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## Next phase of Sound cleanup will be costly

By Kaitlyn Krasselt Updated Jun 2, 2016



Alex von Kleydorff

The crew of the Grace move hoppers back on board after unloading the oysters in preparation for the boat to go back out into Long Island Sound at Norm Bloom and Son in Norwalk Conn. May 31 2016

NORWALK — While efforts to clean up Long Island Sound have proven successful, there's still plenty more work to be done according to area fishermen, shellfish commissions and scientists.

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn, met with Fairfield County stakeholders in the Connecticut shellfish industry Tuesday following weeks of tours and site visits throughout the state to learn about issues facing the industry. In April, Murphy proposed legislation asking for \$860 million in funding for Long Island Sound restoration.

"I'm particularly focused on this industry because as a member of the appropriations committee and further, as a member of the subcommittee that oversees most of the accounts that matter to fishing and aquaculture, the shellfish industry, I'm in a position to try to help," Murphy said. "We're talking about an industry in Connecticut that officially employs about 1,400 people, but in the runoff of that industry, it doubles and triples that amount (of people) so this is particularly important to the state."

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Among those in attendance was Copp's Island Oysters owner Norm Bloom, whose facility Murphy toured last month. Bloom reiterated that one of the biggest issues facing the fishermen is consistent testing of the waters where shellfish beds are located. Every time a storm pushes more water into the Long Island Sound, the waters must be tested to ensure they are safe. Oysters, which filter roughly 100 gallons of water per day, need about two weeks to filter out water that may be impacted by storm runoff, and consistent testing to ensure Bloom's oyster beds are in safe waters is imperative, he said.

"The biggest thing is testing," Bloom said. "We need to make sure the state keeps funded where they're able to get out and do all the testing. Right now we're spread out all over the state so they've got a huge area to cover now. That's one of the biggest things to keep us open is to keep the state and the testing and funding ... and the lab. That's really key to keeping us open and running."

David Carey, aquaculture bureau director for the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, said it is unclear how the state budget will impact testing this year, but that it will have an effect and the department is already looking at ways to reduce expenditures that won't impact testing.

"We're not in the worst position, as long as the weather cooperates," Carey said. "If we get a lot of wet weather and we have to keep retesting that could put us in a tight spot."

In addition to stormwater runoff, area fishermen said they're tasked daily with cleaning garbage out of the Sound. Even so, that garbage has created an uninhabitable environment in many areas.

Ed Stillwagon, of Atlantic Clam Farms in Easton, farms off the coast of Greenwich, an area that hasn't always been open for farming.

"Over the millennia people have dumped a lot of garbage in the Sound and they continue to do so every day," Stillwagon said. "Since I started there, I've collected probably 5,000 to 6,000 tons of garbage through my dumpster."

A screenshot of a website showing two hotel deals. The first deal is for JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu, offering a 32% discount and starting at \$105. The second deal is for Daiwa Roynet Hotel Takamatsu, offering a 19% discount and starting at \$79. The deals are presented in a clean, white box with green accents.

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Stillwagon said he collects roughly 300 to 400 pounds of garbage per day on each of his two boats, just in Greenwich. Stillwagon said the layer of garbage is then covered by a layer of anaerobic silt that washes out from the rivers and creates what the fishermen refer to as "black mayonnaise," a sticky, disgusting mush that makes the seafloor uninhabitable for any lifeform.

“And that’s just on my particular lots,” Stillwagon said. “My clam production is increasing as I go because I’m cleaning it up and it’s producing a more viable habitat not just for shellfish but for everything.”

Though Murphy’s original proposal was aggressive — asking for roughly 15 percent more funding for Long Island Sound restoration over current funding levels — Murphy said people in the Congress are taking note, and some additional funding has been added to the appropriations bill that recently moved out of committee and will be presented to the Senate. That, he said, is important progress toward what he calls the “second generation” of cleanup following improvements to the wastewater treatment plants.

“As aggressive as that sounded, some of the numbers that are embedded in the budget that is coming through the appropriations process suggest that folks are starting to listen and the fact is that we have a lot of overdue investments, we have some expensive projects coming up when it comes to the next generation of cleanup,” Murphy said. “Frankly, as expensive as the wastewater treatment cleanup was, the next generation of cleanup, which comes from nonpoint sources, is more expensive in many ways. There’s some people that are starting to listen.”

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