

# Annual Report 2022



**Save the Sound<sup>®</sup>**

Action for our region's environment.







Dear Friends,

In 2022, Save the Sound is celebrating its 50th anniversary and looking to the future. As you may have heard, Curt Johnson is retiring in the fall of 2022. We are celebrating Curt’s tenure as Save the Sound’s president and thanking him for all of his dedication, energy, and accomplishments. At the same time, we feel fortunate to welcome Leah Lopez Schmalz as our new president to launch our 5-year Strategic Plan to protect, restore, and transform our Long Island Sound region through a framework that will maximize our impact.

A long-time environmental advocate, Leah’s focus on the intersection of climate change, resiliency, and health increased after Hurricane Katrina devastated her home state of Louisiana. She joined Save the Sound in 2001 as staff attorney and grew into our VP of Programs in 2018—as a brilliant strategic campaigner and much-loved manager. Her long history with the organization, along with her outstanding leadership qualities, extreme knowledge of Long Island Sound and its environment issues, and know-how to take action, made her the perfect choice as Save the Sound’s president. She was unanimously chosen by the Board to be Curt’s successor and I have no doubt she will lead the organization toward major environmental victories for our future.

Leah teamed up with our entire Board and staff to craft the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. She not only helped to create the bold and inspiring concepts in the plan but is personally invested in the plan’s vision for our organization. The plan builds on our strengths and promises to protect, restore, and transform our region’s environment.

Please join me in welcoming Leah Lopez Schmalz as Save the Sound’s new president!

With warm wishes,

Todd Cort  
Board Chair



Hello Neighbors,

This is my last letter as Save the Sound’s president. I welcome Leah Lopez Schmalz as the new leader of the organization. Thank you for all you made possible during my tenure as president; it has been my pleasure to work with you to take action for our region’s environment. We have accomplished many great things in my time here.

**You grew our water quality program**  
In the last five years, you transformed our water quality program from early stages to a mature program. You also expanded our legal work and advocacy, significantly diminishing sewage spills and nitrogen levels in Westchester and Connecticut. In 2017, the Long Island Soundkeeper was merged with Save the Sound and today we have three boats, two full time staff, and several seasonal staff monitoring our waters. That same year, we conducted the first Unified Water Study, a program that allows for water quality data to be compared all over the Sound. We currently have 26 partners monitoring the water in 44 bays and harbors!

**You transformed our climate**  
Thanks to you, both New York and Connecticut made progress in setting ambitious clean renewable targets. Save the Sound is working to advance clean transportation, off-shore wind energy, and availability of energy efficiency measures and renewable sources for all who live in the region.

**You made ecological restoration possible**  
Your support fueled growth of our ecological restoration team into our region’s leader. We use nature-based solutions removing dams, creating rain gardens, and transforming landscapes with large scale projects. Special thanks to Libby and Rob Alexander who made possible the expansion of our New York team to include Katie Friedman, our New York Ecological Restoration Program Manager, who is transforming communities, rivers and coasts from Rye to Long Island.

**You are saving Plum Island**  
Thanks to your advocacy, Plum Island—threatened with development—was taken off the auction block and may become a National Monument if our efforts are successful. Had we not had your support to lead the coalition of 117 organizations, none of this would have happened.

At an organizational level, I collaborated with Leah and board chair Todd Cort to establish a visionary and achievable 5-year strategic plan (2022-2027). The plan builds on our strengths and promises to protect, restore, and transform our region’s environment.

Thanks so much for embarking with me in what has been a fantastic journey.

Warmly,

Curt Johnson  
President

Photo on the right: Mark Ljflander.  
Cover image: New Rochelle, NY skyline by Long Island Sound.  
Photo: Denis Tangney Jr.



A special thank you from Curt Johnson and Todd Cort for those who had a great impact on the last five years.

- Libby and Rob Alexander
- Jack Brewer
- Barbara O. David
- Peter DeBell
- Amy Denton
- Gordon Geballe
- The John and Daria Barry Foundation
- Tripp Killin and the Jeniam Foundation
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About Us

The mission of Save the Sound is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and New York communities in and around 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.

Our vision is of a Connecticut, New York, and Sound region where the vitality of nature will be protected for people and wildlife, now and for many decades to come. A region in which people from all walks of life can unite in transforming struggling habitats, polluted waters, endangered wildlife, and a threatened planet into resilient, healthy, vibrant,

50 years in review

In 2022, Save the Sound is celebrating 50 years of action for our environment. Here are some of our major accomplishments, decade by decade. And here's to the next 50 years!

'70s



Save the Sound is founded in 1972, Connecticut Fund for the Environment in 1978, and Long Island Soundkeeper in 1987. By 2017, all three organizations were merged. In 2020, we transitioned to the Save the Sound name under a single logo.

'80s

Protected unique bird habitat at Milford Point, now part of the National Wildlife Refugee system and home to the CT Audubon Society Coastal Center.



'90s



Our water quality program was launched. Today we track bacteria levels all around the Sound, indicating fishable, swimmable, and livable waters and identifying water pollution.

'00s

In a win for public health and the climate, an alliance led by Save the Sound secured passage of Clean Cars standards, encouraging Connecticut to move from polluting fossil fuels to cleaner, renewable fuels.



'10s



Reopened 80 miles of river and 509 lake acres to migrating fish and restored 347 acres of riverbank, marsh, and dune.

Our Transformational Plan for the Next 5 Years

Our team's vision is of Connecticut and New York communities where the vitality of nature will be protected for people and wildlife for many decades to come. A Long Island Sound region in which people from all walks of life can unite in transforming struggling habitats, polluted waters, and a threatened planet into healthy, resilient, and inspiring places that sustain us.

Our new 5-year strategic plan builds on the successes of Save the Sound's last 50 years, and charts a path to protect, restore, and transform the ecosystems and communities we all call home.

Our Strategic Impact by the Numbers

Protect

**12,500 acres** of endangered lands for people and wildlife  
**15 bays & harbors** from raw sewage by expanding our "data to action" monitoring & fixing program  
**2 states** by deploying an expanded Soundkeeper team to bust polluters

Restore

**6 river systems** by reviving historic fish runs and renewing ecological functions, while making communities safer and more resilient  
**1,000+ miles of unhealthy rivers** that feed the Sound polluted stormwater  
**12 shorelines** with the nature-based solutions that wildlife and neighborhoods need

Transform

**4,500 Megawatts of energy** to clean and renewable sources  
**8,000 fossil fuel cars, buses, and trucks** to clean electric transportation for people of all income levels  
**160 city blocks** with rain gardens to absorb pollution and flood waters  
**15 new relationships** to support capacity building at BIPOC-led partner organizations  
**10,000 people's engagement and commitment** to Save the Sound

Over the last 50 years, Save the Sound has become a catalyst for change throughout the region. As we look to our next chapter as your Long Island Sound champion, we will build on our well-established approach of uniting science-driven advocacy, legal expertise, on-the-ground construction, and grassroots action to protect the Sound's bays and harbors, restore the rivers that feed it, and transform our neighborhoods. We will inspire and engage people of many backgrounds united in the same cause: to save the Sound.

We know this future is possible because we have a proven track record of building community to find and fix environmental threats in your backyard. Whether it's partnering with one homeowner to stop pollution with a single rain garden or taking on Shell Oil to protect our climate and Long Island Sound, we are in it for the long haul—every single day. And we are so glad to have you right here alongside us.



## You protect our waters

Keeping our waters safe means measuring and making critical data available for you and everyone interested in our region. It also means taking action where needed to keep our communities healthy. You have accomplished a great deal in 2022:

You've increased the **range of tests we can perform for the Unified Water Study (UWS)**, an important part of our water quality program that compiles data from 26 partners in 44 embayments all over the Sound. **The John and Daria Barry Foundation Water Quality Laboratory in Larchmont, NY has made this work more effective.**

“

**The Unified Water Study is very important to the volunteers of the Ash Creek Conservation Association monitoring group. We live near the shore and enjoy its recreational and aesthetic value. The data we collect is used to drive water quality improvements in our harbor.”**  
— Rick Landau, Ash Creek Conservation Association

You are driving action through water quality testing data. Our latest Beach Grades for more than 200 Long Island Sound beaches were released this summer on our website ***SoundHealthExplorer.org*** giving a clear picture of **how your favorite beaches compare to others.** The Sound Health Explorer displays seasonal rain totals, individual Beach Grades, and much more dating back to 2003. Our team, researchers, local government, elected officials, and residents like you use this data to ensure that pollution issues are addressed near beaches and bays.

Your support helps us to address sewage spills. **Poorly maintained sewage systems can fall into a state of disrepair that may result in chronic sewage spills, impacting the health of residents and our shared environment.** Our investigation of the pipe segment that failed in July, 2020 and poured 2.1 million gallons of raw sewage into the Mill River in New Haven lead to us file a Clean Water Act citizen suit enforcement action to ensure that this type of sewage spill is prevented in the future. In May, Save the Sound reached a collaborative agreement with the Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Authority (GNHWPCA) that will yield a green infrastructure project at the Eli Whitney Museum in Hamden to reduce stormwater runoff and help ensure local residents can enjoy a clean Long Island Sound.



## You protect our region's lands

With you, our legal and community mobilization teams are protecting important endangered land all around our region.

**The endeavor to protect Oswegatchie Hills, in East Lyme, CT, has surpassed 20 years and, so far, no development has been authorized in the 236 acres of coastal forest.**

This parcel, the last mile of undeveloped land along the Niantic River, has been

at risk of losing one-third of its forest for an 840-unit condominium development, which would ruin sensitive wildlife habitats and threaten water quality. Save the Sound is leading the legal effort to prevent ruinous development and will not give up until the Hills are permanently protected.

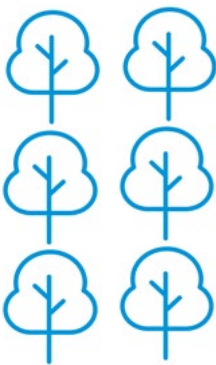
In New York, Save the Sound's leadership to protect Plum Island continues. The

island is home to incredible biodiversity, including 220 bird species—nearly one out of four bird species found in North America—and at least 111 plant and animal species of conservation concern. **The Preserve Plum Island Coalition is working with the NY and CT senators, campaigning for the president of the United States to proclaim Plum Island a National Monument.**

Our efforts to protect the 236 acres of coastal forest at Oswegatchie Hills continues. *Photo: Vivian Brooks.*



In April, the results of a 2021 scientific dive off the coast of Plum Island, NY were released, documenting 126 species of plants and animals beneath the surface of Long Island Sound. The report was prepared by the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) and InnerSpace Scientific Diving and sponsored by generous donors and supported by staff of Save the Sound.

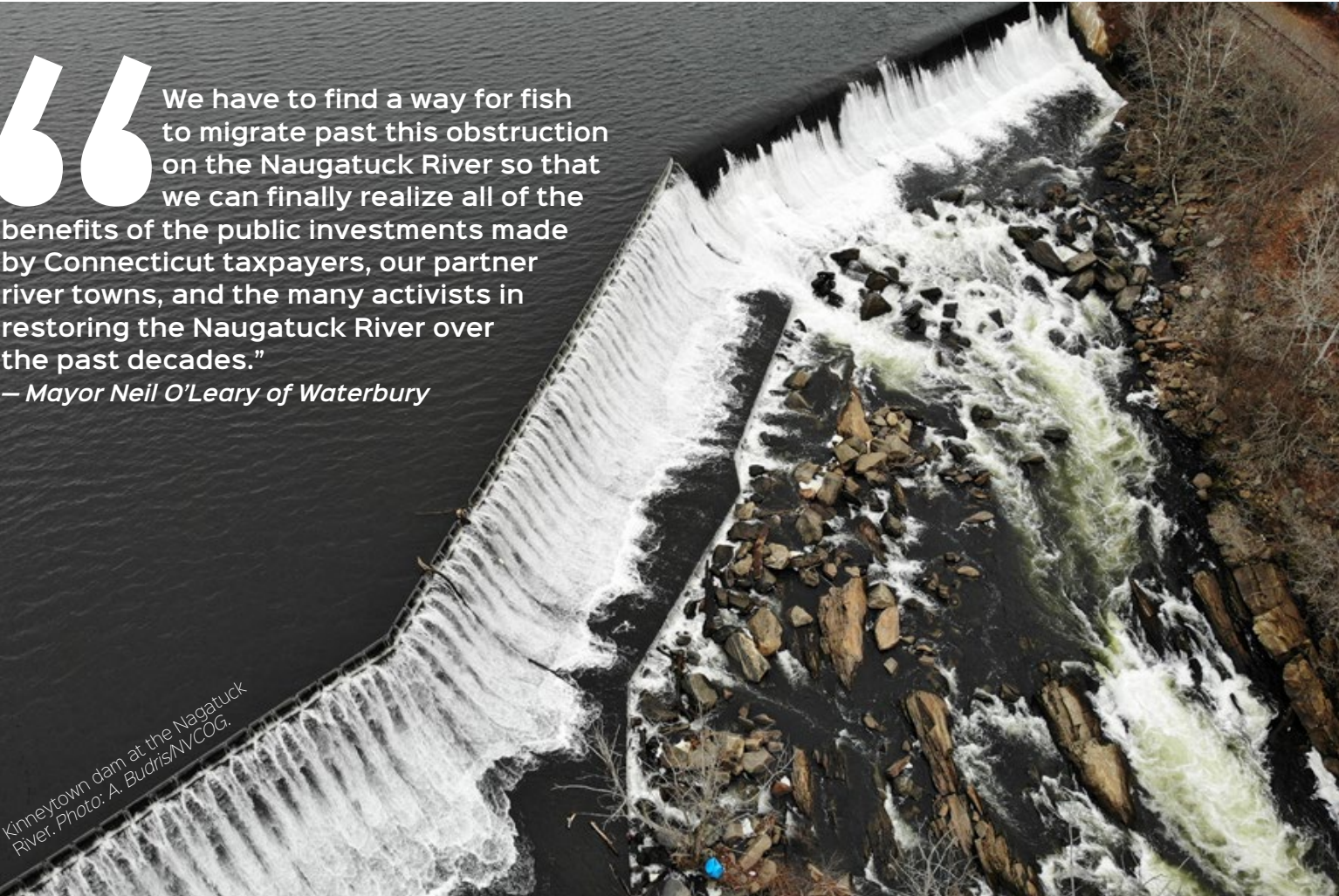


*One acre of trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people to breath for a year and consumes the equivalent carbon dioxide of a car driving 26,000 miles per year. Source: The Nature Conservancy*



You restore our rivers

Removing dams is an effective way to restore rivers and bring back migratory fish. **Human-built dams pose flood risks, impact ecosystems, contribute to the warming of rivers, and impede the passage of migratory fish that are key components of the Long Island Sound food chain.** There are over 4,000 dams in Connecticut and 250 in Westchester County, NY alone, most of which no longer serve a useful purpose.



“We have to find a way for fish to migrate past this obstruction on the Naugatuck River so that we can finally realize all of the benefits of the public investments made by Connecticut taxpayers, our partner river towns, and the many activists in restoring the Naugatuck River over the past decades.”  
— Mayor Neil O’Leary of Waterbury

Kinneytown dam at the Naugatuck River. Photo: A. Budris/WVCOG.

Our lawyers, scientists, and engineers have embarked on an effort to free the fish on the Naugatuck River at Kinneytown Dam in Seymour, CT. The dam stands as the sole remaining barrier to the restoration of access to many miles of spawning and rearing habitat on the river and its tributaries.



Removing the dam will allow several species of diadromous fish like American Shad, Alewife, Blueback Herring, and Sea Lamprey free passage deep into the heart of central Connecticut from the Housatonic estuary where it meets Long Island Sound. We’ve been working with local municipalities and environmental partners to make this vision of a restored Naugatuck River a reality—to return important fish populations to this major river.

You restore our shores

Many coastal communities in New York and Connecticut have stabilized their shorelines with bulkheads and concrete seawalls. However, this disruption in the connectivity of land and sea fuels the loss of critical beach, dune, and marsh habitat—and threaten safety, as hardened coastlines can shunt water to nearby communities and fail to protect infrastructure from flooding during severe storms.

**With your support, we are working to implement living shorelines, a coastal stabilization technique that uses natural materials like native salt marsh plants and hybrid alternatives to traditional hardened structures.** This coastal management practice can restore, enhance, and maintain shoreline and marsh habitat, while dissipating wave energy and mitigating flooding.

A good example of this important work is at Udalls Cove of Little Neck Bay in Queens, NY. In the first phase of this restoration project, we will install oyster castles and plant native coastal species to reestablish one acre of native salt marsh and oyster habitat while creating the conditions for marsh migration in an urban environment. This will address erosion, historical fill, and poor water quality in Udalls Cove, and improve coastal resiliency.



*Capturing carbon: One square mile of salt marsh stores the carbon equivalent of 76,000 gallons of gas annually. Source: NOAA.*



Thanks to you, our Soundkeeper program is expanding! We now have our Soundkeeper Bill Lucey, a new fulltime associate Soundkeeper, seasonal staff, and three boats monitoring from Plum Island to the Throgs Neck. They are your eyes and ears in the Sound, monitoring all over the region, tracking down pollution, and mapping potential sewage sources to restore our Sound and bring life back to our waters.





## You transform our cities

When rain lands on impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, roads, roofs, and parking lots, it picks up pollutants including oil, antifreeze, heavy metals, pesticides, and bacteria, transporting them to lakes, streams, and rivers. They end up in Long Island Sound, harming marine life and closing beaches and shellfish beds.

For clean water and a healthy regional environment, our towns and cities need to create more natural buffers, allowing rainwater to soak into the soil, where it's filtered for our waterways and can replenish groundwater.

**The federal Clean Water Act requires municipalities to have a stormwater permit**

**to stop this type of pollution. But, many municipalities across Connecticut are not following the permit and are discharging stormwater pollution into our local waterways, violating federal water quality standards.**

Our legal team helped to create state regulations and is working to ensure that Connecticut towns protect water quality by creating systems that reduce polluted stormwater discharges, using rain gardens, bioswales and other green infrastructure to absorb and filter, naturally. Many municipalities are required to disconnect one percent of impervious surfaces per year to reduce their polluted stormwater discharges. Most commonly,

“disconnection” means creating green infrastructure like rain gardens or bioswales to absorb and filter the water.

This year we filed Clean Water Act Enforcement Actions against Middletown, Redding, Ridgefield, and Burlington for failing to meet key obligations. We are also in ongoing discussions with other municipalities as the records have revealed that there is widespread non-compliance across the state. We will continue these efforts to bring other towns into compliance to ensure clean water statewide.

*Below: The parking lot at Sunken Meadows Park, Long Island, NY was retrofitted by Save the Sound to absorb stormwater. Photo: Rebecca Grella.*

*On the next page: Dave Cruz-Bustamante is an Youth Eco Advocacy Corps member, self-identified queer, working-class organizer, and high school junior from New Haven, CT. Photo: Greater New Haven Arts Council.*



## You transform our youth

Empowering the generations of tomorrow to address environmental issues is paramount to the resilience of our region. **At Save the Sound, we engage youth, from water monitoring to advocacy, transforming a generation.**

In Mount Vernon, a lower-income, majority-Black town in Westchester County, we have partnered with the local Boys & Girls Club since 2019 to teach teens there how to find and stop water pollution

through education, advocacy, and water monitoring.

Meanwhile, the Youth Eco Advocacy Corps is an ongoing networking opportunity, where young environmental leaders share their sustainability initiatives and learn about climate policy. In partnering with young people on advocacy and environmental protection, we are melding our energies and expertise to increase civic participation.



## You transform our climate

The current rise in greenhouse gases (GHG) is unlike anything the planet has experienced since life began. **The Northeast is the fastest warming region in the contiguous United States, with Connecticut and New York falling behind in their efforts to meet climate targets that, we now know, are too low.**

To target our actions effectively and inspire others, we created the Climate Action Plan for Connecticut 2022 in collaboration with the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health. This Plan provides a short list of critical policies that the legislature should pass to ensure the state meets its Greenhouse Gas reduction targets in an equitable way. It also evaluates best practices for climate mitigation and Connecticut's progress toward implementing them. To read the complete plan, please scan the QR code.



Save the Sound is working to reconnect rivers, address flood risks and allow fish to flow freely with our partners, the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) and the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) by looking at road-stream crossings—like culverts and bridges—in Connecticut. Alex Krofta, our Ecological Restoration Project Manager, says that “By doing these assessments of bridges and culverts, we can help towns plan for healthier ecosystems and safer roads.”

**“This project links short- and long-term infrastructure planning with preserving the ecological functions of our watercourses. The information gathered from these studies will empower municipal decision-makers to allocate resources in a way that best serves the community and environment.”**  
— Rick Dunne, NVCOG Executive Director

*Due to global warming, spring begins a week earlier than it did a few decades ago. In many areas of New York, the first leaf date is more than 8 days earlier and the first bloom date is more than 4 days earlier than in the 1950s.*  
Source: NYS DEC





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Below are listed all donors that gave \$1000 and above or in-kind donations during our 2021 Fiscal Year (October 1, 2020 - September 30, 2021)

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It is only through the generosity of our supporters that Save the Sound is able to work to achieve its mission. We are grateful to each and every donor to Save the Sound, at every gift level. You take action for our climate, heal our rivers and coastlines, save our endangered land, empower local communities and ensure a healthy Long Island Sound. Below are just a few examples of funders who are dedicated to advancing environmental protection in our region.



**The Fred I. and Gilda Nobel Foundation, Oyster Bay, NY**

For over two decades The Fred I. and Gilda Nobel Foundation has supported the work at Save the Sound. The foundation was pivotal in the expansion of our Soundkeeper program by enabling Save the Sound to add another research and patrol boat into our fleet. The mission of The Fred I. and Gilda Nobel Foundation is to protect the Earth from environmental degradation and to assist marginalized people and communities in their struggles for economic, social, and environmental justice.

*“Save the Sound has been very effective in its mission to improve our environment” – Barry Nobel*

**Ben Baker, Branford, CT**

Ben has been on the front lines of impacting how we mitigate climate change, owning and operating companies that put solar power in front of communities of people to promote renewable energy. And for the last five years, he’s served on Save the Sound’s Climate Task Force, helping to make our climate program as effective as possible and also helps by raising funds to ensure that our climate fight remains strong.



**The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, Oakland, CA**

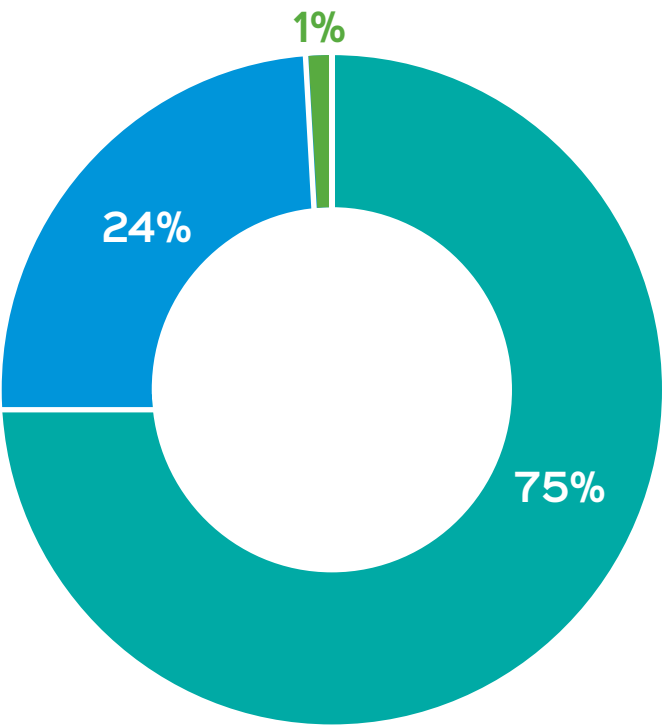
The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment envisions a future where nature is protected, people’s rights are ensured, and environmental justice is advanced. The Foundation supports grassroots initiatives that help people exercise their rights as members of the community, citizens of the planet, and consumers whose collective purchasing power fuels our entire economy. The Rose Foundation is proud to support Save the Sound’s legal efforts to ensure that municipalities comply with Clean Water Act and other environmental laws through the Foundation’s long-term initiative to achieve justice for communities and the environment by channeling funds from legal settlements directly back into impacted communities. Over the past 30 years, state and federal courts have appointed the Foundation as trustee in over 600 settlements related to consumer and environmental issues resulting in awards of \$60 million to support programs to advance its mission.

**Fiscal Year 2021 Financial Report**

(October 1, 2020 - September 30, 2021)

Your generosity and support have given Save the Sound stability and capability to continue to pursue our vision of a healthy environment for the Long Island Sound region, in Connecticut and New York. Only with financial stability can we take action and realize our mission. THANK YOU for contributing to the Long Island Sound region’s environment. Below are our Fiscal Year 2021 audited financials.

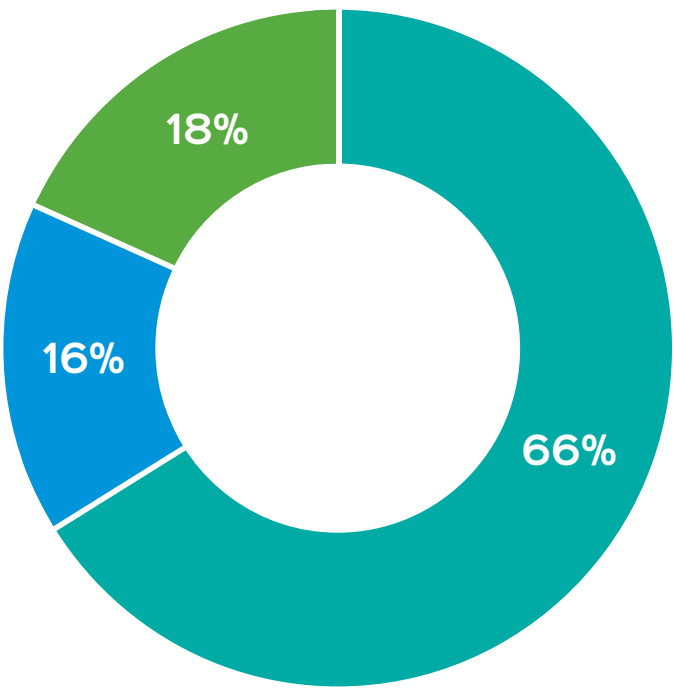
**FY21 Support and Revenue**



- Individual and Foundation donations
- Government grants
- Interest and dividends

Individual and Foundation donations	\$4,463,799
Government grants	\$1,465,725
Interest & dividends	\$59,423
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,988,947</b>

**FY21 Operating Expenditures**



- Program
- Administration
- Fundraising

Program	\$3,441,885
Administration	\$853,323
Fundraising	\$928,462
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,223,670</b>





Save the Sound leads environmental action in your region. We fight climate change, save endangered lands, protect the Sound and its rivers, and work with nature to restore ecosystems. **Thank you!**



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