

SoundBites

Winter 2022

Save the Sound's Legal Expertise
Restoring New York City's Tidal Wetlands
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Curt's Corner: Remembering Julie Belaga



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

Cover photo: A group of dedicated volunteers remove trash from Long Wharf in New Haven, Connecticut.

Restoring New York City's Tidal Wetlands

Announcing the Big Rock Wetlands Restoration Project

Over the past century, New York City has lost more than 85 percent of its tidal wetlands. In Queens, residents have been working for eight years to change that story for Udalls Cove. Part of Little Neck Bay, the cove was once home to a thriving wetland habitat—but rapid erosion, historical fill, and poor water quality have degraded the shoreline to the point where neighborhood infrastructure is at risk. In early 2021, Save the Sound partnered with local community groups—

particularly the Douglas Manor Association, Udalls Cove Preservation Committee, and the Douglas Manor Environmental Association—to bring the Big Rock Wetland Restoration Project to fruition.

Now, a \$604,461 award from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund will fund the first phase of construction to restore degraded shoreline along Memorial Field by installing 600 linear feet of oyster castles

and planting native coastal species. This will restore one acre of native salt marsh and oyster habitat while allowing the marsh to expand and move inland in an urban environment. As climate change accelerates, the health of our wetlands is more important—and more at risk—than ever. The Big Rock Wetland Restoration Project is an example of bold, community-driven, nature-based solutions formed in response to the challenges of our time.



The first phase of construction will seek to restore and stabilize the degraded shoreline along Memorial Field with nature-based solutions.

Mobilizing Youth Leaders for Climate Action

An inside look at our Youth Eco Advocacy Corps

Last year we established the Youth Eco Advocacy Corps to partner with young regional environmental activists. These emerging leaders meet monthly to learn advocacy skills, hone their stories, and take action together for a sustainable future.

One such young leader is Corina Chang, a youth organizer with West Hartford Climate Projects. Corina has partnered with us in pursuit of clean energy and clean transportation policies because she wants to protect Connecticut's climate. Read more about her on our blog at www.savethesound.org/corinachang.

Now that the Connecticut legislative session has begun, Corina and the rest of our Youth Eco Advocacy Corps are fully mobilized for climate action. They recently met with State Senator Will Haskell to build support for our shared climate legislative priorities, including:

- Making it easier to enforce the Global Warming Solutions Act, and requiring the state to consider the law's greenhouse gas reduction commitments in decision-making;
- Codifying Governor Lamont's 100% clean energy goal so it can be used in regulatory decision-making about energy supply and generation;

- Adopting California's Medium and Heavy-Duty vehicle standards, and allowing customers to purchase Electric Vehicles directly from manufacturers.

These young people are already passionate and committed, and we look forward to continuing to work closely as they grow into powerful advocates for a healthy climate!

If you're interested in promoting a healthy climate and sustainability with motivated young individuals, you may register by emailing Climate Advocate Alex Rodriguez at alexrodriguez@savethesound.org.

Donor Spotlight: Marny Smith

A lifetime of environmental advocacy

Marny Smith has dedicated her entire life to protecting our Long Island Sound ecosystem. Growing up in Southport, Connecticut, she has spent 86 years of her life living along the shores of Long Island Sound.

"I have this fondness for the Sound that goes back to my childhood, when I lived in a house right next to the one my grandparents built at Sasco Point where we used to dig clams for dinner," said Smith.

As a former Connecticut Fund for the Environment (now Save the Sound) board member and long-time donor, she has been supporting our mission for over three decades: through our name change and still to this day. From land conservation to engaging the next generation in wetlands protection by getting them outside—she has always taken up the causes closest to her heart.

In the early 1970s, when the world was only just starting to wake up to environmental issues, she found a volunteer position

with the then-Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection talking to people about the state's new waste disposal plan. This was just the beginning of her long career in environmental advocacy.

Eventually, she became president of the Norwalk Land Trust where she would achieve her two proudest accomplishments: the creation of a nature preserve and an outdoor classroom.

In the early 2000s, Marny created a local group—called the "Creekers"—devoted to raising \$4.5 million to acquire a vulnerable 2.5-acre property adjacent to Hart Peninsula and the Farm Creek Nature Preserve in Rowayton, CT. They were successful in purchasing the land and expanding the Farm Creek Nature Preserve to its current 16 acres.

Two years after the acquisition, she would create an outdoor classroom for local fourth graders to learn about tidal estuaries and wetlands on that same piece of land.

“Connecticut has a really strong environmental record and I think that’s largely because it has an organization like Save the Sound working behind it, with it, and for it.”

- Marny Smith

"I read in Richard Louv's book 'The Last Child in the Woods' that children were spending nine-and-a-half hours a day in front of a screen and that's how they were learning," said Smith. "I thought, here we have a preserve of open space where we can have a children's program to give the children a chance to learn about nature in nature instead of on a screen."

Marny now lives in Massachusetts with her husband Fred, but says her heart will always be in Connecticut.



Marny Smith spent decades fighting for land preservation at three different Connecticut land trusts throughout her incredible career. Photo credit: Norwalk Land Trust

Protect your 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 Vice President of Philanthropy Alicia Sullivan at asullivan@savethesound.org or 203-787-0646 x109.

Save the Sound's Legal Expertise

Diving into the legal battles for your environment

From defending your clean water in court to fostering the next generation of environmental leaders—your legal team is always at the frontlines of environmental protection in our region. Catch up on two recent victories, hear about how our legal team is helping the next generation, and meet the attorneys and advocates behind it all.

Defending the Annex Community

In early 2021, we fought and defeated a proposal to expand the waste transfer station located in the vulnerable Annex neighborhood of New Haven, Connecticut.

The Annex is the most environmentally over-burdened neighborhood in Connecticut. It hosts oil terminals, is bisected by I-95, and is near a huge dirty oil-burning power plant. All these polluting facilities border a residential neighborhood with schools, churches, and daycare centers.

This expansion would have brought in waste from the more affluent towns around New Haven, further burdening the community. Your legal team intervened in the zoning and Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection proceedings to argue that the expansion would violate basic principles of environmental justice. Save the Sound worked with neighborhood residents to demonstrate that allowing the plant to process new waste would unreasonably pollute the Annex and the Quinnipiac River. Thanks to these joint efforts, the application was withdrawn.



Fostering the Next Generation of Attorneys and Advocates

Spotlighting the University of Connecticut Environmental Law Clinic



Chris Kelly (left), Roger Reynolds (middle), and this year's legal clinic students out with Soundkeeper Bill Lucey on Bill's boat.

Senior Legal Counsel Roger Reynolds founded and directs the Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Connecticut Law School where the entire Save the Sound legal team educates and trains the next generation of environmental attorneys and advocates.

Acting as certified legal interns, law students draft case briefs, complaints, and other pleadings on behalf of Save the Sound and appear before federal and state courts and administrative agencies. Recently, students authored a successful appellate brief in our long-running case to save Oswegatchie Hills and drafted complaints in our cases against four towns for stormwater pollution.

Teaching the next generation is important as we need more lawyers, legislators, and leaders who understand strategies to address the environmental issues we are facing.

Want to Learn More?

Want to learn more about the incredible work our legal team does for your community?

Meet Save the Sound's attorneys and hear what motivates them on our blog at www.savethesound.org/MeetOurLawyers and keep up with current legal battles at www.savethesound.org/LegalDocket.

Westchester Clean Water Case Can Move Ahead

In 2015, Save the Sound brought a Clean Water Act enforcement case against the County of Westchester and 11 municipalities to address chronic sewage overflow discharges to Long Island Sound caused by aging, inadequately maintained sewage systems.

We reached collaborative settlements with many of the towns; however, four defendant towns that comprise the New Rochelle Sewer District filed a motion to dismiss in 2020. Our legal team fought the motion and on September 14, 2021 it was denied, meaning our case could move forward. This is a huge clean water victory and valuable precedent! We hope that this will incentivize the towns to work out a collaborative solution rather than continue to litigate.



Meet Your Legal Team

The lawyers defending our region's environment



Roger Reynolds, Esq., Senior Legal Counsel

As senior legal counsel, Roger directs cases and legal matters for Save the Sound to protect Long Island Sound, inland waters, land, and air.

Roger is also an adjunct professor at the University of Connecticut School of Law where he founded and directs the Save the Sound Environmental Law Clinic. Prior to joining the team Roger was an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Connecticut.

Where is Roger's favorite place to get outside in our region?

"Westwoods trail system in Guilford, CT. It contains 39 miles of trails on 1,200 acres with a huge diversity of natural formations like salt and fresh water marshes, caves, waterfalls, and stunning rock formations."

Kat Fiedler, Esq., Staff Attorney

Kat provides critical legal support on everything from sewage pollution cases to watershed land protection to river restoration projects.

Kat joined the team in 2018 as the Peter B. Cooper Legal Fellow. Prior to coming to Save the Sound, she worked at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University as the environmental law graduate research fellow.

What was Kat's favorite moment of 2021?

"2021 was my year of water. My favorite moment was a swim in Stamford, CT where we safely watched from the water as a dark grey summer thunderstorm let loose over the NYC skyline. To all at once experience the beauty of the warm water, the jaw dropping strength of the storm, and the proximity to so much humanity was nothing short of magic."



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

Chris supports our land conservation, climate, and environmental justice initiatives.

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

Where does Chris go to experience the wonder of our natural environment?

"I spend a lot of time in Peoples State Forest in Barkhamsted. It's not too far from my home in Hartford for hiking with my dogs and it has overlooks with tremendously beautiful views of the West Branch Farmington River."



A Record-Breaking Cleanup Season

Over 70 cleanup events and four tons of trash collected

After a 2020 cleanup season full of uncertainty, smaller event sizes, and plenty of pivots, this year provided a welcome opportunity for volunteers and Cleanup Captains to gather again at their favorite green and blue spaces. The 2021 Connecticut Cleanup, part of the International Coastal Cleanup, was a resounding affirmation of our collective care for our local waterways.

Nearly 2,400 volunteers attended a record 76 cleanups this year, and collectively removed more than four tons of trash from the parks, riverbanks, marshes, and beaches of Connecticut. As in 2020, the most-found items were again tiny pieces of plastic (24,000+) and cigarette butts (16,000+)—in fact, Connecticut Cleanup

volunteers have now picked up more than 100,000 cigarette butts over the past five years! These results reinforce Save the Sound's focus on plastic pollution as one of the biggest threats to the health of Long Island Sound and our communities. However, there is also some promising news about plastics—most categories of plastic trash are down on a per-cleanup basis since 2017.

This data is critically important for advocacy, for focusing energy on the biggest threats, and for understanding how trash travels. We are incredibly grateful to all volunteers, Cleanup Captains, and our official sponsor, Subaru of New England, for another amazing year.

Thank you to all of our 2021 sponsors!

Subaru of New England

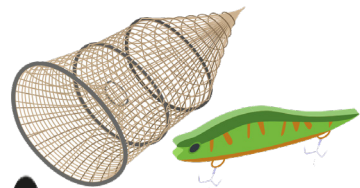
HMTX Industries, Norwalk, CT

Penwood Real Estate Investment Management, West Hartford, CT

CAPCO, Hartford, CT

Neuberger Berman

Orvis Watches

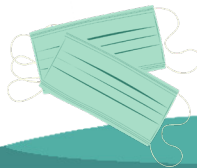


38,248 pieces of food-related trash

**wrappers, bottle caps, straws, take-out containers, bottles, cups, utensils, and plates*



653 masks and gloves



188 miles cleaned in over 76 events



16,229 cigarette butts



Curt's Corner: Remembering Julie Belaga

Celebrating the legacy of a transformative leader

On Friday, November 19, Connecticut lost a community and environmental leader and guide for us all when Julie Belaga passed away at the age of 91. She was a force of nature—a fierce, dedicated public servant who lovingly mentored and led the State of Connecticut, EPA, and Save the Sound for decades. Her leadership accomplishments were numerous, as were the environmental leaders she helped guide and support across the state.

As a member of the Connecticut General Assembly, she was a passionate advocate for our environment—contributing largely

to the drafting and passage of coastal management and waste-disposal bills. In 1986 she made history as the first woman to be nominated for governor by the Connecticut Republican Party. She served as the New England Regional Administrator for the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

She was also an inspirational member of the Save the Sound family, serving on our board for 14 years from 2000-2014, and leading as our program committee chair for over a decade. She had a keen interest in listening, supporting, and guiding staff

at all levels of Save the Sound. She inspired both previous president Don Strait and me to take on big campaigns and bring in the expertise we needed to fill the gaps—most notably the Endangered Lands Coalition, which brought together activists, mayors, and officials from a dozen towns to permanently protect over 15,000 acres of Kelda water company lands.

Her intelligence, humor, and enthusiasm will be greatly missed, as will her love of her fellow board members and staff. With the passing of Julie Belaga, we lose a determined leader who inspired three generations of environmental advocates.

Perhaps her greatest lasting gift is that she continues to inspire our team with courage, passion, and caring for each other. As a team, Save the Sound is proud to be standing on the shoulders of environmental giants like Julie as we continue smart and focused advocacy for our regional environment.



Julie Belaga celebrating the permanent protection of 15,000 acres of Kelda Water Company watershed land in southwest Connecticut in 2001. Left to right: former Save the Sound President Don Strait, Julie Belaga, former First Select of Weston Woody Bliss.

Advocating for your Environment at the Legislature

Fighting climate change and securing high-impact funding

We're a few weeks into the Connecticut and New York legislative sessions, and things are heating up! Our top priority this year? Cutting climate pollution and preparing for its impacts. Here's what we're doing to fight climate change, protect your clean water, and ensure everyone has access to natural resources and open spaces.

Connecticut:

- Advocating for aggressive greenhouse gas reductions from the power generation and transportation sectors, and improving accountability (see

"Mobilizing Youth Leaders for Climate Action" in this newsletter for details).

- Reducing plastic waste to protect Long Island Sound.
- Ensuring environmental programs are fully funded and leveraging federal funds.
- Strengthening state Environmental Justice Law.
- Defending the state's environmental laws against rollbacks.

New York:

- Making communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change through living shorelines and coastal best practices.
- Passing an additional \$1 billion for NY's history-making Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act and fully funding NY's Environmental Protection Fund.
- Investing in infrastructure for offshore wind.

A New Westchester Home for the New Year

A bigger and better lab for your clean water

We've outgrown our previous space in Mamaroneck. In December we began the move to a new office in Larchmont that provides for our growing staff, more storage, and best of all, the John and Daria Barry Foundation Water Quality Laboratory—a bigger, better lab that will help ensure clean water! Stay tuned for more photos as we get settled, and news about when we'll be ready for you to visit.



The new office includes a bigger and more advanced lab for our team of expert scientists to test your waterways and monitor for pollution.

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