

IN BRIEF

Governor's Bay Summit touts accomplishments, welcomes Ames Colt to Coordination Team helm

"A fishable, swimmable, playable, sustainable Narragansett Bay" was the goal proclaimed by Gov. Donald Carcieri at the Governor's Narragansett Bay and Watershed Summit. The summit—an expanded meeting of the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team—was a chance to highlight progress made toward that ambitious goal.

Created in 2004 by the Rhode Island General Assembly, the Coordination Team was formed to better integrate management efforts in Narragansett Bay. The team brings together the seven key state agencies and programs that manage Narragansett Bay and its watershed, and it has been charged with developing a plan that ensures the environmental protection of Narragansett Bay while promoting the economic vitality of its marine resources.

Former Rhode Island Sea Grant associate director Ames Colt took the helm of the Coordination Team this past September as its first chair. "We have, as a state, the opportunity to take the next evolutionary step in watershed, coastal, and ocean management with the Coordination Team," says Colt. "Rhode Island is one of only four coastal states that have recognized and acted on the urgent need to better coordinate management, conservation, research, and monitoring programs dedicated to these environmental and social imperatives. It's a tremendous challenge to undertake in a very difficult federal and state budget climate, but given the incredible importance and value of our coastal and ocean resources, and the powerful forces affecting them such as climate change, coastal

development, maritime activities, and ocean energy resource development, we must do whatever is necessary to enhance the capacity and cost-effectiveness of coastal and ocean protection and management."

In his update on the R.I. Environmental Monitoring Collaborative (RIEMC)—a subcommittee of the Coordination Team—Peter August, URI Coastal Institute director and RIEMC chair, began with this sobering news: "The planet is hotter today than it has been in the last 12,000 years. In the next generation's lifetime, we will see sea level rise 1 meter, which will cut Block Island in half and bring Narragansett Bay's waterline up to Route 1." August went on to say that, if these predictions hold true, it will mean "big changes for the environment. We need monitoring to track these changes." High priorities for the RIEMC include: investing in buoy system monitoring in Narragansett Bay; enhancing stream flow and riverine monitoring to track sources, water quantity, and water quality; developing a monitoring program for invasive species; and establishing baseline monitoring data to consult during an environmental hazard.

In the area of reducing nutrient and bacterial discharges to the Bay, the R.I. Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC) reported on the \$170 million effort to reduce sewage discharges to the Bay from the NBC and six other wastewater treatment plants. "We're ahead of schedule and under budget," said Thomas Uva, NBC director of planning, policy, and regulation. "We saw a 31 percent reduction in nutrients to the Bay this summer." Their report at the summit underscored the importance of monitoring watershed inputs to Narragansett Bay, including those from neighboring Massachusetts. Under certain conditions, "Massachusetts contributes upwards of 85 percent of the nutrients coming into Narragansett Bay, whereas Rhode Island is responsible for only 15 percent," said W. Michael Sullivan, RIDEM director.

Timothy Keeney of the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) discussed solutions to some of the many challenges in his session overview at the summit. Keeney, who is DOC's deputy assistant secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, endorsed a strengthening of partnerships with NOAA-affiliated groups. "We must support existing partnerships in Rhode Island, such as Rhode Island Sea Grant, the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Bay Window Program, and NOAA Fisheries." While recognizing that one of the



Ames Colt is welcomed as first Coordination Team chair. Pictured left to right are Barry Costa-Pierce, Rhode Island Sea Grant director; Colt; Gov. Donald Carcieri; Michael Sullivan, RIDEM director; and Peter August, URI Coastal Institute director. Photo by Heather Rhodes.

biggest funding challenges is earmarks—funding targeted to a specific issue as opposed to supporting core program funding—Keeney urged support for Bay Window monitoring to create long-term datasets, ecosystem-based management of fisheries, investing in special area management plans, and supporting research to answer difficult questions like, “How does taking nutrients out of the Bay affect ecosystem organisms?” In addition, Keeney talked about the role of the Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC), composed of the New England governors and Eastern Canadian premiers and headed by Rhode Island’s Carcieri, which is working to determine priority areas for 10 federal agencies. “The agencies are standing by ready to take action on these priorities.” (The resolution establishing NROC can be viewed at: www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo05/850104007_e.html; updates of the New England Governors’ Conference are available at: www.negc.org/documents/NEGC_Newsletter_905.pdf.)

In addition to the chair, the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team consists of a representative from RIDEM, NBC, the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), R.I. Department of Administration, Rhode Island Water Resources Board, Rhode Island Rivers Council, and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The team is working with federal, state, and local agencies as well as other groups to prepare an overall plan for Narragansett Bay. The Coordination Team will serve as the lead coordinator in implementing the plan.

In addition to the state agencies participating on the Coordination Team, there are also four subgroups that bring together experts in a variety of fields to provide input and advice to the team—the RIEMC, the Economic Monitoring Collaborative, a Science Advisory Committee, and the Public Advisory Committee. Rhode Island Sea Grant and URI Coastal Institute personnel are active in several of these groups.

More information about the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team, its membership, activities, and additional resources for information can be found on the team’s website at: www.ci.uri.edu/ribayteam.

—Malia Schwartz

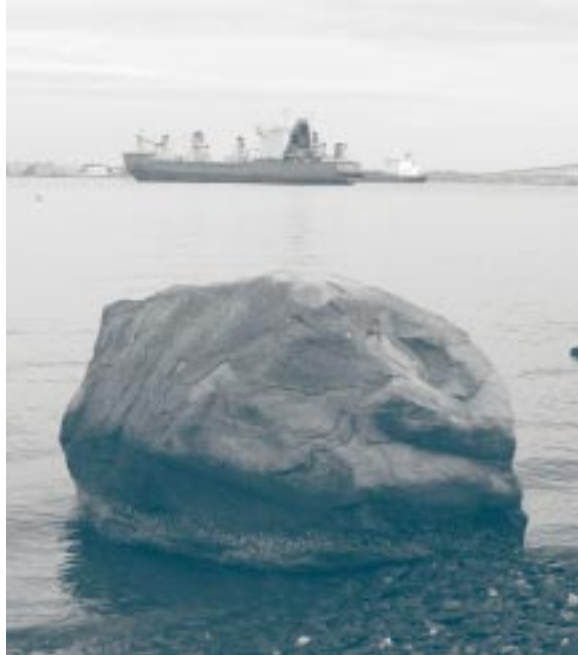


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Ronald Baird (left), retired National Sea Grant director, accepts honor from Barry Costa-Pierce, Rhode Island Sea Grant director. Photo by Heather Rhodes.

Symposium honors retired Sea Grant director

Rhode Island Sea Grant has renamed its annual science symposium the “Ronald C. Baird Sea Grant Science Symposium” in honor of the recently retired director of the National Sea Grant College Program.

In recognition of Baird’s contributions to Sea Grant nationally and to Rhode Island Sea Grant specifically, Barry Costa-Pierce, Rhode Island Sea Grant director, announced the honor at a reception in October, during the 2006 Sea Grant Science Symposium on “Ecosystem Based Management: From Theory to Practice,” held at the Roger Williams University (RWU) School of Law.

“Ron envisioned and implemented the National Sea Grant Legal Program, which was an inspiration for us to launch the Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program based at the RWU Law School. Ron also championed a national effort to add new fisheries extension agents to our programs and to create regional fisheries extension programs. Today, Rhode Island Sea Grant is the national and Northeast regional lead for fisheries extension. Ron also led a global effort to establish Sea Grant International, and we can now point with pride to sister Sea Grant programs in various stages of development in Asia, Africa, and Latin America,” said Costa-Pierce during his remarks.

W. Michael Sullivan, director of the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, also presented Baird with a proclamation of appreciation from Gov. Donald Carcieri.

The Baird Symposium also served as the sixth Marine Law Symposium. Information about the symposium is online at: seagrant.gso.uri.edu/research/science_symposium.html.

—Monica Allard Cox

Editor’s Note: Next year’s Ronald C. Baird Sea Grant Science Symposium will be held in October and will focus on “Urban Coasts and Communities.” Visit seagrant.gso.uri.edu for updates and information.