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Plum Island National Monument Updated Action Plan

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC) supports the establishment of Plum Island National Monument to tell the story of a remote island only 110 miles from New York City. Plum Island is where, for thousands of years, people were served by and interacted with nature, and where, in the past few hundred years, most people's access has been severely restricted or even prohibited.

Now is the time to return Plum Island to use and stewardship by the people and allow managed, sustainable, and equitable access for the island's original stewards, the Montaukett Indian Nation, and all members of the public. The PPIC sees a national monument proclamation offering the greatest flexibility in celebrating and managing the many national assets at this publicly owned island gem, which boasts 24 natural communities, high biodiversity, and many opportunities to educate the public about American history, cultural heritage, and nature. In addition, the island could serve to honor members of the military who have been unfairly discriminated against on account of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, since it was the location of a nationally significant LGBTQ court martial (Major Benjamin M. Koehler in 1914 at Fort Terry).

Over the course of two years, the Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC) and 160 stakeholders from diverse fields embarked on a structured planning process called *Envision Plum Island*, developing an initial vision for the island's future. Below is our action plan accompaniment to *Plum Island: A Connecting Landscape of History, Nature, Research*, which is the Long Island Sound region's community-crafted, consensus vision for Plum Island.

The PPIC supports establishment of a Plum Island National Monument for the purpose of ecological conservation, historical preservation, and the discovery and celebration of our shared cultural heritage.

A Vision Evolved

At the outset of our campaign, this incredibly rich ecological and historic public asset was slated to be sold to the highest bidder. Since the completion of the 2020 report *Envision Plum Island*, the political landscape and strategy for saving Plum Island have evolved. Although the PPIC began federal partner conversations prior to 2016, the visioning sessions, which focused on New York ownership, took place during a time when the federal government was divesting public lands and when a congressional law specific to Plum Island circumvented the normal federal disposition process, including a call for public sale of the property.

At that time, stakeholders, including residents of Long Island and over 100 NGOs, representing millions of members, concluded that New York State was best qualified and positioned to acquire the high-priority conservation areas while reusing the current laboratory zone for job retention. Since the release of the *Envision* report, however, three major events have occurred:

(a) Public and PPIC outreach fueled bipartisan repeal of the congressional language that put Plum Island on the auction block, thereby allowing the normal federal disposition process to proceed.

(b) The current federal administration has made conserving public properties, open space, and Native American cultural heritage a priority.

(c) A major donor has indicated interest in funding stewardship, programs, and other and long-term preservation activities at Plum Island, providing a pathway for federal entities to develop a public-philanthropic partnership. A 501(c)(3) group, Friends of Plum Island, was incorporated in 2021 to support Plum Island stewardship.

As a result, the PPIC—which fully supports a federal approach that partners with the Montaukett Indian Nation, the State of New York, local entities, and the community—is re-engaging stakeholders to ensure preservation, conservation, and education, and access. We call for a full telling and reckoning of America's history—from times of ecological abundance to those of significant cultural disservice and on to the last 70 years of globally significant scientific inquiry and innovation at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center.

Next Steps Toward a Plum Island National Monument

The PPIC suggests the following:

- Advocate for resources to assess the present condition of Plum Island’s ecological communities to determine near-term needs for invasive species control and other protections.
- Create a **roadmap** of necessary actions by federal agencies toward permanent protection of Plum Island. The roadmap would identify significant **milestones** and timelines within which to solidify partnerships and institute protective measures.
- Advocate proclamation of the island as a national monument. The proclamation could include instructions for transfer, final decommissioning, and future management objectives and could be made prior to completion of land transfer to another agency.
- Advocate for resources to **enable the transfer** of Plum Island from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) into a protected status, engaging all parties, including New York State, the Montaukett Indian Nation, and, possibly, local municipal partners in long-term management.
- Advocate for managed, sustainable, and equitable public access to Plum Island for scientific, historical, and cultural research; exercise of traditional cultural practices; education; and passive recreation in keeping with resource management objectives.
- Ensure the structural integrity of the Plum Island Lighthouse, continuing stabilization and repairs.
- Begin the enduring protection of Plum Island’s unique and irreplaceable attributes, by establishing a permanent **special resource office** on the island. Plum Island special resource staff would identify specific stewardship needs that will guide future management planning prior to the departure of DHS.
- Identify economical ways to retain and/or showcase significant Fort Terry buildings, such as by means of fencing and signage.
- Produce—with the support of the PPIC and Friends of Plum Island—a model **management plan** supporting the purposes of the Plum Island National Monument and Plum Island Preserve vision, with realistic goals and objectives, working with Montaukett, federal, state, and other community representatives.

***Envision:** At Plum Island National Monument, people will immerse themselves in the beauty and wonder of the natural world, while visiting a rugged coastal island within 25 minutes off Orient Point and a two-and-a-half-hour trip for 18 million Americans: Our vision protects Plum Island’s ecological value; celebrates Plum Island’s rich cultural heritage and historic past, unites people with park, research, and educational opportunities; and promotes economic sustainability.*

