

## Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program increases outreach, hires research counsel

The Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program is poised to expand its ability to offer its legal research services to state and federal agencies, the environmental community, and the private sector thanks to the hiring of Megan Higgins as the program's research counsel.

Higgins will manage the outreach arm of the Legal Program and oversee the work of Sea Grant Law Fellows.

The Legal Program, located at the Marine Affairs Institute at the Roger Williams University (RWU) Ralph R. Papiitto School of Law, was founded in 2003 to provide analysis and research on marine law issues to foster innovative legal and policy approaches to coastal and fisheries management.

"Megan will play a major role in connecting program attorneys and law students with Sea Grant constituents. We're thrilled she has joined the program," says Kristen Fletcher, director of the RWU Marine Affairs Institute and the Legal Program.

Her new position offers something of a homecoming for Higgins, who completed the Marine Affairs Joint Degree Program, receiving her juris doctor from the RWU law school and her master of marine affairs from URI in 2001. Higgins served as a coastal policy analyst for the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), overseeing the state's Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund. She also conducted research for policy issues affecting CRMC's mandate to protect and restore the state's coastal resources and has worked in a *pro bono* capacity with The Nature Conservancy and Conservation Law Foundation.

"My experience at CRMC gave me perspective on how coastal programs around the country protect, restore, and manage their coastal resources. I am very excited to return to my alma mater and apply all of these lessons learned," Higgins says.

—Monica Allard Cox



Photo courtesy Roger Williams University.

## Northeast Sea Grant programs net funding for ecosystem-based management planning

What is a healthy ecosystem? What services are provided and should be sustained? Can ecosystem responses to disturbances be predicted? What information and tools are available or needed to support ecosystem-based management? Rhode Island Sea Grant, in collaboration with the six other Northeast Sea Grant programs, was awarded \$350,000 over the next four years to develop regional research, information planning, and coordination to address these questions about the Northeast ecosystem—New York to Canada—and determine its value to stakeholders.

The new Northeast Regional Ocean Science Advisory Council plans to develop an ecosystem-based management plan based on priority management concerns identified during roundtable discussions by a variety of stakeholders, including state and local government, industry, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academia, federal agencies, and other interested parties.

This approach comes in response to a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of ecosystems and human activities that has prompted new management approaches to ensure wise use and sustainability of resources and services, such as food, clean air and water, recreation, and waste disposal. "The term 'ecosystem-based management' implies a renewed commitment to balancing human activities with protection and conservation, and recognition that some activities are not

sustainable as they are currently practiced," wrote council members.

The new council is composed of Northeast Sea Grant directors, plus seven appointees to complement the background of the directors, and Canadian representation. Once management and policy priorities are established, a series of workshops will develop specific recommendations to address the issues. The council plans to prepare a science-based regional ocean implementation plan with specific goals and timelines to address the actions. The approach in the implementation plan will vary with the management issues but in general, it seeks to identify data and information needs, research, appropriate technologies, and a process for the technical transfer of knowledge to users. In addition, the council will strive to ensure long-term funding for regional needs.

Its work will complement the efforts of the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers—which coordinates regional policy programs for the Northeast and Atlantic Canada—and several Gulf of Maine groups that are addressing regional management issues, providing scientific data and information, and are dedicated to preserving and protecting Gulf of Maine resources and special areas.

"We're seeing the birth of new regional Sea Grant programs throughout the country. And, for the Northeast, we're connecting internationally to our friends in Atlantic Canada. I see our regional efforts as a growth opportunity for Rhode Island's world-class scientists and other ocean