

# SoundBites

Fall 2020

**The Many Angles of Climate Change  
Curt's Corner: Remembering Environmental Titans  
Long Island Sound Report Card Released  
Fighting for Nature for All**



**Save the Sound®**

Action for our region's environment.

*The scene from Olin Powder Farm,  
102 acres of beautiful open land that  
Save the Sound is fighting to preserve*



# Long Island Sound Report Card Offers New Insights

## *Comprehensive bay and harbor data included for first time*

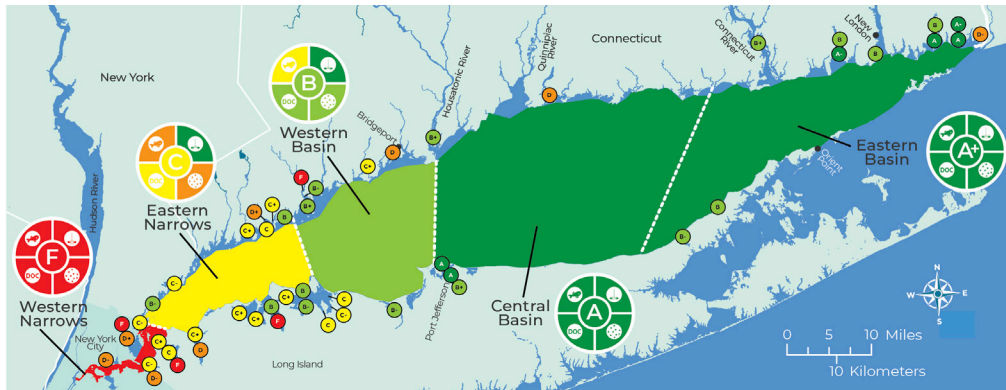
Funded by the John and Daria Barry Foundation, last month we released the 2020 Long Island Sound Report Card, which offers a thorough look into the overall health of Long Island Sound. For the first time, you'll find water quality data on bays and harbors around Long Island Sound that was collected by our partners in the Unified Water Study (UWS). You can download a copy of the

report on our website or view the results on our newly updated Sound Health Explorer tool at [soundhealthexplorer.org](https://soundhealthexplorer.org).

The 2020 LIS Report Card reveals that coordinated efforts in conservation and improved wastewater treatment have helped clean the Sound over the past decade, and at the same time it raises some troubling concerns about the health

of bays and harbors. Nearly half (48%) of the bays or bay segments received poor grades of D or below for dissolved oxygen levels, an important measure of water quality. Low dissolved oxygen can lead to die-offs of fish and other marine life. Many locations received poor grades for excessive seaweed and algae in bays, which is caused by nitrogen pollution entering the Sound from coastal and upstream communities.

The bi-annual report card uses historic sampling data to paint a picture of the health of all of the different regions of the Sound. Importantly, this data allows us to compare local conditions and identify areas that need protection or restoration actions. Making it easily accessible and understandable for community members and elected officials all around Long Island Sound is a huge step towards long-lasting environmental protection and can empower the public to drive action.



Download your copy of the 2020 Long Island Sound Report Card at [savethesound.org](https://savethesound.org).

## Keeping You Up-to-Date on Your Clean Water

### *Improving Connecticut's Sewage Right to Know Law*

Did you know that you have the right to know about any Connecticut sewage spills in your community? The Sewage Right to Know Law went into effect in May 2013 and made information about sewage spills and overflows publicly available.

Since the law was passed, thousands of sewage overflows have been publicly reported for residents, local officials and the press. This information is spurring local repairs and investment in wastewater infrastructure that will lessen the likelihood of future sewage spills and

improve the health of our waterways. It's empowered local communities to fight for their clean water.

We saw firsthand the importance of this law in July when over two million gallons of raw sewage leaked into the Mill River in Hamden, Connecticut. This threatened the health and recreation of thousands of people in nearby communities.

Unfortunately, while the Mill River sewage spill highlighted the need for public notice, it also highlighted the flaws in

Connecticut's reporting system. The sewage spill occurred on Monday yet there was no public notice until the next day.

"We are currently advocating for a real-time reporting system, similar to the one used in New York, to ensure that the general public gets this information as soon as it is reported," said Staff Attorney Kat Fiedler. "The current reporting system resembles a game of telephone, slowing down notification of the public and leading to miscommunications. We are also pushing for more accurate and earlier reporting of the size of the spill, so that municipalities and the general public have an actionable sense of the scale of the issue."

You deserve immediate access to information about your local waters, and we're fighting to improve Connecticut's reporting system to keep you informed.

## 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!

# Donor Spotlight: John and Daria Barry Foundation

## *Impactful gifts to ensure clean water in our bays, brooks, and beaches*

Recently, we announced a \$50,000 challenge match from the John and Daria Barry Foundation to raise funds for Save the Sound and protect the Long Island Sound ecosystem. The challenge was a great success, doubling the donations of over 400 people and turning \$50,000 into \$100,000!

The match was just part of a very generous contribution from the Foundation this year, providing significant support for water quality in the Sound. The family's generosity will fund a new and improved water quality lab in our New York office, which will expand our team's ability to analyze water samples and uncover and take action to address water pollution. It will serve us as well as our many partners, addressing the need for accurate data throughout the region. Their support is also funding a new water quality campaign coordinator position to drive priority actions such as integrated monitoring, advocacy, and legal negotiations required to achieve long term pollution abatement for our waters.

Through their foundation and with their five children, John and Daria Barry are putting their love for our environment into action and keeping our Long Island Sound healthy and vibrant for generations to come. Their family has long been passionate about keeping our local rivers and bays pollution-free. As a family of surfers and sailors, they have always felt

a deep connection to the water and the coastlines of New England. Their support for Save the Sound has brought these passions to life and benefitted our entire region. We are incredibly grateful for their long standing support and commitment to our Long Island Sound and regional environment.



*John and Daria Barry with their five children.*

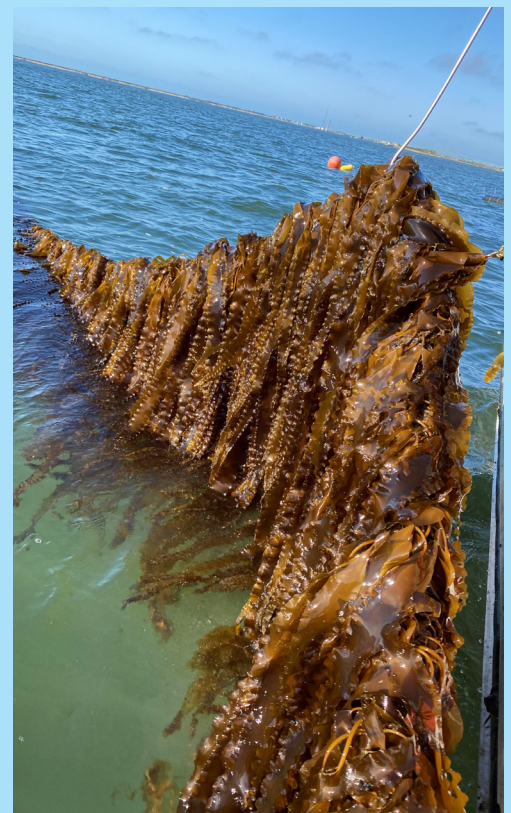
## Kelp: The Clean Water Hero

### *Bringing innovative new methods to the Sound*

Excess nitrogen is one of the leading pollutants in Long Island Sound. It leads to algae blooms and other conditions that are harmful to wildlife and human health. The good news is there could be an innovative method for communities to remove nitrogen from our waters using sugar kelp in areas that are not currently permitted for this activity. Save the Sound will be one of the pilot groups in a study, led by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, that assesses the potential for using sugar kelp to naturally remove nitrogen in near-shore waters. The project is set to start in December and promises to bring nature-based solutions that address water quality problems throughout our region.



*New York's Department of Environmental Conservation had project sites on the south shore of Long Island last year. Photo credit: Nelle D'Aversa*





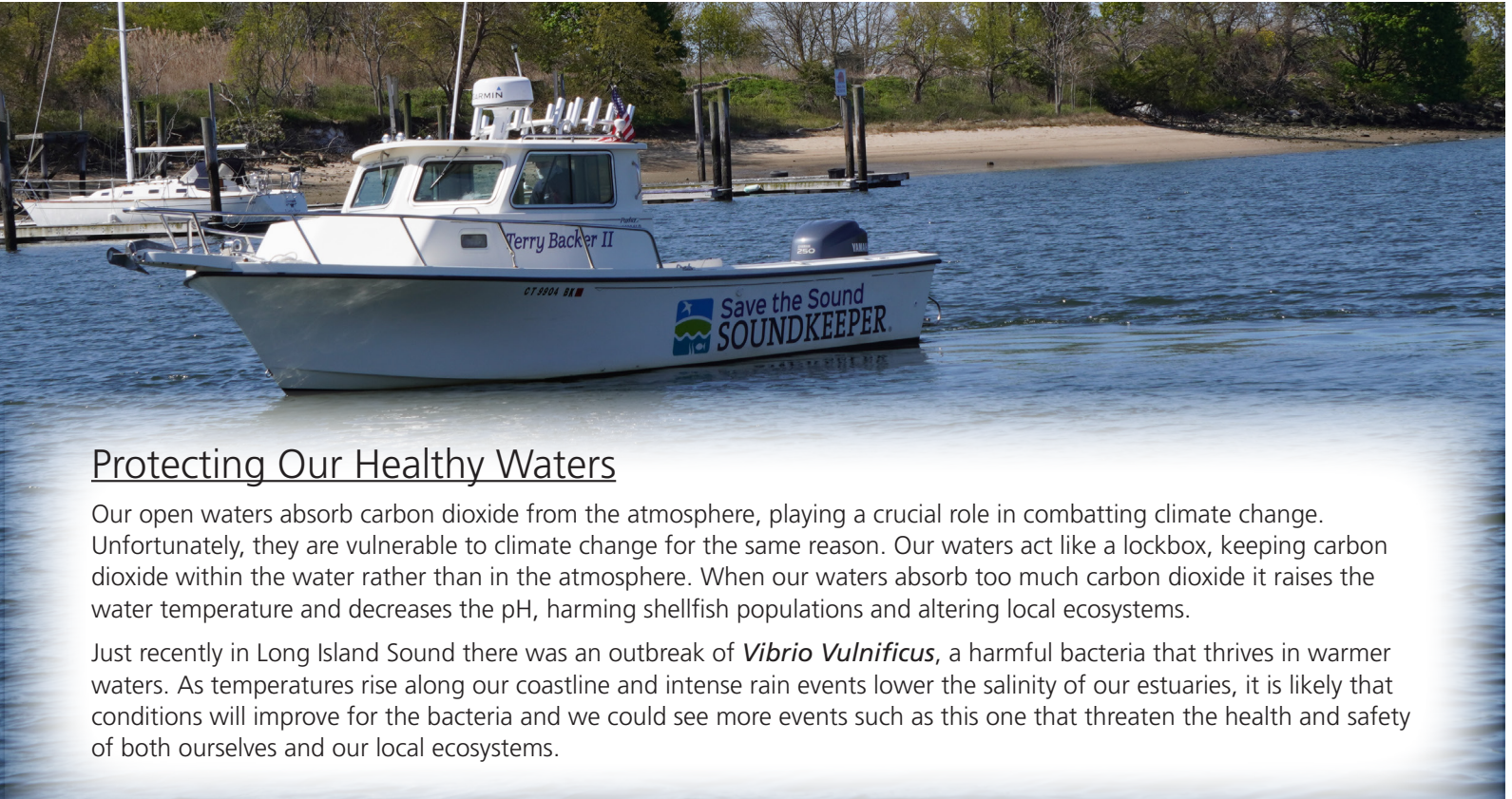
# The Many Angles of Climate Change

## *Examining the dark side and bright side of environmental protection*

Our region's climate is changing rapidly, and dealing with that reality requires looking at impacts and solutions across every aspect of the environment.

Fortunately Save the Sound's extensive tool set means we can work on every aspect of climate change: advocating for policies that reduce emissions, tracking water

quality impacts, protecting the natural systems that lock up carbon, and ensuring communities are resilient to storms and rising waters.



### Protecting Our Healthy Waters

Our open waters absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, playing a crucial role in combatting climate change. Unfortunately, they are vulnerable to climate change for the same reason. Our waters act like a lockbox, keeping carbon dioxide within the water rather than in the atmosphere. When our waters absorb too much carbon dioxide it raises the water temperature and decreases the pH, harming shellfish populations and altering local ecosystems.

Just recently in Long Island Sound there was an outbreak of *Vibrio Vulnificus*, a harmful bacteria that thrives in warmer waters. As temperatures rise along our coastline and intense rain events lower the salinity of our estuaries, it is likely that conditions will improve for the bacteria and we could see more events such as this one that threaten the health and safety of both ourselves and our local ecosystems.

### Preserving the Lungs of Our Land

As wildfires rip their way across the West Coast, we're reminded of the devastating effects climate change can have on our forests and lands. In the same breath, our forests also play a crucial role in fighting climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. A mature tree absorbs 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and, in the same time frame, just one acre of forest can absorb twice the carbon dioxide produced annually by the average car. Our open spaces are a natural buffer against rising carbon emissions. Land conservation is a crucial, yet often forgotten, step in combatting climate change. That is why we are focused on protecting endangered lands, like Plum Island and Oswegatchie Hills.

*Save the Sound is currently fighting alongside the Newhall community in Hamden, Connecticut to preserve over 100 acres of crucial land in an environmental justice community.*



We use nature-based solutions to create a resilient environment for our region:

### Fostering Resilient Communities

Sea level rise and increased extreme weather patterns threaten our coastlines, but those coastlines can also provide natural buffers against these same issues. Marsh restoration creates more resilient coastlines that protect communities from rising tides and increasingly dangerous storms, while restoring critical ecosystem functions like water filtration and providing nursery habitat for birds and fish. Every acre of marsh we restore brings us closer to a sustainable environment for ourselves and all the animals and plants that call the Long Island Sound region home.

Just recently, your support helped us complete a 135 acre marsh restoration at Sunken Meadow State Park in Suffolk County, New York. You transformed a once fractured ecosystem into a vibrant and resilient habitat through bioswales and constructed wetlands that will naturally catch and filter 8.5 million gallons of stormwater every year.

*A volunteer planting native species at Sunken Meadow State Park as part of the marsh restoration in 2019.*





# A Community Fights for Their Right to Nature

## *Saving 102 acres in Hamden, Connecticut*

Olin Powder Farm encompasses over 102 acres adjacent to the primarily African American Newhall neighborhood of Hamden. This land, owned by the Olin Corporation, is a forested refuge that has been fenced off from the neighborhood. Ecologically it contains five ponds, a floating bog habitat, waters that feed into a drinking reservoir, and many species of water fowl. Save the Sound is working alongside the community and Hamden Town Councilman Justin Farmer to push for environmental cleanup and, ultimately, a public park.

Check out some highlights from a recent conversation between Save the Sound President Curt Johnson and Justin Farmer about the project:

*Curt: What makes the Olin property so unique?*

Justin: I think in many ways that it's an urban oasis. I grew up doing Boy Scout trips in environments such as this and it was always a way to get away from my immediate surroundings. This land offers the opportunity to have a natural refuge right in our backyard, rather than miles away.

*C: As a long-time resident of the neighborhood, can you talk a little about the history it has with the Powder Farm?*

J: This area is the most industrialized part of town. There are not many trees around, and factories are mixed in with houses, leading to high asthma rates. But it wasn't always like this. This was a thriving neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Winchester Gun Factory was in operation. When the factory shut down, quality of life dropped and the connection our community had to this land was lost. Now there is a potential for that to be reclaimed and we must fight for it.

*C: With such a long history, how important is conserving this land to the community?*

J: If you asked anyone in the community right now, they would tell you that we need more opportunities for our kids to play and be safe outside. This could be a place where we could celebrate each other's culture and perspective through the landscape. Especially in this time when we're so cognizant of our differences, the ability to bring people together and enjoy the land is something really special.

*C: You paint a really great vision of the future. I remember first hearing about the land and the potential to conserve it as a sophomore in high school. How important is it that this land is remediated and conserved in the next three years?*

J: It's been 35 years without the community being able to interact with the property. Because the land has sat vacant and inaccessible for so long, a lot of the issues

that could be solved have continued to fester. Our neighborhood has high asthma rates, it's a food desert, and for many years we didn't even have an outdoor park. Yet this space that could eliminate so many of these quality of life issues has been closed off for generations.

*C: What can people do to join the fight to clean up the property and see that it becomes a nature park for all to enjoy?*

J: More than 160 people signed the petition calling on Connecticut DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes to issue an order mandating that the Olin Corporation clean up the site in the next couple of years. To join them you can call her office directly at 860-424-3000 and let her know this is an important regional asset that must be cleaned up so it is safe for all to enjoy.



*Olin Powder Farm encompasses over 102 acres and contains five ponds, a floating bog habitat, waters that feed into a drinking reservoir, and many species of water fowl.*

## Giving Tuesday: December 1, 2020

Mark your calendars! Giving Tuesday is December 1 this year. Your donation to Save the Sound goes directly toward fighting climate change, saving endangered lands, protecting the Sound and its rivers, and working with nature to restore ecosystems. Don't miss your opportunity to have a lasting impact on our regional environment!



# Curt's Corner: Remembering Two Environmental Titans

## *The legacies of Melissa Schlag and Kate Robinson*

I'm grieving the loss of two heroes of Save the Sound. Beyond the grief, their passing will propel us forward.

In August we received word of our former board member Kate Robinson passing. Kate was a force of nature, and a giant in Save the Sound history. After serving on the board for a decade, she earned her law degree and joined our legal team. Working with Natural Resources Defense Council, she prosecuted over a dozen Clean Water Act cases—during the 1980s when enforcing citizen suits under the then relatively new Act was a new endeavor. She forced scores of industries and sewage plants to comply with strict new Clean Water Act limits. As a new staff attorney in the mid-'90s, I had the great privilege to witness the respect she engendered with our environmental regulators and industry alike. She had a quiet, steady confidence about her with a no-nonsense style that built a great reputation as a clean water warrior. She will be dearly missed by her Save the Sound family, but we take comfort knowing that her work to protect our

clean waters will live on forever.

Our staff is also in mourning for our Melissa Schlag who passed on in early October. Melissa was an integral part of our communications, climate, and land teams at Save the Sound for the past four years. She brought her quick mind, sharp wit, turn of phrase, and political acumen to every project she touched. Her conviction, curiosity, and willingness to share her deep knowledge made Melissa a natural convener in her work with youth climate activists and a mentor to our policy and global interns. Even in the face of illness, Melissa continued to dedicate herself to environmental advocacy, civic involvement, home renovation, and international travel, putting 100% of herself into all her passions. Her tenacious spirit will live on in all of us as we continue the fight she dedicated so much of her life to.



*Melissa Schlag fought fiercely so that future generations could have an environment to enjoy.*



*Kate Robinson was a powerful force for clean water in the 1980s.*

The greatest thing we can do to honor both of these women is push forward. For Kate, we must work even harder to monitor, track down, and enforce the Clean Water Act to clean up sewage pollution all along the Westchester coast in New York. And in Connecticut, we will accelerate our work in Stamford, Darien, Bridgeport, and West Haven to fix long standing sewage problems. Millions of gallons of raw sewage must be stopped.

For Melissa, we must double down to protect our region's precious open spaces and combat climate change. She inspires us to work with Congress and the Cuomo administration to save Plum Island for future generations. And if that doesn't work, our federal lawsuit will. She loved it when we filed.

We are inspired to join African American leaders in the Newhall neighborhood of Hamden to push for a rapid cleanup of a 100-acre forested gem. Everyone in Hamden deserves safe access to the peace and enjoyment of forests and ponds.

And finally, we will be seeking a talented advocate to continue Melissa's work of helping youth climate advocates slash global warming pollution and bring forth a green, renewable energy future right here in your region. Please pass this opportunity on. Now's the time. We must carry on the legacy that each of these incredible women left behind.



# Envisioning a Future for Plum Island

## History, Nature, Research

This past summer, Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy unveiled *Envision Plum Island*, a new report detailing the region's vision and plan for the future of Plum Island, New York. After two years of workshops with the Preserve Plum Island Coalition and more than 160 stakeholders, the plan offers a tangible vision for the island's future as a preserve, research center, and interpretive historical site. This concrete step offers hope in a decade-long fight and a path forward to preserve this critical island forever and protect habitat for important wildlife, like roseate terns and seals!

Visit [www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report](http://www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report) to read more about the report.

*Left: Cover illustration from the Envision Plum Island report. Painting by Scott Bluedorn.*



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