



Peconic Estuary Partnership

PROTECTING AND RESTORING LONG ISLAND'S PECONIC BAYS

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Clean Water, A Healthy Ecosystem, Resilient Communities, and Strong Partnerships for the Next Decade:

The Peconic National Estuary Program Releases its New Management Strategy for the Peconic Bays and Watershed

Introduction

The Peconic National Estuary Program, **The Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP)**, has completed its **2020 Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP)**. This guiding document establishes the framework for protecting clean water and healthy habitats on the East End of Long Island. As a National Estuary Program, PEP brings together all members of our community – Federal, State and local governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, academia and interested members of the public – to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary and its watershed.

Background

The PEP was established in 1992 under the EPA National Estuary Program as an “Estuary of National Significance” and adopted the first CCMP in 2001. In 2018 we set out on a journey of updating the CCMP with the inclusion of our Management Conference, our local officials, scientific partners, and our community members. Through the years, we have gained a greater understanding of the issues facing the Peconic Watershed; for instance, the importance of groundwater pathways as a leading mechanism of pollution transport to our Bays, the increase in the number of harmful algal bloom (HAB) species adversely affecting our waters, the harmful role excess nitrogen has played, the interconnectivity of our wildlife to the health of our habitats, and the extreme influence climate change will have on everything. The new CCMP (2020) lays out a roadmap for protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary and its watershed and will carry us forward through the next ten years.



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New Goals and Actions to Meet Critical Challenges

While our accomplishments are many, we still face critical challenges as we move into the next decade. The 2020 CCMP includes fresh goals and actions which will strengthen our partnership and bring us together to tackle the issues we face together. **Our new Goals: Strong Partnerships, Resilient Communities, Clean Water, and a Healthy Ecosystem** are the four pillars of our foundation, and our **renewed focus on partnership** will enable us to grow and meet the challenges of the next decade. **The new CCMP lays out 8 new Objectives and 35 new Actions** that will guide PEP and our partners to address the challenges facing our watershed. Some of the **critical challenges we face** are: the impacts of **climate change** such as sea level rise, more frequent and more intense storms, and how changing weather patterns will affect habitat and living resources, water quality, and watershed management practices; **hardened shorelines** - seawalls, bulkheads, and other shoreline structures are constructed at a rapid pace, eliminating vital habitats for many species; **land development** - growth of the human population and associated land development are pressuring the ecosystem and habitat connectivity, affecting terrestrial, aquatic, and avian species; **nitrogen pollution** from septic systems and cesspools, and residential and agricultural fertilizer still plagues many areas; **pollutants from activities on land** such as excess nutrients, pathogens, pharmaceutical compounds and toxic contaminants such as pesticides and per- and polyflouroalkyl substances (PFAS) into the Estuary; **threatened Bay Scallop populations**; **declining eelgrass beds**—which serve as nurseries for scallops and fish—have diminished dramatically and are vulnerable to further decline with climate change; and **HABs** - although brown tides have not hit the Peconic Estuary since the 1990s, other kinds of harmful algal blooms are more frequent – in 2020 we saw an array of HABs throughout our Estuary.

As a coastal community on Long Island, we share the same water and the same habitats, and as a result, we must work together to address the same environmental issues. It is our partnerships that bring positive change and our partnerships that will usher in the next decade of clean water and healthy habitats.

PEP strives to increase community awareness and the inclusion of all of our communities, ensuring people know of the challenges we face while helping people to understand what they can do to support Estuary health. Our partnership is our greatest tool to help us achieve the goals and actions outlined in the 2020 CCMP. We welcome the next decade of working together to follow the plan we built together for the protection and restoration of our Estuary. See the new 2020 CCMP here: peconicestuary.org/CCMP2020/

COMMENTS/QUOTES

U.S. Senator Charles Schumer: *“With the completion of The Peconic Estuary Partnership’s management plan, we now have a roadmap for combatting the many threats facing the Peconic Watershed,”* **said Senator Chuck Schumer.** *“With ever increasing nitrogen levels, annual algal blooms, and climate change, it is imperative that we invest in the research to fully assess these threats to our coastal areas. We must then follow the science and*



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build sound policy at the federal, state, and local level to preserve our ecological resources for future generations.”

EPA Region 2 Administrator Peter Lopez: *“Since 2000, EPA has invested approximately \$12 million to support the preservation of the Peconic Estuary,” said EPA Regional Administrator Pete Lopez. “The restoration of this critical ecological resource and the protection of its water quality are important for the aquatic life, ecosystem and communities who utilize the estuary for commercial and recreational purposes. This updated Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan demonstrates our commitment to build on the progress of the Peconic Estuary Partnership and further revitalize the economic health and vitality of this important watershed.”*

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos said, *“The Peconic Estuary is a critical habitat for numerous species and provides essential feeding, spawning, and nursery grounds for our state’s diverse marine life. DEC has worked with the Peconic Estuary Partnership for more than 25 years to conserve, restore, and protect this critical habitat. As New York continues to combat the effects of climate change, the updated Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan will further ensure the protection of species that rely on this habitat, improve coastal resiliency, and safeguard water quality in concert with the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan.”*

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said, *“Suffolk County is proud to stand together with the Peconic Estuary Partnership in its release of the 2020 CCMP. Development of the CCMP was executed through a robust, transparent and thoughtful public process, resulting in a sustainable Plan that will be owned and embraced by the PEP, stakeholders, and the public alike. The new CCMP addresses many critical environmental issues confronting our region, including excess nutrients, harmful algal blooms, and climate change. This strong new plan will dovetail effectively with Suffolk County’s Reclaim Our Water initiative to leverage resources to address water quality degradation from cesspools and septic systems, and will benefit residents of Suffolk County for decades to come.”*

New York State Senator Ken LaValle said, *“It has been a pleasure working with the Peconic Estuary Partnership throughout my career in an effort to advance clean water initiatives, protect our fragile environment and advance coastal resiliency projects. I am pleased that the 2020 CCMP has been approved and that the dedicated work of all those involved will be continued in the future.” said Senator LaValle.*

New York State Assemblyman Fred Thiele stated, *“Since its inception, the Peconic Estuary Partnership has worked diligently to protect our water, habitat and wildlife, and to support coastal resiliency projects throughout the estuary. The work of the Peconic Estuary Partnership in protecting water quality on the East End has been unmatched, and I have been proud to have been a part of its success from the very beginning. As we continue to see the impacts of climate change on our coastal community, the stakes have never been higher. I*



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am pleased that the 2020 CCMP has been approved, and I look forward to continuing my partnership with the Peconic Estuary Partnership to achieve the outlined goals and protect our water quality.”

Suffolk County Legislator Al Krupski, 1st District said, *“The process of completing the CCMP was long and deliberate, and involved many stakeholders including the public, environmental advocates, and representatives from every level of government, from the EPA on the Federal level, to the East End Towns and Villages. This guiding document will be critical to policy and law makers moving forward as we confront the many challenges and threats facing the Peconic Estuary system, and give us opportunities to improve water quality. Thank you to the Peconic Estuary Partnership, the National Estuary Program, the members of the community who participated in the process, and the many dedicated professionals contributed to this important document.”*

Suffolk County Legislator Bridget Fleming, 2nd District: *“The work and influence of the Peconic Estuary Program has become ever more important, in light of climate change and other threats to our natural resources. The CCMP is the result of community partnerships and fact-based science, and so as a County Legislator, I value it as an invaluable resource. The work of PEP is important not only to support our natural environment but also our tourism-based, coastal economy in eastern Suffolk County,”* **stated Legislator Bridget Fleming of the 2nd Legislative District.** *“The 2020 CCMP will offer a guide for the next decade to help protect our valuable estuary system.”*

NEIWPCC Executive Director Susan J. Sullivan: *“The Peconic Estuary Partnership’s new CCMP is a clear, ambitious road map which will help PEP galvanize positive change in the Peconic and beyond through strong science, inclusive community engagement, and collaborative planning. PEP’s renewed focus on partnership and collaboration has already driven them to success and we’re looking forward to continuing to support them in that work. Congratulations to the PEP staff, Joyce Novak, Sarah Schaefer, and Elizabeth Hornstein, and the many partners and community members who worked tirelessly to shape this exciting next chapter for PEP!”*--
Susan J. Sullivan, NEIWPCC Executive Director

Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman: *“The Peconic Estuary Partnership brings public officials and scientific experts together to improve water quality in this important estuary,”* **said Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman.** *“By working together we can better address impacts caused by land development and climate change.”*

East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc: *“The Peconic National Estuary Program fulfills a vital role in safeguarding and restoring clean water on the East End,”* **said East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc.** *“Our initiatives in the Town of East Hampton to achieve this critical goal of improving the health of the estuary are significantly enhanced through working hand in hand with the Peconic Estuary Partnership.”*



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Pine Barrens Commission Executive Director John Pavacic: *“The completion of the Peconic Estuary Partnership CCMP is a significant accomplishment and the Commission congratulates the entire PEP team on having achieved this major milestone. We are very gratified to have been part of this effort which has also highlighted and reinforced the connectivity of the Central Pine Barrens with the Peconic Estuary and their interdependence.”*—**John Pavacic, Executive Director, Long Island Pine Barrens Commission**

Long Island Regional Planning Council: *“The Peconic Estuary Partnership has worked tirelessly to update the 2001 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan to address the current threats to the Peconic Estuary. The new Plan serves as a blueprint for PEP to direct its efforts and resources to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary and its watershed for the next decade. The Long Island Regional Planning Council supports PEP’s efforts to improve water quality, healthy habitats and wildlife.”* – **John Cameron, Chair of the Long Island Regional Planning Council**

Group for the East End: *“For nearly 3 decades the PEP and its guiding management plan have made a measurable difference in protecting and restoring the health of the Peconic Bay Estuary, and the regional economy it supports,”* said **Robert DeLuca, President and CEO of Group for the East End.** *“By bringing diverse interests together and pursuing a regional conservation and management strategy, the PEP has shown the positive impact that can occur when scientific knowledge is paired with community partnership. We applaud the great work that the PEP has accomplished to date and look forward to the next decade of accomplishments under the newly adopted CCMP.”*

PEP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The work of our partnership has always been dedicated to restoring clean water, protecting and enhancing vibrant ecosystems, and communicating sound science for nature-based coastal planning. In this way, we have shared some key successes: Since our inception PEP and our partners have completed 29 habitat restoration projects including diadromous fish habitat, wetlands, beaches, and eel grass habitats. PEP worked with our partners to establish the Federal designation of the entire Peconic Estuary as a Vessel Waste No Discharge Zone in 2002; we worked with New York State to establish the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Nitrogen in 2007 which set a limit for nitrogen pollution discharges in the watershed, leading to major upgrades in wastewater treatment plants; PEP supported the Southampton Trustees in their action to create the Bullhead Bay eelgrass sanctuary in 2009; and we worked with the East End Towns and Villages and the Department of Transportation to create the Peconic Estuary Protection Committee, the inter-municipal affiliation that focuses efforts on compliance with EPA’s Clean Water Act and New York State’s Phase II stormwater regulations. In 2019 PEP updated the 2009 Critical Land Protection Strategy for the Peconic Watershed, a strategy that supports coordinated efforts of many partners with more than four thousand acres collectively protected to date



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and incorporates climate change scenarios to help our communities adapt to predicted changes as a result of our changing climate.

More recently we have worked extensively with our partners at New York State and Suffolk County on ongoing work to model nitrogen inputs to the Estuary and to reduce nitrogen loads, by encouraging septic upgrades, developing fertilizer recommendations, and working with the agricultural community. PEP's Solute Transport Model of historic nitrogen loads to the estuary, Suffolk County's Reclaim Our Waters initiative and resulting Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan and the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan are all key components to ensuring clean water for future generations.