Peconic Estuary PROGRAM

Summer Newsletter 2018

Save the Date:

All are welcome!

Friday, September 7th

Long Ireland Brewery

Trivia Game at our CAC Meeting

The Peconic Estuary Program invites you to come to our Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (CAC) at Long Ireland Brewery from **4:00-6:00pm**! The purpose of our CAC meetings is to gather citizens to be part of the conversation. Come to enjoy the brewery and learn what we are all about, or join in on our discussion of how we can protect and restore our Peconic Bays. If you care about our wildlife or enjoy the water through boating, fishing, or kayaking - we can discuss the ways in which you connect with our estuary and how you can help keep it healthy for future use and fun. We will be playing a trivia game during our meeting!

Long Ireland Brewery, 817 Pulaski Street, Riverhead, NY 11901

What's Inside?

Species to look for in the estuary this summer

Look for these species while fishing, paddling, and hiking throughout the estuary this summer. Starts on page 5.

Creature Spotlight: Blue Crabs

Turn to page 7 to learn more about this important bottom predator in the Peconic.

Peconic Friendly Boating Tips

Read about best practices to be a "Peconic Friendly Boater" on page 8.

Welcome new PEP members to the team!

Dr. Joyce Novak

Program Director

Joyce came to PEP in 2018 from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection where she was a supervising scientist. As Program Director for PEP, Joyce oversees and manages day to day operations at PEP Suffolk County's office. She serves as the principal spokesperson and advocate for the estuary, promoting effective cooperation with all constituencies on the development of both policies and programs focused on protection and restoration of the estuary. She develops and implements initiatives and partnerships that support the implementation and renewal of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), addressing key issues such as water quality impairment, habitat protection and restoration, local capacity building, and coastal resilience. Joyce's science career began in 1999, when she spent a year monitoring groundwater in New York City for the U.S. Geological Survey. Her experience since spans projects and teaching appointments in New York and Europe. The scope of her work has included marine, coastal, and freshwater projects. Joyce earned her Ph.D. in Geography, focusing her research on Coastal Oceanography, from the University of Limerick.

Lauren Scheer

Education and Outreach Coordinator

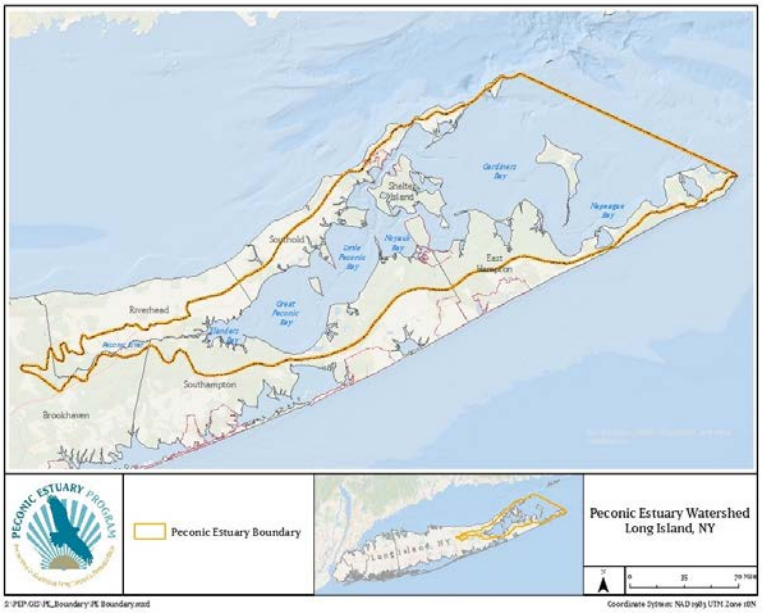
Lauren joined the PEP team in April 2018. She earned her B.A. in Environmental Studies at the College of the Holy Cross and received her M.A. in Marine Conservation and Policy at Stony Brook University. Lauren has experience as an Environmental Educator for organizations like Group for the East End and Blue Ocean Institute, and gained experience as an Elementary School Science Teacher for Preschool-5th Grade. Lauren also has held positions in the communications field where she worked for an environmental consulting firm as a Marketing Coordinator and was a communications intern with New York Sea Grant. As the Education and Outreach Coordinator for PEP, Lauren develops and implements outreach and volunteer opportunities to the citizens on the East End of Long Island to educate the community about the science, ecology, and conservation of the Peconic Estuary. She also creates outreach materials to increase PEP's visibility and brand awareness, and coordinates meetings with the PEP Citizen's Advisory Committee. Lauren is excited to help connect the community with PEP's mission to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary.

Have Your Voice Heard in PEP's Plan to Protect the Peconic

By: Sarah Schaefer

Do you live, visit, work, or recreate around the Peconic Estuary? Help PEP take care of one of the "Last great places in the Western Hemisphere".

The land within the Peconic Estuary watershed spans from the headwaters of the Peconic River and eastward across the reaches of the North and South forks. More than 158,000 acres of water are within the watershed, spanning from the Peconic River, Flanders Bay to Gardiners Bay and out to Block Island Sound between Plum Island and Montauk Point. The land and waters in the watershed encompass many vibrant and healthy habitats which are unique to the coastal zone of NY State and home to over 100 rare or endangered species. The health of these waters, habitats, and plants and animals are extremely valuable ecologically and economically.



The health of the ecosystem is closely connected to how we take care of the land and water. In our region, this is so important because the health of our environment contributes to our economy. Our watershed is the place where hundreds of thousands of people live, work and play.

In 1985, the first Brown Tide bloom occurred in our waters causing broad impacts to water quality, habitats, and caused great harm to the shellfish industry. The local community came together to bring attention and action to the issue. People from all backgrounds, industries, and communities called upon government and environmental groups to preserve and restore the Peconic Estuary and its resources. In 1992, the Peconic Estuary became the 20th estuary in the nation to receive the designation as an "Estuary of National Significance" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), establishing the EPA funded Peconic Estuary Program (PEP). The PEP worked with local, state and federal government, citizens, businesses, environmental groups and other users of the resource to identify local priorities and create the blueprint for how the program and our partners protect and preserve the Peconic, called the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

The CCMP represents a regional consensus on how to address the priority management issues at the time: Brown Tide, Nutrients, Habitats and Living Resources, Pathogens, Toxics, and Critical Lands Protection. The CCMP is a powerful tool to show regional support and focus funding to address priority issues in the watershed. PEP has been influential on many fronts, namely in reducing nitrogen pollution sources, working with municipalities to reduce stormwater pollution, and completing habitat restoration projects that benefit not only water quality but the ecosystem and industries that rely on their health.

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Although much progress has been made, human pressure on the Peconic Estuary has continued to grow as land use changes have affected the estuary in several ways, such as degraded water quality and habitat loss and fragmentation. Much has changed in the last 17 years since the Peconic Estuary Program first released the plan to conserve and restore the Peconic Estuary. Some priority topics have become less important, while new issues have arisen. An updated long-term plan is necessary to continue to effectively improve the health of the estuary. We are currently revising our blueprint for protecting and preserving the Peconic Bays.

Be a part of our future! We are calling upon our stakeholders including business owners, concerned citizens, local organizations, experts and government officials to participate in this process as it requires the cooperation and coordination of multiple groups.

...WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...

What priority issues do you think should be addressed in the new CCMP? The most effective CCMP is one that is a true representation of the East End population's interests and voice. PEP is currently reaching out to the public and our partners to collect feedback and input throughout the rest of the summer.

Tell us your priority concerns and how you think the PEP should address them going forward.

Email ccmp@peconicestuary.org or you can also give us your input through our brief, ten-question survey. To fill out our survey, please go to https://www.peconicestuary.org/the-ccmp-revision/

Once we gather public input and comments, we will be writing a draft CCMP and then open a second phase of public input for people to provide input and feedback on the plan before we publish the final CCMP. The final revised CCMP is expected to be released at the end of 2019!

INTRODUCING PEP SUMMER INTERNS

Bilingual Intern

Nathaly Vasquez is a biology major senior at St. Joseph's College. She is fluent in Spanish which allows her to inform the Spanish speaking community about the importance of estuaries and water quality.

Horseshoe Crab Intern

Julie Dickerson is going into her junior year at Paul Smith's College and is majoring in Fish and Wildlife Management.

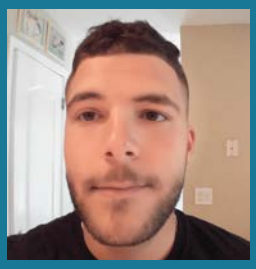
Horseshoe Crab/Terrapin Intern

Kaitlin Morris plans to graduate in August with her MA in Marine Conservation and Policy at Stony Brook University. She holds a MS in Nutrition from Adelphi University, and a BS in Biology with a minor in Marine Science from Stony Brook University.

Terrapin Intern

Noah Reiser will be a senior and is attending Roger Williams University. He will be studying abroad in Bermuda and working with the BIOS program in ST. Georges. He is earning a BA in Marine Biology and will be graduating in 2019.

GIS Intern



Peter Larios graduated from Stony Brook University where he majored in Marine Science. He is returning to Stony Brook this year to get his GSS certificate, and hopes to one day work for an environmental consulting company.

GIS Intern

Kaitlyn Fenster is a senior at Stony Brook University with a major in Marine Science and a minor in Writing. After graduating, she wants to pursue an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Geospatial Science.

Species to look for in the estuary this summer

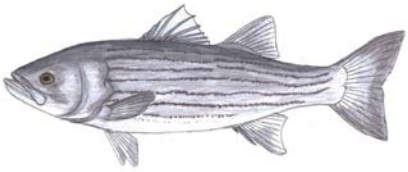
By: Elizabeth Hornstein

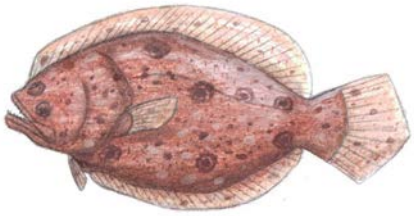
While fishing, paddling, and hiking throughout the estuary this summer, look out for the following species!

Marine Fish

The Peconic Estuary provides important habitat for many commercially and recreationally important fish species. Some species live in the estuary throughout the year, while others use the estuary seasonally for breeding or feeding. During the summer months, weakfish, scup, and blackfish can all be found spawning in the estuary. Adult blackfish prefer hard bottom habitats, but small blackfish tend to congregate in shallow vegetated habitats, like eelgrass. Summer flounder or fluke, are also commonly found in the estuary in the summer in areas with sandy or muddy bay bottoms. Another common summer resident is the bluefish. Juvenile bluefish (commonly called snappers) can be found congregating in shallow areas and tidal creeks feeding on anything they can catch. Other fish to look out for include striped bass, black seabass, and northern puffer.

These predatory fish are supported by the numerous small prey fish found in the estuary, including bay anchovy, Atlantic silverside, Atlantic menhaden, Atlantic herring, alewife, and sand lance. Salt marshes, tidal creeks, and seagrass are all important habitats for these small fish.





Shellfish, Crabs, and Squid

The shallow waters of the estuary are where you can find the majority of the shellfish, such as hard clams, soft-shell clams, oysters, and mussels. Other invertebrates to look for include the long-fin squid, whelk, lady crab, spider crab, and blue crab!

Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals

The summer is a great time to be on the lookout for marine mammals, such as harbor porpoises, bottlenose dolphins, humpback, and minke whales. These animals follow their food source, primarily herring and squid, into our coastal waters. Sea turtles, including Green, Loggerhead, and Kemp's Ridley, will also enter the estuary from late spring to early fall to feed. The sea turtles that visit our Estuary were hatched on the beaches in the Southern U.S., Gulf Coast, and Caribbean.

Diamondback Terrapin

The diamondback terrapin, an exclusively estuarine reptile, lives in the salt marshes of the estuary year-round, but you are most likely to see them in June and July when they come ashore to lay their eggs.
PEP is in its second year monitoring diamondback terrapins during their nesting season. Our goal is to determine where they are nesting and monitor predation of the eggs. During the nesting season, you can join PEP at one of the advertised volunteer high tide walks and help us collect terrapin activity data.

Shorebirds

When on the beach, look for least, common, and roseate terns and piping plovers. When in the marsh, look for osprey, egrets, and heron. By fall, these birds will be migrating south to their overwintering areas.

Illustration Credit: Amanda Levine

Creature Spotlight: Blue Crabs

By: Adelle Molina

If you choose to swim, paddle, or boat in the Peconic Estuary, you may encounter a blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*), also known as the savory swimmer. These large, rather aggressive crabs are important predators and prey in estuarine ecosystems. You may see them doing their characteristic sideways swimming underneath your favorite local dock or along the side of your boat. Blue crabs may even pick up your bait while you are fishing for bottom feeders. Blue crabs are both scavengers and predators, consuming prey such as clams, mussels, juvenile fish, and more.

Be careful, if you agitate a blue crab or pick one up incorrectly, they might try to pinch you with their large, strong claws. It hurts! The best way to grab them is either from behind by the base of the 5th pair of legs known as paddle-like swimmerets, or by holding both claws strongly closed with both hands. Be cautious while handling blue crabs, especially if you have children with you.

Image from DEC: Tagged Blue Crab

Crustaceans grow by molting - the old shell will crack open and the blue crab will gently back itself out of the old shell, leaving behind a molt. For several days, the crab is soft to the touch and rather vulnerable until the larger new shell hardens. After female blue crabs have a terminal or final molt, they are ready to mate. Male blue crabs perform elaborate dances to encourage a female to choose him. After mating, the males will stick around in upriver or shallow estuarine habitats to forage and feed. Meanwhile, the females go on long migrations towards an inlet where the bay opens into the ocean. The females time the release of their eggs with the outgoing tide because baby blue crabs hatch out in the open ocean and require salt water to grow. While they live as plankton in the coastal ocean, baby blue crabs go through several phases of metamorphosis as they are transported far and wide along the coast by currents. Some time in the fall, the now juvenile crabs are transported via tides back into an estuary, like the Peconic. Once in a calm bay with structured nursery habitat, juvenile blue crabs will spread out to feed before winter arrives. Finally, when the cold of New York winter settles in, all blue crabs will bury themselves in the sediment and enter hibernation until temperatures warm enough for them to reemerge in the spring.

If blue crab populations increase or decrease too much, other species can also feel these effects as blue crabs are important bottom predators in estuaries. If you choose to harvest blue crabs, make sure to check the local regulations. If you catch an egg-bearing female crab (a large mass of orange or brownish eggs on the underside) you must throw her back! The blue crab season is open all year, and you may keep up to 50 legal sized crabs per day (DEC). The minimum legal size for a blue crab depends on whether it is hard, soft, or shedding as measured in inches from tip to tip or the top of the shell; the legal sizes are 4.5”, 3.5”, and 3” for each of the three shell types (DEC). If you use a crab pot or trap, you must have a Terrapin Excluder Device (TED), which allows trapped turtles to escape without suffocating (DEC). Also, toss back any undesired catch!

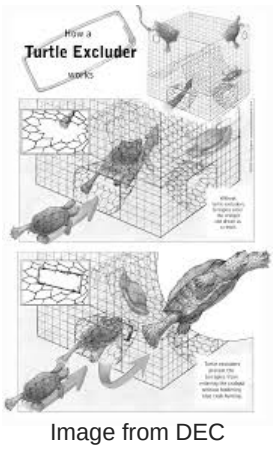


Image from DEC

Image from longisland.com

The DEC and Stony Brook University researchers are studying local blue crab populations and recreational fishing behavior to better understand the current status of this important species. DEC is asking recreational fishermen to voluntarily report their blue crab harvest using the Recreational Blue Crab Survey (https://on.ny.gov/2MUqbVD). If you happen to catch a tagged blue crab, please report it to the DEC Blue Crab Tagging Program (https://on.ny.gov/2KRxLTx) or call the number listed on the tag. These efforts can help manage blue crabs throughout NY state.

Peconic Friendly Boating Tips

By: Jenna Schwerzmann

While boating this summer, help protect our estuary by using these best practices!

Eelgrass

Seagrass is a plant that grows entirely underwater and has a rooted system. Eelgrass is the type that's found locally, and happens to be a critical habitat for local species like scallop, fluke, forage fish, turtles, and seahorses. Eelgrass also buffers us from storms as it holds the sediment and seabed together.
If you find yourself in an eelgrass bed, slow down and keep your anchor in the boat as it can leave scars, tilt your engine up to keep the propeller away from the eelgrass, stay in marked channels, and comply with no-wake zones.

No Discharge Zones

The Peconic Estuary is designated as a federally recognized *Vessel Waste No Discharge Zone (NDZ).* In a NDZ, treated and untreated discharges from marine toilets are prohibited. Boaters must modify their "heads" to prevent discharges. Several towns offer free pump-out services, both via boat and land-based stations. Many private marinas have onshore pump-out stations available for a fee. You can find a map of all the pump-out locations in the Peconic Estuary on our website.

Other tips to ensure that we have healthy waters

-Check for leaks and avoid overflow when filling up your tank. Put an oil absorber in your boat bilge and change at least twice annually.
-Tune up your engine to make it more efficient, pollute less, and save fuel.
-Use a water-based bottom paint
-Use a dustless sander and clean up paint chips or dust before it can be washed away into the waterbody.
-Use biodegradable soaps to clean your boat, and try to do this while it's still on land.
-Dispose of trash properly on land (includes fish waste). Recycle your used monofilament fishing line at one of our receptacles on the East End. Recycle used oil and batteries on S.T.O.P. dates at your town's recycling facilities.

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