

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Project  
*Oceanology*  
Since 1972

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# ABOUT US

Since 1972, **Project Oceanology** has been sparking curiosity and a passion for marine science in students, educators, and the public from our waterfront facility in Groton, Connecticut.

As **marine educators, scientists, and environmental advocates** we provide immersive, inquiry-based experiences that bring learning to life, from exploring Long Island Sound aboard our research vessels to investigations on the shore and in our labs.

**Inspiring the next generation** of marine scientists and environmental stewards is more critical than ever. Through innovative, standards based educational programs; research opportunities; internships; and community partnerships, we empower students to understand, protect, and advocate for our marine ecosystem.

# Message from our Executive Director

As we look forward to the future, I reflect back on the past year and our many successes to celebrate which you can read more about in the pages of this report including: strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ones; unique opportunities for in-depth learning and fun; engaging in meaningful research and teamwork; and recognition for our contributions as a nonprofit to education, environmental restoration, and our community.

This past year also brought challenges too. The largest financial and operational event that transpired at Project Oceanology last year was the sale of one of our research vessels, Enviro-Lab III. The decision to sell a resource that is central to our mission was not an easy one. While this decision challenged us, it also presented new opportunities to overcome obstacles. Utilizing R/V Enviro-Lab II along with additional support from contracted vessels we continue to deliver high quality educational programs on the waters of Long Island Sound while we work toward vessel acquisition.

On behalf of the entire team at Project Oceanology, I want to thank you – our members, supporters, and friends – for enabling us to continue to provide hands-on experiential environmental education. You make what we do possible; your active engagement and support is preparing the next generation of ocean scientists, stewards, policy makers, and global citizens. I look forward to continuing to guide Project Oceanology as we head into another year of new opportunities, challenges, and successes.

With respect and gratitude,



**J. ANDREW ELY**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR







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J. Andrew Ely, *Executive Director*  
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Kelsey Gillen, *Marine Science Educator*  
Marissa Gustafson, *Marine Science Educator*  
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Lesley de Labry, *Administrative Manager*  
Raymond Mastronunzio, *Custodian*  
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Ian Morrison, *Captain*  
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Brae Rafferty, *P/T Captain & Maintenance Tech.*  
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Callie Scheetz, *Director of Curriculum & Instruction*  
Haylie Schwarzenbach, *Marine Science Educator*  
Amy Stockburger, *Marine Science Educator*  
Brian Tucker, *P/T Marine Science Educator*



# MEMBER SCHOOLS

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Bozrah Public School District\*  
Columbia Public School District  
East Lyme Public School District\*  
Groton Public School District\*  
Ledyard Public School District\*  
Marine Science Magnet High School  
New London Public School District  
Norwich Free Academy  
Preston Public School District  
Salem Public School District\*  
Sprague Public School District  
University of Connecticut Avery Point  
Waterford Public School District\*

*\* Member since Project Oceanology's founding in 1972*





# DONORS, SPONSORS & PARTNERS

## DONORS

Alexis Kahn  
Amanda Fall  
Amy Stockburger  
Andrew and Robin Ely  
Bruce Buckley  
Callie Scheetz  
Chris Aldrich  
Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut  
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CT Environmental Forum  
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North American Sea Glass Association  
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## SPONSORS

Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation  
Chelsea Groton Foundation  
Connecticut Judicial Branch  
Connecticut Sea Grant  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
Connecticut Sun  
Dominion Energy  
Eversource Energy  
Franklin Templeton  
Ignite Thames River  
Mystic Financial Group  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Revolution Wind - Powered by Orsted & Eversource  
Rotary Club of Groton  
SCIENT Federal Credit Union  
The Scripps Family Fund for Education and the Arts

Town of Groton  
West Marine Blue Future  
Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

## PARTNERS

Alewife Cove Conservancy  
Baker Cove Watershed Committee  
Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce  
Eastern Connecticut Conservation District  
Ella T. Grasso Technical High School  
Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce  
Just Mystic  
Ledge Lighthouse Foundation  
Long Island Sound Study  
Mitchell College  
Mystic Aquarium  
Mystic Museum of Art  
Mystic Oysters  
Mystic Seaport Museum  
Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
New England Ocean Science Education Collaborative  
New England Science & Sailing  
Pine Island Marina  
Pro Bono Partnership  
Remote Ecologist  
Restore America's Estuaries  
Save the Bay  
Save the Sound  
Southeastern New England Marine Educators  
Stonington Kelp Company  
The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk  
The Nature Conservancy  
U.S. Coast Guard Academy  
U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center  
University of Connecticut  
University of Rhode Island  
Wequetequock Cove Water Coalition







# RECOGNITIONS

## NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR

Project Oceanology was selected as Nonprofit of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut.

This award recognizes Project Oceanology's significant contributions to the community, particularly through our educational programs that provide opportunities for students and adults to explore and learn about the ocean. The award highlights our initiatives that make eastern Connecticut a better place to live, along with our unique programs and opportunities for growth and development of staff and volunteers.

Project Oceanology was recognized at a ceremony on March 27th at the Mystic Marriott Hotel & Spa.



# FEATURED PROGRAMS



## LOBSTER TRAP RECOVERY & ASSESSMENT PARTNERSHIP

Project Oceanology continues a partnership started in 2022 with the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk, Save the Sound, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Remote Ecologist in the Lobster Trap Recovery & Assessment Partnership (L-TRAP), recovering 2,985 abandoned lobster traps in Long Island Sound. This effort helps clean up the Sound, monitor marine life, and support the health of its ecosystem. Learn more information about the program [here](#).

## UNIFIED WATER STUDY

Project Oceanology partners with Save the Sound to assess water quality in Mumford Cove and the Poquonnock River from May to October. Twice a month, our educators record parameters like temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen. We also conduct macrophyte surveys to evaluate the distribution and classification of marine algae in local waters. You can see the latest Long Island Sound Report Card [here](#).

## NOAA BAY WATERSHED EDUCATION & TRAINING

The NOAA B-WET grant program empowers students and teachers from underserved communities to become watershed stewards by designing and creating outdoor learning spaces, such as outdoor classrooms. These efforts promote environmental stewardship and enhance community resilience in the face of climate change. View current and past B-WET Grantees [here](#).



# CONNECTICUT RIVER CONNECTIONS

## What is Connecticut River Connections?

For over 20 years, the Connecticut River Connections program has brought students from urban and rural districts within the Connecticut River valley together to share hands-on marine science lessons, labs, and field studies in order to foster appreciation and a spirit of stewardship for “their river.” Students get to know students from their partner school, find commonalities, and learn to value cultural differences while establishing common ground and passion for marine science.



6,500 students  
31 schools  
18 towns



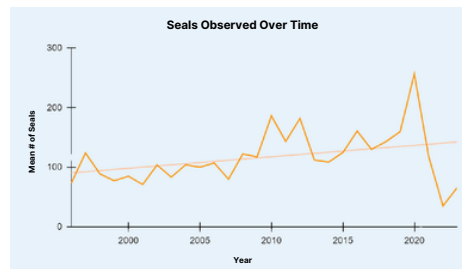
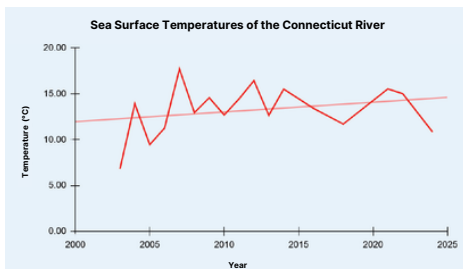
356 shipboard experiences  
194 benthic trawls  
96 eagle surveys  
66 harbor seal studies



87,143 pieces of trash  
56 watershed cleanups

## Citizen Science

Throughout the duration of our program, students investigate the Connecticut River watershed. Each meeting is designed to reflect on real-world problems the watershed is facing, both at present and historically. Students collect both biotic and abiotic samples of the river aboard both R/V Enviro-Lab II (Project Oceanology) and R/V RiverQuest (Connecticut River Museum), such as water quality, fish and crustacean diversity, seal populations, and eagle nesting activity.



This program is made possible by an interdistrict grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education and delivered in partnership with the Connecticut River Museum.







Marine Science Magnet High School and Norwich Free Academy students attended Capitol Hill Ocean Week in DC, where they received advocacy training, met with Connecticut lawmakers, and joined talks on ocean challenges with scientists, policymakers, indigenous tribal leaders, and business leaders.

We expanded our summer camp program, providing tuition assistance to 50 young people out of 480 campers. Thanks to our sponsors and partners, including Just Mystic, SCIENT Federal Credit Union, Robin's Ice Cream Truck, Town of Groton, CFECT, the Eastern CT Chamber of Commerce Foundation, SFFEA, and NOAA we enhanced campers experiences with additional resources.



We also hosted a variety of public events, including Trivia Night, Public Cruises, Family Day, Marine Science Day, and SnorkelFest, bringing people of all ages together to explore and learn about marine science while strengthening our community's connection to the ocean.



# STAFF HIGHLIGHTS



**AMY STOCKBURGER** became a certified 100-ton captain, adding another skilled captain to our team. She earned this title by documenting over 720 days of experience at sea aboard our vessels, showcasing her expertise in marine operations.

We are excited to welcome new staff members **KELSEY GILLEN** and **SYDNEY BUCKLEY** to the team! Kelsey brings experience as both an educator and aquarist, while Sydney's time as a Project Oceanology camper offers a unique perspective to her educator role.



**KATERINE CUZCO** has been instrumental in translating our educational materials into Spanish and providing bilingual instruction. Her work ensures that our programs are accessible to a broader audience, enhancing inclusivity and community engagement.



# DISCOVERIES

## Bobtail Squid

A bobtail squid was discovered during a Project Oceanology trawl on April 11! These fascinating bioluminescent creatures are rarely seen in our local waters. We are collaborating with the UConn Department of Marine Sciences to learn more about this unique find.



## European Sea Lemon

On October 17, during a lobster trap recovery trip the Project Oceanology team collected a nudibranch called the European Sea Lemon (*Doris pseudoargus*) south of Black Ledge in Long Island Sound at 35 feet deep. This invasive species has never been observed in Long Island Sound. Since then, six more have been discovered on L-TRAP trips by our team!



For **53 years**, we've been igniting a passion for marine science, engaging **over 25,000 students** annually in our programs.

This year, **480 summer campers** from **20 states** and **6 countries** dove into discovery along our shorelines.

**330 passengers, ages 6 to 84**, explored Long Island Sound on our public cruises this year.



# FISCAL YEAR 2023 REVIEW

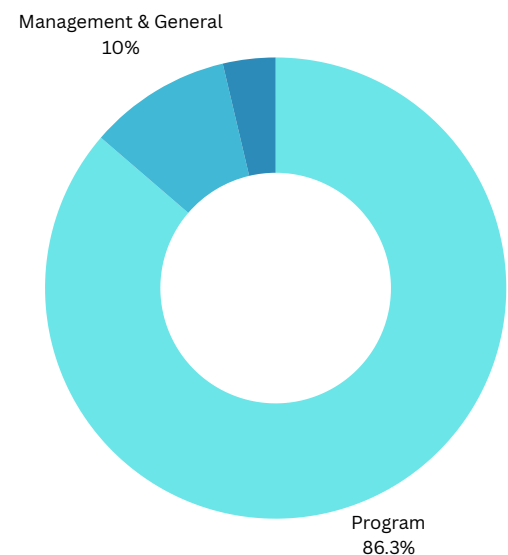
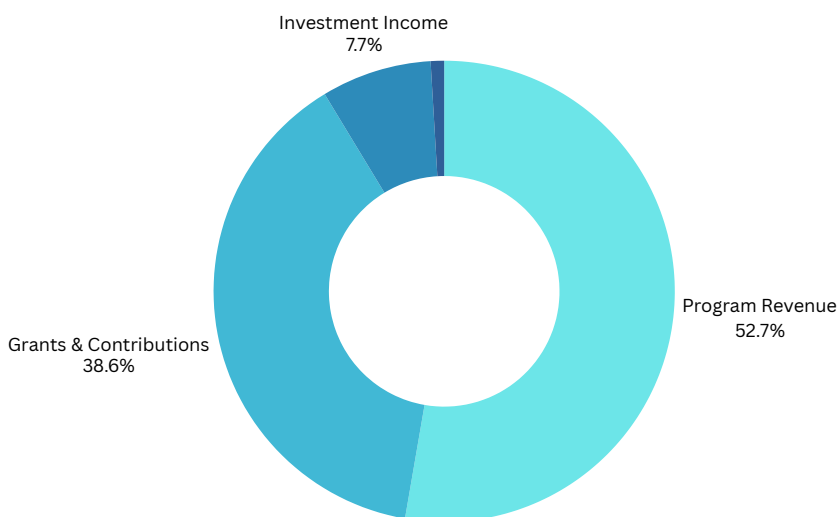
Year Ended June 30, 2024 (FY 2023)

## REVENUE, GRANTS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Program Revenue	\$ 843,467	52.7%
Grants & Contributions	\$ 617,636	38.7%
Investment Income	\$ 123,686	7.7%
Other	\$ 15,042	0.9%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,599,831</b>	<b>100%</b>

## EXPENSES

Marine Programs	\$1,400,212	86.0%
Management & General	\$ 167,270	10.3%
Fundraising	\$ 59,810	3.7%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,627,292</b>	<b>100%</b>





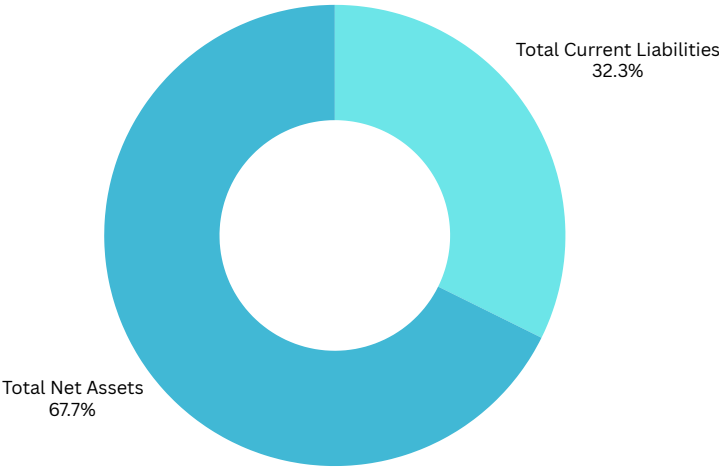
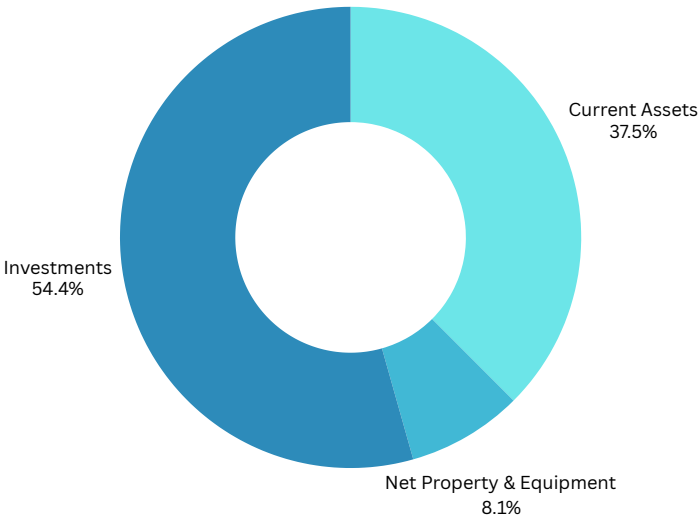
# FISCAL YEAR 2023 ASSETS

## ASSETS

Current Assets .....	\$689K
Net Property & Equipment .....	\$149K
Investments .....	\$999K

## LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Total Current Liabilities .....	\$592K
Total Net Assets .....	\$1.24M





*“Project Oceanology serves as a cornerstone to our Marine Science curriculum from elementary through High School. As a founding district, Waterford depends on Project Oceanology for the field experience that we cannot provide through any other venue.*

*I have personally brought over 5000 students to Project Oceanology and estimate that they have served close to 1,000,000 students over the 50+ years of existence. Every one of those students has had an experience they will not forget.*

*If I wear a Project Oceanology hat or shirt in public, no matter where in the world I am, people stop me to say how much they love Project Oceanology and how fondly they remember their experiences.*

*Many of my students have also attended camp, interned, and worked at Project Oceanology. Many have used the experience as launching pads for careers in marine and environmental science. From my school alone, Project Oceanology has inspired dozens of my students to continue in Marine Science. Five of which continued to the PHD level in Marine Science. One was recently cited in the most recent IPCC report on climate change. Project Oceanology serves as a cornerstone to our Marine Science curriculum from elementary through High School.”*

**- Mike O' Connor, Waterford High School Science Teacher:**





# PROJECT OCEANOLOGY

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