

# New Haven, Connecticut

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Jones Auditorium  
Thursday, June 1, 2000

**The second hearing took place at the Jones Auditorium, Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven, Connecticut. Twenty-seven of the forty attendees testified about their dreams for and problems facing the Sound and potential**

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~ Rosemary Bonito

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**solutions. The hearing was chaired by Carolyn Hughes of National Audubon Society – Connecticut.**

**Michael Horn, member of the New Haven Bird Club, shared his enthusiasm about ospreys, the big, beautiful fish eagles with large wingspans that he suggests serve as an indicator of how well we are doing preserving Long Island Sound and its habitat. “They’re absolutely gorgeous birds, and they’re coming back strong in the state of Connecticut,” began Horn, referring to their stunning recovery since the banning of the pesticide DDT in the 1960’s. “Last year, the official number of fledges was 315.” He noted that successfully fledging these large birds requires some key infrastructure. “Part of that infrastructure is preservation of habitat where they can find their food, mainly the shoreline of Long Island Sound.” He urged the group to take action to protect their natural habitat.**

**Barbara K. Johnson, member of the Sierra Club and the Gilford Land Preservation Trust, called for a**

**renewal in interest of the Quinnipiac and Mill Rivers. Concerned by the public perception that the Sound was not an inviting area, she suggested field trips so that children could get acquainted with the Sound, learn about salt marshes and begin to understand how chemical fertilizers can affect water quality.**

## Comments on the Reserve Concept

**Roland C. Clement of New Haven, who was part of the first Long Island Sound study committee 30 years ago, reiterated the idea that we must introduce the public to the shore by increasing public access. This would serve to increase the Sound’s value in the minds of the community. Clement anticipated that Connecticut salt marshes will decline because of the rising sea level and suggested that we “buy time” by improving tidal circulation to pockets of high marshes now cut off by culverts. “Any semi-land-locked marsh of five acres or more has the potential for supporting populations**

of salt marsh sparrows, seaside sparrows, and clapper and Virginia rails,” said Clement.



Rosemary Bonito, a resident of the Quinnipiac River District in New Haven, board member of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association and board member of the New Haven Land Trust, submitted written testimony. The testimony was reflective of other speakers with respect to the need for public access and the need to clean up industrial contamination, especially for sites that could then be restored and protected as part of a reserve system. “U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman’s proposal to create a Long Island Sound Reserve would likely translate

into increased financial help for the restoration of these sites. Federal action would open up more of the marsh for recreation and educational uses,” affirmed Bonito.

## Sites in the area for the Reserve System

Mr. Henry Ferris, president of Menunkatuck Audubon Society, touted the grasslands of the Griswold Airport as an area treasure. “If the airport site is developed, it will not only mean the loss of an extremely great potential for an upland grassland area near Long Island Sound and also 400 feet of frontage on the Hammonasset River right before it comes into Long Island Sound, but also it will remove an extremely important protective barrier to the natural area preserves of Hammonasset State Park. This is a place that has over 300 sightings of different species and which is frequently a magnet for rare and endangered birds.”

Charles A. Schegal, president of the East Haven Land Trust, sited other areas for preservation including the Farm River salt marshes, north of Route 142, the wetlands south of the runway at the Tweed New Haven Airport, Morris Creek, Caroline Creek, the wetlands north of Cozy Beach Avenue, land adjacent to Farm River State Park, and potential public access sites along East Haven Beaches.

“Habitat restoration involves all measures necessary to restore, enhance or create healthy ecosystems, including the re-establishment of native vegetation and fish and wildlife habitat on disturbed sites,” asserted Tracy Egoscue, Esq., policy analyst of Save the Sound. “The main goal of restoration is to help rebuild a healthy, functioning system that emulates habitats that existed before it

was destroyed or degraded.” Egoscue revealed other possible restoration sites including the section of the Mill River north of Interstate 91, which is a “riverine migratory corridor”; the New Haven Airport site, which is a tidal wetland; the aforementioned Quinnipiac River Marsh; and portions of the West River. In East

Haven, Morris Creek and Caroline Creek were identified. In Milford, 19 sites were suggested including Charles Island, Great Creek Marsh and Wheeler Marsh. In Branford, another 16 possible sites were identified including Farm River and Sybil Creek.

Lisa Santacroce, director of environmental affairs of the Connecticut Audubon Society, reiterated the need to connect the community to the Sound and promoted establishing educational facilities, such as more coastal centers, nature centers, along the Sound. In turn, she asked the public to utilize the education programs to decrease non-point source pollution. “All of the polluted run off that’s coming into the Sound from farms and driveways and roads is a difficult problem and harder to control. It’s something that every individual can have an impact on,” commented Santacroce. She also named coastal islands and barrier beaches, such as Milford Point and Griswold Point, as critical habitats that should be protected for bird populations and nurseries of fish on which birds, like the osprey, depend.

Mark Francis supports habitat preservation and expressed particular concern about the impact of expanding the Tweed New Haven

Airport on Morris Creek.

The chair of the tidal marsh working group of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Partnership, Nancy Rosenbaum, suggested that the Quinnipiac River, and specifically the Quinnipiac tidal marsh, should be preserved and restored with more public access. She added that contaminated areas must be cleaned up and public access provided. The marsh sustains a great diversity of animal life, although it is a victim of surrounding chemical dumps and negligent industry. “We’ve documented that in the last 10 years, there are over 140 species of birds that are in that marsh,” Rosenbaum pointed out. “When I go along the river, it has the largest fiddler crabs I’ve ever seen.”

New Haven resident Crystal Manning also supports the Quinnipiac River

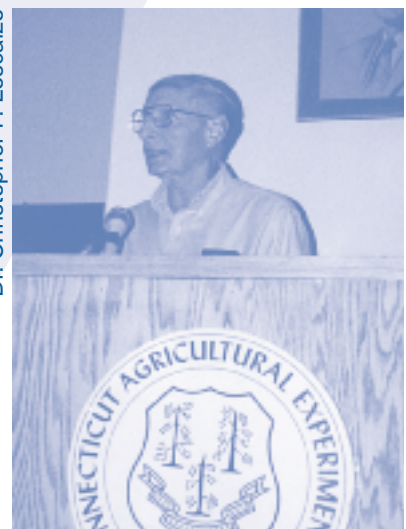
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~ Lisa Santacroce

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Dr. Christopher P. Loscalzo



Henry Ferris

tidal marsh restoration, protection of the Long Wharf mud flats and the West Haven sand spit. “I feel that too often environmentalists ignore urban areas and focus on preserving pure wilderness, and I think it’s really important that we pay attention to nature in our cities,” stated Manning.

Dissatisfied with pollutant by-products and poorly planned development, Manning advocated for a stringent regulatory system. She continued, “I’m against development that’s not properly regulated. The development here in the New Haven area is too often done ad hoc with no long-term vision.”

Martin Mador, vice president of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association, asserted that the public must be informed of the historic amounts of heavy metal contamination in the river from point source pollution. According to Mador, the problem has abated and the marsh, now recovering from the effects of the pollution, offers downstream advantages.



Harborview Marsh

“It’s also one of the finest oyster seeding beds in the country, if not the world, which is an extraordinary fact not many people are aware of, and why the oyster beds have done so well in spite of what man has done to the marsh upstream of it,” Mador assessed. “We need to protect it.”

Referring to the Quinnipiac River, New Haven resident Stuart Hutchings noted that it is not often that an urban setting has such a natural treasure right on its doorstep. Hutchings fishes regularly on the river and calls it an incredible fishery

with a terrific diversity of species. Hutchings voiced trepidation on behalf of the oyster industry, “My concerns are for the oyster industry...the Quinnipiac itself supplies 50 percent of the seed oysters for the Connecticut oyster industry, which is number two in the country, slightly behind Louisiana, and is growing. I would like to see the state ensure that areas of the river and harbor

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be protected and improved upon, and old industrial sites cleaned up and either re-stored or used for public access for New Haven residents, and this includes the mud flats along the side of Interstate 95.”

Rosemary Bonito, citing the need for preservation of marshes of the Quinnipiac River south of the railroad tracks, stated, “The

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“The Quinnipiac River, the Mill River and the West River all deserve to have completed greenways along each of them so that people can really enjoy the water.”

~ Alicia Betty

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area we are concerned about is about 60 acres of tidal wetlands and uplands, of which the New Haven Land Trust already owns 25 acres. The area is rich in wildlife. It is one of the prime birding spots in New Haven, harboring a good diversity of species and some state-listed birds.” The land trust is also interested in protecting land along Hemingway and Morris Creeks.

Like many that testified, Heather McRae from the Center for Watershed Studies at Yale University recommended that the reserve system include critical habitats, particularly remaining tidal marshes in the Quinnipiac, Mill and West Rivers.

Arne Rosengren, member of the New Haven Bird Club, placed a personal spin on Sandy Point in West Haven, which he dubs a “little gem.” Sandy Point, which splits and extends nearly a mile into Long Island Sound, is an important area because it is a breeding ground for state listed species of concern, as well as other species that breed in this habitat. “They are all very, very vulnerable to predation, to disturbances by human beings.” As a

highly recognized area for birders, Rosengren maintained it should be certified as an official bird sanctuary.

West Haven residents spoke of the need to preserve and enhance the Cove River, the Oyster River and the West River, and also passionately voiced support of Oldfield Creek preservation. West Haven homeowner Joanne Martin, like many of her neighbors, would like the creek to be restored through increased tidal flushings and to be preserved. Mary E. Head, president of the West Haven Watershed Association, claimed that the creek should become a nature preserve, and a nature study center could be instituted for both children and adults.

## Mechanisms to protect open space

Alicia Betty, field representative for the Trust for Public Land, acknowledged the need to prioritize which sites are potentially available and ensure that adequate funding is available. Betty contended that “the only way” to protect land as development pressures rise is to build local, regional and statewide partnerships.

**“The Long Island Sound Reserve will really attract attention and will help focus a lot of those federal dollars to this area that aren’t being focused here now,” continued Betty. She noted that urban areas should be a particular focus of the reserve, reconnecting urban communities with their waterfronts. “New Haven, particularly, the Quinnipiac River, the Mill River and the West River all deserve to have completed greenways along each of them so that people can really enjoy the water.”**



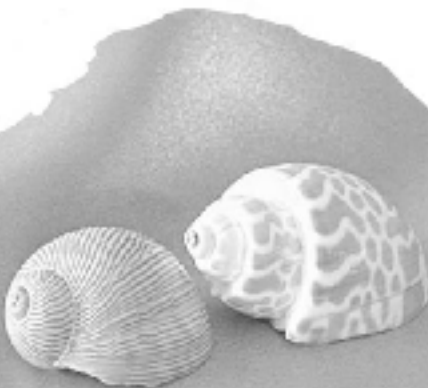
Christopher P. Loscazo

Roland C. Clement

**The director of the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point, Barbara Milton, said her organization had partnered with Manument, Inc., to produce a shorebird survey along the shore of Connecticut. “In the last two weeks, the range of shorebirds spotted at Milford Point was from 2,000 to 2,500,” said Milton, “...and at the same time I found out that there’s a big impetus now to improve Sikorski Airport which would mean rerouting the planes over Milford Point.” Milton pointed out that this issue could threaten Milford Point and pose serious consequences to shore birds.**

**When he first encountered the undeveloped East Haven Industrial Park, he found nothing there but wildlife, stated Michael Criscolo, chairman of the East Haven Union Committee for Protection of Property Rights. He addressed the need to respond to the illegal affront committed at this site. “Every tree, every shrub, every bush was cut to the ground over a two-acre area,” said Criscolo.**

**“This was done by the Airport Authority. They don’t even own the land that they did it on.” Criscolo’s statement highlights the need for proper management and stewardship of open space sites.**



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**Pat Leahy, member of the New Haven Bird Club and board member of the Milford Point Sanctuary, emphasized the need for stewardship and education funds.**



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## ● **Concluding Remarks**

**In support of the reserve program, vice president of the Connecticut River Salmon Association, Dick Bell summarized the objective of the hearing. “It is self-evident, I think, to all of you that a fish restoration program depends a good deal on the welfare and the health of its ecosystem. So any effort that proceeds to support, enhance and ensure the health of Long Island Sound is, from our perspective, consistent with the effort to restore both the Atlantic Salmon and other anadromous fishes to the Connecticut River Basin.”**



**Like others who based success of the reserve on a collaborative undertaking of community and state, Michael Criscolo, chairman of the East Haven Union Committee for Protection of Property Rights, said, “For the organizations and groups interested in the environment and what’s happening in our community, it is very important that everyone should stay together...to try to preserve as much wetlands and as much area as we possibly can.”**