

CRMC 2016: A Year in Review

The year 2016 marked the 45th anniversary for the CRMC, one filled with accomplishments and progress. The Block Island Wind Farm started spinning, aquaculture garnered a lot of positive public interest, despite the continued objections to permitting leases. Progress continued on the Shoreline Change (Beach) Special Area Management Plan, including the introduction of additional mapping tools. And two major habitat restoration projects neared completion.

Block Island Wind Farm spins

This year, the CRMC and State of Rhode Island saw the completion and start of commercial operation for the nation's first offshore wind farm.

The wind farm would not have been possible without the specialized, streamlined permitting process developed by the CRMC as part of its groundbreaking RI Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP), on which the Northeast Regional Ocean Plan has been modeled. Through Executive Director Grover Fugate's work as the state lead for the Northeast Regional Planning Body, the CRMC had extensive input and involvement in the development of the Ocean Plan, which was certified by the National Ocean Council in December 2016.

Coastal Habitats

In 2016, the CRMC continued its leadership role in the preservation, restoration, and monitoring of important coastal habitats. With federal funding from the Department of the Interior and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the agency led a large-scale salt marsh restoration project in Ninigret Pond. The project involved dredging within the pond's breachway channel and using the dredged material to enhance the elevation of the adjacent marsh—a restoration technique that is relatively new in New England. The CRMC collaborated with state and federal agencies,

the towns of Charlestown and Westerly and non-governmental organizations such as Save The Bay throughout the design and permitting phases of the project. The project is in its final stages and will be completed this spring. Learn more about the project [here](#). The CRMC also consulted on another salt marsh restoration project led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge. This is a similar project that includes dredging and marsh enhancement, and will also be completed this spring.

Public Access

During the summer of 2016, the CRMC announced that RISG had launched a new web-based app that makes getting to Rhode Island's public access points – including all 222 of the CRMC's rights-of-way to the shore – easier than ever before. Discovering the Rhode Island Shore (<https://www.shoreline-ri.com>) was designed to help residents and visitors find their way to pathways, boat ramps, scenic vistas, parks, beaches, wildlife refuges, and fishing sites along Rhode Island's 400 miles of coastline. The app offers photos of each site, daily tide information based on the Newport tide gauge, real-time local weather conditions, a list of public amenities, and directions to each location that can be synced to the user's smart device.

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CRMC expands wetlands program

The CRMC, along with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management Division of Water Resources and the R.I. Natural History Survey have created a new position within DEM's freshwater wetland monitoring and assessment program. The position will advance wetland assessment, monitoring and restoration in Rhode Island.

Since 2007, RIDEM has partnered with the RI Natural History Survey to develop methods and metrics for assessing the condition of freshwater wetlands throughout the state. Through an expanded partnership with CRMC, that work will now extend to coastal wetlands. RINHS has hired ecologist Tom Kutcher, formerly the Narragansett Baykeeper for Save The Bay.

There are 4,000 acres of salt marsh in Rhode Island, and 58,000 acres of vegetated freshwater wetlands in the state.

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Fugate receives Benchley Ocean Award

The CRMC, along with the University of Rhode Island, and Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Regional Planning Bodies, were recently honored with a Peter Benchley Ocean Award, recognizing marine leaders all over the world.

The 2017 winners of this award – the world's preeminent ocean honors – and their efforts span a range of global conservation solutions including creating and vastly expanding marine protected areas, mitigating overfishing, reducing marine pollution, and addressing climate change.

Garnering the award for Excellence in Solutions, the CRMC was lauded for its creation of the R.I. Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP), along with the SAMP team, including the University of Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Center and URI Graduate School of Oceanography.

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