



Ocean & Great Lakes Accomplishments



On August 9, 2006 the *New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act* was signed into law, pledging to “conserve, maintain and restore” the state’s ocean and Great Lakes resources. This groundbreaking legislation shifts NY’s coastal policy to a more comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach, rather than one focused solely on species-by-species or problem-by-problem management. Since the Act’s inception, New York State has appropriated \$12 million in funding to ocean and Great Lakes projects through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and – in the course of just 3 funding cycles –, much has been accomplished. Hard shell clam populations are

on the rise, monitoring for migration pathways of whales is underway and loggers are changing techniques on forested lands to protect watersheds. Our ocean, estuaries and Great Lakes are important sources of food, recreation, and revenue, and investment in these resources yields significant benefits to both the environment and the economy.

• **Two Pilot Projects: Great South Bay & Sandy Creek**

The Act established two pilot projects to help demonstrate the benefits of ecosystem-based management: one was established in Great South Bay, the other was in Eastern Lake Ontario. Comprehensive restoration plans are being developed for both pilots – two of New York’s most productive waterbodies – while moving forward with on-the-ground actions, such as the ones highlighted below.

Great South Bay. Three million clams were seeded in Great South Bay. Results indicate that they have spawned 250 to 300 million baby clams – bringing hopes that the hard clam fishery and the water quality benefits that come with these shellfish can return.^[i]



Sandy Creek Watershed. Much has been done to combat invasive species, restore riparian buffers, and hold workshops for loggers on sustainable forestry practices. Additionally, in February of 2008, the six-year Tug Hill Aquifer study began to accurately map the aquifer's geological layers and water flow. Once completed, the study will be an invaluable tool to aid local municipalities looking to develop accurate comprehensive water management programs.



- **Whale Monitoring**

Whale monitoring listening buoys have been deployed in New York Harbor to help determine the presence of whale species migrating through the state's waters, and better identify key migration routes in the hopes of preventing tragic ship strikes. The project's initial data has already documented migrating humpbacks, fin and right whales – some just a few miles from the Statue of Liberty. “These are some of the largest and rarest animals on this planet trying to make a living just a few miles from New York's shores,” said Chris Clark, director of the Bioacoustics Research Program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.^[iv] A similar initiative was performed in Massachusetts and the state now has a buoy listening system that allows researchers to alert ship operators to the whales' presence in real time so that ships can slow down or be re-routed to prevent collisions.

- **Bycatch Observer Program**



Bycatch is the marine life (*e.g.*, fish, seabirds, sea turtles) that is unintentionally caught by commercial fishing activities and thrown back, either dead or dying, because it's a protected species or just unwanted. New York has programs in place to independently count the amount of fish brought into its docks – but not everything that is caught at sea, and this creates problems in monitoring the health of our marine species. EPF funding has been allocated to help design and implement an at-sea observer program to identify the nature and amount of bycatch, so that we can better manage our precious fish stocks like shad and herring and prevent waste.

- **Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas**

An online, first of its kind, Ocean and Great Lakes Atlas has been developed. This important database combines the state's current data resources into one user-friendly website available to the state and local governments, as well as the public. Continually expanding, the database will eventually house more than 900 datasets from state and local government agencies and universities into one user-friendly website.

- **Critical Data Collection**

EPF funding has augmented the state’s fisheries data collection so that we have a better understanding of the status of our important commercial and recreational fish populations. Funding has been used to help confirm commercial fisheries’ landings and ships’ trip vessel reports, which form the backbone of the state’s knowledge of the status and health of our state fisheries, as well as to expand New York’s nearshore ocean survey work and explore why the winter flounder population is failing.



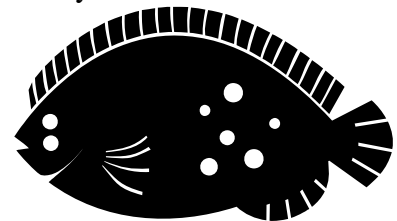
- **Educational Kiosks**

Educational and interpretive kiosks have been designed and installed to promote ocean literacy and sea turtle conservation. The kiosks have been placed in high visitation beaches, such as Robert Moses State Park, Montauk State Park, and Sunken Meadow State Park. Educational signage is also being developed for a 17 mile long barrier beach in the Sandy Creek Watershed. The beach contains the largest, most extensive freshwater sand dune formations in the State.

- **Interagency Collaboration**



The Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act also established an interagency Council co-led by the Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of State, and including the Commissioners of Agriculture and Markets, Economic Development, General Services, Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and Transportation; the President of the Energy Research and Development Authority; and the Chancellor of the State University of New York. Working together, these nine agencies have identified more than 200 state programs key to the ecological and economic health of the state’s ocean and costal resources. From the 200 programs they have taken a detailed look at over 30 programs to see where they can collaborate and become more efficient to improve and streamline their program. This inter-agency collaboration and internal review of improving and re-writing existing guidelines is the foundation of using an ecosystem based management approach.



^[i] “Baby clams a good sign.” Newsday. 14 Nov. 2008.

^[iv] Chang, Kenneth. “Near New York Harbor, the Song of Whales.” New York Times 17 Sept. 2008. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/science/17whale.html?ref=science.](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/science/17whale.html?ref=science;); “Whales Heard Near New York City.” U.S. News & World Report. 16 Sept. 2008. <http://www.usnews.com/articles/science/plants-animals/2008/09/16/whales-heard-near-new-york-city.html>.