

# Newsday

## LONG ISLAND

### \$1.5M plan to help fish swim to South Shore habitat

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BY JENNIFER SMITH

Some of Long Island's dams have been here so long they've become part of the landscape.

Built to power mills or create ice ponds in the days before refrigeration, the dams also hampered age-old migratory patterns of fish such as alewives and eels that once headed upstream from the sea to mature or spawn.

Yesterday, environmental advocates and local officials announced an ambitious 10-year plan to return those fish to 30 miles of river habitat along Suffolk's South Shore. They propose building fish ladders to help fish over barriers and, where possible, removing some of the 30 dams the group has deemed obsolete.

"To make this dream happen, we

need to open up the rivers," said actress Isabella Rossellini, a Bellport resident and member of Environmental Defense, the national non-profit group backing the proposal.

The project is funded by nearly \$1.5 million from New York State's 1996 Clean Air-Clean Water Bond Act. It is a partnership between Environmental Defense, Suffolk County, the Town of Brookhaven, the South Shore Estuary Reserve, the Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited.

A fish ladder was installed on the Peconic River at Grangebelle Park in Riverhead; another is in the works for the lowest dam across the Carmans River. But the idea of dismantling dams entirely -- a tack that has met with success in Pennsylvania and other states -- is new in Long Island, said Dave Thompson of Trout Unlimited, a

fish conservation group.

The idea is to return rivers to the paths they once cut through the landscape. Instead of warming and calming in ponds, water would run narrow, fast and cool, creating ideal habitat for brook trout and limiting the growth of invasive plants such as fanwort, said Jake Kritzer, a marine scientist with Environmental Defense. "Nature responds, the river rebounds and the fish come back," he said.

Dam removal may be a hard sell for those who enjoy fishing for bass in impoundment ponds, and for property owners distressed by the prospect of their waterfront property turning into a meadowfront lot.

Bob Conklin, a founder of the Peconic River Fish Restoration Committee and a force behind the fish ladder there, has opposed

dam removal on the Peconic, saying it would mean losing habitat for those fish that thrive in the ponds.

The proposal is focused for now on the Carmans River, the Swan River and Mud Creek, all in Brookhaven Town. After researchers identify where along the South Shore alewives are still trying to come upstream, they will undertake a comprehensive survey of local dams to see which ones might be best suited for removal, Kritzer said.