

A Long Island Briefing

What Every Long Islander Should Know About Conservation

By: Nancy Rauch Douzinas

To get straight to the point, what Long Islanders should know about conservation is what a poor job of it we're doing. I think most people would be shocked.

Long Islanders care about the environment. And they are serious about protecting it. Polls consistently show a high level of environmental awareness and concern.

What's more, they back up their convictions, with millions of dollars of hard cash. Nassau residents have passed two Environmental Bond Acts totaling \$150 million since 2004—both winning 77% of the vote. Community Preservation Funds on the East End have raised \$430 million. The overwhelming support these measures receive, despite Long Island's sky-high taxes, testifies to the public's environmental commitment.

Long Island residents also generously fund an impressive array of local environmental groups, as well as local chapters of national organizations. Some 85%-95% of the budgets of these groups comes from Long Islanders' individual contributions and memberships dues.

Yet when it comes to conserving, our track record is dismal. Consider the following data from the *Long Island Index*:

- From 1998 to 2004, residential electricity consumption jumped by over 20%. (Commercial and industrial consumption increased 13%.)
- From 2002 to 2004, recycling *decreased* 27%. Residential waste production increased 2.9%.
- From 2002 and 2003, per capita pesticide use increased 17%.

Why is a public as aware and concerned as ours doing so little to conserve? Have we grown complacent?

We can't afford to be. We need to remain mindful of what is at stake. Let's think back, to the damage we have already suffered. The bay scallop industry, which in 1994 brought in a harvest of more than 200,000 pounds, today is essentially nonexistent. The hard clam harvest over the past 25 years has declined 93%.

Let's think forward, to proposed new power plants, undersea power cables and liquefied natural gas terminals in Long Island Sound. These projects are bitterly opposed by many Long Islanders, but seem unavoidable if our energy consumption continues to grow.

Let's keep in mind that our environment is not just a pleasant amenity: it's essential to our region's prosperity. Our \$4.3 billion tourism industry depends on preserving open space, clean water and a healthy farming industry. Commercial and recreational fishing, which brings in \$43 million and employs 30,000 Long Islanders, likewise depends on our environmental stewardship.

And let's not forget the connection between what happens to our Island and our own individual actions. Conservation does make a difference—a big one. A compact fluorescent lightbulb uses 75% less electricity than a regular bulb; over its lifetime it eliminates literally hundreds of pounds of atmospheric pollutants. (It also cuts your electric bill by \$40 over its lifespan!) EnergyStar appliances reduce electricity consumption 30%. (Find more ways to conserve at the website of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority: getenergysmart.org.)

Environmental protection is a job all Long Islanders must work on together: business, environmental organizations and government. But it's also a job for each one of us, every day.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, and convener of the Long Island Index. The Index provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit www.longislandindex.org.