Summer 2016 Estuary News

PRESIDENT OBAMA REAUTHORIZES THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

Washington, DC – Congressman Lee Zeldin (R, NY-1), member of the Long Island Sound Caucus and Congressional Shellfish Caucus in the House of Representatives, announced that legislation he supported in the House of Representatives to reauthorize the National Estuary Program (H.R.944/S.1523) was signed into law by President Obama on Friday, May 20, 2016. The new law authorizes $26.5 million in funding for the National Estuary Program, which includes two nationally recognized estuaries on Long Island: the Peconic Estuary and the Long Island Sound. Continued on page 2

SUFFOLK COUNTY TESTS ALTERNATIVE SEPTIC SYSTEMS

This spring, the Department of Health Services toured some of the demonstration projects that are part of Suffolk County’s Innovative-Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Program. The local testing that occurs in the “Demo Program” as it is often called, is the final step for treatment technologies before they can be approved for widespread use in Suffolk County. The Health Department anticipates approving the first group of new technologies this summer, with more to come by early next year. Read more on page 2
On the East End of Long Island, we must be committed to safeguarding our environment and improving our water quality.

The funding will be used for water quality and wetlands restoration, as well as other local conservation projects to restore local beaches and protect wildlife. The bill ensures that funding will be prioritized to address urgent and challenging issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of coastal areas including nitrogen, harmful algae blooms, and flooding or wetland loss.

Congressman Zeldin said, “On the East End of Long Island, we must be committed to safeguarding our environment and improving our water quality. Over the years, water quality on Long Island has suffered severely from issues such as pollution, overdevelopment and the dumping of dredged materials. This new law, which I was proud to support in the House, would ensure that Long Island’s estuaries receive the funding needed to improve and protect our waterways. There is much we can do to improve water quality on Long Island, and I will continue working in Congress to ensure our waterways are preserved for generations to come.”

“The Peconic Estuary Program is grateful to Congressman Zeldin for his support of this important bill,” said Dr. Alison Branco, the program’s Director. “For nearly 30 years, the National Estuary Program has demonstrated that these locally-driven, non-regulatory programs can successfully protect Estuaries of National Significance, like the Peconic Estuary and Long Island Sound. We work with the community to craft and implement action plans to solve environmental problems at the watershed level to preserve the healthy, productive ecosystem that supports our coastal economy. With this renewed mandate from Congress, the Peconic Estuary Program looks forward to updating its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan and tackling the challenges facing our estuaries today and into the future.”

COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT STUDIES NEW SEPTIC TECHNOLOGY

On a rainy afternoon, county employees and citizens alike boarded a Suffolk County Transit Bus eager to get a first-hand look at some of these systems we had all been working, in various capacities, to bring to Suffolk County to help alleviate our nitrogen pollution problems. The 15 attendees included NY State Assemblyman Steven Englebright, Paul Brady from south fork Legislator Bridget Fleming’s office, and Council of Environmental Quality member Mike Kaufman. The leaders of Suffolk County’s water quality team explained the pilot program, upcoming regulatory changes, and showed us four different installed systems. Along the way, attendees spoke with manufacturers and installers, and very enthusiastic homeowners. These homeowners were part of the first wave of 19 winners of the “septic lottery” last year. The next set of winners will be announced this summer, and Suffolk County anticipates selecting 2 or more in each of the 10 towns.

Over the next decade, we hope to see many of the cesspools and septic tanks within the Peconic Estuary watershed upgraded to one of these newer technologies that reduce nitrogen loading to the groundwater, thereby reducing the load that is polluting the estuary. 

~Dr. Alison Branco, PEP Director

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE NEP

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PEP is poised to update the estuary’s management plan. This major CCMP revision will be accomplished through a process that brings together all levels of governments and all sectors of the community surrounding the Peconic Estuary. Management topics include:

- Nitrogen loading into the estuary
- Harmful algal blooms
- Climate change adaptation
- Habitat restoration and monitoring
- Land protection
- Public Education

Email: cac@peconicestuary.org to be involved in our public input process.

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PLASTIC POLLUTION IN THE PECONIC BAYS

Recent studies estimate that eight million metric tons of plastic pollution enter the world’s oceans annually and the plastic pollution problem is projected to get worse every year. If left unchecked, the global quantity of plastic in the ocean is projected to almost double to 250 million metric tons by 2025. It is estimated that 80% of trash in the ocean derives from land-based sources and 75% of land-based plastic pollution is the result of uncollected plastic. Initially, most of that pollution enters the streams, rivers and embayments in our estuaries and eventually ends up in boundless accumulations of trash in our oceans.

Work to reduce aquatic trash must involve the reduction of litter and trash on land and far upstream of the oceans. The best solution to the problem of plastic waste pollution in the ocean is stopping leakage in the first place, rather than treating the problem after it has already occurred. However, reducing the plastic leakage into our aquatic systems at the source is one of the greatest challenges in the battle to reduce plastic pollution.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, six of the top ten contributors to plastic in our oceans are single-use, or disposable, plastic products. Most of the single-use, or disposable plastic products are “food service ware” which includes food and beverage containers, bottles, plastic bags, food wrappers, cups, plates and cutlery and drinking straws.

How does this impact the Peconic Estuary?

Long Island is a densely populated island surrounded by three of twenty-eight estuaries designated as an “Estuary of National Significance” by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). They include the New York-New Jersey Harbor, Long Island Sound, and the Peconic Estuary—bordering the East End of Long Island between the north and south forks. The actions we take on land are closely tied to the health of those waters because of this geography. Continued on page 7
If you have spent anytime driving around Riverhead this year, you may have ended up on Roanoke Avenue, or County Road 73. Since the beginning of the year a major repaving and construction project has been taking place between Route 25 and the circle on Route 58. As with many highway projects, much of the construction will be devoted to resurfacing and paving the road. However his project will also include some technology to limit stormwater pollution reaching the nearby waterway, Merritt’s Pond.

Part of the new design to help combat stormwater runoff will include permeable concrete gutters and the installation of vortechs stormwater basins. Polluted stormwater runoff is often transported by conveyance systems into our local waters. Common pollutants include oil and grease from roadways, pesticides, fertilizers, pet waste, sediments from construction and carelessly discarded trash and litter. These designs will reduce the stormwater that reaches Merritt’s pond by 50 percent.

Rather than a paved surface for the stormwater to flow directly over, the permeable gutter will allow for water to percolate through. For the vortechs stormwater basins, a typical leeching basin is replaced by units that will take the stormwater flow and direct it so that the unit will screen, separate and trap debris, sediment and oil. Except during exceptionally high rain fall events, all stormwater that will head toward Merritt’s Pond via this conveyance system will be go through this new filtration system.

COMMUNITY STORMWATER STEWARDSHIP

Since March of this year, volunteers have been involved in water quality testing in the Peconic Bay by collecting environmental parameters including temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, nutrients, and water clarity—all important indicators of health of our local bays. At the start, this citizen-science program will focus on the waters surrounding the Suffolk County Marine and Environmental Learning Center in Southold, NY and will aid aquaculturists in the healthy brooding of shellfish larvae for our surrounding waters. As membership grows, we hope the volunteer monitoring program will expand across the bay and become an estuary-wide resource in protecting and restoring the health of the Peconic Bays! Interested? Attend our next training workshop on Wednesday June 22nd in Southold. Email peptalk@peconicestuary.org
EDWARDS AVENUE FISH PASSAGE

This spring, the NYSDEC undertook a construction project to repair the deteriorating dam on the upper Peconic River under the Edwards Avenue roadway.

As part of the repair work, a newer and safer kayak launch will be installed as well as a fish ladder that will allow fish and eels to reach upstream and downstream habitats for living and spawning.

Watch our video to see other fish migration projects PEP is involved with on the Peconic River. https://vimeo.com/167339295

RAINGARDEN PLANTED ON RIVERFRONT

This April, the Peconic Estuary Program, in cooperation with Riverhead Town, celebrated Earth Day by planting a raingarden in Downtown Riverhead near the Peconic riverfront. Over 25 volunteers braved the rain and cold to plant native plants that were selected for the site based on their tolerance for flooding and salt and for their ability to attract native bees and butterflies. The garden, located in the parking lot behind Main Street and adjacent to Heidi Behr Way, will help filter out stormwater runoff pollution from the parking lot before it reaches the Peconic River. When informational signage is installed this summer, the raingarden will also act as an educational tool for the community.

PEP also has two native plant gardens at the Big Duck in Flanders, NY and at Downs Farm Preserve in Cutchogue, NY. Visit one of PEP’s ecogardens this summer!

ESTUARY TERMS

What is an estuary?

es-tu-ary

[ˈesChəˌwerē] noun

the tidal mouth of a large river, where the tide meets the stream.

What is a watershed?

wa-ter-shed

[ˈwôdər ˈSHed, ˈwādər ˈSHed] noun

an area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas.

PEP’S CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The PEP was created because a group of concerned citizens came together and spoke up after seeing the negative impacts of brown tide in the Peconic Bays. They formed the Brown Tide Citizens Task Force and pledged to protect the Peconic Estuary forming the PEP Citizens Advisory Committee. So get involved!

CAC SPECIAL TOPIC MEETINGS:

will be held this summer. Guest speakers will present on issues the estuary is currently facing.

July 21st (NOFO)
August 4th (SOFO)

CAC’S NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING:

Tuesday September 13th
6:00-8:00pm
Suffolk County Community College Culinary Arts Center Main Street
Menhaden populations have significantly rebounded in the estuary since their population decline a few decades ago.

Atlantic Menhaden *Brevoortia tyrannus*

Atlantic Menhaden, also known as bunker, are found in coastal waters along the Atlantic coast of North America from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Indian River, Fla. Atlantic Menhaden average 9 in. to 12 in. and 0.5 lb. to 1.3 lb. These fish can normally live to 8 years old and grow very quickly until age 4. These fish begin to mature at age 2 and all fish are mature at age 3. Bunker are filter feeders that feed at the primary production level mainly consuming algae. These fish accomplish this by swimming with their mouths agape and gill openings spread, filtering out entrapped organisms with their feathery gill rakers.

Spawning occurs throughout the year over a broad geographical and temporal range, in Peconic Bay spawning is most intense when in water temperature is between 59°F and 64°F. Menhaden are prey for nearly all piscivorous (carnivorous eating primarily fish) fish marine mammals and seabird on the east coast of the United States, top inshore predators include bluefish, striped bass and weakfish. Mass mortalities of menhaden have been reported in many parts of the range along the coastal United States. These mortalities are usually associated with oxygen depletion in shallow water habitats. The large number of fish in warm shallow water exhaust the dissolved oxygen, but algal blooms and bacterial respiration associated with active or decaying plankton can also contribute to mass fish die offs. ~Cornell Cooperative Extension Fisheries

BUNKER LIMITS LIFTED IN THE PECONICS

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) recently approved the DEC’s request to allow commercial fisherman to catch more menhaden in order to reduce the number that might otherwise perish during a die-off. Local commercial fishermen are working together with DEC and the Town of Riverhead to harvest as many fish from the river as possible in the coming weeks. The removal of these additional fish is being done to 1) improve chance of survival of the remaining fish; 2) use the fish caught beneficially as bait instead of having to dispose of carcasses on the shoreline; 3) eliminate or reduce the magnitude of a fish kill.

The ASMFC has allowed New York to harvest an additional 1 million pounds of menhaden in the Peconic River as part of their episodic event program. ~New York State Department of
Based on New York/New Jersey Baykeeper’s estimates, at least 165 million plastic particles are floating within the New York - New Jersey Harbor Estuary waters at any given time. Approximately 85% of particles counted were microplastics (smaller than 5mm- the size of a pea) and the most abundant type of plastic present in samples was foam (38%), materials that make disposable coffee cups and packaging peanuts. When just one large piece of plastic such as a single use spoon, water bottle, or plastic bag enters our waterways and breaks down, the harmful impacts to wildlife and our own well-being from the numerous pieces of plastics used daily are uncountable.

The East End of Long Island is not as heavily populated as is the land surrounding the New York - New Jersey Harbor Estuary, but the impact of plastic in our waters is still the same. Marine debris can impact aquatic species and habitats by reducing light availability to underlying waters and depleting oxygen levels. These biological changes can reduce the ability if open water and bay bottom habitats to support life. Additionally, animals and marine life may mistake plastic in the water for food, which can cause bodily damage and lead to starvation. And plastics can absorb chemical contaminants in the water around them and when animals eat these plastic pieces the contaminants make their way up the food-chain.

**What is EPA’s Trash Free Waters Initiative?**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently developing customized regional strategies with projects to enhance federal, state, and local programs that reduce or prevent trash from entering our watersheds and ultimately our coastal ecosystems. The EPA hopes to achieve significant reductions in the flow of trash in our nation’s waters and along our shores. To date, the EPA has been implementing regional strategies in the Gulf of Mexico, New York/New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the EPA is well on their way to implementing regional strategies in the Mid-Atlantic States, California and the Pacific Islands. The Peconic Estuary Program is currently collaborating with partners in our watershed to work towards reaching the EPA’s long term goal of zero-loading of trash into U.S. waters within 10 years.

**Progress in Our Watershed**

In 2015 Suffolk County banned microbeads. Peconic Estuary Program Director, Alison Branco, was instrumental in gathering and assessing information about the environmental impacts of micro-beads and the logistics of banning their use, which contributed to the successful passage of the micro-bead ban bill. The Peconic Estuary Program is currently pushing Suffolk County legislation to ban single-use plastic bags.

The Peconic Estuary Program is continuing to support Trash Free WATER’s initiatives in the Peconic Estuary to reduce plastics in our watershed and the world’s oceans. We have many exciting activities you can get involved with and support. Stay tuned to our events calendar for clean ups and plastic source reduction projects!
SUMMER EVENTS 2016

June

Trash Your Line Workshop
Thursday June 16th 4:00pm
Excess fishing line is one of the most common and deadliest forms of marine trash to wildlife. Join PEP as we build monofilament waste receptacles to be distributed at beaches and fishing sites around the Peconic estuary. Cornell Cooperative Extension 423 Griffing Avenue 1st floor Riverhead, NY 11901.

Community Stormwater Stewardship Water Quality Training Day
Wednesday June 22nd
10:00am-12:00pm
Citizen Science training day!
Learn how to collect water samples and test for important environmental factors. Become a volunteer in gathering data for our local aquaculturists on the North Fork. Suffolk County Marine Environmental Learning Center 3690 Cedar Beach Road Southold, NY

July

Ludwigia Removal Event
Tuesday July 12th 9:30am
Water primrose or Ludwigia peploides is a freshwater invasive plant in the Peconic River that out competes native plants, reduces biodiversity, blocks sunlight to oxygen producing plants, and impedes fish habitat and recreational use of the river. Using kayaks and boats, we will remove Ludwigia during this day-long event. Bring water, sunscreen, and lunch. Meet at the NYSDEC boat launch on South River Rd. Calverton, NY.

Please contact Sherryl Jones (631) 727-7850 ext. 353 or email peptalk@peconicestuary.org for more information or to register.

August

Kayak Tour of Peconic Bay in Coecles Harbor
Tuesday August 16th 9:00am
Raindate Thursday August 18th 9:00am
Explore the Peconic Bay and its beautiful habitats! Join PEP educators as we paddle the Coecles Harbor Marine Trail in Shelter Island! This self-guided interpretive trail shows the bounty of our estuary and the area's marine conservation efforts. Bring your own kayak or rent from Shelter Island Kayak Tours 631-749-1990 (kayaks will be delivered to launch site). Life jackets are required! Bring water, sunscreen, and a snack. Burns Road Town Landing Shelter Island, NY

CAC Special Topic Meetings 6:00-8:00pm
Thursday July 21st North Fork
Thursday August 4th South Fork
Join PEP as we discuss topics relevant to the protection and health of our estuary.
Presentations from local experts and impactful project leaders will share their work and experience. Summer residents are encouraged to attend! Locations to be determined. Email cac@peconicestuary.org for more information

Visit PEP Raingarden and Native Plant Garden Projects Anytime!
Learn more about stormwater and solutions to runoff pollution.
Three locations:
Heidi Behr Way Riverfront Park, Riverhead NY
The Big Duck, Rte. 24 Flanders Road, Flanders NY
Downs Farm Preserve Rte. 25 Main Road, Cutchogue NY

Look for PEP at various upcoming summer events including Alive on 25 in Riverhead, The Peconic Paddle Battle, The RBID Cardboard Boat Race.

Citizen’s Advisory Committee
2016 Meeting Dates
Saturday February 27th 10am-12pm
Wednesday May 18th 6-8pm
Tuesday September 13th 6-8pm
Wednesday November 16th 1-3pm

Special Topic Summer Meetings:
Thursday July 21st NOFO August 4th SOFO
Locations to be determined
$500 HOMEOWNER REWARDS PROGRAM

RECEIVE A REIMBURSMENT FOR INSTALLING RAIN GARDENS, RAIN BARRELS OR PLANTING NATIVE PLANTS

In order to help reduce the amount of pollutants entering our waterways, Peconic Estuary Program is offering homeowners that live within the Peconic Estuary watershed up to $500.

Visit PeconicEstuary.org to find the application, guidelines and interactive map to see if you qualify. For any questions about the rewards program please e-mail us at rewards@peconicestuary.org

Do your part to protect our beautiful bays!

Rain Barrels collect water that would otherwise run off into our bays

Rain Gardens and Native Plants trap rain to recharge the groundwater
MORE ABOUT THE PECONIC ESTUARY PROGRAM

One of the 28 EPA designated “Estuaries of National Significance”, the Peconic Estuary became a member of the National Estuary Program in 1993. PEP is an innovative partnership of local, state, and federal governments, citizen and environmental groups, businesses and industries, and academic institutions with a common goal of protecting and restoring the Peconic Bay.

For more information on PEP programming and ways to get involved, please contact Sherryll Huber-Jones peptalk@peconicestuary.org (631) 727-7850 ext. 353

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

VISIT OUR WEBSITE PECONICESTUARY.ORG
JOIN OUR MAILING LIST
FOLLOW PEP ON SOCIAL MEDIA

PECONIC ESTUARY PROGRAM STAFF

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