

RI's salt marsh restoration and enhancement projects: A new method for buying more time

The CRMC is managing and overseeing a number of habitat restoration and dredging projects, including a project at Narrow River that will serve as a pilot for future marsh restoration projects in the state, and a similar project at Ninigret Pond that will hopefully provide a salt marsh with more time in the face of rising seas and climate change.

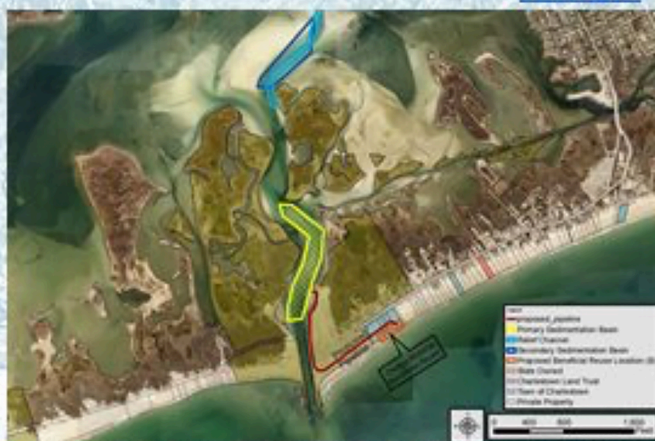
Ninigret salt marsh restoration, enhancement project to begin

[11/18/16—10 a.m., Ninigret restoration & enhancement project celebration, Charlestown](#)

Sea levels in Rhode Island have been rising at an increasing rate, and many of our salt marshes—including those in Ninigret Pond—confirm what models are reporting: that salt marshes are beginning to drown in place. Salt marshes perform many important functions, including acting as a natural buffer to storms and providing protection for communities along our shorelines. Inside the Charlestown breachway in Ninigret Pond, sand has been accumulating as it is swept in by currents. As it enters the pond it covers eelgrass beds—another important habitat—and makes navigation difficult for boaters. The CRMC and its partners have designed a project that will use sediment dredged from the breachway channel to build up the elevation of the adjacent marsh. The goals of the project are: preserve the functions of the existing salt marsh, making it more resilient to sea level rise; to slow sediment entry into the pond; and to improve navigation.

Dredging is slated to begin during the first week in December. Work on the salt marsh will begin shortly after dredging begins, and will continue through January. The salt marsh work will be done using a lightweight, amphibious excavator, and is anticipated to be completed no later than mid-April. Planting of the marsh will occur in the mid to late spring. Ecological monitoring of the site is ongoing and will continue after the project is completed.

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Update on Narrow River salt marsh restoration project

Work has begun on the marsh restoration within the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge on the Narrow River, and will be visible to residents and users of the river.

There are currently many areas of the marsh where ponded water stays on the surface, even at low tide, drowning vegetation and providing areas for mosquitos to breed. This is thought to be the result of sea level rise, which is happening at an increasingly faster rate due to climate change. Marshes with healthy vegetation are better able to accumulate sediments and build elevation to keep up with rising sea levels. However, recent evidence suggests that most of the marshes in Rhode Island are not keeping pace with sea level rise and drowning.

If the marsh disappears, the important “ecological services” it provides are also lost. Among many other functions, marshes are important habitat for fish and wildlife. To combat drowning, and to hopefully increase the lifespan and resilience of the marsh to future sea level rise and other stressors, the CRMC and its partners aims to restore and elevate the marsh surface.

One method of restoration involves placing dredged material on the surface of the marsh to raise the elevation so that plants can thrive. This method will be used in the Narrow River. Material will be dredged from select locations to create depths where eelgrass—another important habitat—can grow. The dredged materials will then be dispersed on the adjacent marsh surface to slightly increase the marsh’s elevation.

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