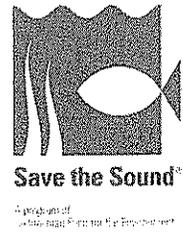




Testimony of:
Save the Sound
a program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment



In Support of Raised Bill No. 6515
AAC JOB CREATION AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Before the Appropriation Committee

March 31, 2011
Submitted by Leah Schmalz

Save the Sound is a regional program dedicated to the restoration and protection of Long Island Sound; together with its parent organization, Connecticut Fund for the Environment ("CFE"), a statewide non-profit environmental advocacy organization, it represents over 5,700 members. Since 1978, CFE has used law, science and education to improve Connecticut's environment.

Dear Sen. Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Save the Sound, a program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment submits this testimony in support of Raised Bill 6515, An Act Concerning Job Creation and Habitat Restoration. If passed, this legislation could leverage federal funds, create jobs, and restore critical habitats necessary to the state's ecosystem.

Background

Section 1 of RB 6515 provides Connecticut with an opportunity to generate revenue for Habitat Restoration projects. That section would allow "Preserve the Sound" license plate holders to voluntarily contribute to the existing Long Island Sound Account, if the Department of Motor Vehicles chooses to implement the donation program. Section 2 creates a new subaccount within the Long Island Sound Account to ensure those voluntary contributions are directed to restoration projects that will create new jobs throughout the state.

Currently purchasers of the "Preserve the Sound" license plates support Long Island Sound programs by paying an additional one-time fee when they register their vehicle. There is no subsequent donation during the biennial registration renewal. However, many individuals who purchase these specialty plates do so to protect Long Island Sound and would gladly volunteer \$7 per year (\$15 per biennial renewal) to restore the Sound. This bill could provide them with that option.

Job Creation Potential

These allocations could be used to leverage federal dollars available through a wide variety of restoration and coastal acquisition programs—like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Community Based Restoration Program, the NOAA Open Rivers Initiative, the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—that require a non-federal match.

By capitalizing on these federal programs with a state matching fund, *Connecticut can improve public access to the shore, provide environmental benefits through restored habitats, and create local, high quality jobs.* Job-creation benefits include opportunities in engineering, landscaping, hydrology and specialized labor force, typically calculated at 29 jobs for every \$1 million spent.¹ The proposed request would create a fund which could leverage additional federal backing, resulting in approximately 105 jobs per year.²

Restoration Need

Coastal habitats are the transition between land and sea, providing food and refuge for birds, fish, crabs and many other animals. Many of these habitats also act as buffers, preventing erosion and flooding and providing a storm-effect dampening service for developed coastal areas.

The Long Island Sound Study Habitat Restoration Initiative (HRI) is the working group managing restoration in and around Long Island Sound. It is comprised of federal and state regulatory agencies, as well as university and NGO partners. The HRI sets priorities and protocols for identifying and implementing restoration projects regionally. It has identified the following 12 priority coastal habitat types that require efforts and are generally eligible for funding:³

Cliffs and Bluffs

Intertidal Flats

Coastal Barriers, Beaches, & Dunes

Riverine Migratory Corridors

¹ University of Oregon, “Ecosystem Workforce Program Briefing Paper”
<http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/downloads/bp13.pdf>

² Using the number of new Long Island Sound plates sold between 1993 and 2008 (approx. 139,000), the dedication of \$10 per LIS plate registration renewal would generate approximately \$695,000 each year (\$1,390,000/ 2yrs.; based on a two year registration renewal) for the Habitat Restoration Matching Fund. Using the 25% Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program match requirement as an example, the proposed Habitat Restoration Matching Fund of \$695,000/yr could leverage an additional \$2,085,000 of federal money for a potential yearly contribution to Connecticut habitat restoration of an estimated \$2,780,000/ yr (or \$5,560,000/2yr. renewal timeframe)

³ The Long Island Sound Study Habitat Restoration Initiative, “Guidelines for Habitat Restoration Grant Applications”
http://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/grantguidelines_finaldec20101.pdf

Coastal Grasslands

Coastal and Island Forests

Estuarine Embayments

Freshwater Wetlands

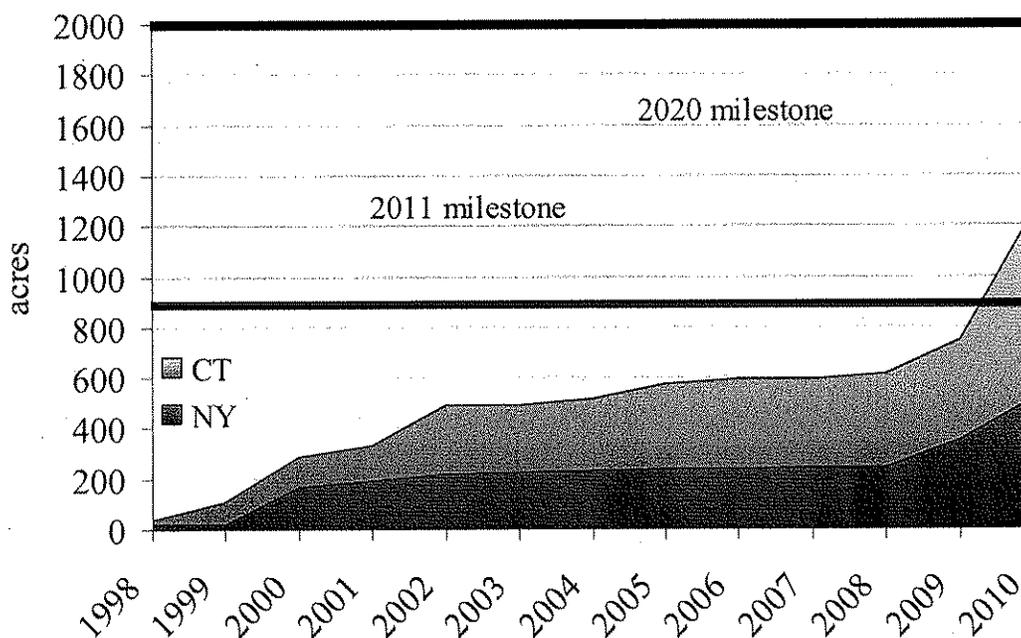
Riverine Migratory Corridors

Molluscan (shellfish) Reefs

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation

Tidal Wetlands

The Long Island Sound Study, along with the states of Connecticut and New York, have committed to restoring or protecting over 800 acres of habitat by 2011 and restoring 2000 acres by 2020.



Despite solid progress, it is estimated that at the current rate, the region will not reach the 2020 milestone. Because funding availability is a primary driver in moving restoration projects forward, implementing new mechanisms—like the proposed Restoration Matching Fund—are critical to the state's success.

Conclusion

Not only is the new matching fund needed, renewal allocations of \$10 per Long Island Sound license plate (\$15 total, with \$5 provided to the Department of Motor Vehicles for

administration) is way to gather funds without unduly burdening the public; these plates are voluntary and logically connected to the new initiative. Adding this modest renewal donation will capitalize on a demographic likely to contribute and address declining additions to the Long Island Sound accounts. At 21,003 plates sold, 1993 marked the height of interest for first-time purchases of the "Preserve the Sound" plates. Since then, there has been a steady decline, with only 3,634 plates being sold in 2008. By instituting a donation opportunity during registration renewal, Connecticut could replenish the account each year. Providing this expanded pool of funders and more predictable level of funding will result in long term benefits for Long Island Sound.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

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