

# SoundBites

Summer 2020

**The Story of Your Long Island Soundkeeper**  
**Tips for a Healthier Lawn and Environment**  
**Curt's Corner: Defending Your Clean Water**  
**Air Quality Trends in the Time of COVID-19**



**Save the Sound<sup>®</sup>**

Action for our region's environment.

*Cedar Beach, Mt. Sinai, New York.  
Photo by Colleen Kelly, the winner of  
our recent nature photography contest*

# Protecting Land for the Future With Past Victories

## *70 acres of open space in Greenwich on track to be conserved*

Connecticut Fund for the Environment, before joining forces with Save the Sound, began as a small team of attorneys in the 1970s determined to enforce the environmental regulations that the government was not. **Our legal team set foundations in state law that continue to help conserve thousands of acres of significant watershed land.** This strong legal program is critical to our mission in continually enforcing your right to clean water, clear air, and open spaces.

Water companies are the second largest owners of open space land in Connecticut. These lands protect our drinking water sources and preserve forests that clean our air, filter our water, provide homes for wildlife, and offer hiking and birding opportunities. **But sometimes water companies choose to sell this vital open space.**

Fifteen years ago, Save the Sound was instrumental in passing state laws that

ensure water company land remains conserved when sold through the use of certain procedures and a critical incentive structure. Today, land trusts and municipalities use this process to purchase and preserve vital open spaces.

The incentive structure includes a flexible tax credit and a shareholder allocation scheme that, together, allow land trusts and towns to maximize the land conserved and minimize the cost. It's these incentives that are allowing for the **permanent conservation of over 70 acres of open space** in Greenwich, Connecticut, underway now.

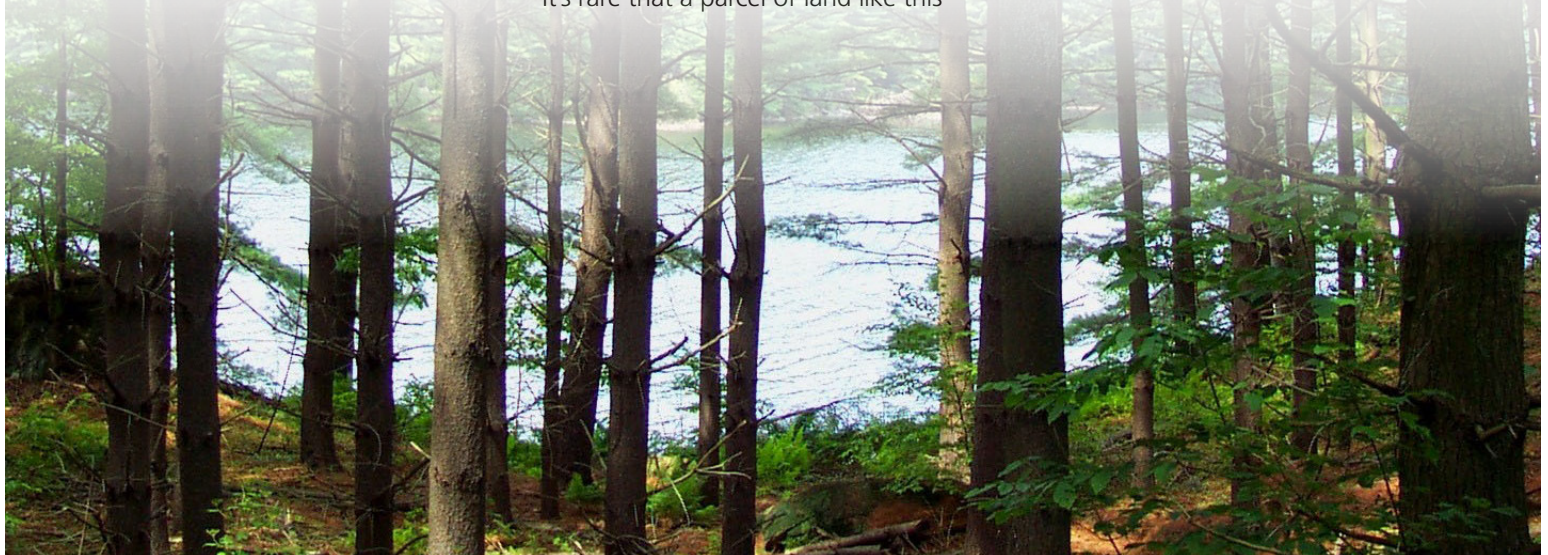
For the past nine months, Save the Sound attorneys have been supporting the negotiations and strong leadership of Greenwich Land Trust and the Town of Greenwich on an agreement to protect the parcel of forest and wetland currently owned by Aquarion Water Company.

"It's rare that a parcel of land like this

one becomes available for permanent conservation in an urban area," said Legal Fellow Kat Fiedler. "We're pleased that the parties took full advantage of the Connecticut laws that my predecessors championed to preserve this special place."

We continue to empower land trusts and towns with an understanding of how to use these legal tools, and also continue to build upon this framework through action before governmental agencies. Taking advantage of a unique opportunity through a regulatory process, the legal team worked with Connecticut Water Company to identify properties that might be at risk of being sold and supplemented state laws by providing extra time to land trusts and towns to save the land. This will ensure that these properties located throughout the state are permanently conserved.

Your legal team is working hard to protect your vital open spaces for our future by building on past victories.



*Save the Sound has been preserving our open spaces for over 40 years and identifying opportunities to develop more tools for conservation.*

## An Update on the Connecticut Legislative Session

Little has gone as expected this year—including legislative advocacy. Connecticut's legislative session shut down abruptly in March due to COVID-19, with much **unfinished business on climate action, clean water, and more.** As of this writing, a short special session is underway, focusing on urgent topics like healthcare and police accountability, and a second special session is expected in the fall. We'll defend environmental laws against rollbacks, and ensure any changes to the Transfer Act protect ecological and public health. **As always, we'll keep you updated about outcomes and how to talk with your state legislators about the issues you care most about.**

# Unified Water Study Persists Despite Challenges

*23 groups in 40 bays, harbors, and inlets monitor your water*

**When the water monitoring season began under a strict quarantine, our water quality monitoring team jumped into action to adapt and develop safety protocols that would allow the Unified Water Study to continue.**

Launched in 2017 by Save the Sound, the Unified Water Study (UWS) is a water quality monitoring protocol developed for community sampling groups and local clean water advocates. It is the **largest EPA-funded community science monitoring program in the Sound**. UWS enables groups around Long Island Sound to collect comparable data on the health of our bays and harbors—and **it's made a big difference!**

Already this data, that is assembled and analyzed by Save the Sound scientists, has informed state and local management actions. It's been incorporated into Clean Water Act Assessments to protect your bays and harbors while also identifying

those in need of additional efforts to restore acceptable water quality.

While the 2020 season was delayed due to COVID-19, **nothing can stop our team from fighting to safely continue the water quality monitoring efforts.**

Our staff began filming trainings that are typically done in person and came up with creative methods of delivering equipment to partner groups. After weeks of working to maintain participant safety while piecing together all necessary elements, **the water quality monitoring season officially began on June 1.**

This year the study includes **23 groups and 40 bays, harbors, and inlets** around Long Island Sound.

It might look a bit different, with socially-distanced monitoring, protective equipment, and online trainings rather than in-person gatherings, but **the water quality monitoring goes on!**



*Our water quality interns follow strict safety protocols while testing water quality.*

## Swimmable, Fishable, Livable: Exploring Your Waters

*Coming this August: Sound Health Explorer redesigned*

**Save the Sound is bringing you a comprehensive resource to learn about and take action on the environmental challenges facing your waters.**

Sound Health Explorer (SHE) is an online tool that visualizes historic water sampling data and scientific analysis for the beaches, bays, harbors, and open waters of Long Island Sound. This release has a completely new design with easier navigation and more data for more regions, identification of the challenges for healthy waters, and clear actions you can take to restore and protect clean water in your community.

**It's never been easier to find exactly what you're looking for, exactly where you're looking for it.**

"We've broken the data into three sections named Swimmable, Fishable, and Livable to provide our community with an easier way to find what matters to them most," said Communications Specialist Martin Hain, "Instead of getting lost in a bunch

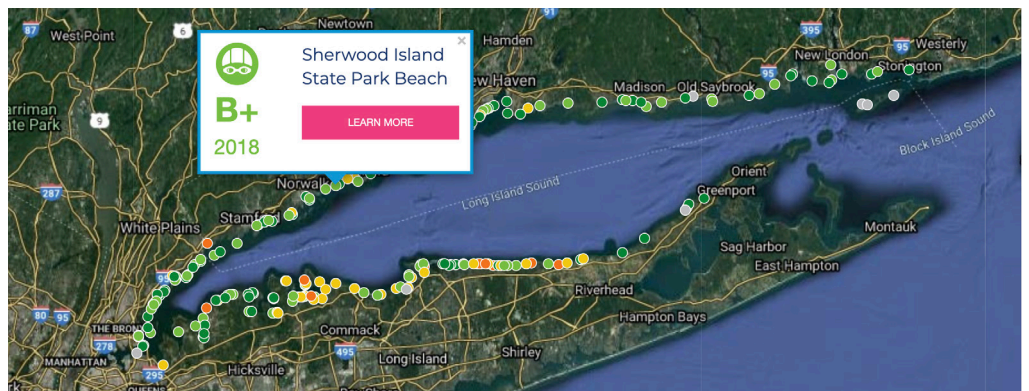
of numbers, we've done the hard work of analyzing and visualizing the data in ways that make it easier for anyone at any age to understand."

**Swimmable** will provide sampling data and grades for local beaches; **fishable** will be for bays, harbors, and open waters including data from the Long Island Sound Report Card as well as the community monitoring data from the Unified Water

Study; and **livable** will house the Surging Seas tool created by Climate Central that you can use to experience sea-level rise and see how it will affect your community.

**With just a click you'll be able to find opportunities to volunteer and take action to protect our beloved Long Island Sound!**

See for yourself at [www.soundhealthexplorer.org](http://www.soundhealthexplorer.org).



*Sound Health Explorer gives you access to the water quality data at your local beaches.*

# One Man's Passion Sparks Clean Water Movement

## *Exploring the history of your Long Island Soundkeeper*

Your Long Island Soundkeeper has a rich history of protecting Long Island Sound.

In the 1980s, Long Island Sound was overcome with huge areas depleted of oxygen from billions of gallons of sewage that was killing fish and lobsters and fouling beaches. **The Sound was not safe for people or wildlife—it was dying.**

Lobstermen and fishermen were among the first to notice and the first to take action. Among that group was **Terry Backer**, who formed the CT Coastal Fishermen's Association and sued four municipalities along the Connecticut coast for violating the Clean Water Act. **Funds from that lawsuit were used to make Terry the first Soundkeeper.**

**So, who was Terry Backer?** As a third-generation commercial fisherman, and as a state representative, he dedicated his life to protecting the Sound, using advocacy, water testing, and legal enforcement to restore its health—serving as an on-the-water-watchdog until he passed away in 2015. **He helped pave the way for us and many other environmental organizations to protect your clean water for generations to come.**

Continuing Terry's legacy, Save the Sound relaunched the Soundkeeper program in 2017—**but this time it would be a movement.**

Bill Lucey, the new Long Island Soundkeeper, is continuing Terry's efforts.

He is an advocate, a biologist, and a resource for citizens and groups interested in fisheries and water quality issues throughout the region.

Bill works closely with our water quality team to **monitor the Sound and the bodies of water that feed into it**, coordinates with our program staff to **develop science-based policy solutions and seek funding for water infrastructure**, and collaborates with our environmental attorneys to **enforce the Clean Water Act and hold polluters accountable.**

## Take a look at some of the ways Bill protects our Long Island Sound!

### Bringing Communities Together:

With his breadth of knowledge and experience, **Soundkeeper Lucey is a valuable resource to citizens and local governments around the Sound who have local pollution problems, challenges in maintaining access to the Sound, and/or interest in starting Sound-friendly projects in their communities.** In addition to advocating alongside local residents for clean and healthy waterways, Bill brings a variety of skillsets from the full Save the Sound team to communities in need. He works hand-in-hand with our seasoned team of scientists, attorneys, and habitat restoration experts. **Together they identify and stop water pollution, restore depleted coastal landscapes, and secure passage of water-friendly laws.**



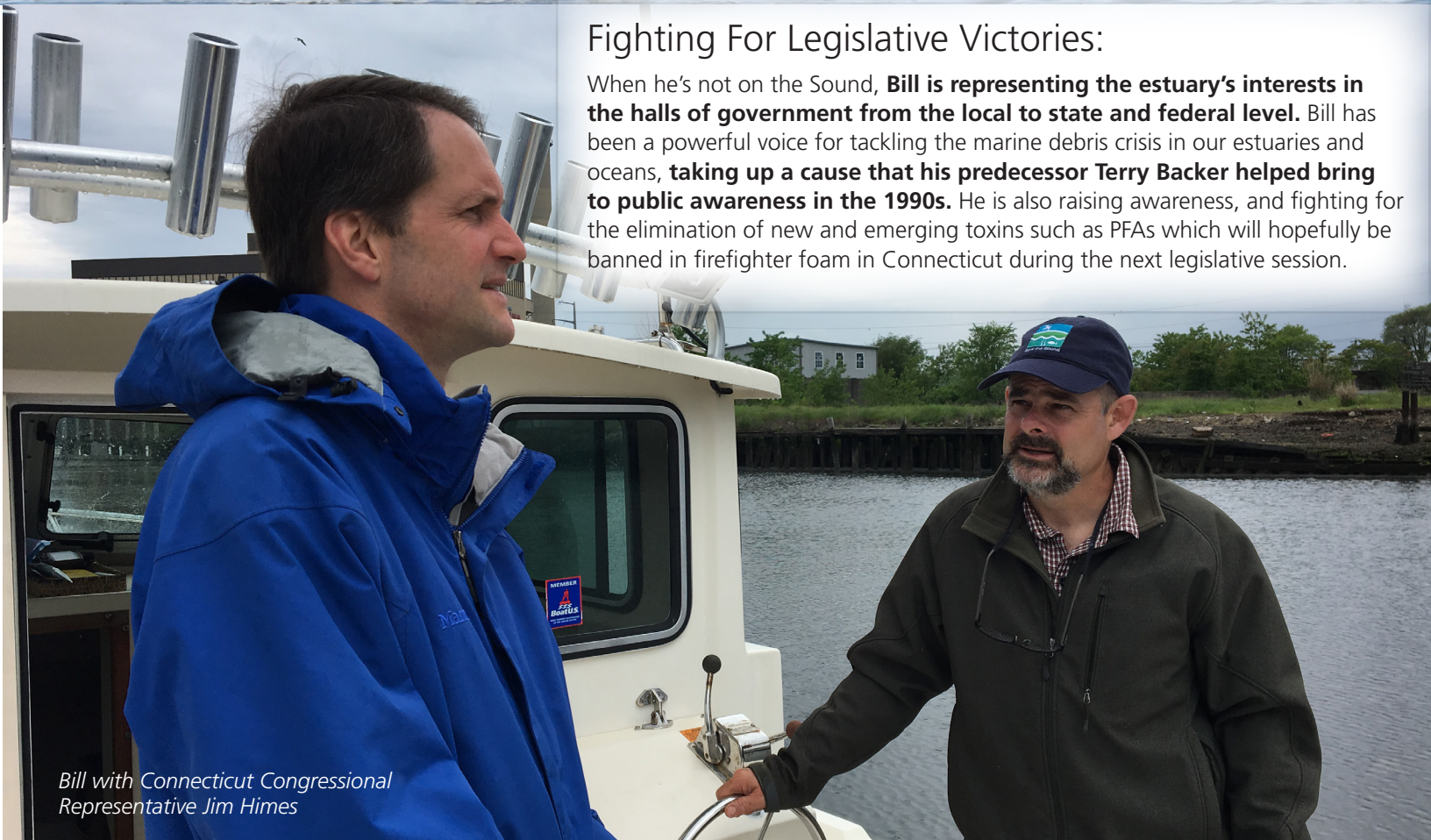
## Monitoring Our Waters:

From the vessel *Terry Backer II*, Bill patrols the full coastline of Long Island Sound looking for water pollution issues and providing a deterrent to would-be polluters. **He responds to pollution reports from the public – confirming water pollution incidents and sources, and collaborating on solutions.** On patrol he also supports a variety of scientific activities from sampling toxic sediments to visiting and observing coastal communities at risk from sea level rise, partnering with local aquariums, universities and state agencies to improve our understanding of the Sound and how we can better protect it.



## Protecting Our Fish Populations:

**Your Soundkeeper is our chief advocate for fish, seabirds, and all the wildlife that call Long Island Sound home.** He represents their interests across many forums both local and federal including the Connecticut Shellfish Restoration Committee, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Coast Guard Area Committee, **currently working on plans to protect the Sound from oil spills.** In addition to fighting for better fisheries practices to protect key species such as menhaden, Bill is also piloting strategies to protect local marine life, such as the **removal of abandoned lobster gear** that is "ghost fishing," to this day capturing large numbers of tautog and lobsters along with many other species.



## Fighting For Legislative Victories:

When he's not on the Sound, **Bill is representing the estuary's interests in the halls of government from the local to state and federal level.** Bill has been a powerful voice for tackling the marine debris crisis in our estuaries and oceans, **taking up a cause that his predecessor Terry Backer helped bring to public awareness in the 1990s.** He is also raising awareness, and fighting for the elimination of new and emerging toxins such as PFAs which will hopefully be banned in firefighter foam in Connecticut during the next legislative session.

Bill with Connecticut Congressional Representative Jim Himes

# Quick Tips to a Healthier Lawn

*Creating a lawn that's good for the environment*

**Did you know that many of the time-consuming tasks you currently do to maintain your yard actually hurt it and our environment?** Here are some tips that benefit your lawn and your environment at the same time:

## 1. Mow less and give your rake a break!

Your lawn only needs to be mowed once every other week, and 2-4" is the healthiest height for your grass. When you rake after mowing, you're actually stripping your lawn of the nutrients found in grass clippings. Aggressive mowing and raking prevents your grass from getting the proper nutrients.



## 2. Kick the chemical habit

**Fertilizers and pesticides are NOT your friend!** Pesticides and fertilizer often wash into our waters where they cause algal blooms that kill fish and wildlife and contaminate our drinking supply. Instead try natural substitutes for pesticides and mulch clippings from mowing into your lawn for **free and natural fertilizer!**



## 3. Create a pollinator oasis

**Help the bees and butterflies, add color to your lawn...and have less to mow!** Reduce your lawn size to benefit the environment. Take an unused section or corner of your lawn and plant native flowering plants to turn it into a pollinator oasis.



# Air Quality During COVID-19

*Connecticut saw a 30-40% decrease in air pollution*

Since March, our region has been battling the COVID-19 pandemic and dealing with immeasurable challenges, but there was also an unexpected, and beneficial, side effect—a **vast improvement in air quality.**

Almost immediately after the northeast's statewide shutdown, there were fewer cars on the road, fewer airplanes in the sky, and all non-essential activity had come to an abrupt halt. **This had a substantial impact on the levels of pollutants being released into the air we breathe.**

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has been using 14 air quality monitoring stations throughout the state, as well as satellites, to collect data on air quality. They also collect traffic information in order to correlate roadway congestion with the air quality data.

The transportation sector currently accounts for nearly **40% of Connecticut's carbon emissions.** Between January 1 and March 13 this year, Connecticut roadways saw about **169,000 vehicles every day.** However, from March 14 through April, this **dropped to only 99,000 vehicles every day.**

When comparing this year to the last three years around the same time, there was a **30-40% overall decrease in air pollutant concentration.** The concentration of nitrogen dioxide decreased by about 13-37%, while the

decrease was 7-21% for carbon monoxide and 23-34% for black carbon.

*So, how can we maintain these results well into the future, past the pandemic?* We must continue pushing for policies that **address climate change, air quality, and public health.** Save the Sound is working to ensure that Connecticut remains a leader in combatting the climate crisis in our region by **continuing regional and local initiatives to reform the transportation sector and invest in clean energy.**

Next legislative session, with your support, we'll be pushing for easier access to clean energy programs and electric vehicle chargers, as well as the implementation of green building standards and establishing a Green New Deal for Connecticut.

**Air, like water, doesn't respect state lines.** With both air pollution and COVID-19, our region has taken important steps that are seeing benefits, but we aren't alone as a state. Our regional air quality is impacted not only by what we emit in Connecticut and New York, but also by what our surrounding states are doing. We need everyone on board to create real change.

Watch a webinar dedicated to this topic and how we're working so that all communities can breathe cleaner air entitled "Air, Climate, and Covid-19: Dramatic Trends in Our New Normal" at [www.savethesound.org/VirtualArchive](http://www.savethesound.org/VirtualArchive).

# Curt's Corner: Clean Water Needs a Strong Defense

*Save the Sound has the range of expertise needed to tackle sewage spills*

Two million gallons of raw sewage flowed into New Haven's Mill River on Monday, July 13. The impact of this spill is devastating not just for our environment, but also for the thousands of area residents who had their access to local waters stolen from them.

To make matters worse, many of us are relying on our local outdoor spaces now more than ever for safe, socially-distanced recreation. **Save the Sound responded to the threat by jumping into action to defend your right to clean water.**

Like area communities, we were not informed of the spill for nearly 48 hours. Your Long Island Soundkeeper Bill Lucey was at the site by Wednesday morning, taking water samples in the lower Mill River, at the confluence of the Mill and Quinnipiac Rivers, and in New Haven Harbor—samples which, four tide cycles after the spill, came up pretty clean. Additionally, your legal team filed a Freedom of Information Act request to demand all the relevant facts to guide our course of action.

This sewage spill highlighted the importance of taking action on many

levels, when it comes to pollution. It is not enough to run water quality tests. It is not enough to talk to our legislators. It is not enough to take legal action. It is not enough to look at how this spill affects local fish and wildlife populations. **We must do all of these things at once to keep your waters clean and healthy.**

**That's why Save the Sound's breadth of expertise is so crucial.** Your water quality monitoring team, legal team, Long Island Soundkeeper, and advocacy experts work together to protect our clean water and favorite coastal places—that's how we get results.

The Mill River sewage spill shows the need for preventative action and prompt public notice across the region. How can we prevent something like this from happening again?

**First, we need stronger reporting requirements in Connecticut.** Too often people remain unaware of potentially dangerous sewage spills in their own backyards due to delayed public notice. Town leaders and the public need to know the day of a giant spill, not 48 hours later! Save the Sound will continue to

advocate that Connecticut adopt a system similar to New York's live-reporting, as well as a system that alerts downstream communities.

**Second, we need to stop these spills before they reach your waters.** Your legal team is currently working with many municipalities in Connecticut and New York to improve outdated sewage infrastructure and prevent future spills. We will fight to change the law and require compensatory damages for the beach days lost when a large sewage spill closes down beaches.

In many cases, the combined sewer systems (CSOs) have not been updated in decades, **resulting in hundreds of millions of gallons of raw sewage flowing into our rivers and Long Island each year.** I encourage all of you to ask your own local leaders about sewage infrastructure and report any sewage smells and sights immediately.

Our environment deserves better. We deserve better. **Together we're creating a future free of sewage spills and pollution, and a vibrant Long Island Sound ecosystem.**

## Stay Engaged with Your Local Environment

We want to stay connected with you even while we need to be apart! Through our virtual events, which you can join via your home computer or by phone, you can easily learn more about conservation and restoration and get updates on environmental battles happening in your backyard and across our region. Find an upcoming webinar, film club discussion, or educational offering at [www.savethesound.org/StayEngaged](http://www.savethesound.org/StayEngaged).

## Leave an Environmental Legacy

You've cherished and protected a healthy, vibrant environment your entire life.

By including Save the Sound in your estate plans, you'll protect the land, air, and water of Connecticut and the Long Island Sound region for generations to come. Please contact Chief Development Officer, Alicia Sullivan at 203-787-0646 Ext. 109 or [asullivan@ctenvironment.org](mailto:asullivan@ctenvironment.org) to discuss the possibilities. Thank you!

# Fish Revival in Our Local Waterways

## Recapping the 2020 fish run

This spring the fish run went on as usual, and Fish Biologist Jon Vander Werff was watching closely. Five or six days a week, he trekked out to local waterways to count fish using catch-and-release traps. This data is crucial in monitoring the health and biodiversity of our local waterways over time. In recent years, it has been telling a story of resurgence, and 2020 was no different—your support is bringing fish back to our waters. A record 409,115 alewives passed through at Bride Brook, and the run at Hyde Pond saw 325 alewives. Watch Jon’s webinar about this season’s results at [www.savethesound.org/VirtualArchive](http://www.savethesound.org/VirtualArchive).



Photo credit: Bob Jacobs, CT DEEP

At Bride Brook in East Lyme, Connecticut, the alewife run peaked just shy of 130,000 in the seven years prior to the culvert replacement led by Save the Sound in 2009.



At Hyde Pond in Mystic, Connecticut, where we led a dam removal project back in 2015, 325 alewives have been recorded.

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