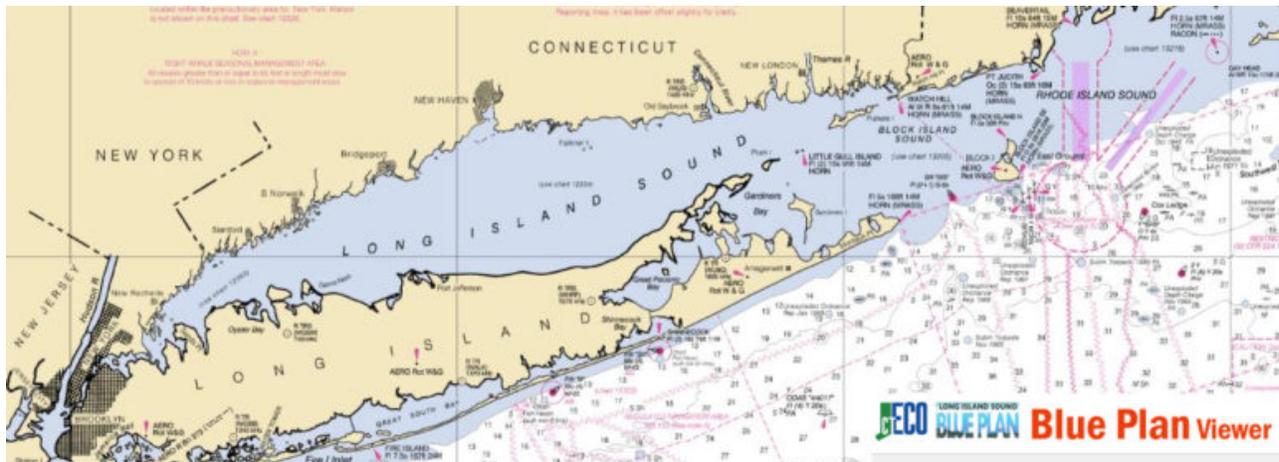


State legislature to decide fate of Long Island Sound Blue Plan

by **JUDY BENSON**
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Do a Google search on “puzzle sales during pandemic” and you’ll find phrases like “going bonkers” and “sales up 370%.”

While rediscovering the simple pleasure of jigsaw puzzles as a way to unwind, many of us are also experiencing the mental health benefits of turning off the brain noise by focusing 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 provides a common denominator for understanding and evaluating proposals that will foster good decisions, whether that's about a transportation tunnel, energy cable or other type of 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 final approval by the full legislature, after [being voted out of the Environment Committee](#) on Feb. 26. The leading legislative champions, co-sponsors, Rep. Joseph Gresko of Stratford and Sen. Catherine Osten of Sprague, led the way for a thumbs-up vote by all 32 of the members present. In 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.

The Blue Plan is “a living document,” wrote Jerry Morgan, owner of Captain Morgan’s Bait & Tackle in Madison, admitting he was apprehensive when he first learned about the project.

“It...allows progress without trampling on existing and documented valuable resources within it...It allows for the coexistence of activities without harm to established users.”

Karen Petersen Mehra of Greenwich said approving the plan would be a gift to the state’s future residents.

“Please, oh please, throw your full support to the Blue Plan,” she wrote. “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?”

The Long Island Sound Blue Plan [can be found here.](#)

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