**Norwalk Land Trust wins $50,000 for island sanctuary**

National Fish and Wildlife Fund and Environmental Protection Agency officials announced Monday a $50,000 federal grant for a Norwalk bird sanctuary, contingent on $12,500 in local fundraising.

The Norwalk Land Trust won the grant which will complete its nine-year campaign to remediate toxic contaminants and convert Hoyt Island into a permanent sanctuary for birds and other wildlife.

“We’re excited and grateful that multiple highly-regarded federal conservation agencies affirmed our vision for a world-class bird sanctuary,” Norwalk Land Trust President Lisa Shanahan said.

The Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant, one of 41 awarded in New England, is paid for by the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, as part of the Long Island Sound Study (LISS).

The grants “provide a unique opportunity to make significant environmental improvements that will last generations," Lisa F. Garcia, EPA Region 2 Regional Administrator said.

Donated to the Norwalk Land Trust in 1979, the three-acre Hoyt Island is located near Village Creek.  The island is heavily used by local and migrating birds, sits on the Atlantic Flyway, and is home to 148 bird species.  A bald eagle nest is located near the island and young eaglets have been observed learning to fly and hunt on Hoyt Island.

The island contained an unoccupied caretaker’s cottage which burned to the ground in 2008 and contaminated island soil with toxic PCBs, asbestos, and other hazardous chemicals.  The NLT obtained a $100,000 Connecticut DEEP grant with support from Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff (D-25), and raised an additional $200,000 for environmental remediation, a complex operation scheduled around weather, tides, and Spring Bird Migration.  In 2021 workers using heavy equipment removed more than 50 tons of contaminated soil, loaded it onto a barge for transport to the mainland, and trucked it to Michigan for disposal at an EPA-approved facility.

“Remediating Hoyt Island was a heavy lift, but worth it as an investment in conservation that will pay dividends for Norwalk and our natural world forever,” Shanahan said.

“This work will enhance biodiversity, support the Sound and its inhabitants, and strengthen Hoyt Island’s resilience to coastal storms and flooding,” she added.

The Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant will pay for new native trees and shrubbery in the remediated area, installation of deer fencing, and habitat monitoring under a conservation plan developed by the Connecticut Audubon Society in 2013.

“Many thanks to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, the Connecticut DEEP, and especially to the foundations and individual donors who support the Land Trust’s mission of conserving open space in its natural state, forever — all were critical to this project’s success,” Shanahan said.

“In addition, we are deeply grateful for the support of this grant application provided by our city and state officials, including Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, Rep. Terrie Wood, and Norwalk Conservation Officer Alexis Cherichetti,” Shanahan said.

“This grant is the culmination of a successful collaboration between the Land Trust, city, state, and federal agencies, and also the Fairfield County Community Foundation, which introduced the opportunity,” Shanahan added.

Longtime Norwalk Land Trust director Midge Kennedy wrote the grant application, which marks the first time the organization has been the lead recipient of a federal grant.

Kennedy recently completed a 17-year stint as NLT director, and was honored at this year’s annual meeting for her pivotal role in multiple successful conservation campaigns, including the campaign for the Charles Irwin Schoendorf Farm Creek Preserve and the Hoyt Island Bird Sanctuary.  In December, the Land Trust board of directors elected Shanahan President, Peggy Holton, Mary Verel, and Connie Bennett as Vice Presidents, Rich Baskin as Treasurer, and John Fitzpatrick as Secretary.  Former President D. Seeley Hubbard, who led the organization 2009-14 and 2019-22, will remain on the board in an ex-officio capacity.

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