

Summary of Meeting 6
Citizens Advisory Committee
Greenwich Bay Special Area Management Plan
Wednesday, December 17, 2003 6:30-8:30 PM, Warwick Sewer Authority, RI
Habitat Protection Meeting

At the sixth meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Greenwich Bay SAMP, guest speakers discussed the habitat protection issues in the Greenwich Bay area. The members also discussed potential policies and regulations for these issues. The meeting was chaired by CRMC Chairman Michael Tikoian with fellow CRMC member David Abedon in attendance.

Summary of Habitat Chapter

A fact sheet was distributed that summarized the major issues/themes covered in the chapter along with draft recommendations. There were five main themes – fish and wildlife, eelgrass, rare and endangered species, wetlands and vegetated buffers. This fact sheet will be posted on the GB SAMP website.

Habitat Protection

Art Ganz from the RI Department of Environmental Management presented information regarding the shell- and fin-fishing industry issues in Greenwich Bay. The purpose of the SAMP is to balance human uses with the natural resources that all residents in the watershed enjoy. However there is conflict between intense development on land and the filter-feeding mollusks living on the bottom of the Bay. The net decline of economically valuable fisheries is due to a combination of overfishing and reduced habitat carrying capacity. The SAMP can address the reduced carrying capacity element by protecting and restoring the quantity and quality of available habitat.

This introduction was accompanied by a graph of commercial landings of quahogs in Rhode Island. The graph showed a decline in the fishery over the past ten years. Greenwich Bay is essential to this fishery. Major quahog areas are North of Quonset Point in the Upper Bay and Greenwich Bay. A contour map of major quahog densities in the bay showed high numbers in the coves. This distribution is important since coves act as spawning grounds and are not fished because they are behind water quality closure lines. There are not high numbers of shellfish in Brush Neck/Butonwoods coves due to the unsuitable substrate. As for finfish, there is no commercial fin-fishing in the bay, only recreational sportsfishing.

The fish kill event in 2003 had no measurable mortality of quahogs. However, sampling techniques do not pick up small young-of-year quahogs. Greenwich Bay may have lost these younger, more sensitive age groups. There is also a “hole” north of Chipewanoxet where quahogs are not found – perhaps due to anoxia. No anadromous fish died in the fish kill.

There has been a resurgence of oyster population, probably due to early aquaculture efforts. Oysters require a balance of low salinity and high salinity for growth and reproduction. There was a good population level until two oyster diseases reduced the population in 2000 (MSX and “dermo”).

There is a paradox in regards to the slow water flow and flushing in the bay. Slow flow is good for shellfish populations, but also carries a risk of low dissolved oxygen and harmful algal blooms.

DEM has been doing transplants for close to thirty years in the bay. The program transplants annually, waits through two spawning seasons (hence “spawning sanctuary”) then allows harvest. Two sites are now High Banks and Potowomut. This practice thins overcrowding, replenishes depleted areas and re-seeds the middle of Narragansett Bay. So, this is not just a one for one transplant, but allows other generations from larvae. The duration from larvae to harvest is usually 3-4 years, however Mary’s Creek is 2 years.

Some key management tools and strategies used in the bay to maintain the quahog fishery include protecting the brood stock, closures, transplants and reduced daily catch limits. To maintain this productive fishery, the SAMP must improve water quality, conserve wetlands, continue the shellfish management program, recognize the value of shellfish behind the pollution lines, and realize that aquaculture is not a replacement for management and conservation of existing resources. The SAMP should also improve communication between dredging plans and the shellfish program so the resource can be transplanted.

CAC Comments and Suggestions

Marinas

- ? Moratorium on marina expansion is needed in the western portion of the Bay
- ? Capacity limit should be developed for marinas
- ? Prohibit expansion of marinas for 25 years
- ? Eliminating all marina expansion would also prevent marinas from improving past mistakes (creosote, pressure treated wood removal, etc.).
- ? Moratoriums need to be based on science to be legal
- ? Build-out analysis of marinas and private docks is needed to understand the cumulative impact
- ? Brush Neck Cove has the least amount of organisms in the bay and anoxia, but it has no marinas. Therefore we need to have science to link the issues properly

Buffers

- ? Banks should get involved in development – require a buffer zone before approving mortgages?
- ? Lot size dependent buffer zone should be developed
- ? Get \$10 million from governor for open space
- ? Prohibit ATV and motorcycle use in buffer areas – make calls regarding this to police stations a class 2 versus class 3
- ? Treat tributaries the same as coastal areas
- ? Mandate shellfish transplants for maintenance dredging
- ? Identify shellfish resources clearly on a map for harbor commission, etc

Citizen Involvement

- ? Have citizens adopt-a-stream as one way to help improve habitat and water quality that shellfish are dependent upon.
- ? Citizen participation in planting buffer zones
- ? Get broader user input to bay management and limits
- ? Need voluntary actions (CRMC policies more lenient for this)

CAC Recommendations for Policy or Regulation

Marinas/boating

- ? 20 year moratorium on encroachment or no expansion of marinas on Mary's creek
- ? Base moratoriums on science
- ? Assess carrying capacity and establish limits to uses of Bay waters
- ? Develop and ensure marina adoption of best management practices for marina construction and operation

Dredging

- ? Shellfish transplant is requirement of every dredging project
- ? Policies for not reducing or stagnating water flow

Habitat

- ? Vegetative Buffer of 200' that can not be developed - CRMC and municipalities
- ? Policy for stopping bank loans to structures destroyed in flood hazards
- ? Acquisition of open space/priority for sites closeness to bay + \$10 million the governor proposes for acquisition in Greenwich Bay watershed
- ? Policy to control phragmites and stop it from spreading
 - non systemic herbicide (CRMC regs)
 - salt/tidal restoration (CRMC regs)
- ? Protect horseshoe crab egg laying areas
- ? Extend coastal wetland protection to freshwater wetlands along streams and through watershed
- ? Prohibit motorized vehicles from beach
- ? Make environmental enforcement "class 2" call to police department
- ? Restore and maintain critical habitat
- ? Ensure Phase II stormwater implementation by both Warwick and East Greenwich

Action Items

- ? CRMC will update draft policies for the Habitat Chapter. Revisions will be discussed in February to link with the other chapters.
- ? CAC members should read the draft Hazard Chapter posted online before the next meeting on December 17.
- ? CRMC will invite a guest speaker to address the CAC at the next meeting to discuss town hazard plans for the bay.

Next Meeting

The CAC will meet next on January 7 from 6:30 – 8:30pm at the Warwick Sewer Authority. The focus of the discussion will be on reviewing the Hazard Mitigation chapter.

Attendees

CAC Members

Rich Langseth, Buttonwoods Bay Committee
Carol Fritz, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
Bill Bergen, RISA
Jack Early, Defenders of GB
Karen Way, Buttonwood Beach Garden Club

Stephen Medeiros, RI Saltwater Anglers Assoc.
Jim White, RI Saltwater Anglers Assoc.
Steve Insana, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Elaine Todd Trench, EG Historic Commission
David Richardson, Chepiwunoxet Neighbor Assn.
Chris Ruhling, RIMTA

Individual Citizens

Lincoln Ross, Cedar Tree Point Assoc.
Michelle Komar, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Neil Ross, Chepiwunoxet, Neighbor Assn.
Heather Ross
Sharon Fitzgerald, Old Buttonwoods
Carolyn McGillierary, Old Buttonwoods
Doug MacPherson, RISAA
Ed Kearney, RISAA
Ernest Theetge
John Williams
Leah Robinson, Buttonwoods Bay Comm.
Lee Steitz, Warwick Schools
Linda Greene, URI Watershed Watch

Management Staff & Technical Committee

Michael Tikoian, CRMC Chair
Grover Fugate, CRMC Ex. Director
Megan Higgins, CRMC
Virginia Lee, URI Coastal Resources Center
Glenn Ricci, URI Coastal Resources Center
Michael Campana, URI Coastal Resources Center
Lora Harris, URI Graduate Student