

**Citizens Campaign for the Environment  
Group for the East End  
Operation SPLASH  
Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island  
Friends of the Bay  
Nautical Adventures  
HealthyPlanet  
Sludge Stoppers Task Force  
Seatuck Environmental Association**

December 12, 2012

Commissioner Joseph Martens  
NYS DEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Commissioner Martens,

The undersigned organizations are writing today to request your help in restoring the Great South Bay, by allowing the newly created breach in the wilderness area of Fire Island to remain open.

In 1997 there was multi-agency effort to create the Breach Contingency Plan. This plan calls for the immediate filling of breaches on Fire Island which do not occur in federally-designated wilderness areas. A breach within the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness, triggers a 45-60 day monitoring period to assess the natural processes for the breach to fill in naturally. The plan states that if the breach will not close naturally, it will be closed manually. Although the plan was well-intentioned at the time, it is woefully inadequate under today's ecologic conditions. Water quality in the Great South Bay has significantly degraded and Superstorm Sandy has caused the release of raw and partially treated sewage, fuel oil, gasoline, household hazardous waste chemicals and a potpourri of other pollutants into the already struggling south shore waters. ***The Great South Bay is in need of flushing, and the preliminary data is indicating that the new inlet is helping to improve water quality. On Long Island, a healthy bay leads to a healthy economy. We need your help in ensuring the inlet is not artificially closed because of an antiquated and narrowly focused regulation.***

The newly released Great South Bay Ecosystem-Based Management Plan recommends leaving the breaches to their natural processes. Strategic Action 4.1 states, "Amend coastal policy to acknowledge the value of breaches and overwash in terms of ecological integrity and long term viability of the barrier island."

Stony Brook's science shows that "New Inlet" (as it is being called) is having no impact on tidal amplitude on the mainland, but does appear to be increasing the oceanic water exchange in the eastern bay as evidenced by higher salinity since the storm. The fear of increased flooding to the mainland is not founded in the current science.

**Ware urging DEC to understand the potential benefits of leaving the breach open, benefits that include ecological and economic health.** Many on Long Island have worked aggressively to protect and restore this estuarine system. We are losing the battle. Red Tide and Brown Tide have gotten a foot hold on these waters. Nitrogen levels are increasing and water quality is degrading. Towns, Suffolk County and NY State have spent

millions in collaborative efforts to aid restoration. Now nature has provided us with a precious opportunity that may in fact be a significant force in helping to obtain a cleaner Great South Bay.

In the 1970's 700,000 bushels of hard clams, which was half of the nation's harvest, came from the Great South Bay. The shellfish filtered more than 40% of the bay's waters. Today less than 10,000 bushels of clams are harvested from the bay and only 1% of its waters are filtered naturally. In October of 2008, the NYS DEC estimated that the wholesale (dockside) value of the Great South Bay hard clam fishery at its peak landings in 1976 was approximately \$12 million, which represented an estimated economic return of \$51 million to the State's economy. In 2008, the dockside value of the hard clams was at its lowest - a mere \$600,000. Improving water quality has the potential of improving hard clam populations in the GSB.

We have the opportunity to study the benefits of leaving the new breach open. ***We encourage you to explore the long-term benefits of an open breach and resist the urge to immediately close the breach.*** We have the opportunity to dramatically improve water quality in the bay and ensure a healthy island economy. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Thank you,

Adrienne Esposito  
Executive Director  
Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Robert S. DeLuca  
President  
Group for the East End

Rob Weltner  
President  
Operation SPLASH

Bob DiBenedetto  
President/Executive Director,  
HealthyPlanet

Arthur H. Kopelman, Ph. D.  
President  
Coastal Research and Education Society of  
Long Island

Pat Aitken  
Executive Director  
Friends of the Bay

Captain Don Harris, MS  
Nautical Adventures

Scott Bochner  
Sludge Stoppers Task Force

Enrico Nardone, Esq  
Executive Director  
Seatuck Environmental Association

CC:

The Honorable Kenneth Salazar, Secretary of Interior  
Rachel Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish Wildlife and Parks  
Jonathan Jarvis, Director, National Parks Service  
Dennis Reidenbach, Regional Director, National Park Service  
K. Christopher Soller, Superintendent, Fire Island National Seashore  
Colonel Paul E. Owen, Commander, New York District  
Lieutenant Colonel Michael Clancy, New York District  
Joseph Seebode, Deputy District Engineer, New York District  
Judith Enck, Regional Administrator, US Environmental Protection Agency  
Peter A. Scully, Regional Director, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation