

Hempstead Harbor shellfishing ban finally lifted

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Collaborative effort improves water quality

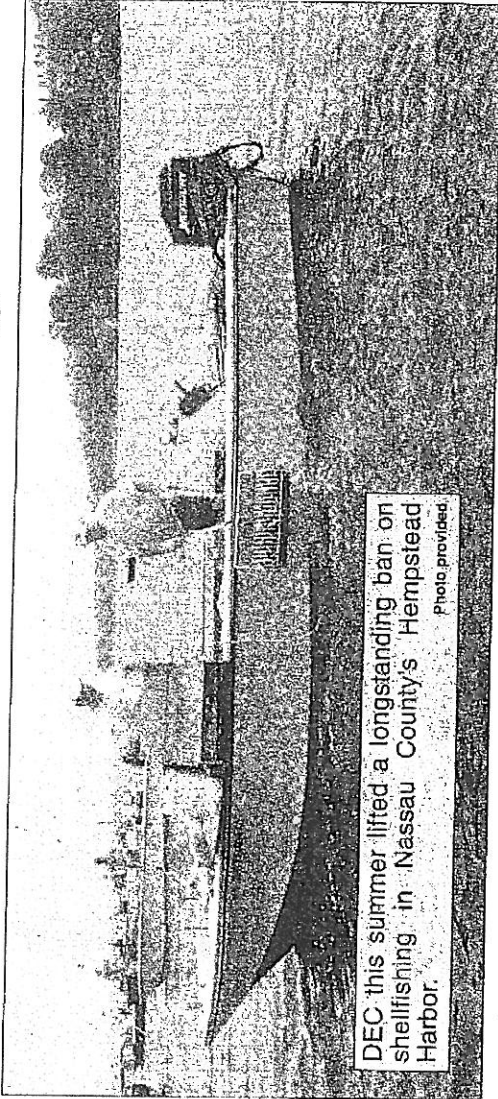
By Jeff Murray
Contributing Writer

Hempstead, N.Y. — For 40 years, Hempstead Harbor in Nassau County was a fetid symbol of runaway pollution that threatened all of Long Island Sound.

But thanks to a coalition of local governments and sportsmen's groups, DEC recently lifted a longstanding ban on shellfishing in the harbor.

DEC Commissioner Joe Martens announced the reopening of shellfish harvesting areas in approximately 2,500 acres of outer Hempstead Harbor, citing the positive results of sanitary surveys, water quality monitoring and shellfish tissue testing.

Testing of water samples conducted over more than five years showed levels of fecal bacteria in



DEC this summer lifted a longstanding ban on shellfishing in Nassau County's Hempstead Harbor. Photo provided.

approximately 2,500 acres of outer Hempstead Harbor and Long Island Sound are meeting the stringent state and federal standards for a certified (open) shellfishing area.

Additionally, hard clam samples from the area were tested for the presence of various metals, PCBs, dioxins, furans, pesticides

and radioactive elements.

The state Health Department concluded that the potential exposure from eating shellfish from the newly certified waters is not a health concern.

That outcome is the result of a true team effort, said Kevin Braun, Town of North Hempstead environmental con-

trol specialist.

The inner portion of Hempstead Harbor and three tributaries (East Creek, West Pond and Dorris Pond) that empty into outer Hempstead Harbor will remain closed to shellfishing. But officials are pleased with the progress to date.

"The shellfish opening is perhaps the greatest milestone yet in our efforts to restore Hempstead Harbor," said Bill Clemency, chair of the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee. "Not only will shellfishing create jobs and provide increased recreational opportunities for the residents, but this very tangible achievement provides clear proof that far-off visions can become reality when governments come together around a problem and work closely with citizens and others toward those goals."

DEC will continue to monitor the water quality of the reclassified areas and others as part of its participation in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program. "The agency will make changes as necessary, according to a news release, to protect the health of shellfish consumers and provide additional harvesting opportunities for commercial and recreational shellfishing. The reopening is great news, but the work is far from over, said Braum, who said the strong collaborative effort needs to continue.

"Long Island Sound is a very unique and delicate estuary. It is shared by two states and many local governments. All over the sound there have been significant efforts to improve the water quality of Hempstead Harbor will continue and we will bring more people back to the harbor to fish, clam, swim and recreate. There is much of the harbor that hasn't been opened and that's the next goal for me locally."

"The primary reason the harbor now gets a clean bill of health is because of the collaborative efforts of the Town of North Hempstead, Town of Oyster Bay, the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee, the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor and the City of Glen Cove, all pulling in the same direction to make water quality improvement the goal," Braum said.

"Over the last several years there have been many projects and many efforts to clean up pollution in Hempstead Harbor," he said. "They included wetland restoration of the shoreline to absorb excess nutrients and take out years of pollutants, the closing of the Koslyn sewage treatment plant, upgrades to the Glen Cove treatment plant, the acquisition of open space so that parts of the shoreline stay within the public domain and no industrial manufacturing can occupy the shoreline, frequent water testing and seeding the harbor with additional clams and oysters."

Since the affected area is state-owned, anyone may harvest shellfish (clams, oysters, mussels and scallops) consistent with daily harvest limits and size limits for the various types of shellfish

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