



# Save the Sound®

Action for our region's environment.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
LOUISE HARRISON  
LONG ISLAND NATURAL AREAS MANAGER, SAVE THE SOUND  
LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON  
H.R. 1584, H.R. 1647, H.R. 3047, H.R. 3173, H.R. 6852, and H.R. 7332  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES FEDERAL LANDS SUBCOMMITTEE  
MARCH 7, 2024

Chairperson Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your invitation to speak before you today about H.R. 1548, the Plum Island National Monument Act. Thank you to Representative LaLota for introducing this legislation and for his leadership on this issue, and to Representatives Courtney, Garbarino, D'Esposito, Himes, and Lawler for co-sponsoring this important bipartisan legislation.

My name is Louise Harrison, Long Island Natural Areas Manager at Save the Sound. It is an honor to be here today and address this legislation. I do so on behalf of Save the Sound and the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

**Save the Sound** leads environmental action in the Long Island Sound region. We fight climate change, save endangered lands, protect the Sound and its rivers, and work with nature to restore ecosystems. Save the Sound is a founding member of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition; we coordinate the coalition's activities.

**The Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC)** is made up of over 120 national, regional, and local organizations. The mission of the PPIC is to

*secure the permanent protection of the significant natural, historical, and cultural resources of Plum Island. The PPIC advocates for comprehensive conservation and management solutions that safeguard this national treasure in the public trust as a national monument, wildlife refuge, preserve, or other equivalent protection, with carefully managed and equitable public access, in perpetuity. Through the course of this incredible multi-year campaign, the mission of the PPIC has been refined to clarify and prioritize the most promising opportunities for the permanent preservation of this magnificent natural and cultural asset.*

We enthusiastically support H.R. 1584 and its resulting designation of federally owned Plum Island as a national monument **for the purpose of ecological conservation, historical preservation, and the discovery and celebration of our shared cultural heritage.**

### Widespread Support

We invite you to visit the PPIC's website, <https://www.preserveplumisland.org>, where you will find a great deal of information about Plum Island, our campaign, and the widespread support from

across the United States for preserving this national treasure. We especially encourage examination of the volume we compiled last September, *Plum Island Campaign Support*, which contains over a decade of expressed support from elected officials, organizations, individuals, and media outlets for protecting Plum Island. This document may be found on our website's [campaign support](#) page.

## Introduction

Preserving Plum Island as a national monument would return sustainable, managed access to this federal asset to the people and help tell the story of a unique American landscape in Eastern Long Island Sound. About 110 miles from New York City, the island is a key component of one of the very last large, wild, coastal ecosystems in the nationally celebrated Long Island Sound and Peconic Estuary – both designated National Estuaries. Plum Island is where, for thousands of years, people interacted with and were served by nature, and where, for the past few hundred years, most people's access has been severely restricted or even prohibited.

The Montaukett Indian Nation was dispossessed of Plum Island in the 1600s. Private ownership and subsequent federal uses of the island as a military installation and, later, security surrounding the island's famous animal disease research laboratory have made Plum Island off limits for most people. Now that the Department of Homeland Security is nearing the end of its mission on the island, it is time to declare that Plum Island truly belongs to the people of the United States whose history it so well charts. To return to the people the stewardship and enjoyment of the island's significant ecological and cultural riches, the PPIC seeks permanent protection of the island and long-term, public-philanthropic stewardship and potential public-private partnerships.

Over 600 acres of this 822-acre island have been given defacto protection from development in the past 70 years because they buffer the successor to Fort Terry, the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC), which is overseen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS is preparing for the PIADC's world-famous food-security research on animal diseases to be transferred to the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kansas. DHS endeavors to decommission the Plum Island facility and to meet the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's cleanup requirements.

The location and geology of the island, its agrarian use before the federal purchase (in 1897 and 1901), and Army and DHS measures limiting development and access, have resulted in tremendous biological diversity. The island is home to 111 at-risk plant and animal species. Two hundred and twenty-nine (229) species of birds have been sighted there, which is nearly a quarter of all bird species in North America, north of Mexico. The island hosts 24 different ecological communities. Together and in their island context, these habitats are integral to the basis for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's designating Plum Island as part of a Significant Coastal Habitat. A 97-acre freshwater wetland affords habitat and drinking water for island and wetland wildlife. The island is surrounded by pristine underwater communities teeming with marine life, which have remained that way due to lack of extensive development on the island

Endangered Roseate Terns forage in the waters around Plum Island and take shelter on its rocky shores. The island also is home to one of the largest seal haul-out areas in Southern New England and the largest one in New York State.

Plum Island has become the biological linchpin of a beautiful New York archipelago that adjoins Connecticut and Rhode Island and is in view of thousands of boaters, fishers, and ferry passengers.

## **Preservation through a National Monument Designation**

The PPIC supports a national monument designation as a vehicle for preservation because it can permit flexibility in coordinating and comprehensively managing Plum Island's wide array of resources—ecological, historical, cultural—and, through a carefully crafted management plan, lead to custom-tailoring a sustainable, equitable visitation program. Under a national monument designation, multiple themes and attributes may be combined for protection, further research, and public access and education.

Designation will begin the process of righting long-standing wrongs that have prevented members of the Montaukett Indian Nation, an historic tribe seeking federal reaffirmation, from visiting the island. The Montauketts have told us they consider Plum Island to be an important part of their cultural heritage and territory. Restoring access to Plum Island will give them the chance, after more than three-and-a-half centuries, to practice cultural traditions and visit sacred sites. A Plum Island National Monument will also help educate the public about the significance of the island's Trust species, rare plants and animals, exemplary ecological communities, and its fascinating role in American history.

## **Near-term Action and Management Planning**

The PPIC believes it is imperative to designate Plum Island as a national monument now to prevent degradation of some of what makes Plum Island so special. The Department of Homeland Security has already engaged in extensive outdoor restoration, and it can complete decommissioning of the indoor facilities notwithstanding a national monument designation. We support designation as a national monument as soon as possible, with management planning commencing immediately. This can be accomplished with support of the PPIC and Friends of Plum Island, a 501(c)(3) organization, and involve members of the Montaukett Indian Nation and the general public.

Although more can always be learned about the island's fascinating resources, there is a great deal of information already available on Plum Island's biodiversity and history. Resource management planning, undertaken as soon as possible and employing the vast amount of information already available, will help ensure protection of sensitive ecological communities and species. This can allow near-term control of adverse impacts, such as incursions of invasive species, already gaining a foothold and posing threats to nesting birds, rare plants, and wetland resources. Rooftop maintenance of former Army barracks would help prevent further deterioration while historic resource inventories proceed under the Section 106 report currently in preparation by DHS.

A management plan should guide future public access and education, ensuring that visitation is not only equitable but that it also proceeds at environmentally sustainable levels and frequency, once the laboratory facility is fully decommissioned.

## **Envisioning Plum Island**

Save the Sound and The Nature Conservancy in 2018 and 2019 conducted *Envision Plum Island* to articulate a vision for the island's future. In this process, hundreds of stakeholders met in small and large groups, aided by consulting firm Marstel-Day, LLC, to create a plan that is now reflected in the core elements of H.R. 1584's designation of Plum Island as a national monument. The report we produced, [available on the PPIC website, here](#), was presented in 2020 to the members of Congress who had requested it; within six months, Congress repealed its previous requirement to sell Plum Island at a public sale (laws enacted in 2008 and 2012). We were greatly relieved that

Plum Island was off the “auction block,” but the desire to find a permanent preservation solution was stronger than ever, bolstered by the growing enthusiasm generated by *Envision Plum Island* and shown in PPIC’s growth in membership.

## **Updated Vision**

The PPIC since has revised the Plum Island vision somewhat, based on changing circumstances, such as the repeal of the sale language, the subsequent reinstatement of the normal federal property disposition process, and the existence of a major donor. The donor has expressed interest in funding stewardship, programs, and other long-term preservation activities at Plum Island. In addition, we consider historical preservation to be achievable through interpretation of the island’s rich history for the public, instead of requiring structures to be rehabilitated or opened for visitation—though conversion of a small Army building into an educational outpost is something to consider in the future for the researchers who have expressed strong interest in accessing the island for research and teaching reasons.

Rather than a full transfer of Plum Island to New York State, as we had previously envisioned, the PPIC now fully supports a federal approach that partners with the Montaukett Indian Nation, the State of New York, local entities, and the community. We call for a full telling and reckoning of America’s history – from times of ecological abundance to those of significant cultural disservice, and on further to the last 70 years of globally significant scientific inquiry and innovation at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center. We are not surprised and are delighted to know that the PIADC is being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. There is also a highly significant civil rights court martial that occurred on the island in 1914 that is worthy of further study and recognition.

We also envision a visitor center and small museum at the government-owned Plum Island ferry parcel at Orient Point—across Plum Gut from Plum Island—in an existing building, which would attract many daily visitors disembarking the highly successful Cross Sound Ferry, situated immediately next door, within walking distance. The benefits of preserving Plum Island and its ecological riches, at the very entrance to Long Island Sound—which plays a huge role in supporting the regional economy—are nearly inestimable.

Our vision can be fully realized through the designation of Plum Island as a national monument.

## **Economic Value**

The countless activities dependent on Long Island Sound generate about \$9.4 billion annually (adjusted for inflation in 2015 dollars) in the regional economy, according to the Long Island Sound Study. With the uses it serves and the recreational opportunities it provides, Long Island Sound is among the most important and valuable estuaries in the nation. Of course, water quality, living resources, and habitats keep this economic engine running.

Plum Island may be seen as the biological and ecological linchpin of an archipelago that reaches across the outer, eastern Long Island Sound from the North Fork of Long Island, all the way to Napatree Point in Rhode Island. Careful stewardship of this landscape is required to protect the special “cocktail” of clean, oxygenated ocean water mixed with productive estuarine waters that makes Long Island Sound the economic powerhouse it is today. A national monument designation of the island will enhance this value economically by providing educational, research, and cultural

opportunities that adhere to a resource-focused management plan for long-term stewardship and sustainability.

### **Studies of Plum Island**

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition has compiled information we present here today, as well as much more, using numerous professional studies and publications. We would be pleased to provide a full bibliography on request. We especially rely on and encourage examination of:

- Professional biodiversity field studies of Plum Island undertaken by the New York Natural Heritage Program, available at <https://www.nynhp.org/projects/plum-island-inventory/>.
- Extensive research on Plum Island history, presented in *A World Unto Itself – The Remarkable History of Plum Island, New York*, by Ruth Ann Bramson, Geoffrey K. Fleming, and Amy Kasuga Folk, 2014, (388 pp.). Available through the Southold Historical Society.
- An inquiry into the Montaukett Indian Nation’s dispossession of Plum Island by celebrated scholar on Long Island Native Americans, John A. Strong, in an article entitled, “The Plum Island deed game: A case study in dispossession of Indian land on Long Island,” published in the *Journal of the Suffolk County Historical Society*, Volume XXXI, December 2017 (pp. 3–25).

The following people have contributed information that supplements this testimony:

- Marian Lindberg, Conservation Projects Manager, The Nature Conservancy in New York
- Matthew Schlesinger, Chief Zoologist, New York Natural Heritage Program
- John Turner, Spokesperson for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition and Senior Conservation Policy Advocate, Seatuck Environmental Association

### **Special Designations**

Because of its location, natural features, and ecological communities, Plum Island has received, or lies within areas that have received, the following government recognition and designations:

- Within (at confluence of) two estuaries designated by Congress as Estuaries of National Significance—Long Island Sound (Long Island Sound Study) and the Peconic Estuary (Peconic Estuary Partnership)
- Designated a unit (NY-24) of the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS)
- Within four miles of the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), a formal partnership between NOAA and the state of Connecticut, designated in 2022 and encompassing 52,160 upland and offshore acres
- Part of an NEP Long Island Sound Study Stewardship Area (“Plum and Gull Islands”)
- Part of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Significant Coastal Habitat (Site 7)
- Adjoins New York State’s Plum Gut Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Within New York State’s Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Protection Area

- Within the Suffolk County, New York, Peconic Bay Environs Critical Environmental Area
- 350 acres zoned as Town of Southold's Plum Island Conservation District (PIC)
- Site of the Plum Island Light Station, listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- Site of Fort Terry Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places

### **Biological and Ecological Significance of Plum Island**

Despite a long history of human use, Plum Island and the marine waters immediately surrounding it contain a diverse assemblage of natural communities. The island's natural, terrestrial ecological communities—totaling more than two dozen, according to an assessment by the New York Natural Heritage program—have remained nearly untouched since the 1950s, when the U.S. Army ended its use of the island. These natural ecological communities range from forested areas, including successional maritime forests, maritime shrub- and heathland communities, and a wetland forest dominated by red maple and black tupelo to an extensive 97-acre freshwater wetland, where blueberry bog thickets, emergent marsh, and shrub swamps provide habitat for wetland-dependent plant and animal species.

Plum Island boasts marine rocky subtidal and intertidal, beach, bluff, and dune communities which ring the island; five of these have been identified as significant by the New York Natural Heritage Program. A maritime dune community exists in the southwestern corner of Plum Island and this area and a wide sandy beach along the island's southern boundary provide nesting habitat to Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), the East Coast population of which is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) also breeds on its sandy beaches. Several of these natural communities are rare in New York State or regionally, and a few, such as maritime dunes and heathlands, represent especially high-quality examples.

The island's assemblage of natural communities supports many plant and animal species. Two-hundred-twenty (220) bird species were seen on Plum Island from 2006 to 2016, which is more than one fifth of the 1,023 species comprising total avifauna of the North American continent north of Mexico, with 61 species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), 17 of which are high priority SGCN as classified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The latest count of birds seen at Plum Island is 229. The bird surveys have been performed by and on behalf of Audubon New York, which has designated Orient Point and Plum Island as an Important Bird Area.

Several dozen bird species breed here, while many others pass through during migration or overwinter on the island. The high frequency of sightings of large numbers of passerines during spring and fall migration underscores the island's significant value in providing migratory stop-over habitat. Birds of prey occur on Plum Island. Although the number of nests fluctuates, as many as ten Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) nests have existed on Plum Island. Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) occur here too, as do several accipiter and falcon species during migration. Several Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) colonies exist in the high bluffs situated along the southern shoreline of the island; the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology website *All About Birds* reports that in general Bank Swallow numbers have crashed by an estimated 89% since 1970.

A notable component regarding the island's avifauna is its value to several species of rare terns, including Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), a state-listed threatened species, and Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*), a state- and federally listed endangered bird. These species breed on nearby

Great Gull Island, which boasts the largest breeding colony of Roseate Terns in the western hemisphere, containing as many as 1,300 breeding pairs, and the largest breeding colony of Common Terns in the world, with approximately 9,500 pairs. Plum Island serves as developmental habitat for these species, where they often rest, and the waters surrounding the island are rich in the bait fish on which these species forage. With sea level rise likely to adversely impact Great Gull Island, Plum Island may take on much greater significance in the future in providing breeding habitat for Roseate and Common Terns.

One of the larger seal haul-out sites in southern New England, and the largest in New York, occurs along the southern side of the eastern tip of the island. During the winter months, several hundred harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and several dozen grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) can be seen resting on large offshore boulders or swimming in the waters in between.

Immediately surrounding Plum Island are high quality marine communities in New York State waters containing a high diversity of species. These communities include an eelgrass meadow north of the island's harbor, an eelgrass restoration area along the southeastern shore, and a New York State-significant intertidal rocky shoreline, among others. Two scientific dive surveys to investigate marine biota have taken place in the waters around Plum Island over the past decade; scientists documented 126 species of marine flora and fauna, including macroalgae, sponges, corals, bryozoans, jellyfish, comb jellies, crabs, tubeworms, gastropods, bivalves, and barnacles. The large, submerged boulders are a common colonization site for many of these species.

Regarding the terrestrial flora of Plum Island, a 2013 professional paper by Ph.D. botanist Eric E. Lamont, published in the Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society notes: "Plum Island, New York, has one of the highest concentrations of rare plants in the state and supports a high diversity of native plant species. The island's varied topography and diverse ecological communities have contributed to the diverse flora; for much of the past 100 years, approximately 90% of the island has remained undeveloped. The vascular flora consists of 414 species within 270 genera and 92 families. Twenty-three species are listed as endangered, threatened, or rare in New York. Of these 23 species, 17 are extant, having been observed in the field during this study, and six are considered extirpated..." Spring ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes vernalis*), a graceful and beautiful orchid species, serves as an excellent example of the many rare plants occurring here—a very rare species in the state—and as many as several hundred plants have been found in the former military parade grounds region of Plum Island.

The ecological relationships between the federally owned Plum Island, the biologically diverse and clean waters of eastern Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary, and nearby islands in the same archipelago are significant and interdependent.

## **History of Plum Island**

It is our understanding that the Department of Homeland Security is preparing an NHPA Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) and Historic Properties Management Plan as part of its required work in the decommissioning of the PIADC. We look forward to reading it and hope it can be a useful component of a comprehensive Plum Island resource management plan.

Much of what we offer below is based on the Bramson et al. book, *A World Unto Itself – The Remarkable History of Plum Island, New York*; Robert Hefner's 1998 *Historic Resources Survey: Plum Island, New York*; and research conducted by Marian Lindberg in preparation for her 2020

book, *Scandal on Plum Island—A Commander becomes the Accused*. We will gladly provide additional references on request.

## 1600s

After its dispossession from the Montauketts in the mid-1600s, as stated in *A World Unto Itself*, “Plum Island’s story is really America’s story, in miniature.”

In 1675, prevailing over other colonists who sought ownership of Plum Island, Samuel Wyllys [Willis] received a patent and manorial rights to the island from Edmund Andros, the fourth colonial governor of New York. Wyllys, a Connecticut magistrate, and son-in-law of Connecticut’s first governor, had helped Andros gain the allegiance of the three eastern Long Island towns (including Plum Island’s town of Southold) after the towns’ leaders resisted New York’s authority, citing Connecticut’s help defending them against the Dutch.

Wyllys did not live on Plum Island, but used its land to graze livestock, possibly for shipment to Antigua, where he co-owned a sugar plantation and at least some of the workers were enslaved. The possible role of Plum Island in supporting the sugarcane economy is of interest to the Plain Sight Project.

## 1700s

Plum Island was divided into separate farm holdings controlled by a few families after Wyllys sold the island to John Dudley, the son of a Massachusetts Bay Colony governor and future governor himself of the Province of Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire.

In August 1775, the British stole livestock from Plum Island, inciting a naval skirmish. Long Island fell to the British one year later, by which time residents of Plum Island had fled to the mainland. “During the revolution, the British fleet used Plum Island primarily as a source of clean water for its warships. Other resources, such as lumber, grain, corn and livestock, were also seized.”

## 1800s

Residents returned to Plum Island after the Revolutionary War, but in the War of 1812, “Plum Island became a staging location for British and, early on, American naval forces,” including a blockade by the Royal Navy, according to *A World Unto Itself*. Although the war ended in December 1814, British ships remained around Plum Island until March 1815.

With the construction of a light station in 1829, a lighthouse keeper joined the farming families on Plum Island. Nonetheless, shipwrecks occurred because of the unpredictable currents of Plum Gut. The lighthouse was replaced in 1869; this structure remains and is listed as the Plum Island Light Station in the **National Register of Historic Places**.

During the mid- to late-1800s, city dwellers seeking to escape urban heat and boaters began visiting Plum Island in summertime. Farmers allowed clubs to set up camps, and the lighthouse keeper provided meals. The fishing around Plum Island became known as so exceptional that even Grover Cleveland fished its waters.

Beginning in 1883, a man acting secretly on behalf of unidentified investors bought the farms of Plum Island, leading to ownership of the island (except the lighthouse) in 1889 by Abram Hewitt, a wealthy industrialist and recent New York City mayor. It was rumored that Hewitt intended to build a resort, but the United States had a different plan: national security. In 1897, as tensions heated up with Spain over its occupation of Cuba, Congress authorized a defense post on Plum Island because



of its strategic location at the mouth of Long Island Sound. Hewitt sold Plum Island for the construction of the Army's Fort Terry in two installments, 193 acres in 1897, and 647 acres in 1901.

### **1900s to Present**

Most of the buildings at Fort Terry (1898–1948) were constructed between 1898 and 1912.

The central administrative structures remain in their original locations, adjacent to the former parade grounds, including “Endicott and Taft Period post buildings which are significant for representing national types,” according to Robert Hefner in his 1998 *Historic Resources Survey: Plum Island, New York*. Former gun batteries also remain along the coastline, including one, Battery Steele, said to be unique in the nation.

Fort Terry was an important site for multi-fort military drills, including joint Army–Navy war games, and served as a training and transport location for Army recruits in World Wars I and II.

Fort Terry's extant buildings, including large former barracks and the fort's hospital, guard house, and post exchange, were added to the **National Register of Historic Places** in 2021, along with the parade grounds and 11 former gun batteries and other tactical structures on the coast, forming a “Fort Terry Historic District.” As the Department of Homeland Security stated in its 80-page application:

“Fort Terry was established in 1898 based on recommendations for improvements to United States coastal defenses contained in an 1885 report from the Endicott Board. Fort Terry was later modified based on a report from the Taft Board in 1906. [A]s a whole the district retains a significant number of character-defining elements and is able to illustrate the fort's significant themes from the period of significance.”

An incendiary court-martial that garnered national attention and Cabinet-level involvement took place at Fort Terry in 1914 when the commanding officer, Major Benjamin M. Koehler, was accused of groping male subordinates. He claimed the charges were concocted by disgruntled to oust him. This early case of alleged sexual harassment marked the beginning of federal policies against military service by gays and lesbians.

New York's historic preservation office strongly supported the historic district designation.

After the post's closure in 1948, the Army Chemical Corps and Plum Island Animal Disease Laboratory reused its buildings. The lab modified Building 257, the former Mine & Cable Storage Building, for its use, and added an external ramp for use by animal research subjects. Numerous unconfirmed stories about bioweapons research ensued.

Later in the 20th century, the Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) built new facilities on the western part of the island. For over 70 years, employees who commuted to the lab from New York and Connecticut made major breakthroughs in vaccine research to prevent animal diseases, especially foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). The PIADC has played a significant role in the economy of Eastern Long Island's North Fork because of employment opportunities in biotechnology, veterinary science, and jobs for electricians, carpenters, plumbers, and other trades, including security. DARPA exercises in power grid cybersecurity have taken place on the island, providing learning opportunities in issues of national security importance.

Prominent animal disease researchers at the PIADC included:

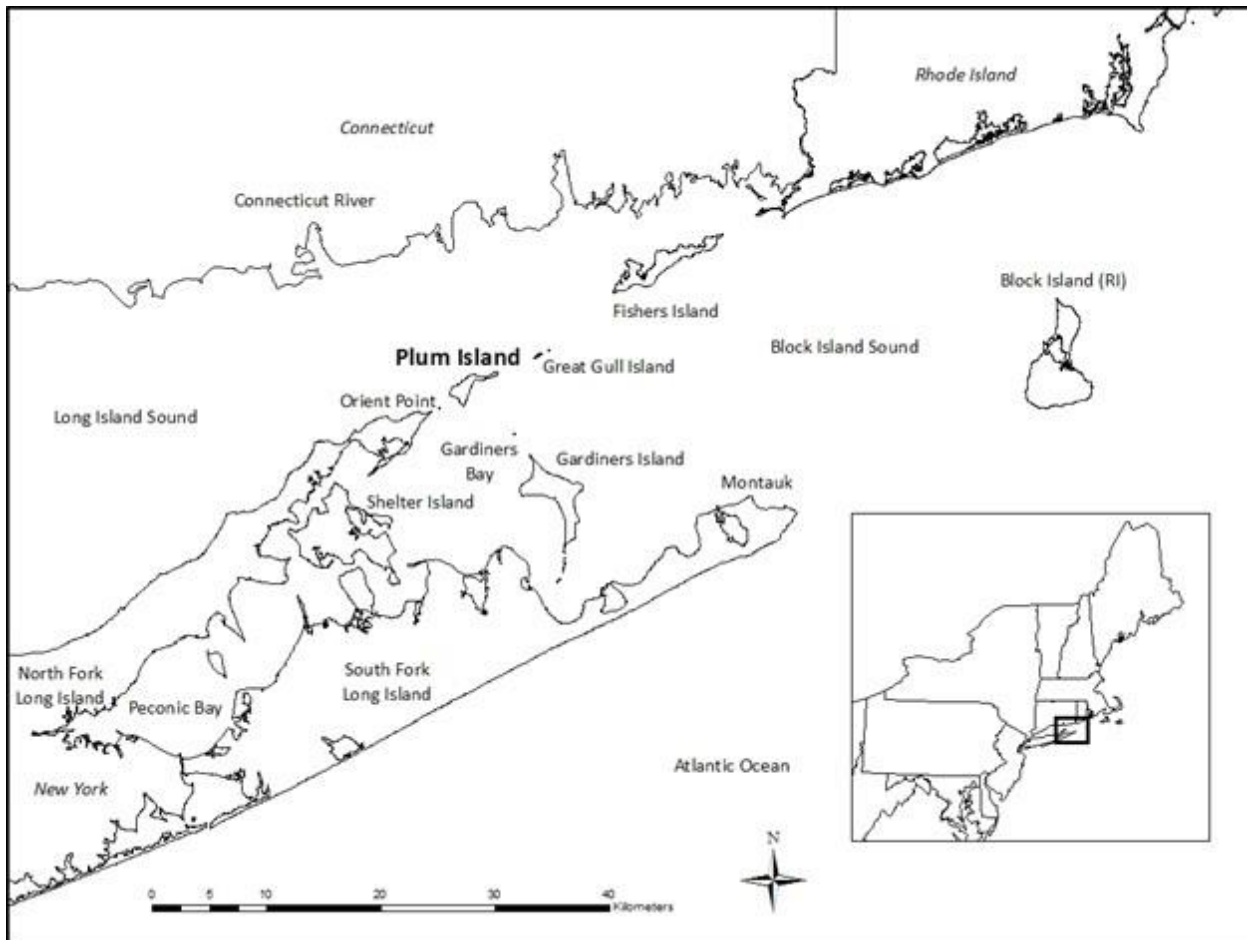
- Dr. Maurice S. Shahan (DVM), co-director of the joint committee to assist in controlling a FMD outbreak in Mexico (1947–1952), named the first director of the laboratory (1952–1963);
- Dr. Jerry J. Callis (DVM), who studied FMD in Holland and served as Assistant Director (1956–1962) and Director of Plum Island’s laboratory (1963–1983);
- Dr. Howard L. Bachrach (PhD), who studied FMD in Denmark and became Chief Scientist and Director of Biomedical Research at Plum Island (1953–1981), made advancements in the growth of the virus for research purposes, and developed a live virus vaccine; and
- Dr. Marvin J. Grubman (PhD), whose research and isolation of the proteins in the FMD virus resulted in the development of the first recombinant (non-live virus) vaccine for one serotype of the disease.

In 2022, citing the lab’s significance in science for its association with a government-supported scientific research program, New York State recommended the listing of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Conclusion**

Plum Island should be returned to use and careful stewardship by the people under a comprehensive management plan. We envision managed, sustainable, and equitable access for the island’s original stewards, the Montaukett Indian Nation, and all members of the public. We see the designation of Plum Island as a national monument as the model offering the greatest flexibility in offering interpretation, national celebration, and co-management—involving public–philanthropic and potential public-private partnerships—of Plum Island’s many natural, historical, and cultural assets. We urge you to pass H.R. 1584. Thank you for this opportunity to present our views today.

## Location of Plum Island, New York



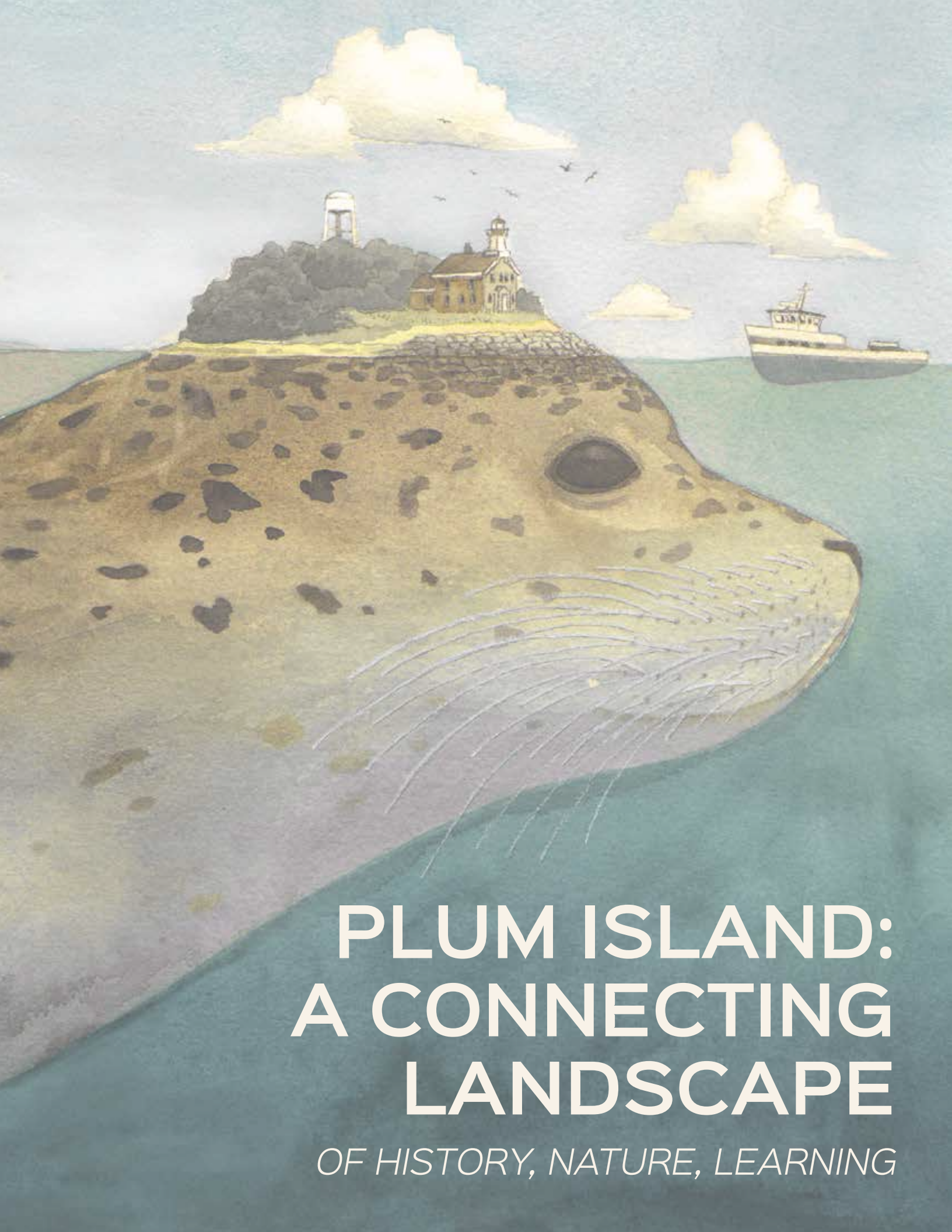
Plum Island shown with surrounding islands and points in mainland New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Islands are within New York State unless otherwise noted. *Inset:* Area of detail within the Northeast United States.

(Reproduced from: Schlesinger, M.D., A.L. Feldmann, and S.M. Young. 2012. Biodiversity and ecological potential of Plum Island, New York. New York Natural Heritage Program, Albany, New York.)

## **Members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition**

American Birding Association	Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County	The Ink Spot Southold
American Bird Conservancy	Defend H2O	InnerSpace Scientific Diving
American Littoral Society, Northeast Chapter	East End Apiaries	Island Outreach Foundation
Andrew Sabin Family Foundation	East End Lighthouses	Long Island Audubon Council
Archipelago New York	East End Seaport Museum & Marine Foundation	Eastern Long Island Audubon
Asharoken Garden Club	Eastern Long Island Chapter of Surfrider Foundation	Great South Bay Audubon
Audubon Connecticut	East Hampton Town Natural Resources Department	Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon
Audubon New York	East Marion Community Association	Four Harbors Audubon
The Captain's Table Charters	Endangered Species Coalition	North Shore Audubon
Central New York Chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology	Environment East - Peconic	North Fork Audubon
Citizen's Campaign for the Environment	Environmental Defense Fund	South Shore Audubon
Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor	Finker Wellness, Inc.	Long Island Botanical Society
Coast Defense Study Group	Fishers Island Conservancy	Long Island Environmental Voters Forum
Coastal Research and Education Society of L.I.	Fishers Island Oyster Farm	Long Island Forest Walks
Coastal Steward Long Island	Footprints In The Water, LLC	Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference
Concerned Citizens of Montauk	Foundation for Ecological Research in the Northeast	Long Island Greenways and Healthy Trails
The Connecticut Audubon Society	Friends of Plum Island	Long Island Indigenous People Museum & Research Institute
Connecticut - Rhode Island Coastal Fly Fishers	The Garden Club of East Hampton	Long Island Nature Organization
Connecticut Land Conservation Council	Gourmet Foods International	Long Island Paddlers
Connecticut Ornithological Association	Group for the East End	Long Island Pine Barrens Society
Conservation & Natural Areas Planning	Great Gull Island Project	Long Island Soundkeeper
	Henry L. Ferguson Museum - Fishers Island	Mattabesek Audubon Society
	Huntington Lighthouse Preservation Society	Mattituck-Laurel Civic Association
		Menunkatuck Audubon Society

Montaukett Indian Nation	Potapaug Audubon Society	The Trust for Public Land
Mystic Aquarium	Randall T. Parsons AICP	Third House Nature Center
Narrow River LLC	Peconic Baykeeper	Three Village Community Trust
Nassau Hiking and Outdoor Club	Peconic Land Trust	Treiber Farms
The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut	Preservation Long Island	Trimble's of Corchaug Nursery
The Nature Conservancy in New York	Quality Parks	United States Lighthouse Society
The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island	Queens County Bird Club	WATERWASH Projects
New London Maritime Society	Quogue Wildlife Refuge	Westbrook Land Conservation Trust
New York City Audubon	Regional Plan Association	Whaling Museum and Education Center of Cold Spring Harbor
New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV)	Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association	Wild Bird Crossing of Bridgehampton
New York Sailing Club	Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation	Wild Birds Unlimited of Syosset
New York Section of the International Dark Sky Association	The Safina Center	Wildlife Conservation Societ
New York State Ornithological Association	Save the Bay - RI	
New York State Marine Education Association	Save Mattituck Inlet	
Northeast Sisters of Mercy/Associates, Bridgeport CT Coalition	Save the Sound	
North Fork Environmental Council	Seatuck Environmental Association	
North Shore Land Alliance	Setauket Harbor Task Force	
Norwalk River Watershed Association	Sierra Club - Connecticut Chapter	
Old Saybrook Land Trust	Sierra Club, Long Island Group	
Operation SPLASH	Sierra Club, New York City Group	
Orient Association	Southold Indian Museum	
Park & Trails New York	Southold Town Historic Preservation Commission	
	StoneRidge Conservation Committee	
	Suffolk County Legislator Steven Englebright	



# PLUM ISLAND: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE

*OF HISTORY, NATURE, LEARNING*



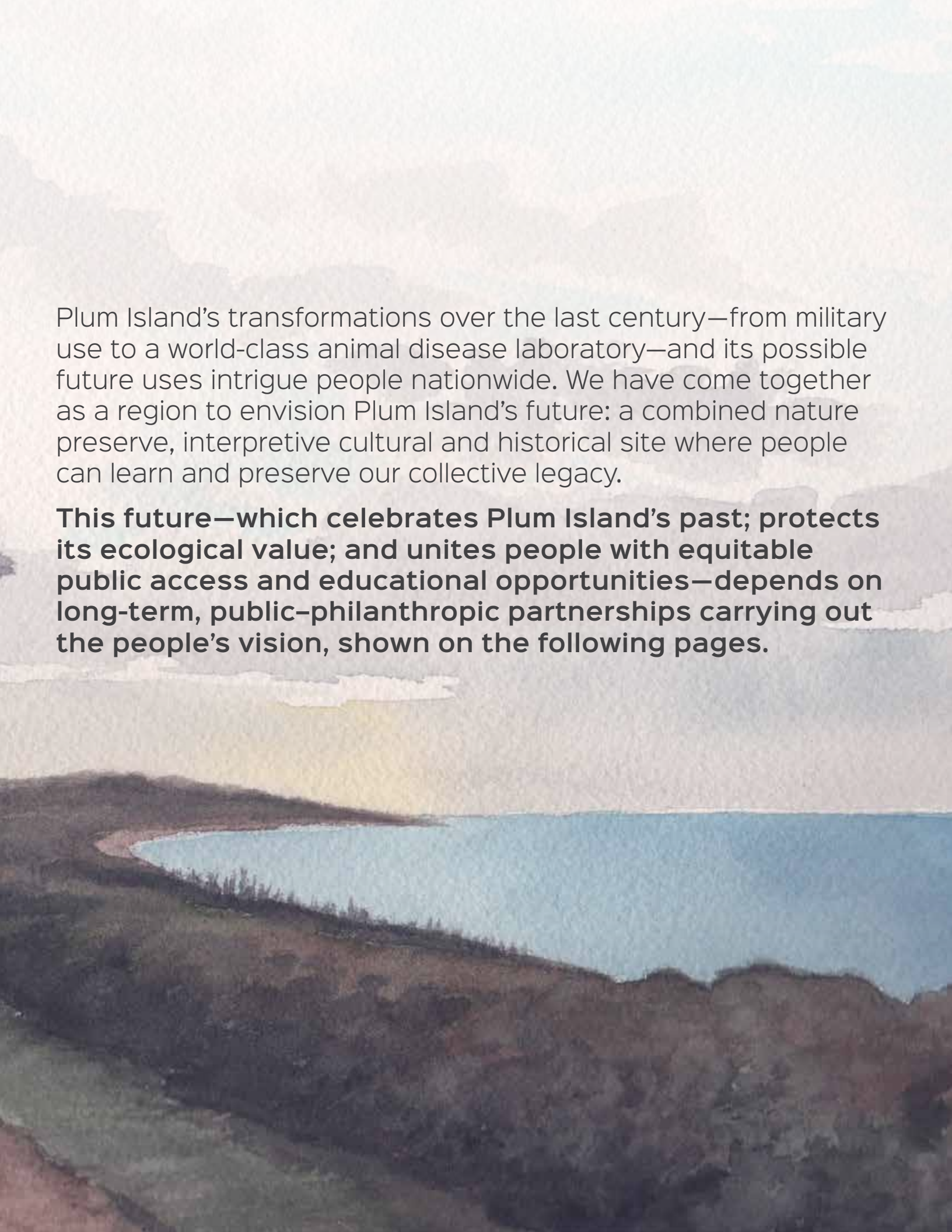
# PLUM ISLAND: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE

Beautiful and mysterious Plum Island is an 822-acre, inspiring 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 people with history, nature, and opportunities to learn the stories of America.

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.







Plum Island's transformations over the last century—from military use to a world-class animal disease laboratory—and its possible future uses intrigue people nationwide. We have come together as a region to envision Plum Island's future: a combined nature preserve, interpretive cultural and historical site where people can learn and preserve our collective legacy.

**This future—which celebrates Plum Island's past; protects its ecological value; and unites people with equitable public access and educational opportunities—depends on long-term, public-philanthropic 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 ecological 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 equitable public access tourism and educational opportunities or a sensitively-sited extension of New York's trail system. Access would be managed for ecosystem protection.

**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. "Friends of Plum Island" 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 the finest example of a seacoast defense post remaining in the country—a site that also played a role in early injustice against sexual minorities in the military. At a dedicated Plum Island visitor center located at 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** Researchers and students might use a small field station and dormitory in an adaptively refurbished building for academic studies and one-night stays. Interpretive programs may also 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, Friends of Plum Island, 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 could 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 natural communities and the island's 228 bird species and 111 species of conservation concern.

**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. Subtidal habitats are rich in biological diversity.









# Plum Island Pres

## Vision Concept



Plum Island  
Research District  
(PIR)

Nature Trails  
Fort Terry His  
Cultural  
General Public

Nature Preserve  
Student and Research Access

Lighthouse Historic District  
General Public Access (Guided)



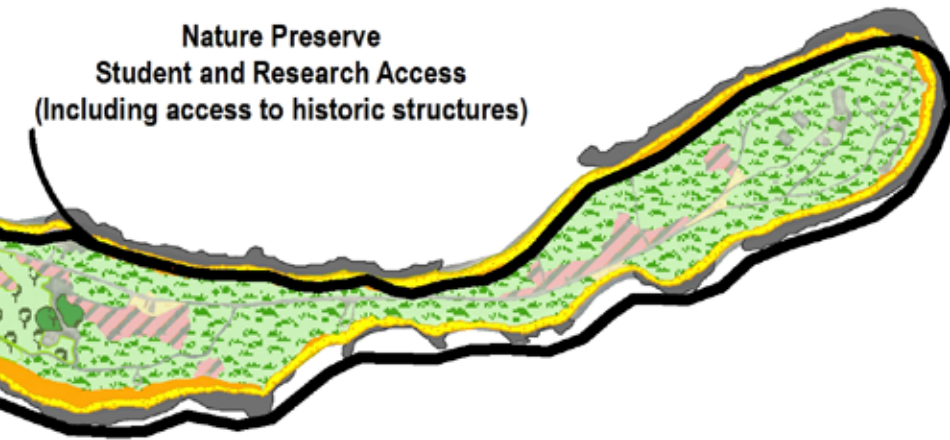


# serve

The Nature Conservancy

Preserve Plum Island Coalition

Save the Sound®  
ACTION FOR OUR REGION'S ENVIRONMENT



Recreation,  
Historic District,  
Exhibits  
Access (Guided)

## 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

\* 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

## ENVISION PLUM ISLAND PRESERVE: A CONNECTING LANDSCAPE

- **Conservation:** Public–philanthropic partnerships–federal, state, and local governments, nonprofits, Friends of Plum Island, volunteers
- **Historic Preservation:** Fort Terry, Plum Island Lighthouse
- **Visitor Center:** Natural and Indigenous cultural heritage, history
- **Ferry:** From Orient Point, NY
- **Sustainability:** Equitable, managed ecotourism, connections to trail system
- **Friends of Plum Island:** Partnerships for security and support

## Image Credits

*Photography in order of appearance and clockwise on pages:*

**Story 1:** James Dineen; Chris Pickerell at Cornell Cooperative Extension; Arfel 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  
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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](http://preserveplumisland.org/envision-report)

**For questions or copies:** write [info@savethesound.org](mailto:info@savethesound.org) or call (203) 787-0646