

KEYSPAN – It's a Sound Idea!

By Carole Nemore

EXTRAORDINARY! That word best describes the opportunity that exists right now on the east end of Long Island. In Jamesport on the North Fork there are 520 acres of open space and farmland replete with sand dunes, wetlands, a freshwater pond and one mile of scenic shoreline beaches. This is the largest remaining expanse of open space left on Long Island Sound in both New York and Connecticut; and it's for sale! KeySpan Corporation, the owner, would like to sell it and is exploring options. Meanwhile the state

The response from lawmakers and Governor George E. Pataki's representatives was very positive. From Senators LaValle and Marcellino to Assembly members Englebright, DiNapoli, and Acampora, to Al Caccese of the NYS Office of Parks and Lynette Stark of the Governor's Office, there was unequivocal recognition that the KeySpan site was one of the state's top land acquisition priorities for this year.

David Miller called KeySpan the "Whitney of the Sound," referring to a gem of a land acquisition in the Adirondack Park a few years ago that galvanized support from statewide environmental groups.

Richard Amper pointed out the statewide public support for the KeySpan acquisition, in addition to

would like to buy it and have this area become a new state park. Public support for this acquisition is key to making it happen.

On March 19, Audubon New York led a small group gathered in Albany to meet with key decision makers to convince them to make the KeySpan possibility a reality. The group, consisting of Richard Amper and Jill Lewis from the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, Eve Kaplan of the North Fork Environmental Council, Rob Pirani from the Regional Plan Association, Robin Kriesberg of Save the Sound (an organization representing both Connecticut and New York citizens), and Audubon New York's David J. Miller, William Cooke, and Carole Nemore had a simple message — that this land is an extraordinary opportunity for the bi-state region that surrounds Long Island Sound and that the state should buy it.

being Audubon's top priority including the New York State League of Conservation Voters and The Nature Conservancy. Eve Kaplan, representing 1000 members of the North Fork Environmental Council, spoke of the group's 30-year history with trying to save this land, first from degradation by sand mining and then from development for a nuclear power plant. Now its preservation for parkland and farmland is within reach. Both the public and nature will benefit.

Thanks to the graciousness of the KeySpan Corporation, community area residents and bird lovers alike were invited to enjoy an extraordinary outdoor experience. On May 11 in celebration of International Migratory Bird Day, our hosts, the North Fork Audubon Society, led a group of dedicated conservationists on a bird walk through the sites' diverse landscape features and habitats.

International Migratory Bird Day commemorates the extraordinary flights that migratory birds undertake twice a year, spanning distances that can exceed thousands of miles. Stopover habitats that offer refuge en route are essential to their survival.

The Jamesport site provides migratory refuge for neotropical birds, shorebirds and waterfowl, many of which were spotted by our birders. Additionally, it is a critical seasonal and year round habitat for many resident bird species.

The KeySpan property is already a priority project under the state's Open Space Plan making it eligible for Environmental Protection Fund dollars. Its public acquisition could mark the beginning of a bi-state effort to protect the remaining open spaces along the Sound and better manage all lands that surround the Sound.

Audubon New York, Save the Sound, and the Regional Plan Association are leading a collaborative effort called the "Long Island Sound Stewardship Reserve." This collaboration of federal agencies such as EPA, Fish and Wildlife, and Sea Grant; representatives of state agencies from New York and Connecticut; regional land trusts such as the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy, and local governments are meeting regularly to develop a proposal to establish a network of significant lands - a necklace of gems around the Sound that will be protected and conserved. The KeySpan property is a prime example of this effort.

This proposal will be available for public comment by the fall. Stay tuned — the Long Island Sound Stewardship Reserve is coming!

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER FRAULO



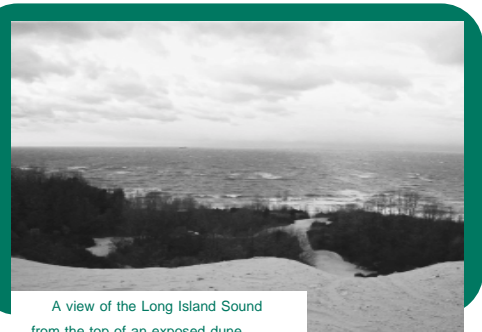
A partially vegetated dune on the KeySpan property.



A westbound view of the KeySpan beach and bluffs.



Planners access the beach on a windy day in January.



A view of the Long Island Sound from the top of an exposed dune.



An eastward view of the beach and bluffs.

Low Tide for Long Island Sound

What is a day at the beach, an afternoon sail, a lobster dinner, watching birds at sunset on the Sound worth? Some say Priceless!

More than 15 million people live within 50 miles of the Sound and its estimated economic value to the surrounding community is \$5.5 billion. But the Bush administration has proposed a mere \$477,000 in this year's budget for Long Island Sound's cleanup. Last year Bush proposed the same amount but Congress added more that \$5.5 million bringing the 2001 budget for the Sound's restoration up to \$6.5 million. This year advocates are calling for at least \$20 million to be appropriated. That would be half of the \$40 million dollars per year for five years that Congress had originally intended when it enacted the Long Island Sound Restoration Act of 2000.

Surely saving Long Island Sound is worth the time it takes to write a letter or send an email. Please contact U.S. Senators Clinton and Schumer and your Congressional representatives. For addresses, go to www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/addressform.asp