

# COASTAL FEATURES

April/May 1990

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council's Report on Current Events

George N. DiMuro, CRMC Chairman  
Grover J. Fugate, CRMC Executive Director

## AN OPEN LETTER FROM CRMC STAFF TO SAVE THE BAY

The letter to the Editor by Curt Spalding, Acting Executive Director of Save The Bay which appeared in the April 2, 1990 edition of the *Providence Journal* is in our opinion a naive, misleading, and abusive attack on the Coastal Resource Management Council (CRMC) which demands our response.

Mr. Spalding, it seems, has viewed the RI coast and found that he does not like what he sees. We too do not always like what we see, and we fully agree that the ecological and aesthetic health of this state's and the nation's coastal zone is being dangerously threatened by the ever-increasing pressures of growth and development. We disagree, however, with Mr. Spalding's glib attempt to lay the blame for this threat on the CRMC rather than on the true culprit: a society driven by an apparently insatiable need for more — more houses, more roads, more shopping plazas — needs which, in turn, generate more negative impacts from sewage, rubbish, and the like.

As Pogo stated, "We have met the enemy and he is us" — all of us, not an underfunded, understaffed state agency attempting to carry out its charge to the limit allowed by its rules and regulations.

The RI Coastal Resources Management Program has been hailed as a strong and progressive document. However, it does not confer upon the Coastal Council omnipotent powers to prevent all development, nor does it allow the Council to exercise its decisions in a vacuum. In contrast to the freedom afforded the acting Executive Director of Save the Bay, the Council's opinions and decisions are rendered in a legal forum, and, therefore, must be legally defensible. For exam-

ple, while we share Mr. Spalding's concern regarding the numerous septic systems sited in the Point Judith Pond and Narrow River watersheds, we would like to note that this problem did not develop over night or even in the last 20 years. Existing and future development is in many instances a function of land use patterns established long before the institution of the CRMC in 1971. Though the Council's powers are broad, they do not allow the Council to correct every past wrong. To suggest otherwise is unfair.

No regulatory agency in this or any other state has been able to promulgate regulations to fully address the serious concerns relative to the cumulative impacts of septic systems. The primary reason for this is not government lethargy, but rather the complexity of the underlying technical and legal issues. We would assume Mr. Spalding knows this.

While this problem has not yet been fully addressed, the CRMC, through its Salt Pond and Narrow River Special Area Management Plans, has implemented some of the most stringent and progressive controls in the nation pertaining to the cumulative impacts of septic systems and non-point source pollution. No less credible an authority that the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) will attest to that.

In regard to Mr. Spalding's statements concerning the "over-development of Newport Harbor", we would like to note that this area has been identified in the Rhode Island Coastal Resource Management Program (RI CRMP) as a developed harbor area, consistent with its historic use. Newport Harbor has been developed in full accordance with Newport's own planning and zoning requirements, the

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### CRMC PLANS TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH URI OFFICE OF MARINE PROGRAMS

To help Rhode Island teachers learn more about the State's coastal zone and its waters, CRMC is initiating a for credit coastal program in conjunction with the University of Rhode Island's *Narragansett Bay Classroom*.

To begin next fall and spring, the program will offer "mini-courses" for teachers in different aspects of coastal zone management, oceanography and marine biology. Instructors will include University faculty and staff, and professionals from CRMC.

Coursework will occur on the water, on the shoreline and in the classroom. Required courses will include a research and materials class, basic marine biology and a final activities presentation class, in which teachers will "present" unit plans appropriate for the grade level which they teach. Teachers will also participate in a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Workshop in which they will learn to use a multi-disciplinary curriculum known as "Project Aquatic Wild."

Using the format of the *Narragansett Bay Classroom*, teachers will have a choice of approximately 10 courses each spring and fall semester. These courses, part of the regular *Classroom* curriculum, will include enrichment programs on the biology and management of tidal areas and salt marshes, shark dissection, volcanoes in the sea, botany, archaeology and others.

"The object of the program is to help others understand the importance of management and protection of Narragansett Bay," said Grover Fugate, Executive Director of the CRMC. "One way of meeting this need is to educate our state's teachers so they can, in turn, educate their students about the importance of our greatest natural resource, Narragansett Bay."

Further information about this program and course offerings is available by calling 277-2476.

### STUDENTS HONORED BY CRMC FOR STATE SCIENCE FAIR PROJECTS



STATE SCIENCE FAIR WINNERS ERIK RIESENFELD and JOHN PRASSL were awarded \$500 and \$250 by CRMC, in recognition of their achievement. Both students are from Bishop Hendricken High School in Warwick. Prassl was first place winner. Riesenfeld tied with Gardner for second place.



MARINE DIATOMS was the subject of Allison Gardner's second place winning R.I. State Science Fair entry. Gardner is from Cumberland High School.

Three Rhode Island high school students were presented with special awards by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, for March, 1990 State Science Fair projects.

First place winner was John Prassl, a student at Bishop Hendricken High School in Warwick. Prassl's work investigated "A Macro-benthic Community and Estuary Salinity Gradient." CRMC awarded Prassl \$500 for his project.

Second place winners were Erik Riesenfeld, also from Bishop Hendricken High School and Allison Gardner from Cumberland High School. Riesenfeld's project studied "A Multi-Parameter Analysis of an Aquatic Ecosystem." Gardner's project looked at the "Response of Marine Diatoms to a Eutrophic Condition."

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DEM Water Quality certification process and all applicable requirements of the RI CRMP. It is unfortunate that Mr. Spalding disagrees with the collective wisdom of these agencies, but that is his right. To suggest, however, that the CRMC is solely responsible or has acted in contradiction to its rules and regulations is in our opinion wrong.

Mr. Spalding also finds fault with our agency's enforcement and planning efforts. In regard to the latter, we find this to be a strange charge in light of the nationally recognized leadership role the CRMC has exercised in this arena. The agency's most recent efforts in Harbor Management Planning have been hailed by the EPA as well as the Environmental Quality Study Commission (EQSC).

As to the criticism of our enforcement efforts, we would agree that additional resources are required. The recent legislation conferring on the Council the authority to levy fines on those who undertake activities prior to undergoing a permit review has helped; but we ask that we be given additional enforcement staff and funding necessary to accomplish this mission before we are judged too harshly.

The CRMC is an agency that is moving in the right direction. The Council staff is providing the Council with clear professional recommendations designed to protect the coastal environment. The Council has been supportive in following these recommendations. However, it is important to note that effective coastal zone management does not depend solely on the consideration of biological and engineering issues.

The Council has taken a leadership role in requiring that proper stormwater management controls be implemented and has required applicants to establish large buffer zones on sensitive shorelines. We believe that we and the Council are doing the best jobs we can within the limits of our authority.

We feel compelled to respond to the Spalding letter not so much to defend ourselves or the Council, but to present a realistic picture to the public as to how the coastal resources of the state are being managed. As regulators we understand that many of our actions will not receive univer-

sal support but we believe these actions are taken with the public's best interest in mind. We are also writing to challenge Mr. Spalding's illogical conclusion that the public would be best served by eliminating a 17 member board and replacing it with a singular authority. How would this assure that a better balance of often competing interests would be struck?

We reject the conclusion that merging the CRMC into a Department of Environmental Quality would result in better coastal zone management. The proposals that we have reviewed to date would in essence merely change the name on our office doors. Achieving Spalding's laudable goal of better, more effective coastal zone management requires a far more ambitious initiative than simply merging agencies and changing names. In our opinion, it requires tougher local zoning laws, a strengthening of the rules and regulations governing the review process undertaken at the state and federal levels, and a significant increase in funding for all agencies involved in the very difficult process of managing Rhode Island's coastal zone.



Those wishing to comment on articles in *Coastal Features* are invited to do so. Please send to:

Margaret Pratt, Editor

*Coastal Features*

Coastal Resources Management Council

Oliver H. Stedman Government Center

Tower Hill Rd.

Wakefield, RI 02879

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Telephone (401) 277-2476

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Wakefield, RI 02879

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