



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Owen H. Johnson

Senator Owen H. Johnson's Legislation to Safeguard New York's Seagrass and Wildlife Was Signed Into Law

OWEN H. JOHNSON August 1, 2012

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT**

Governor Cuomo signed a bill to protect New York's seagrass beds, an essential part of our underwater environment, and its surrounding wildlife.

"Seagrass beds in New York State are a vital habitat for many species of fish, and by endangering the seagrass, we risk losing some of our vibrant marine life," Governor Cuomo said. "This bill will stop many of the practices that have been causing our seagrass to die. We can no longer turn a blind eye to procedures that threaten our environment, and I thank Senator Johnson and Assemblyman Sweeney for their hard work to protect this fragile ecosystem."

New York's seagrass beds used to be much larger. It is estimated that in 1930, there were 200,000 acres. Unfortunately, only 21,803 acres remain, and they provide a home to a variety of important fish and shellfish. In order to preserve and expand New York's seagrass, this bill will restrict activities that may threaten seagrass areas, such as mechanically powered fishing gear, and grant the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) the authority to develop and adopt a seagrass management plan to further protect at risk areas.

This law takes effect in 150 days.

Senator Owen H. Johnson, sponsor of the bill, said, "Governor Cuomo signing this legislation into law is great news for Long Island! Seagrasses are vital to the health of our bays, providing a habitat for many valuable species of fish and shellfish, as well as stabilizing the bay bottom sediments. New York's seagrass beds have shrunk from an estimated high of over 200,000 acres in 1930 to fewer than 22,000 acres today. The Seagrass Protection Act will go a long way toward preserving and protecting this valuable marine resource and I thank the Governor for signing the bill into law."

DEC Commissioner Joe Martens said, "Seagrass beds stabilize shorelines, reduce turbulence, and provide spawning and nursery habitat for fish and invertebrate species. With this law, DEC will be able to better protect these sensitive seagrass areas and the marine life that depend upon it."