

Connecticut Delegation Introduces Bill to Protect Long Island Sound

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 25, 2005
Connecticut Delegation Introduces Bill to Protect Long Island Sound

WASHINGTON - Senator Joe Lieberman and Congressman Rob Simmons led members of the Connecticut and New York delegations in reintroducing legislation to establish a new system to preserve the environmental quality of the Long Island Sound (LIS).

More than a decade ago, the Environmental Protection Agency identified the LIS region as vulnerable to degradation and with the Senators' support established the Long Island Sound Study to develop a plan for protection of the Sound. Study results released in 2002 concluded that coordinated action to save the Sound was necessary.

Building on several of the study's recommendation and on feedback from subsequent public hearings throughout Connecticut, New York, and Washington, DC, the members first introduced the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act (LISSA) last spring. LISSA would encourage protection of the LIS by providing financial incentives for owners of land parcels within the LIS area to preserve the environmental quality of and public access to this endangered habitat. The legislation passed the Senate last fall but did not pass the House, and so must be reintroduced in the new Congress.

"The health of the Long Island Sound is crucial to our region's economy, quality of life and heritage," Lieberman said. "My colleagues and I have been concerned about the deterioration of the Sound for nearly a decade and this legislation gives us the opportunity to use the Study's key recommendations to take the first step towards protecting it."

"The Long Island Sound is a source of livelihood, nourishment and recreation for many in Connecticut and New York," Simmons said. "The Long Island Sound Stewardship Act will play a significant role in ensuring that the Sound remains a valuable resource to both our states and the nation. Our shoreline communities will benefit from the most effective conservation efforts to enhance the Sound and I hope Congress will pass this bill in 2005 and send it to the president for his signature into law."

"Long Island Sound is a living, breathing environmental and economic entity. It is critically important that we protect both the Sound itself and coastal areas to ensure its health for future generations," Senator Chris Dodd said. "This measure can help by taking critically important steps today to ensure that it remains healthy and vibrant tomorrow."

"Long Island Sound is a valuable environmental and economic resource and it is critical that we protect it," Congresswoman Nancy Johnson said. "This legislation applies the most effective conservation methods available to identify, protect and enhance sites with ecological, educational and recreational value. And it does so in a way that is consistent with the vision put forward by a coalition of local groups that have been working for over a decade to save the Sound."

"The Long Island Sound Study Act (LISSA) gives Members from both sides of the Capitol, both sides of the aisle and both sides of the Sound an opportunity to come together with local conservation groups to advance a goal we can all agree on: preserving the Sound and ensuring it remains an environmental, economic and educational resource for generations to come," Congressman Christopher Shays said.

"If enacted, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act will be a model public-private partnership that will improve management of one of the country's most important estuaries," Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro said. "The bill will protect some of the area's most threatened shoreline, using good science - not politics - as the means of directing federal and state dollars."

“It is a pleasure to join my colleagues in introducing this legislation to safeguard the environmental health and future of one of Connecticut's greatest natural assets,” Congressman John Larson said. “Following a number of recommendations from the study that was undertaken, this action will help preserve and protect Long Island Sound for generations.”

The bipartisan legislation establishes a broad-based “Long Island Sound Stewardship Committee” comprised of all LIS stakeholders, including federal, state, public interest and landowners representatives. The Committee would be charged with evaluating the parcels of land within the LIS region and designating crucial parcels as “Stewardship Sites” eligible for special preservation funds. Under the legislation, the Committee would give owners of Stewardship Sites financial incentive to sell their land to preservation groups or preserve the environmental and public access features of that land themselves by volunteering to sell development rights to the land to the Committee itself. The legislation designates \$40 million for the Committee's budget, to be taken out of the funds authorized for LIS preservation under the EPA's Nation Estuary Program.

The legislation provides specific criteria for the Committee to use in designating Stewardship Sites that evaluate the contribution of the land to open space on and public access to the LIS as well as the ecological value of the land.

###