

Thriving Habitats and Abundant Wildlife Work Group Connecticut College and virtually via ZOOM Sept. 4, 2025 – Meeting Summary

Announcements

Funding

- LISCIF Round 3 (RAE): \$1.2M for projects in 2026 to support technical and financial assistance for NY/CT communities (<https://estuaries.org/liscif-2026/>).
- CT DEEP Habitat Funding: Contact Mindy Gosselin (CT DEEP).
- LISFF Update: Suzanne Paton (USFWS) noted multi-year projects shifting to supplemental/base funding.

Planning Updates

- THAW Workplan FY26: Updated based on partner input; ~\$37M in projects included (Google Drive link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P_dmt3aUhjR-08xk6JK6VXDBWEJvbQCw/view?usp=sharing).

Great Gull Island

- Joan Walsh shared that their Conservation Plan (funded by LISFF) is online at greatgull.org and can be requested directly (jwalsh@amnh.org).

Presentations

1. Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Resilience (Maria Rosa – CT College)

- Projects: Camel Reef (artificial reef site) and Mamacoke Marsh (1 mile upriver).
- Concrete reef balls installed June 2021; chosen due to erosion, hardened shorelines, and dredging history since 1800s.
- Monitoring: water quality, erosion, habitat change. Reef balls showed 3–5 cm of sediment accumulation annually.
- Biodiversity: Camel Reef higher than control; Mamacoke initially strong but impacted by flooding.
- Setbacks: Sedimentation plates lost; mussel recovery failed; marsh no longer keeping pace with SLR (flatlined since 2014).
- Vegetation surveys (1978, 1983, 1997) show **Juncus** being replaced by other species.
- Future work: continued monitoring, wave attenuation, invasive removal, cordgrass/eelgrass plantings. Pilot planting: 90% survival at Camel Reef, near-total mortality at control.
- Discussion: Reef ball spacing (~1 ft) effective for horseshoe crabs; sediment pins measure surface deposition only.

2. Marsh Loss Analysis (Josh Wilson – Greenvest)

- Methods: aerial imagery, sediment cores, quadrats.
- Documented >25,000 sq. ft. marsh loss since 1974; accelerated in last 50 years.
- Marsh not keeping pace with SLR.
- Geotechnical data confirm historic peat extent; tidal flooding frequency has increased.

3. LISP Stewardship Strategy Update (Cayla Sullivan, EPA/LIS Partnership)

- Objective: Build a Stewardship Network to coordinate site managers, grassroots “Friends of” groups, and partner orgs.
- Feedback:
- Juliana (CT Sea Grant): Track rare/protected species in assessments.
- Erica Casper (CT Sea Grant): Keep managers connected (listserv, newsletters, THAW).
- Suzanne Paton (USFWS): Ensure existing stewardship areas gain protection.
- Anthony Allen (Save the Sound): Connect with upstream communities; link with Coastal Restoration Coalition.
- Joan Walsh (Great Gull Island): Shared projects; highlighted need for outreach capacity; eager to collaborate.
- Corrie (Audubon): Suggested BMPs for site visits, guided walks.
- Chris Schubert (USGS): Explore Tribal co-stewardship opportunities.
- Challenges: Many sites lack formal managers; balance outreach with protecting sensitive areas.

Key Takeaways

- Camel Reef and Mamacoke projects show ecological gains but face resilience challenges.
- Funding opportunities (LISCIF, LISFF, CT DEEP) are open for FY26.
- Stewardship strategy will emphasize networking, inclusivity, and permanent protection.
- Participants encouraged integration with grassroots groups, volunteers, and upstream communities.