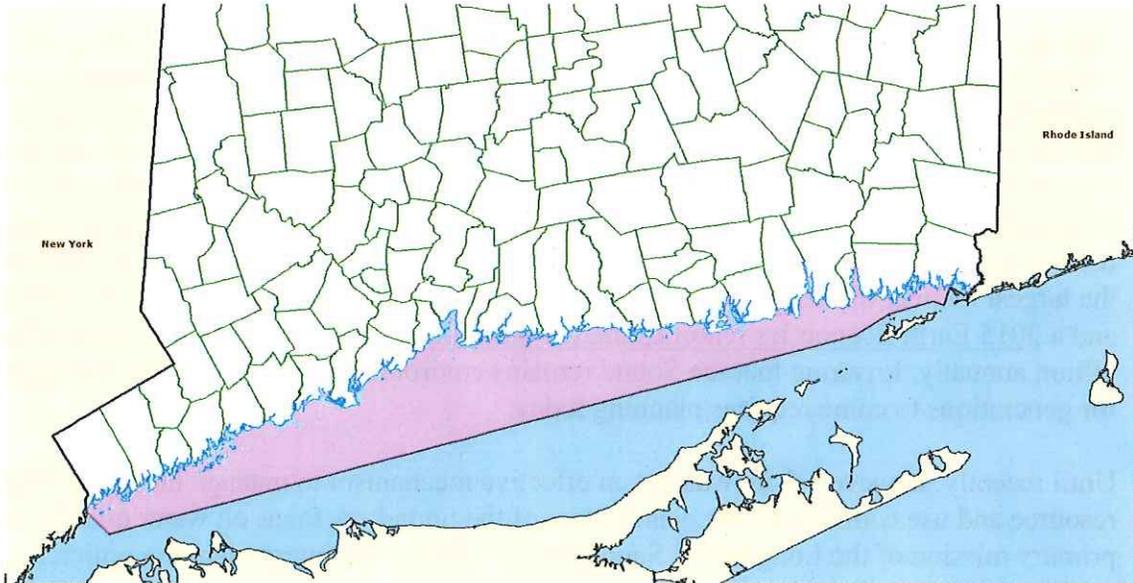


APPLICATION FOR 2017-2019 NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
LAND AND WATER RESOURCES DIVISION
BUREAU OF WATER PROTECTION AND LAND REUSE



THE BLUE PLAN

OCTOBER 14, 2016

PROJECT CONTACT:



David J.L. Blatt
Supervising Environmental Analyst
Land and Water Resources Division
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
79 Elm Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-5127
Phone: (860) 424-3610
Fax: (860) 424-4054
Web: <http://www.ct.gov/deep/lis>
E-mail: david.blatt@ct.gov

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The concept of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) has become a significant phenomenon in the field of coastal management, and has been applied at the international, national, regional and state levels. With this proposal, Connecticut's coastal management program offers the opportunity for a Coastal Fellow to play a key role in developing a marine spatial plan for one of the continent's most prominent and actively used estuaries.

Although a relatively small body of water, Long Island Sound has often been referred to as Connecticut's most valuable natural resource. The Connecticut shore of the Sound exhibits a distinctive heterogeneity, hosting many diverse ecosystems and habitats for 1,200 species of invertebrates, 170 species of fish, and dozens of species of migratory birds. The resource value of Long Island Sound has been recognized by Congress is establishing the Long Island Sound Study as part of EPA's National Estuary Program. <http://longislandsoundstudy.net> In addition, the Sound is also a waterbody heavily used by humans: 23 million people live within 50 miles of its shores, and 8 million within its watershed; the largest number of marine event permits of any Coast Guard district in the U.S. are issued for LIS; and a [2015 Earth Economics report estimated the value of Long Island Sound](#) and its basin at \$17-\$36 billion annually. Ensuring that the Sound remains environmentally vibrant and economically productive for generations to come requires planning today.

Until recently, however, there was not an effective mechanism to manage the spatial aspects of potential resource and use conflicts on the open waters of the Sound. A focus on water quality, which is the primary mission of the Long Island Sound Study, existing voluntary planning policies, and individual permit reviews conducted mostly by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, are no longer sufficient. In recent years, several controversial cross-Sound projects such as electric transmission cables, gas pipelines and LNG facilities agitated the public and prompted ad hoc legislative efforts that quickly faded or were forgotten. Since then, marine spatial planning came to New England as Massachusetts and Rhode Island developed state-level MSP programs, and all the states participated in developing the Northeast Regional Ocean Plan under the umbrella of the federal National Ocean Policy: <http://neooceanplanning.org>.

In Connecticut, proposals related to marine spatial planning had been discussed within the Department since around 2008, but it was not until after several years of effort by a coalition of partners grouped around a the Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, led by Connecticut Sea Grant and The Nature Conservancy, including agency staff, universities, and NGOs, that the concept of MSP gained any traction. The Working Group concluded that legislation would be needed to establish effective marine spatial planning in Connecticut, and worked towards the ultimate passage of PA 15-66, An Act Concerning a Long Island Sound Blue Plan and Resource and Use Inventory, which was enacted unanimously in 2015: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/ACT/pa/pdf/2015PA-00066-R00HB-06839-PA.pdf>, codified as CGS §25-157t https://www.cga.ct.gov/2016/sup/chap_483.htm.

The Blue Plan statute (so-called in reference to the Green Plan, a terrestrial statewide open space planning document) establishes a process to create a resource and use inventory of existing data, and a spatial plan, all under the oversight of the DEEP Commissioner, in conjunction with

UConn and a 16-member advisory committee of gubernatorial and legislative appointees. A draft plan will be completed by 2019 and, after formal public hearings and comment, be submitted to the legislature for approval.

While marine spatial planning is always an ongoing process, there are two significant work products required by the Blue Plan statute: a Resource and Use Inventory, and the marine spatial plan document. Under the bill, the Resource and Use inventory is to be completed by a Long Island Sound Inventory and Science subcommittee convened by the University of Connecticut (UConn). It must be comprised of the best available information and data on Long Island Sound's natural resources and uses, including all of its plants, animals, and habitats; ecologically significant areas in nearshore and offshore waters and their substrates; and uses of the waters and substrates, including boating and fishing, waterfowl hunting, shellfish beds, aquaculture and energy facilities, shipping corridors, and electric power line, gas pipeline and telecommunications crossings.

Based on the resource and use inventory, the actual plan is required to establish the state's goals, siting priorities, and standards for effective stewardship of the Sound's waters; promote science-based management practices that consider existing natural, social, cultural, historic, and economic characteristics of planning areas within the Sound; preserve and protect traditional riparian and water-dependent uses and activities; and promote maximum appropriate public access to the Sound's waters for traditional public trust uses such as boating and fishing. The plan must also reflect a long list of stated values, including avoiding use conflicts, protecting biodiversity and ecosystem health, encouraging bi-state planning with New York, and identifying appropriate locations and performance standards for activities, uses, and facilities regulated under state permit programs, and guiding the siting of such regulated activities.

Under the bill, the plan must be consistent with the Resource and Use Inventory and be coordinated, to the greatest extent feasible, with local, regional, and federal planning entities and agencies including the State of New York, the unofficial Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, the Long Island Sound Study, and the Northeast Regional Planning Body.

Since passage of the bill, 15 of 16 Advisory Committee members have been officially named (including several members of the Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group), and the Committee has met three times as a complete body. In order to carry out its work between quarterly meetings, the Committee has established three Subcommittees—Inventory and Science, Stakeholder Engagement, and Policy—to coordinate activities of several hands-on Work Teams. The Work Teams, which will include experts and stakeholders who are not on the Advisory Committee, include a Plan Development Team, an ad hoc Vision and Goals Team, and Work Teams for Plan Development, Ecological Characterization, Data & Mapping, and Human Use Characterization. The Subcommittees and Work Teams, which include representatives from New York state agencies, are conducting regular conference calls and are developing specific work plans for their areas of focus.

Connecticut's coastal management program, housed within the newly organized Land and Water Resources Division of the DEEP Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse, provides staff support to

the Commissioner and to the Advisory Committee. As part of those functions, we have established a Blue Plan website, <http://www.ct.gov/deep/lisblueplan>, which includes links to other MSP-related sites and to an e-mail listserv for Blue Plan news and updates. In addition, there are links to preliminary reports produced by the Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, which include an inventory of existing resource and use datasets inventory, a detailed discussion of institutional frameworks for MSP, and an examination of options for stakeholder involvement http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2705&q=574470&deepNav_GID=1635, and serve as a platform for the Advisory Committee's future work.

Connecticut's MSP process so far has highlighted a number of differences with the experiences of our neighboring states. In Massachusetts and Rhode Island, offshore wind energy proposals acted as a driver, creating political impetus and attracting additional resources, as well as some degree of public controversy. Long Island Sound has no wind farm or other immediate controversy, so that the Blue Plan effort enjoys widespread public and political support, albeit with a relatively lower profile. While this allows us space and time to think and plan without immediate pressures, it also does so without any additional resources or support. To successfully meet its Blue Plan responsibilities, the Department will need to seek out a cooperative network built from state agency, academic, and environmental sectors. Especially after organizational changes, together with ongoing and impending budget cuts, every DEEP staff person working on the Blue Plan will have significant other responsibilities. Thus, perhaps more than our neighbors, we could benefit greatly from the expertise, assistance and enthusiasm that a Coastal Management Fellow could bring to the Blue Plan process.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Blue Plan Fellowship project is, of course, to deliver a marine spatial planning document to be approved by the DEEP Commissioner and submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly. To reach that goal we will pursue the following objectives for the Fellowship:

- (1) Become familiar with the state of the art in marine spatial planning policies and practices, and come up to speed on the background, status and progress of the Blue Plan process.
- (2) Participate in all quarterly Advisory Committee meetings, as well as Subcommittee and Work Team meetings, with particular focus on the Plan Development team, and participate in developing and implementing their work plans.
- (3) Monitor compliance with internal timelines as well as with statutory requirements and deadlines.
- (4) Coordinate with partners outside of Connecticut, including NOAA OCM and New York state agencies; ensure stakeholder outreach efforts are supported and maintained.

- (5) Assist with integration of the Resource and Use Inventory and Work Team products into a draft Blue Plan document; assist in developing a final draft for legislative submittal.

MILESTONES AND OUTCOMES

Unlike previous Connecticut Fellowship projects, the Blue Plan Fellowship must operate within a framework of specific statutory deadlines. Happily, these milestones coincide with the timing of a 2017-2019 Fellowship, and will allow some flexibility in completing the intermediate steps.

August 2017-December 2017: Become familiar with the Department, marine spatial planning, and the Blue Plan process; participate in all Subcommittee and Work Team calls and meetings. Objectives 1 and 2.

January 2018-May 2018: Continue participation in Subcommittees and Work Teams; assist in implementing the Stakeholder Engagement work plan; assist in engagement with New York agencies and interests and the bi-state aspects of the process; finalizing Resource and Use Inventory and data products, initiate public hearings. Objectives 2, 3, and 4.

June 2018-December 2018: Integrate products of Data & Information and Stakeholder engagement work Teams, assist in developing policy components for the Blue Plan document, coordinate consultations with NOAA-OCM. Objectives 2, 3, and 4.

March 1, 2019: Statutory deadline for issuance of the draft Blue Plan for 90-day official public notice and comment. Objectives 3, 4 and 5.

March 2019-August, 2019: DEEP Commissioner adopts final draft of the Blue Plan, submits to the legislative Environment Committee. Fellow takes a bow, but continues coordination, stakeholder engagement, and plan revisions during the legislative review process. Objectives 3, 4 and 5.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Blue Plan Fellow will be tasked with overseeing the focal point of Connecticut's marine spatial planning process—the draft of the actual Plan document for the Commissioner's approval and subsequent submittal for legislative ratification. The Fellow will not serve as simply an intern or scribe, but will be challenged to contribute his or her skills and perspectives to compile a meaningful product of bi-state importance. On the other hand, we do not expect the Fellow to

dive into a pile of data and reports to come up with a complete marine spatial plan all by her or himself. The Blue Plan is a collaborative effort, and considerable work has been done and is being done by many people.

The Fellow is not required to write the Blue Plan from scratch, but rather will have responsibility for insuring that the contributions of staff, Advisory Committee members, partners and stakeholders are integrated into a coherent whole. The Fellowship project will move forward in three cumulative, overlapping phases: Learning, Understanding, and Synthesizing.

Learning

Depending on the Fellow's previous experience, it will take some time to get up to speed with the field of marine spatial planning and provide context and perspective for the Blue Plan effort. This will include learning about the National Ocean Policy, the Northeast Ocean Plan and its data portal (which will be relied on heavily as a source of Blue Plan resource and use data:

<http://www.northeastoceandata.org>) as well as MSP on the state level, particularly our neighbors in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York.

Closer to home, the Fellow will learn the background of the Blue Plan, including Connecticut's coastal management program and other state and federal programs affecting Long Island Sound, such as the Long Island Sound Study. She/he will then become conversant with the Blue Plan process itself, starting with the reports and findings generated by Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, and continuing through the statute and the documents and records produced by the Advisory Committee, Subcommittees and Work Teams. All this preliminary study will create a base of knowledge for the Fellow's own insights and perspectives on our marine spatial planning efforts.

Understanding

This is the working phase of the project, in which the Fellow will apply what he or she has learned towards developing the Blue Plan. In particular, the Fellow will participate in each of the three Subcommittees and four Work Teams, although depending on the Fellow's areas of interest and expertise, we expect a concentration on one or more of these topics.

Long Island Sound is obviously a resource shared between two states, since neither fish nor fishers recognize any boundary line in the water. Consequently, the Fellow will focus on Sound-wide resources and uses in assisting the Inventory and Science Subcommittee and the Ecological Characterization, Data & Mapping, and Human Use Characterization Work Teams with the compilation of data products and the completion of the Resource and Use Inventory. We are required by the Blue Plan statute to jointly develop a Sound-wide spatial plan in conjunction with New York to the extent possible, and at the invitation of DEEP's Commissioner, representatives of New York's Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of State have joined the Advisory Committee and the Work Teams. Perhaps more significantly, as a result of discussions through the Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, the Department of State has offered to share their Information Gateway as a web-based platform for compiling and hosting datasets from the Resource and Use Inventory, <http://opdgig.dos.ny.gov/#/home>, a process that is now ongoing.

The Blue Plan statute also requires, and the Department is committed, to developing the Plan in a transparent and inclusive process that seeks widespread public and stakeholder participation and encourages public input in decision-making. As such, the Fellow will work with the Stakeholder Engagement Subcommittee in reaching out to stakeholders and presenting Committee work products on the website, at events, and through other channels for public outreach. We are hoping that a Fellow could bring additional expertise in social media and electronic communications, which will extend our more traditional approaches.

The Fellow will help to create a plan structure and policy focus for the Blue Plan in conjunction with the Policy Subcommittee and Plan Development Work Team. The language of the statute provides a starting point by prioritizing the protection of existing natural resources and uses such as fishing, aquaculture and navigation from future conflicting or incompatible activities, but without creating new regulatory restrictions for them. The Blue Plan would not “zone” the entire Sound—there is no need to specify uses and use zones over every part of the water surface—but it could establish priority use areas (e.g., utility corridors or shellfish beds where no other use could interfere with the primary use) and low- or no-impact zones (e.g., habitat areas where benthic or water column disturbance would not be allowed, or navigation/recreation areas where permanent or structural occupation of the water surface or water column would not be allowed). As Plan policies are developed, the Fellow will assist in coordinating with NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management with regard to CZMA program change procedures. While the statute directs us to seek official incorporation of Blue Plan policies affecting Long Island Sound’s resources and uses into Connecticut’s Coastal Management Program, we are particularly interested in obtaining OCM’s ongoing advice and input so that the process will run smoothly and without unnecessary obstacles.

Synthesizing

The centerpiece of the project is, of course, the actual drafting of a plan, and the Fellow will be the primary staff person responsible for the production of the Plan document. This will involve a synthesis of the contributions and work products of all our partners and stakeholders and from the Subcommittees and Work Teams. The Fellow will help us determine the Plan format and structure, applying her or his own insights and experience, to help create a comprehensive yet accessible document. At this point no particular format or structure has been determined, and although the Plan must be based on the Resource and Use Inventory and address all the listed statutory concerns, recent experience with other marine spatial plans suggests it would be most useful by providing a considerable number of maps linked to data and prioritizing graphical spatial guidance on resources and uses. The Fellow’s work in this phase, alongside that of all the other contributors, will culminate in the production of a draft plan document for the DEEP Commissioner’s review and approval prior to official public release by March 1, 2019. For the remainder of the Fellowship term, the Fellow will assist with the formal public review process and in revising the Plan to make a final draft ready for submission to the legislature after appropriate education and outreach.

BLUE PLAN FELLOW MENTORING

While the lead mentor for the Blue Plan Fellowship will be David Blatt, supervisor of the Division's Planning section, the Fellow will work with the entire DEEP Blue Plan Group, which comprises Mary-beth Hart (Stakeholder Engagement Work Team, web page) former Coastal Fellow Kevin O'Brien (Data and Mapping Work Team, data and information, mapping technical data), and Coastal Management Program Manager Brian Thompson (Plan Development Team, Connecticut's delegate to the Regional Ocean Planning Body). All of us serve as staff to the Advisory Committee and to the Commissioner, and we each participate in two or more Subcommittees and Work Teams. Department management including Deputy Commissioner Michael Sullivan and Commissioner Rob Klee will also support and guide the BLUE PLAN Fellow and project.

While Connecticut's coastal management program no longer has a separate institutional identity as the Office of Long Island Sound Programs as a result of a recent reorganization, all of our previous functions are contained within the new Land and Water Resources Division, still under the Department's Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse. Accordingly, we can also invite Fellow into participate in the ongoing work of the Division, which continues to address the breadth of opportunities and challenges faced by a coastal management program. For example, the Division's Planning unit deals with legislative and municipal liaison matters, so the Fellow can become experienced with municipal efforts in implementing State coastal policies; the regional Regulatory Units administer our direct regulatory programs affecting in-water structures, which the Fellow will need to be familiar with as these programs will be instrumental in implementing the policies of Blue Plan; and the Coastal Resources section provides technical services, data and analysis related to the Sound's natural resources. Staff in each section of the Division will advise and accompany the Fellow in activities such as attending state, municipal and regional meetings, site visits to the coast, meetings with stakeholders, academic and NGO partners, and potentially staff from various Federal agencies and neighboring states.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Naturally, the Fellow will work with a number of people outside of the Department, but will coordinate especially closely with two partners have been leaders in Long Island Sound marine spatial planning efforts from the very beginning: Dr. Sylvain De Guise, Director of Connecticut Sea Grant, <http://seagrant.uconn.edu/whatwedo/msp/index.php>, and Nathan Frohling, the Director of Coastal and Marine Initiatives for The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/connecticut/explore/ct-charting-li-sound.xml>. Sylvain and Nathan have jointly led the Connecticut-New York Bi-State Marine Spatial Planning Working Group and continue to play an active role in the Blue Plan process. Sylvain has been designated the University of Connecticut's Blue Plan coordinator, and is therefore responsible for chairing the Inventory and Science subcommittee and producing the Resource and Use Inventory. Nathan leads the Stakeholder Engagement Subcommittee, and both participate on every Work Team as well as the Policy Subcommittee. Their experience and contributions will be essential to the success of the Fellowship project and to the Blue Plan as a

whole. The Fellow will also partner with other members of the Advisory Committee and engage with stakeholders, learning their perspectives and assist with their concerns and Blue Plan work tasks as appropriate.

COST SHARE DESCRIPTION

The Department will provide \$15,000 (\$7,500/year) in required matching funds from state special funds, as state general funds are more limited every year. The LIS License Plate Fund established pursuant CGS §22a-27v is the most likely source of funds, but SEP compliance funds or state permit application fee funds may also be available. Details for this arrangement will be worked out with the Coastal Services Center.

For the duration of the Fellowship, DEEP will provide the Fellow with:

- A fully furnished cubicle equipped with a VOIP telephone and voice mail system, desktop PC with high-speed internet and e-mail access and laptops for field visits/presentations;
- standard office software such as MS Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. Access to specialized software required conducting the proposed work tasks will also be provided, including ESRI ArcGIS software for supporting data analysis; and
- access to state cars for project-related travel.

The Fellow will also have full access to all professional training courses available to DEEP staff, including OSHA health and safety, software use, personal development and wellness, etc.

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA

The Blue Plan Fellowship will advance objectives associated with all three of CSC's Strategic Focus Areas, but primarily responds to those of Healthy Coastal Ecosystems and Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies. We will promote the objectives of Healthy Coastal Ecosystems through the Resource and Use Inventory that seeks to identify and preserve the ecosystem services and habitats associated with Long Island Sound, and through the provisions of the Plan that protects those resources. Similarly, the Blue Plan Fellowship will also enhance Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies by identifying traditional and potential uses of Long Island Sound and developing a mechanism to manage potential use conflicts. The very essence of the Blue Plan is to preserve, manage and sustain the Sound's natural resources and water-dependent uses by efficiently guiding future decision-making on regulatory and development issues.