
H HARBOR NEWS

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Report Cards Released for Long Island Sound and Hempstead Harbor

The Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor has been working as a partner in the development of a report card for Hempstead Harbor for the purpose of more clearly communicating the health of the harbor to the general public. The Inner Hempstead Harbor report card was part of a larger effort that began in 2013 to launch the Long Island Sound report card and included a Norwalk Harbor report card (see http://www.ian.umces.edu/press/location/long_island_sound/; http://www.nfwf.org/whoware/mediacenter/pr/Pages/loundislandsoundreportcards-pr-15-0608.aspx#.VXs9F0bl_-d/; <http://ecoreportcard.org/report-cards/long-island-sound/>; and <http://www.umces.edu/project/umces-produces-first-ever-ecosystem-health-report-card-long-island-sound>). The process was intended to highlight some of the great successes that we have had around the sound and harbor as well as point to areas where more work is needed or more data must be collected. The report cards were released on June 8 with a New York press event at the Webb Institute in Glen Cove and a press event occurring simultaneously on the Connecticut side of the sound, in Westport.

The Inner Hempstead Harbor report card uses and grades 2013 data collected for the Hempstead Harbor water-monitoring program for three water-quality parameters: dissolved oxygen (the form of oxygen fish and other marine life need to breathe and survive), nitrogen (which can end up in the harbor through storm-water runoff, failing septic systems and waste-water treatment plants, and even atmospheric deposition), and water clarity. The grades for each of the parameters were



calculated to arrive at a grade for each of three sections in the inner harbor: the lower harbor south of what was formerly Bar Beach, the middle section of the harbor, and Glen Cove Creek.

A grade of D+ was calculated for the entire area that makes up “inner harbor” and concludes that nitrogen levels and water clarity need improvement. Water clarity for this area was given a failing grade (F) and is what pulled down the overall grade for the area. Nitrogen levels were given a C grade. **The good news highlighted in the report card is the B+ grade for dissolved oxygen (DO),** one of the most important testing parameters in determining the health of a waterbody. DO is one of the first things we focused on when CSHH started the monitoring program in 1992.

What Is Not Included in the Report Card

For those who live and work around Hempstead Harbor or use it for a wide variety of recreational activities, there is no doubt that the harbor has experienced a tremendous turnaround in water quality and improved habitat. The harbor now sustains an incredible diversity of fish and other marine life and wildlife.

The 2011 reopening of shellfish beds for harvesting in the outer harbor after more than 40 years of closure is a testament to the improvements in water quality (specifically lower bacteria levels, which were not graded in the report card). By 2014, Hempstead Harbor had the second highest number of hard clams harvested in New York, representing nearly a \$1.4 billion economic value. Unfortunately, the outer harbor--which constitutes more than a third of the entire area of the harbor--was not included in the report-card grade because we lacked the necessary data to calculate a score. For 2013, we had only one monitoring station in the outer harbor, whereas three stations with the data for the same testing parameters are required to calculate a grade. For the 2015 water-monitoring program, we have added two more monitoring stations in the outer harbor to help us assess the health of this large area.

How Report Cards Can Help Communicate the Health of the Harbor and LI Sound

The just-released Inner Hempstead Harbor report card describes the wide variety of activities that take place around the harbor, despite the grades that are given to both the inner harbor and the western portion of Long Island Sound. The report cards attempt to sort out the complexities of the parameters that are used to assess water quality in the harbor and the sound. We know from our members that this information is not easily understood. More has to be done to distill scientific information and relate it to how people use the harbor and the sound. Most people want to know



the answers to a few pretty simple questions: is it safe to swim, fish, and sail on the harbor and the sound, and what can individuals do help improve water quality?

Residents Have Their Say about Water Quality in Hempstead Harbor

In anticipation of the release of the report cards, the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor conducted an survey to capture local community residents' knowledge, perceptions, and use of the harbor (see [http://www. http://coalitiontosavehempsteadharbor.org/survey-of-residents-views-of-conditions-in-hempstead-harbor/](http://www.coalitiontosavehempsteadharbor.org/survey-of-residents-views-of-conditions-in-hempstead-harbor/)). We also asked survey participants to give a letter grade to various aspects of Hempstead Harbor. By June 1, 70 respondents (who included primarily residents who live in communities bordering Hempstead Harbor) gave us their opinions of Hempstead Harbor's water quality. The following is a summary of the results.

Nearly 89% of the survey respondents have lived in communities adjoining the harbor for more than 10 years, with an additional 6% in residence between 5 and 10 years. Accordingly, this sample represents a group of people who have observed Hempstead Harbor for a fair number of years.

The most striking result is the percentage of respondents (85.7%) who said there has been an improvement in Hempstead Harbor. Of these respondents, 60% have observed "cleaner," "clearer" water; 32% said there is more marine and wildlife. The 8.5% of respondents who said the harbor has declined noted debris, odor, spills and runoff as concerns. In a separate question to rate the degree of clarity on a scale from A (excellent) to F (failing), 46% gave Hempstead Harbor an A or B, while 36% rated clarity C and 11% D or F. Similar percentages were reported for the absence of floatable debris: 47% A or B; 32% C; 19% D or F.*

Respondents' comments about water-quality improvements:

- *More plant life and birds, clearer water.*
- *Dolphins, swimmable in general.*
- *Water appears more clear, less polluted.*
- *I've lived here in the '70s and early '80s. I would not have put a toe in the water at that time. It's much cleaner now.*
- *Clearer water.*
- *Looks clearer. More fish & clams.*
- *Generally cleaner summer water.*
- *Cleaner water, so much more wildlife.*

Most survey respondents felt that Hempstead Harbor provides a suitable habitat for marine life and birds: 42% of respondents gave an A or B grade for marine life habitat; 53% gave an A or B grade for bird habitat. A C grade was given by 30% of respondents for marine life habitat and by 24% for bird habitat; 15% of respondents gave a D or F grade for both marine and bird life.



Cormorants on a float by the Sea Cliff Yacht Club (photo by Carol DiPaolo, 9/10/14)

As might be expected, respondents were less able to discern the extent to which chemical, bacteria, and nitrogen pollution, as well as levels of dissolved oxygen, are affecting the harbor. A large number of respondents--42% to 50%--opted for "not sure" in questions related to these areas.

Although the D and F grades are still cause for concern, taken in perspective to what Hempstead Harbor was like in the past, a tally of 85.7% of respondents reporting improved water quality reflects a significant achievement. In addition, **the overall grade that respondents gave to Hempstead Harbor for all parameters was C+.**

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

1. Hempstead Harbor received high ratings for the following categories:

- *Recreational Activities: 85% gave a grade of A or B.*
The most popular activities are (in order of percentage of participants): sailing, swimming, kayaking, walking on the beach.
- *Quality of Life: 87% A or B.*
- *Aesthetics: 71% A or B.*
Concerns include: overdevelopment and clean-up and maintenance of National Grid site and beach areas.
- *Economic Value: 74% A or B.*

2. Recommended Improvements:

- Continue water-quality monitoring program
- Reduce pollutants entering the harbor (sewage spills, runoff, dumping bilge waste)
- Increase public walkways/access
- Limit development

(*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to a "not sure" option.)

We want to hear from you. You can still fill out our survey until July 15. Let us know how what you think about water-quality conditions in Hempstead Harbor.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Everyone can do something to help improve conditions in and around Hempstead Harbor. Here are some suggestions.

- Don't pour harmful chemicals down the sink or into streets or storm drains
- Don't over-fertilize lawns and gardens in the summer and don't fertilize at all from November to April
- Don't overwater your lawn
- Pick up after your pets
- Maintain your septic system (have it pumped every 3-5 years)
- Don't leave litter on beaches, parking lots, and roadways
- Help with beach cleanups
- Create a rain garden
- Build and use a compost bin
- Use boat pump-out facilities
- Install a boat "fuel whistle"
- Don't feed ducks and geese
- Get involved and become a sustaining member of the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor!**



Beach cleanup at Tappen Beach (photo by Carol DiPaolo, 9/27/14)

“Sludge” or Pollen Slick?

That was the question that kept the US Coast Guard (USCG), NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor busy during the week of May 4. Both USCG and DEC had received several reports of “sludge” or an oil slick on parts of Long Island Sound and in some of its embayments. The agencies had investigated and assured that there hadn’t been any sewage spills or oil spills and concluded that what people were seeing were thick pollen mats mixed with algae.

We had been out on the water on April 29 for our reconnaissance trip preceding the beginning of the regular 2015 water-monitoring season and had seen this type of mat in different sections of Hempstead Harbor and recorded it as a pollen slick with possible algal bloom. We have seen this in previous seasons; in spring, when cars, outside tables, and other surfaces are covered with thick yellow-green pollen, these slicks appear on the water’s surface. As the pollen decays, it turns brown and can mix with other vegetation or algae to create a “mat” on the water’s surface.



Pollen slicks – not sludge-- in Hempstead Harbor (photos by Carol DiPaolo, 5/7/15)

When we received a call from DEC asking about our observations, we reported a pollen slick, as USCG and DEC had concluded. When we went on our first monitoring trip for the season on May 7, we saw a long, thick pollen slick stretching from an area just outside of Sea Cliff Beach through to Hempstead Harbor Club. There was no odor, but it was rather nasty looking. We took a sample right from the slick to have it tested for bacteria so that we could at least eliminate that as a possibility. The test results showed that there were hardly detectable amounts of bacteria – so no sewage spill was implicated in this event. We were unable to have tests done for traces of petroleum products but were assured that if these were present that there would have been a noticeable odor from the slick.

For anyone reporting unusual conditions on Hempstead Harbor or Long Island Sound, it helps to report the details. Take note of the location, time of day, and describe the conditions in as much detail as possible. If the event that you are seeing has to do with fish or wildlife, report the numbers, sizes, and conditions. If you are reporting unusual water conditions, also include color, area covered, and odors. And whenever possible, photos and GPS points help. You can call CSHH at 801-6792, and we will make sure the appropriate agencies are alerted.

Wild Life – Belugas, Bunker, and Deer

BELUGAS VISIT THE NORTH SHORE

Just when everyone's sights were on the Memorial Day weekend, visitors from the Arctic showed up Friday morning in Manhasset Bay. On May 22, when we received a report of whale sightings in Manhasset Bay, our first reaction was disbelief, so we called Town of North Hempstead Bay Constable Mal Nathan to check out the story. He not only confirmed the sighting, but he was the one who took the video of the three male juvenile belugas that went viral. (See <http://www.coalitiontosavehempsteadharbor.org> and click on the Facebook page.)

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had been tracking the whales that had traveled from the Arctic to the St. Lawrence estuary south and into Long Island Sound. (See <http://www.ibtimes.com/trio-beluga-whales-spotted-coasts-new-york-rhode-island-connecticut-1936100>.) On Monday, May 25, the belugas decided to spend some time in Oyster Bay.



Breaching belugas in Oyster Bay (photo by Carol DiPaolo, 5/25/15)

The whales seemed to be enjoying the north shore bays and found plenty of food. Observers in Manhasset Bay reported that the whales seemed to be going after herring and fluke.

FISH KILLS

Less than a week after the beluga whales were sighted in Manhasset Bay, we received a report of a fish kill in the bay that was limited in numbers and involved only adult Atlantic menhaden, commonly referred to as bunker. We called DEC, whose staff were focused on the large bunker kills and turtle kills in the Peconic estuary (see <http://www.newsday.com/news/health/suffolk-tests-peconic-estuary-site-after-massive-fish-kill-1.10492493> and <http://www.longislandpress.com/2015/06/02/fish-turtle-die-offs-spark-concerns-on-east-end/>).

The Manhasset Bay event was different from the large bunker die-off in the Peconic. About 25-30 individual adult bunker could be seen throughout the bay displaying unusual behavior – whirling at the surface and sometime swimming belly up or even vertically at the surface. About another 25 were seen dead on the small beach by the town dock. CSHH tested oxygen levels late in the afternoon, and they were high.

A DEC crew was able to visit Manhasset Bay the next day and also do testing – their results and observations were the same as those from the day before. Although fish samples were collected, none were viable by the time arrangements could be made to have the fish tested.

(Dissolved oxygen will usually be at highest levels late in the day and at lowest levels overnight. If dissolved oxygen is too low – a condition referred to as *hypoxia*--fish and marine life that can't get out of the area may suffocate. Low dissolved oxygen is part of the cause of the large bunker kills that occurred in the Peconic estuary and other areas. See <http://files.ctctcdn.com/beffa830101/b96f3299-9f06-45af-a6af-c01c98ec1497.pdf>.)

CSHH worked with the DEC and Nassau County Department of Health (NCDH) to develop protocols for fish-sample collection, storage, and shipment in the event of another unusual fish-kill event. A week later, another similar, limited bunker kill occurred in Manhasset Bay, but this time, thanks to the cooperation and efforts of the Town of North Hempstead, DEC, NCDH, with coordination by CSHH, fish were collected and shipped to Cornell, Ithaca, at the Aquatic Animal Health Lab for testing to determine whether a virus may have been present in the fish and implicated in the Manhasset Bay bunker kill.

DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS—NEAR YOU!

So you thought you would see a deer only if you traveled to the east end. Over the last couple of years, we have had reports of deer making their way west across the north shore bays. Recently, however, there have been increasing reports of deer sightings locally. (See <http://www.antonnews.com/greatneckrecord/news/28550-we-have-deer-neighbors-.html> and <http://longisland.news12.com/news/long-island-s-deer-population-moving-west-1.10520363>.) On May 18, four deer were seen at about 9:15 am in the Shorecrest area of Glen Cove. On May 30, a deer was seen at about 10 pm between Roslyn and Main Avenues in Sea Cliff, near an area behind the Sea Cliff Post Office.



Deer sighted in Sea Cliff (photo by Kenny Neice, 5/30/15)

29 YEARS AND STILL COUNTING!

That's how many years have passed since the Coalition To Save Hempstead Harbor was formed in 1986! A lot has changed, and a lot of the changes that have helped to improve conditions around Hempstead Harbor can be attributed to the hard work and support of longstanding CSHH members.

CSHH continues as an important voice in the community, still striving to protect our local environment. Operational expenses continue as well, and these can be met only by the generosity of community members.

We need your help! Please consider making a donation, payable to the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor, P.O. Box 159, Sea Cliff, NY 11579. If you can offer special services or technical assistance, please call 801-6792. Encourage friends to get on our e-mail list by writing to cs hh@optonline.net. Please let us know that you value CSHH's work over the last 29 years by making your tax-deductible contribution now. Go to <http://www.coalitiontosavehempsteadharbor.org> to make a contribution via PayPal.

