

# GROUP ACTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF GROUP FOR THE EAST END

Let's Keep the  
East End Wild!

Disappearing turtles,  
frogs, ducks and more...

- Group Victory in Bridgehampton
- 400 Participate in Earth Day Celebration
- Huge Resort Complex Threatens East End
- Fight for Clean Water Continues

Photo: Jen Skilbred



# Numerous East End Species at Risk of Local Extinction – A Report from the President

## DEC Releases List of Species of Greatest Conservation Need



The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) quietly released an updated conservation status report reviewing nearly 600 wildlife species.

Sadly, the report found that of all the species evaluated, **372 species (63%) were in need of conservation action** to stem their decline over the next ten years, and another 111 (20%) lacked sufficient information to evaluate.

Of the 372 species already at risk, nearly half of these animals (~190 species) are considered by the State to be “High Priority” and in “URGENT” need of conservation action to avoid collapsing populations over the next ten years.

**We were shocked to see how many of these “High Priority” species were both present on Long Island and of substantial economic value to the region.**

Signaling that we may well be facing a new environmental and economic crisis if we don't improve the habitats that support these species.

It's almost impossible to believe that once plentiful species such as black duck, winter flounder, box turtles, pipefish, bay scallops, oysters, horseshoe crabs, hard clams, and lobsters are all on this High Priority list. In fact, it appears that Long Island in general and the East End in particular will experience a

disproportionate level of species loss due to overdevelopment, coastal water pollution, and climate change.

**Addressing these threats to our local wildlife may sound like an astronomical challenge but it represents the core of Group for the East End's mission** to protect and restore the region's natural resources including healthy populations of native wildlife.

For the better part of the last 42 years we have advocated for the protection of natural areas, wetlands and coastal waters that our native wildlife, shellfish and finfish need to survive. We have also fought successfully for local land use and land protection programs that have greatly reduced the habitat and species loss that we see in so many other parts of Long Island's overdeveloped landscape.

These efforts coupled with our direct action programs to restore degraded habitats, build nesting structures, and monitor rare and threatened wildlife, proves that where there is a will, there is a way, and that is exactly how we see the challenge presented by this recent report on the state of our local wildlife.

Instead of accepting the “inevitable” demise of the region, here at the Group we worked to create one of the largest and most successful campaigns for land protection anywhere in the country. In the end, the effort led to the now well-established Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund, which this year raised its billionth dollar for land protection and secured more than 10,000 acres of land for preservation. Proving positive environmental change can and does happen.

We now see a number of opportunities to link Long Island's ongoing awakening about its water quality issues to the many species identified as needing urgent help in this DEC

report. This linkage will very likely allow us to build a larger and more effective base of support for long term political and legislative change.

Ultimately, the East End needs a Wildlife Action Plan. **The prospect of developing and implementing a plan to protect our most threatened wildlife is no less formidable than the land protection challenge we faced twenty years ago, and the water quality challenge we face today.**

However, we believe there is every reason to move ahead with this effort and transform the sobering findings of this report into



an affirmative plan for species conservation, while there is still time to make a difference.

*Bob DeLuca*  
**Bob DeLuca,**  
President





**Expansion of this sand mine would have gravely threatened already stressed water resources.**

# Drinking Water Victory in Bridgehampton

## Proposed Mine Expansion Threatened Drinking Water Supply

*Over the last year, the Group has united with neighbors, stakeholders, environmental organizations and government officials to fight against the proposed expansion of a pre-existing sand mine that could put our drinking water at risk.*

The project proposed a major expansion of an aging sand mine in the hills of Bridgehampton. It would have brought the floor of the mine and their vegetative waste processing operation 40 feet deeper into the earth, where pollutants could more easily reach our drinking water.

The project known as “Sand Land,” is located in a town-designated Aquifer Protection Overlay District where mining is currently prohibited. The property also lies within a State-designated Special Groundwater Protection Area, and a County-designated Critical Environmental Area. These designations were intended to help protect our vulnerable underground reserves of clean drinking water. In fact, the groundwater beneath this site represents the purest remaining source of clean drinking water for the eastern part of Southampton Town.

Even with a full awareness of the area’s environmental sensitivity, and numerous letters from community organizations, environmental groups, the Commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Health, and the Town of Southampton, the Long Island office of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) maintained that no further environmental review was necessary and was poised to approve the expansion.

As it became clear that the local NYSDEC office was prepared to let the project go, working with our partners, we turned our attention to the NYSDEC Commissioner’s office in Albany.

Thankfully, once the project was evaluated by technical staff in Albany the full extent of the application’s environmental risks were acknowledged and the Albany NYSDEC rejected the sand mine expansion. In its denial of the application the NYSDEC cited a long list of environmental concerns, which validated every single issue raised by the Group and its partners throughout the application process. Although the applicant appears intent on fighting this determination, for now, thanks to your support, we have succeeded in protecting Long Island’s drinking water and bringing proper scrutiny to the

assessment of outdated industrial operations located directly above our only source of fresh drinking water.



***“In its denial of the application the NYS DEC cited a long list of environmental concerns, which validated every single issue raised by the Group and its partners...”***





## Instilling a Conservation Ethic

The Group's education team has been busy as usual this school year. Group educators taught a variety of engaging and captivating natural science programs in over 30 different classrooms in 18 schools across the East End from Eastport to Montauk and Orient. They also provided weekly hands-on environmental lessons to children in Springs School's Project MOST (which provides enriching after school activities for East Hampton children regardless of their ability to pay.)

Our educators have been very busy at Downs Farm Preserve as well. In just over two years, the Group has taught over 95 programs, held three community service days, planted two gardens, and fostered an interest in natural science for countless children and their families. During the busy spring field trip season Group educators are leading students from East End public and private schools through beautiful local areas while teaching about the natural wonders that abound almost daily. Our beloved education programs connect concepts students are learning in the classroom, with real world, hands-on experiences in our local environment. Thanks to your generous contributions we are fostering a love of the East End's wild spaces and a conservation ethic in the next generation!

## 2nd annual Earth Day Celebration

at Downs Farm Preserve hosted by Group for the East End is a huge success!

Approximately 400 people participated in crafts, games, gardening, hiking, presentations, and wildlife experiences, with 30 local organizations and businesses represented. Thanks to all who joined us!

Don't forget to sign-up your young naturalist for our ever popular **Summer Field Ecology Program today!**

For more information contact: Steve Biasetti 631-765-6450 x205 or sbiasetti@eastendenvironment.org.

Visit [GroupfortheEastEnd.org](http://GroupfortheEastEnd.org) for a wide variety of upcoming nature adventures!



# Group Campaigns to Stop Huge Resort Complex Proposed for the Pine Barrens

## “The Hills” Development Would Put Local Natural Resources at Risk

The property known as “The Hills” in East Quogue, is the largest unprotected tract of privately held pine barrens forest remaining in Southampton Town. The Group has worked for years to permanently protect this parcel and organized dozens of civic, community, and environmental groups in support of its preservation. These efforts led to several formal acquisition offers by Suffolk County and Southampton Town, but all were rejected by the property’s owner.

Instead, the owner, an Arizona based development company known as Discovery Land has emerged with a plan that would transform this nearly 450 acre woodland, just outside the Village of Quogue, into an expansive residential, condominium and golf course destination resort complex that would dramatically alter the site, eliminate extensive swaths of pine barrens habitat, and put nearby surface waters of Shinnecock Bay at risk of further contamination from sewage and pesticides.

Although the Town of Southampton could have voted to reject the proposal, which is not allowed under the site’s highly restrictive zoning, the Town Board decided to consider the creation of a special new zoning district just to accommodate this project.

Working with members of the East Quogue community, the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and other concerned citizens, the Group is now pressing for a stringent environmental review.

The Group remains committed to a conservation outcome for this property, and with your support we will fight against any project that threatens to further degrade our local pine barrens and add any more pollution to our already-impaired waterways.



*“Given the scale of water quality problems confronting [Southampton] town, the Town Board should be spending far less time negotiating complex development plans and far more time on its recently released water protection plan, which could make a real long-term difference. With dead fish and turtles still piling up along our shorelines, it is time for a major course correction.” - Bob DeLuca, Group President*





# Will You Leave A Legacy?

Help preserve the East End by naming the Group as a beneficiary in your estate plans. Whether it's through your will, a trust, a retirement plan or an insurance policy, you can plan for the future, pass on your values, and make a lasting difference for the environment on eastern Long Island.

## For more information:

Please contact Vice President  
Aaron Virgin at  
631-765-6450 x218.

All calls are confidential.



## Piping Plovers Return

### Southold Town Supports Group Monitoring Efforts

Piping plovers are NY State Endangered and Federally Threatened birds. They nest on dry sandy beaches and feed on marine worms, crustaceans, and mollusks. Habitat loss, human disturbance, unleashed dogs on beaches, predators, and garbage are the main threats that they face. With your support, and a grant from Southold Town, Group Program and Stewardship Coordinator, Christine Tylee has been monitoring these shorebirds across the North Fork in order to collect information on local populations and protect their nests.



## Future Environmentalists Arrive

We are excited to announce the arrival of three beautiful new nature lovers. Group Educator Missy Weiss, Communications Specialist Jen Skilbred, and Group Advocate Jenn Hartnagel each brought a bundle of joy into the world this fall. Welcome Fischer, Lieve, and Cameron, we can't wait to see what great things you will do in this world!



# Strategic Partners Secure Clean Water Investment for Long Island

## State Budget Provides \$5 Million for Long Island Water Quality Plan

Despite some pretty challenging days in Albany of late, we are extremely pleased to report that our work with the Long Island Clean Water Partnership (of which Group for the East End is a founding member) has paid off again! Along with the Long Island Association, the Long Island Builders Institute and other industry stakeholders we have forged a unique coalition that is united in its desire to develop a clean water action plan for Long Island and has been working to secure funding for a LI Water Quality Plan.

With special thanks to State Senator Ken LaValle, Assembly members Fred Thiele and Steve Engelbright, and Governor Cuomo, the 2015 State budget has included \$5 million for a plan to identify causes, and recommend specific actions that will reduce the amount of nitrogen entering Long Island waters, which is one of the primary causes of the region's worsening water quality.

As part of our work with the Clean Water Partnership the Group has helped to highlight the negative impacts of excess nitrogen from sewage and other pollution in local waters and build community support for legislative, policy, and budget efforts at all levels of government to help clean up Long Island's water resources.

The development of a focused plan to address nitrogen pollution has been one of our strategic goals for clean water for the past three years and the dedicated funding in this year's budget will help that goal become a reality.

***Enjoying local waters is what makes our region special. Spring is here, and as you start enjoying East End waterways again, please continue to support us in our efforts to protect water quality.***



Sign up today for clean water action alerts at [LongIslandCleanWaterPartnership.org](http://LongIslandCleanWaterPartnership.org).

**You are a big part of the solution. Thank you.**

**Our Mission:** Group for the East End is a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization that protects and restores the environment of eastern Long Island through education, citizen action and advocacy. We inspire people to embrace a conservation ethic. All contributions are tax deductible.



Through Earth Share of New York's workplace giving program, part of each paycheck can be automatically deducted to support the Group. Sign up at [EarthShareNY.org](http://EarthShareNY.org).

**DONATE ONLINE**  
[GroupfortheEastEnd.org](http://GroupfortheEastEnd.org)



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Group for the East End

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# Fish Kills, Turtle Kills, Shellfish Closures, Toxic Algae Blooms

Photo: Joel Milton

## Nitrogen pollution from sewage is no longer just a threat, it is a crisis

This spring our beaches were strewn with record numbers of dead turtles and fish. It was simply awful. Immediate action is needed to reduce this pollution that threatens our environment, economy, health, and way of life.

**Right now Group for the East End, with your support, is fighting to take back our bays and harbors.** Specifically we are working to:

- Establish specific wastewater goals and plans for all East End towns.
- Pass local pollution control regulations that exceed those imposed by New York State and Suffolk County.
- Develop a lasting revenue source to get advanced sewage treatment systems in the ground NOW.
- Stop expansive development proposals, which only add more pollution to our local waters.

The Group has been solving complex environmental problems for more than four decades, and we are taking on this issue with every resource available. Thank you for your support.

Learn more about our work at  
**GroupfortheEastEnd.org**

