

# SoundBites

## Summer 2021

New Faces at Save the Sound

Protecting Lands Throughout Our Region

Breaking Down the 2021 Legislative Session

Curt's Corner: Decade on Ecological Restoration



**Save the Sound<sup>®</sup>**  
Action for our region's environment.

*Save the Sound's 6th annual Paddle for the Sound event will run from July 23 to August 1, virtually bringing together paddlers, kayakers, sailors, and runners. Read more on page 3.*



# Breaking Down the 2021 Legislative Sessions

## *The victories and disappointments from Connecticut and New York*

The most unusual state legislative sessions in memory have also proven some of the most momentous for Connecticut's and New York's environment. Though lobbying remotely posed many challenges, our team expanded partnerships, held webinars, and mastered the art of texting with legislators on weekends. And most effectively, our efforts were backed by yours! You sent thousands of messages to lawmakers to win these victories for our region.

### What you fought for in Connecticut:

#### **Turning the Tides on Water Pollution**

Our team made a huge splash on protecting clean water and public health. Long-fought efforts paid off with approval of the Blue Plan to guide and balance the many uses of Long Island Sound, and a strengthened Sewage Right to Know Act that better notifies you of sewage spills. The legislature also banned toxic polyfluoroalkyls (PFAS) in firefighting foam and food packaging.

Municipalities were a big winner, with \$225 million in clean water and resilience grant funding, plus a new tool for climate

resiliency and clean water investment—stormwater authorities—which we've been working towards for 13 years. That's the kind of sustained commitment your support makes possible!

#### **Fighting Climate Change and Cleaning Your Air**

There were mixed results and missed opportunities for climate action. In our wins column is establishment of an energy efficiency retrofit program for the Connecticut Department of Housing and an energy storage bill that will increase capacity and help bring clean energy to scale.

But legislators failed to enact greater accountability for meeting Connecticut's greenhouse gas reduction and clean energy targets, to strengthen emissions standards for medium and heavy duty vehicles, and to make it easier for consumers to purchase electric vehicles in-state.

Most disappointingly, the legislature punted the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI), a regional cap-and-invest program that reduces emissions over time while creating investment opportunities. The proposal

prioritized investment in rural and urban communities overburdened by air pollution or underserved by transportation. We are pushing hard for the legislature to pass TCI as soon as possible.

#### **Pursuing Healthy and Just Communities**

Connecticut failed a major test of commitment to environmental justice when legislators and agencies couldn't reach a deal to protect already overburdened communities from housing additional polluting facilities. But there was some progress: Save the Sound joined the Desegregate CT coalition to combat historically racist zoning policies and will work next session to redirect development from endangered green spaces to vibrant transit hubs. The Bottle Bill was also modernized, with the first redemption rate increase since the '70s and the expansion of qualifying beverage containers—that means more recycling and more economic activity.

### How you helped invest in New York's environment:

With your support, we lobbied alongside labor, business, and environmental groups for our shared vision of clean water, clean air, improved infrastructure, and open parks for all New Yorkers. The NY State Legislature's and Governor Cuomo's massive commitment to investing in our water infrastructure will make our communities cleaner and greener. We are happy to report that another \$500 million was authorized for community grants through the Clean Water Infrastructure Act and \$300 million was passed for projects supported by the state Environmental Protection Fund.

See our full Connecticut legislative wrap-up at [www.savethesound.org/CTsession2021](http://www.savethesound.org/CTsession2021)



*Last summer, two million gallons of raw sewage spilled into the Mill River in New Haven, CT, and brought to light questions surrounding how these situations are handled. This legislative session Connecticut strengthened its Sewage Right to Know Act to ensure our communities are kept informed about their clean water.*

## Protect our land, air, and water for generations to come

Did you know that a planned gift can be as simple as naming Save the Sound as a beneficiary on a retirement plan account, life insurance policy, or bank account? You maintain control of the asset, can spend it if you wish, and there's no cost to you now. Any funds remaining after your lifetime will transfer to Save the Sound to protect the environment that you love. For more information, contact Chief Development Officer Alicia Sullivan at [asullivan@savethesound.org](mailto:asullivan@savethesound.org) or 203-787-0646 x109.

# Donor Spotlight: Nancy Vincent

## *Protecting the Sound by paddling the Sound*

Small personal steps can turn into concrete, positive community action—and no one knows that better than Save the Sound supporter Nancy Vincent. Six years ago she embarked on a journey that began as a small paddling event with a few friends and has since brought out hundreds of people to enjoy the water and raised over \$40,000. Her bold idea to start Paddle for the Sound, envisioned and initiated as a paddleboard race across the Sound from Rye, NY to Glen Cove, NY, has



Nancy (left) with Kyle Troy from the Marine Education Center in Mamaroneck after their paddle cleanup event.

created a cleaner environment for us all.

Nancy grew up swimming along the coast in Westchester County, where she fostered a love for Long Island Sound from a young age. She always understood the importance of environmental protection, but it wasn't until she began paddleboarding that she realized the devastating impact pollution was having on the waters she spent hours exploring.

"Seeing things first hand is very different than reading or learning about them," said Nancy. "The more I was on the water the more upset I got with all the trash in it."

In 2016, Nancy opened SUP Westchester to share her love of the Sound with her community. She wanted to make water recreation more accessible, but it quickly became something much bigger. Now, although she no longer holds classes, she still organizes environmental cleanups in her community.

"When my friends and I would go out paddling we would always come back to the launch with plastic bottles and trash under the bungee straps on our boards," said Nancy. "I couldn't believe all the trash we would pick up every time we went out on the water. That is when I came up with the event Paddle for the Sound where all proceeds would go to protecting the waters I loved paddling and swimming in."

"I want my family and future generations to be able to enjoy these waters like I did as a child. The marine life is slowly coming back. It's our duty to do our part for future generations to help protect our environment."

- Nancy Vincent

Nancy lives in Mamaroneck, New York with her husband and three children and frequently spends her days out on the water. It's her children that drive her to do everything she can to protect our waters.

"I want my family and future generations to be able to enjoy these waters like I did as a child," said Nancy. "The Sound is so much cleaner now than when I grew up, it been amazing to see the transformation. Never did I think we would be seeing whales, dolphins, and turtles here in Westchester, but we are. The marine life is slowly coming back. It's our duty to do our part for future generations to help protect our environment."

## Join Paddle for the Sound 2021

### *Paddle, sail, or run for your local environment*

Paddle for the Sound is an annual paddling, sailing, and running competition to raise awareness and funds for your environment. This year, you can join from wherever you are and log miles from July 23 to August 1. Register in one of three categories—paddle/kayak, sailboat, or land lover—and compete against your fellow Save the Sound members to see who can cover the most distance. Plus, raise your paddle in our online auction starting July 18. Learn more and register at [www.savethesound.org/Paddle2021](http://www.savethesound.org/Paddle2021).



Support the great outdoors and test your skills on the open waters and terrain this summer.



# New Faces Fighting for Your Land, Air, and Water

## Meet the newest members of the Save the Sound team

It takes a village to protect our region from the environmental threats it faces. That's why we're growing our staff—so we can tackle new challenges and create a healthy environment for generations to come.

### Maggie Cozens, Lands Communications Specialist

Maggie is the environmental storyteller for advancing our land conservation campaigns.

She received her M.S. in Environmental Science from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, where she researched wetland ecology and worked on sea turtle conservation. Maggie seeks to involve multi-media and interdisciplinary storytelling in her environmental communications.

*"I'm excited to work with this incredibly talented, intelligent, and passionate group of people to achieve meaningful environmental change for our local communities and ecosystems!"* – Maggie



### Katie Friedman, NY Ecological Restoration Program Manager



Katie Friedman manages the New York Ecological Restoration Program including river restoration, living shorelines, and green infrastructure projects in Westchester, New York City, and Long Island.

Katie has a background in urban watershed restoration and planning, wetlands protection, and water quality monitoring. She most recently worked for NYC Parks & Recreation as their Aquatic Ecologist where she developed a watershed management plan for the Harlem River and managed diadromous fish restoration efforts on the Bronx River.

*"I'm thrilled to join Save the Sound to expand ecological restoration practices in my home state of New York. I've been able to hit the ground running on projects ranging from living shorelines at the Big Rock Wetland Restoration in Queens, to watershed planning for the Hutchinson River in Westchester, and look forward to cultivating more opportunities to restore habitat and improve our coastal resiliency."* – Katie

### Chris Kelly Esq., Peter B. Cooper Legal Fellow

Chris supports the organization's land conservation, climate, and environmental justice initiatives.

Chris' career in law and policy is informed by experiences as a legal fellow at the Connecticut Urban Legal Initiative in Hartford and in various internships in local government. Before coming to Save the Sound, he helped develop a program for law students to be appointed as advocates in animal cruelty prosecutions.

*"Save the Sound is full of knowledgeable and passionate environmentalists, and I've been lucky to join them in making a difference by fighting for our natural spaces, like Oswegatchie Hills. Our years-long fight to protect this pristine coastal forest along the Niantic River is heating up, and we're back in court this summer to preserve the last 236 acres of unprotected land from development."* – Chris





## Alex Rodriguez, Climate Advocate

Alex mobilizes youth and supports climate communications, coalition building, community engagement, and legislative advocacy.

Alex previously planned and executed campaigns on climate action, voting rights, and electric school buses at the CT League of Conservation Voters, and served as Chair of the Public Participation subcommittee of the Governor's Council on Climate Change.

*"Our youth are our future and it is an absolute honor to work with incredible youth activists throughout the region on climate action. It's been a privilege to work with our new Youth Eco Advocacy Corps to hold legislative phonebanks and social media calls to action to promote policies such as the Transportation and Climate Initiative, home energy affordability, and medium and heavy duty vehicle standards. Our youth are ready to fight for their future." – Alex*

## Javier Román-Nieves, Ecological Communications Specialist

Javier conveys our ecological restoration projects through a lens of human ecology and ecosystem conservation.

He is a Puerto Rican artist, writer, and naturalist with over ten years of experience in design and environmental communications. Javier thrives at the intersections of humans and nature, finding himself at home among the green infrastructure and dam removal projects of our Ecological Restoration team.

*"Restoring a healthy relationship with our environment is necessary to sustain a culture of healing and caring for one another, so helping Save the Sound transform the landscape for the better is an opportunity that I cherish and appreciate." – Javier*



# A Special Farewell to an Incredible Team Member

## *Valerie Wormley-Radford moves on after 13 years with Save the Sound*

Our Save the Sound team is saying goodbye to an incredible team member. Valerie Wormley-Radford is moving on after 13 years of dedicated service to our region.

"Throughout her career with us, she has been a warm and caring presence that so many of us, including myself, looked to for support and wisdom," said Save the Sound President Curt Johnson.

Valerie has never hesitated to take on many different responsibilities, including providing critical support as Administrative Assistant and most recently as our inaugural Volunteer and Intern Coordinator. All of

the work we've done in your communities over the last 13 years wouldn't have been possible without Val. Not only was she a dedicated and passionate employee, she has also been a dear friend to many.

She is moving on to pursue her dream job as a career trainer with the Connecticut Department of Social Services, where she'll be able to use her incredible social work skills to help others pursue their dreams.

Val was a giving and gracious team member who constantly brought out the best in her colleagues. We will miss her deeply and wish her well in her future endeavors.





# Protecting Your Precious Open Spaces

*Updates on our three biggest land conservation campaigns*

## Plum Island

The fight to protect Plum Island continues as the Preserve Plum Island Coalition seeks a permanent owner to conserve Plum Island's ecological and cultural resources, which includes making critical repairs to the historic Fort Terry buildings and lighthouse. The Department of Homeland Security is expected to decommission the Plum Island Animal Disease Center within seven years, and we'll continue working over that timeframe to protect these resources and save this ecologically precious parcel of land.

We are also still exploring the underwater world around Plum Island. In 2019, divers found rich seafloor resources including multiple habitat types and corals. Thanks to generous supporters of Save the Sound, a second scientific dive is scheduled for this August by the New York Natural Heritage Program and Innerspace Scientific Diving. This year's dive will focus on documenting Plum Island's underwater biodiversity, including the many different fish species in the area. Our Soundkeeper will be on hand to support the divers and Cornell Cooperative Extension will participate to check for eelgrass beds, which are important habitats for many marine organisms. The submerged parts of Plum Island will surely mirror the richness of species above the tide line!

*Photo credit: Bob Lorenz*

## Six Lakes

Save the Sound is working closely with community partners, including the Hamden Land Conservation Trust, to realize the creation of a park and nature preserve in Hamden, Connecticut. This 100 acre parcel of land, also known as the Olin Powder Farm, is home to native vegetation and wildlife, along with several freshwater ponds and wetlands. The Six Lakes coalition seeks to facilitate the full remediation of this property and its transformation into a nature preserve and public park for the Hamden community.

Currently, the coalition is working to identify park amenities most desired by the nearby Newhall neighborhood and other stakeholders. Conversations are ongoing, and many exciting developments in visioning and public input are expected for this project come the fall. Learn more at [www.sixlakes.org](http://www.sixlakes.org)

## Oswegatchie Hills

The Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition, launched by Save the Sound in early 2016 with Save the River - Save the Hills and the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, seeks to protect the last undeveloped, unprotected coastal forest on the East Lyme banks of the Niantic River.

This environmentally fragile forest supports native vegetation and wetlands, which are critical habitats for amphibians, migratory birds, and other wildlife. It also serves as a natural pollution buffer, filtering rain runoff from roadways that eventually drains into the Niantic River and Long Island Sound.

In the last 20 years, more than 450 acres of coastal forest have been protected as the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. The remaining 236 acres we seek to protect are in the northern end of the Oswegatchie Hills, where much of the critically important habitat is located.

*Photo credit: Suzanne Thompson*



# Curt's Corner: Restoring Local Habitats and Ecosystems

## *The United Nations Decade on Ecological Restoration*

Save the Sound is joining the United Nations and countless other global partners to celebrate the incredible potential of ecological restoration to positively transform our environment. The United Nations Decade on Ecological Restoration is all about grounded hope. Hope for free-flowing rivers and clean natural space, grounded by the track record built with your support—over 20 river sections restored and five dams removed over the past decade. Hope grounded in momentum towards healthy, thriving, and expansive restoration.

In total, your support has allowed us to lead nearly 60 collaborative restoration projects in the region over the last 15 years. We are grounded by a proven track record of getting things done—from restoring over 100 acres

of wetland habitat at Sunken Meadow State Park in Suffolk County, NY to installing a fishway that frees over 10 river miles at Pages Millpond Dam in North Branford, CT.

Without healthy ecosystems we cannot have healthy communities. That's why we are expanding our ecological restoration team and the incredible work they do across the region.

Thanks to the support of Robert and Libby Alexander, our ecological restoration team is growing in New York, starting with work on the Hutchinson River watershed. New York Ecological Restoration Program Manager Katie Friedman recently joined the team and hit the ground running, laying the groundwork to make future projects a success.

Local and regional action combine to create big victories for your clean water and open spaces. Right now our dedicated team is fighting to open 32 miles of the Naugatuck River at the site of Kinneytown Dam in Seymour, CT and to restore tidal flows on the Nissequogue River in Smithtown, NY.

This next decade is where we must increase the momentum. We need to sprout thousands of rain gardens to protect neighborhoods from climate induced flooding. We must accelerate living shorelines of marshes and dunes to protect our coast and re-build nature. With your help it's going to be a great decade for ecological restoration and harnessing nature to create community resilience.

## Gearing up for Cleanup Season

### *Featuring the sponsors who make it possible*

The 2021 Connecticut Cleanup is just around the corner and we've already begun recruiting Cleanup Captains throughout the state. This is our local effort as part of the International Coastal Cleanup, an annual event which brings together hundreds of thousands of volunteers in more than a hundred countries to keep litter out of waterways around the world. We work with Cleanup Captains from all over Connecticut to identify areas in need of cleaning, and to recruit teams of volunteers who dedicate their time and energy as part of the global action. Cleanup events are organized from late August through early October, peaking this year on September 19.

Last year, the Connecticut Cleanup enlisted the help of 1,495 volunteers who worked together to fill some 605 bags of trash—that's 7,498 pounds of litter off 132 miles of Connecticut beaches, riverbanks, parks, and wetlands! Personal protection equipment (PPE) was a notable new trash group commonly discarded or littered during the pandemic. How will that change as vaccination rates increase and requirements are relaxed? We have to see what the results of 2021 have in store, but we'll need your

help in getting that data.

This annual effort requires other support as well—financial support for coordination, raising awareness, distributing supplies, securing permits, gathering and analyzing results, and sharing our findings. Last year's effort was made possible with the help of presenting sponsor Subaru of New England,

as well as HMTX Industries. Past sponsors include Penwood Real Estate Investment and Barret Outdoor Communications. Do you know or work at a business that might be interested in being a corporate sponsor of this year's effort? Email our cleanup coordinator Annalisa Paltauf at [apaltauf@savethesound.org](mailto:apaltauf@savethesound.org).



*Together we have already done 14 cleanups this season, with many more ahead.*

# How Clean is the Water at Your Favorite Beach?

## *The Long Island Sound Beach Report is finally here*

The results are in! Save the Sound released our 2021 Long Island Sound Beach Report on June 10, and it's good news for swimmers. Seventy-nine percent of the more than 200 Long Island Sound beaches graded earned "A" or "B" grades for water quality in the 2020 swimming season.

The biennial report provides a list of the "Top 20" public beaches on Long Island Sound—10 each in NY and CT—based on water quality, and includes comprehensive overall grades for 204 swimming beaches for the last three years.

However, the report did note a decline in water quality at many beaches in the days following rain events, which is especially troubling given predictions of increasing seasonal wet weather due to

climate change. Several regions showed substantially higher percentages of wet weather water quality failures than in previous years. Save the Sound is calling on elected officials to invest additional resources in repairs and improvements to sewer lines and stormwater systems, which impact beach water quality after heavy and even moderate rain.

To see the complete findings and find out how your beach was graded, download your copy of the Beach Report on Save the Sound's dedicated Long Island Sound online tool—[www.SoundHealthExplorer.org](http://www.SoundHealthExplorer.org)—which features interactive maps highlighting more than a decade of water quality data for the Sound.



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