Division of Water Response to Comments
for the
Long Island Watershed Action Agenda

Background
The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) released the Draft Long Island Watershed Action Agenda (LIWAA) in the Environmental Notice Bulletin and on the NYSDEC Long Island Watershed Program webpage on June 25, 2025. The public comment period closed on July 25, 2025. NYSDEC thanks everyone who took the time to review the draft LIWAA and submit a public comment.

Here is a list of commenters:

Affiliation	**Name**	**Date**
Central Pine Barrens Commission	Julie Hargrave	July 16
Elizabeth Bailey [Garden City resident]	Elizabeth Bailey	July 25
Gerald A Ottavino [Member of the public]	Gerald Ottavino	July 25
Long Island Golf Course Superintendents Association	Pat Ryan	July 25
Northshore Baymen's Association	Robert Wemyss	July 24 & 25
Save the Great South Bay	Robyn Silvestri	July 18
Save the Sound	Ella McGrail	July 25
South Shore Audubon Society	Russ Comeau	July 25

Comments are summarized and organized in alphabetical order.

Central Pine Barrens Commission

Comment:

Page 4: The map on this page should show the boundary of Central Pine Barrens. Please contact this office if a shapefile is needed.

- *Response: Changes have been made in response to this comment. The map was updated to include the Central Pine Barrens boundary as well as other unique features of Long Island such as its Special Groundwater Protection Areas and the location of the Shinnecock Nation. The text was also updated to include information on Special Groundwater Protection Areas.*

Comment:

Page 5: This section should mention Suffolk County Water Authority as the main water purveyor in Suffolk County.

- *Response: The "About Long Island" section does not go into detail of water purveyors on Long Island. Water purveyors from Suffolk and Nassau County were part of the Implementation Committee that developed the Action Agenda and have reviewed the language related to water resources in the document. No changes have been made in response to this comment.*

Comment:

Comments related to the "Protecting Water Resources" section of the narrative suggested that there should be a distinction between freshwater and tidal or estuarine habitats. Additionally, the section should include often unmapped but ecologically significant habitats like vernal pools.

- *Response: Changes have been made in response to this comment. The "About Long Island" section was updated to include more information on the fresh waters that are present on Long Island.*

Comment:

Page 19: Summary tables should include the Towns that actively acquire and preserve land to protect water and natural resources and open spaces and that have 1) land use regulatory controls and 2) Community Preservation Fund (CPF) money including Riverhead, Southampton in the Central Pine Barrens and Southold, East Hampton and Shelter Island outside of the Central Pine Barrens.

- *Response: The tables on this page show where Implementation Committee organizations, grouped by category, self-assigned to advance specific actions. There are no specific Towns on the Implementation Committee and therefore we cannot comment as to their commitment to these actions. This does not exclude Towns or other entities who do similar work to advance these actions. When the Implementation Committee begins work that addresses open space and land preservation, relevant municipalities or other organizations will be engaged. No changes have been made in response to this comment.*

Comment:

Comments related to the Healthy Habitats goal narrative. This section should include the variety of mechanisms and planning practices local municipal zoning codes utilize to protect natural vegetation and habitat while accommodating development. This section should also include Town CPF Programs and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Programs that conserve land while also accommodating efficient, orderly development.

- *Response: The purpose of the "Healthy Habitats" goal section is not to go into detail on the various types of mechanisms and practices, but to give an overview of the Healthy Habitats goal. The specific mechanisms and practices suggested were part of the conversation when drafting the Actions underneath this goal and will continue to be a part of the discussion when implementation of projects has begun in*

coordination with the Implementation Committee. No changes have been made in response to this comment.

Comment:

Page 25: This section should cover the NYS Environmental Conservation Law Article 57 the Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act of 1993 with its goals of groundwater protection and ecological resource protection, compact efficient and orderly development and preservation of cultural resources and support of environmental education and stewardship partnerships and activities. The Commission is presently engaged in a year-long feasibility study to build a Central Pine Barrens Nature Center. This type of center focused on the history and resources of the region is planned to engage the public and Commission partners to experience and spread awareness and education about the presence of the Central Pine Barrens. This study is another reason the Commission should be engaged in the Action Agenda on its mission to "education the public on how to protect, improve and sustain water resources for the future," and to "foster stewardship" and "engage residents and the public," as it is described in the Action Plan Agenda.

- *Response: The Action Agenda does not call out specific laws or regulations but instead gives a more general reference to all "Local, state, and federal regulations" in the Supporting Efforts section under each goal, this includes NYS ECL Article 57. No changes have been made in response to this comment.*

Elizabeth Bailey [Garden City Resident]

Comment:

The comment opens by expressing support for the ongoing efforts at reducing nitrogen levels in Long Island waters, specifically mentioning the Bay Park Conveyance project. The comment touches on a number of topics, including strengthening water conservation education and outreach, county legislation related to irrigation systems, and upgrading public water suppliers to "Eye on Water" systems. It is also noted that Nassau County and Suffolk County's situations be handled separately due to various differences between the counties, including prevalence of agriculture, sewers, and impermeable surfaces. The comment concludes by asking where the effort to measure success is captured within the Action Agenda.

- *Response: The Long Island Watershed Program recognizes the concerns outlined in the comment. Water conservation and water usage is a key part of the Action Agenda. Under the Sustainable Groundwater Resources goal, implementation activities like promoting sustainable landscaping for water conservation, educating homeowners on water usage and how to reduce their usage, as well as working with public water suppliers and governments will be a focus. Long Island Watershed Program staff, in partnership with the Implementation Committee, will be evaluating the progress made under each goal, objective, and action in five years and an*

adaptive management approach will be used throughout the 10-year plan to ensure continued success. No changes were made in response to this comment.

Gerald Ottavino [Member of the public]

Comment:

The comment proposes several changes to NYS Environmental Conservation Laws about wells, including new regulations regarding permitting and expiry, and expresses support for restrictions on pumping. Additionally, the comment proposes laws regarding the quantity of water that can be pumped from a well, and to categorize geographic areas based on aquifer health. The comment concludes by suggesting that the Action Agenda address legacy and emerging contaminants in groundwater and suggests that the Action Agenda utilize the findings from the Long Island Groundwater Sustainability Project to make changes to Environmental Conservation Laws.

- *Response: The Long Island Watershed Program acknowledges the concerns outlined in the comment. Water conservation is a priority of the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda (LIWAA), specifically under the Sustainable Groundwater Resources goal. The Actions under each goal were written to be able to capture a broad range of potential activities to meet the goal. The activities outlined in this comment that relate to the LIWAA include those that reference the Long Island Groundwater Sustainability Project (LIGWSP). As the LIGWSP progresses and the scientific understanding of the aquifer system's response to various stresses evolves, policies and practices will be evaluated. Additionally, science-based decision making is a cross-cutting principle of the LIWAA. The other comments are outside the scope of the LIWAA. No changes have been made in response to this comment.*

Long Island Golf Course Superintendents Association

The Long Island Golf Course Superintendents Association (LIGCSA) provided a letter of support for the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda. The LIGCSA indicated that their members are committed environmental stewards who care deeply about the health of Long Island's water resources and ecosystems. The letter outlined the key environmental services golf courses offer, as well as the practices the industry has implemented to improve water quality and promote water conservation. LIGCSA highlighted their support for science-based water use policies and university-backed research on best management practices for water use and turfgrass sustainability. The letter closed with LIGCSA looking forward to collaborating and contributing to protecting Long Island's water resources.

- *Response: Thank you for your letter of support. No changes were made in response to this comment.*

North Shore Baymen's Association

Comment:

Comments suggest that nutrient bioextraction is not adequately backed by science and uses public money to perpetuate annual grant funding loops. Comment suggests the bioextraction program should be subject to an audit and practices like wetland restoration should be prioritized.

- *Response: Nutrient Bioextraction involves growing and harvesting shellfish and seaweed for the purpose of removing nitrogen and other nutrients from coastal waters, providing environmental and economic benefits. Nutrient bioextraction can complement existing programs (such as using advanced treatment methods to remove nitrogen from wastewater treatment plant sewage discharges into the Sound). Numerous scientific papers support bioextraction as a management approach. It is important to evaluate its potential and consider costs and benefits from broader scale implementation. No changes to the Action Agenda were made.*

Save the Great South Bay

Save the Great South Bay provided a letter of support for the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda (LIWAA). The letter highlighted how LIWAA's four goals mirror the pillars of Save the Great South Bay's work and ongoing initiatives. Save the Great South Bay expressed being encouraged by the Action Agenda's emphasis on leveraging partnerships, fostering local champions, and integrating public education. Additionally, the emphasis on integration of existing programs, plans, efforts highlight the coordinated, science-driven strategy of the Action Agenda. Save the Great South Bay urged the State to prioritize aggressive action on septic system upgrades, expansion of sewering in priority areas, large-scale replacement of outdated cesspools, and significant reduction of fertilizer use across Long Island. The letter closed with Save the Great South Bay's confirmation of continuing to collaborate with the State, local governments, nonprofits, and academic partners to help advance the Action Agenda's priorities

- *Response: Thank you for your letter of support. No changes were made in response to this comment.*

Save the Sound

Comment:

The comments open with Save the Sound's assessment of the Action Agenda, including support of the goals and objectives and specifically the focus on nature-based solutions. The second part of the comment offers opinion on the definition of the word "habitat" and puts forth a suggestion on that definition. The third part of the comment discusses

funding and expresses hope that the Action Agenda will include a section on funding sources for undertaking actions. The comment concludes by expressing hope that the Action Agenda will be a "living document" and suggests a website as a means to provide regular updates on progress.

- *Response: Changes have been made in response to this comment. Thank you for your support. The definition of "habitat" was updated to better convey what habitat the Action Agenda includes. The actions described in the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda will be implemented by various federal, state, local, and private organizations which makes it difficult to capture all the funding sources that might avail themselves to this effort. The "Implementation" section was updated to reflect the essential role funding plays in implementation. The webpage for the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda currently exists and will provide program updates. The webpage can be found here: LIWP Action Agenda - NYSDEC.*

South Shore Audubon Society

Comment:

A key benefit is how significant it will be to have a Long Island Watershed Action Agenda. It will put LI on a more level playing field with other big watersheds, like the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain and the Hudson River, that all have DEC action agendas. Having an Action Agenda for LI can increase funding opportunities, increase program longevity, and increase focus on Long Island.

- *Response: Thank you for your support. No changes were made in response to this comment.*

Comment:

DEC's new Long Island Watershed Action Agenda has an expanded scope beyond the legacy Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan's nitrogen reduction alone. The new Action Plan includes phosphorus, pathogens, and recent emerging contaminants on Long Island such as 1,4-dioxine, PFAS, and can include any other pollutant sources. However, the Action Agenda does not directly acknowledge state or federal environmental cleanup sites on Long Island which has an all-time history of 256 such sites, some of which still exist as superfund sites today. Some sites still have industrial toxins and plumes in the water below ground, some of which reach bay waters. This topic is very important to residents, so it may be comforting and inclusive for DEC to directly acknowledge it with information in the Action Agenda.

- *Response: The Long Island Watershed Program recognizes how important hazardous waste sites are to Long Island residents. While hazardous waste sites can contribute to water pollution, there are hazardous waste remediation programs in place at the federal and state level to address those concerns. These programs are efficient at investigating discrete sources of hazardous waste and recommending and implementing remedial measures. Therefore, it was determined that hazardous*

waste sites would be outside the scope of the Action Agenda. No changes were made in response to this comment.

Comment:

Comments suggest more groups should be included on the Implementation Committee, especially organizations that are wildlife-habitat oriented. Comment also suggests that the Action Agenda does not mention wildlife enough. In addition to wildlife needing to be included more, the definition of essential habitats in the Action Agenda is narrow. The Action Agenda should include all aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity and biological community needs for high quality water on Long Island.

- *Response: The focus for the Long Island Watershed Action Agenda is on water quality and things affected by water quality. The Long Island Watershed Program sees wildlife conservation and restoration as a co-benefit to implementing water quality improvement projects, but not the main focus of water quality projects. Additionally, the members of the Implementation Committee represent a balanced grouping of partners who implement projects across Long Island focused on water quality improvement. No changes were made in response to this comment*.

Comment:

Comments suggest including flora and native plant restoration into the Action Agenda. Comment emphasizes riparian buffers and vegetation and the benefit these practices have on water quality. Additionally, the comment notes that flora has a benefit for stormwater runoff management and emphasizing these practices would make a more holistic approach with the Action Agenda.

- *Response: The Long Island Watershed Program recognizes the benefits of native plants and green infrastructure, and the positive impact these practices can have in reducing stormwater runoff. Native plants, riparian buffers, and green infrastructure are included in the Action Agenda and are important actions related to stormwater, sustainable landscaping, flood risk reduction, and agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). No changes were made in response to this comment.*