



Press Release

NAPATREE POINT DUNE RESTORATION PROJECT UNDERWAY

Funding Provided By the Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund, Administered by the Coastal Resources Management Council

Napatree Point Conservation Area, consisting of a barrier spit beach and dune complex, supports an important dune plant community and provides valuable habitat for a host of seasonal and resident wildlife species. It is also an important recreational area, with beach access, fishing, and birdwatching. Napatree Point Conservation Area contains one of the state's most valuable natural dune systems. The beach and dune complex is heavily visited throughout the year, and many pathways now cross the dunes, damaging beach grass and fragmenting wildlife habitat. The Watch Hill Fire District (WHFD), in collaboration with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Restoration Center, is leading an effort to restore this habitat by planting beach grass in some of the existing pathways and reducing the number of pathways open to pedestrian traffic. The WHFD and its project partners have recruited community volunteers, including members of The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, URI, and local youths to plant beach grass on Saturday, March 27. Beach grass is typically dormant during this time and can be planted with minimal harm to the plants. The proposed planting work will be consistent with CRMC's dune grass planting guidelines.

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The funding for the project has been made possible through the Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund legislation passed in 2002. The Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration and Trust Fund allocates \$250,000 of the fees collected under the oil spill response and prevention statute to potential habitat restoration projects, pursuant to the bill's criteria. The money is made available through a grant application process administered by the RI Coastal Resources Management Council for projects aimed at improving coastal habitats. On November 26, 2002, the Council unanimously approved funding for the Napatree Point Dune Restoration Project, among other coastal habitat restoration projects, pursuant to the legislation. The projects are a result of the efforts of the Rhode Island Habitat Restoration Team which presented to the Council a proposed list of funding needs for habitat restoration projects within Rhode Island. The projects reviewed by the team consisted of coastal wetlands restoration projects, the creation of anadromous fish runs, and restoration of eelgrass beds.

The project is consistent with CRMC's goals to preserve, protect and restore coastal features as conservation areas. Planting dune grass at the site is expected to improve habitat for native plants and wildlife, and preserve the dunes for the public with future generations to enjoy. This community-based restoration project is designed to restore vegetation to some of the paths, reduce erosion and habitat fragmentation, and help promote environmentally sound stewardship of this highly valuable, fragile dune system. Interpretive signs describing the significance of the dune habitat, project, and volunteer participation, will be created and placed on-site to educate visitors and encourage them to respect the symbolic fencing used to redirect foot traffic, avoid disturbing planted beach grass, and develop a greater sense of stewardship for this dune system.

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