

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

KATE BROWNING
County Legislator, 3rd District
Public Safety Committee, Chair



COUNTY LEGISLATURE

1120 Montauk Hwy., Suite G
Mastic, NY 11950
Fax: (631) 852-1303

Contact: Joshua Slaughter
631-852-1300
631-456-1718

Media Release

September 21, 2015

Bellport Bay Eelgrass & Shellfish Restoration Project Advancing

Suffolk County & Brookhaven Town Partner on Water Quality Initiative

Hauppauge, NY – As a part of a larger effort to improve water quality in the Great South Bay, Suffolk County and Brookhaven Town are partnering on a plan to restore eelgrass and shellfish habitats in Bellport Bay. Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) secured the passage of introductory resolution 1570-15, which appropriates \$56,710 for the purpose of the restoration of three species of shellfish; hard clams, oysters and scallops, and eelgrass in Bellport Bay. The Town of Brookhaven has committed to accept the grant from Suffolk County and to enter into an inter-municipal agreement for the project.

The species being targeted have had their numbers reduced as the result of harmful algal blooms, overfishing and loss of habitat. The funding was requested through the Suffolk County Water Quality Protection and Restoration Program, and the Town of Brookhaven has also committed to provide matching project funds of \$72,115.93 or one half the cost of the project.

The monies will be used to restore eelgrass habitat, which is important to the survival of shellfish in the bay, and will contribute the success of scallops that are harvested from this project. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk will oversee the planting of eelgrass habitat after conducting a bay bottom survey to identify the most suitable locations. In total, 250,000 oysters, 1,000,000 juvenile hard clams, 100,000 spawner clams and 70,000 scallop bugs will be planted in Bellport Bay as a result of this partnership.

“The opening of the new breach after Super Storm Sandy has resulted in improved water quality, and this project seeks to take advantage of these improved conditions since early reports have shown better success with shellfish survival in the areas surrounding the new inlet,” stated Legislator Kate Browning. “All of the species that will be planted contribute to the removal of nitrogen in the bay, which is desperately needed to reverse the harmful algal blooms that have plagued the area. I want to thank the Town of Brookhaven for partnering with Suffolk County on this important initiative.”

“This partnership with the County will help restore the water quality of Bellport Bay by reducing nitrogen levels and providing natural protection and habitat for scallops,” said Brookhaven Town Supervisor Ed Romaine. “The restoration of shellfish species will further improve water quality by filtering massive amounts of water through their bodies and removing excessive amounts of algal blooms. It's right in line with Brookhaven's

commitment to protect and preserve our waterways by taking action and cleaning them up now, before it's too late. By working together on this initiative, we will make a positive impact on our environment for years to come."

"The project to restore the shellfish population in the Great South Bay, which has been made possible through collaboration between the Town and County, will advance our initiative to strengthen the ecosystem of the Bay," stated Councilwoman Connie Kepert. "Shellfish are vital to the long-term viability of the Bay because they provide water quality maintenance by filtering nitrogen and particulates from the water, stabilize the shoreline, and provide habitats for other organisms. Through this partnership, the Town and the County have committed to improving and fortifying the conditions of the Bay in a sustainable way for future generations."

"Friends of Bellport Bay (FoBB), a volunteer organization whose mission is to assist at improving the water quality in Bellport Bay by reestablishing shellfish colonies, is thrilled with Legislator Browning's efforts and success at securing funding that will support our goals," stated Thomas Schultz, Co-Chair of Friends of Bellport Bay. "Legislator Kate Browning recognizes the importance in respecting and protecting our bay, and her support is greatly appreciated."

###