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BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS
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Good morning. I am Mark Tedesco, Director of the US Environmental Protection Agency Long Island Sound Office. I am pleased to be here today, and I thank the Fisheries and Oceans Subcommittee for this opportunity to discuss the Long Island Sound Study's efforts to restore and protect the Sound.

The EPA Long Island Sound Office is authorized by Section 119 of the Clean Water Act, as amended by the Long Island Sound Improvement Act of 1990, and the Long Island Sound Restoration Act of 2000. The Act charged EPA with establishing an office to assist the Management Conference of the Long Island Sound Study in carrying out its goals. Specifically, to:

- assist and support the implementation of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Long Island Sound developed in 1994;
- conduct or commission studies deemed necessary for strengthened implementation;
- coordinate the grant, research and planning programs authorized under this section;
- coordinate activities and implementation responsibilities with other Federal agencies that have jurisdiction over Long Island Sound;
- provide administrative and technical support to the conference;
- collect and make available to the public publications, and other forms of information the conference determines to be appropriate, relating to the environmental quality of Long Island Sound; and
- convene conferences and meetings for legislators from State governments and political subdivisions thereof for the purpose of making recommendations for coordinating legislative efforts to facilitate the environmental restoration of Long Island Sound and the implementation of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan;

The Long Island Sound Study is currently in its 11th year of implementation of the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP). The Management Conference established under the Clean Water Act is strong and implementation is moving forward. What has the partnership accomplished over the past 11 years? Are the waters of Long Island Sound cleaner and healthier? Are its living resources more abundant and diverse? The answers to these questions are not always simple. We try to answer these questions by using environmental indicators to chart the progress made and challenges ahead in restoring the Sound.

What do the indicators say about progress in protecting and restoring Long Island Sound?

- Thanks to stringent pollution controls, the discharge of toxic contaminants in the Sound's watershed reported in the Toxic Release Inventory have decreased by more than 75 percent since the late 1980s. Contaminants in sediments and in fish and other aquatic organisms are declining. Ospreys, once almost driven to extinction by DDT poisonings, have returned to the Sound.
- Sewage treatment plant upgrades to provide biological nutrient removal of nitrogen have resulted in 59,000 fewer pounds of nitrogen entering Long Island Sound each day, a 28% reduction from the peak in 1994.
- The Long Island Sound nitrogen control program uses water quality trading to increase the effectiveness of implementation and lower costs. First, management zones are treated as a "bubble" within which individual discharges can cooperate to comply with reduction targets. This provides flexibility for a discharger to optimize treatment investments to meet the overall *pollution reduction goal*. Second, the program assigns each watershed management zone an equivalency factor that identifies the relative impact that sources from that zone have on water quality. The states of New York and Connecticut, working with affected municipalities, may reallocate allocations between management zones as long as the new allocations result in equal or greater water quality improvements. This provides flexibility for the states and dischargers to optimize treatment investments to meet the overall *water quality goal*.
- What has this approach resulted in? Connecticut has established a Nitrogen Credit Exchange Program to economically control and reduce point sources of nitrogen load to Long Island Sound. Facilities that discharge less nitrogen than permitted acquire and can sell weighted credits to facilities that need them. In Connecticut, 74 communities with sewage treatment plants began trading credits in 2003 based on calendar year 2002 results. This innovative water quality trading program, by harnessing market forces within an accountable but flexible framework, is expected to save the state more than \$200 million in wastewater treatment construction costs over the next decade. In New York City, attaining the aggregate zone allocation using equivalency factor adjustments compared to attaining the individual allocations for each facility is projected to save up to \$660 million. The savings result from implementing the most cost effective mix of actions to achieve water quality objectives.
- The Long Island Sound Study's Habitat Restoration Initiative continues to restore tidal flow to coastal wetlands, open rivers for fish passage, and combat invasive species. So far, more than 535 acres of coastal habitat have been restored and 58 miles of rivers and streams have been reopened for fish migration.

We have witnessed many Long Island Sound success stories over the past 11 years, but still face some real challenges. Widespread summer hypoxic events—areas of low dissolved oxygen—persist in Long Island Sound. Lobster and oyster harvests have been affected by disease. And even as we strive to restore degraded areas, our restoration efforts can be undermined by coastal development.

The seven priority issues identified in the CCMP remain the focus of our efforts to improve the health of the Sound. These issues are low dissolved oxygen (hypoxia), toxic contamination, pathogen contamination, floatable debris, living resources and habitat management, land use and development, and public involvement. But the Long Island Sound Study continues to evolve to apply new approaches and to respond to new issues. One new effort is the Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative.

In 1992, Dr. J.R. Schubel, Dean of Stony Brook University's Marine Sciences Research Center, recommended that healthy areas throughout the Sound be protected because "practicing preventative environmental medicine is far more effective and far less expensive than cleaning up environments that are degraded." "Practicing preventative medicine" is a good way to think of the Long Island Sound Study's Stewardship Initiative. Based on recommendations of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan and the 2003 Long Island Sound Agreement, the Stewardship Initiative is working to identify places along the Sound's coast with significant ecological, scientific, or recreational value and to develop a strategy to protect and enhance those special places. Very simply, the Stewardship Initiative's role is to identify what we value most in the Sound – both for human use and for ecological health – and provide the knowledge and framework to preserve and enhance the things we value through collaboration and voluntary partnerships.

Our approach is comprehensive and inclusive. First, we are looking at the Sound as an ecosystem, unhindered by political boundaries. We recognize that human use is a vital component of the ecosystem and that habitat protection exists within a context of the commercial and recreational uses that the Sound supports. Second, the Stewardship Initiative depends on the work and expertise of many partners, including Audubon New York and Connecticut, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Regional Plan Association, Save the Sound, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

The first phase of the Stewardship Initiative was to develop an inventory of important ecological and recreational sites around the Sound. More than 800 sites around the Sound were identified through this process, and this inventory was made available to the public for comment last spring. Since last year, RPA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service with funding contributed by the Long Island Sound Study, have been using GIS technology to compile, analyze, and display the results of the recreational resource inventory and then, working with resource experts in CT and NY, to narrow the list to priority sites. Thirty-two Stewardship Areas, each containing one or more sites, have been identified. Each area focuses on a publicly-owned site – what we're calling the anchor site. These 32 Stewardship Areas were presented to the public through six public meetings held around the Sound. We asked for feedback on these proposed areas and information from a local perspective on potential threats or stewardship opportunities. We also asked for recommendations on additional areas that should be a priority for stewardship.

Building on this public input, the Long Island Sound Study will present an inaugural list of Stewardship Areas for adoption by the Long Island Sound Policy Committee later this year. The Long Island Sound Study will then focus on fostering improved Stewardship in these areas through activities such as voluntary collaborations, education, and technical assistance. For example, the Long Island Sound Study Futures Fund administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation can provide assistance to communities to help them plan for and achieve stewardship actions. Through a Futures Fund award this year, the state of Connecticut will design, install, and maintain a one-half acre exhibit of native plants common to the Connecticut coastal area at the Barn Island Wildlife Management Area. ADA compliant pathways will improve access to educational signage explaining the plantings. Barn Island, one of the state's premier wildlife management areas because it hosts a mosaic of habitat that supports imperiled species, has been identified as an inaugural Stewardship Area.

And finally, the Stewardship Initiative has not to date, and will not in the future, be used as a back door for dealing with other management questions such as dredged material management or marine protected areas.

EPA has not reviewed H.R. 307 in detail and can not provide comments at this time.

Professor Glen Lopez of Stony Brook University has said Long Island Sound "is the first 21 st century estuary. Its issues are all about human habitation." Where Long Island Sound is, other estuaries are going. To the credit of the people of Connecticut and New York, Long Island Sound can also be a reason for optimism in the future. This valuable resource is being restored.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to update you on the Long Island Sound Study's efforts and introduce you to our Stewardship Initiative. I am available at any time to respond to any questions you might have. Thank you.

