

Things to Remember...

When using Public Trust Resources in Rhode Island:

- Use Public Rights-of-Way to gain access to and from the shore;
- Respect private shore-front property;
- Keep the shore clean of all debris, trash and plastics. Bring a bag to carry your trash and litter and then dispose of it properly;
- Be aware of Federal conservation and nesting areas along the shore. These areas remain, even within the 10-ft area; and
- Leave the shore in the condition in which you would want to find it.

This brochure is intended to be distributed to the general public.

"...to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations through comprehensive and coordinated long-range planning and management designed to produce the maximum benefit for society from such coastal resources; and that the preservation and restoration of ecological systems shall be the primary guiding principal upon which environmental alteration of coastal resources shall be measured, judged and regulated."

For additional copies of this brochure, contact the CRMC at (401) 783-3370 or visit us at the Stedman Government Center.



For more information, scan these QR codes!



The Public Trust: Public Access

Your Rights to the Coastal Lands and Waters of Rhode Island



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More about Public Access in Rhode Island

Rhode Island Colony Charter

“Every one of them shall have liberty to use the trade of fishing upon the coast and to set upon the ‘waste land’ belonging to the Colony and Plantations”

- Charles II



Rhode Island Constitution

“The people shall continue to enjoy and freely exercise all rights of fishery, and privileges of the shore”

- Article I, Section 17

FAQs

Q: What are my rights to the shore as a citizen of Rhode Island?

A: Rhode Island law recognizes the individual’s rights to fish from the shore; leave the shore to swim in the sea; gather seaweed; and pass along the shore. Trespassing across private property to access the shore, however,

is illegal.

Q: How do I know what part of the shore is public and what part is private?

A: Every state has its own laws on this issue, but by law in Rhode Island, the public has the right to access the shore to the “recognizable high tide line,” or wrack line—the maximum height reached by a rising tide—plus 10 feet. If there are multiple wrack lines, the boundary is defined by the most seaward line. The activities that are allowed under this law are listed in the previous answer. Where shore exists, you may exercise these rights outlined in the Constitution, and these rights shall be liberally construed. In 2023 the General Assembly passed a law providing more clarity on what had been a confusing Public Trust law utilizing mean high water, and clearly designating the 10-foot area as public.

Q: Are there any limitations to the 2023 Shoreline Access Law?

A: Prohibited activities remain as such. These might include trespassing, fires, alcohol consumption, creating a public nuisance or disturbing the peace. Areas where sensitive wildlife are federally protected remain so, even if they are within the 10-foot area. Also, no entitlement is created for the pub-

lic to use privately-owned amenities or property.

Q: Are there any other issues associated with beach access?

A: Erosion is another problem that complicates the public/private access debate. The beach is dynamic. Generally, if projects are proposed that alter the shore, the primary purpose must be the restoration of the natural feature. However, new projects that seek to restore dunes or beaches, such as snow fence installation, must be within five (5) feet of the existing vegetation or dune toe (whichever is more landward) and must not interfere with lateral access. Because of the natural fluctuations in erosion and accretion (when sand is deposited on a beach), the location of Public Trust land and the zone of lateral access fluctuates as well.

Q: Is putting up fencing and Private Property signs legal on the beach?

A: These are activities that require permits from the CRMC. Preventing lateral access is prohibited.

Questions? Contact us:
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