



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Bays, Rivers and Watersheds Coordination Team's Systems Level Plan

Date: September 12, 2008

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Location: Riverside Park, Woonasquatucket River, Providence

The waters and watersheds of Rhode Island are resilient, productive, and offer a wealth of future opportunity. Our state's maritime culture, development patterns, and major sectors of its economy stem directly from its estuarine geography and fresh water resources. Rhode Islanders identify deeply with the state's water environments and their historic legacies of human use.

Public perceptions regarding the health and productivity of RI's waters were transformed in August 2003 when a massive fish kill occurred in Greenwich Bay. The fish kill was caused by oxygen-deprived waters accumulating in the western portion of Greenwich Bay, trapping and killing about one million juvenile menhaden and hundreds of small crabs, blackfish, and horseshoe crabs. We also witnessed numerous saltwater beach closings that summer, frequently due to contamination from stormwater flows into marine waters.

The fish kill and beach closings together galvanized public and political attention upon Narragansett Bay. In fall of 2003, Governor Carcieri launched the Governor's Commission on Narragansett Bay and its Watershed, which issued a report with numerous recommendations on how the state should work to improve water quality. In response to the report's call for greater intergovernmental coordination and systems management approaches, the General Assembly created the RI Bays, Rivers and Watersheds Coordination Team.

The Coordination Team is a state interagency commission dedicated to the protection, management, restoration and sustainable development of Rhode Island's fresh and marine waters and watersheds. It is comprised of representatives from the following agencies: DEM, CRMC, EDC, DOA Division of Planning, Water Resources Board, NBC, and the RI Rivers Council.

Systems Level Plan Just Completed

The Coordination Team recently completed its Systems Level Plan for 2009-2013. This strategic plan, which was mandated by the General Assembly, includes a strategy for attaining goals,

delineates specific responsibilities among agencies, and identifies a timetable for meeting goals. The SLP is organized into eight major sections: Waterfront and Coastal Development, Watersheds, RI's Water-Reliant Economy, Natural Hazards, Freshwater Supply, Water Quality, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Aquatic Habitats and Invasive Species.

Specifically, the SLP includes planning for:

- Reduction of pollution from point source discharges, including municipal and industrial discharges and storm water and combined sewer overflows
- Reduction of pollution from non-point sources including septic systems, residential and agricultural fertilizing practices, animal wastes, recreational boating, and land use practices
- Protection and restoration of shellfish and finfish
- Protection and restoration of aquatic and terrestrial habitat
- Conservation of open space and promotion of smart growth practices
- Management of aquatic nuisance species
- Management of dredging and dredged material disposal
- Identification of research needs and priorities
- Promotion of education and outreach
- Promotion of equitable public access
- Promotion of sustainable economic development of the water cluster

The SLP and additional information about the Bays, Rivers and Watersheds Coordination Team can be found on www.coordinationteam.ri.gov

Interviews:

Ames B. Colt, PhD, Chair of the Coordination Team – provided an overview of what the systems level plan is and why it is important for the future well-being of RI's waters and watersheds.

Alicia Lehrer, Executive Director, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC) – talked about how the SLP and the efforts of the coordination team will benefit the Woonasquatucket River watershed. This includes WRWC's plans to restore fish passage and habitat to the Lower Woonasquatucket River, and restoration of habitat, greenspace and recreation throughout the river corridor called the Fred Lippitt Woonasquatucket Greenway. We

are currently developing and improving the parks system, building off-road bicycle and canoe access to the area offering bike rides, walks and canoe paddles, and educating students and residents about the importance of river and greenway protection.



Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Systems-Level Plan: 2009-2013

Key Points

Enhanced protection and restoration of Rhode Island's waters and watersheds.

- Stormwater controls
- Water supply system maintenance and upgrades
- Water demand management incentives
- Water quality protections for fresh and marine waters
- Prevent and control aquatic invasive species
- Protect and restore watersheds and riparian buffers, including wetlands

Smarter public investments in Rhode Island's maritime and watershed economies.

- Assess public infrastructure that supports maritime industries, fisheries, and recreation and tourism.
- Invest in habitat restoration to advance social values and economic activities.
- Seek great technical assistance, training, and financial support for local governments to carry out state mandates in water quality protection, land-use planning, and water supply management.

Forward-looking planning and management to prepare for and adapt to the climate crisis and sea-level rise.

- Coordination of agencies to address sea level rise and management of critical areas through CRMC SAMP process, and other interagency collaborations.

Implementation priorities:

- Coordinate state agency initiatives and programs that address key issues
- Improve how RI state agencies work with federal and local counterparts
- Implement ecosystem-based management to address strategically key issues and integrate environmental and economic priorities.

Contact:

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