

# Manhasset, New York

## North Hempstead Town Hall Tuesday, June 20, 2000

Jennifer Wilson Pines, vice president and conservation chair for the North Shore Audubon Society, welcomed nearly forty people to the seventh Listen to the Sound 2000 hearing.

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“Clearly the place we call Long Island Sound and lands adjacent to it are phenomenal natural treasures for the people of New York, Connecticut and all over the United States...”

~ Michael Burger, Ph.D.

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Shirley Hartman, director of development for the National Audubon Society of New York State, chaired the meeting.

Many speakers stated that long ago Long Island Sound contained wetland and buffer areas along its coastline and tributaries that once acted as a filter and provided habitat and healthy waters for marine life. Today, development has diminished these areas leaving only ten percent of the coastal land remaining in the original state.

Testifiers agreed that although more than half of the undeveloped sites are owned by the public or by organizations with an environmental focus, almost all of the remaining sites should be included in the state’s Open Space Plan.

Eric Dumont, Long Island program coordinator of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE), referred to the Long Island Sound estuary as, “our region’s greatest natural and economic treasure.” Dumont blamed the steady decline of marine life and habitat on the rapid pace of human recklessness, developmental sprawl and

inadequate wastewater treatment facilities.

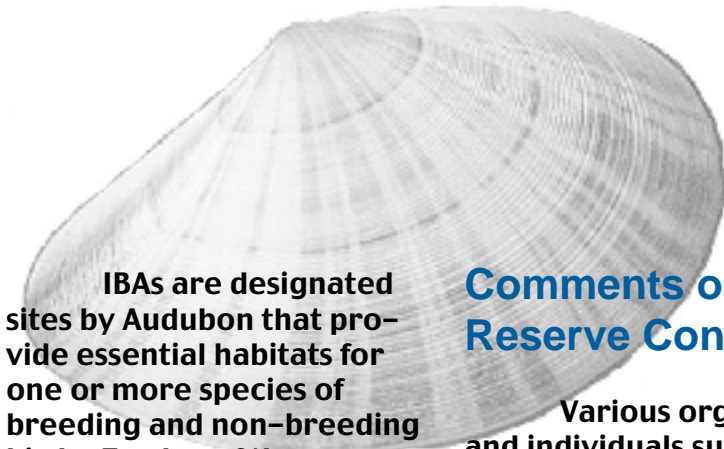
Dumont, having witnessed a “serious decline” in water quality over the past 20 years, insisted that protection of the areas would “help to preserve sensitive habitats, protect estuarine life, reduce polluted runoff and increase public access to the water.”

The director of bird conservation at the National Audubon Society of New York State, Michael Burger, Ph.D., echoed Dumont’s sentiment stating, “Half of the endangered, threatened and special concern bird species in New York state are found at Important Bird Areas (IBAs) on Long Island Sound.”



Guy Jacob

Robert Gans



**IBAs are designated sites by Audubon that provide essential habitats for one or more species of breeding and non-breeding birds. Twelve of these special sites are located on Long Island Sound and are home to no fewer than 18 of the 38 state-listed endangered species, including the piping plover, bald eagle, least tern, American bittern, osprey, black skimmer and others. "Clearly, the place we call Long Island Sound and lands adjacent to it are phenomenal natural treasures for the people of New York, Connecticut and all over the United States," said Burger.**

**Ten of the 12 Long Island Sound IBAs are threatened by pollution or development or both. "From the breeding herons and migrating songbirds of Pelham Bay Park to the largest roseate tern colony in North America on Great Gull Island," said Burger. "We have to act now to make sure that all birds continue to be part of the Sound's natural heritage."**

## **Comments on the Reserve Concept**

**Various organizations and individuals supported the concept. The League of Women Voters of Nassau County firmly supported the reserve system that they referred to as, "a comprehensive system of permanently protected open space and underwater lands along Long Island Sound."**

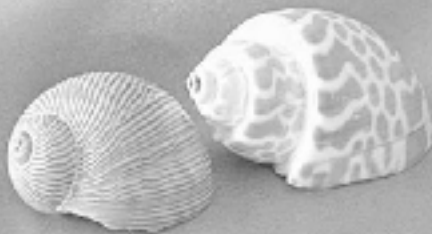
**Giving a statement on behalf of Ruth Kogel, natural resources director of the League of Women Voters of Nassau County, Robin Gordon said, "Loss of essential habitat and breeding areas, food sources and shelter for fish, birds and animals have diminished the abundance of the Sound's wildlife and production of all kinds of marine and wetlands life."**

**Carol de Paolo, community programs director of the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor, supported the reserve and encouraged open space preservation and habitat**



**Carol de Paolo of the Hempstead Coalition**

**restoration along the entire coastline of Long Island Sound. Under the auspices of this reserve concept, the system could assure preservation of open spaces and property, therefore, increasing public access to the harbor "through extended trail ways or expanded park land and provide a coastal buffer that is critical to continue the improvements that have been made on water quality."**



## Sites in the area for the Reserve System

Dr. Burger listed the following IBAs as reserve possibilities: Pelham Bay Park, the Oyster Bay area, Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary, Little Neck Bay to Hempstead Harbor, Crane Neck to Misery Point, Great Gull Island, Huntington and Northport Bays, Nissequogue River watershed/Smithtown

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“The Gouldstone land...From the highest point of this acreage, there is this spectacular view of Long Island Sound. With the pond, a forest and about four acres of wetlands, this is an important property to earmark for preservation.

~ Guy Jacob

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Bay, Orient Point and Plum Island, Edith Read Wildlife Sanctuary, Huckleberry Island and Marshlands Conservancy. While this hearing was specific to the Glen Cove area, Burger’s recommendation included the entire northern coast of Long Island.

Jim Jones, a biology teacher at Tribber High School in Port Washington, suggested southwest Hempstead Harbor, from Bar Beach to the Rosen Viaduct. “It’s about 1.75 miles. At one time, it was a natural wetland, today it’s primarily unused and it’s prime wetland habitat. Since 50 years ago, it’s been nothing but stressed, but we have the opportunity to take it back,” said Jones. “We’ve been doing a study of osprey restoration of the past nine years around the peninsula of Cow Neck and we have nine active nests this year.”

Mitchell Creek Salt Marsh was illegally filled back in the late ’60s. Julian Kane of Hofstra University listed it as a marsh in need of protection. The Mitchell Creek Salt Marsh, which is located in the village of King’s Point, leads into Manhasset Bay and eventually into the Sound. The old George M. Cohan Estate, also in the King’s Point region, was also suggested.

Robert Gans, director of conservation of the Bronx River Restoration, asked for community access to Queen’s Dock, a property

south of the Westchester Bridge. Gans also suggested Starlight Park, a beautiful park that hosts herons and egrets and other wildlife, and lastly Soundview Park, a wetland.

Carol de Paolo suggested that the following properties be incorporated into the reserve plan: Morwood property and two acres of land that lie on the eastern shore of the harbor could be sold by the local water company and twenty-five acres that are on or near the waterfront on the eastern shore of the lower harbor are being assessed for possible sale by the public utility, KeySpan. Eight other acres in this industrially zoned portion of the waterfront are up for sale by two separate owners.

Guy Jacob, chairman of the Sierra Club Coastal Resources, championed the “pristine coastal watershed buffer land” that lies between the Sunken Meadow



Guy Jacob

Region 1 NYSDEC director Ray Cowan

State Park and the new Nissequogue River State Park. “Its preservation would link two state parks, and therefore multiply and strengthen the individual prominence of each park. Consequently, the whole would be monumentally greater than the sum of its parts,” said Jacob.

“The Gouldstone land should be included in this Sound reserve system,” stated Jacobs. “From the highest point of this acreage, there is this spectacular view of Long Island Sound. With the pond, a forest and about four acres of wetlands, this is an important property to earmark for preservation.”

Glenwood Landing resident, Patrice Benneward urged all public and elected officials to support the reserve effort. Benneward suggested Glenwood Landing Waterfront, as well as Hempstead Harbor, at large, be included in the planning efforts.



James Morgan

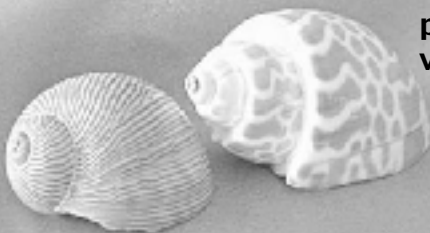
## Mechanisms to protect open space

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The town of North Hempstead proposed “a fund of \$15 million for three major public purposes; \$8 million for open space acquisition,” said Town Supervisor May Neuberger. The supervisor hopes this effort will be part of a reserve system.

Ray Cowan, regional director for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, read a prepared statement to the audience. It included, “As charged in the Governor’s State of the State message, we have begun working in partnership to provide ten Long Island Sound access sites over the next ten years, an effort for which we have committed \$25 million. And although the Sound is a tremendous public resource, recreational use is compromised by limited public access to its waters. Only a few state park facilities provide unrestricted access to the public for recreation. Our goal is to add new opportunities for enjoying a restored Sound, including swimming, access for operators of powerboats, canoes and kayaks, access to scenic vistas, and even camping near the shore.”

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Cowan added that the reserve system is another cornerstone in the restoration of Long Island Sound, in addition to the work that the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of State have been doing to reduce nitrogen, control non-point source pollution and restore aquatic habitats through Governor Pataki's Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act. The reserve system dovetails perfectly with the state's Open Space Conservation Plan and its update of the 21st Century Open Space Plan.

Cowan concluded that federal legislation and funding to match New York's efforts are critical and stated New York's support of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA).

Patrice Benneward noted that several miles of waterfront property were currently available for redevelopment on Shore Road in Glenwood Landing. Benneward advocated for the restoration of critical land and marine habitat on the North Shore of Nassau County to "create a much needed coastal watershed buffer, expand public access to the waterfront and provide breathtaking views of the Sound."

## Concluding Remarks...

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~ Frank Morris

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Photographer and writer, Helen Gaillet de Neergaard observed, "The harbor is relatively calm, very beautiful and needs to be preserved, with all of the coalitions who are actively doing so."

"The Sound is cherished by millions and yet the Sound, like all of New York state's waters, has been taken for granted and damaged by human exploitation," exclaimed Frank Morris, chairman of Long Island's Sierra Club. "Our common interests can best be served by the common purpose of Sound restoration."

"We really have to look back now at what happened and see if we can recreate our environment," began Joel Ziev, a consultant for the waterfront in the Town of North Hempstead. "I know the Village of Port Washington is looking at making a deal with Lewis Oil and taking over the waterfront there."

"Thank you for this opportunity to provide these comments on behalf of the governor on his vision for Long Island Sound and to publicly endorse Listen to the Sound 2000 and to launch the creation of the Long Island Sound Reserve system," said Ray Cowan.

Jennifer Wilson Pines, vice president and conservation chair of the North Shore Audubon Society, resolved that the reserve had reached a "critical juncture where the open space that's left is diminishing tremendously" and resolved that we preserve the space.