



Environmental Roundtable

May 10, 2000 Update

Narragansett Bay Summit 2000: Results and Follow Up Actions

The Bay Summit 2000 was a collaborative effort to provide a comprehensive update on the human and natural environment that centers on Narragansett Bay. It brought together experts, decision-makers, and stakeholders to examine the principal uses of the Bay, exploring their meaning to Rhode Island's economy as well as the Bay's ecosystem.



Summit presentations were based on a set of issue papers on seven topics: the Bay ecosystem, land use and transportation, recreation and tourism, research and technology, fisheries and aquaculture, industry, and marine transportation. The conclusions from the papers also formed the basis of discussion for the six panel discussions that were part of the conference. The Summit also provided a forum for participatory discussions of the Bay and its future through the use of small group discussions that prioritized issues and recommendations.

Priority issues that were identified include: creating a vision for the future of the Bay and watershed and improved Bay and watershed planning processes (economic and environmental); taking action on habitat restoration; taking steps to provide education and training; urban revitalization; and improved data collection with centralized data made available to the public.

Several ongoing actions to follow up on the Summit agenda are in the planning stages. The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, in partnership with Grow Smart RI, the Blackstone Valley Institute and the URI Coastal Resources Center, has submitted a grant proposal to bring the results of the Summit to the public. A series of regional workshops will seek public input to identify elements of a vision statement for the Bay.

Environmental Bond Issues

Two proposed bond issues are of particular importance to DEM: the Governor's \$50M Open Space bond and the \$42M Clean Water bond.

Open Space

Since 1965, primarily in the past 15 years, the state has preserved 17,000 acres, including 43 farms, 67 forest parcels, 56 conservation areas, and 67 recreation areas. Thousands of additional acres have been preserved by municipalities and non-profit organizations. This open space tradition is built on partnerships between the state, cities and towns, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, local land trusts and others.

But, our remaining open space is disappearing rapidly. The rate of loss of forests, farmland, and other open space in Rhode Island is dramatic.

Development has increased eight times faster than population. Since 1970, while Rhode Island's

population has increased by five percent, an additional 55,000 acres have been developed for residential and commercial purposes, an increase of 40 percent. Rhode Island is number six in the nation in terms of the rate at which the state's land area is being developed. In Rhode Island, we no longer have vast open spaces or the luxury of time to correct mistakes.

The Governor's Open Space Bond proposal provides \$25 million for the state acquisition program, with \$800,000 set aside for planning grants of up to \$20,000 each for municipalities. Another \$15 million will provide 50 percent matching grants toward acquisition and expansion of local parks and conservation land. And, \$10 million will be allocated to community recreational development, including a \$1 million matching grant for Roger Williams Park and \$3 million for state recreation development projects. The \$50 million will be used to leverage other funding sources, resulting in a total of \$100 million or more for open space protection over 10 years.

Clean Water

The \$42 million *Clean Water 2000* bond will provide \$30 million for controlling discharge of combined sewer overflows and \$12 million in funds for water quality and water restoration projects, primarily for local restoration action. Of the \$12 million, funding categories include \$5 million for wastewater grants, \$2 million for non-governmental grants, \$2 million for nonpoint abatement, \$2 million for planning and feasibility studies, and \$1 million for habitat restoration.

But, the funds from these previous water bonds have been spent, and there is more work ahead. There are still nearly 100 impaired bodies of water in the state. Some have excess nutrients. Some have bacteria. There are too many areas closed to shellfishing, too many ponds with algae growth.

The watershed portion of *Clean Water 2000* builds on the success of the three previous bond programs by wrapping them into one package that will restore water resources in a comprehensive way. The \$12 million in state bond funds for local water quality restoration projects will be matched by federal and local investments, meaning that at least \$24 million will be available to clean up our waters.

West Nile Virus

The state's West Nile Virus action plan is moving ahead smoothly, with the cooperation of municipalities, the news media, and individuals from a number of organizations. DEM has held mosquito training sessions for more than 100 representatives of 35 municipalities, the Narragansett Indian Tribe, and the Narragansett Bay Commission, and has invited staff from state and



federal agencies and the remaining municipalities to a similar training session May 11.

Briquettes of the larvicide Altocid will be distributed to communities on May 16 and 17, and town workers are expected to begin placing it in catch basins in early June. Westerly, as it has done on a routine basis each year since 1996, plans to apply granules of the mosquito larvicide Bti, a naturally occurring bacterium, by helicopter to 500 to 1,000 acres in the Chapman's Swamp area on May 12. The state is not advocating wide-scale aerial distribution of larvicide. Chapman Swamp is unique because of its large size, its inaccessibility and because of the 1996 presence there of mosquitoes carrying the Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus.

DEM, with the help of wildlife rehabilitators, veterinarians, members of the RI Audubon Society and animal control officers are monitoring birds, particularly crows, for evidence of West Nile Virus. **HEALTH** is monitoring health care providers to identify any human cases of the disease. The URI lab is geared to test mosquitoes for West Nile Virus as well as EEE. **DEM** will begin its weekly mosquito trapping in early June, at 24 sites across the state.

Staff from **DEM** and **HEALTH** have met individually with editors and reporters from nearly every news outlet in Rhode to brief them and ask for their assistance in educating the public in a straightforward, non-alarmist way. The response from the media has been uniformly positive, and includes ongoing coverage, in depth news features, and informative personal protection reminders. The state has informational tip cards available to the public in several languages, and will roll out a "Protect Yourself" public information campaign next month, which includes advertising on busboards. Tip cards, posters, stickers and pins for distribution can be ordered, free of charges, from **HEALTH**.

Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Update

The Rhode Island Emissions and Safety Testing Program is progressing smoothly. Under the direction of the Department of Administration Division of Motor Vehicles, 77,000 cars and trucks were inspected in the program's first ten weeks. 13.6% of



those vehicles failed inspection and nearly half of those failures, 6.25%, were for emissions problems.

Since the startup on January 3, 2000 the number of inspection stations has increased from 250 to 263, providing additional options for motorists. The private purchase of testing equipment by those 13 additional stations, and the express interest of other stations marks the industry's increasing acceptance of the program. As of now, 876 privately employed state-licensed inspectors have been trained and certified to do the testing.

Now, for the first time, testing data is being directly fed to a host computer at Keating Technologies, Inc. The data is accessible to both **DMV** and **DEM**, enabling each agency to do advanced analysis on the effectiveness of the program while providing details on the vehicle fleet.

Permit Streamlining Update

DEM has initiated a Wetlands Task Force that is reviewing this program. The group has been meeting on the first Thursday of the month and is focussing on ways to improve the program by suggesting administrative, policy and regulatory program changes. This task force is wrapping up its work and a draft final Wetlands Report should be completed by mid June.

The department will be reviewing all the permitting programs and will move onto the **ISDS** program in May, the Waste Programs in the June/July time period, the Air Program in late August and Water Quality Certifications and **UIC** October. If you are interested in helping **DEM** to review of any of these programs, please contact Tom Getz at 222-4900 x 2417. For further information concerning **DEM**'s streamlining activities, visit our website at: <http://www.state.ri.us/dem/org/ombuds.htm#stream>

Global Enforcement/ Inspection Policy

Two policies are in draft form:

Field Inspection Guidelines provides direction on balancing property rights and expectation of privacy with our need to conduct an environmental inspection.

Establishing Target Timelines for Enforcement Process works to establish a timeline for an orderly and predictable path through the steps in progressive enforcement.

In addition, we have posted a prototype web page for formal enforcement actions taken or resolved during the month of April. It can be found at <http://www.state.ri.us/dem/enforce.htm>.

Enforcement Update

Enforcement figures show that the department is about four percent ahead of last year's numbers as a whole. The Department in the first five months of this year has already exceeded the number of actions issued in 1998.

Formal Enforcement Actions Issued			
Office of Compliance and Inspection			
Program	1/1/98 12/31/98	1/1/99 12/31/99	1/1/00 5/4/00
Air	4	14	5
LUST	3	14	0
Multi-Media	1	3	1
RCRA	6	20	3
ISDS	5	9	1
Solid Waste	4	11	4
UST	3	20	20
Water	1	1	4
Wetlands	5	5	4
Total	32	97	42