

LIVING WITH LESS: RHODE ISLAND TACKLES SHORELINE CHANGE



NOTES FROM RHODE ISLAND SEA GRANT APRIL 2013

WHEN GROVER FUGATE, executive director of the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), surveyed the damage from “Superstorm” Sandy at Misquamicut Beach in Westerly, he heard government staff and citizens alike asking: “What are we going to do to fix this?”

But there’s no easy “fix,” says Fugate, for the kinds of problems Rhode Island coastal areas face after storms. Powerful waves can erode and flood coastal communities, while rising ocean waters—an impact of climate change—also encroach over time.

What can be done, says Fugate, is adapting to the impacts of shoreline processes. “Losing your house or business to the ocean is a big and very personal thing, but we’re all going to have to work together if people want to continue to live and function at the water’s edge for the long term,” says Fugate. “We’re going to have to collaborate on a comprehensive approach.”

The R.I. Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan, or Beach SAMP, will highlight policies already in place to address erosion and inundation issues. “We need to enhance these and develop new ones, but it is important the people of Rhode Island know we have already a solid policy base that we intend to build on. In fact, we are far ahead of most other states in this regard, and we intend to stay there and only improve on our resilience efforts,” Fugate says.

The hope, says Fugate, is that the Beach SAMP gives coastal communities the tools they need so that people’s lives and livelihoods aren’t in the future significantly upended by storms like Sandy and sea level rise. “We know one sure thing—these weather events aren’t going to disappear,” says Fugate, “The sooner we get everyone on the same page, the better off we will be at protecting our communities.” ■

THE BEACH SAMP is a collaborative effort between the CRMC, the state's administrator of coastal regulations, and the University of Rhode Island (URI) Coastal Resources Center/Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program, College of the Environment and Life Sciences (CELS), municipalities, and state agencies. It brings state, federal, municipal, academic, and civic and private sector interests together to review existing policies and develop a state management plan with guidance for communities adapting to short-term and long-term shoreline change.



Rhode Island Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan (Beach SAMP) Kickoff Meeting, Thursday, April 4, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Corless Auditorium, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, Narragansett, RI. Directions at www.uri.edu/home/visitors/Map/. RSVP to Amber Neville at beachsamp@etal.uri.edu or (401) 874-6106. For more information, visit seagrant.gso.uri.edu/coast/beachsamp.html.

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