

Plum Island: An Unprecedented Opportunity

One cloudy, rainy afternoon this past September, scores of CFE and Save the Sound members and friends convened at the elegant Saybrook Point Inn to hear a presentation by Save the Sound's Chris Cryder on the case for saving Plum Island, and from CFE Program Director, Attorney Leah Schmalz, about our legal advocacy on the issue. Guests enjoyed wine, hors d'oeuvres and outstanding images taken by photographer Robert Lorenz, as well as atmospheric paintings by John Sargent, both of whom have had privileged access to the normally restricted island in recent years,

Why were all those individuals inspired to come out on a drizzly afternoon to hear about an island? As John Muir famously wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." Start trying to pick anything out from the fabric of an ecosystem, and the first thing to go is the web of habitat. When habitats are threatened, so are the animals who live there. Many animals and plants have developed over thousands of years to survive in their specific habitats—they can't simply move someplace else. So what happens when a place rich in diverse habitats like Plum Island gets sold for development? It impacts us all.



CFE and Save the Sound members and friends came together at the elegant Saybrook Point Inn to hear a presentation about what we are doing to save Plum Island from the auction block.

Plum Island, for instance, is home to more than 200 bird species. Some birds live there much of the year. Others use Plum Island as a critical stopover on their migratory journey. Still others use the island for breeding and raising young. When their habitat is broken up by roads or other commercial development, their ability to survive is thrown into jeopardy.

And Plum Island's habitats are at risk right now.

Typically, when one branch of the federal government decides it doesn't want a property any more, it offers that property to other interested branches of the government, like the Fish and Wildlife Service, or the state. The question is why hasn't that happened with Plum Island? Why the rush to sell the island to the highest bidder? Originally, it was thought that the sale would finance moving the research facility to Kansas, but that project is now funded and construction has begun. Selling Plum Island to development interests won't help the Kansas project, but it could seal a deal that threatens critical habitats and wildlife.

Recently, we were offered a challenge. A kind, but anonymous, donor will match dollar-for-dollar to \$20,000 all Plum Island gifts and pledges made before December 31, 2015. As the year draws to a close, we hope CFE and Save the Sound members will consider leveraging these dollars with their own gift toward this effort. It could make the difference between selling and saving Plum Island.

Sixty years ago, Rachel Carson considered what a world without birds would sound like and came up with her book title *Silent Spring*. Today, we need to consider what an island without many species is going to sound like and look like. It might not be Silent Spring. It might be Silent Forever.



Robert Lorenz ©2015

Plum Island: Quick Facts

-  Less than 10 miles off Connecticut's coast and 1.5 miles off Long Island.
-  Home to a host of endangered and threatened animals and plants.
-  Made up of 840 acres, about 80 percent of which are in a natural state.
-  The remaining 20 percent is occupied by the nation's foreign animal disease center, scheduled to move to Kansas.
-  A law passed by Congress in 2008 set in motion a plan to sell Plum Island to finance the move, but also gives the General Services Administration and the Department of Homeland Security (responsible for administering the island) discretion to conserve wildlands and protect wildlife.
-  The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified Plum Island as a "Critical Natural Resource Area."
-  We believe the island should remain in federal hands as a protected refuge for the public—instead of being sold to the highest bidder for development and private gain.

In this issue

Driving Green	2
Time to Talk about Climate Change.....	2
The Night Crawlers.....	3
Students Help Out.....	4
Under the Sea	4
2015 Annual Meeting.....	Back Cover
In <i>SoundBites</i> : Testing Our Waters	

Driving Green

Most weekday mornings, architect Bruce Becker unhooks his BMW i3 from its charger, which is connected to solar panels on his garage roof, pushes a button and sets off on his morning commute. Bruce's firm is ten miles away in Fairfield, Connecticut, and he can make several round trips to the office without having to recharge. But on Wednesdays when he attends project meetings in Hartford, he plugs into one of eleven public chargers there, so he can make the trip back to Westport without activating a gasoline-powered generator that comes with his car.

Driving an electric vehicle, or EV, is just an extension of the green ethic with which Bruce designs his buildings. Take his latest mixed-use green building at 777 Main Street in Hartford, Connecticut—the former Hartford National Bank.

Previously, Bruce had designed buildings in New York where the state encourages the use of fuel cells and other green technologies. When he set out to use these technologies in Connecticut—to green the existing building at 777 Main Street and his new 360 State Street building in New Haven—he was surprised that the regulatory process took a whopping six years to navigate. “It was a long fight, but Bruce’s determination paid off when state regulators finally authorized him to use the fuel cell at 360 State Street to provide electricity



Architect Bruce Becker plugs in his BMW i3 at one of the 11 EV charging stations at 777 Main Street in Hartford. The 400 kilowatt fuel cell at left powers the chargers and the entire building.

for tenants, and not just common areas,” says Shannon Laun, CFE’s climate and energy attorney. “CFE submitted comments in support of Bruce’s position in the regulatory proceeding, and we are delighted that he can now provide clean power to residents at 360 State Street and 777 Main Street.”

In addition to a fuel cell that provides heat and electricity, 777’s green makeover included the installation of eleven EV charging stations—more than any other public charging location in the state. “As an architect,” says Bruce Becker, “I believe good design involves not harming the environment, so a large EV charging station was paramount.” Bruce is a longtime proponent of EVs and charging stations. He sees green technology as a way to stimulate the economy. “Connecticut doesn’t produce fossil fuels,” says Bruce, “so all the money we spend

on gas leaves the state. On the other hand, the money you save if you fuel your car with solar panels on your roof, you might well spend in-state—on local restaurants or retail stores, for instance.”

CFE continues to advocate for state-wide EV policies. With more than 300 publicly accessible EV chargers throughout the state, driving an EV is easier than ever. You can view a map of the state’s charging stations on our website at ctenvironment.org.

Time to Talk about Climate Change

It’s a sobering but exciting time for all who are concerned about the climate crisis. We have a long way to go, but institutions, countries, states, and citizens around the world are pushing for change and making their voices heard.

This spring, Governor Malloy established the Governor’s Council on Climate Change to recommend policies to meet the state’s greenhouse gas reduction goals, and appointed CFE President Don Strait to serve on it. CFE was an important player in establishing the state’s greenhouse gas reduction goals. In 2008, CFE advocated for and helped pass the Global Warming Solutions Act, which requires Connecticut to reduce its total greenhouse

gas emissions to at least 10 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, and to at least 80 percent below 2001 levels by 2050.

The climate council has formed two working groups: one to focus on leadership, accountability, and engagement; and the other on analysis, data, and metrics. Don is serving on both, assisted by Energy and Environment Attorney Shannon Laun. CFE members can also be part of the conversation. Members of the public can provide input during the public comment period at the end of each meeting or submit written comments to deep.climatechange@ct.gov. See ct.gov/deep for details.

CFE’s Media Coordinator Sarah Ganong will attend the international Paris conference on climate change starting November 30. Watch for her posts on CFE’s blog “Green Cities, Blue Waters.”

The Night Crawlers

About twelve years ago, we got a call from a resident of Old Saybrook, telling us about a forest that he and others in the town were trying to protect from development. We went out to look at it, and we were stunned. It was 1,000 acres of forest, streams, and wetlands. The Preserve, as it was known, was the largest unprotected coastal forest between Boston and New York. The proposed development would have devastated it.

Fast-forward twelve years. This past August, at a ceremony organized by The Trust for Public Land and attended by Governor Malloy, Senator Blumenthal, and others to celebrate the closing of the real estate deal that permanently protects The Preserve, I accepted an award on CFE's behalf. When she gave me the award, Alicia Sullivan, Connecticut State Director of the Trust for Public Land said, "We would not be here today and The Preserve would not have been protected without the significant efforts of CFE over the last 15 years."

She was right. CFE's core mission is legal enforcement and law-making, not land purchase. So it took TPL to broker the deal and raise the funds to buy the land. That conservation purchase, however, could never have happened if not for the decade of

effort of CFE's lawyers and cooperating scientists, working with local residents. Our lawyers were truly beloved by townspeople and truly hated by some of the commission members, whose normal job involved night-time hearings of a couple of hours—but who were forced to keep the hearings open very late, while we presented detailed scientific evidence. Our lawyers were nicknamed "the night crawlers" by exhausted commission members who knew that when they saw our attorneys arrive, it meant they could be up until at least 1:00 in the morning. We argued at more than 80 of these hearings over the years, spending thousands and thousands of hours.

The most dramatic turn in the battle was in March 2006, when we won a come-from-behind 4-3 Wetland Commission vote. The Commission's written decision featured 11 reasons for denial—based primarily on evidence put forward by CFE. Ultimately, Lehman Brothers, the owner, came to the bargaining table with Trust for Public Land and other groups and a deal was worked out.

This is work that every CFE donor should be proud of. It could not have happened without your support.

Today, we have new land protection challenges before us. In this newsletter, you can read more about why protecting Plum Island is such a critical undertaking. A committed donor has given us a special opportunity by agreeing to match, up to \$20,000, gifts to save Plum Island made by December 31, 2015. As the holiday season approaches, I hope you will contribute to this important opportunity. If you have already made a donation this year, please accept my deepest thanks, and if possible, consider an extra gift toward the effort to save Plum Island.

The environment needs our help. You can't put a price tag on the value of open space for people and animals, clean air and water, or a healthy energy future. Thank you for the faith you have placed in our work to date. We are grateful for each and every donation.



Donald S. Strait, President



On August 10, more than 200 supporters of the 15-year effort to protect The Preserve gathered to mark the property's official public opening with a ribbon-cutting and short hike. Attendees included Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, State Rep. Phil Miller, Old Saybrook First Selectman Carl Fortuna, and from Trust for Public Land: President and CEO Will Rogers, Connecticut State Director Alicia Sullivan and Project Manager Karen Brown, as well as representatives from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and a host of dedicated activists.

CFE/ Save the Sound Tribute Cards

Send a CFE Holiday Tribute card and spread a message about protecting our land, air and water and Long Island Sound with family, friends and colleagues.

We request a minimum of \$10 per tribute card to cover our costs and provide a donation toward our environmental initiatives. To order, call Michelle Lemere at (203) 787-0646, ext. 104 or email mlemere@ctenvironment.org.



Students Help Out

It was August. The weather was hot, muggy and buggy—but that didn't stop our staff and stream volunteers from wading with a purpose! Students from Common Ground High School helped Save the Sound staff get down and dirty in the water to complete stream surveys in the West River Watershed this past August. Biology teacher Dave Edgeworth served as Supervisor for the Common Ground High School West River Stewards. The students experienced being citizen-scientists firsthand while helping to assess erosion, bank vegetation, and other qualitative stream conditions in Wintergreen Brook from its source above Lake Wintergreen in Hamden to its confluence with the West River in New Haven. Students contributed their findings to the West River Watershed Management Plan, released in October, which will be used to identify future outreach, restoration, and green infrastructure projects in the area. (See the Plan on our website ctenvironment.org under Newsroom & Resources: Publications.)

"It was exciting to help the students get to know the West River Watershed through the lens of Wintergreen Brook, which flows—literally—through the front yard of Common Ground High School, and to watch them as they began to understand the connections between the health of the landscape and the health of the river," said Green Infrastructure Program Manager Kendall Barbery.

Volunteers from the West River Watershed Coalition, Solar Youth, Friends of Edgewood Park, and the Friends of Beaver Ponds Park also helped with our stream surveys. Altogether, staff and volunteers surveyed 30 out of 31 identified stream reaches covering more than 24 river miles throughout the West River and its tributaries.

As part of our work in and around the West River, we also successfully installed two rain gardens in New Haven's Edgewood Park

on September 26 to reduce runoff and prevent combined sewer overflows to the West River. Rain gardens are specially designed to capture and filter stormwater runoff to improve water quality in nearby waterways. Kendall coordinated the projects, recruiting volunteers and working with a host of stakeholders, including the New Haven Parks Department, the City of New Haven Department of Engineering, and Friends of Edgewood Park.



Common Ground High School student Lovell Davis (right) and biology teacher Dave Edgeworth helped assess stream conditions in Wintergreen Brook near their school.

Under the Sea

Denis Habza can't look at the Sound without thinking about what's in it. "Long Island Sound is teeming with marine life. It's full of history," he says. "Most people would be really surprised to learn what's down there—everything from mantis shrimp and blowfish to historic shipwrecks."

"I was born and raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut," says Denis, "and was always fascinated with Long Island Sound. As I got older, I noticed that many people speak negatively about the Sound, often referring to it as 'filthy.' In 2005, I bought my own boat and learned scuba diving." With the help of a GoPro video camera, he set out to change people's perceptions. "To me, education is key to creating awareness," says Denis. "For instance, most people might not think of fish as having a personality, but when you see them up close in their own environment, you can tell that fish and squid are intelligent, curious animals."



Denis Habza of Squalus Marine

Denis launched Squalus Marine Divers several years ago to promote scuba diving in the Sound with a message about conservation, education and stewardship. Through his website and YouTube video channel, he gives us a unique window on the Sound. "I've received fan mail from as far away as Morocco and England," says Denis. "When I

asked one of them why he was interested in our Long Island Sound dives, one viewer said it was because the Sound is 'exotic.' It got me thinking about how often people fail to appreciate what they have right here at home. Hopefully, through our dives and the videos we make of them, we can help raise awareness. When people understand that Long Island Sound is home to countless forms of marine life perhaps they will become more interested in protecting this natural treasure on our shores." Check out Squalus Marine on YouTube and squalusmarine.com. Squalus Marine is available to give presentations in the off season. For details, contact: info@squalusmarine.com.



Save the Sound

A program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment

SoundBites

Fall 2015

Testing Our Waters

Dressing up in old clothes and trudging through muck and seaweed might not be everyone's idea of a positive experience. It was, however, for Ashley Ryan, one of 25 volunteers who trained with Save the Sound and collected more than 400 water samples at 52 weekly testing sites in 12 towns this past summer. A recent graduate of SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Ashley valued her time volunteering on the project because it gave her the chance to work on something she feels passionately about—preserving Long Island Sound. "Save the Sound's water quality monitoring project is essential," explains Ashley, "because it confirms that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. It shows that some areas are getting worse over time, which tells us that the problem is not going to go away on its own."

Analysis of the samples collected by volunteers and staff indicates that sewage is reaching our beaches and other places where people come into contact with the water. The data shows that the highest levels of fecal contamination are found in the rivers, brooks, and creeks that feed Long Island Sound.

"The high levels of fecal contamination we are documenting in many of the rivers and streams that run through our communities are a source of serious concern," said Tracy Brown, director of Save the Sound's Western Long Island Sound program. "Not only do these waterways deliver that pollution to our beaches and the Sound, they are also locations where people, especially children, can come into contact with unsafe water that can make them sick. With our sampling program we are trying to identify these problem areas and support local actions to clean them up."

Save the Sound expanded our sampling program this year, adding sites in Port Chester, Pelham Manor, and Greenwich for a total of 12 communities where we now test local water. We doubled the number of samples collected



Ashley Ryan, Save the Sound volunteer

overall, an increase that would not have been possible without our dedicated volunteers. See the full results at savethesound.org/waterquality.

Water quality testing is just one part of our work to stop the flow of raw and nitrogen-filled sewage into the western Sound. This summer, we initiated legal proceedings to ensure that environmental laws related to sewage overflows into the Sound are enforced. After months of meetings with town and Westchester County officials, we filed suit in federal court against Westchester County and 11 of its municipalities in an effort to speed up needed wastewater infrastructure repairs. We are calling on the County and municipalities to work together to repair the current leaks in our wastewater infrastructure and to create a program that will ensure proper maintenance of the system into the future.

We also launched our Sound Health Explorer (more at right), an online tool to help empower citizens in advocating for safer, healthier beaches and waterways. We're working to develop a new section that will aggregate data about nitrogen contamination related to hypoxia along the Sound shoreline. Excess nitrogen robs the Sound of oxygen each summer, creating a hypoxic dead zone where marine life cannot survive. Reducing nitrogen discharges from sewage treatment plants can help. This layer of the tool will support our nitrogen reduction program goals, spurring local action.

Meet the Sound Health Explorer

At one time, you had to be a scientist to know about Long Island Sound water quality. Not anymore. The Sound Health Explorer makes water quality data for any beach on Long Island Sound readily available and user-friendly. Visit soundhealthexplorer.org, and click on your favorite beach to see how it performs. "The Sound Health Explorer is a game changer," says Water Quality Program Manager Peter Linderoth. "It's an important tool to help those who want to advocate for their beach to be free of pollution from failing sewers and contaminated stormwater." We launched the Sound Health Explorer this past summer and it has already started many conversations around the Sound.



The Sound Health Explorer at soundhealthexplorer.org helps coastal residents better understand the water quality at their local beaches.

In this issue

Driving Green	2
Time to Talk about Climate Change.....	2
The Night Crawlers.....	3
Students Help Out.....	4
Under the Sea	4
2015 Annual Meeting.....	Back Cover
In <i>GreenSheet</i> . Plum Island	

2015 Annual Meeting



We celebrated our 2015 annual meeting at the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport, Connecticut, with inspiring presentations from sustainable community advocates and awards to activists of all ages, as well as our thanks to outgoing Board Chair Johan C. Varekamp and welcome to new Board Chair Leslie Lee.



Caroline Vary of Jonathan Rose companies delivered an inspiring keynote address on sustainable communities in Connecticut and beyond.

JOIN THE Green Team

When you become a member of our monthly giving society, The Green Team, you save paperwork and help us make the most of your membership donation to CFE or Save the Sound. Find out more at www.ctenvironment.org by clicking on the red "Donate" button.

LEAVE A LEGACY

A planned gift from your estate to CFE and its bi-state program Save the Sound can help protect public health and the endangered places you care about far into the future. Please consider a lasting gift to the environmental heritage of Connecticut and Long Island Sound. For more information, contact Heidi Green at 203-787-0646, ext. 102.

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