



Save the Sound[®]

Action for our region's environment.

Annual Report 2020



Welcome!

Creating a connected, resilient region

Your dedication inspires us. In times like these, we are more thankful than ever to be part of a community dedicated to protecting our land, air, and water.

All over Connecticut, and in Westchester, New York City, and Long Island, water flows. Raindrops and groundwater trickle into streams, streams run into rivers, and rivers course to the Sound. This is the Long Island Sound watershed, and it connects our region.

From the forested lands that protect our drinking water in northwestern Connecticut, to pollution monitoring on the densely-populated Hutchinson River in Westchester, to the restored marshes of Sunken Meadow State Park on Long Island, Save the Sound leads the way in defending your land, air, and water.

Comprehensive programs and a talented team are what set Save the Sound apart. We have climate advocates, environmental scientists, and ecological engineers, backed up by a legal team that can truly hold polluters accountable, and a communications team that spreads awareness and leads community action.

Most importantly, we have generous supporters who understand how urgent it is to keep our waters clean and healthy, reduce the impact of climate change, and restore and protect habitat for our local flora and fauna. Even during a pandemic, your dedication has not wavered. For that, we are exceedingly grateful.

In such difficult times, this report is a celebration of everything you do to surround the Long Island Sound region with strong environmental protections. Your commitment fills us with hope and we thank you.

With gratitude,
Leslie Lee, Board Chair
Curt Johnson, President

Home owners, staff members, and volunteers building rain gardens in the Newhallville neighborhood of New Haven, near the West River. Both before and during the pandemic, Watershed Coordinator Nicole Davis collaborated with community members to plant 28 rain gardens like these, adding greenery to city streets. All of these green infrastructure projects capture and filter stormwater, letting it sink into the ground instead of carrying litter and toxins to the West River and on to the Sound.

(Cover photo of the Housatonic River by J.G. Coleman)



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About Us

Save the Sound was previously known as Connecticut Fund for the Environment/ Save the Sound. It's the same organization with the same mission—just a simpler name.

The mission of Save the Sound is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and Long Island Sound. We use legal and scientific expertise and bring people together to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations.

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.



Strong in the face of a crisis

The entire team—staff, board, and our generous donors—has remained resilient in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to drive environmental action in our region.

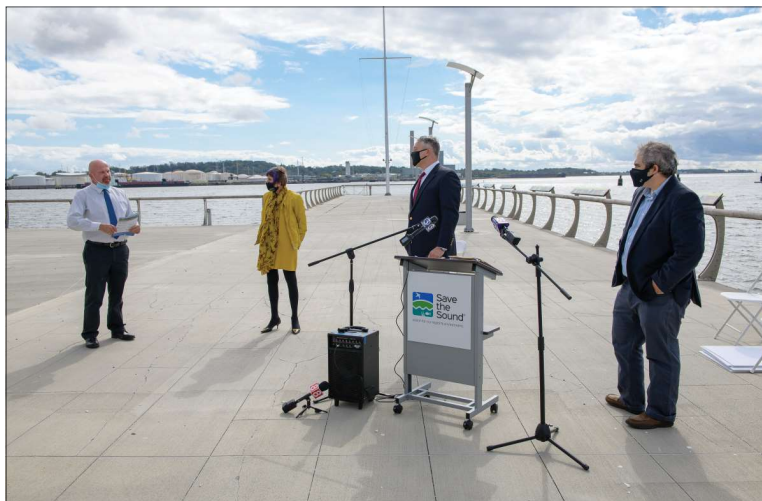
Climate and Resiliency Even as legislative sessions in 2020 were disrupted due to the pandemic, Save the Sound has taken a leadership role on the Governor’s Council on Climate Change, where we’re guiding the future of climate action in Connecticut. Because of your generosity, we’re also helping to implement laws and drive down emissions in our region.

Passing a key piece of legislation often feels like a dream come true. However, once a law passes, it’s up to government agencies to make big decisions about how to implement the law. Often, details ironed out during that process determine whether or not the reality lives up to the dream. During the pandemic, Climate and Energy Attorney Charles Rothenberger has worked remotely, guiding the implementation process for offshore wind and electric vehicle incentives using careful watchdogging and expert testimony. He represented your interest in making shared solar for all a reality and ensuring that home solar installations receive a fair return on investment.

Water Quality Save the Sound’s Unified Water Study (UWS) partners with groups around the Sound, using standardized equipment and methods to monitor nitrogen pollution in our bays and harbors. This comprehensive, data-driven picture of the health of Long Island Sound drives clean water policy and funding for environmental work in our region. The close coordination required for UWS was difficult in a pandemic, but Long Island Sound can’t afford for us to take a year off.

Instead of having groups pick up their equipment, the team fanned out to locations all around the Sound with two U-Hauls full of clean, sanitized gear, making socially distant curbside deliveries. Then we established a robust online program to train groups in the proper sampling techniques.

Save the Sound also conducts sampling in more than 60 river, stream, and beach sites in Westchester and Western Connecticut, monitoring for bacteria that indicate sewage pollution. Unable to engage volunteers due to the pandemic, staff took on extra duties to ensure the crucial data was gathered.



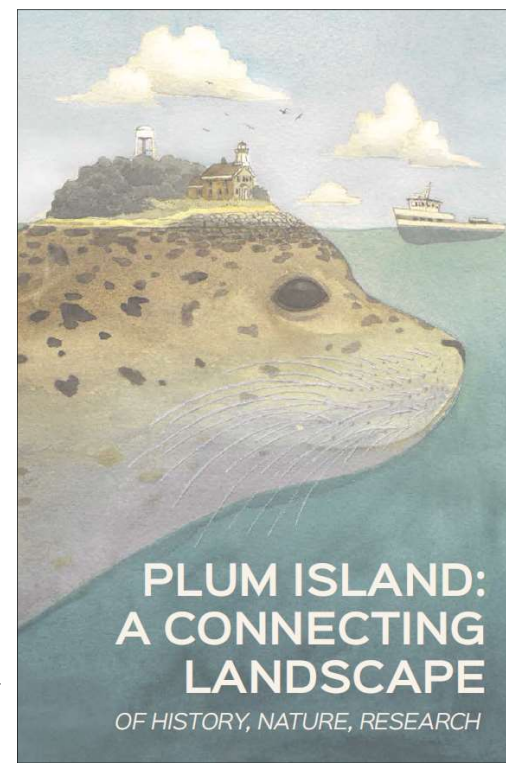
Legal Team Save the Sound legal staff has been working remotely throughout the pandemic, protecting your land, air, and water. Even though the 2020 legislative session was anything but typical, Peter B. Cooper Legal Fellow Kat Fiedler continued watching closely to defend against laws that roll back environmental protections, just as she does during normal sessions. Neither Kat nor Senior Legal Counsel Roger Reynolds have stopped using the Clean Water Act to fight sewage pollution in your local waterways, holding municipalities accountable for repairing leaking sewer systems and advocating for the funding needed to make repairs.

Endangered Lands This summer saw the culmination of Envision Plum Island, a two-year, community-oriented process to develop a clear vision for Plum Island’s future. Envision Plum Island is a crucial landmark in our battle to save Plum Island, achieved thanks to the supporters who sustain our work. It provides the concrete plan the US Congress and New York State need to take decisive action to save the island permanently.

Ecological Restoration In May, a new fishway at Pages Millpond dam in Branford was completed. A series of ladder-like ramps and concrete channels now allow fish like alewife and American eel access to 4.25 acres of lake and 6 miles of stream beyond. Much of this is historic habitat for laying eggs, hatching young, foraging, and sheltering that has not been accessible since the dam was built in colonial times. We’re grateful to the dam owners—the Suter family of Branford.

“Watching the construction has been a true joy,” said Lindsay Suter in a recent reflection on the project. “Not merely because we have been working on it for nearly 15 years; not merely because it will connect migratory fish to miles more spawning habitat; not merely because our family wants to be good stewards of our little piece of Connecticut; but because it is real, tangible progress in a time of forced inaction.”

Our work has not stopped during the pandemic. Thank you for your continued support! Clockwise from right: This spring, Environmental Analyst Elena Colón delivered equipment to partner groups, allowing us to collect water quality data crucial to maintaining the health of the Sound. A clear, new vision for Plum Island’s future was released this July (cover art Scott Bluedorn). Director of Water Quality Peter Linderroth at a press release this fall for the Long Island Sound Report Card. The construction team atop a new fishway completed on the Farm River in Branford in April.



Save the Sound is leading on bold climate action through policy leadership and on-the-ground projects that help our neighborhoods and ecosystems adapt to escalating climate threats.



Building a green future for all

New York and Connecticut are leading the fight against climate change and you are driving that action. With your support, Save the Sound advocated successfully for a 2018 Connecticut law requiring that more than 40% of electric power be generated from renewable sources by 2030. And in 2019, New York passed the strongest climate legislation in the country, setting goals that include 100% carbon-free electricity by 2040.

How do we reach those targets? By making renewable energy and clean transportation available to everyone in our region through shared solar, offshore wind, and affordable electric vehicles. With your support, Save the Sound has already taken major strides towards those goals.

Connecticut has some of the nation’s highest energy costs, and often the low-income families most affected are unable to install solar panels on their homes. Shared solar reduces that burden by giving families credits on their electricity bill from community solar projects, bringing energy fairness to our communities.

In 2018, your advocacy passed a Connecticut law allowing for 25 megawatts per year of shared solar power. Since then, Save the Sound has engaged in the design of the program, advocating for consumers every step of the way. Because of your support, we were able to ensure a streamlined program that protects consumers, maximizes the amount of available solar generation, and focuses the benefits on low and moderate income residents.

Last year, thanks to your advocacy, New York State banned offshore drilling for oil and natural gas, and Connecticut passed legislation that allows for up to 2,000 megawatts of offshore wind, enough to power 400,000 homes.

In 2020, Save the Sound continued leading the charge by joining New England for Offshore Wind, a regional advocacy coalition advancing responsibly sited offshore wind projects, and Wind Works



Save the Sound’s climate work creates jobs, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and makes clean energy and electric vehicles available and affordable. With your support, we’re partnering with youth and building a green future for all.

Long Island, a coalition working to support New York offshore wind projects.

The Northeast region is leading the development of the nation’s offshore wind resources. A new offshore wind project Save the Sound has advocated for will be uniquely suited to our area, and developers are using research on local conditions to find the site that best protects habitats and wildlife. Responsibly sited and operated offshore wind increases electric grid reliability, helps meet winter peak demand, and reduces reliance on fossil fuels—all while supporting new, high-quality jobs.

Connecticut has a goal of putting 500,000 electric vehicles (EVs) on the road by 2030 in order to meet state carbon reduction targets. But as of July 2020, there were only 12,624. To be successful, we need an effective and robust incentive program that makes EVs more affordable for everyone.

Save the Sound coordinates the Connecticut EV Coalition, fighting for Connecticut’s EV rebate program, CHEAPR (Connecticut Hydrogen Electric Automobile Purchase Rebates). Already, we’ve successfully advocated for used vehicle incentives and higher rebates for the low and moderate income residents who need them most.

Reducing the effects of global warming protects the environmental gains Save the Sound makes in other areas—like clean water, habitat restoration, and protected lands—from rising seas, superstorms, and catastrophic floods. And in turn, our on-the-ground work removing dams and installing green infrastructure can help mitigate flooding, making communities more resilient.

Fighting climate change means a greener, more equitable future for our region. With your support, we’ll continue to drive climate action, holding our states accountable for reaching our climate targets one step at a time.

For more than 40 years Save the Sound has been winning battles to preserve our region's threatened forests, islands, and riverfronts.



Defending greenspace and lands at risk

Plum Island, New York is an 840-acre oasis in Long Island Sound, one mile off the North Fork of Long Island. In contrast to the dense population in much of our region, this island is a mosaic of pristine habitats, including dunes, rocky shores, upland forest, and freshwater marshes.

For five days in September 2019, thanks to the generous support of Save the Sound donors, a team of divers and marine scientists conducted a first-of-its-kind marine survey of the underwater habitats around Plum Island. They spent the winter and spring poring over their field notes, photographs, samples, and data, and in March 2020, they released their findings, which were nothing short of incredible.

Underwater boulders 8 to 12 feet across, every inch of their rocky surfaces covered with plants and animals. Sea urchins, kelp, and anemones with their wreaths of white tentacles. Jellyfish wafting past northern star corals and delicate bryozoans that look like underwater ferns.

Eelgrass meadows full of long, green blades floating in the waves. Spider crabs traipsing across sandy expanses. Grey seals darting back and forth under the surface of the water.

We are only beginning to study and catalog this rich marine life, but we know that on shore, Plum Island is home to more than 500 plant and animal species, many of them rare or threatened. In addition, the island contains a historic, decommissioned Army post, lands used by Indigenous nations, and a federal research facility providing high-quality jobs.

But Plum Island is at risk of being sold to private developers in a way that would deprive the public of all the island has to offer, cause irreversible harm to local wildlife and cultural treasures, and leave hundreds of workers without jobs.

With your support, Save the Sound's legal team brought a lawsuit against the government agencies that are pushing to auction off Plum Island. Because of that lawsuit, the government has agreed to stay the case and address their faulty statement about the environmental impact the sale of Plum Island would have before the remaining claims in the lawsuit are addressed.

In late 2019, your advocacy brought about new defenses for Plum Island at the local, state, and federal level, and permanent protection has never been closer. But there's still more to do.

We have strong allies in our region's U.S. Senators and Representatives. But we need support from a majority in the nation's House and Senate to repeal the legislative language that allows for the sale of Plum Island.

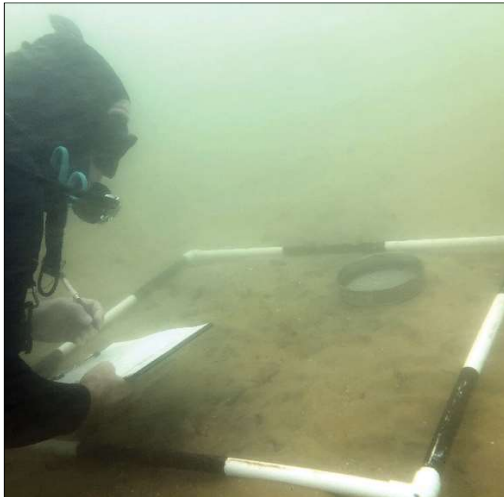
New York State and its citizens are the ideal stewards of Plum Island, not the highest bidder at an auction. By making Plum Island a part of its park preserve system, the state can protect it permanently. It's crucial that New York State announce its intention to champion the conservation of Plum Island.

"The more we know about the underwater communities that surround Plum Island, the better we can protect all of Plum Island's valuable habitats," says Land Campaign Manager Chris Cryder. "We can absolutely save Plum Island. Save the Sound and the entire Preserve Plum Island Coalition are experts at this work. We know how to win this battle and momentum is on our side."

Plum Island isn't the only place we're building momentum to save endangered lands. On the Niantic River, we're fighting for Oswegatchie Hills, 840 acres of rugged coastal forest at risk from high-density development. In Hamden we're working in partnership with community leaders to clean up decades-old pollution and restore a much-needed urban green space. And recently, we supported Greenwich Land Trust and the Town of Greenwich in acquiring over 70 acres of open space land from Aquarion Water Company that would have been incredibly vulnerable to development.

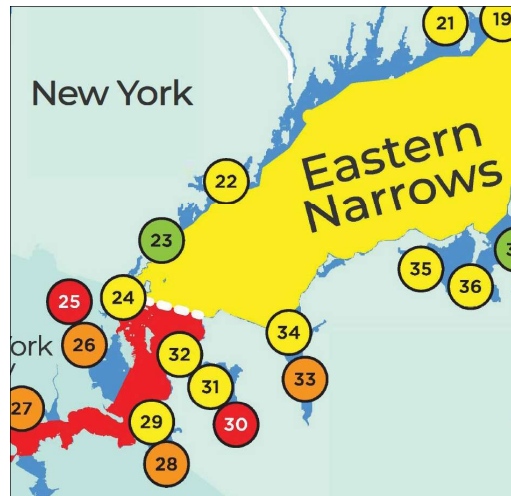
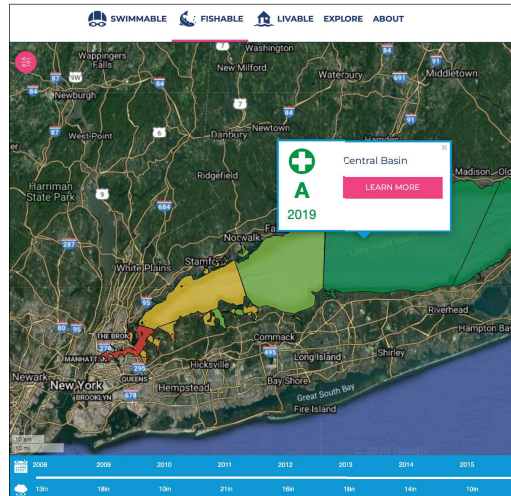
We are grateful to our supporters for sustaining this urgent work to save important lands that are increasingly at risk of being lost forever. We've saved every forest and wetland we've ever fought for, and are now taking on more battles than ever to save thousands more acres. Thank you for your commitment!

The New York Natural Heritage Program and InnerSpace Scientific Diving were able to conduct a survey of Plum Island's underwater habitats because of the generous support of Save the Sound donors. These marine scientists with decades of experience were blown away by the riches they found in this vibrant, life-filled corner of Long Island Sound. (Photos InnerSpace Scientific Diving)





Protecting every beach, bay, and brook



Top and Middle: Take action to protect your local waterways. High-quality, hyper-local data is available online in the Sound Health Explorer and the Long Island Sound Report Card. Bottom: Environmental Analyst Elena Colón and Director of Water Quality Peter Linderth taking water samples at Beaver Swamp Brook in Harrison.

Hyper-local, high-quality data creates a road map for clean water guardians. That's why we're dedicated to collecting and tracking data on rivers, streams, beaches, bays, harbors, and open water, all around and across the Sound. Your support converted thousands of data points into two clear, accurate, visual reports grading the health of each of these waterways, and put those reports in the hands of elected officials and community members invested in the health of their local waters.

In 2019, Save the Sound released the Long Island Sound Beach Report, which tracked indicators of harmful fecal bacteria in the waters where our communities swim. Comprehensive grades for 204 swimming beaches in New York and Connecticut, made accessible through this report and the online Sound Health Explorer, will protect the health of everyone who swims in the Sound.

The 2020 Long Island Sound Report Card includes more than 12 years of data on water quality in the open waters of the Sound. This year, for the first time, the Report Card includes grades for 50 bays and bay segments in Long Island Sound, collected by Save the Sound and 22 partner organizations. Consistent sampling methods between the groups allow us to compare local conditions and identify areas that need protection or restoration actions.

What story does all that data tell?

While many beaches, bays, and open-water regions of the Sound are clean and healthy, many others are struggling from pollution. Because of antiquated sewer systems that combine sewage outflow with stormwater, many of our waterways suffer from sewage pollution. Harmful fecal bacteria from sewage makes beaches unsafe for swimming. In addition, both sewage and stormwater bring excess nitrogen into our waterways. Too much nitrogen leads to excessive seaweed and algae growth, as well as hypoxia, a lack of oxygen in the water that can cause marine life to suffocate and die.

As a result of climate change, the Long Island Sound region is expected to experience increasing rainfall over the coming decades which means more needs to be done to improve coastal stormwater management and sewage infrastructure.

That's why, with your support, Save the Sound is fighting to make sure that every beach, bay, and brook in and around the Sound is swimmable, fishable, and livable.

Save the Sound runs a seasonal water quality monitoring program to measure bacteria levels at more than 60 beaches, shorelines, streams, and rivers in Westchester County, Little Neck Bay, and Greenwich. In addition, the team responds to reports of sewage pollution from community watchdogs all around the Sound.

Applying that data, Save the Sound legal staff track down sources of leaking sewage and take action to stop it. We always try collaborative methods first, but don't hesitate to use litigation when necessary to fight for a clean and healthy Long Island Sound. Thanks to our policy team, hundreds of millions of dollars are available each year from Connecticut's and New York's Clean Water Funds to help municipalities address the problems that our monitoring and legal teams identify.

Following our Clean Water Act case in Westchester, 8 towns have taken action to fix 530 miles of leaking sewage pipes. Leaders in Darien have committed to eliminating defects in sewage infrastructure that caused nearly 1 million gallons of raw sewage to overflow into their rivers and harbor over a recent one year period. We need your help to fight sewage overflows in Bridgeport, Norwalk and West Haven, and assure that progress continues in Westchester, Darien, and other towns on the Sound and its waterways.

When all of the repairs are done, hundreds of miles of leaking pipes will have been repaired to stop tens of millions of gallons of untreated and under-treated sewage from entering our lakes, rivers, and Long Island Sound. That's work you are making happen. Your support will ensure that every beach, bay, and brook in and around the Sound continues to be protected, just when these waters need our care the most.



Soundkeeper Bill Lucey is your on-the-water watchdog, working with your water quality and legal teams to find pollution and fix it all over Long Island Sound. This summer Bill worked with Save the Sound interns on an experiment to find out how well compostable bags biodegrade.

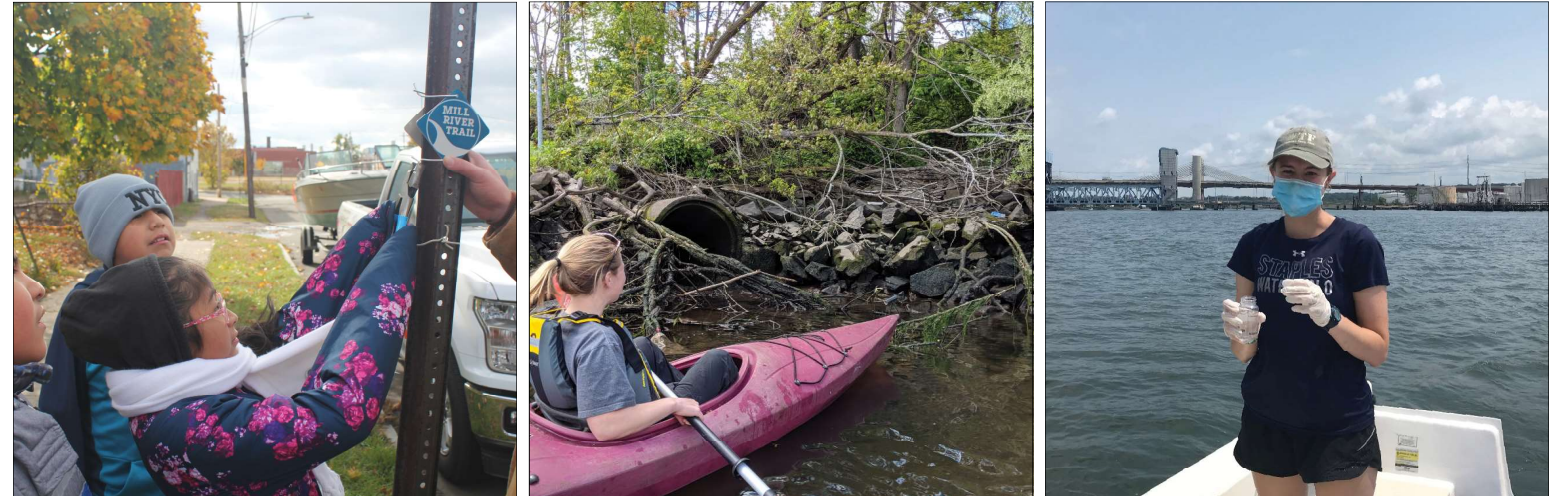
Save the Sound leads hands-on habitat restoration in the Long Island Sound region, creating lasting physical change that strengthens natural ecosystems to benefit both wildlife and people.



Caring for watersheds, restoring rivers



As part of the Mill River Watershed Plan, Save the Sound will construct four blocks of the Mill River Trail in Fair Haven by converting degraded roadway and vacant land into a linear trail and green infrastructure parklet. Before the pandemic, Fair Haven students helped put the plan into action by hanging markers along the trail and painting artwork above storm drains to remind everyone who passes by that only rain should go in the drain. Right: Ecological Restoration Project Manager Anna Marshall conducting a survey of the Mill River with the team. Far right: Save the Sound Intern Tegan Smith collects water samples with Soundkeeper Bill Lucey in New Haven Harbor after a sewage spill in the Mill River.



Early on the morning of Monday, July 6, a section of sewer main just north of the New Haven border in Hamden collapsed. Over 2 million gallons of raw sewage flowed first into storm drains and then into the Mill River.

Because of the comprehensive, interlocking programs that you generously support, Save the Sound was able to take immediate action. Soundkeeper Bill Lucey took water samples in New Haven Harbor to document how much pollution might be reaching nearby beaches. Your legal team submitted a Freedom of Information Act request and met with the Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Agency to determine whether or not the sewer system in this area has been assessed, whether it is in good repair, and what repair work has been done.

Save the Sound is also drafting legislative amendments to strengthen Connecticut's Sewage Right to Know Act, and legal staff are also working with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to improve the notification system for communities downstream of sewage spills.

However, responding to urgent spills is not the only way Save the Sound cares for the Mill River. The Mill River watershed encompasses all the lands that surround the river and its tributaries, from Cheshire all the way to the Fair Haven neighborhood in New Haven. Since early 2018, Watershed Coordinator Nicole Davis has worked hand-in-hand with community members in the Mill River watershed to craft and implement a plan to bring this struggling river back to life.

The first major project in that plan is to create an educational, public greenspace along the Mill River Trail in Fair Haven. This project will remove degraded pavement and invasive plants and create a trail

and a small park. The parklet will include many species of native and flowering plants that absorb and filter stormwater while beautifying what is currently a predominantly industrial area. This green infrastructure will help reduce persistent flooding in the adjacent schoolyard and mitigate sewage overflows in the Mill River. Nearby school children will have access to a vibrant greenspace, as well as STEM lessons related to the green infrastructure in their backyard.

“The community is full of anticipation and excitement around this project, and it’s not just about storm water,” says Watershed Coordinator Nicole Davis. “Neighborhood teachers want the park to create a nicer, safer space around the school yard. A neighbor who lives with his grandchildren across the street from the project site hopes that having a park instead of an empty block will deter people from dumping trash in that spot. For a local business owner, it’s important that the project inspire everyone to take pride in their neighborhood.”

Everyone deserves local waterways that are clean, accessible, and protected from flooding. Everyone deserves to have beautiful green spaces in their neighborhood. Your support makes that possible.

Save the Sound’s restoration work also includes reopening dammed rivers to migrating fish, and developing nature-based solutions to prevent inland flooding and help our shores absorb the impact of stronger storms.

With your support, we completed a wetlands restoration project in Sunken Meadow Creek State Park on Long Island in 2019, our largest restoration project to date. And now, the generosity of our donors will allow us to expand this crucial ecological restoration work to Westchester County.



Thank you!

It's all because of you. Thank you!

Our Generous Supporters

We are deeply grateful for the most important members of our team: each and every one of our supporters. The impactful work detailed in these pages only happens because of your care and dedication.

On these pages are just a few examples of extraordinary commitment. We are honored by every single gift from our generous and enthusiastic supporters. You are driving action for our region's environment and we sincerely thank you!

The John and Daria Barry Foundation

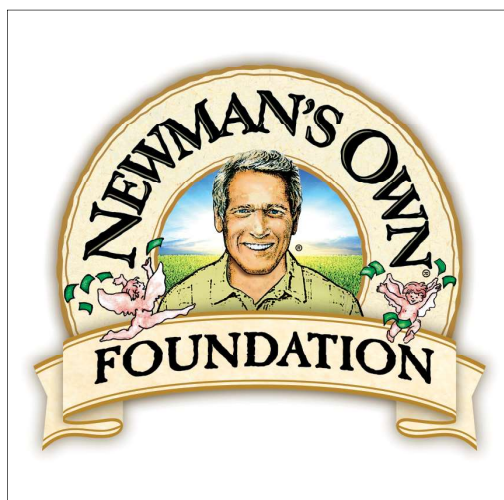
Through their foundation and with their five children, John and Daria Barry are putting their love for our environment into action and keeping Long Island Sound healthy and vibrant for generations to come. Among other initiatives, the family's generosity will fund a new and improved water quality lab in our New York office, which will expand our team's ability to analyze water samples and 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.

The Barry 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.

Newman's Own Foundation

Newman's Own Foundation has been a steadfast and generous supporter of Save the Sound for over 25 years and was instrumental in establishing and expanding the Soundkeeper as a Save the Sound program. Most recently, their support has allowed Save the Sound to build awareness around the issues facing the Long Island Sound region, and increase community engagement in the fight to protect our environment. In addition, they have increased our capacity to provide pollution-preventing green infrastructure to the communities that need it most.

Newman's Own Foundation uses all net profits and royalties from the sale of Newman's Own food and beverage products



for charitable purposes. Since 1982, Paul Newman and Newman's Own Foundation have donated over \$500 million to thousands of charities around the world.

Barbara O. David

Barbara O. David has been a supporter of Save the Sound for over 30 years. As a conservation leader and one of our longest serving Board Members, she has been a cheerleader for our land, air, and water projects, both in Connecticut and the Long Island Sound region.

Barbara is particularly enthusiastic about our advocacy: "Our legal work is the most permanent piece of what we do. We need the structure of the law today more than ever, to ensure the ongoing, permanent, protection of our natural resources and the health of our environment. My hope is that others might be inspired to support Save the Sound's legal work as well."

In 2018, she established the Barbara Osborn David Legal Director Endowment.

Long Island Sound Funders Collaborative

The Long Island Sound Funders Collaborative (LISFC) is a group of funders with missions that include the protection and restoration of Long Island Sound. Their long-time support has allowed Save the Sound to take water quality data and turn it into environmental action through projects like the Unified Water Study and data visualization for the Sound Health Explorer. LISFC is also funding an on-going partnership between Save the Sound and the Mount Vernon Boys and Girls Club to fight sewage pollution in the Hutchinson River.

LISFC is a collaboration among Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, Fairfield County's Community Foundation, Jeniam Foundation, Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Long Island Community Foundation, McCance Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, New York Community Bank Foundation, New York Community Trust, Pamela and Richard Rubinstein Foundation, Public Service Enterprise Group, Rauch Foundation, and Westchester Community Foundation.



Save
the
Sound®

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.