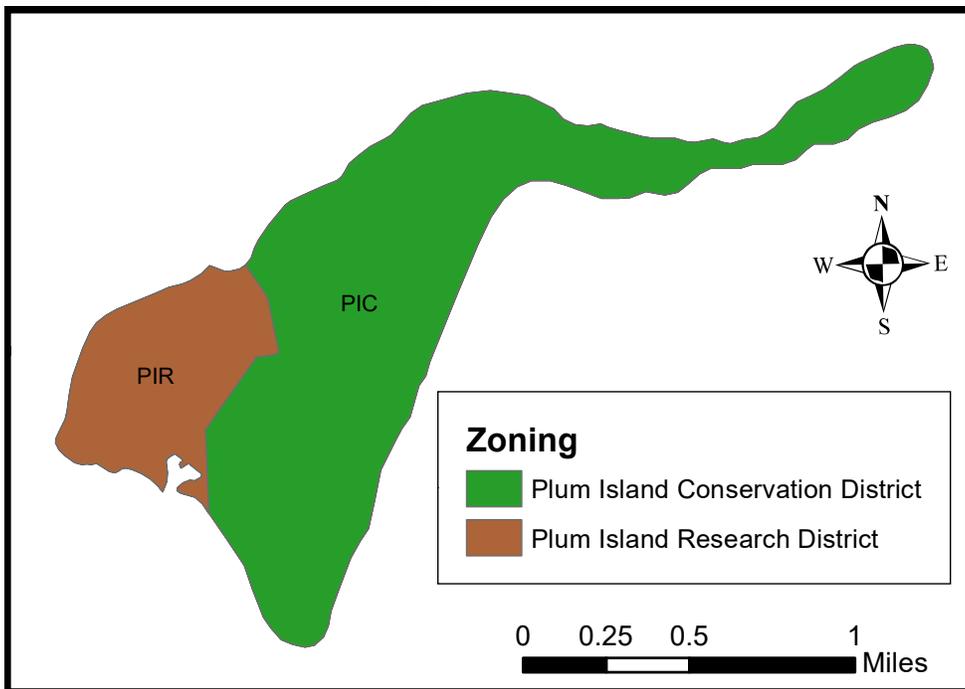
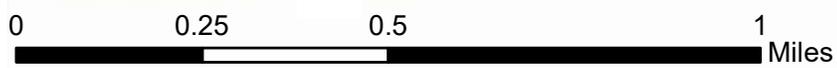
Plum Island Zoning Map





Figure 2.
Plum Island Zoning Map.

Map produced in ArcMap GIS
Southold Town Planning Department
February, 2020
Aerial: 2016 Imagery



“The rationale for creating new zoning designations ... is based on a study of the limited infrastructure, both on the island and in the eastern portion of Southold Town, the community character of the Town, including along the main route to the island through East Marion and Orient, the economic value of the current use of the island, the value of the natural resources supported by the island, and the historic resources.”

—Plum Island Planning Study, Southold Planning Board (2013)

The minimum lot size is 125 acres and buildings may not exceed 35 feet in height. Lot coverage restrictions apply, and new structures and impervious surfaces must be set back at least 300 feet from the shoreline, bluff or dune crest, or wetlands edge, whichever is more protective.

As in the Conservation District, “Solar energy generation in excess of that needed to provide power to permitted uses” may be permitted if approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board.

Accessory uses may include:

- Any customary structures or uses which are customarily incidental to the principal use, except those prohibited by this chapter.
- Cafeteria, sleeping quarters, apartments or dormitories for personnel associated with approved uses
- Infrastructure necessary to the operation of approved uses, limited to roads, sewer system, water storage, and water pipelines and utility lines
- Existing harbor and ferry facility for transportation by boat to and from Plum Island.

Marine III District (MIII). At present, the PIADC’s approximately 9-acre parcel at Orient Point, on Southold’s “mainland,”¹³ provides employee parking and logistics support. As a federal property, it is not subject to local zoning enforcement; it currently is zoned Marine II, which allows multiple uses.¹⁴

In 2019, Southold created a new MIII zoning category which, when applied to the Orient Point parcel, will “provide a waterfront location in the portion of the Town located on Long Island for ferry service to and from Plum Island.” Ferry terminal(s) for ferry service to and from Plum Island is the only permitted use, subject to site plan approval by the Planning Board.¹⁵

Accessory uses and/or structures include: Ticket offices, waiting areas, snack bar; off-street parking or loading areas; offices for executive and administrative uses; storage sheds and tool sheds; on-site storage and repair facilities directly related to the operation of the primary permitted use; museum; and any other customary structures or uses which are customarily incidental to the principal use.

“Right now, the way we have it worded, the only way you could subdivide [Plum Island] would be along the zoning lines ... otherwise there ... won’t be any additional lots here according to our proposed zoning and one of the reasons was we didn’t want to create a large residential community out there. We didn’t think it was the right place for it.”

—Heather Lanza, Southold Planning Director [see Lanza (2013)].

POTENTIAL ZONING MODIFICATIONS

The Town has indicated a willingness to consider adjustments to its Plum Island zoning regulation. Potential topic areas include:

- Clarification that a Fort Terry building could be converted into a small dorm and classroom facility for single-night stays by researchers and students.
- Reuse of Plum Island Lighthouse as bed-and-breakfast site: Examine how this use may or may not conflict with the needs of an entity occupying the Research District and if compatible, clarify/ensure permissibility. This type of use may help support maintenance of the lighthouse, itself.
- Zoning for the lighthouse and immediate environs: It may be appropriate to assign the lighthouse to the Conservation District, with a buffer zone around it extending south to the harbor and to limits ensuring (a) appropriate historic district treatment and (b) separation of visitors from Research District occupants.
- District boundaries: It may be desirable to adjust the boundaries between the two districts so as not to divide ecological communities as mapped by the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP). This would facilitate future land management activities, such as ecological restoration.
- Solar arrays: Despite assurances from town officials that, as accessory uses, any proposals for solar arrays in the Conservation District would be subject to an exhaustive environmental review, we suggest the Town (a) significantly reduce the 20% lot coverage allowed for such installations and (b) enact clearing restrictions for such uses that protect sensitive ecological and/or historical areas (e.g., the Fort Terry parade ground).



A Region Unites: Experts and the Public Come Together with a Vision for Plum Island

With the help of project sponsors,¹⁶ scores of stakeholders¹⁷ participated at each of the three *Envision Plum Island* workshops, which included presentations by invited speakers and encouraged a diversity of voices in break-out groups to identify and resolve potential conflicts over future island uses.

Outreach Methods. To the three stakeholder meetings, held from November 2018 to November 2019, we invited experts in conservation, biology, policy, government, economic development, history, and locally represented Native American nations (see Acknowledgments). We held numerous smaller meetings and conversations with other members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, local and state agency personnel, the business community, former employees of the PIADC, scientists, museum personnel and affiliates, remediation experts, university leaders, and elected officials. We even received input from fifth and sixth graders who studied Plum Island, envisioned its future, and wrote to Governor Cuomo to express their concerns and ideas.¹⁸

In addition, volunteer videographers Thomas Halaczinsky and Petrina Engelke conducted interviews for *What Do You See?*, a short film that was shown at all three workshops and on social media platforms (www.preserveplumisland.org/what-you-see).

The process of convening, listening, sharing ideas, researching unanswered questions, and analysis of documents, resulted in a unified vision for Plum Island Preserve. We are grateful for everyone's informed and well-considered input.¹⁹ Workshop attendees and additional organizations contributing to the Plum Island Preserve vision are listed in Acknowledgments.

Workshop Results. Participants noted that successful models exist of preserves allowing limited public access, combined with researcher use and/or historic structures. One notable example in New York State is Governors Island, where two forts have been designated National Monuments and the majority of the rest of the island is open to public visitation. Another model is Santa Cruz Island, California, shared by the National Parks Service and The Nature Conservancy. On Long Island, Connetquot River State Park Preserve and Caumsett State Historic Park Preserve combine history and visitation.

To elaborate on the recommendations made above, it is worth sharing some points and recommendations made by stakeholders.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT, STEWARDSHIP, AND ACCESS.

- Recognizing public access is important for long-term stewardship, research, and education, stakeholders believe conservation of the island’s ecological resources is paramount. This means that some ecologically sensitive areas should be used solely for research, restoration, and education, with access only by permit or other control.
- Town zoning should be adjusted to ensure that solar energy installments, if any, should not harm sensitive habitats or historical areas.
- Invasive species should be addressed using early detection, rapid removal (ED/RR) protocols.
- Habitat restoration activities can be educational and the subject of guided tours and/or volunteerism.
- There exists little in the written record about Native American use of Plum Island. Cultural heritage of the island should be researched with sensitivity, with goals of preservation and public understanding. Native American voices should be part of the decision-making process for Plum Island’s future.
- Reuse of a Fort Terry building in the Conservation District for a small dorm or classroom for researchers and their students would be beneficial, and such individuals may play a stewardship role.
- Some areas lend themselves better to public access and passive recreation. Nonetheless, appropriate measures should be taken, including elevated walkways and designated paths, to protect natural ecological communities and sensitive species. Fencing should be placed only where necessary.
- Scientists and naturalists oppose overnight camping on Plum Island, especially if unsupervised.

- The waters around Plum Island provide an additional vantage point for visual public access. Boat tours may be popular and help protect on-island resources.
- There is an immediate need to stabilize historic buildings to prevent further deterioration. The island provides great opportunities for interpretation of cultural heritage and history.
- Clearly defined management plans and memoranda of understanding will be needed to address potential use conflicts between the Research District and the Conservation District.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REUSE OF RESEARCH DISTRICT.

- Infrastructure in the Research District should not be wasted; it is important to find new uses that can contribute to Long Island’s economy and bring jobs.
- The proposed Long Island Research Corridor should be extended to include Plum Island.
- Continued use of the Research District is important for future infrastructure operations in and related to the Conservation District.
- Southold zoning allows educational facilities with multiple buildings, campus-style. There may be reuse potential of portions of the PIADC administrative offices and auditorium for classroom and meeting space.
- Given the transportation challenges associated with working on an island, it might be best to attempt attracting new enterprises to the Research District that “need an island,” are best situated away from populations, or benefit greatly by Plum Island’s estuarine location and resources.
- NYSDEC oversees²⁰ cleanup of any remaining contamination on Plum Island; U.S. Department of Homeland Security

“Plum Island should become a wildlife refuge ... inviting the public to learn at a visitor center, hike on numerous trails, visit the lighthouse and Fort Terry, and enjoy world-class wildlife viewing opportunities. Tourists and other visitors would spend money in the local economy, which would support jobs, improved environmental health, and biological diversity.”

—Bailey Shannon, sixth grade student in 2018, Cutchogue East Elementary School, in a letter to NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo

is responsible. The federal government has determined that no portions of the island warrant Superfund designation, and much cleanup of landfill waste has already occurred. DHS has proposed additional groundwater monitoring and possible waste removal or capping, but given the necessary state and federal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan, timeframe, and costs for additional monitoring and cleanup have not been finalized. These issues should not adversely affect a conveyance of property for conservation purposes, and the island will not be opened to the public unless and until NYSDEC has certified it as safe. *See also Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), at the end of this report.*

PLUM ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE AND ORIENT POINT FERRY PARCEL.

- Lighthouses are popular sites for visitation.
- Potential partnerships are available with nonprofits, maritime/historical societies for restoration, operations, and interpretation.
- Some stakeholders suggested bed-and-breakfast use of the Plum Island Lighthouse when restored (not currently supported by zoning).
- The Orient Point ferry parcel should be dedicated to providing ferry service to and from Plum Island for future employees of

the Research District as well as visitors to the Conservation District.

- A museum for interpretation of cultural heritage, Plum Island history, and the island’s geological and natural history should become a reality.

Outcomes from Additional Meetings with Experts and Officials. We tested ideas with experts in various fields (see list in Acknowledgments), undertook additional research as necessary, and moved continually toward a unified, feasible, vision. Along the way, we found that collaborative conversations began taking place in government chambers and among members of the research and business communities, outside our own process. As ideas and information accumulated, so, too, did agreement and enthusiasm. Below are some outcomes of continued regional and statewide conversations and interest in preserving Plum Island.

Governor Cuomo’s Executive Chamber.

We kept Executive Chamber staff, as well as high-level agency personnel in New York’s Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Department of Environmental Conservation, and Department of State informed of stakeholders’ coalescing vision throughout the *Envision Plum Island* process. Of particular interest are the types of conveyances available to states in the federal government’s standard process for disposing

of surplus property. In our vision, New York is the Plum Island Preserve champion, ensuring protection of this national treasure.

NYS Legislature. The 2019 *Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area* delineates a marine zone around Plum, Great Gull, and Little Gull Islands and is aimed at affording additional protection for marine mammals and sea turtles within that zone. NYS Assembly Environmental Conservation Chair Steve Englebright authored this law and worked with PPIC members over three years for its passage, achieved with co-sponsorship by Senator Monica Martinez and the signature of Governor Cuomo.

Montaukett and Shinnecock Indian Nations. Discussions with members of the Montaukett Indian Nation, Shinnecock Nation, and associated researchers reinforced there is a strong desire to protect, and educate people about, the relationship between Plum Island and Native American cultural heritage.

Congress. The PPIC has traveled with Long Island Sound advocates to Washington, DC, and to district offices to discuss Plum Island preservation measures with congressional representatives and staffers. In December 2019, our efforts succeeded in a *temporary suspension of funding of marketing and sales activities for fiscal year 2020.*²¹

The PPIC also requested Congress help fund stabilization measures²² for the deteriorating structures of Fort Terry and asked for congressional legislation engaging the National Park Service in preparing a Special Resource Study. Such a study would further document Plum Island's natural, historical, archaeological, and cultural resources and could be a key element in building federal support for a low- or no-cost conveyance of Plum Island to New York for conservation purposes.

Town of Southold. Town officials

participated in *Envision Plum Island* at stakeholder workshops and in smaller meetings. The Town of Southold informally expressed a preference for a Plum Island museum in a building on a future ferry parcel zoned Marine III, rather than on Plum Island.

The Nature Conservancy. TNC arranged for a nationally recognized appraisal firm, LandVest, to conduct an appraisal of the two Plum Island zoning districts in 2019, taking into account the Southold zoning, and the Orient Point ferry parcel (as zoned currently, Marine II). The market values determined by LandVest are substantially lower than estimates mentioned by federal officials and real estate representatives in the past. (*See Chapter 4 for additional information on conveyance possibilities.*)

Previously, TNC arranged for the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) to make two assessments²³ of the terrestrial biodiversity of Plum Island, including a





four-season biological inventory, resulting in detailed reports in 2012 and 2016. In 2018, TNC and officials at PIADC took steps to plan a LiDAR flyover survey for archaeological purposes, but this work was terminated by the General Services Administration (GSA) and DHS in April 2018 at the same time that access to Plum Island by nonprofit groups was suspended.

New York Natural Heritage Program.

Save the Sound and an anonymous donor arranged for scientific divers to conduct an initial habitat survey in the waters around Plum Island in early fall 2019. High biodiversity and possible fish nursery grounds were documented, fortifying the need for special protection of Plum Island and its immediate offshore habitats.

Long Island Association. The LIA, Long Island’s premier business association, voted in favor of the following 2020 priority:

“Support continued state funding for the creation of a Research Corridor from Brookhaven National Laboratory to the New York Genome Center in Manhattan and expand the corridor east to include research activities on Plum Island.”

Empire State Development

Corporation. Based on an initial meeting, ESD may be of help in exploring reuse of and attracting investment to the Research District. Joint discussions with the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council, NYSDEC, and the Long Island State Park Region will be pursued in 2020 to ensure compatibility of potential economic development ideas with the overall vision of Plum Island as a preserve.

Please see also Chapter 4, Actions Needed Now.

“You could have sustainable development, you could have sustainable tourist activities going on, in a way that’s not harmful to the environment ... I think, maybe, a world renowned artist colony.”

—Scott Bluedorn, artist and illustrator, East Hampton, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018)

“As a person who is used to putting together deals—trying to make something happen—to me, a more realistic approach would be a public–private partnership of some kind.”

—Mike Tannen, board of NYC Audubon and Mohonk Preserve, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018).





CHAPTER 2

Plum Island: A Critical Resource

A Refuge for Wildlife

“The island is of National Park quality.”²⁴

—NYS Assemblyman Steve Englebright

Plum Island has been a property of the American public for over one hundred years. Yet after the U.S. Army transferred the island to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) for research in the mid-1950s, the island began to be turned over to nature, too. Although many of the remaining Fort Terry buildings were used, at first, to support PIADC research activities, USDA gradually transferred those activities to the newer lab facilities being built on the western side of the island. By the early 1990s, most research activity was confined to the developed areas surrounding the present-day PIADC complex. From the outset, the policy of keeping cloven-hooved mammals such as deer off the island helped protect bird species, and visitation by people generally was limited to PIADC personnel, who left most of the island undisturbed. As a result of these factors, numerous species of wildlife found the right conditions for habitat and safety. Significant ecological communities reestablished themselves. Rare plants reappeared, some with significantly large new populations. Nature found refuge. Eighty percent of Plum Island has become a de facto wildlife sanctuary.

Key Location. The property slogan—“location, location, and location”—truly explains why Plum Island has become the national treasure it is. It is a “wild gem” in eastern Long Island Sound, which, in its more western reaches, is highly urbanized. The island is a key element of the wildlife-rich archipelago that reaches from Orient Point, NY, to Napatree Point, RI.

Situated between two estuaries and the Atlantic Ocean, with geology resulting from glacial and marine forces, conditions on and surrounding Plum Island have created and fostered 25 natural communities on 17 soil types, including a 96-acre wetland,²⁵ 196 acres of upland hardwood and maritime forests, and five communities of statewide significance, according to the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP): maritime beach, maritime bluff, maritime dune, marine rocky intertidal community, and marine eelgrass meadow.²⁶ Beaches and dunes comprise 101 acres and are considered pristine, with little disturbance for nearly 70 years.

The island’s adjoining Plum Gut is one of two primary migration corridors for striped bass to reach Long Island Sound and is thought to be the major migration corridor for Atlantic salmon returning to the Connecticut and Pawcatuck Rivers in early spring. The concentrations of finfish foraging and passing through Plum Gut is considered unusual in New York State.²⁷ Federally endangered and rare juvenile Kemp’s ridley sea turtles may use the surrounding waters as important summer feeding and nursery areas.

Nearby, on Great Gull Island, owned by the American Museum of Natural History, are the largest breeding population of Common Terns in the world and the greatest population of breeding Roseate Terns in the western hemisphere. Those species forage in the waters surrounding Plum Island. The NYS-endangered (federally threatened)

Piping Plover nests on Plum Island. Scientists who, in 2015, were undertaking an inventory of biological resources on Plum Island later stated, “Common Tern observations were so frequent and dispersed around the island that we did not map them. Roseate Terns were also found all along the shoreline ...”²⁸

“A partnership with an educational institution, we think, makes a lot of sense. ... The most important thing we have to answer is, how would this plot sustain itself, financially?”

—Lou Burch, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, at A Look Back to Envision Plum Island workshop, September 26, 2019.

It should also be noted that through the National Estuaries Program, the federal government has invested millions of dollars in restoring and protecting Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary, which meet at the shores of Plum Island. Development of Plum Island would run counter to the long-standing effort to protect the critical resources of National Estuaries.

Widespread recognition. Plum Island has been noted for its biological richness and natural features numerous times and by numerous entities. For instance, it is:

- within the boundaries of two estuaries of national importance in the *National Estuaries Program (NEP)—Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary*;
- part of an NEP *Long Island Sound Study Stewardship Area* (“Plum and Gull Islands”);
- included within the federally designated *Coastal Barrier Resources System* created by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act;



- part of the Long Island Sound’s *Essential Fish Habitat* for numerous species as delineated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) program;
- identified by the USFWS as being within, and an element of, a *Significant Coastal Habitat* for its quality and areas of natural diversity in need of protection;²⁹
- immediately adjoining the New York Coastal Management Program’s designated *Plum Gut Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat*;
- within and an important element of the “*Eastern Islands*” *Regionally Important Natural Area* identified in the Long Island Sound Coastal Management Program;
- included by Suffolk County in its *Peconic Bay Environs Critical Environmental Area*; and
- an *Important Bird Area* identified by Audubon New York as critical bird habitat.

New York State recognizes Plum Gut for its turbulent marine deepwater habitats and shoals, which, together, produce a highly productive environment for invertebrates and finfish, including large concentrations of striped bass, bluefish, tautog, and summer flounder, among others.

Despite so much recognition, the threat of permanent habitat destruction is real. An auction of the island could well result in private development and an attack on Southold’s zoning, with concomitant conversion of natural areas to hardened landscapes inhospitable to wildlife and native plants.

Plum Island Species. Underpinning many of the above-listed special designations are the species comprising the rich biodiversity on and surrounding Plum Island. Animals and plants abound. According to NYNHP, Plum Island has been documented with 111 species and communities that are of conservation concern.³⁰

- As many as 227 bird species—which is nearly one quarter of all bird species in North America, north of Mexico—have been sighted at Plum Island. These include raptors, such as Northern Harrier and Osprey; shorebirds, such as the American Oystercatcher; wading birds, such as the Glossy Ibis; waterfowl, such as the Common Eider and Long-tailed Duck; scores of songbirds, including Indigo Bunting, Hermit Thrush, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark, and Bank Swallows, which are in decline in New York. As of 2016, a total of 61 avian Species of Greatest Conservation Need were documented on the island. In 2019, 57 at-risk species were known there; 63 were confirmed to be breeding; and 13 were confirmed to be breeding, at-risk species.³¹
- Hundreds of harbor seals, and some gray seals, use the southern, rocky coast of Plum Island as a “haul-out”—an area for coming ashore to rest. Plum Island’s haul-out area hosts more seals each winter than any other in New York; it is one of the largest such areas known in southern New England.

- Rare sea turtles can find suitable marine habitat in nearshore waters and an eelgrass bed provides important habitat for shellfish, crustaceans, and sea turtles alike.
- 280 species of plants grow on Plum Island, including 23 of conservation concern (endangered, threatened, or rare).³²
- The unusual freshwater wetland in the southeast part of the island provides habitat for snapping and painted turtles. Recent investigations show it is running brackish; it is worthy of considerably more study than it has been afforded.
- The rare Needham's Skimmer, Rambur's Forktail, and Golden-Winged Skimmer, found at wetland sites, are among at least 269 other insect species inventoried on Plum Island in 2015. Sixteen are of conservation concern.

In its context—the waters around

Plum Island. Plum Island's biodiversity demonstrates the inextricable and varied linkages between land, sea, and air that might exist with any island: tides, storms, and rising sea level interact with and shape the shoreline and the lives of its denizens; birds using both air and sea nest in sandy terrestrial zones; areas that are intermediate between dry land and exposed groundwater become wetland; wind piles up and moves dunes, between which, blowout areas reveal groundwater; interior forests hold the soil and host wading bird colonies, and so on.

Yet the waters around Plum Island, known widely for fish, turtles, and marine mammals, remain mostly unexplored. We are learning these waters, too, are highly biodiverse. Plum Island should be viewed in the context not only of its nearby islands, as perhaps the biological "linchpin" of the archipelago, but also in the context of the clean, oxygenated waters from which it emerges.

ENVISION PLUM ISLAND

Through partnerships with federal, state, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and volunteers, Plum Island will become a place of study, conservation, and ecological restoration. Researchers will study the island's exemplary marine rocky intertidal zone; maritime bluffs, beaches, and dunes; and eelgrass beds and nearshore marine biology. Conservation efforts will demonstrate how natural areas can rebound and thrive.

Academic researchers and students will study sensitive natural areas by special permission. Day visitors will be inspired viewing wildlife at a 96-acre freshwater wetland and join guided walks to learn about the island's 227 bird species, 22 state-listed endangered, threatened, and rare plant species, and 25 natural communities.

Harbor seals haul out on the rocks at Plum Island during the winter in the largest numbers anywhere in New York. Sea turtles, harbor porpoises, and whales use the surrounding waters. Seeing the conservation potential of this critically valuable natural resource area, in 2019 New York created the Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area around Plum, Great Gull, and Little Gull Islands.



Spring ladies tresses (*Spiranthes vernalis*), a rare and endangered orchid, once was found on the island in the largest population known in the State, but by 2016 the numbers had dropped significantly. NYNHP scientists suggest that with proper management of the island's resources, the orchid population might recover. Photo credit: NYNHP

“A variety of high-priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need ... including the Harbor Porpoise, Kemps Ridley Sea Turtle, American Lobster, Tautog (Blackfish), Lined Seahorse, White Shark, and Roseate Tern may be relying on habitats around the island for protection and food, and documenting their occurrence could inform management.”

—New York Natural Heritage Program and InnerSpace Scientific Diving (2020).

“The local boat captains could take people out on tours; it would give them some kind of income as well as exposure to the island.”

—Sheila Meehan, volunteer, Save the Sound, at Envision Plum Island's Conservation District workshop, March 23, 2019.



The largest known population of Roseate Terns, a federally endangered species, forage on and around Plum Island.



“There are probably children on Long Island who don’t even realize that they live on an island. So to be able to take them to a smaller island, like Robins Island or Plum Island, where they can learn the unique ecosystems of that island, would be ideal.”

—Peggy Dickerson, retired science teacher and former Southold Town Trustee, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018).

“Given the area’s proximity to and access to it from several public and private educational and research institutions in three states, the entire area provides unique opportunities for collaborative, ‘in depth’ coastal nearshore and offshore research.”

—Resler (2015)



Diving In to Document Diversity. In September 2019, an underwater scientific diving effort³³ to characterize the surrounding benthic environment delivered early news of high biological diversity in the swiftly moving, clean waters around Plum Island. Submerged boulders of glacial origin, most prevalent over large expanses off the north shore of the island, were discovered to be completely covered with a variety of sponges, bryozoans (“moss animals”), tube worms, anemones, and northern star coral. Long kelp fronds, attached to hard surfaces, extended outward horizontally in strong currents, demonstrating that Plum Island may be one of the few places in New York where expanses of macroalgal communities, such as kelp beds, survive. On boulders reaching within 1 meter of the surface, layer upon layer of blue mussels completely cover the tops of the rock surfaces. Divers confirmed that eelgrass meadows are “well established” off the west side of Plum Island.³⁴

Over four days, divers encountered and photographed jellyfish and seals, and found juvenile black sea bass and juvenile Atlantic bumper, the latter typically found further south along the Atlantic seaboard, feeding

around the reef-like, organism-encased, boulder communities. The dive report lists all the organisms identified in this initial exploration. Another set of dives to expand the biological inventory is planned, which we expect will reveal many more species.

New York State Marine Mammal Protection. New York State owns the waters around Plum Island; in 2020 the State added protection for some of the wildlife using the immediate marine area. The legislature passed, and the governor signed, a law designating a zone around Plum Island, Great Gull Island, and Little Gull Island as a *Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area*. The zone includes the waters within 1,500 feet of mean high water, yet further seaward in shallow waters, to the outermost limit of waters 15 feet in depth. The statute authorizes the NYSDEC to “promulgate regulations to prevent the harassment and for the protection of marine mammals and sea turtles within the marine mammal and sea turtle protection area” and further states that “[n]othing in this act shall be deemed to impose new fishing restrictions.”



Discovering Plum Island’s Cultural Heritage and History

From its geologic origins in the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier, beginning anywhere from 20,000 to 15,000 years before present, to recent advances in animal disease vaccines, Plum Island has a long story to tell. History, uncovered through documents going back to the 1600s, has been researched and reconstructed; cultural heritage of the Montaukett Indians who used Plum Island prior to European contact deserves to be studied further and shared. As authors Ruth Ann Bramson, Geoffrey Fleming, and Amy Kasuga Folk have stated, “Plum Island’s story is really America’s story, in miniature. It paints 400 years of our history and experience on a tiny canvas.”³⁵ It’s also part of a region where people have lived for thousands of years.

Indigenous Peoples’ Cultural Heritage.

Plum Island, carefully and sensitively studied, would provide an opportunity for understanding Plum Island’s indigenous past through archaeology. In a letter³⁶ to Save the Sound, archaeologist Allison McGovern wrote that the “histories and ontologies [of indigenous peoples] are tied directly to this significant resource.” She pointed out,

“Long Island’s indigenous peoples have been present in the Long Island area for nearly ten thousand years. Their histories are tied to a sense of place. Indigenous ontologies are recorded through tribal histories, and the material record of the long-term indigenous presence is preserved in buried archaeological sites.”

Dr. McGovern continued, *“Due to the island’s location and its natural resources, Plum Island may yield significant archaeological resources that could shed light on the Paleoindian period—a period that has few archaeological traces on Long Island due to its formation during the Ice Age (thus causing many Paleoindian sites to be buried off-shore by rising sea levels). The island could also yield archaeological traces of indigenous habitation during the Archaic, Woodland, and post-Columbian periods.”*

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition coordinated with Native Americans in the *Envision Plum Island* process, and it is clear that tribal representatives wish to continue having their voices heard. They have spoken of their deep connections to the landscape

“We have to come together on this, because the Native Americans want to participate in this whole process of saving the island, because it’s saving our heritage and culture.”

—Sandi Brewster-walker, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018)

and with each other through long-term, kin networks. Dr. McGovern, too, recommends continued coordination with these groups as Consulting Parties, and development of future programs for Plum Island that incorporate indigenous voices and interests as stakeholders. Early on in *Envision*, Sandi Brewster-walker, founder of the New York State-chartered Long Island Indigenous People Museum and a Montaukett Indian, expressed deep interest in future museum programming that would connect Plum Island with the cultural heritage of Native Americans.



Dr. McGovern reminded us that *“[b]ecause the dominant American narratives and histories draw a distinction between present-day Native American tribal groups and sovereign nations and their ancient predecessors, non-indigenous members of the public tend to dissociate modern indigenous peoples from the archaeological sites that preserve evidence of their ancestors’ lives before European arrivals.”*

Plum Island, if preserved, would present an opportunity to reverse that trend. Through careful study, we could discover and celebrate the ancient past and its connections to today.

John A. Strong, a noted authority on the Indians of Long Island, sent a message to stakeholders attending the cultural heritage *Envision* session. His letter said, in part,

“I can envision natural history, archaeology, and human history being studied and shared through educational activities long into the future.

“Plum Island should be thoroughly investigated to document any evidence of Native American occupation and use. That’s where to begin. We should engage a qualified archaeologist to conduct a surface survey; based on those findings, further subsurface studies may be recommended.

“As for future uses of Plum Island, I suggest you consider the National Park Service’s William Floyd Estate—where the archives of William Floyd, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, are held and studied in an historic structure surrounded

*by a nature preserve—as a potential model for how multiple themes and attributes may be combined for protection, further research, and public access and education.”*³⁷

In “The Plum Island Deed Game,”³⁸ John A. Strong writes about the issues of land tenure in the relations between the English colonists and Native Americans in Eastern Long Island.

“The documents related to Plum Island demonstrate that the dispossession of Indian lands in the seventeenth century was much more complicated than the conventional scenario of cardboard heroes and villains would suggest. The native people were not easily manipulated dupes who sold their land for worthless trinkets and shiny beads. The sachems were attempting to protect their interests as best they could in a rapidly changing demographic and political environment.

“... The English, who had the advantages of a rapidly growing population and a superior military technology, simply imposed their definition of property as commodity on a vulnerable native population, who saw the land as a communal trust within the context of a kinship system.”

His article raises interesting questions about how, in 1659, Native Americans were dispossessed of Plum Island.

Professional archaeologists and Native Americans could use modern, non-invasive means for identifying and establishing a record of the island’s indigenous use in buried archaeological sites, leading to better understanding, interpretive programs, and enrichment of cultural ties between constituencies. A Plum Island museum at Orient Point would be a perfect venue for informing the general public on an ever-evolving and expanding body of knowledge about the island’s past.

American History and Plum Island.

Fascination with Plum Island has drawn researchers and writers to uncover and tell the stories of its colonial and American history. A great amount of historical research and compelling writing resulted in *A World Unto Itself: The Remarkable History of Plum Island, New York*, by Ruth Ann Bramson, Geoffrey K. Fleming, and Amy Kasuga Folk, published by the Southold Historical Society in 2014. This authoritative volume carries the reader from a brief overview of the island's glacial origins, through early European exploration of the Long Island Sound region and interactions with Native Americans, into the era of colonialization, to changing possession and uses of Plum Island, through lawless activities and dangerous shipping tales and wrecks, and into the federal government's extensive activities on Plum Island, including its possession for war needs, training, and today's work at the Plum Island Animal Disease Laboratory (PIADC). The book takes the reader right to the issue setting the Preserve Plum Island Coalition into formation—Congress' public sale mandate and transfer of research to Manhattan, Kansas. We suggest the volume be made available through additional interpretive venues—on and off of Plum Island.

After Plum Island was under English control, a long series of land transactions occurred, described in detail by Bramson et al. (2014). For 250 years, “a handful of families ... farmed and grazed livestock there.” As is true for islands today, in the late 1800s, the “remoteness and isolation made Plum Island popular among the wealthy and well-known, who sought relaxation and escape from hectic city life at rustic fish camps there.”

Although a lighthouse had been established on Plum Island by 1827, intense federal interest in and subsequent ownership of Plum Island by the United States was prompted later in the century by the threat



of the Spanish–American War: Congress commissioned Fort Terry on Plum Island in 1897. Although no fighting in the 1898 Spanish-American War came near Long Island, the Army proceeded with constructing Fort Terry, along with three other eastern Long Island Sound posts: Fort Wright on Fishers Island, Fort Tyler on Gardiners Island Point, and Fort Michie on Great Gull Island. The surviving structures at Fort Terry by far are the most intact and historically significant. These comprise the core of the former post, in the eastern central plain of the Plum Island Conservation District, consisting of a dozen brick buildings and the former parade ground. Nothing similar exists at the other fort locations. Fort Terry's unique history should be made available through interpretive services to day visitors and perhaps from boat tours around the island, as well.

National Register of Historic Places.

The New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) has declared the Fort Terry structures to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2011, quoting historian Robert Hefner, who prepared a 1998 comprehensive report of the Fort Terry buildings, the NYSOPRHP stated:

“The Fort Terry resources ... were recognized in 1906 as one of six ‘Defenses of First Importance’ on the east coast and in 1940 were still considered by the Army to protect ‘the most strategical area in the continental United States.’ The Fort Terry resources are particularly significant for

illustrating the Endicott and Taft Period in the history of American seacoast fortifications These Fort Terry resources represent a full range of batteries, submarine mining facilities, fire control structures, shelters for searchlights and power houses. The intact setting conveys the historic relationships between these components.”³⁹

“I think we should also consider keeping the federal government involved in protecting, after all, two National Estuaries whose waters wash on each side of the island.”

—NYS Assemblyman Steve Englebright, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018)

In 2016, DHS agreed to develop historic district covenants.⁴⁰ We support proposals by both NYSOPRHP and DHS, which manages Plum Island along with the Department of Agriculture, in their intention to create an historic district encompassing the Fort Terry buildings and parade ground.

To maximize protection of natural resources, such as sensitive ecological communities, however, we would seek a district smaller than both the New York and federal recommendations, which DHS approximates would comprise 493 acres.⁴¹ Outlying Fort Terry buildings, such as gun batteries, still could be granted historic status with buffers around them. It may not be necessary for a central historic district to be extended in all directions merely for the purpose of contiguity with the batteries, however. Stakeholders at *Envision Plum Island* workshops stressed the need for careful management planning to integrate preservation and visitation of historic structures with protection of Plum Island’s

sensitive and rare ecological resources. If the purpose of the larger, proposed historic district was to include potential significant archaeological deposits, then the original recommendation to DHS by NYSOPRHP in 2010⁴² regarding covenant language should be honored in accordance with DHS’s original response,⁴³ rather than the subsequent softened Final Environmental Impact Statement.⁴⁴

To ensure the cultural heritage and historical preservation goals of Plum Island Preserve vision can be achieved, *the language of the “Proposed Historic Preservation Covenant for Plum Island Deed” should be included in the deed transferring the island out of federal ownership.* Should New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation receive ownership of Plum Island, we anticipate the elements of the proposed covenant would be carried out fully as part of the agency’s responsibilities under historic preservation laws.

Reuse of Fort Terry Buildings. Two buildings at Fort Terry could be appropriate for further use. One, which appears to be in relatively good condition, is the former Fireman’s Quarters—it was recently renovated and used for overnight stays at least as recently as 2011. This building could be converted into a “green” dorm with a small classroom and used for one-night stays for researchers and their students. Another choice for similar use is the former Guardhouse.

Stakeholders recognize an immediate need to stabilize remaining structures at the fort as an essential first step in interpreting and honoring Plum Island’s national significance. We see a future where day visitors can visit restored areas of the fort, accompanied by docents.

Gun Batteries. Eleven gun batteries were built in the early 1900s; several more were added in World War II. It is too late to salvage some already destroyed by erosion. Eldridge battery, however, on the southeastern shore, apparently is stable enough for people to reach an open area with magnificent views.

A workshop participant knowledgeable about coast defense history considers Battery Steele significant and unique in the nation. Its condition is unknown. A few batteries were used in the past by the PIADC for animal pens; although DHS has conducted cleanup, some inaccessible areas were not remediated. Those areas likely would not be optimal for future historical interpretation without complete remediation.

Military History Interpreted.

Stakeholders agree that interpretation of the history of Fort Terry will become increasingly out of reach if building deterioration is permitted to continue. Once stabilized, buildings would be safe to view, at least from the outside. We foresee signs and programs explaining why the fort was built, what stories emerged from its fifty-five-year span of military use, and how advances in military tactics rendered the fort obsolete. Veterans and their families could visit the fort itself, take boat trips around the island to consider yesterday's military decisions about fort siting, and attend programs at a museum at the Orient Point ferry parcel to learn about Plum Island's role in our nation's history.

Stakeholders recommend that historical resource restoration and interpretation on Plum Island is undertaken in concert with ecological principles and as elements of a comprehensive management plan.

Plum Island Lighthouse. (See also: *Adapt Structures for Jobs* section.) The Plum Island Lighthouse, built in 1869, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. Marking Plum Gut, which is notorious



for challenging currents, the lighthouse no longer functions to aid marine navigation. It still represents many things to many people, however, from symbolizing a bygone era when waterborne transportation was essential for commerce, to stories of lighthouse keepers and their guests,⁴⁵ to a familiar landmark for today's ferry passengers in transit between Orient Point, New York, and New London, Connecticut.

Although the lighthouse is located in the Research District, stakeholders support Conservation District zoning for it. Additionally, an easement should be provided across the Research District for lighthouse visitors to continue on to those portions of the greater Conservation District accessible to the public. DHS and United States Army Corps of Engineers will jointly spend the appropriated \$1.5 million to begin stabilizing the structure, addressing rust and stonework first. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, work was expected to be completed by December 2020.⁴⁶

The chairman of the Southold Town Historic Preservation Commission, Ted Webb, has pointed out that thousands of mariners and ferry passengers pass the lighthouse every week.⁴⁷ During one *Envision Plum Island* workshop, in a letter, Mr. Webb praised the appropriation of dollars to stabilize the lighthouse structure as “a small but important first step in restoration and preservation of this historic lighthouse.” He pointed out that “[e]aves, (soffits), appear to be crumbling, the front door lintel is deteriorating. These are a few of the signs of deterioration that

can be seen from the waters of Plum Gut.” On behalf of the commission, he states that “[d]ue to years of neglect, this historic icon of our Country’s maritime heritage is at dangerous risk of being lost forever.” Yet Mr. Webb also shared his vision for the future of the light:

“I picture Plum Island’s preservation as a national or state preserve with the lighthouse serving as a visitor welcome center and museum of lighthouse history, with its fourth order Fresnel lens replaced in the tower, once again serving as a beacon for mariners plying our local waters. (The original Fresnel lens is on exhibit at the East End Seaport Museum in Greenport on loan from the United States Coast Guard and Dept. of Homeland Security.)”⁴⁸

For the past few years, Cross Sound Ferry has provided lighthouse tours by boat, narrated by Mr. Webb, including a viewing of Plum Island Light.

During *Envision Plum Island*, stakeholders discussed potential future use of the lighthouse, including tours, a museum, and a bed and breakfast for overnight stays, which would require a change in permitted uses under Southold’s zoning code. Although the PPIC and the Town favor a museum at Orient Point instead of on Plum Island, we encourage further study, especially with regard to funding and future lighthouse stewardship.

Use of “Un-Development” on Plum Island. At our third workshop, *A Look Back to Envision Plum Island*, Joseph Cato, a Town of Southold resident, proposed that certain structures on Plum Island that are in extreme disrepair and/or of little historical value could be removed for the purpose of open space restoration. Mr. Cato referred to the “Bittner property” (now Soundview Dunes County Park) in Southold as an example of un-development.⁴⁹

Fred Stelle, of Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects, remarked that it would not be inappropriate to allow some vestiges of our military history to slowly erode and “disappear into the sands of time.”

Plum Island Animal Disease Center.

To some it seems premature to consider an ongoing laboratory and its support systems as part of our shared heritage, but the PIADC is slated to be “history” by 2023. The world-renowned research program on animal diseases will be transferred to the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kansas, when the new laboratory complex there is expected to be fully equipped and operational. The process of decommissioning the PIADC has begun. The facility, which includes several areas of the island, is expected to undergo continued remediation to meet the requirements of state and federal laws and the standards and satisfaction of the NYSDEC.⁵⁰



Work at the PIADC has generated solid waste, regulated medical waste and other biohazardous materials, hazardous waste, petroleum spills, pesticide use, wastewater discharges, and air emissions. The generation of the above might have impacted the land and waters of the island. The NYSDEC has reviewed the data, collaborated, advised and communicated with PIADC representatives at all levels on all matters necessary to ensure and secure the proper closure of the facility.⁵¹

Yet all of this necessary work will not preserve a memory of the historic and world-class research on Plum Island that has taken place since the 1950s, when the military turned the island over to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Even though Plum Island has appeared in novels that heightened fear, films made frightening references to it, and conspiracy theorists spread rumors about activities there, great things were done there. While the public helped perpetuate negative connotations, Plum Island scientists and veterinarians, themselves, were focused on protecting our nation's and the world's food supply. They studied highly communicable diseases and developed vaccines. The PIADC has served since 1954 as the nation's premier defense against accidental or intentional introduction of transboundary animal diseases (a.k.a. foreign animal diseases), including foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). PIADC is the only laboratory in the nation that can work on live FMD virus.⁵² This critically important work helps protect our country from potential economic collapse.

Stakeholders agree these are stories to be preserved and told. We envision including the history of the PIADC in future interpretive programs as essential. The PIADC's historic victories and advances in the study of animal diseases should be shared and celebrated.

ENVISION PLUM ISLAND

Day visitors will enjoy tours of historic Fort Terry to explore its unique features and its critical role in United States defense. Explorers also will learn of earlier uses of Plum Island by Native Americans, colonists, and subsequent owners at a dedicated Plum Island museum at Orient Point. Archaeologists, undertaking research with sensitivity, will expand understanding of our shared cultural heritage.

Partners will stabilize, maintain, and interpret historic buildings. Researchers and students will use a small field station and dormitory in an adaptively refurbished building for academic studies and one-night stays. The Plum Island Animal Disease Center's research and vaccine development, vitally important to agriculture in the United States and around the world, will be commemorated.

The iconic Plum Island Lighthouse, a National Register historic site overlooking the turbulent Plum Gut, will be rehabilitated and reused for tours and tales of mariner rescues. Visitors will read interpretive signs and maps along historical pathways and elevated walkways. Areas with cultural and historical significance will be managed carefully to be compatible with ecological restoration goals.

Adapt Structures for Jobs While Preserving a National Treasure

Throughout the *Envision Plum Island* process, stakeholders offered several concepts for the Plum Island Research District (Research District) and the Orient Point parcel. More work remains, however, as we (a) engage additional stakeholders in discussions about economic development in the Research District and (b) await further action by Southold on the Orient Point ferry parcel. In the meantime, this report provides background information and initial vision concepts related to these parts of the Plum Island property (see also Chapter 4, Actions).

The boundary between the two districts aligns well with stakeholders' concepts for future economic opportunities and stewardship of sensitive resources. We note, however, that some ecological communities split by the boundary may need additional protections than afforded under present zoning in the Research District.

The Research District and Orient Point parcel include several structures and facilities, including (a) the structures associated with the PIADC and the Plum Island Lighthouse, and (b) the PIADC's ferry terminal site. (Please refer to our vision for the Plum Island Lighthouse in the previous section, *Discovering Plum Island's Cultural Heritage and History*.)

REUSE OF THE PLUM ISLAND ANIMAL DISEASE CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE

The Research District comprises the western portion of Plum Island, closest to Orient Point and containing the harbor. Generally, it is developed as an institutional campus, yet its boundary includes the Plum Island Lighthouse. DHS describes the PIADC infrastructure as follows:

"The Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) occupies approximately 215 acres [... and] comprises 47 buildings, including a 55,000-square-foot administrative building, a 190,500-square-foot laboratory, and a number of support buildings, including a water treatment plant and a power

*plant. Plum Island has a well-established infrastructure supported by underwater cables for electricity and communications, and includes utilities, a tank farm and fuel pipeline, fresh water wells, a water tower, and a water distribution system. Plum Island is improved further with a harbor facility, fire station, a helipad, 4 miles of paved roads, and 8 miles of gravel roads."*⁵³

The PIADC includes 47 buildings.⁵⁴ Roads extend across the island from the campus to East Point; water and electric utilities also extend off the main campus. The remaining elements are in proximity to, surround, and/or support the PIADC's primary laboratory facility and offices.

It is unclear whether existing laboratories will remain following PIADC's decommissioning, yet in the view of stakeholders, newer supporting infrastructure such as fuel tanks and sewage treatment facilities should not be wasted. It is important to find new uses for the space and the infrastructure that can contribute to Long Island's economy and bring jobs.

In addition to structures, the following are anticipated to be part of the "personal property and transportation assets" that will be excessed with the real property transfer of ownership:

- Three passenger/cargo ferries capable of carrying various-sized vehicles and up to 149 passengers

- Emergency response vehicles, and
- Surplus laboratory and office equipment.⁵⁵

Town of Southold Views. Regarding the Research District, Southold’s 2013 planning study states:

“Plum Island has long been a source of high-paying technical jobs for Southold Town residents. Currently the lab employs 60 people who live in Southold Town.”⁵⁶

by the Planning Board, “[s]olar energy generation in excess of that needed to provide power to permitted uses.”⁵⁸

Within the Town there is a strong desire for Plum Island to continue to host good research jobs. The stated purpose of the Research District in the zoning regulation emphasizes this goal within the context of Plum Island’s importance to the entire region:

“A variety of high-priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need ... including the Harbor Porpoise, Kemps Ridley Sea Turtle, American Lobster, Tautog (Blackfish), Lined Seahorse, White Shark, and Roseate Tern, may be relying on habitats around the island for protection and food, and documenting their occurrence could inform management.”

—New York Natural Heritage Program and InnerSpace Scientific Diving (2020).

“Retaining a research and/or an educational facility that will provide a similar number of jobs is of great importance to the Town. The Plum Island Research District is designed to encourage this type of development by clearly stating that type of use is allowed, and also by limiting the ability for the island to be subdivided. This subdivision limitation (accomplished by the large minimum lot size), will ensure the site of the research facility remains large enough to contain and maintain its own infrastructure, as well as containing enough land for future expansion, and to retain flexibility in future design.”⁵⁷

The Plum Island Research District permits “educational facilities with multiple buildings, campus-style.” Research laboratories with multiple buildings also would be “allowed in campus-style development.” The Research District also permits, by special exception by the Board of Appeals and subject to a site plan approval

“The purpose of the Plum Island Research District is to encourage the use of land for research and educational opportunities, provide quality employment opportunities and to preserve Plum Island’s regionally significant natural, historic, scenic and cultural resources.”⁵⁹

Stakeholder Views. Stakeholders wish to see economically beneficial reuse of the Research District, its structures, and assets, to meet the goals of retaining jobs and providing resources for the general operation of Plum Island. Research use supports our concept of Plum Island as a center for innovation, conservation, and interpretation.

Although the environmental community has focused on stewardship of sensitive ecological resources, our diverse participants in Envision workshops agreed that continued use of the Research District is imperative for providing shared support services for future Conservation District operations.



Stakeholders highlighted that ideal new enterprises for the Research District would view the offshore location as advantageous for specialized research. Such research might:

- “need an island” (e.g. need a site for studying the effects of climate change on island ecosystems),
- be boosted by a location away from residential areas or large populations, and/or
- benefit greatly by Plum Island’s estuarine location and resources.

The fulfillment of such needs then could offset the costs of transportation challenges associated with working on an island, albeit one close to shore.

Stakeholders also supported potential academic reuse of the PIADC buildings because:

- retrofitting of specialized laboratories is very expensive,
- transportation expenses may be prohibitive for academic institutions without large endowments, and
- the remarkable ecosystems at Plum Island may hold more appeal for future research than the presence of substantial existing infrastructure.

Stakeholders in *Envision* workshops and other meetings showed general consensus in their vision for future research in biotech, health, energy,⁶⁰ utility cyber-security drills, climate science, island studies, and ecology. During all workshops, many people stated

their ideal of partnerships between academic institutions and government or industry. Numerous stakeholders suggested that the location of Plum Island would be perfect for creation of a consortium made up of the region’s great universities. All agreed that the reuse of the Research District would require major investment.

With the important need for substantial investment identified, we met with Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association (LIA), the premier business organization on Long Island. Within months, the LIA’s board approved the following 2020 LIA priority:

“Support continued state funding for the creation of a Research Corridor from Brookhaven National Laboratory to the New York Genome Center in Manhattan and expand the corridor east to include research activities on Plum Island.”⁶¹

Such a Research Corridor also would include Cornell Tech’s Tata Innovation Center on Roosevelt Island, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Stony Brook University, and Brookhaven National Laboratory. With Plum Island’s worldwide reputation for discovery, innovation, and invention, it is fitting that it join such a prestigious alliance of top research institutions in attracting investment and advancing scientific collaboration. The other institutions presently are in operation; Plum Island, however, might be seen as a “research opportunity zone,” offering unique physical and geographic features to researchers in science and technology.v

We hope to continue our discussions about Plum Island opportunities when COVID-19 restrictions ease and New York State officials become available once again.

PLUM ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE.⁶²

Lighthouses are exceptionally popular places for public visitation. The Plum Island Lighthouse, located on the western end of Plum Island, overlooking Plum

Gut and in the Research District, is the island's most recognized feature; it also is in immediate need of stabilization. Plum Island stakeholders call for immediate repairs to the Plum Island Lighthouse to prevent further costly deterioration, which, if not addressed, may preclude future public access and interpretation.

Bed-and-Breakfast Concept. Some stakeholders in the *Envision* process suggested that the lighthouse could become a popular bed-and-breakfast, an element of sustainable tourism. The zoning would need modification, however. There are models for such use elsewhere, including at the nearby Orient Point (“Coffee Pot”) Lighthouse; *Envision* workshop participants expressed how such use might produce revenue to assist with maintenance.

Visitor Center Idea. Others wondered if the Plum Island Lighthouse might house a Plum Island museum—a place to promote sustainable tourism, research, and education, and, possibly, store and interpret certain cultural artifacts. Its location near the harbor would make it appropriate as a welcoming center to receive arriving visitors straight off a ferry from Orient Point. An organizational partnership, with, perhaps, a future Plum Island Historical Society might be helpful.

Preservation and Interpretation by Nonprofit. At least one nonprofit organization is interested in taking on the challenges of restoring and reusing the lighthouse. Save the Sound received the following communication in December of 2019 from the executive director of the New London Maritime Society, Susan Tamulevich:

“The New London Maritime Society (NLMS) has agreed to apply for ownership of the Plum Island Lighthouse, should it become available through the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000.



“NLMS already owns New London Harbor, Race Rock, [and New London] Ledge Lighthouses. Since adopting our first lighthouse, in 2010, NLMS has worked to preserve these significant landmarks and to keep them accessible to the public.

“NLMS would be pleased to add Plum Island Light to our lighthouse network.”

Museum, Plum Island Lighthouse, and Research District Considerations.

Based on a communication with the Town of Southold Planning Department, it appears that the Town might prefer to see a future Plum Island museum housed at the other end of the ferry route, at Orient Point (discussed below in “Getting There”). Informally, there seems to be some agreement with the Town of Southold, that modifying the present boundary of the Research District to exclude the lighthouse could be beneficial; instead, the lighthouse should be included in a Conservation District or have similar protections.

The Town and stakeholders agreed that cross-easements between the Research District and the Conservation District may be necessary, depending on future ownership of the Research District. Cross-easements could assure public access from the harbor and the lighthouse to points east for public access to natural areas and historic Fort Terry.

GETTING THERE—FERRY TRAVEL AND REUSE OF THE ORIENT POINT PARCEL

At Orient Point, close to Orient Beach State Park and near Orient Point County Park, lies the Plum Island ferry terminal, which DHS describes as follows:

Pristine beaches and dunes stretch east to bluffs and rocky shorelines.

ENVISION PLUM ISLAND

We envision academic or industry-driven research at the western end of Plum Island, near the harbor. Areas of particular interest to the region include biotech, health, energy, power structure cybersecurity, climate science, island studies, and ecology.

Long Island’s “research corridor” will expand to include Plum Island, continuing the island’s prestige as a center of innovation, drawing new investment, and providing good jobs.

Repurposed office and auditorium space and potentially new laboratories will provide experimental and learning spaces and can host meetings, conferences, or other events.

Workers and visitors will reach the island via the former research center’s ferry site at Orient Point. Families will visit a museum at the ferry dock to discover Plum Island’s history, cultural heritage, and ecosystems. We predict countless “Eureka!” moments once people travel to Plum Island for work or pleasure.

“[T]he Plum Island government-owned asset also includes a 9.5-acre support facility at Orient Point with a man-made harbor. In addition, the parcel is improved with a 2,000-square foot administrative building, a supply warehouse, guard shack, and parking lot with approximately 200 spaces (Orient Point Facility), as shown in Figures 8 and 9. The Orient Point Facility is the primary access point to Plum Island and provides a strategic staging area. It is the main access point for personnel and delivery of supplies, vehicles, and equipment to Plum Island.”⁶³

“... The harbor at the Orient Point Facility is an 80,000-square-foot basin, and the Plum Island harbor measures 240,000 square feet. Each harbor includes four vessel berths and two movable boat ramps for loading and unloading freight and vehicles. Vessels up to 200 feet can be accommodated.”⁶⁴

This fully equipped ferry transportation facility sets Plum Island apart from all other nearby islands. This parcel holds the key to future, limited and controlled, public access to Plum Island.

Synergy. In a 2016 analysis, DHS recognized “[t]he synergistic relationship between Plum Island and the Orient Point Facility”⁶⁵ [emphasis added]. It further stated,

“The close proximity and multiple amenities of the Orient Point Facility make it an ideal gateway to Plum Island for the transport of personnel, vehicles, equipment, and supplies. The ample parking, indoor and outdoor storage areas, and administration building complement the harbor operation and can support a broad range of uses and activities on Plum Island.

“The continued relationship between Plum Island and the Orient Point Facility would benefit any alternative for the final disposition of the Property⁶⁶ and is a vital link to those interested in the future reuse of the existing buildings and infrastructure

on the Property. There likely would be a significant adverse impact on the value and utility of Plum Island if rights of access to and use of the Orient Point Facility are not included in future conveyance documents.”

Though stakeholders agree, they see it in the context of future *public* access. For this reason, we call for the following: In any transfer of Plum Island property, the Orient Point ferry facility be conveyed with Plum Island’s PIR District, at the least, to assure future access to the island (see also Chapter 3).

Zoning. The Orient Point parcel is zoned Marine II, which allows a broad array of uses (see Appendix C). Stakeholders encourage the Town of Southold to apply the Marine III (MIII) District zoning category to the Orient Point parcel. Stakeholders see the purpose of the MIII District, “to provide a waterfront location in the portion of the Town located on Long Island for ferry service to and from Plum Island,” as a perfect fit with the Orient Point parcel.

Public access is key to any sustainable use of the island in the future, yet boundless access would be harmful to North Fork communities as well as to the delicate natural resources of Plum Island itself.

Potential for Future Museum. If the Town of Southold applies Marine III zoning to the Orient Point parcel, stakeholders support siting a small Plum Island museum there, which also would serve as an assembly area or visitor center for people going to the island. From informal communication with the Town, it appears that siting a museum at

the Orient Point ferry parcel is favored over creating one on Plum Island itself.

One favorable aspect of an Orient Point museum is that it could accommodate more people than can be sustainably accommodated on the island. Visitors might include people who already are present at Orient Point, such as those coming ashore from the Cross Sound Ferry or those enjoying the local parks. We envision attendance that does not generate additional traffic on the North Fork’s limited and seasonally congested travel corridors.

The proximity of the Orient Point ferry parcel to the parks—less than 200 feet from the Orient Point County Park’s entrance and less than 350 feet from that of Orient Beach State Park—also works in favor of siting a museum at the Plum Island ferry site. The eastern tip of Orient Point County Park affords pedestrian access to spectacular views of the Plum Island Lighthouse, the western end of Plum Island, and Plum Gut. A visitor center at the ferry parcel could highlight unique attributes of the Orient Point–Plum Island complex, including its Important Bird Area, Plum Gut fishing, the Orient Point (“Coffee Pot”) Lighthouse, and the ecological wonders that result from Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary flowing together from either side of the Point. Orient Point’s two parks offer visual cues to visitors as to the geographic location of Plum Island among other elements of the archipelago, with views of Gardiners Island and Connecticut, and Plum Island itself.





CHAPTER 3

The Path Forward: Disposal and Beneficial Use of Plum Island

A Strategy to Achieve Our Plum Island Preserve Vision

With the help of Marstel-Day, LLC, we developed an integrated, comprehensive Plum Island Disposal and Beneficial Reuse Strategy.⁶⁷ The strategy builds on the Plum Island Preserve vision and provides conveyance pathways for all of Plum Island and the Orient Point ferry parcel. This chapter is a condensed version of Marstel-Day's full report.

The standard federal process for disposal of surplus property would provide New York and local governments the right to request (a) a Public Benefit Conveyance (PBC) for some or all of Plum Island at no cost or reduced cost for park, historic monument, conservation, or educational uses; or (b) a Negotiated Sale option for other public purposes. By contrast, under the 2009 and 2012 legislation exempting Plum Island from the standard property disposal process, the General Services Administration is on course to sell Plum Island at a Public Sale, which is the same as an auction, where the highest bidder buys the property.

The PPIC believes the State of New York is well suited to be the public agency champion for the preservation and reuse of Plum Island. The State has a rich history of leading and executing the protection of open space, including islands, and in 2016 it included acquisition of Plum Island in its New York State Open Space Conservation Plan.⁶⁸ **The PPIC encourages New York to continue its championing of Plum Island as an important part of its ongoing conservation plans.**

Summary of Disposal Options

Options	PBC Option	Negotiated Sale Option	Comments
Conservation District	PBC for Parks, Historic Monuments and/or Wildlife Conservation (one or multiple PBCs)	Negotiated Sale	<p>Property is suitable for one or more conservation or recreation-based PBCs, noting that these would require a federal-sponsor-approved management plan and would include perpetual land use restrictions.</p> <p>A Negotiated Sale is a viable option, provided the State agrees to ensure long-term protection for the site's natural and cultural resources.</p>
Research District	PBC for Education and/or Public Health public uses (one or multiple PBCs).	Negotiated Sale	<p>Site is suitable for PBC, noting that PBC would require 30-year use restriction, which could limit future use of this site if it were no longer viable for the originally intended PBC use.</p> <p>New York State could request via Negotiated Sale for any public or private use that provides a public benefit and could use sale or rental income to support Plum Island activities.</p>
Orient Point Ferry Parcel	Bundle with PBC for PIC or PIR District	Bundle with Negotiated Sale for PIC or PIR District	<p>Purpose is to preserve the integrity of this parcel and its ability to support a wide range of potential future Plum Island reuses by assuring continued ferry service between Plum Island and Long Island.</p> <p>A related purpose is to prevent a private purchaser from acquiring this site and subsequently interfering with the desired reuse of Plum Island.</p>

ROLE PLAY

In this chapter, we identify a role or roles the State of New York could play in a given scenario.

Of course this is contingent on the State wishing to play the leadership role identified in this chapter's reuse scenarios for acquiring, conserving, and managing Plum Island, including facilitating future re-use as needed.

If the State is so willing, this chapter identifies specific strategies we think the State should consider to plan for the acquisition of the property.

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition fully understands that any decision by the State to acquire Plum Island will be based on the decision-making authority of the governor and his executive and agency staff.

With that in mind, all scenarios described here are intended to serve as inputs for consideration in that decision process.

The PPIC and its 110 member organizations, with support of the region's elected officials, call for the Department of Homeland Security, General Services Administration, and Congress to stop the planned Public Sale of Plum Island.

DISPOSAL FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC BENEFIT CONVEYANCES (PBC) AND NEGOTIATED SALES

To achieve the Plum Island Preserve vision, the standard federal property disposal options best suited to both zoning districts and the Orient Point parcel are one or more PBCs and/or a Negotiated Sale. Conversely, a Public Sale is least likely to result in protection of the island's precious resources; rather, such a sale is most likely to lead to their destruction.

Public Benefit Conveyance Option.

Federal law has created multiple types of PBCs that enable state and local governments to acquire property at no cost or reduced cost. The PBC process requires federal agency sponsors for each type of PBC; this, then, is a consideration that must be evaluated by the potential PBC recipient(s).

PBCs are useful disposal mechanisms where state or local governments have a clear plan for long-term, public reuse of surplus federal property. However, PBCs also require property recipients to develop a long-term plan to fund and manage parcels for the purposes allowed in the individual PBC program—and, they do not permit the future reuse of the property for other than permitted purposes for as long as the PBC restriction exists:

- Education and public health research use = 30 years;
- Park, historic monument, and conservation use = perpetuity.



It is common for disposal of a large, diverse parcel to include multiple PBC requests that are based on different proposed uses. Each PBC parcel must have a defined recipient; multiple parties can develop a plan to cooperatively manage the parcel, however. For example, a park preserve, as envisioned for Plum Island, could include roles for entities specializing in park management, wildlife and habitat protection, and cultural/historic preservation and events.

Negotiated Sale Option. Although a Negotiated Sale technically is a form of PBC,⁶⁹ the federal government treats it very differently as a separate type of disposal. It is subject to different rules and procedures. Primary differences include:

- the buyer pays fair market value,⁷⁰ per published requirement in the Federal Management Regulation,
- the sale is negotiated directly with GSA (and not with a sponsoring federal agency), and
- there are no future-use requirements or restrictions on the property.

Negotiated sales frequently are used when a proposed use does not fit into a PBC category.

The primary advantage of a Negotiated Sale is the lack of future land use restrictions. It also allows a transferee (state or local governments are the only authorized initial transferees; they can sell the property to any future parties, however) to:

- acquire title to prior to finalizing reuse plans for the property,
- do so through a non-competitive process, and
- avoid competing for and potentially paying above-market prices through a Public Sale.

The transferee is free to lease, subdivide or sell the property for any purpose to any recipient. This can be useful if there are multiple potential property re-users or tenants, e.g., research labs or commercial entities that would be interested in using portions of the property, but not in taking control of the entire parcel.

The only restriction associated with a Negotiated Sale is a three-year windfall profits provision, in which any net profits above and beyond the costs incurred to plan and redevelop the property would be recouped by GSA.



Public Benefit Conveyance Alternative. State and local officials would decide if it is more practical to:

- apply for a single PBC (e.g., for park and recreational use) for the PIC District and to manage historic and ecological resources under it, or
- apply for and manage separate PBCs for each of these uses.

APPLYING THE DISPOSAL FRAMEWORK TO THE PLUM ISLAND CONSERVATION (PIC) DISTRICT

Disposal options compatible with the Conservation District include Public Benefit Conveyances for state park, historic monument, and/or wildlife conservation use, or a Negotiated Sale.

A single PBC is administratively simpler by virtue of involving only one real estate transaction, one sponsoring agency, and one property recipient. It would be prudent for New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) and Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to confirm that a single PBC could accommodate all of their program requirements, however.

If multiple PBCs are contemplated, then it may make sense for the NYSOPRHP to submit both applications; an ultimate outcome of managing the park and historic monuments assets jointly would be possible. The National Park Service (NPS) approves both park and historic monument PBCs.

Negotiated Sale Alternative. A Negotiated Sale could provide another pathway to acquire Plum Island land for conservation use. Under this scenario, New York State could purchase some or all of the island at fair market value, considering the value impacts (i.e., diminution of value) resulting from the statutory, regulatory, and zoning restrictions on the future use of the property. Another government entity, such as Suffolk County, also could participate in the purchase. Upon acquisition, the transferee(s) could decide which agencies would manage the refuge areas and the historic/recreation/public access areas. Potential guidance from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and support from private conservation organizations would enhance management outcomes.

APPLYING THE DISPOSAL FRAMEWORK TO THE PLUM ISLAND RESEARCH (PIR) DISTRICT

For the Research District, disposal options would include a PBC for education or public health, or a Negotiated Sale.

Under either scenario, lead agency and supporting agency roles would need to be defined in terms of funding and providing ferry access, utility operations, and public safety services to Plum Island after the PIADC is closed. Planning should include two potential scenarios:

- one in which the State assigns an entity other than a transferee responsibility for the PIADC complex and maintaining its support services, and

- one in which the PBC/Negotiated Sale transferees are responsible for developing a plan for managing and providing these services, either on an interim or permanent basis.

Public Benefit Conveyance Alternative.

Education and public health research PBCs are limited to state and local governments and to tax-supported or nonprofit institutions. In this scenario, New York State officials would seek to:

- identify potential state education agencies, universities, or public health agencies that could request such a PBC, or
- establish a goal of receiving a letter of intent from a qualified nonprofit educational or public health research entity within the next two years to prepare to submit a PBC application by the time that the PIADC is vacated.

Negotiated Sale Alternative. With a Negotiated Sale, the State would have the option of subdividing the Research District and selling or leasing portions of it, as opportunities arose, to multiple reuse entities. Further, future land uses would not be restricted, as they would be with a PBC. The appropriate disposal option for the Research District will depend on the success of State and local officials in attracting a large-scale educational and/or public health research organization to reuse the specialized PIADC. The potential for the Department of Homeland Security to receive at least some revenue from a Negotiated Sale also could provide an incentive for Congress, DHS, and GSA to support using the standard federal property disposal process for Plum Island.

APPLYING THE DISPOSAL FRAMEWORK TO THE ORIENT POINT PARCEL

The Town of Southold’s Marine III (MIII) zoning ordinance, which restricts the



permitted use to providing ferry service to and from Plum Island, has not yet been applied to any particular parcel; the Preserve Plum Island Coalition supports the MIII zone being applied to the PIADC’s Orient Point ferry parcel, however. This parcel should be included in a PBC or Negotiated Sale request for Plum Island itself; the parcel is vital to support reuse of the island.

Public Benefit Conveyance Alternative.

If the State pursues a park, wildlife preserve, or historic monument PBC for the Conservation District, it also should inquire if it can include the Orient Point ferry parcel in the PBC request. If not, it should seek to acquire the Orient Point ferry parcel through a Negotiated Sale to ensure future public access to Plum Island similar to the role that it would play for the Research District.

Negotiated Sale Alternative. If the State pursues a Negotiated Sale of the Research District, it should include the Orient Point ferry parcel to ensure future access to that parcel and preclude any other purchasers from acquiring it and thus limiting access to Plum Island.



Diadumene sp. is an anemone common on boulders and large rocks offshore the north side of Plum Island. Photo credit: InnerSpace Scientific Diving.



SUMMARY

There is growing awareness of Plum Island’s nationally significant cultural, historic, and natural resource values, and the need to protect them from being lost forever in a Public Auction to the highest bidder. Over the past year, New York State officials have become more engaged in the reuse process, and stakeholders have agreed on a coherent vision with preferred property disposal and reuse options. Stakeholders have pragmatic reuse ideas, including:

- Controlled public access to the island through a state park Federal Lands to Parks Program Public Benefit Conveyance, with technical support provided by other public and private entities to reduce park operating costs and to protect sensitive habitat.
- A Negotiated Sale to acquire the Plum Island Research District parcel or all of Plum Island, including the Orient Point ferry parcel, an option that would provide reuse flexibility and provide surplus land sale revenue to the Department of Homeland Security.

These ideas and developments demonstrate that **a Public Sale is not the only practical means for GSA to dispose of Plum Island, or to obtain sale revenue on behalf of DHS/GSA.** Now, New York State and local officials and conservation stakeholders are well-positioned to enter into discussions with the GSA to see if a transfer plan can be formulated, and to urge Congress to change the Public Sale language for Plum Island in pursuit of alternatives consistent with Southold’s zoning and stakeholder positions.



“The science labs could be recycled. It may be appropriate to establish a university research program in the realm of universities from New England and New York.”

—NYS Assemblyman Steve Englebright, in What Do You See? (Halaczinsky and Engelke 2018)

“There was an acknowledgment that you need to have a responsible party that can maintain the whole island ... We see a need to encourage the active use by a financially responsible, long-term party for the lab parcel.”

—Rich Engel, Marstel-Day, LLC, at A Look Back to Envision Plum Island workshop, September 26, 2019.



CHAPTER 4

Actions Needed Now

According to DHS's latest timeline (see Appendix F), the PIADC will close and move to the newly constructed National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Kansas in 2023, after which GSA plans to sell Plum Island. It often takes a long time, sometimes four years or more, to develop a complex conservation and reuse plan like that envisioned for Plum Island. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress and New York State *act now*.

Actions for Congress.

- **Stop the sale of Plum Island** by repealing the 2009 and 2012 laws that triggered the Department of Homeland Security and General Services Administration to bypass the normal federal disposition process and move to sell Plum Island to the highest bidder. Alternatively, **proactively restore the normal federal disposition process** for Plum Island. This would allow the State of New York, Suffolk County, municipalities, and other partners to work together and acquire Plum Island and the Orient Point parcel for the purposes of research, conservation, and education.
- **Stabilize the historic Fort Terry structures** that are at risk of being severely damaged or lost forever due to leaky roofs by requiring the Department of Homeland Security to repair roofs now, which could prevent significant restoration costs in the future.
- **Compel the Department of Homeland Security** to complete the nomination of certain Fort Terry structures for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Request a Special Resources Study of Plum Island** by the National Parks Service, which would further uncover and document the natural, cultural, and historical features and significance of Plum Island. The study results then (a) would be included and considered in the upcoming Supplemental Environmental Impact

Statement and (b) would support federal agency sponsorship of a potential Public Benefit Conveyance of Plum Island's Conservation District.

Actions for New York State.

- **The State becomes the public champion** for the preservation and reuse of Plum Island.
- **Governor Cuomo announces** his intentions that New York State will lead and work towards the implementation of the vision created by Plum Island's local and regional stakeholders.
- **New York State agencies continue** to work with members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, officials of the Town of Southold and Suffolk County, the Long Island Association, and other academic and business partners, to develop an acquisition and reuse plan for Plum Island considering strategies as outlined in the Marstel-Day LLC report.
- **Governor Cuomo's Executive Chamber and Washington, D.C., office convey** to the General Services Administration, Department of Homeland Security, and Congress the interest of New York State in acquiring Plum Island. This then could lead to a legislative solution allowing the transfer of the island to the State.
- **The State requests the Department of Homeland Security allow** a team of officials to tour and inspect Plum Island for the purpose of gathering much-needed information necessary to consider acquisition and management of the island.

Actions for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

- **The Coalition's 110 organizations and their members continue to call on Congress** to repeal the 2009 and 2012 laws that initiated the planned sale of Plum Island to the highest bidder.
- **The PPIC advocates for Town of Southold zoning changes:**
 - Applying the MIII zone to the Orient Parcel
 - Clarifying and limiting solar installations in the Conservation District
 - Protecting the Plum Island Lighthouse and its potential future uses
 - Allowing reuse of a (future) refurbished building at Fort Terry for a small dorm and classroom facility
 - Making small boundary adjustments between the two districts in such a way as to not divide ecological communities
- **PPIC members assist** in the creation of a **Friends of Plum Island group** that can raise funds for security, management, and stewardship of the island.
- **Members**, upon General Services Administration's commencement of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement process, **organize at all levels**—agencies, organizations, and citizens—for full participation in SEIS scoping and reviews.



Frequently Asked Questions about Preserving Plum Island

Is it true there is hazardous waste on Plum Island, and if so, how is it being remediated?

When the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) leaves Plum Island in 2023, the federal Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which currently manages the island, must meet strict New York State safety standards before transferring ownership.

PIADC, its predecessor U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory, and the Army's Fort Terry all generated waste as part of their operations. Until 1991, PIADC deposited waste in landfills on the island. None of this waste was hazardous enough to result in a Superfund designation and much work has been done to remove the waste and monitor the island's groundwater. While thus far no water supply impacts have been reported by New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), which has oversight over the federal government's cleanup efforts, full and thorough monitoring of soil and groundwater is required to determine whether or not impacts exist. NYSDEC has requested additional monitoring and cleanup. Waste from inside the laboratory has been decontaminated by autoclave (high-temperature steam process). A spill of #2 fuel oil from an underground storage tank near one of the lab buildings is still being monitored and remediated. Asbestos-containing materials have been

removed from several buildings, but some additional removal may be necessary. Soil vapor monitoring also must be conducted in accordance with the law.

Save the Sound hired Dermody Consulting, an independent contractor with expertise in hydrogeology, environmental laws, groundwater and soil contamination, and soil vapor intrusion, to review the cleanup progress, identify omissions or gaps in the DHS cleanup plan, review correspondence between NYSDEC and DHS, and make recommendations for future monitoring. The federal government has acknowledged that it will remain liable into the future for any legacy contamination, including for emerging (not yet recognized) contaminants.

Will the cleanup of Plum Island require new, unanticipated federal expenditures?

In its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), issued in 2013, the federal government acknowledged that it is obligated to pay for cleanup of Plum Island. The cleanup costs will vary: In general, the more restricted the future use(s) of Plum Island, the less cleanup would be required, and the lower the government's costs. For example, a bifurcated sale that includes compatible reuse of the lab facility paired with a limited-public-access nature preserve could require less cleanup, and thus cost less than an unrestricted sale for residential use, according

to the government contractor most recently involved in assessing cleanup efforts to date.

Can't the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) or the National Park Service (NPS) own and manage the island as a wildlife refuge and/or a national park/monument?

If Congress repeals its “sell” law, the normal federal process for disposition of surplus property would allow both USFWS and NPS to consider owning and managing the island. It is not clear, however, that either agency is equipped financially, or has the staffing availability, to expand their current holdings or properly steward additional land. This is one reason why we believe that New York, which has expressed interest in stewarding the island, should become the owner, possibly with participation by Suffolk County.

If the General Services Administration (GSA) sells Plum Island, will the sale generate significant revenue for the federal government?

No. An appraisal conducted in 2019 valued the entire island, as well as the 9-acre ferry terminal parcel in Orient Point, far lower than past estimates. This appraisal took account of Southold’s restrictive zoning for Plum Island, which the federal government and off-the-cuff statements by realtors failed to include.

What is the status of the lawsuit brought by certain members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition against the Department of Homeland Security and General Services Administration?

Legal action challenging the sufficiency of the 2013 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was filed by a few members of the

Preserve Plum Island Coalition, including Save the Sound (but excluding The Nature Conservancy). During 2018, in reaction to the suit, GSA announced that it would prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) that would address deficiencies in the FEIS. GSA and DHS did not indicate any intent to address what the plaintiffs argued is the most significant problem: the Environmental Impact Statement’s failure to consider conservation or a conservation sale as an alternative. The lawsuit is stayed until any SEIS is developed.

Why hasn't language to repeal the 2009 law that initiated the sale of Plum Island ever passed in the U.S. Senate?

Though the House of Representatives has passed legislation to repeal the Plum Island “sale” law, this legislation has failed to pass the Senate. Several majority senators have blocked the Plum Island legislation for the following reasons:

- A policy disagreement between western senators and eastern senators, regarding the ownership, use, and management of federal land.
- A belief that a repeal would result in a loss of federal revenue for the new animal disease facility in Kansas, called the National Bio and Agro-defense Facility (NBAF) (see revenue question above) and the belief that without an acceptable plan, the island will sit vacant, unused, and deteriorating at taxpayers’ expense.

Moreover, because the bills and amendments to protect Plum Island often end up in Senate Homeland Security subcommittees for consideration, other, more controversial issues, such as immigration or the Mexico–United States border wall, often overshadow Plum Island legislation.

To address these issues, every year, the Preserve Plum Island Coalition works with the region’s U.S. senators to expand support in New England and throughout the United States for the protection and reuse of Plum Island. The primary reason for the passage of 2009 law triggering the sale of Plum Island at auction—namely to pay for NBAF—no longer exists. Additionally, bypassing the normal federal disposition process for properties is bad policy in this case. It circumvents the very reason that federal process exists: to allow states and municipalities the opportunity to direct the future of lands within their jurisdictions. We want the fate of Plum Island to be returned to local control—something on which every elected official on Long Island and across the region, regardless of political affiliation, agrees.

Moreover, we’ve learned that some senators still may be unaware of the significant devaluation of Plum Island that has resulted from the Town of Southold’s zoning of the island. Some senators still may believe that the island is worth much more than its current value; and many do not know that money for NBAF has already been appropriated and provided. The Coalition will continue to do outreach and education on these points.

Finally, the publication of this report answers the senators’ concern that the island will sit vacant. Stakeholders from the region now have a dynamic vision for the reuse of Plum Island—Plum Island Preserve.



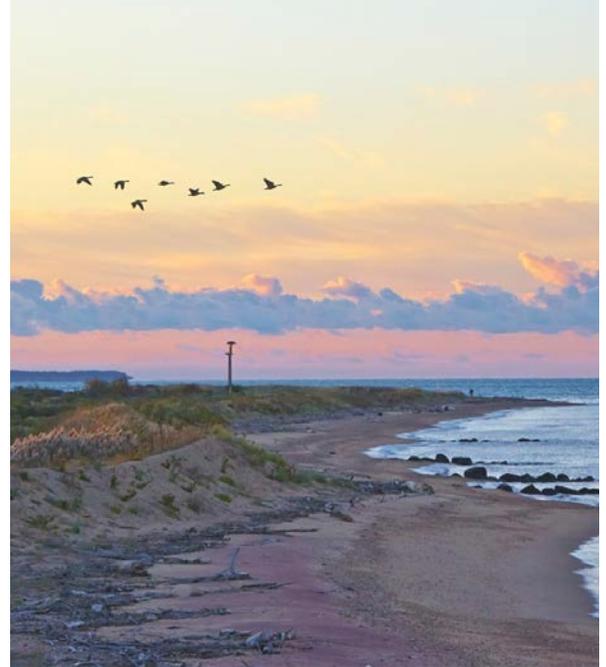
Conclusion

Plum Island is a rarity. Steeped in history, teeming with wildlife, and ideal for research jobs, it is clear that preserving its features will be a success for not only the region, but for the nation. In the *Envision Plum Island* effort, we sought varied viewpoints and achieved this consensus vision through the painstaking work of many throughout New York and Connecticut.

By hosting the document online, we anticipate incorporating new information and stakeholder feedback as such becomes available (visit www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report). It is worth noting that several ideas and guidance emerged through *Envision Plum Island* that is better suited for future Plum Island plans. Although not included in this report, this valuable guidance should be incorporated in those habitat and wildlife management plans, historic building stabilization and restoration plans, and community engagement plans.

To ensure Plum Island will be permanently protected, we need Congress, New York State, Connecticut, and the general public to act on this collective regional vision of *Plum Island Preserve*.

Plum Island belongs to the people. Together, we can keep it that way. Join us (www.preserveplumisland.org) in making ***Plum Island Preserve a reality.***



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Endnotes

Executive Summary

1. Schlesinger et al. (2012), p. 1.
2. The facility is transferring its activities to a new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kansas. <https://www.gsa.gov/about-us/regions/welcome-to-the-new-england-region-1/buildings-and-facilities/development-projects/sale-of-plum-island-new-york>. Accessed 6/29/2020.
3. Estimates of Plum Island's total acreage vary. Throughout this report, we use The Nature Conservancy's Geographic Information System estimate of 822 acres. Acreages for specific zones referenced may add up to a different total area.
4. The full report may be found online at www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report. In addition to this report, our suite of results includes the brochure *Plum Island: A Connecting Landscape of History, Nature, Research*; and a report by Marstel-Day, entitled *Strategy for Disposal and Beneficial Reuse of Plum Island*. Portions of the Marstel-Day report are summarized in *Envision Plum Island*.
5. Report available upon request by contacting lharrison@savethesound.org or ccryder@savethesound.org.

Introduction

6. As measured by The Nature Conservancy, using Geographic Information System mapping tools.
7. The Consolidated Security, Disaster, Assistance and Continuing Appropriations Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 110-329 ("Appropriations Act") and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-74.
8. The other members of the PPIC steering committee are: Audubon New York and Connecticut; Chris Zeeman; Citizens Campaign for the Environment; Group for the East End; John Turner; North Fork Environmental Council; Orient Association; Richard Remmer, and Sierra Club–Long Island Group. Please visit www.preserveplumisland.org.

Chapter 1

9. Local Law No. 6 of 2013, *A Local Law in relation to Plum Island Zoning* (see Appendix A). The planning steps for this zoning are memorialized in the 2013 Plum Island Planning Study (see Appendix B) and are consistent with the Town of Southold *Comprehensive Plan and Local Waterfront Revitalization Program*.
10. Terry (2019a).
11. Town of Southold Planning Board (2013)
12. A survey of the property would be required to determine acreage with accuracy.
13. The Town of Southold includes several islands: Plum Island, Great Gull Island, Little Gull Island, and Fishers Island.
14. See Appendix C for Marine II allowable uses.
15. Local Law No. 17 of 2019, Article XXXV (Marine III Zone District), §280-205, filed the amendment with NYS Department of State on December 6, 2019 (see Appendix D).
16. Please see Acknowledgments, page 4.
17. Ibid.
18. Retired science teacher Peggy Dickerson worked with Cutchogue East Elementary School teachers in 2018 and 2019 to guide students in their Plum Island studies and written work. Governor Cuomo sent his Suffolk County representative, Theresa Santoro, to meet the 2019 fifth grade students and read the Governor's response to their letters.
19. Original documents from the workshops have been retained by Save the Sound and may prove useful in future management planning.
20. See Appendix E for role of NYSDEC in overseeing remediation on Plum Island.
21. The 116th Congress passed appropriations that included a provision effectively preventing marketing/sales activities until the end of the federal fiscal year, September 30, 2020. The provision reads as follows: SEC. 635. None of the funds appropriated by this Act 6 may be used to enforce section 540 of Public Law 110– 7 329 (122 Stat. 3688) or section 538 of Public Law 112– 8 74 (125 Stat. 976; 6 U.S.C. 190 note). See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1158>.
22. The Southold Historic Preservation Commission successfully appealed to Congress for initial funds of \$1.5 million to stabilize the Plum Island Light.
23. Available at www.nynhp.org/plumisland.

Chapter 2

24. Englebright (2018).
25. Mapped and regulated as a freshwater wetland under NYCRR Article 24.
26. Schlesinger et al. (2016).
27. New York State Department of State (1987, 2005).
28. Schlesinger et al. (2016).
29. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (1991). This seminal study helped inform designation of New York's Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats—a key component of New York's coastal zone management program—and formed critical bases of the Long Island Sound Coastal Management Program, under the Coastal Zone Management Act.
30. Schlesinger et al. (2016). We encourage readers to review this report, Plum Island Biodiversity Inventory, for a more comprehensive list of plants, animals, and natural communities on the island and the methods used for documenting them.
31. The Town of Southold maintains a list of bird species sighted at Plum Island. Most of this inventory has been compiled by Audubon New York over many years, beginning in 2006. Summarized in Schlesinger et al. (2016), pp. 28–29.
32. Schlesinger et al. (2016).
33. New York Natural Heritage Program and InnerSpace Scientific Diving (2020).
34. Ibid.
35. Bramson et al. (2014).
36. McGovern (2020).
37. Strong (2019).
38. Strong (2017).
39. New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (2011).
40. United States Department of Homeland Security (2016), p. 19.
41. Ibid, p. 3.
42. Martin (2010).
43. Kelly (2010).
44. General Services Administration and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2013).
45. Bramson et al. (2014), pp. 88–92.
46. Smith, Tara (2019).
47. Zeldin, Lee (2019).
48. Webb (2019).
49. http://southoldtown.iqm2.com/citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?ID=3162
50. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (2020).
51. Ibid.
52. <https://www.dhs.gov/science-and-technology/plum-island-animal-disease-center>, accessed 6/18/2020.
53. United States Department of Homeland Security (2016), p. 3.
54. Town of Southold Planning Board (2013), p. 1.
55. United States Department of Homeland Security (2016), p. 12.
56. Save the Sound staff have heard estimates of higher numbers of PIADC employees who live in the Town of Southold or in the East End towns of Southold, Riverhead, and Shelter Island, combined (approximating 200).
57. Town of Southold Planning Board (2013), p. 4.
58. Town Board of Town of Southold (2013).
59. Ibid.
60. Informal discussions between The Nature Conservancy and Robert Catell, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, took place on the topic of non-turbine wind power research as a possible reuse of the Plum Island Research District. Stakeholders suggest this option could be valuable in the future.
61. Long Island Association (2020). "The LIA's Top Priorities: 20/20," #6 in State priorities list. <http://www.longislandassociation.org/lia-priorities>, accessed 5/11/2020.
62. See also: Discovering Plum Island's Cultural Heritage and History, p. 39.
63. United States Department of Homeland Security (2016), p. 11.
64. Ibid, p. 28.
65. Ibid, p. 25.
66. "Property," in this case, refers to Plum Island and the "personal property" and assets currently slated for public sale.

Chapter 3

67. Report available upon request by contacting lharrison@savethesound.org or ccryder@savethesound.org.
68. On page 82, the 2016 *New York State Open Space Conservation Plan* lists under Long Island Sound regional priority conservation projects, "Plum Island: Southold: Suffolk. Failing transfer to USFWS for a federal preserve, the undeveloped portion of Plum Island, 600–700 acres, for wildlife habitat, shoreline preservation and protection of significant cultural resources."
69. GSA includes Negotiated Sales in its list of PBCs because they are reserved for state or local governments, and recipients must demonstrate that they will provide some type of public benefit (e.g., economic development).
70. Any appraisal of market value would have to consider the local zoning, and the federal and state historic preservation, and environmental restrictions on the property. Of note, a September 2019 appraisal by LandVest, commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, reflected the impact of these land use restrictions and found an appraised value far less than past estimates offered by real estate agents that did not take Southold's strict zoning into account.

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Appendices

Appendices are online only at www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report

- Appendix A** A Local Law in Relation to Plum Island Zoning and Schedule A
- Appendix B** Plum Island Planning Study
- Appendix C** Marine II District Description
- Appendix D** Marine III Zoning
- Appendix E** NYSDEC Plum Island Role Summary
- Appendix F** NBAF Timeline
- Appendix G** Federal laws effective in 2009 and 2012 exempting Plum Island from the normal process for transferring surplus property
- Appendix H** Envision Plum Island—
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- Appendix I** Envision Plum Island’s Conservation District—
Agenda and Questions for Stakeholders
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Agenda and Questions for Stakeholders
- Appendix K** Covenant communication, May 6, 2010.
Letter from Elizabeth Martin to Phil Youngberg.
- Appendix L** Covenant communication, June 22, 2010.
Letter from John E. Kelly to Elizabeth Martin.





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