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June 15, 2012

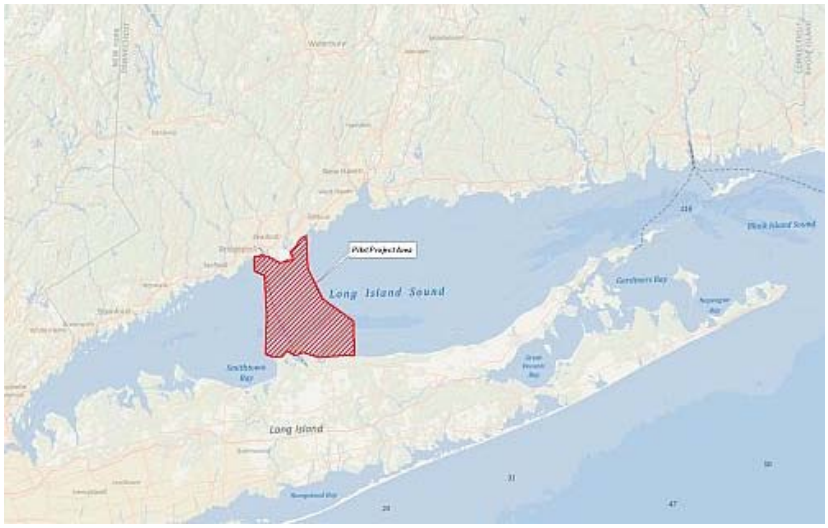
NOAA Ship Thomas Jefferson to Begin New Seafloor Mapping Project of Long Island Sound this Summer

Ship visits New London to display capabilities and technologies to public officials and scientists

Public officials and scientists today toured a research vessel that will begin mapping the bottom of Long Island Sound this summer as part of an effort to gather information and data on the seafloor to help guide future decisions about its uses.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) Ship Thomas Jefferson, was docked at Fort Trumbull State Park for the tour. The tour provided information to legislators and area scientists on the capabilities the Thomas Jefferson has on board that will be used during the surveys.

Thomas Jefferson will continue work this summer to map the seafloor of the Long Island Sound. The project is a collaborative effort between several state, federal, and research organizations. Partners in the research effort include the states of Connecticut and New York, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NOAA, and area universities from Connecticut and New York. This collaborative work is focusing on the collection of high resolution geophysical data for the seafloor of Long Island Sound, in the territorial waters of the State of Connecticut and the State of New York (figure attached).



Surveys are planned for a pilot project this summer, and long-term seafloor mapping of Long Island Sound habitats will take place over the next several years. Initial surveys will take place in the mid-Sound area of Stratford Shoal, extending from New York on the North shore of Long Island to the Connecticut shoreline.

"Long Island Sound is an incredibly important and productive natural resource for literally millions of people who live within its watershed and use it for recreation or their livelihood," said Curt Spalding, regional administrator of the EPA's New England office. "In order to make the right, smart decisions for the Sound, we need high quality scientific data. EPA is proud to partner with NOAA, Connecticut DEEP, N.Y. DEC and our other colleagues to research and map the seafloor habitats of Long Island Sound."

"This seafloor mapping project, which will help us better understand the Sound's resources and how we can best protect them, is critical to both the environmental and economic future of Connecticut" said DEEP

Commissioner Daniel C. Esty. “Wise policy decisions about any proposed future uses of the seafloor of the Sound for projects such as new pipelines or cables must be based on the type of sound science and data that this mapping project will provide.”

Funding for this project comes from a June 2004 settlement between Connecticut, New York, Long Island Power Authority, Northeast Utilities, and the Cross Sound Cable Company. The settlement arose from the adverse impacts to Long Island Sound from non-compliance with permits for a variety of energy-related infrastructure projects across the Sound. The fund was created for the purpose of mapping the benthic, or bottom environment of Long Island Sound to identify areas of special resource concern, as well as areas that may be more suitable for the placement of energy and other infrastructure. This activity will provide valuable information for preserving and protecting the coastal and estuarine environments and water quality of Long Island Sound.

“Ocean floors are amazingly dynamic, and we have to chart those changes to provide precise and accurate navigational data for today's maritime economy,” explained NOAA Corps Cmdr. Lawrence Krepp, commanding officer of Thomas Jefferson and the ship's chief scientist. “Our data is used to update NOAA’s nautical charts, but the hydrographic information can also be used to support a number of non-navigation uses, ranging from benefits to fisheries management to support of regional ocean planning efforts.”

“This collaborative pilot seafloor mapping effort will initiate the exploration of more than 1,300 square miles of habitat under the Long Island Sound,” said New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Joe Martens. “This pilot project will aid the two states in proactively addressing multiple issues that include proposed energy-related infrastructure, management and stewardship of marine resources, climate change adaptation responses and planning for dredged material management."

“No one has looked at Long Island Sound mapping in a systematic way until now,” says Ivar Babb, director of UConn’s Northeast Underwater Research Technology and Education Center. “This is precedent-setting in the scope of what’s being done for the Sound, and precedent-setting in the scope of what we do.”

“Long Island Sound is the drainage basin for New York City and much of New England, a region that is home to nearly 9 million people,” said Frank Nitsche, a geophysicist at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory. “The wealth of new seafloor data that that we collect during this project will provide a scientific basis for management of the seafloor ecosystem and provide an excellent basis for future research.

“In the past, advancing and retreating glaciers shaped the bottom of Long Island Sound” added Nitsche. Today, the seafloor continues to evolve as strong currents shaped by the tides and the shape of Long Island Sound itself make their mark.”

The complete list of project partners:

- CARIS
- City University of New York
- Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
- Connecticut Sea Grant
- Environmental Protection Agency, Long Island Sound Study
- Environmental Protection Agency, Regions 1 and 2
- Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University
- New York Department of Environmental Conservation
- New York Sea Grant
- NOAA, Biogeography Branch
- NOAA, Integrated Ocean and Coastal Mapping Program
- NOAA, Office of Coast Survey
- Stony Brook University
- United States Geological Survey
- University of Connecticut
- University of Minnesota
- University of New Haven
- University of Rhode Island
- Wesleyan University

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