



Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee

An Inter-municipal Watershed Protection Committee of the County of Nassau, the Towns of North Hempstead and Oyster Bay, the City of Glen Cove, and the Villages of Sea Cliff, Roslyn Harbor, Roslyn, Flower Hill and Sands Point

NEWS RELEASE

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SHELLFISHING TO BE ALLOWED AGAIN IN HEMPSTEAD HARBOR AFTER MORE THAN 40 YEARS!

On June 1st, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will re-open about 2,500 acres of Hempstead Harbor to shellfish harvesting. This will mark the first time that shellfish can be legally harvested in the harbor in over 40 years.

Given the fact that the standards for opening shellfish areas are very strict and require years of consistent results before waters can be certified, this is perhaps the strongest sign yet that years of efforts by citizen groups, residents and local governments to improve the water quality in Hempstead Harbor are paying off.

“This is a remarkable turnaround and a great team effort” said Bill Clemency, Chair of the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee. “In the 1970s and 1980s, the harbor was plagued with sewage spills, fish kills, industrial wastes and rotting barges with nowhere to go. Today we have nesting falcons, diamondback terrapins, osprey and now we can once again dig clams and oysters!”

The re-opening of shellfish beds was first set as a goal in the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee’s (HHPC’s) 1998 *Water Quality Improvement Plan For Hempstead Harbor*. In August of 2004, the DEC’s Bureau of Marine Resources initiated a sanitary survey of the area after observing commercial shellfish harvesters working in Long Island Sound, just east of Matinecock Point. Routine water quality monitoring conducted over the next four years indicated that water quality in outer Hempstead Harbor was meeting

the bacteriological criteria for certified areas, where shellfish can be taken for human consumption. The HHPC, the Town of Oyster Bay and the Coalition to Save Hempstead each assisted the DEC in the collection of samples. Results consistently showed levels of fecal bacteria in the area sampled are meeting the stringent state and federal standards

With these positive results, hard clam samples were then obtained from the area and tested for the presence of various metals, PCBs, dioxins, furans, pesticides, and radioactive elements. The data was reviewed by the New York State Department of Health which concluded that the potential exposure from eating shellfish from the newly certified waters was not a health concern.

The next step was for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to conduct a required dye study at the Glen Cove Wastewater Treatment Facility to determine the range of its discharge.

Finally, the DEC conducted a shoreline survey to determine any areas where there may be localized areas of concern that would warrant those areas continuing to be restricted to shellfish harvesting.

After going through a public comment period and responding to comments, the DEC announced the opening date of June 1st.

Village of Sea Cliff Mayor Bruce Kennedy remarked:

“Sea Cliff has always had a special bond with Hempstead Harbor as its shoreline is part of what makes Sea Cliff so charming. It wasn’t that long ago that the thought reopening Hempstead Harbor for shell fishing would have been a distant dream. The results achieved through this team approach have been tremendous. This consolidation of efforts through the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee has generated true results that will assure the sustainability of all our communities.”

Oyster Bay Town Supervisor John Venditto stated:

“Preserving and enhancing water quality is an environmental legacy for which I would like my administration to be remembered. I am very proud of the role the

Town played in bringing about the reopening of Hempstead Harbor to shellfishing. Working with the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee, the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor and other groups and governmental agencies, it is a testament to what can be accomplished when residents and government work together. Everyone involved is to be commended. The work is not done, though, and the Town remains committed to working toward the day when the remainder of the harbor will be open to shellfishing.”

North Hempstead Councilman Fred L. Pollack also pointed out:

“When we started the HHPC in 1995, we would have been thrilled with any of the improvements to water quality and the surrounding uplands that have been achieved. Opening the Harbor to shellfish harvesting is an extraordinary accomplishment and marks a new chapter in restoring the Harbor to its unique role as a recreational gem.”

Glen Cove Mayor Ralph Suozzi reflected on the achievement:

“The communities surrounding Hempstead Harbor have worked collaboratively and diligently in attempting to recapture the full potential of the recreational, economic and natural resource opportunities that those before us enjoyed. Kudos to all involved from the HPPC to the regulatory agencies and to each of the contributing communities for aligning ourselves along common goals that can only add to an enhanced quality of life for ourselves and future generations. Together we can do so much more than each of us can achieve alone.”

Patrice Benneward, President of the Glenwood / Glen Head Civic Association stated:

“Restoring shellfishing in Hempstead Harbor has required a long-term commitment and tremendous cooperation. We appreciate the effort that has been made across all levels of government.”

This will be the largest harbor to re-open in New York State in decades. This is especially significant when viewed in the context of the harbor’s condition as recently as in 1971. In October of that year, Newsday saw fit to publish a six page expose entitled

"Who's Killing Hempstead Harbor?" The article painted the bleakest of pictures with A. Harry Brenowitz, head of the Adelphi University Marine Sciences Institute proclaiming that the harbor was dying.

There are many factors that contributed to the harbor's remarkable turnaround. Credit must first go to the citizens group, the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor (the Coalition) which formed in 1986 and began its award-winning water quality monitoring program in 1992. Their focus started the ball rolling, with both the public and with local governments. In 1995, former Sea Cliff Mayor Ted Blackburn and then-NYS Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli (now New York State Comptroller) conceived the idea and formed the inter-municipal Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee (HHPC) under which the nine local governments that surround the harbor all signed an agreement to work cooperatively toward its improvement. With the creation of the HHPC, Long Island's first inter-municipal watershed effort was formed. It in turn, has spawned the creation of at least 5 other similar groups.

Carol DiPaolo, the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor's Programs Director stated:

"Since the inception of our monitoring program, we have observed dramatic improvements around the harbor, evidenced by the quantity and diversity of marine life. The reopening of the shellfish beds is the best indicator we could have to attest to the health of the Hempstead Harbor."

For the past 16 years, the HHPC, working with the Coalition, the Glenwood / Glen Head Civic Association and others, has conducted numerous studies, received millions of dollars in grants and has developed and implemented various plans to help restore the harbor. Meanwhile, many local governments have revised their zoning to ensure more compatible land uses and federal, state and local governments have cleaned up contaminated parcels around the harbor and have restored wetland areas.

At the same time, many of the former industrial uses around the harbor have been eliminated over the past forty years. Wastewater treatment plants have been either upgraded (such as Glen Cove's) or closed (such as Roslyn's).

Many of these efforts were funded by more than \$10 million in grants obtained through New York's Environmental Protection Fund grants from the DEC and New York State Department of State and by the two Nassau County Environmental Bond Acts.

More recently, the HHPC sought and received federal approval for a vessel waste "No Discharge Zone" for the harbor which prohibits all discharges of sewage from vessels into the harbor. Recently, the U.S. EPA announced its intent to extend the No Discharge Zone to all of Long Island Sound.

Educational campaigns carried out by the Coalition, the HHPC and the municipalities on such topics as picking up after pets, not feeding waterfowl, not over-fertilizing and proper septic maintenance and the corresponding actions taken by homeowners in response have all played a role.

The initiation of programs like the Town of Oyster Bay's award-winning GeesePeace Program have humanely begun to cut down on area Canada Goose populations and all that they leave behind.

In anticipation of the opening of the waters to shellfish harvesting, Nassau County, the Town of North Hempstead, the HHPC and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County conducted two "shellfish plantings" whereby nearly 3 million "seed" clams and oysters were placed in the harbor to grow and help increase future populations. The first planting took place on October 9, 2007 when one and a half million clams and a half million oysters were planted. The second occurred on October 15, 2009 when another 1.1 million clams and oysters were added to the harbor.

Not only did these plantings help increase the shellfish population, but they also have helped clean the waters since shellfish are filter feeders. They feed on plankton and other organisms that otherwise could stress the marine environment. A large clam can filter about a gallon of seawater in an hour or up to 15 gallons per day. A mature oyster can cleanse up to 30 gallons per day.

To further assist in the effort, during 2009 the Town of Oyster Bay conducted an extensive shellfish survey of the harbor to document existing populations and other conditions in the harbor.

Since the area to be opened is state-owned, once the DEC opens the area, anyone may harvest shellfish (clams, oysters, mussels and scallops) consistent with daily harvest limits and size limits for the various types of shellfish (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/29870.html>). It is important to note that the inner portion of Hempstead Harbor and three tributaries (East Creek, West Pond and Dosoris Pond) that empty into outer Hempstead Harbor as well as an area of approximately 20 acres around Glen Cove's Crescent Beach will all remain uncertified (closed) to shellfishing until further notice.

Residents who wish to dig shellfish for personal consumption will not need a state license. Those who shellfish for commercial purpose will require a state "digger's permit".

The DEC will continue monitoring the water quality of this area as part of its participation in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program. As conditions warrant, DEC will make changes to the classification of shellfish lands to protect the health of shellfish consumers and provide additional harvesting opportunities for commercial and recreational shellfishers.

In order to properly educate the public about the shellfish opening the HHPC has developed a campaign which includes a travelling display and an informational brochure. HHPC will continue its efforts to improve water quality in the harbor so that in the future, other areas may be re-opened to shellfishing.

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The Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee is Long Island's first inter-municipal watershed-based collaborative effort. It consists of nine local governments – the County of Nassau, the Towns of Oyster Bay and North Hempstead, the City of Glen Cove and the Villages of Sea Cliff, Roslyn Harbor, Roslyn, Flower Hill and Sands Point. It was formed in 1995 and is funded through municipal contributions and grants.

