

PLUM ISLAND: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE


OF HISTORY, NATURE, RESEARCH

PLUM ISLAND: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE

Beautiful and mysterious Plum Island is an 822-acre, storied landscape about a mile and a half off the eastern tip of Orient Point, New York, where Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary mix with clean, oxygen-rich, ocean waters. It is a landscape that connects history, nature, and research.

Ecologists and other scientists are learning and sharing the story of high biodiversity on the island, in its surrounding waters, and as part of an island chain and coastal ecosystem. Historians and archaeologists are investigating the island's earliest human uses.



The background of the page is a painterly landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, textured hills or fields in shades of brown and green. A bright blue body of water, likely Plum Island Sound, stretches across the middle ground. The sky above is a pale, hazy blue with soft, white clouds. The overall style is that of a watercolor or oil painting, giving it a serene and artistic feel.

Plum Island's transformations over the last century—from military uses, to a world-class animal disease laboratory, to future uses—intrigue people nationwide. We have come together as a region to envision Plum Island's future: a combined preserve, research center, and interpretive cultural and historical site.

This future—which celebrates Plum Island's past; protects its ecological value; promotes economic sustainability; and unites people with park, research, and educational opportunities—depends on long-term, public-private partnerships carrying out the people's vision, shown on the following pages.



1 BE IMMERSED IN THE RAW BEAUTY OF LONG ISLAND SOUND

1 Windswept, surrounded by biologically rich waters, and hosting significant ecological communities, Plum Island invites us to visit, learn, and continue research. A marine eelgrass meadow, a community declining in New York, could be an underwater research site.

2 While absorbing panoramic views of coastal and fresh-water landscapes, visitors will enjoy passive recreation, nature observation, and historic site interpretation through limited-access tourism and educational opportunities or a sensitively-sited extension of New York's trail system.

3 Guides and guests will celebrate specifically planned and managed areas of cultural, military, and natural heritage, learning how the island's location and its geological and ecological attributes have influenced uses by wildlife, plants, and people over the ages. "A Friends of" organization will help to secure and steward the natural resources of the island.







2

ENCOUNTER THE CULTURE & HISTORY OF AN EARLY AMERICAN COASTAL LANDSCAPE

4 The iconic Plum Island Lighthouse, a National Register historic site overlooking turbulent Plum Gut, will be restored and reused for tours and tales of mariner rescues. Visitors will read interpretive signs and maps along historical pathways and elevated walkways. Areas with cultural and historical significance will be managed carefully to ensure compatibility with natural processes.

5 Day visitors will enjoy tours of National Register historic site Fort Terry to explore its critical role in United States defense and its unique features that dot the northern and eastern portions of the island. At a dedicated Plum Island museum located on Orient Point, explorers can also learn of earlier uses of Plum Island by Native Americans, colonists, and subsequent owners. Archaeologists will conduct sensitively-undertaken research to expand understanding of our shared cultural heritage.

6 Partners will stabilize, maintain, and interpret historic buildings at several sites around the island. Researchers and students will use a small field station and dormitory in an adaptively refurbished building for academic studies and one-night stays. Interpretive programs will commemorate the Plum Island Animal Disease Center's research and vaccine development, which have been vital to protecting animal agriculture.







3 CONSERVE A RARE NATURAL ECOSYSTEM

7 Through partnerships with federal, state, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and volunteers, Plum Island will become a place of study, conservation, and ecological restoration. Researchers will study the island's exemplary marine rocky intertidal zone; maritime bluffs, beaches, and dunes; and eelgrass beds and nearshore marine biology. Conservation efforts will demonstrate how natural areas can rebound and thrive.

8 Academic researchers and students will study sensitive natural areas by special permission. Day visitors will be inspired viewing wildlife at a 96-acre freshwater wetland and join guided walks to learn about the island's 228 bird species, 22 state-listed endangered, threatened, and rare plant species, and 25 natural communities.

9 Harbor seals haul out on the rocks at Plum Island during the winter in the largest numbers anywhere in New York. Sea turtles, harbor porpoises, and whales use the surrounding waters. Advancing the conservation potential of this critically valuable natural resource area, in 2019 New York created the Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area around Plum, Great Gull, and Little Gull Islands.







ADAPT STRUCTURES FOR JOBS WHILE PRESERVING A NATIONAL TREASURE

10 People in the Long Island Sound region envision academic or industry-driven research at the western end of Plum Island, near the harbor. Areas of particular interest to the region include biotech, health, energy, power structure cybersecurity, climate science, island studies, or ecology. The new center would provide transportation to and from the island, as well as easements for and transit to conservation zones and the lighthouse. The enterprise also would contribute resources for the overall management of the island preserve.

As promoted by business leaders, Long Island's nationally significant "research corridor" would expand to include Plum Island, continuing the island's prestige as a center of innovation, drawing new investment, and providing good jobs. Repurposed office and auditorium space and potentially new laboratories—housed in energy-efficient, bird-friendly buildings—would provide experimental and learning spaces and could host meetings, conferences, or other events.

11 Workers and visitors would reach the island via the former research center's ferry site at Orient Point. Families would visit a museum at the Orient Point dock to discover Plum Island's history, cultural heritage, and ecosystems. We predict countless "Eureka!" moments once people travel to Plum Island for work or pleasure.





DID YOU KNOW?

- **Plum Island and its wildlife belong to the people.** Plum Island is publicly owned and its wildlife and natural assets are held in trust for us.
- Through the advocacy of stakeholders invested in Plum Island's future as a preserve, **Congress in 2020 repealed earlier language that had placed the island on the auction block.** Plum Island's transfer to a new owner now is subject to the normal federal property disposition rules.
- The **Preserve Plum Island Coalition** (preserveplumisland.org), coordinated by Save the Sound (savethesound.org), supports preservation of Plum Island and reuse of the research center.
- **At least 111 species of conservation concern** use Plum Island. That makes the island not only fascinating, but an extraordinary living laboratory for the natural sciences.
- **Plum Island hosts two National Register Historic sites:**
 - The **Plum Island Lighthouse**, built in 1869, can be restored to its former glory by interested maritime groups for everyone's enjoyment.
 - **Fort Terry**, commissioned before the Spanish-American War, was in service through World War II. Its surviving features illustrate military evolution and will fascinate everyone.



- The **Plum Island Animal Disease Center's** vaccine for foot-and-mouth disease saved agriculture and worldwide economies from devastating effects on food supplies. The Center's work will continue at the **National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility** in Kansas.

Image Credits

Photography in order of appearance and clockwise on pages:

Story 1: James Dineen; Chris Pickerell at Cornell Cooperative Extension; Ariel Shearer; Robert Lorenz

Story 2: Unknown; Tom Kmetzo; Robert Lorenz; Robert Lorenz

Story 3: Louise Harrison (background); New York Natural Heritage Program; cluster: A.J. Hand, New York Natural Heritage Program, B. Van Valen at bvanvalenphotography.com, New York Natural Heritage Program; Robert Lorenz

Story 4: Robert Lorenz (ferry background) and Louise Harrison (ferry foreground)

Original art by Scott Bluedorn.

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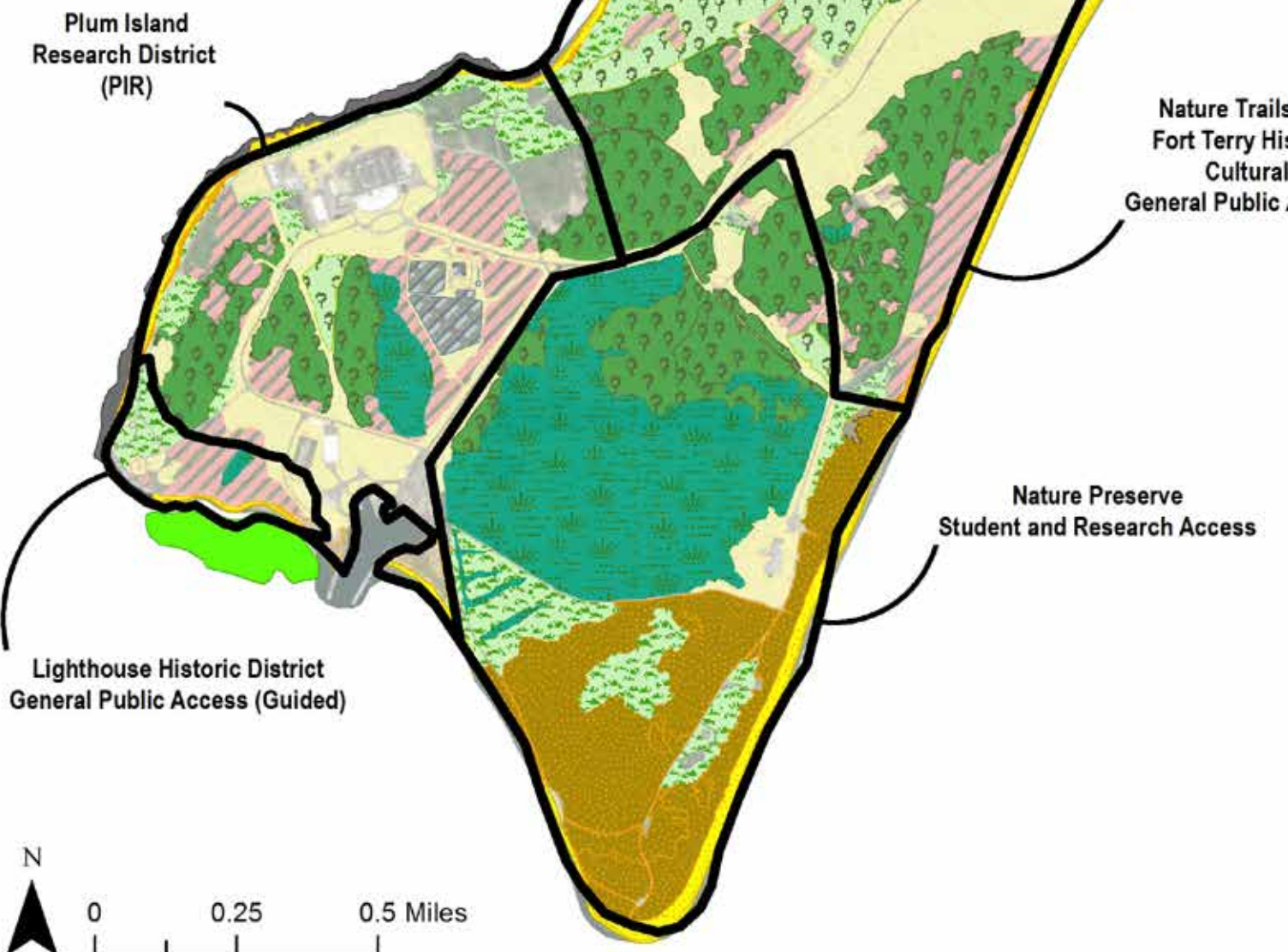
Plum Island Preserve *Vision Concept* map by The Nature Conservancy.

Design and layout graciously provided by Haddad & Partners.



Plum Island Pres

Vision Concept



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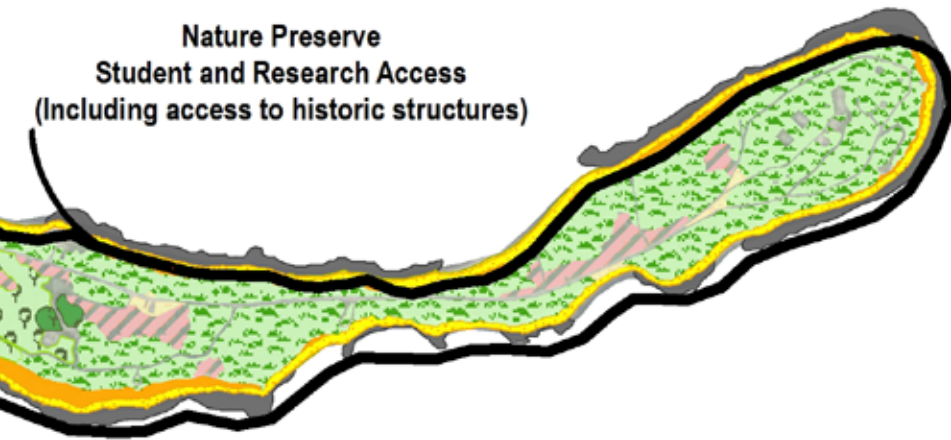
The Nature Conservancy




Nature Preserve


Student and Research Access


(Including access to historic structures)





Significant Natural Communities:

 Marine eelgrass meadow


 Marine rocky intertidal


 Maritime beach


 Maritime bluff


 Maritime dunes


Natural Communities*:


 Marsh


 Maritime forest


 Maritime forest/Shrubland mix


 Shrubland

 Old field/grassland

 Invasive/Mix

 Dunes and beach

 Erosion control/artificial beach

 Sewage treatment pond

Recreation,
Historic District,
Exhibits
Access (Guided)

ENVISION PLUM ISLAND PRESERVE: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE

- **Conservation:** Public-purpose partnerships—federal, state, and local governments, nonprofits, volunteers
- **Research:** 125-acre academic/industry campus, high-quality jobs, repurposed buildings
- **Historic Preservation:** Fort Terry, Plum Island Lighthouse
- **Museum:** Natural and Indigenous cultural heritage, history
- **Ferry:** From Orient Point, NY
- **Sustainability:** Controlled ecotourism, connections to trail system
- **Friends of Plum Island:** Partnerships for security and support

* Natural communities condensed from 25 classes - See NYNHP report for details.

Data Sources:

NYNHP Natural Community Map - Schlesinger et al. 2012

NYNHP Element Occurrence Communities 2018

Aerial imagery from Esri

Map updated July 2020



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Save the Sound®
Action for our region's environment.



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Learn more: read the *Envision Plum Island* public report at
preserveplumisland.org/envision-report

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