

# SoundBites

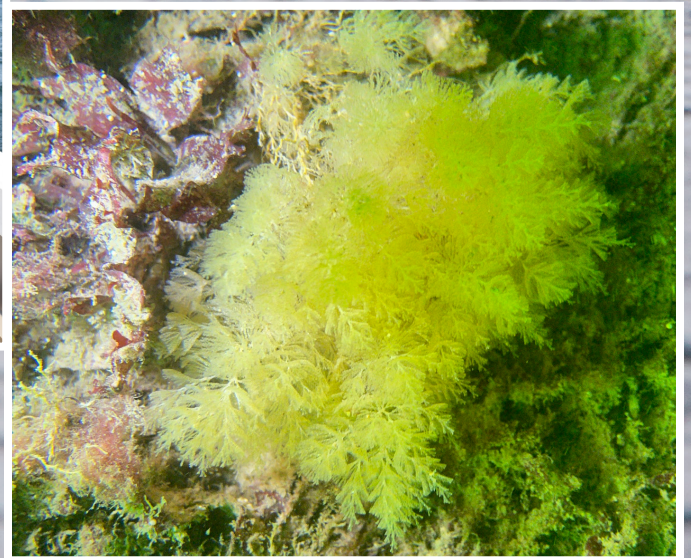
## Fall 2021

Severe Storms of the Summer

Exploring the Life Around Plum Island

Connecticut's Clean Transportation Future

Curt's Corner: Our Future Together



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

Cover photo: View of the Plum Island Lighthouse from the water. Photo credit: Bob Lorenz. Additional photos: The second Plum Island dive unveiled the vibrant life below the water. Photo credit: InnerSpace Scientific Diving.



# Exploring the Life Around Plum Island

## Second underwater biodiversity survey completed

*"Incredible." "Amazingly diverse." "Pristine."* These were some of the remarks made by scientific divers upon surfacing from underwater surveys off Plum Island, New York, during the first week of August.

The dive was the second half of a New York Natural Heritage Program study, sponsored and coordinated by Save the Sound and conducted by InnerSpace Scientific Diving, to explore the biodiversity of Plum Island that lies under the waters of eastern Long Island Sound. The findings will inform best

conservation practices and help in the fight to preserve the island forever.

Four divers spent five days surveying transect lines perpendicular to the island. They found every hard surface—from glacial boulders to the backs of slipper shell snails—covered with life.

"Plum Island's rich natural habitats are in its marine waters, too. Knowing about the island's overall biodiversity helps us understand the valuable natural heritage from which we all benefit, in ways we know

The coastal habitat around Plum Island holds some of the last wild water to remind us how the shores of Long Island Sound once teemed with life and could again someday.

- Soundkeeper Bill Lucey



Corals and bryozoans wave in the swift-flowing waters around Plum Island.

Credit: InnerSpace Scientific Diving

and countless ways yet to be understood," said New York Natural Areas Coordinator Louise Harrison.

This is the first detailed survey of nearshore subtidal areas. It's a major step toward protecting these habitats and species, and will provide a framework for future scientific studies. Keep an eye out for an upcoming documentary on the dive and the full report on the island's underwater life!

Save the Sound thanks the many donors who have made the scientific dives possible including: Mr. Paul Ahern; Captain Mike Bady; Safe Harbor Marinas in Greenport; Port of Egypt Marina; Mr. Bob Haase at Duryea's; Orient Country Store; Silver Sands Motel; and Northeast Diving Services Inc., Ilene Merenstein, Nancy Sernag, and Eddie O'Connor.

## Monitoring for Safe Swimming

### Thank you volunteers!

Save the Sound recently wrapped up our seventh year of seasonal water quality sampling. A total of 657 samples were analyzed at 62 different sites from Greenwich, CT, through Westchester County, to Queens, and into Nassau County to determine if waters are safe for swimming. This data is shared with regulatory agencies, elected officials, municipal staff, and the public to inform remediation and preservation plans for your local waterways.

This effort would not be possible without an extraordinary group of 21 volunteers. This water-loving group attends an annual training on sampling procedures before scrambling down riverbanks and walking the beach to collect water samples for processing in Save the Sound's laboratory. We thank these intrepid individuals and look forward to seeing you next season!





# Donor Spotlight: Paul Ahern

## *Bringing it all together for positive change*

"I've never lost my love for the Sound or the sense of discovery and freedom it offers," said Save the Sound supporter Paul Ahern.

Paul grew up on Long Island and shared a Boston Whaler with his brother. From a young age, he spent his days roaming Oyster Bay and Cold Spring Harbor. Now he and his partner Ilene Merenstein live in Greenport for six months out of the year and spend as much time as they can on the water.

Relatively new to Save the Sound, Paul and Ilene haven't hesitated to dive right in and have already become major donors to our work. From participating in Save the Sound's

Climate Task Force to supporting our water quality program to graciously donating their time, skills, and boat for our most recent Plum Island dive—they give to support nearly every facet of our crucial work, because they know it's all interconnected.

"Ilene and I were thrilled to work for and with a dedicated science team," said Ahern of the Plum Island dive. "I loved being an important part of the daily process by shepherding the divers with my boat, and Ilene's video production talent created excitement and proves the value of the whole adventure. The fog day in the ferry lanes will always keep me humble."

*The Anthropocene challenge is clearly to manage our species into natural sustainability—daunting as an individual, but I think possible as a collective mind.*

- Paul Ahern

Paul is no stranger to environmental protection and what it takes to create positive change. He started his career by morphing an academic focus in anthropology into an early marketing career, through which he pushed for eco-conscious products and practices. As his second act, he built a solar company from the ground up.

Now, in his third act, Paul is looking forward to learning the behind-the-scenes science that will help create a healthy and vibrant region that's resilient against climate change—and he knows Save the Sound can get us there.

"Their mandate is right in front of me, local and inviting. Save the Sound's legal track record and heritage to me means it is practical and effective. As a businessperson, I love results. The leadership is strategic, committed, and persistent—in a word successful. This is why I chose to donate and volunteer my time to Save the Sound," said Ahern.

When they aren't busy with Save the Sound, you can find Paul and Ilene "sailing, boating...anything on, near or in the water."



*Paul Ahern with the Plum Island dive crew. Left to right: NY Natural Areas Coordinator Louise Harrison, Paul Ahern, Soundkeeper Bill Lucey, divers Janet Klemm and Steve Resler.*



*(Left to right) High school senior Trent Lee, EE Ford Community Engagement Fellowship recipient Peter Nicholas, and Skye Spencer, whose brothers also volunteer with us, were just three of our incredible volunteers this monitoring season.*



# Severe Storms of the Summer

## *Local impact from a global problem*

The climate crisis is here, and our communities are experiencing its devastating effects. Just this summer, Connecticut and New York saw record flooding from three tropical storms. In July, Tropical Storm Elsa brought between one and a half and five inches of rain to communities in New York and Connecticut in less than 12 hours. Tropical Storm Henri and Hurricane Ida followed in quick succession in August, flooding both coastal and inland communities. In their wake they left massive beach closures, families without power, and communities grappling with damaged homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

These three intense storms overwhelmed local sewage systems and ultimately led to nearly 180 million gallons of raw and partially untreated sewage pouring into your waterways, and that data is just Connecticut.



*Photo taken by Omer Uzun at his home after Hurricane Ida.*

“The experience was scary but brief—probably typical of a flash flood. I was relieved the windows held up and prevented any major property loss. I heard others were not so fortunate. One person, maybe in Eastchester, had a basement door give way completely to the force of the flood.”

- Omer Uzun, New Rochelle, NY resident

## How Did We Get Here?

These three storms illuminated drastic deficiencies in our wastewater treatment systems and sewage overflow reporting, along with the need for concrete action to combat and adapt to the climate crisis. It's simple: we are not equipped to deal with the disruptive weather patterns climate change is bringing to our doorstep.

The violent rains and storm surges we're seeing now are exacerbated by our warming climate, and we need to do a lot more to mitigate climate change and the impact of increasingly strong storms in our region. We're fighting for meaningful policies that will prevent the worst effects of climate change and help our communities prepare.

In September, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection released its Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. The report tracks the state's progress toward meeting the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets in the Global Warming Solutions Act, which Save the Sound helped design and pass in 2008. It examines data from 2018—the most recent available—revealing that greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation and building sectors increased over the previous year and that transportation emissions were higher than the 1990 baseline. This is alarming news, and not in line with the greenhouse gas reduction needed to meet the state's 2020, 2030, and 2050 commitments.

“This report demonstrates that our legislative leaders cannot continue to turn a blind eye to our worsening climate crisis and our state's failure to meet its own commitments. They must take action immediately,” said Climate and Energy Attorney Charles Rothenberger.



# Taking Action for Our Future

The impacts of tropical storms Elsa and Henri and Hurricane Ida highlight the crucial connectivity of climate resiliency, healthy waters, and thriving ecosystems. The good news is that we have the tools to mitigate the impacts of the next Ida, and the one after that—and your Save the Sound team knows how to use them.

As you read this:

- Your climate team is advocating in Hartford for clean energy and transportation policies that will lower our emissions and get us on track to tackle the climate crisis;
- Your Soundkeeper and legal team are collaborating with local municipalities to improve stormwater treatment facilities and, when necessary, taking polluters to court to protect your waterways;
- Your ecological restoration team is working on living shorelines and wetland restoration projects that provide critical habitats for threatened species and an effective natural buffer to storm surges along our coasts and flooding in our rivers.

The bottom line: climate change is here. We must protect our communities from its worst impacts.



*A brick wall at the Rye Public Library was destroyed in Hurricane Ida.*

“As a long time resident of Rye, NY I can say that I have never seen such devastation as that caused by Hurricane Ida. My basement fully flooded, my girlfriend lost her car to the stormwater, and my sister lost her fitness facility. The sheer power of the winds and floodwaters made any prior storm feel almost insignificant. Sadly, this forbodes the changes that we will begin to see more regularly if drastic measures aren’t taken to address climate change.”

- Assistant Soundkeeper Gavin Kreitman

## Connecticut Storm Sewage Pollution by the Numbers

Tropical Storm  
Elsa  
**131,175,059\***

Tropical Storm  
Henri  
**25,088,229\***

Hurricane Ida  
**22,865,498\***

\*gallons of raw or partially untreated sewage combined with stormwater that entered your waterways

*New York also experienced devastating sewage overflow events, but due to a lack of reporting it is impossible to know how much sewage entered your waterways. In 2019, Save the Sound and our allies brought a lawsuit in New York Supreme Court to compel New York City to report to the public the volume, date, and time of sewage discharges as required by the New York Sewage Pollution Right to Know Act.*



# Connecticut's Clean Transportation Future

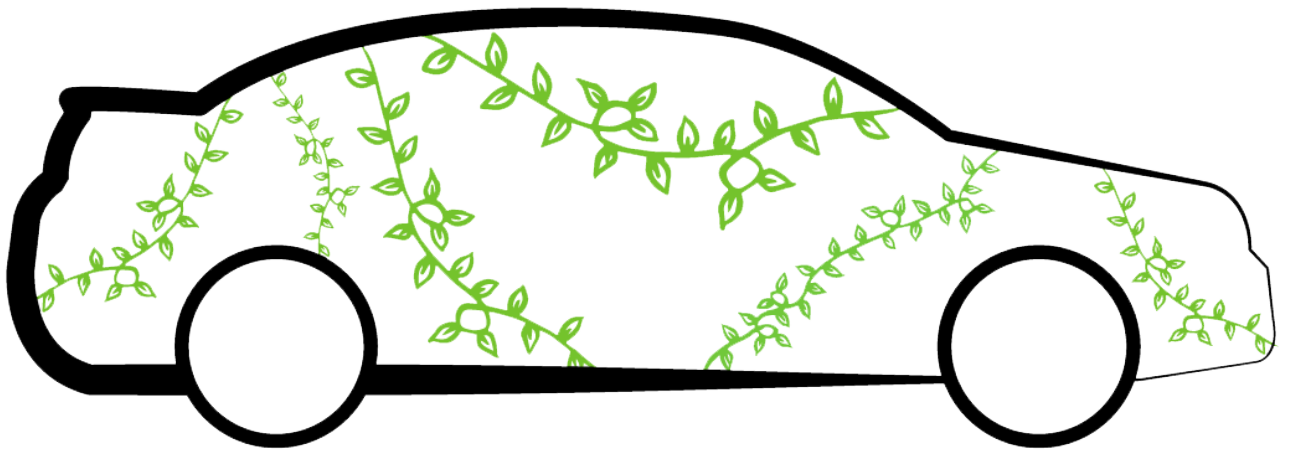
## *And how you can help us get there*

The Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) is our region's best opportunity for meaningful climate action now. It caps transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and reduces them over time. Funding from auction of emission allowances to fuel suppliers and wholesalers will be invested in our communities to improve clean transportation, infrastructure, and public health—investments like transit services, electric vehicle charging, and rural

broadband internet. Climate pollution would be reduced, and urban, rural, and suburban communities alike would benefit. It can be implemented in Connecticut by a vote of the General Assembly.

Climate change disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations. TCI would require that at least 50 percent of investment go to communities overburdened by air pollution or underserved by transportation, and would establish an equity council to guide investments.

As of mid-October, our climate team continues to push for a vote on TCI in a special session of the General Assembly. We're partnering with a coalition of advocates—plus medical professionals, businesses, and municipal leaders—to highlight the benefits of the policy and earn the support of more state legislators and people across Connecticut. We won't get this over the finish line alone. Visit [www.CTTransportationFuture.org](http://www.CTTransportationFuture.org) to get involved.



## Where Roads Meet Rivers

### *Enhancing infrastructure for healthy habitats*

Each time a road crosses a wetland, stream, or river, a balance is struck between the needs of human transit and the connectivity of an ecosystem. These crossings have implications for the resilience of both roads that humans rely on and wildlife.

Beginning this fall in the Connecticut towns of Groton and Ledyard, Save the Sound's ecological restoration team—with help from local high school students—will be assessing culverts and other road-stream crossings for ecological connectivity and flood resilience. We'll share the results with municipal staff and regional planners to inform a more holistic prioritization of culverts for replacement. Paired with more resilient designs that simulate streams, this work has the potential to improve the lifespan of our infrastructure and connected, intact habitat for fish and other wildlife in the face of increased flooding.



# Curt's Corner: Our Future Together

## *Save the Sound's strategic plan 2022-2027*



Because of you, your voices, and your support, Save the Sound has succeeded, even through this pandemic. Looking ahead, we need to address the climate change fueled storms, the environmental injustice that many communities suffer, and the health of our water that affects our region's fish and wildlife. We're now setting our course for the future with a five year strategic plan. With your continued support, we'll be able to achieve our goals.

We'll build upon our strong programs to take action for our region's environment and accelerate and expand, to do more in Connecticut, Westchester County, New York City, and Long Island. Here's what we'll do with your help:

### ***Stopping sewage and preventing stormwater pollution through:***

- Ongoing protection of your bays, beaches, and harbors throughout the

Sound and adding more monitoring locations in Queens and Long Island;

- Adding rain gardens in cities to filter stormwater and opening shellfish beds in Westchester;
- Continuing our fight against nitrogen pollution from New York City.

### ***Freeing the Sound from plastics and protecting open space in the region by:***

- Expanding our successful volunteer cleanups to include more inland rivers and additional coastal sites;
- Working to ban single use plastic in our region;
- Ensuring that our most endangered lands are protected (Plum Island, Oswegatchie Hills, and drinking water reservoir lands), and expand this work to Long Island.

### ***Fighting climate change through:***

- Ongoing action to pass climate smart legislation and regulations allowing for citizen action and reducing carbon emissions;
- Expanding climate friendly transportation that serves all communities;
- Ensuring that governments are accountable to meet climate goals.

### ***Restoring our coast and enhancing rivers by:***

- Expanding our successful dam removal and shoreline restoration work with increased focus in New York;
- Building up our natural defenses to coastal erosion with living shorelines;
- Researching and analyzing culverts and creating watershed plans for rivers.

### ***Empowering BIPOC-led environmental organizations by:***

- Continuing our internal diversity, equity, and inclusion work and expanding our environmental justice action;
- Deepening relationships with organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color;
- Forming partnerships to address community environmental pollution.

**These strategic objectives are ambitious AND achievable**—with your involvement and support. I'd love to hear your thoughts; email me at [cjohnson@savethesound.org](mailto:cjohnson@savethesound.org) or call me at 203-787-0646. We will need you on board!

## Bringing Energy Efficiency to Your Home

### *Resources for Connecticut and New York*

As the weather gets colder, it's important we make the most of the energy we rely on to warm our homes. Energy efficiency cuts energy waste, making it one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to combat climate change, clean the air we breathe, help families meet their budgets, and help businesses improve their bottom lines. Connecticut and New York both have programs to help you access efficiency resources.

#### **New York**

Go to [www.NYSERDA.ny.gov](http://www.NYSERDA.ny.gov) and search for "energy efficiency" to find a range of programs designed to help residents identify areas where their homes are driving up energy costs, and can provide assistance in completing energy efficiency improvements for a healthier, more comfortable home or business.

#### **Connecticut**

[www.EnergizeCT.com](http://www.EnergizeCT.com) highlights a variety of programs that provide financial incentives to help Connecticut consumers reduce the amount of energy used in their homes and businesses.

# Report from the Water

## Expanding the Soundkeeper fleet for cleaner water

This year the Soundkeeper program added the *Terry Backer III* to the fleet, and a second crew piloted by Assistant Soundkeeper Gavin Kreitman and first mate Emma DeLoughry. That makes three boats on the water—from New Haven Harbor to the Hutchinson River, and along the North Shore all the way to Plum Island.

As the fleet grows, so does our capacity to take on more projects. In addition to hunting down sewage leaks and cleaning up storm debris, this year your Soundkeeper team dove for eel grass seeds to support restoration experiments and created our first drone video for the Six Lakes conservation effort in Hamden, CT. Looking ahead, we'll be expanding our drone work by using infrared technology to create an image of our waterways so we can more easily identify warm sewage leaks in cold weather.



*The Terry Backer III loaded down with Elsa storm debris.*

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In this issue...

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