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**Testimony of Nathan Frohling – Director of CT Coastal and Marine Initiatives
before the Environment Committee – February 27th, 2015**

In Support of H.B. No. 6035 - AAC A LONG ISLAND SOUND RESOURCE AND USE INVENTORY AND A LONG ISLAND SOUND BLUE PLAN; and

H.B. No. 6839 - AAC A LONG ISLAND SOUND BLUE PLAN AND RESOURCE AND USE INVENTORY.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy and with my colleague David Sutherland, I express our strong support for these two bills. This legislation is needed to enable the State of Connecticut to conduct marine spatial planning for Long Island Sound (MSP).

Purpose & Benefits:

Long Island Sound is owned by the public. At its core, the Inventory and Blue Plan will enable the public to realize a vision for use of the Sound in the public interest. It will identify and protect traditional uses of the Sound such as commercial and recreational boating and fishing and maritime commerce. It will recognize and regard the natural resources and ecological well-being of the Sound as well. This intelligent and publically supported plan will also mean reducing conflicts between users and reducing the costs associated with those conflicts. It will mean that new uses can be better planned and made compatible with existing uses. Once established, the Inventory and Blue Plan can also mean that federal decisions and funding will be consistent with the plan.

Timing is now:

The timing is now for Blue Plan legislation for three reasons. *One:* there is considerable attention and resources being invested in MSP in the Northeast which Long Island Sound could benefit from if there was a MSP process in place now. That includes the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Bodies which are actively working on regional marine spatial planning now. Closer to home, there has been the informal "CT-NY Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group (discussed below) that is working to enable MSP for Long Island Sound. However, the support of these entities and window of opportunity will not last, especially if the Blue Plan does not get started now. *Two:* because all of Connecticut's bordering states have completed or are in the process of pursuing MSP, Connecticut may find itself left behind in realizing the benefits of MSP and could conceivably be targeted by undesirable facilities that are barred from other states' waters. *Three:* it is preferable to prepare a Blue Plan with interested stakeholders in a period of calm - prior to the next crisis which could polarize that same set of stakeholders – making a consensual planning process much harder to achieve.

The Connecticut-New York Bi-State Working Group:

This unofficial working group has been meeting for 2.5 years to support MSP in the Sound. It is made up of voluntary participants from key state and federal agencies (e.g. CT DEEP, NY DOS, NY DEC, EPA, NOAA, etc.), regional ocean entities (NROC, NE RPB), trade organizations and other user interests, conservation organizations (e.g. The Nature Conservancy) and Connecticut and New York Sea Grant. It has worked on the purposes and potential guiding principles of MSP for the Sound, has completed an extensive data inventory and is in final production of a guidance document entitled “Sound Marine Planning Framework Report.” The working group has already fostered and facilitated the cooperation and coordination of the states of Connecticut and New York on MSP. In short, this working group is a valuable asset in providing capacity for a Blue Plan but this support will not last without timely passage of the Blue Plan.

Data Sufficiency:

Having sufficient data is critical for MSP. The Working Group’s inventory demonstrates that there is sufficient data to move forward on MSP. For example there are at least 8 data sets related to energy and infrastructure, 3 related to industrial uses, 11 related to navigation, 11 related to commercial fishing, 11 related to recreation and 26 related to birds, marine mammals, fish, plankton, habitats and physical oceanography. The \$7 million Seafloor Mapping project is now generating new data on the physical and ecological attributes of the Sound. The Nature Conservancy has just completed its “Long Island Sound Ecological Assessment.” There is never all the information desired but planning can be pursued with the best information available and provisions made where information is lacking. Gathering new information is an ongoing part of MSP.

Importance of Bi-State Approach:

For Long Island Sound, half of which is in CT and half in NY, an MSP process must be bi-state. As Connecticut moves forward with the Blue Plan it must concurrently reach out to and work closely with the State of New York to the extent possible. Section 1(b)(N) and (R) and Section 1(e) of H.B. 6839 are therefore very important.

Long Island Sound Marine Spatial Planning is Widely Endorsed

Many formal Long Island Sound plans call for marine spatial planning. For example, the *Long Island Sound Study Action Agenda: 2011-2013*, includes a priority action to “Support development of Coastal Marine Spatial Planning that balances human use needs with ecosystem protection and is integrated with regional marine spatial plans” (Long Island Sound Study, 2011). Additionally *The Sound Vision: An Action Plan for Long Island Sound 2011-2020* calls for MSP in multiple supporting actions identified under the action item “Develop effective planning for multiple uses” (Long Island Sound Study Citizens Advisory Committee, 2011). Moreover, the draft updated *Long Island Sound Study Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* (see Chapter II section B for further discussion) calls for MSP as part of its “Sound Science and Management” theme (Long Island Sound Study, 2014b). Finally, results of a 2013 survey of approximately 400 LIS respondents showed a strong consensus in support of LIS MSP, as well as strong support for a bi-state planning process. (O’Connell, 2013).