

The Day, New London, CT

A 'Blue Plan' to protect Long Island Sound



[BUY PHOTO](#)

4/24/2018 :: Region :: Standalone :: A woman lies in the sand at Ocean Beach as a sailboat passes New London Ledge Light on Tuesday, April 24, 2018. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

Published March 07, 2021 12:01AM

By **Judy Benson**

Jigsaw puzzles are a simple pleasure many of us rediscovered during the pandemic. With some favorite music playing in the background, it's a great way to unwind by focusing the mind on a pleasant challenge.

But what if there were no picture on the puzzle box? And what if the pieces formed a three-dimensional sculpture? For most of us, tackling that kind of puzzle would be anything but relaxing.

Now think of Long Island Sound as something like that three-dimensional puzzle, but one priceless in its value as an economic, recreational and environmental asset to Connecticut's people and wildlife. Some consider the Sound our version of a national park or forest, but it's really more the public commons where we play, work and traverse. Until recently, no one had a comprehensive guide to show how all the pieces fit together, or how a new element could be brought in with minimal disruption.

Enter the [Long Island Sound Blue Plan](#), a kind of specialized encyclopedia of the estuary with numerous maps, plant and animal inventories, habitat descriptions and illustrations of popular sailing routes, fishing areas, cargo lanes and many other traditional human uses we want to recognize and preserve. In both its print and digital forms, the documents that comprise the Blue Plan form the first-ever marine spatial plan for the waterway. It's a user-friendly, science-based tool that regulators, developers, conservation groups and the public can use to help ensure that the Long Island Sound of the future is the one we all want. It doesn't impose new regulations, but instead supplies a common denominator for understanding and evaluating proposals that will foster good decisions, whether that's about a transportation tunnel, energy cable or other project.

First envisioned in 2010, the creation of the Blue Plan began in earnest in 2015 when the state legislature approved the authorizing statute. Since then, the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Connecticut Sea Grant and the Connecticut chapter of The Nature Conservancy have led the complex process that involved some 200 meetings and webinars, input from more than 2,000 stakeholders and experts, and the synthesizing of volumes of information that is accurate, relevant and intended to be kept up to date.

Now, the final draft of the Blue Plan awaits approval by the full legislature, after being voted out of the Environment Committee on Feb. 26 by all 32 members present. At the public hearing two weeks before the vote, all 33 people who submitted testimony urged adoption of the Blue Plan. The unanimous sentiment came from a diverse array of voices – from environmental groups to a waterfowl hunter, from shoreline and inland residents to academic experts, from a shellfish farmer to a member of a striped bass fishing club, from a bait shop owner to DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes.

“Please, oh please, throw your full support to the Blue Plan,” wrote Karen Petersen Mehra of Greenwich. “This is a once-in-a-generation chance to DO THE RIGHT

THING and stand up and help Long Island Sound have a fighting chance at a healthy survival into the future.”

Asked John Pritchard of Lyme, an avid saltwater fly fisherman and president of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust: “Is there ANY downside in having such a potentially important and well thought-out resource as the Blue Plan?”

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