

# Coastal Features

Information about the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council

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## Bay Summit 2000 Casts Wide Net over Problems and Prospects Facing Narragansett Bay

■ The First of its Kind Conference Draws Hundreds to the Rhode Island Convention Center on April 24-25 to Reflect and Strategize on the Current Status and Future Prospects of Narragansett Bay

Last year's highly charged debate and ultimate failure to adopt a plan for a container port at Quonset Point gave rise to the idea for Bay Summit 2000: a proactive and rational forum for diverse user groups to plan the future of Narragansett Bay. And the idea for the summit seemed prescient when a spirited argument erupted during the first day at the suggestion to scrap plans to dredge the Providence River Channel and develop Quonset Point as the state's sole maritime cargo port.

It was a fitting start to two days of talks that stretched from the impacts of maritime and other traditional uses of the Bay, to emerging problems of the relatively new phenomenon called suburban sprawl. A diverse audience of about 300 included scientists, economists, environmentalists, real estate developers, commercial fishers, educators, military personnel, tourism professionals, government officials, and others.

To encourage wide-ranging ideas and debate, white papers were written and panel discussions were convened to focus attention on several diverse use types:

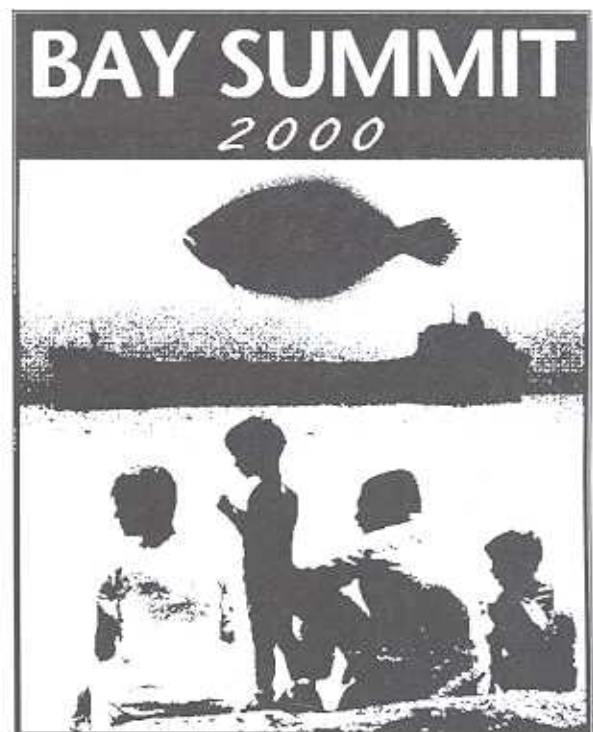
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The Quonset Point controversy began when Dennis Nixon, a professor of marine affairs at the University of Rhode Island asserted that it was "a colossal waste of tax dollars" to spend an estimated \$160 million to dredge the Providence River

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**Narragansett Bay Summit 2000**

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Channel and maintain shipping at the Port of Providence. Nixon contrasted the generally accepted notion that the channel would require dredging again in about twenty years, with the fact that the Quonset/Davisville Channel has not been dredged in about fifty years, and can still accommodate deep draft vessels.

Nixon also argued that because Rhode Island's population center has shifted away from urban areas such as Providence to "North Kingstown and East Greenwich," it makes sense to locate a port where the demand for petroleum is highest and the distance required to transport it is reduced. Quonset Point is located in North Kingstown.

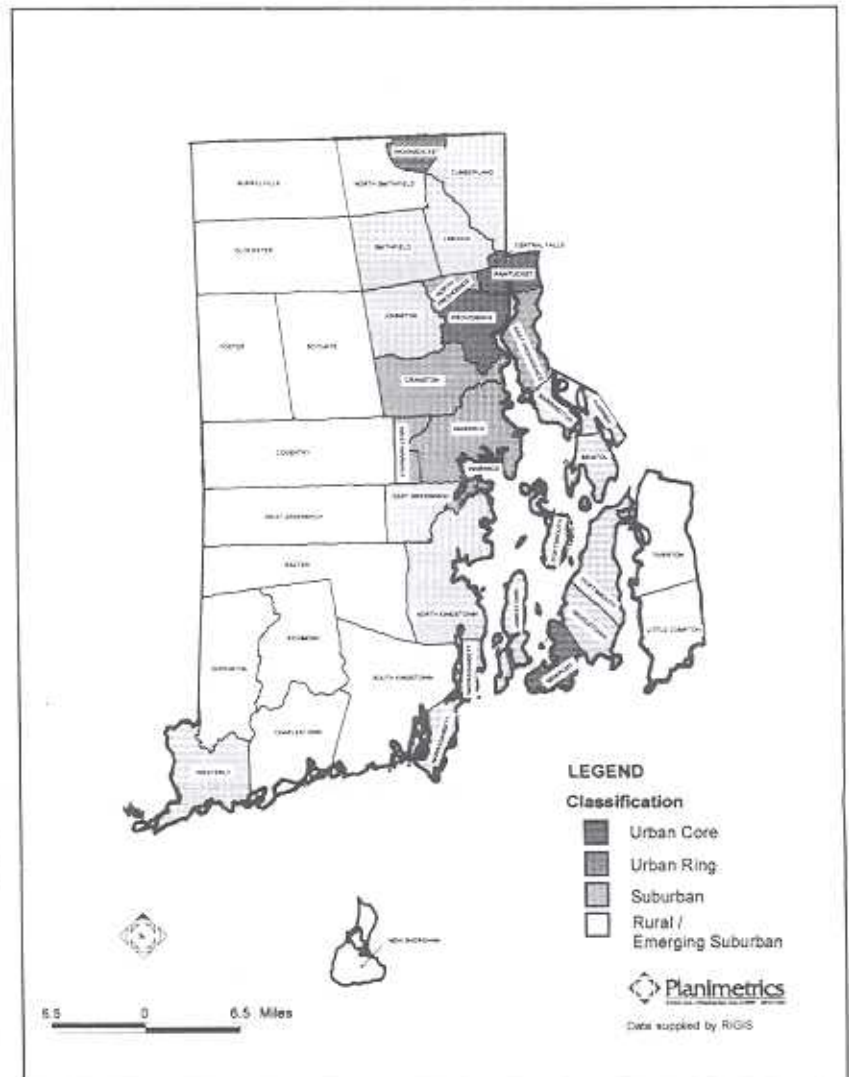
But North Kingstown Town Planner Marilyn Cohen strongly opposed the idea and protested that a port at Quonset Point would result in a petroleum distribution pipeline that would threaten the town's "single source aquifer."

The summit showed that many old familiar problems, such as declining fish populations and persistent pollution in the upper Bay are the result of activities that directly use its waters and coastal

areas. But it also showed that new threats to its water quality, and even to its aesthetic

value are beginning to emerge from the relatively recent phenomenon called suburban sprawl. Grow Smart Rhode Island, a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization "created to combat suburban sprawl and urban decay" states that suburban sprawl has been occurring in Rhode Island for the past 50 years and defines it as "a low-density, large lot, and scattered...inefficient development pattern." Congressman Robert Weygand confessed to being part of the problem. He said that the very street he now lives on was a bucolic gravel lane "with maybe four houses on it" that he used as a shortcut while attending URI. Now, it's a paved street with about 400 houses. Similar neighborhoods are becoming the norm in parts of many coastal communities.

**The Current Pattern of Suburban Sprawl  
Around Narragansett Bay**



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For further information on suburban sprawl contact:  
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**Coastal Features**

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## Narragansett Bay Summit 2000

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The problem for Narragansett Bay is that many of these neighborhoods lack sewers. The non-point source pollution from both contaminated groundwater and stormwater run-off can degrade previously unpolluted areas of the Bay. And hinting at the loss of aesthetic beauty that makes Narragansett Bay so attractive for recreation and tourism, Weygand said, "we can't stop sprawl, but if we're not careful Narragansett Bay will resemble Route 2 in Warwick."

A myriad of other problems face the Bay. Declining fisheries resources, increased demand for recreational boating, the need to dredge marinas, disposal of dredged materials, and habitat restoration all demand solutions. Some potential answers may be forthcoming. Legislation to pay for habitat restoration has been proposed but not passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly for the past few years. But real hope seemed to emerge from the summit that this could be the year that this changes. Nonetheless, answers to most of the problems discussed at the summit remain unrealized.

The true value of the summit may come from a consensus decision by key leaders to support some priority resolutions:

- support for habitat restoration, including eelgrass beds, salt marshes, and anadromous fish runs
- short term support for existing marine transportation uses; support plans to dredge the Providence River Channel



- long term support for a comprehensive Bay management plan that addresses problems raised at the summit

Finally, it may be useful to remember Representative Robert Weygand's keynote remarks: "We need a true vision not only of what coastal zone management means in terms of habitat restoration and resource protection, but also in terms of development. We need to create a comprehensive plan for Narragansett Bay that addresses the future of Rhode Island. If we simply talk about the planning process for the next year but produce no product we have failed."

**Bay Stewards:** Bay Summit 2000 concluded with a panel discussion led by some of the key environmental and economic decision makers for Narragansett Bay. From left to right: Kenneth F. Payne, Senior Policy Advisor, RI Senate; Kip Bergstrom, Executive Director, RI Economic Policy Council; Grover J. Fugate, Executive Director, RI Coastal Resources Management Council; Peter Ginaitt, RI State Representative; Jan Reitsma, Director, RI Department of Environmental Management; Robert O' Connor, Director of Watersheds and Land Policy, MA EOE. Not shown is Curt Spaulding, Executive Director, Save The Bay, Inc., who later joined the panel discussion.

## The Bay Summit Planning Group

Brown University; City of Cranston; City of Providence; Coastal Vision, LLC; Conservation Law Foundation; Environmental Science Services, Inc.; Green Light Foundation; Green Party of Rhode Island; Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs; Narragansett Bay Estuary Program; Narragansett Bay Commission; Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Newport Convention Center & Visitors' Bureau; Newport Institute; Ocean State Aquaculture Association; Providence Plan; R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council; R.I. College; R.I. Convention Center; R.I. Department of Administration; R.I. Department of Environmental Management; R.I. Department of Transportation; R.I. Economic Development Corporation; R.I. Economic Policy Council; R.I. Greenways Council; R.I. House of Representatives; R.I. Seafood Council; R.I. Senate; R.I. Sea Grant; R.I. Shellfishermen's Association; Roger Williams University; Save The Bay, Inc.; Sierra Club; South County Tourism Council; Town of North Kingstown; Town of Portsmouth; Town of Westerly; U.S. Coast Guard; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Navy; University of Rhode Island; West Warwick Sewer Commission.

### Thanks to the Sponsors of the Bay Summit!

The Bay Summit sponsors are: the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council,



RI Department of Environmental Management/Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, Rhode Island Sea Grant, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, University of Rhode Island, Roger Williams University, Newport Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, R.I. Economic Development Corporation, R.I. Economic Policy, and New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission.



**Kudos to the Behind the Scene Team:** from left to right, DEM's Tom Ardito and Richard Ribb, and CRMC's Laura Ernst and Dave Alves are just four of the many people from dozens of organizations who dedicated their time and energy to make the Bay Summit a success. A tip of the cap to everyone who served on the Bay Summit Planning Group!

## Rhode Island's Coastal Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program Receives Federal Approval - EPA Awards \$3 Million Grant for Non-Point Source Pollution Control Project

■ Rhode Island is the first New England state and second in the nation to gain federal approval of its Coastal Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program; Towns of New Shoreham, Charlestown, and South Kingstown share EPA grant for non-point source pollution control project

Rhode Island's coastal waters received a double dose of good news on April 20 when federal officials approved the state's coastal non-point source pollution control program and funded a project to use innovative septic system technologies to combat non-point source pollution in fragile coastal areas.

Speaking at a ceremony at South Kingstown Town Beach, Jeff Benoit, director of NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management said "Rhode Island has demonstrated resolution and leadership in meeting the requirements and goals of the coastal non-point program through its own state laws, programs and interagency cooperation." Benoit further remarked, "NOAA is proud to announce that its fiscal year 2001 budget request includes \$4.5 million for our state partners to help them reduce polluted runoff."



EPA acting New England regional administrator Mindy Lubber presents a check for \$3million to Governor Lincoln Almond during a ceremony at South Kingstown Town Beach to celebrate federal approval of RI's coastal non-point source pollution control program and the funding of an innovative project to control non-point pollution in the towns of New Shoreham, South Kingstown, and Charlestown.

Mindy S. Lubber, EPA acting director for the New England region added, "polluted runoff is a major problem in Rhode Island, causing shellfish closures, swimming bans, and degraded aquatic habitats." "The program we're approving is a major step forward in addressing this complex water pollution problem; it will dramatically improve how we manage activities that degrade coastal waters, including septic system improvements." "EPA is proud of Rhode Island's achievement" Lubber said.

NOAA and the EPA are the federal agencies that reviewed and approved Rhode Island's non-point pollution program. Federal approval of a state's coastal non-point pollution control program creates an ongoing partnership between these federal agencies and the coastal state to combat the degradation of coastal waters by non-point source pollution.

Governor Lincoln Almond praised this new partnership in Rhode Island by noting "Rhode Island takes great pride in the quality of its coastal waters, and non-point sources such as mismanaged urban areas and failing septic systems create enormous impacts and severely threaten the integrity of our fragile coast." "Therefore, we are extremely pleased to be the first New England state and only the second state nationwide to receive full approval of coastal non-point pollution control program. I look forward to our continued collaboration with NOAA and EPA as Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in efforts to abate non-point sources and protect the coast."

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## RI Coastal Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program

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Ms. Lubber also announced EPA's approval of a \$3 million grant to fund the Block Island/Green Hill Pond Onsite Wastewater Demonstration Project. The project will protect fragile coastal ecosystems in the Towns of New Shoreham (Block Island), Charlestown, and South Kingstown through innovative septic system management programs. (See summary of demonstration project on page 7).

The \$3 million grant - \$1.5 million to Block Island, \$1 million to South Kingstown, and \$500,000 to Charlestown - will pay for technical assistance, water quality specialists, septic system upgrades and other elements of wastewater management plans the towns will develop during the four year grant period. The grant will also fund a partnership between the towns and URI's Cooperative Extension to provide extensive technical and program support to the towns.

Failing residential and other on-site septic systems have long been blamed as a chief source of non-point source pollution in Rhode Island's coastal waters: Green Hill Pond, a coastal pond in South Kingstown has been closed to shellfishing since the mid-90's because of high levels of coliform bacteria. Green Hill Pond is crowded by dense residential development that consists of very small lots with old on-site septic systems.

While Block Island's water quality is still very good according to New Shoreham First Warden Richard Kiley, he worries that "continued new development and old septic systems will negatively impact water quality in the near future. And that could have a direct negative impact on the island's economy." Kiley said "this grant will allow us to accelerate the implementation of wastewater performance standards adopted by the town in 1998."

The grant allows the towns to manage their wastewater on an ecosystem sensitive basis. Instead of making wastewater treatment decisions based on the capacity of individual house lots, the new program will enable the towns to manage septic systems based on the cumulative effects on their watersheds and sensitive ecosystems within those watersheds.

On Block Island, the grant money will be budgeted for the following activities:

- \$90,000 for design, site evaluation, and innovative repairs to 12 existing substandard septic systems
- \$280,000 for 800 tank retrofits to existing septic system tanks
- \$145,000 of additional financial assistance for repairs and upgrades to existing septic systems, with preference given to low-income property owners and septic systems in sensitive areas
- \$74,000 to support seven water quality monitoring stations in the Great Salt Pond
- \$167,000 for an on-site wastewater specialist, GIS work and program clerk support

In Charlestown and South Kingstown, the grant money will be used as follows:

- \$90,000 for design, site evaluation, and innovative repairs to 12 existing substandard septic systems
- \$214,000 of financial assistance for repairs and upgrades to existing septic systems, with preference given to low-income property owners and septic systems in sensitive areas
- \$36,000 to support seven water quality monitoring stations in the Great Salt Pond
- \$344,000 for two on-site wastewater specialists, GIS work and program clerk support

### Section 6217 of the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act

One of the major problems the U.S. Congress addressed when it passed the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments of 1990 was non-point source pollution of the nation's coastal waters. Section 6217 was added to the Coastal Zone Management Act to address this problem. Section 6217 requires each state with a federally approved Coastal Zone Management program to create a Coastal Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program. Rhode Island's approved Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program is jointly managed by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council through its jurisdiction over activities that effect Rhode Island's coastal resources, and the RI Department of Environmental Management via its authority to manage non-point source pollution. Additional information on Section 6217 and other coastal zone management issues is available from NOAA's website at: <http://www.ocrm.nos.noaa.gov/czm/welcome.html> and from EPA at: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/NPS/coastnps.html>

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## The Block Island and Green Hill Pond Onsite Wastewater Demonstration Project

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**Overview:** The towns of New Shoreham, Charlestown, and South Kingstown in conjunction with the University of Rhode Island (URI) Cooperative Extension are embarking on a four-year project designed to effectively manage water quality from a watershed perspective. It is an innovative approach to managing wastewater concentrating efforts in situations that present the greatest threat to the most sensitive resources, sole-source aquifers, coastal waters, and fisheries. It is intended that this project will be used as a model for other communities throughout the country.

**Project Goal:** To establish sustainable, onsite wastewater management programs for Block Island and the Green Hill Pond Watershed. This project will demonstrate the merits of using enhanced septic system technologies coupled with septic system maintenance requirements unique to each location. These advances will reduce pollution and protect the health of vital water resources.

**Reasons for Action:** Failing septic systems have produced localized threats to Block Island's aquifer while overall water quality remains high. Protecting the existing water quality is the driving force behind Block Island's participation in the project. Outdated cesspools and failing septic systems are the principle reasons for the presence of unacceptable bacteria in local wells and for shellfish closures in the Green Hill Pond Watershed. In both locations, nitrogen is an additional concern because of its health effects in drinking water and over-fertilization of coastal waters. Furthermore, Block Island and the Green Hill Pond Watershed are experiencing steady new development pressures that threaten these same bodies of water. To date, the towns of New Shoreham (Block Island), Charlestown and South Kingstown (Green Hill Pond Watershed) have invested considerable local resources and made significant progress in developing wastewater management ordinances. With the support of the EPA, state legislators, and the URI Cooperative Extension, they will be able to fully implement the management practices needed to make their objectives and ordinances effective.

**Expected Results:** Through the dissemination of information and technology transfer, this project will build a local knowledge base for managing enhanced treatment systems. Each town will establish self-sustaining wastewater management programs by creating practical policies for the managed care, repair, and upgrading of septic systems. Innovative septic systems will be selectively used to help achieve each town's water quality goals. These communities will demonstrate practical methods that towns throughout Rhode Island and across the country can use to better manage onsite wastewater treatment systems within a watershed.

### **Planned Approach:**

- Repair, upgrade or retrofit onsite wastewater systems in the towns of New Shoreham, Charlestown, and South Kingstown.
- Institute septic system standards, inspection and installation procedures, and pump out and repair requirements tailored to each watershed.
- Develop monitoring procedures that measure the impact of the upgraded systems on ground and surface water quality.
- Provide educational materials for local and national audiences

**Subsidiary Partners:** Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Committee for the Great Salt Pond, Salt Ponds Coalition.

**Project Funding:** \$3 Million, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency      **Time Frame:** April 1, 2000 – March 31, 2004

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