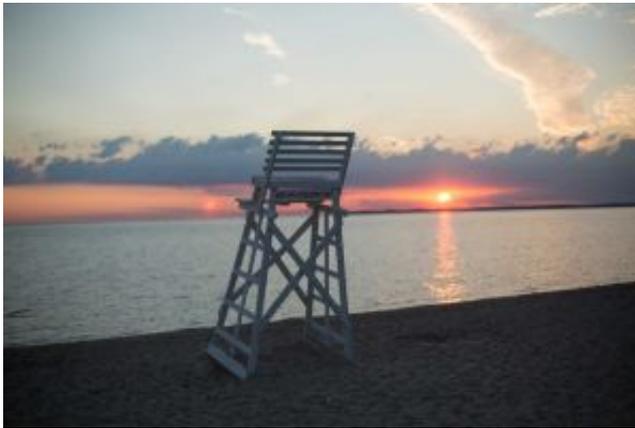


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Environmental report: Water quality of extreme western Long Island Sound gets failing grade

June 8, 2015 by EMILY C. DOOLEY / emily.dooley@newsday.com



The extreme western portion of Long Island Sound is suffering from high nitrogen levels, low oxygen and cloudy water but the 1 million acre system grows healthier in eastern portions.

Scientists, politicians and environmentalists released Monday morning a first-of-its-kind ecosystem health report card evaluating the sound, which is bordered by New York and Connecticut.

The water off Queens and North Hempstead scored an F grade while it's immediate eastern neighbor all the way to Northport earned a D+.

Smithtown Bay and north earned a B- while areas east to Orient Point earned B and A scores.

Researchers from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science created a water quality index by measuring nitrogen, phosphorus, chlorophyll, oxygen and clarity.

While abundant naturally, nitrogen is also introduced into the water through fertilizers and sewage. Excess levels of nitrogen can cause growth of algae that depletes oxygen levels in the water.

"By creating this scientifically-based report card process, we can track our progress in protecting and restoring Long Island Sound," a scientist from the Maryland school, Bill Dennison, said in a news release. "It will be challenging to protect and restore Long Island Sound in the face of population pressure and climate change, but it is heartening that there are still regions in the Sound with good water quality, thriving eelgrass meadows and abundant fish and shellfish."

The report card also looks at other wildlife and human health measurements, such as piping plover populations, acres of eelgrass and bacteria counts.

"This report card incorporates a variety of fish, bird and human health indicators that tell the story of Long Island Sound," said Amanda Bassow, director of the northeast regional office of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Inner Hempstead Harbor, which includes Glen Cove Creek and the Middle and Lower harbors,

scored an overall D+ but represents a bit of a comeback, organizers said. In 1987 marine trawls caught no fish and bottom-dwellers like starfish and crabs had 80 percent mortality rates because of low oxygen levels.

"At one time the challenges seemed insurmountable," said Nassau County Legis. Delia DeRiggi-Whitton, who pointed out that families fish, swim, kayak and enjoy the harbor in ways they did not years ago.

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