

Tides

MAGAZINE



An Aquarium Like No Other

HOW A SMALL BEACHSIDE CENTER IS
BECOMING A DOWNTOWN DESTINATION

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Stronger Than Ever

This is an exciting time of growth for Save The Bay. Throughout our history we have made strategic investments in pursuit of our mission to protect and improve Narragansett Bay, from launching our habitat restoration program in the 1990s to expanding the geographic footprint of our on-the-water “Keeper” program and making major investments in our Explore The Bay environmental education program in the 2000s.

We are at another inflection point today. Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium—now under construction at the Gateway Center in Newport—represents a dramatic expansion of our educational outreach. This 7,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility will provide a one-of-a-kind experience for adults and children through a unique and sustainably managed collection of animals endemic to the Narragansett Bay region; hands-on exhibits; interaction with expert educators; an invitation to get involved with the cause of protecting the Bay; and a relaxed, family-friendly setting.

Meanwhile, we are hiring new staff to identify, design, and implement habitat restoration and adaptation projects—an initiative inspired by feedback we received during our most recent strategic planning process. While new sources of funding for habitat projects have become available, municipalities and other partners often lack the capacity to take advantage of these dollars. Our objective is to accelerate the pace of project work—typically in partnership with towns and local landowners—around the Bay.



Aquidneck Island, Greenwich Bay, and the Pawtuxet and Wood-Pawcatuck watersheds are areas of particular focus for this work.

While we are excited about these new growth initiatives, our advocacy, education, and volunteer programs are running at full throttle. This issue of *Tides* highlights several examples, including our ongoing efforts to reduce plastics pollution and ensure responsible renewable energy development.

As you may have heard by now, I will be stepping down from my role as Executive Director in June after 14½ years at the helm of Save The Bay. What a journey it's been! During my tenure, I have had many opportunities to appreciate the generosity and resolve of the amazing Save The Bay community: our donors, volunteers, advocates, partners and staff. I am grateful for the friendship and support of so many of you, and will always remain committed to the mission of this wonderful organization.

With appreciation,

Jonathan Stone
Executive Director

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What's That Flag?

Strategic Plan Pillar: Education

Save The Bay staff have already begun working toward the goals set forth in our recently adopted 2027 Strategic Plan, and we look forward to sharing our progress with you! In this issue you will see markers, like the one shown above, noting that the story you're reading relates to a Strategic Plan initiative. Make note of which of our plan's three pillars the story refers to—Education, Advocacy, or DEI—and learn more at savebay.org/strategic-plan-2027.

ON THE COVER:

A moon jelly moves with the current in a tank at Save The Bay's Exploration Center and Aquarium.

COMMUNITY

Small Bottles, Big Problems



BY JULY LEWIS,
VOLUNTEER AND
INTERNSHIP MANAGER

When did alcohol nips become such a problem? When I started getting involved in shoreline cleanups in 2006, we found them occasionally, but it did not seem to be a major issue. Little by little, these tiny bottles have proliferated and now you see them everywhere you go—on the sidewalks, on the streets, in parking lots and on the beach. As they have built up in our environment, people's frustration with them has built up, too.

There is a ton of plastic out there on our roads, our beaches, and in Narragansett Bay. Bottle caps, straws, foam pieces, broken up bits of hard plastic—all of it is a problem. But nips have become a focus for many reasons. From an environmental perspective, they're generally too small to be sorted at recycling facilities, including Rhode Island's Materials Recycling Facility



Using roughly 12,000 nips, the team held a photo shoot featuring Mother Earth. Credit: Aleksander Baba-Vulic.

in Johnston. They slip through storm-water grates and filters, and so when littered, they easily end up in the Bay. (We can attest to this; we regularly find nip bottles washed up in the wrack line on the beaches.) And to cap it all off (ha!), nips are frustrating because one simple way to address the problem—a bottle bill that would require a deposit on nips and other beverage containers—has failed to pass in Rhode Island despite years of effort by environmental organizations.

So, when Friends of the Saugatucket initiated a challenge to pick up as many nips as possible to show how big the problem had become, the response was incredible. Groups like Clean Ocean Access, Ocean Recovery Community Alliance, Cozy Rhody and Save The Bay all mobilized their volunteers for The Great Nip Pickup Challenge—and the volunteers delivered! By bins, bags, and buckets, the nips came in staggering amounts. Collecting from roadsides, trails, parking lots, and beaches, volunteers seemed to relish the opportunity to showcase how frustrating this particular litter item has become. Over 90 days, 86,000 nips were collected from all 39 cities and towns in Rhode Island!

The incredible visuals of thousands and thousands of collected nips made for impressive images and an interesting story. The media began to take notice, and in interview after interview, Save The Bay and other organizations were able to talk about that simple solution that has evaded Rhode Island for decades: a bottle bill. The Beverage Container Deposit Recycling Act—House Bill 5502 and Senate Bill 751—had committee hearings this spring. Inspired by the nip collection effort, advocates showed up in force, creating both enthusiasm and momentum around this important issue.



(Above) Bill McCusker of Friends of the Saugatucket and July Lewis, Save The Bay's volunteer and internship manager, load up collected nip bottles. (Below) Volunteers drop collected nip bottles off in a dedicated recycling bin at Save The Bay's Bay Center in Providence.



The Great Nip Collection Challenge of 2023 is now complete! Some of the nips are destined to be converted into a chandelier by artist Duke Riley. The rest have been sorted and, due to the quantity, were sent to the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Center in a special dedicated load. And the bottle bill? At the time this publication went to print, the bill was still making its way through the general assembly. Save The Bay and other advocates were fighting hard for it, and opponents were fighting hard against it as well. Regardless of outcome, one clear victory has already been won: there has never been more energy around the issue than this year, when hundreds of volunteers said, through their actions, that something needs to change. ■

WHO SAVES THE BAY? STAFF PROFILE

Jess Bornstein: From Cleanups to Community Outreach



BY KATY DORCHIES NUTINI,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

Meet Jess Bornstein, Outreach Coordinator and Education Specialist.

All of us at Save The Bay have our own story about getting to know and appreciate Narragansett Bay. What's yours?

My first introduction to Narragansett Bay was when I visited the University of Rhode Island when I was 16. I remember seeing the rocky shore and exploring the tide pools—coming from Georgia, I didn't realize water could be so cold! When I enrolled at URI, I got to learn more about and explore Narragansett Bay. Now, it's my favorite place to go snorkeling, relax and unwind.



Jess Bornstein, shown here during an outdoor stroll, first connected with Narragansett Bay just before college. Today, her love for the Bay and its species has led her to a position as Save The Bay Outreach Coordinator and Education Specialist.

So you probably didn't know about Save The Bay until you went to college then.

During my first week at URI, I did a shoreline cleanup with Save The Bay as a welcome activity! It ultimately led me to pursue other opportunities with the organization, as a volunteer, then an intern, and a part-time employee. Currently, I am the Exploration Center outreach coordinator and education specialist. I love that this dynamic position lets me do outreach within the Aquidneck Island community, work with volunteers and interns, manage operations, and run education programs.

Do you have a favorite exhibit?

It's always changing! Right now, I really love the Rocky Shore Touch Tank. All the creatures that call that habitat home have some amazing adaptations that allow them to thrive in a harsh environment. This exhibit lets our guests not only learn about these creatures, but also get their first "hands-on" opportunity!

Will guests be able to have similar experiences at the new aquarium this fall?

Yes! And so much more! All of our animals will be getting larger, more spacious exhibits, and we will have better back-of-house areas to ensure the health of new Bay animals—but I think what I am most excited about is the accessibility for guests and staff. Our Easton's Beach location can be hard to get to, but the new space will be right at the RIPTA hub!

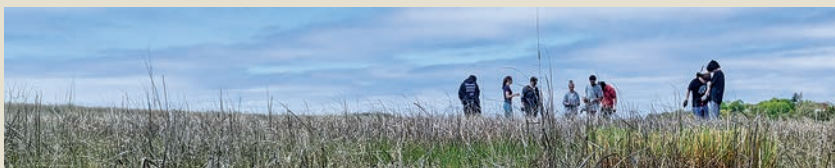
Anything else you would like people to know about the aquarium?

While there's so much to love about the Exploration Center—from our net-positive management of our animals, to the hands-on way guests can interact with local species—I think our greatest strength is our interns and volunteers. They are a passionate, knowledgeable, hardworking group that I'm lucky to work with every day! They make the Exploration Center so special and I am constantly reminded of that when guests leave the aquarium raving about their interaction with our staff. ■

Save The Bay Action Updates

Education + Engagement

- Thanks to a NOAA grant*, Save The Bay's education team began a **three-year programming partnership with Warwick Public Schools** in which we will meet regularly with the 4th-grade classes at each of the City's 13 elementary schools. This October, we engaged 580 students and 40 teachers in "A Walk in Your Watershed" program that introduced the concept of watershed-wide pollution using a hands-on model.
- Our International Coastal Cleanup effort was supported by **2,465 volunteers who collected 22,655 pounds of trash** from shorelines around Narragansett Bay between the months of September and November. This data supports a global report on litter and marine debris that is published by the Ocean Conservancy and made available to advocates worldwide.
- We have begun **construction of Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium** on the first floor of the Gateway Transportation and Visitors Center in downtown Newport, R.I. The new facility will allow us to build on the experience guests have at our existing Exploration Center and Aquarium, while expanding our capacity for community programming, partnerships and more. We expect the new aquarium to open to the public in Fall 2023. Learn more in our cover story on page 10.



Habitat Restoration + Advocacy

- Save The Bay joined a coalition of environmental advocates to support Question #3 on Rhode Island's November 8 ballot. Ocean Staters overwhelmingly voted "YES" on the question, resulting in the **approval of \$50 million in bond funds** that will fortify climate change resilience, protect Narragansett Bay and drinking water, reclaim contaminated brownfield sites, conserve open space, and more.
- After 10 years of coordination with the Town of Barrington, designing restoration plans, and securing funds through CRMC and Rhode Island's Municipal Resilience Program, a **habitat adaptation and public access enhancement project at Barrington's Walker Farm** is underway! Save The Bay will continue to support the effort by planting native grasses and shrubs at the start of the 2023 growing season.
- Riverkeeper Kate McPherson visited **six vernal pools** to collect data on their physical characteristics, as well as take inventory of the wildlife present. (Nineteen salamanders and frogs were observed!) The data will support both the protection of amphibians and a better understanding of important wetland habitat in the Narragansett Bay watershed.

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Thank You...

Sponsors support Save The Bay's mission to protect and improve Narragansett Bay by making all of our special fundraising events possible! Many thanks to this year's supporters:

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RESTORATION



BY WENLEY FERGUSON,
DIRECTOR OF HABITAT
RESTORATION

Doing Even More for Narragansett Bay's Habitats

Strategic Plan Pillar: Advocacy

Restoring Narragansett Bay's habitats has been a priority for Save The Bay since the program began in the mid-1990s. In the early days, we created a special report that highlighted the condition of three

restoration projects. For nearly 30 years, we have collaborated on dozens of projects, from removing culverts that restricted tidal flow in salt marshes and planting eelgrass to building fish ladders and removing dams that obstructed river herring from reaching their spawning grounds.

Just over a decade ago, when the region was feeling the impacts of Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy, Save The Bay expanded the scope of our habitat program to include coastal adaptation and resilience projects. These projects restore coastal habitats and increase community resilience to the effects of climate change, including accelerated sea level rise and increased storm intensity.

Working on town and state lands, we embarked on new projects, including removing low-lying infrastructure like roads or parking lots that are subject to flooding or erosion; installing areas to treat polluted stormwater; regrading and replanting eroding banks; and restoring dunes.

Today, thanks to Save The Bay's 2027 Strategic Plan, we are undertaking another expansion to meet the growing needs of coastal and wetland habitats throughout the Bay's watershed. As climate change spurs rapidly changing conditions in these habitats—due to factors like sea level rise, storms with greater precipitation, and warming temperatures—our program growth will equip Save The Bay with the resources needed to keep up with the increasing demand for these projects.

In our rivers and streams, this means identifying and removing obstructions to streamflow, like undersized pipes, and removing manmade fill in flood plains to



A recent land protection on the Palmer River in partnership with the Warren Land Conservation Trust will allow the adjacent salt marsh to survive rising sea levels by protecting the inland space the marsh needs for migration.

coastal habitats: salt marshes, migratory fish runs and eelgrass beds. Targeting coastal habitat restoration and involving community volunteers in the restoration effort were new strategies for Save The Bay, which had primarily focused on advocating for water quality improvements during its first 25 years. The expanded scope allowed us to collaborate with new partners like land trusts, towns, and state and federal natural resource agencies on planning, designing and implementing on-the-ground



improve stream habitat and reduce flooding. In coastal areas, it means partnering with land trusts to protect upland areas, giving salt marshes space to move inland as sea levels rise. In more developed areas, it means removing pavement near the coast and rivers, and replacing it with native plants to enhance public access and reduce the heat island effect, a condition where extreme temperatures affect urban communities due to the quantity of pavement. Our added capacity will improve the health of our streams, wetlands, salt marshes and other coastal habitats and allow them to be more resilient to climate change.

To help make this growth a reality, we are extremely excited to welcome a new member to our habitat team: our new restoration ecologist, Ben Gaspar. Ben has been a long-time restoration partner working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's wildlife refuges. In years past, he has worked side by side with us on projects to restore marshes by both digging drainage channels and increasing salt



marsh elevation. Already, Ben's skills—including expertise in GIS mapping and surveying—have helped us conduct more salt marsh restoration projects and expand our monitoring capacity to assess the effects of these projects. We're grateful to have him on the team as we step into this next chapter of protecting and restoring the habitats of Narragansett Bay. ■

(Top) Ben Gaspar, Save The Bay's new restoration ecologist, brings years of field experience and technical know-how to our restoration program. He even has the skills to operate the state's low ground pressure excavator! (Above) Volunteers join Wenley Ferguson, director of habitat restoration, at one of Save The Bay's coastal adaptation project sites at Sea View Drive in Warwick. Prior to the removal of a section of road and the restoration of the dune, the area flooded regularly.

COVER STORY

An Aquarium Like No Other

HOW A SMALL BEACHSIDE CENTER IS BECOMING A DOWNTOWN DESTINATION



BY KATY DORCHIES NUTINI,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

Strategic Plan Pillar: Education

In October 2012, one of the largest Atlantic hurricanes on record made its way up the eastern coast of the United States. By the time Superstorm Sandy reached Rhode Island, the tropical storm brought damaging gusts and severe flooding across the Ocean State. Save The Bay's Exploration Center and Aquarium, located at sea level, on the first floor of the Easton's Beach Rotunda in Newport, Rhode Island, took the full brunt of the storm.

Despite the deployment of sandbags, the facility was left in disarray. The main exhibit area sat under three feet of water and a foot of sand. The aquarium's electronic systems, located in the building's flooded basement and powering the life support systems, failed. While the facility reopened nine months later, and has been a popular destination ever since, one thing was clear: in the face of climate change, sea level rise, and the promise of even more storms like Sandy, the Exploration Center and Aquarium would need to find a new home. Thus began a decade-long search for the ideal facility that concluded in September 2021 with the signing of a lease that would allow the aquarium to relocate to the first floor of Newport's Gateway Transportation and Visitors Center.



It's impossible to spend even a brief amount of time at Save The Bay's Exploration Center and Aquarium without learning something about Narragansett Bay.

While the facility is only 1,200 square feet, it is home to over 40 exhibits—three of them touch tanks—that feature hundreds of local species. At any given time, as many as 10 staff, interns and volunteers are engaging guests of all ages in the wonders of the world that thrives beneath the Bay's surface. On weekdays during the school year, school groups crowd around tanks and Save The Bay educators, fully immersed in subjects ranging from climate change and water quality to endangered species and marine mammals. Last year, 19,496 visitors walked through the Exploration Center's doors. The space is, in a word, vibrant—and a far cry from how Save The Bay found it when we took it over from New England Aquarium in 2006.



Narragansett Bay that inspires them to join our mission to protect and improve it."

The aquarium was an immediate success, welcoming 6,300 guests in its first summer. After installing heat, the facility was able to open year-round. Its location near Save The Bay's boats and the beach

injured species, giving them a permanent home when they cannot survive in the wild, and supported local populations of chain catsharks and little skates through a hatch-and-release breeding program.

"Building the aquarium into the space it is today took a long time," said Lead Aquarist Adam Kovarsky. "None of us were aquarium experts, and we largely learned as we went, with the help of experts and volunteers who had the experience we lacked. Over time, we really came to have a deep understanding of how to coordinate our exhibits, take care of our animals, and build an experience worthy of our students and guests."



"The rooms were dark," remembered Director of Education Bridget Prescott who, at the time, was the original aquarium manager. "The space was segmented, and it felt serious. We had a vision for a fun, bright space, that would truly help us diversify our school programming, and engage, not only students and teachers, but also the public, in the kind of information about

has allowed for school programs that pair more traditional indoor programs with on-the-water and in-the-field experiences. The facility's unique species management practices—which include only housing species collected from Narragansett Bay, and returning them to local waters after a brief visit—appeal to even the most ardent wildlife advocates. Staff have rescued

After Superstorm Sandy severely damaged the Exploration Center and Aquarium in October 2012 (opposite page, bottom), the popular Easton's Beach attraction (shown above) was forced to close for months. Following the incident, Save The Bay began searching for a new site for this hands-on experience that engages Bay enthusiasts of all ages (left, and opposite page, top).

continued on next page >>>

“The Exploration Center plays an important role in our mission-based work,”

explained Save The Bay Executive Director Jonathan Stone. “Not only does it allow us to demonstrate our commitment to supporting the health of the Narragansett Bay ecosystem, but as a component of our education program, it helps people connect with our mission, and functions alongside our advocacy and habitat restoration efforts as one of the three key strategies we deploy to work toward our vision of a fishable, swimmable, Narragansett Bay accessible to all—which is why relocating the facility is important to Save The Bay, long term.”

While the discovery of available space at the Gateway Transportation and Visitors Center addressed the need to find a more stable coastal location, it offered Save The Bay plenty of other benefits, as well.

“When we first started looking for a new space after Sandy, we were looking to check a few boxes,” said Prescott. “We knew that we wanted a bigger facility, one with ample parking that had higher visibility, and was easily accessible for school groups and the public. It was also important that the facility be close to a dock where we could keep our education vessels, so that we could continue offering programs that combine aquarium visits with boat time.”



And the Gateway Center checked every single box.

“The location solves many of the challenges we have at Easton’s Beach,” said Stone. “Its larger footprint—7,000-square-feet—allows us to showcase a more extensive collection of marine life, with many new hands-on, interactive exhibits. Its location at a public transportation hub offers easy access to visitors from all over the state. It will be the first thing you see when you drive into downtown Newport. It has space for school buses to come right up to the doors. It’s within walking distance of Perrotti Park, where we’ll be keeping our education vessels and running our seal tours. It’s a fabulous location, and we see so many opportunities to engage people in new and different ways.”

“Everything about this space—from the life support systems to the 10 main habitat-themed exhibits—is built to support learning and connection,” said Prescott. “We’ll be able to engage more school groups, more members of the public, visitors to Newport—even expand our already popular internship program into one that can engage more aspiring aquarists and marine biologists.”



Of course, designing an aquarium from scratch takes a village.

Following the signing of its lease with the City of Newport and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, Save The Bay wasted no time teaming up with exhibit designers, architects and construction teams; life support system and lighting specialists; and local artists and model builders to ensure that the new space would not only capture the lively spirit of the existing aquarium, but also make the most of every opportunity afforded by the new facility.

“Part of the beauty of this project,” said Stone, “is that we already have a model that works really well. Our staff’s deep knowledge of marine life and Bay ecology, our school program curricula, our experience in animal husbandry and life support systems have all allowed us to create a truly enriching experience. We know that people already love visiting our aquarium. They love learning about wetlands and marshes and the rocky shore from our staff. They love petting local species of sharks and skates, and holding spider and horseshoe crabs. We’re not looking to change those experiences—we’re looking to expand them.”

Even the earliest blueprints of the space included new spaces and exhibits that demonstrate the growth that Stone is referring to. A community room that will function as a classroom for school groups, but also as a rentable space that can host presentations and cultural events

with partner groups graces the plans. Interactive exhibits that will allow guests to explore the watershed, visualize sea level rise, understand stormwater runoff, and even compare their height to the marine life of Narragansett Bay, can be found throughout the facility. Plus, of course, Save The Bay will present new, exciting entry points for becoming engaged with all areas of its work, from its volunteer program to its advocacy efforts.

Construction of the new aquarium began over the course of 2022.

Contractors welded steel floors into place to ensure that the thousands of pounds of tank water would be properly supported. New walls began to shape the various exhibit halls, and custom-built tanks began to arrive. In Summer 2023, the life support systems will begin running, kicking off the two-month “cycling” process that is required to achieve stable tank conditions before staff move species from the

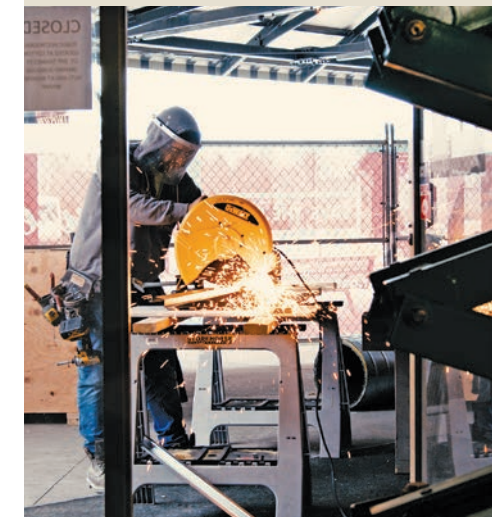
Easton’s Beach location to their beautiful new home.

“An aquarium is an intersection of science and art,” said Kovarsky. “It’s an exciting process that is a lot of work—but work that we’re really looking forward to.”

Save The Bay’s Hamilton Family Aquarium is scheduled to open fall 2023. ■

Interns, students and guests alike can learn about Narragansett Bay species at the Exploration Center and Aquarium (far left, below), and Save The Bay looks forward to expanding this experience at Save The Bay’s Hamilton Family Aquarium this fall. (Left) Sample rendering of the new aquarium provided by DBVW Architects.

Save The Bay is proud to be working with the following partners as we build Save The Bay’s Hamilton Family Aquarium:



DBVW Architects
Infrastructure and facility design services

Roto
Exhibit design and fabrication

Tenji
Life support systems design and installation

Lightswitch
Specialty lighting design

Farrar & Associates
Construction management

Five Featured Fish (and More)

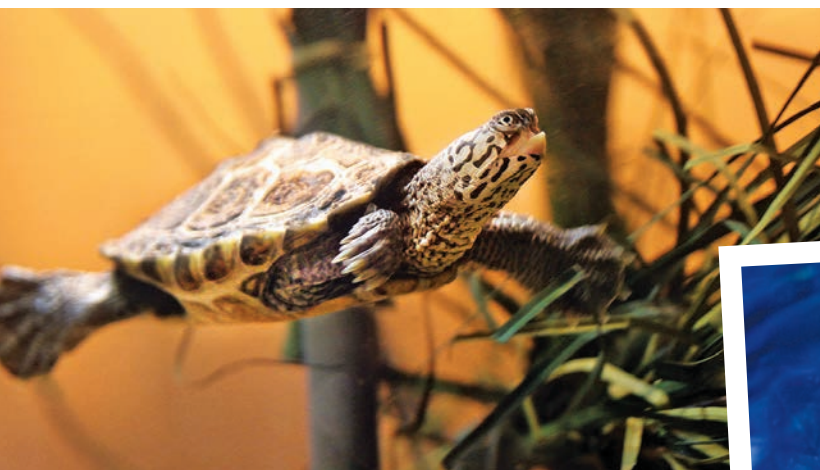
Learn about some of our favorite Narragansett Bay species—all of which can be observed at our Exploration Center and Aquarium at Easton's Beach in Newport before making their way to Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium this fall.



BY ADAM KOVARSKY,
LEAD AQUARIST

1 Northern Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*)

These stunning turtles are endangered in the state of Rhode Island. They live exclusively in salt marsh habitat which is disappearing worldwide. Luckily, many local organizations—



including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, Roger Williams University, and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island—are working tirelessly to protect them. Thanks to these efforts, new populations have been discovered nesting in Rhode Island in recent years!

2 Common Octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*)

Many studies report that octopuses have the same problem-solving skills as a five-year-old human! Over 60 percent of their neurons are in their arms, allowing them to be multitasking masters. Their ability to camouflage is among the most stunning in the entire animal kingdom and they live right here in Narragansett Bay!

3 Winter Skate (*Leucoraja ocellata*)

The winter skate currently appears on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Save The Bay hopes to support the winter skate population in the future through the development of a breed-and-release program modeled after our successful little skate (*Leucoraja erinacea*) breeding program. Through our own efforts, and those of many others, we hope that the winter skate can make it off the threatened species list someday.



All of Save The Bay's terrapin specimens, like the one shown at left, are non-releasable rescues. The octopus shown above arrived injured and is being rehabilitated before returning to Narragansett Bay.

4 Northern Lined Seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*)

This unique Narragansett Bay fish inhabits eelgrass beds just below the low tide line. Upon first glance, one might think seahorses are terrible swimmers—but they actually have a novel set of adaptations that make them designed for success, including: a prehensile tail (meaning, “a tail that can grasp things”), vacuum-like snout, hydrodynamic shape and the ability to camouflage. One of this species’ most surprising features is that the males carry the young during pregnancy!

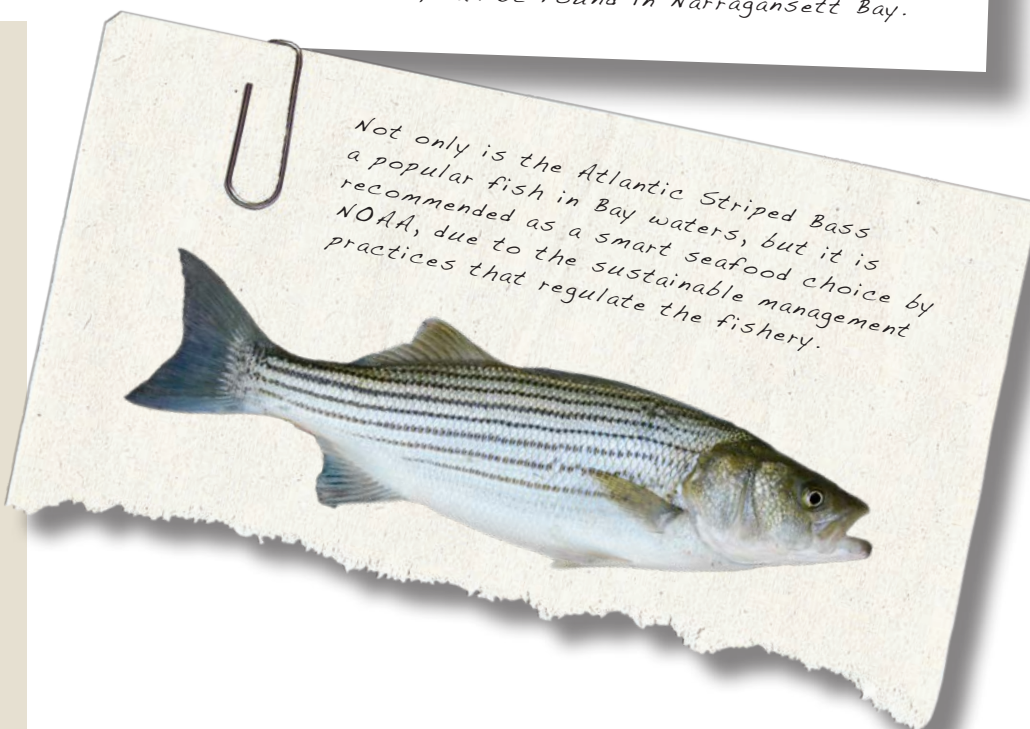
5 Atlantic Striped Bass (*Morone saxatilis*)

In addition to being the Rhode Island state fish, the popular Atlantic Striped Bass holds the same title in five other states! This iconic fish has a myriad of phenomenal adaptations, but one it never acquired was eyelids. When the sun rises, the fish retreats into darker waters to protect their eyes. As a popular game fish, we hope to familiarize visitors with this species and educate them on the regulations that create a sustainable fishery.



Many people are surprised to learn that seahorses, like the Northern Lined Seahorse shown here, can be found in Narragansett Bay.

Save The Bay's collection of marine life is supported through a partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Division of Marine Fisheries. While our RIDEM Special Collections Permit allows us to collect and release native species from and into local waters, the agency also supports our goal of fostering a diverse collection by providing us with live animals that feature in our nursery, hatch and release, rescue, and education programs.



Not only is the Atlantic Striped Bass a popular fish in Bay waters, but it is recommended as a smart seafood choice by NOAA, due to the sustainable management practices that regulate the fishery.

ADVOCACY

Renewable Energy, Responsibly Sited



BY TOPHER HAMBLETT,
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY

Strategic Plan Pillar: Advocacy

As climate change continues to impact both the planet and Narragansett Bay, Save The Bay advocates a holistic approach to the dual challenge of (1) reducing greenhouse gas emissions with a rapid transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy

1,705 square miles of Narragansett Bay's watershed. That is why Save The Bay supports the responsible siting of renewable energy facilities, be they on land or in water.

What do we mean by "responsible" siting of renewable

energy? We mean that renewable energy development—including both solar and offshore wind development—should avoid and minimize harm to habitats, water quality and species in both salt and freshwater environments.

SOLAR

The construction of large "solar fields" often involves clear-cutting hundreds of acres of forest at a time. According to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Rhode Island lost 1,041 acres of forest to solar development from 2018-2021.

These are the same for-

sources, while (2) helping the Bay adapt and remain resilient to climate change impacts.

Achieving these two goals is no simple matter. Renewable energy growth is now a major priority at the federal and state level, with ambitious greenhouse reduction goals and robust financial incentives accelerating the pace and scale of production. But renewable solar and wind energy facilities require lots of space. They must go somewhere, and this is where it gets complicated.

In fact, the urgency of the energy transition can have unintended consequences for the marine environment and the

ests that the region's top scientists say are critical to maintaining wetlands and groundwater supplies, as well as animal, fish and bird habitats that require fresh water and cooler temperatures that trees provide.

It is both alarming and ironic that Rhode Island's renewable energy laws have actually incentivized the clearing of our watershed's valuable forests. How can the state take a more responsible approach? By changing those laws to end incentives for clear-cutting of intact forested tracks of 250 acres or more, and strengthen incentives for solar in already-developed areas like gravel pits, landfills, highway median strips, large scale



rooftops, and big parking lots. To achieve this change, Save The Bay is working with a coalition of environmental groups, labor unions, and solar industry representatives to help Rhode Island pivot from irresponsible to responsible solar siting policies.

OFFSHORE WIND

Save The Bay participated in the development of the Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP), a “federally recognized coastal and regulatory tool” that was used to guide the siting of potential offshore wind facilities. Through scientific studies that accounted for fisheries, ocean geology, and other factors, the Ocean SAMP determines where wind turbines and cables should—and should not—be sited.

Unfortunately, the Ocean SAMP does not guarantee the responsible sit-

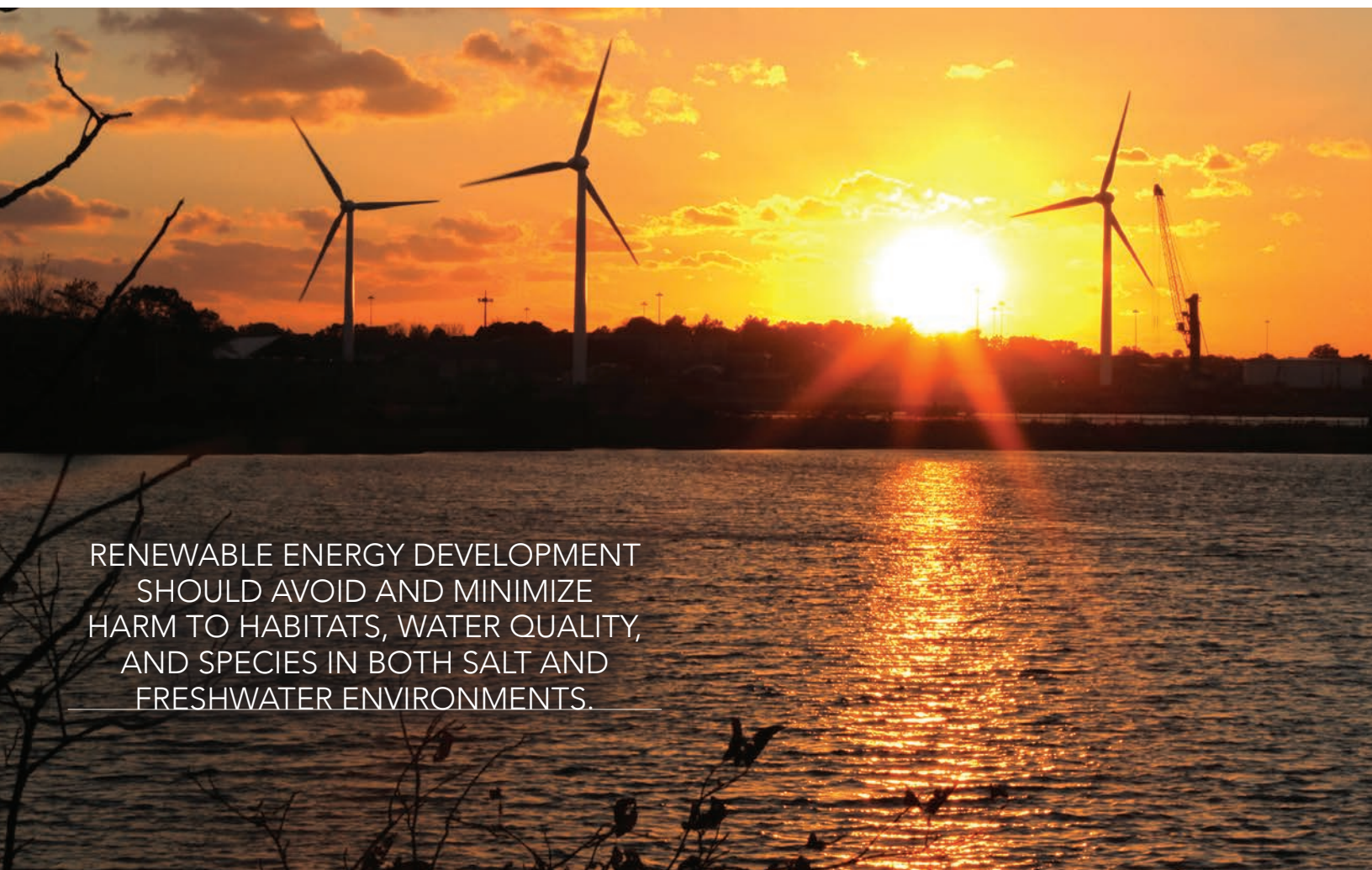
ing of wind energy facilities. In 2021, working off the Ocean SAMP’s determinations, Save The Bay opposed the siting of the South Fork Wind farm on Cox Ledge, south of Block Island, because of its highly valuable fisheries habitat. Coastal Resources Management Council’s professional staff advised the Council that Cox Ledge was “one of the worst possible locations within Rhode Island Sound” for such a project. Due to a lack of coordination between federal regulations and state processes, the project moved forward regardless, demonstrating just some of the challenges behind ensuring responsibly-sited wind energy projects.

As the offshore wind industry grows, other big decisions lie ahead, including the route of cables that will connect hundreds of offshore wind turbines to the electric grid on the mainland. Save The Bay will continue monitoring proposals,

and advocating for cable routes and landing locations that have minimal negative impact on the health of Narragansett Bay.

Calling for renewable energy that is responsibly sited allows us to make progress in addressing the causes of the climate crisis, while protecting the habitats and ecosystems that are inherent to the health of Narragansett Bay and its watershed. Given the urgency and pace of renewable energy growth, this is our one chance to address the challenge in a responsible way. ■

As the wind (below) and solar (far left) industries grow rapidly in the Ocean State and throughout the Bay watershed, Save The Bay advocates that the “where” is just as important as the “why.”



RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT
SHOULD AVOID AND MINIMIZE
HARM TO HABITATS, WATER QUALITY,
AND SPECIES IN BOTH SALT AND
FRESHWATER ENVIRONMENTS.

EDUCATION

From Classroom to Salt Marsh



BY CHRIS DODGE,
CAPTAIN AND
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

“Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences” (MWEEs). That’s the framework for and the goal of implementing a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant-funded Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program. While we don’t usually use the phrase “MWEE,” these experiences are what Save The Bay’s education program has always been about. On a daily basis, we deliver meaningful watershed educational experiences to students throughout Narragansett Bay and its watershed, which is precisely why Save The Bay’s Salt Marsh Nursery (SMN) program has proven to be such a perfect fit for grant funding under NOAA’s B-WET program.

Starting in the early 90s, Save The Bay’s habitat restoration and adaptation program has had a strong record of executing habitat projects focusing on salt marsh restoration throughout Narragansett Bay and the south coast of Rhode Island. But a little over 20 years ago, the organization identified a unique opportunity to combine this habitat work with its education programming, and Save The Bay’s Salt Marsh Nursery program was born. In 2019, we were able to demonstrate the decades of meaningful watershed educational experiences that had already been delivered, and successfully applied for grant funding through NOAA’s B-WET program.

During each year of this grant funding, the Salt Marsh Nursery program has worked with classes and teachers from Rhode Island’s East Providence and Chariho (Charlestown, Richmond and Hopkinton) high schools to engage in hands-on science and take part in restoration efforts close to their campuses. With the help of Save The Bay staff, and professional development opportunities made possible through the funding, our partner teachers have integrated this program directly into their normal school year curriculum. Save The Bay staff meet with our classes eight times a year to teach about salt marshes, *Spartina alterniflora* (a marsh grass), and the important role these habitats play in protecting Rhode Island’s coasts. Our visits include a full-day field experience aboard a Save The Bay education vessel, during which we visit a salt marsh and collect *Spartina* seeds to be grown in the classroom; participation in a civic action project on campus or in the community; planting salt marsh grasses at restoration sites close to students’ communities; and engaging in an end-of-year EcoSummit to discuss their experiences with other participating B-WET schools.

(Below) East Providence High School students wrap up marsh grass planting at the Tillinghast Place restoration site in May 2022.

At the end of each year, the students who participated in the program reflected on the impact that meeting in the field, in the environment that is being studied, had on their





ability to learn. Students have also noted that our approach gave them a sense of ownership of the material and environmental stewardship over both the salt marshes they are helping and their campus environment. In other words, the program has indeed given them a “meaningful watershed educational experience.”

This funding from NOAA has allowed for both growth and consistency in Save The Bay’s Salt Marsh Nursery program, and has resulted in including two schools, four teachers, and over 100 students being provided this one-of-a-kind place-based, experiential learning opportunity. In addition, because of this program, thousands of salt marsh plants have been transplanted



into at-risk marshes around the state, benefiting Narragansett Bay and everyone in Rhode Island. ■

This program was prepared by Save The Bay under award #NA19N-MF0080087 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

(Above) East Providence High School students visit the salt marsh at Jenny’s Creek on Prudence Island in October 2019. (Left) Chariho High School students transplant their Spartina at the Quonochontaug Marsh restoration site in May 2022.

WHO SAVES THE BAY? VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

An Aquarium Family Affair



BY KATY DORCHIES NUTINI,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

Inspired by the Barrette family? Learn more about Save The Bay's volunteer program and browse current volunteer opportunities at [SAVEBAY.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://savebay.org/volunteer).

Meet Kenneth (50), Maeyee (49) and Mackenzie (15) Barrette: three family members who nurtured a shared interest in environmentalism into a volunteer effort at our Exploration Center and Aquarium.

Hello Barrettes! The three of you have been star volunteers at our aquarium for a while now. How did you get started?

Mackenzie was the first one of us interested in volunteering! She loves the ocean, but was too young to volunteer on her own. In November 2021, we decided to volunteer together! As parents, we love being able to spend time with her and see her confidence grow as she engages with aquarium visitors as a docent.

Do you remember when you first became acquainted with Save The Bay?

We first got to know the organization by bringing Mackenzie and her brother to the aquarium when they were very young. It was always a hit, and we were impressed with how knowledgeable and engaging the staff was. In the time since, we've become members and have attended many Save The Bay events.

Environmentalism is really woven into your family's values. Can you share a bit about how you all became so connected with these issues?

Maeyee's love of conservation and respect for the natural world began when she worked for the National Geographic Society. Ken's awareness began while he was growing up in Rhode Island, as he heard about water quality issues, erosion, and pollution in school and on the news. Mackenzie's passion was really cemented at school, and she's been influential in family decisions to advocate for initiatives like straw bans, and to make choices that reduce our household's carbon footprint.

What are some of the highlights from your volunteer experiences?

We love sparking interest in aquarium guests, and hearing guests repeat facts we've shared with them about the animals. (As an educator, Maeyee especially enjoys engaging younger guests and helping people become comfortable with holding animals.) It's always fun to return to the aquarium after a time and see the new animals—especially newly hatched sharks and skates!

What motivates you to stay engaged with Save The Bay?

We need more changemakers. If we don't do something, who will? As an organization, Save The Bay offers a great environment to engage in a variety of ways: donating, volunteering, participating in events, attending programs, and even sharing information about public policy.

Any advice for those considering volunteering?

Don't wait! Do it as soon as possible, and get your whole family involved. Volunteering is fun, meaningful, and a way to engage the entire family! ■



As a family of environmental advocates, the Barrette family—three members of which volunteer at the Exploration Center and Aquarium—enjoys a little outdoor time.

A 30-Year Tradition of Supporting Narragansett Bay



BY JONATHAN STONE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In this issue, we speak with Dory Hamilton Benson, Chair of the Aquidneck Island Fund and Grants Committee Member of the Hamilton Family Charitable Trust. The Hamilton family's support for Save The Bay, which began over 30 years ago, reflects their commitment to the health and well-being of the Aquidneck Island community.

Your family has a long history in and around Rhode Island and Narragansett Bay. Can you tell us how this area has impacted you?

Newport is a major part of our family's story and continues to be as we raise our children, who happen to be the 13th generation of Bensons to grow up on Narragansett Bay. We enjoy it all: swimming, sailing, fishing, exploring, and walking the coastline. Growing up, my grandmother, our family and close friends would have picnics on the rocks. We spent so many afternoons exploring tidal pools; it's one of my fondest memories and I am so happy to continue the tradition with my family.

And, of course, your family has supported Save The Bay for a long time as well.

I remember my parents supporting Save The Bay growing up and I have a vivid memory of those red-and-white stickers all over any number of car rear windshields and vessels. When my own family and I decided to settle back in Newport, the Bay became the backdrop for our daily lives. We learned more about Save The Bay's programs and the work you do for our community. When our family foundation started the Aquidneck Island Fund and began looking into various local nonprofits to get involved in, Save The Bay was at the top of our list.



It sounds like you truly connect to Save The Bay's mission of protecting and improving Narragansett Bay. What motivates you to be a part of this work?

Changing weather patterns, pollution, and wildlife habitat degradation are just some of the many issues facing the Bay. For us, maintaining Bay health and ensuring a clean and safe space for all of its creatures is most important—in fact, it's one of the reasons our family's Aquidneck Island Fund invests in programs and efforts to that protect the Bay and help children and families learn how to keep it safe. The more people learn about this ecosystem and fall in love with it, the more they'll want to take care of it, too.

So, supporting Save The Bay's new aquarium was the perfect pairing for your family, then!

Collectively we've spent countless hours in the aquarium in its previous location, and it has saved many a rainy afternoon. We hope that moving the aquarium to the Gateway Center will enable easier access to the resource and will allow more of our residents and visitors to experience its magic! We are looking forward to sharing the new space with my family as well as our beloved community for generations to come! ■

Hands-on experiences, like the one shown here, have inspired the Hamilton family to support Save The Bay's efforts to build a new, bigger aquarium in downtown Newport.

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SAVE THE BAY'S*Wish List*

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working vehicles to
support our education
programs!

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**Questions?**

Contact Maureen Fogarty at 401-272-3540 x109
OR send us an email at savebay@savebay.org

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Read our *Tides* blog at: savebay.org/tides

Mission and Vision: Save The Bay works to protect and improve Narragansett Bay and its watershed through advocacy, education and restoration efforts. We envision a fully swimmable, fishable, healthy Narragansett Bay, accessible to everyone and globally recognized as an environmental treasure.

An annual celebration of the sights, sounds & flavors of Narragansett Bay

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