

RIVERHEAD NEWS-REVIEW

Environment

Senators push for Plum Island to become park

by [Joe Werkmeister](#) |
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The fight to prevent Plum Island's sale to a private developer — an effort local officials have been pushing for several years — received another boost this week from Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

The senators said in a statement that the property should be obtained by a federal agency such as the National Park Service or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Plum Island has “immense environmental value,” the senators said in arguing for the Senate to repeal the law that would allow the land to be sold to the highest bidder.

“With open space ever dwindling on Long Island, we should do everything possible to preserve the environmental and wildlife habitat that is Plum Island,” Mr. Schumer said in a statement. “We should change the current law and prevent Plum Island from being sold to a private developer.”

Either federal agency, the NPS or FWS, would commit to preservation and protecting the environment if it took ownership of the land, the senators said.

Proceeds from the sale of Plum Island are expected to offset the cost of the lab's replacement in Manhattan, Kan., which had ballooned up to over \$1.2 billion by 2013, up from an original estimate of \$450 million.

Officials from Southold Town, Suffolk County and environmentalists urged a New York State Assembly committee to [preserve Plum Island in September](#). Southold Supervisor Scott Russell called the sale "ill-advised."

"We need to do everything we can to keep to keep it the way it is," Mr. Russell said at the hearing.

In 2013, representatives of Donald Trump, who may now become the Republican nominee for president, spoke with town and federal officials about the possibility of purchasing the [land building a golf course](#). It's that kind of development officials hope to avoid.

"It would be a mistake and lost opportunity to rip apart this unique 840-acre environmental setting and destroy the habitat of the endangered species that live there," Mr. Schumer said.

Plum Island and the waters that surround it are home to a unique mix of habitats and wildlife species, including sea turtles, rare orchids and a number of migrating birds, some of which are federally protected as endangered or threatened species, officials said. The piping plover and roseate tern are among the endangered species, officials said.

Adrienne Esposito, the executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said there's once chance to preserve Plum Island while the federal government owns it.

"Selling Plum Island for development would be hypocritical and antithetical to all the programs designed to restore Long Island Sound, protect endangered species and listen to the will of the public, which strongly favors preservation," Ms. Esposito said in a statement.

Plum Island is currently home to a Department of Homeland Security animal-disease research center, which will be replaced with a new facility in Manhattan, Kansas. The government is required by law to sell Plum Island in the next five to seven years.

In 2013, the Southold Town Board [adopted local zoning](#) for Plum Island in an effort to push for preservation.

Mr. Schumer introduced a Senate bill in June called [The Plum Island Conservation Act](#) that would change an existing law to prevent the General Services Administration, which oversees the island in conjunction with the DHS, from selling to the highest bidder.