

**Testimony of John Atkin,
Vice President and Connecticut Director
Regional Plan Association
Before the United States Congress Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans
Concerning H.R. 307, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2005
June 27, 2005, 10 AM
University of Connecticut Avery Point, Groton, CT**

My name is John Atkin and I am Vice President and Connecticut Director of Regional Plan Association (RPA). I also serve as the Connecticut Co-Chairman of the Long Island Sound Study's Citizen's Advisory Committee.

Formed in 1922, RPA promotes sustainable economic development, environmental stewardship and social equity for the tri-state New York-Connecticut-New Jersey metropolitan region. We strive to anticipate the trends that will shape the region's future and develop comprehensive plans to sustain its special quality of life. We also advocate for these plan's implementation across the 2,000 political jurisdictions that fragment the metropolitan area. From our proposals to expand Jones Beach and the Palisades Interstate Park in our 1929 Regional Plan, to the calling for the protection of Jamaica Bay and the Delaware Water Gap in the 1968 Regional Plan, RPA has developed the vision through these documents that shapes the parks and open spaces that the region enjoys today.

This is why we have collaborated with Save the Sound and Audubon's New York and Connecticut to advocate for the development of a Long Island Sound Stewardship System, and are partners on the working group with those organizations, as well as the US EPA, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Connecticut DEP and New York DEC and other NGOs to make a Stewardship System a reality. This advocacy over the past six years has gotten this project to the point it is at now; the introduction of this vital legislation, **H.R. 307, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2005**.

In 1994 then Governors Lowell Weicker (CT) and Mario Cuomo (NY) and EPA Administrator Carol Browner signed a document called the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) of the Long Island Sound Study. The CCMP makes hundreds of recommendations to improve the water quality and biological integrity of Long Island Sound to the two states, federal agencies, municipalities and NGOs. Recommendations include actions to reduce hypoxia, reduce toxic substance, reduce contamination from pathogens, better manage the land surrounding the Sound, and manage living resources and their habitats.

It is within the Management and Conservation of Living Resources and Their Habitats section, that a small gem of a recommendation is found. The recommendation is to "Create a Long Island Sound Reserve System consisting of areas of land and water of outstanding or exemplary scientific, educational or biological value to reflect regional differentiation and variety of ecosystems and to include representatives of all of the significant natural habitats found in the Sound. Where appropriate, sites will be selected from existing land and wetlands held for conservation purposes so that acquisition funds will be directed towards those lands in private ownership that are needed to complete the reserve system."

The CCMP goes on to state that the purpose of developing such a system is to ensure that as much exemplary coastal habitat as possible is left undeveloped for the benefit of the living resources that depend on them. And linking existing protected areas with new ones is intended to

elevate the importance of such areas in the public consciousness. And most importantly to RPA is that the broadest range of public access be made available, particularly in underserved areas.

Bob Yaro, RPA's President, reminded Long Island Sound advocates of this recommendation at a LIS Watershed Alliance conference five years ago, which sparked the aforementioned groups and government agencies to form the workgroup and ultimately make a Reserve, renamed a Stewardship System by the workgroup, a reality.

The need for such a System is obvious. The highly developed shoreline that surrounds Long Island Sound makes any remaining wildlife habitat especially significant and generally precludes public access and recreation by an underserved population. Only 20% of the shoreline is accessible to the general public. Those public facilities that do exist are so overburdened that the visitor experience is diminished and sensitive natural resources compromised. Improved stewardship of these parks, as well as private lands, could greatly enhance their habitat value, reduce pollution impacts, as well as provide more ecologically sensitive public access.

We envision a Stewardship System to be a network of exemplary areas in the immediate coastal upland and underwater areas of the Sound. This system of protected sites will preserve the Sound's upland and estuarine natural systems while providing new recreation and public access opportunities for the 12 million residents of counties bordering Long Island Sound.

To that end the working group just completed a series of six public meetings around the Sound pointing out 32 exemplary sites around the Sound, which were selected from an original inventory of over 800 sites. This proposed list, in anticipation of the pending legislation caused dozens of citizens to appear at these meetings to discuss the advantages of the anticipated sites, as well as pointing out other potential sites in their towns. The need for this enhancement and protection legislation is obvious, land is at a premium around the Sound, and the resources that would become available if the legislation is passed would help municipalities, the states of Connecticut and New York, and federal agencies improve these identified places for public use and ecological value.

An early-on success of our efforts is New York State's acquisition of the Keyspan property in Jamesport, Long Island, the largest remaining expanse of open space on the Sound. Due to the advocacy of the Long Island Sound partners and others, 520 acres of open space has been preserved as a state park and working farmland - creating what could be a flagship site for the Stewardship System. Although unfortunately most available tracts of land are much smaller than the Keyspan property, areas do exist. We anticipate that the workgroup's original list of 32 priority sites would be pared down to the 20 sites called for in the legislation, and would then be considered the cornerstones of such a system, using criteria such as fishing, boating and swimming access; aquifer and woodland protection; nearby education facilities, greenways and parks; and ecological needs such as wetlands and buffers.

In order for the System to become a reality, RPA believes the passage of **H.R. 307, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2005** would create the critical mechanism to provide funding to the states, the municipalities, and other entities. The committee described in the legislation is critical to determine what areas would become part of such a system, potentially based on the list the working group developed. EPA is the logical agency to oversee such a System since they have already established a Long Island Sound office to implement the Long Island Sound Study through the National Estuary Program. The US Fish and Wildlife Service's role is critical in the development of the ecological aspects of the System. And it is clear and appropriate in the legislation that creation of such a System would in no manner include any regulatory authority

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over existing government regulations of the land, and that the boundaries established should be only to provide an area where federal funds could be expended.

I know you will be hearing from other NGOs and government agencies later in this hearing, which will provide you with some of the specifics from their perspectives. But I think we all agree that that the passage of **H.R. 307, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2005** would help acquire new land and enhance existing land before it is too late. Long Island Sound is indeed the equivalent of our region's national park. Its splendor should be enjoyed and accessible by all, and its ecosystems must be protected. Thanks to Congress's commitment, our children and grandchildren will continue to be able to enjoy its beauty and its bounty

I thank you for your invitation to testify today and for your valuable time. I will be happy to answer any questions.

