



*55 Church Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06457
203-568-6297*

**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – February 19th, 2016
In Support of Senate Joint Resolution 4**

***RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO
PERMANENTLY PRESERVE PLUM ISLAND AS A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.***

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our strong support for Senate Joint Resolution 4 urging the U.S. Congress to repeal laws it had previously passed requiring the sale of Plum Island.

We would like to stress that in light of Senator Blumenthal's, Representative Courtney's, and our entire Congressional delegation's extensive efforts over many years, we strongly suggest that a clause be added to the resolution specifying: "Whereas Connecticut's Congressional delegation has worked tirelessly with its New York colleagues to ensure the preservation of Plum Island;"

Plum Island is an 840-acre island that lies off the North Fork of Long Island as part of the Town of Southold, New York. Since 1954, about 175 acres of the island have been the site of the U.S. Animal Disease Center under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and recently, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS). About 660 acres of the island have remained undeveloped, hosting an extraordinary array of natural coastal habitats and wildlife populations.

In 2008, as part of authorization to move the Plant Disease Center to a new facility in Kansas, Congress mandated that the USDHS work with the U.S. Department of Administrative Services (USDAS) to sell the island to help defray the costs of building the new center. USDAS has interpreted the mandate, we believe questionably, to mean it must be sold to the highest bidder.

Any island or coastal tract of land of this size and ecological importance, put up for sale by a private party, would be the subject of intense efforts by the environmental community to ensure it would be preserved by the federal government. In this case, that government already owns the land. Selling it for development would waste an exceptional conservation opportunity, threaten the island's unusual natural resources, and provide an insignificant portion of the money required for the Kansas facility.

The Connecticut Congressional delegation has been working with New York colleagues to pursue at least two possible means of repealing the 2008 law or ensuring that a conservation outcome is more diligently investigated and allowed by the USDAS. It is important that our delegation be able to demonstrate to their Congressional colleagues that Connecticut's entire state government realizes the importance of this New York island to all of Long Island Sound and Southern New England.