Plum Island Preserve: Near-Term Action Plan

A Vision Crafted: Plum Island Preserve is the story of America the Beautiful: a small coastal island’s big impact on natural ecosystems, Indigenous people, colonizers, and immigrants, all in the shadow of one of the world’s greatest cities. 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 pictorial synopsis of the Long Island Sound region’s community-crafted, consensus vision for Plum Island.

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.

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 conservation areas while reusing the current laboratory zone for job retention. Since the release of the Envision report, 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 unfold;

(b) the current federal administration has made conserving public properties, open space, and Indigenous cultural heritage a priority; and

(c) a major donor has indicated interest in funding federal stewardship and long-term preservation of Plum Island, providing a pathway for federal entities to develop a public–private partnership. As a result, the PPIC—which fully supports a federal approach that partners with Indigenous nations, the State of New York, local entities, and the community—is in the process of re-engaging all stakeholders to ensure preservation, conservation, and education, including a full telling and reckoning of America’s history, from times of ecological abundance to those of significant cultural disservice.

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Toward a Vision Realized: Next Steps
To bring this vision to life, the PPIC suggests the following:

• Establish **Friends of Plum Island**, a stewardship 501(c)(3) charity, to assist with security, restoration, staffing, and programming through private funding. (*FoPI has been created and is organizing.*)

• (By Department of Interior) **Express interest** in Plum Island to General Services Administration (GSA) prior to or during GSA’s agency coordination process that follows Department of Homeland Security’s Plum Island **Report of Excess**.

• Advocate for resources to **enable the transfer** of Plum Island from DHS into a protected status as the island becomes available—engaging New York State, Indigenous nations, and, possibly, local municipal partners in long-term management.

• **Ensure the structural integrity** of the **Plum Island Lighthouse**.

• Commission a Plum Island **Special Resource Study**.

• 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. For example, a conservation or restoration biologist could:
  – identify ecological restoration needs and management objectives;
  – begin habitat improvement prior to the departure of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS);
  – support a Special Resource Study; and
  – help ensure precious resources can be saved and ultimately preserved.

• **Stabilize and rehabilitate** buildings that are important components of **Fort Terry**.

• Improve natural communities on Plum Island by **removing invasive, non-native plant species**.

• Produce—with the support of the PPIC and Friends of Plum Island—a model **management plan** supporting the **Plum Island Preserve** vision with realistic goals and objectives, working with federal, state, and Indigenous representatives.

• Transfer Plum Island from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to a federal **conservation holding**, while involving one or more **New York State agencies** in a conservation **partnership**.

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**Envision**: At Plum Island Preserve, 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; unites people with park, research and educational opportunities; promotes economic sustainability; and celebrates Plum Island’s rich cultural and historic past.