

Conservation Ownership on Long Island, NY

A Private Sector Approach – Conservation Agreements in support of Marine Protection



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Ownership Case Study: New York Restoration

Location

Great South Bay, Long Island, New York, USA

Description

This case study presents a project in which a large tract of subtidal lands were acquired in fee-title for conservation purposes.

As part of a regional effort to protect and restore Long Island's South Shore, **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** accepted ownership of 11,500 acres of subtidal bottomlands within the **Great South Bay** in October 2002, and an additional 1,500 acres in 2004. Both parcels were transferred from the Bluepoints Oyster Company, which owned the lands in fee-title (including exclusive harvesting rights) under arrangements dating from colonial times. While Bluepoints Oyster Company (now defunct) harvested shellfish from the bottomlands for the last 100 years, shellfish populations had fallen precipitously and attempts at aquaculture were not succeeding. Thirteen-thousand acres are now in TNC ownership, representing approximately 20% of Great South Bay.

As recently as 1976, Great South Bay produced more than 50% of the nation's harvested clams. By 2003, over-harvest and pollution reduced the catch to barely 1% of the 1970 levels. With clam populations decimated, bay water was no longer adequately filtered. Harmful algal blooms resulted, shading out eelgrass meadows and further limiting clam survival.

The rights conveyed with the Bluepoints property are particularly comprehensive. Owing to the nature of the colonial grants and patents, these rights include not only shellfish harvest but all rights of hunting and fishing in the area, subject only to the public right of navigation and the regulatory power of the state. TNC plans to use these rights to test new management approaches, which may be applied throughout Great South Bay and elsewhere.

TNC is working closely with the Bluepoints Bottomlands Council, a group of government, business, academic and environmental community members, to develop a plan to manage and restore the Bluepoints property and the entire Great South Bay. As the entire bottom is owned by just three entities—TNC and the towns of Islip and Brookhaven—it is hoped that a coordinated effort will lead to effective restoration. While the ecosystem is complex, and many factors may be involved in the loss of shellfish in the bay, first steps will focus on seagrass and hardshell clam restoration, as well as improving water quality. As of summer 2006, 480,000 adult clams had been placed in spawner sanctuaries on the property, and one million seed clams had been dropped into the bay to reestablish populations.



Learn More

See the summary for ocean and coastal management in **New York**.



Transaction Summary

Fee simple	2 deeds
Area	13,000 acres (5,260 hectares)
Resource	Bay Bottom
Dates/duration	2002 and 2004
Fee/price	\$63,000
Location	Great South Bay, south of Islip, New York
Use	Restoration of hardshell clams, seagrass, and water quality
Grantor(s)	Bluepoints Oyster Company
Grantee(s)	The Nature Conservancy

Lessons Learned

- While the bundle of rights associated with the Bluepoints property is particularly strong, major opportunities sometimes arise to own large tracts of submerged land where the bundle of rights may not be strong or clear.
- As a landowner, the Conservancy has a unique *place at the table* in planning for restoration of Great South Bay.
- Cooperation among all stakeholders is critical to ultimate success.

Cost Summary

Activity	Costs
Legal research of deed and negotiations	Unavailable
Purchase of tidelands	\$5,000 for the 11,500 acre parcel \$58,000 for the 1,500 acre parcel
Personnel	Unavailable
Shellfish restoration	\$1 million for 7 to 10 years

Lead Project Organization

The Nature Conservancy - **Long Island Chapter**
Great South Bay Preserve
 250 Lawrence Hill Road
 Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724
 Tel: 631-367-3225

Partners

- **Bluepoints Bottomlands Council**
- **Bluepoints Oyster Company**
- **Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County**
- **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**
- **State University of New York**
- **Town of Brookhaven**

Documents

- 2003 Deed ([download .pdf](#), 8,750k)
- 2004 Deed ([download .pdf](#), 5,483k)

Publications

- Kaledin, J. 2005. Chapter 4: New York Case Study: New Opportunities in Coastal Underwater Land Conservation, Great South Bay, New York. In Beck, M.W., K.M. Fletcher, and L.Z. Hale. *Towards conservation of submerged lands: The law and policy of conservation leasing and ownership*. 33-44. Rhode Island Sea Grant, Narragansett, RI. ([download pdf](#), 2,338k)
- New York Sea Grant. 2004. The Nature Conservancy and the Bluepoints Bottomlands Council launch sweeping Great South Bay restoration plan. ([Web page](#))
- The Nature Conservancy. 2005. Bluepoints Bottomlands Project making Great South Bay great again! ([download pdf](#), 189k)
- The Nature Conservancy. (No date.) Community-based restoration in the Great South Bay: Leveraging conservation cooperation to ecosystem scale. In Common Ground: Celebrating Conservation Partnerships. ([Web page](#))
- The Nature Conservancy. (No date.) Nature conservancy protects 11,500 acres of bay bottom in innovative marine conservation deal. ([Web page](#))
- The Nature Conservancy. (No date.) A new underwater frontier: Great South Bay, New York. ([Web page](#))
- Woodward, N.H. 2004. The Nature Conservancy Goes Deep to Save the Last Great Places on Earth. *The Hamptons.com*, June 23. ([Web page](#))

