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New York Kick-Offs Multi-Year Seafloor Mapping Project of Long Island Sound

DEC and SUNY Stony Brook Host Ship Seawolf Tour in Port Jefferson

Public officials, scientists and the public will have the opportunity to tour a research vessel that will map the bottom of Long Island Sound, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced. The vessel will be used as part of an effort to gather information and data on the seafloor to help guide future decisions about the uses of the Sound.

The event will include tours of the Stony Brook University Research Vessel Seawolf docked at the Harbor front in Port Jefferson. The tour is designed to provide insight to legislators and area scientists on the resources the Seawolf has to offer and that will be used during the floor mapping project. A similar event took place on June 15th at the Fort Trumbull State Park in Connecticut on board the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) Ship Thomas Jefferson. Both vessels will be used for the project.

"The launch of this exciting new partnership research

Contact for this Page

Press Office - Lori
Severino
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-
1016

[email us](#)

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project on Long Island Sound will benefit the future of this outstanding natural resource," said DEC Commissioner Martens. "The Long Island Sound provides an abundance of natural and recreational benefits to the area. This mapping project will assist the state in learning more about what the bottom of the Sound provides in terms of valuable habitat for our fisheries resources and ultimately will enhance our ability to better plan for existing and future uses of the Sound."

In an independent project, researchers from Stony Brook University School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences began mapping the seafloor of the Long Island Sound aboard the Seawolf this summer. These mapping efforts are helping inform regulatory and planning decisions about the use of Long Island Sound and the protection of its unique and critical habitats. The project is a collaborative effort between several state, federal and research organizations.



Partners in the research effort include the states of New York and Connecticut, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NOAA and area universities from New York and Connecticut. This collaborative work will focus on the collection of high-resolution geophysical data for the seafloor of Long Island Sound, in the territorial waters of the State of Connecticut and the State of New York.

Surveys are planned for a pilot project this summer and long-term seafloor mapping of Long Island Sound habitats over the next several years. Initial surveys will take place in the mid-Sound area of Stratford Shoal, extending from New York, on the North shore of Long Island, to the Connecticut shoreline.

Funding for this project, a total of \$1,382,020 comes from a June 2004 settlement between Connecticut, New York, Long Island Power Authority, Northeast Utilities and the Cross Sound Cable Company. The settlement arose from the adverse impacts to Long Island Sound from non-compliance with permits for a variety of energy-related infrastructure projects across the Sound. The fund was created for the purpose of mapping the benthic, or bottom environment, of Long Island Sound to identify areas of special resource concern, as well as areas that may be more suitable for the placement of energy and other infrastructure. This activity will provide valuable information for preserving and protecting the coastal and estuarine environments and water quality of Long Island Sound.

"It's routine to map critical natural resources on the land to manage and protection them," said Mark Tedesco, director of the EPA's Long Island Sound Office. "EPA is proud to partner with NOAA, NYS DEC, Connecticut DEEP, the NY and CT Sea Grant programs, and university scientists to research and map the seafloor habitats of Long Island Sound. This initiative will help identify and protect the Sound's vital resources."

"This seafloor mapping project, which will help us better understand the Sound's resources and how we can best protect them, is critical to both the environmental and economic future of the region," said Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Commissioner Daniel C. Esty. "Wise policy decisions about any proposed future uses of the seafloor of the Sound for projects such as new pipelines or cables must be based on the type of sound science and data that this mapping project will provide."

Minghua Zhang, Dean, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences (SoMAS) at Stony Brook University said that SoMAS investigators have been at the forefront of using this modern technology around the world and in New York coastal waters.

"This is an important undertaking particularly as those in charge with oversight of the Long Island Sound are confronted with trying to adjust to consequences of climate

change," said Zhang. "Undertaking applied research of this type, which will help the State and the region, is what was envisioned by the NY State Legislature when they created the Marine Sciences Research Center (predecessor of SoMAS)."

"This project will help us better understand the seabed of Long Island Sound," said Assemblyman Bob Sweeney, Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation. "A better understanding of the Sound will help us to protect and preserve the vitally important aquatic life that is used by millions of people for recreation or for their livelihood."

"The Harborfront Park pier was refurbished in early 2002, converted from an oil unloading pier to a 12 feet wide recreational pier as part of our Harborfront restoration project," said Village of Port Jefferson Mayor Margot Garant. "Funded with a New York State Economic Development Grant facilitated by Senator Ken LaValle and proceeds from both the Incorporated Village and SUNY Stony Brook, Port Jefferson is proud to have the Seawolf based on the refurbished pier to support marine science for the benefit of the entire Long island Community."

"The Sound's seabed is a mosaic of interconnected habitats that we do not yet fully understand," said Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. "Mapping our sea floor will allow us to use new science-based information to more fully understand our bottomlands and benthic habitat. Over the years there have been many battles to protect LI Sound including a dangerous LNG facility, ill-advised long-term dumping plans and disputes over new pipelines. Increased knowledge through this mapping project provides essential information to make crucial decisions that will help us better protect and shape the future of Long Island Sound."

The complete list of project partners includes:

- CARIS
- City University of New York
- Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental

Protection

- Connecticut Sea Grant
- Environmental Protection Agency, Long Island Sound Study
- Environmental Protection Agency, Regions 1 and 2
- Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University
- New York Department of Environmental Conservation
- New York Sea Grant
- NOAA, Biogeography Branch
- NOAA, Integrated Ocean and Coastal Mapping Program
- NOAA, Office of Coast Survey
- Stony Brook University
- United States Geological Survey
- University of Connecticut
- University of Minnesota
- University of New Haven
- University of Rhode Island
- Wesleyan University