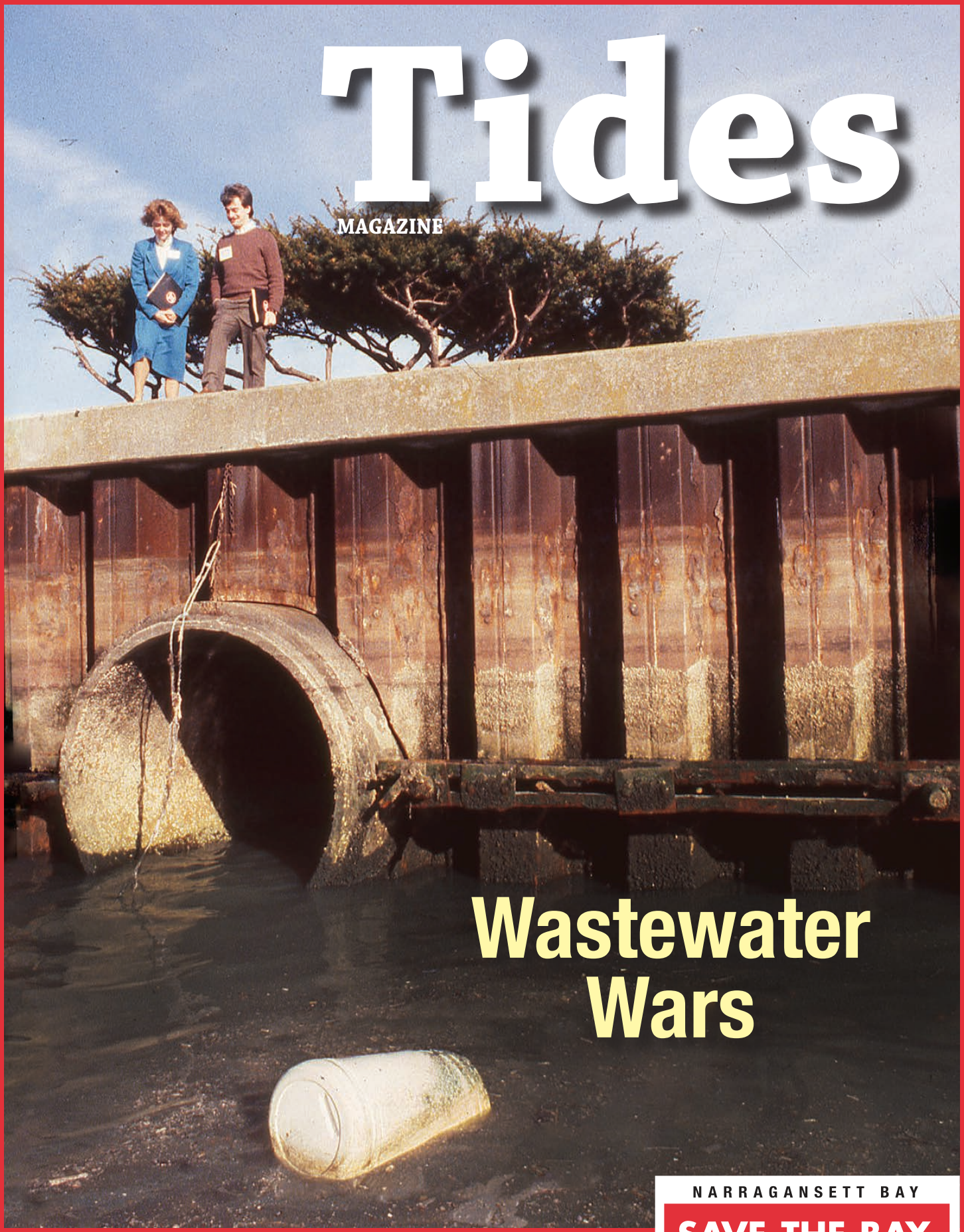
FALL 2019 | Volume 51 | Number 1

Tides

MAGAZINE



Wastewater Wars

History of our Habitat Restoration Program

Establishing the Bay Defense Fund

People Power and the Bay

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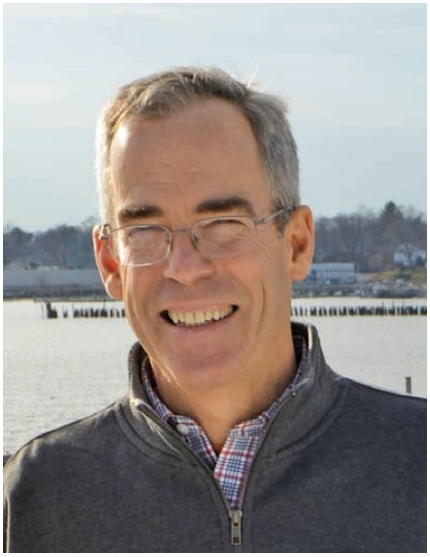
ARTWORK BY ONNE VAN DER WAL

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Promise and Peril



In mid-September, members of Save The Bay's program and policy committee joined staff on a boat ride up the Providence River. It was a balmy late-summer evening, with an orange sun sinking below the western skyline as we returned to the dock at Fields Point. This one-hour excursion captured the promise and peril of our efforts to protect beautiful Narragansett Bay.

As we idled up the shipping channel, swarming bluefish and striped bass cut through vast schools of bait fish, mostly menhaden, all around us, while hundreds of birds squawked and dove to take their share of dinner. The sheer scale of this blitz, this abundance of sea life, was awe-inspiring. The extraordinary display was clear evidence of recovery, of a Bay returning to health.

But perils were evident as well. For some bad actors, the Providence River remains a dumping ground, a place to scuttle derelict vessels and discharge pollution from dirty salvage yards. Floating rafts of trash and plastic debris accumulate in an eddy inside the hurricane barrier, while tiny bits of microplastics are embedded in the seaweed along the shore. The boat ride was a cautionary tale. Pollution is taking new forms and a changing climate threatens to undo hard-won gains.

In this issue of *Tides*, we continue our 50th Anniversary commemoration by celebrating people who have dedicated themselves to cleaning up and protecting the Bay, people to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. But for the efforts of these dedicated individuals, the abundant life we witnessed on a September evening would be nowhere to be seen.

As Save The Bay marks next year's milestone of 50 years of advocacy for Narragansett Bay, we dedicate ourselves to building on the progress made. If we want to sustain progress, we must bring the same energy, dedication, knowledge and persistence as our predecessors to bear.

It is what we—Save The Bay, our members and supporters—are all about.

Our children's children are counting on us.

Jonathan Stone
Executive Director

What's Inside...

ON THE COVER:

In the 1980s, tours of wastewater facilities—like the Newport plant visit featured here—helped illuminate the severity of sewage pollution in Narragansett Bay.

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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.

Access for All, and a Vision Fulfilled

SAVE THE BAY'S PUBLIC PIER INCREASES PUBLIC ACCESS AT FIELDS POINT

BY KATY DORCHIES,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

Mother Nature gave Save The Bay a sweet 50th anniversary gift on May 20, 2019: the first warm and sunny day of the season, on the very same day we cut the ribbon on our new public pier at Fields Point.

"From our earliest days nearly 50 years ago, Save The Bay has been committed to protecting the public's right, enshrined in the state constitution, to access Narragansett Bay. We invite our neighbors and visitors from near and far, to enjoy the new pier and grounds at Fields Point," said Save The Bay Executive Director Jonathan Stone.

The vision of a public pier at Fields Point has long been on the horizon for Save The Bay. In fact, when we opened our award-winning Bay Center in 2005, a former city landfill was transformed into a new public window on the Bay, and the only thing missing was a public pier.

"As soon as we selected this location, we knew that we had a huge opportunity to use the space to remove barriers to Narragansett Bay and increase public access," said Save The Bay Director of Operations Maureen Fogarty.

The first phase of the pier's construction involved the installation of a 240-foot floating wave attenuator. Funded by several NOAA programs, Johnson and Wales University and other private funds, the attenuator, which serves as both a public dock and protection measure for Save The Bay's education vessels, was completed in 2015.

The second phase of the project, however—which included the installation of wood pilings, access ramps, and more—didn't get underway for another two years. With generous gifts from the James M. Cox Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Boating Infrastructure Grant, Champlin Foundation, REI, Paul Sherlock Center for Disabilities, and the Island Foundation, the final pieces of the pier finally came together.

Today, the accessible pier offers a touch-and-go dock, two kayak launches, and a wooden deck with plenty of space for fishing, bird watching, and taking in the views of the Bay.

FIVE DECADES OF PROGRESS: 1987 - 1993

1987
Save The Bay supports a $65 million Open Space bond referendum designed to finance the preservation of Rhode Island's vanishing open spaces.

We organize and host a landmark national conference, "Saving Our Bays, Sounds, and the Great Lakes: An Activist Agenda."

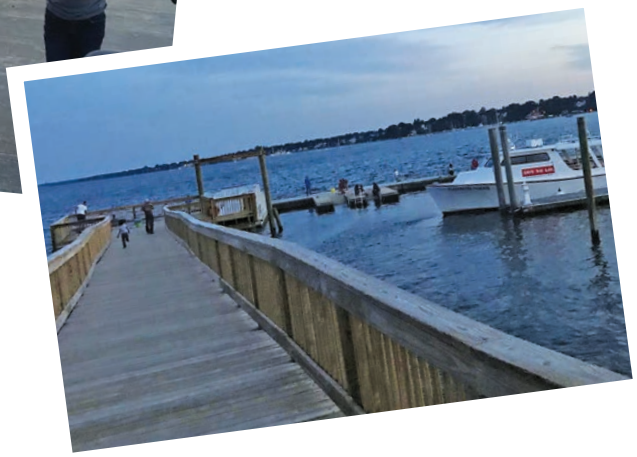
Save The Bay launches Explore The Bay, a shipboard Bay education program for kids.

During the pier's ribbon-cutting on May 20, kayakers from REI took to the Providence River, while nearly 100 visitors—funders, media, community members and government officials—filled the deck to thank supporters, recognize the upper Bay's newest public access point, and celebrate both public access and the progress of Save The Bay.

"When I arrived today, there was a middle school class getting ready to go out on the boat," said Congressman David Cicilline. "They were so excited to learn about organisms in the water. I thought, 'When I was in school, we didn't get to go out on a boat during the school day!' It was just an example of one of the great uses of this pier and the difference it's going to make in the lives of young people who will become stewards of the water."

Immediately following the opening of the pier, residents, kayakers and outdoor enthusiasts began to visit daily, each making use of the space in their own way: catching fish, relaxing, picnicking, taking in sunrises and sunsets, and, of course, posting photographs to their social media accounts.

Every time we see our neighbors and visitors making use of their right to access, use and enjoy the shoreline by visiting the Bay Center and pier, we have the opportunity to both see the results of a vision 15 years in the making, and observe an important reminder that access to Narragansett Bay is a right worth preserving and fighting for. ■



Top, Panoramic: Opening day at the Save The Bay Public Pier; photo by STB staff. Above: Photos by Jaffreysi Caroly Santos Perez.

1988
Save The Bay fights for the preservation of the path at Black Point in Narragansett.
(more on page 24)

We publish, "A Raw Deal: Combined Sewer Overflow Pollution in Rhode Island," a report and campaign to end CSO pollution in Narragansett Bay.

Save The Bay moves beyond Rhode Island borders to address Massachusetts-based pollution with the Massachusetts Project.

Your Narragansett Bay Memories

"My favorite memory, so far, is being out on the water with my husband and two kids this summer. You think summer is a time to slow down and relax but it feels even busier than the rest of the year—especially with two young kids. So, we try to enjoy every little bit of nice weather—on the boat, at the beach, everywhere—with each other. On Memorial Day, we **spent the day on the Bay together on our boat** to kick off the unofficial start of summer. It was great!" ~ Rachel M.

"When the Big Mamie was towed in from the Atlantic Ocean through Narragansett Bay and Mount Hope Bay to its final destination in Fall River Cove, my father, my mother and I were out in our 16-foot powerboat following her in to her final destination with hundreds of other boats." ~ Jerry B.

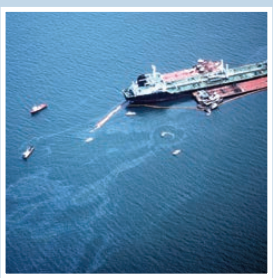
"Back when my son was small, we spent a few summers on Jamestown. There are many special Bay-related memories but one of my favorites is of swimming at night in the bioluminescence. It was magical, made more so by the delight and wonder shared with a child. Summer night swimming became a tradition and we often made a special effort to get back out in the Bay when the conditions were right for a sparkly swim." ~ Linda S.

"I remember being a small child and clamming at Oakland Beach with my father and his cousin, my brothers and my sister." ~ Alice L.

"As a RISD senior in 1976, my specialty was creating large-scale body sculpture and masks to be worn in my original performance art pieces. My uncle, Aaron Cohen, one of my biggest fans, heard through a close friend working with Save The Bay that the organization was looking for a mascot to appear at an early fundraising meeting, to hit home the message that pollution in the Bay was a serious problem, with dire consequences. I earned the commission with my proposal for the creation of a weary, soggy, beleaguered creature called **the Bay Bottom Blotch**, who'd climb out of the Bay, appear in the meeting room and deliver an impassioned speech about his intolerable living conditions. How could funders possibly ignore such a poignant plea? It was my first such 'experiential marketing' commission and it set the stage for my career designing creative community engagement solutions illuminating significant issues of our times. That first experience with Save The Bay, showed me the power artists can wield in collaboration with organizations working for a better world." ~ Amy C.

FIVE DECADES OF PROGRESS: 1987 - 1993

1989
Save The Bay mobilizes hundreds of volunteers to aid in the massive cleanup of the M/V *World Prodigy's* 420,000 gallon oil spill on Brenton Reef.



1990
Save The Bay publishes "Promise for the Pawtuxet," outlining pollution sources and cleanup steps for Narragansett Bay's second largest freshwater source.

"I've been coming to Newport for over 20 years. Matter of fact, I met my wife here; we were also engaged and married in town and now own property in The Point, two blocks from the Bay. The Bay is the first thing we see when we come to town and the last thing we see as we leave. For me over the past few years, the Bay has become an escape from the everyday. It gets me away from the craziness of life, business, and the big cities. **I love to kayak and fish the Bay** and I have incredible memories of seeing everything out on the water from friendly harbor seals, to migrating false albacore, to an ocean sunfish. The bounty of available game fish the Bay holds is incredible: Striped Bass, Black Sea Bass, Bluefish, Scup, Bonito, Fluke, and Tautog are all there throughout the year. I look forward to this time of year now as it is about to start the next season of waiting, watching, and seeing what magic the Bay might unveil. Whether I'm on the water on the kayak or taking a walk or bike ride, the Bay is always by our side. I look forward to helping the Bay stay healthy for many years to come as the Bay has truly become a part of who I am today." ~ Todd T.

TAKE ACTION!

Share YOUR favorite Bay memories and photos with us at savebay.org/your-stories-and-memories

1992
We launch the "Fishable, Swimmable" campaign, demanding state governments set goals to make all Narragansett Bay and watershed waters safe for swimming and fishing.

Save The Bay launches the Baykeeper program, enhancing our defense of Narragansett Bay.

1993
Save The Bay's experiential education program, Explore The Bay, expands to include shoreline and classroom Bay education programs.

Strength in Numbers:

The Power of People in the Battle for Narragansett Bay

BY TOPHER HAMBLETT,
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY

Save The Bay's mission is simple and powerful: to protect and improve Narragansett Bay. But pulling the Bay back from the brink of being an over-industrialized, open sewer has been made possible because people have made the decision to support this mission by taking direct action for the Bay, actively participating in rallies, protests, city and town council hearings, and elections.

In Save The Bay's early years, the 1970s, rivers were running the colors of industrial pollution, raw sewage choked Upper Bay beaches and shellfishing grounds, and the specter of the Bay becoming home to major fossil fuel energy plants was real enough to galvanize people to action.

In later decades, the threats of large-scale development proposals tested the political will of the region. These projects—including the Quonset "mega-port," the Hess LNG proposal for Mount Hope Bay, and Invenergy's gas-fired power plant in the Blackstone River watershed—were backed by the political weight of elected officials and editorial boards, and came with dubious promises of thousands of jobs and economic security. In the face of intense pressure, the people of Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts rose up to defend Narragansett Bay, and protect the hard-fought gains of previous decades. Imagine what Narragansett Bay would look like if people had chosen to ignore these grave threats.

1999: A hearty rally on the steps of the Capitol building organized by Save Our State drew hundreds of concerned citizens.

Save The Bay's June/July 1986 Newsletter

DEM budget still ailing

By Sue Kiernan

As the fiscal year (FY) 86-87 budget moves closer to adoption, Save the Bay called on Governor DiPrete to help adequately fund Rhode Island's environmental regulatory programs. Of particular concern is the Water Resources Division of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) which administers the programs for discharge permits, wetlands permits, and construction grants for sewage treatment plants.

In a letter to the governor, Save the Bay expressed fears that the underfunding of the Water Resources Division would result in a crippling of the enforcement of water quality regulations, thus jeopardizing DiPrete's own RI Clean Water Act.

Save the Bay cited a draft Environmental Protection Agency mid-year review of the Division that stated "Critical funding issues in Rhode Island are resulting in operational problems in FY-86 and would result in major water program inadequacies or failures during FY-87..." and that "Rhode Island is experiencing severe resource constraints due to a lack of state fundings of water programs."

Additional EPA data indicates that Rhode Island ranks last among New England states in funding water programs. The state's committment, measured as percentage of the budget paid for by the state, is also the lowest in New England. (See chart). By relying so heavily on federal funds, the Division is very vulnerable to the expected cutbacks in federal funds.

"We're putting a new coat of paint on a car that the government is about to take the engine out of," said Trudy Coxe, executive director of Save the Bay. "To put it another way, Save the Bay will be spending *more money* than the Division of Water Resources next year to clean up Narragansett Bay. There is something very wrong with that."

The situation is particularly alarming given that the Division has taken on major new responsibilities, many of which are mandated by state legislation. Despite this fact, state funding for new staff has not kept pace and the programs are suffering.

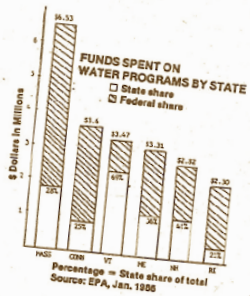
For example, the governor's new RI Clean Water Act, aimed at accelerating improvements to sewage plants, has not been accompanied by an increased staff for the construction grants and permits sections. Since these sections have already been identified by EPA as inadequately staffed, Save the Bay questioned how the DiPrete administration will guarantee the Clean Water initiatives will move forward? Who will do the work?

A lack of resources is a similar problem with other environmental regulatory programs. There is increasing grumbling by builders about the delays in obtaining septic system and wetlands permits. However, a recent DEM press release pointed out that the Land Resources Division has received twice as many applications for water table readings this year as compared with previous years. It noted "The high number of applications, coupled with the lack of a true wet season, have overstretched the Division's manpower..."

The wetlands program faces a similar increase workload, due to the upswing in construction activity, but lacks the manpower to expeditiously reduce the time it takes to properly review an application.

Finally, enforcement of the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is increasingly the subject of complaints. CRMC has only one person assigned to handle enforcement for the entire state. As a result, only the most flagrant situations are properly investigated. Numerous cease and desist orders are issued, but follow-up on these is often lacking. It is estimated that a *minimum* of two additional enforcement staff are needed to help resolve this situation.

Individuals can help Save the Bay push for increased funding for environmental programs by writing or calling Governor DiPrete and your General Assembly representatives to express your concerns and frustrations. For more information on this issue, contact Save the Bay.



Our role as the people's voice for Narragansett Bay is as important today as it was in 1970. In many ways, the challenge of protecting and improving the Bay is greater than ever. Why? Because the threats to the Bay are more subtle and complex than they were in the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

It is always gratifying to hear feedback from the community that the Bay is "so much cleaner than it used to be. " But progress also can lead to complacency, and a weakening of the political will that is needed to tackle today's major threats—especially climate change and stormwater runoff, which continues to pollute local waters and close swimming beaches.

On the statewide political level, these threats are exacerbated by a lingering, old-school mindset that says that protecting the environment is somehow bad for the economy. While Rhode Island voters consistently and emphatically vote for clean water bonds to protect the Bay, the state's political leadership has, for over a decade, weakened the capacity of the state's two most important environmental agencies: the Department of Environmental Management and the Coastal Resources Management Council. The DEM, which once had over 600 employees to protect the environment, now has only about 390 staff members. The CRMC, which is charged with protecting over 400 miles of coastline, has just 32 staff and only 2-3 staff members for enforcement. Without resources or support, these agencies cannot do the fundamental work of environmental permitting and enforcement.

The environmental and political realities we face today demand a renewed commitment to activism for Narragansett Bay. Now, more than ever, the well-being of the Bay depends on people getting involved and taking action. That is why Save The Bay strengthened our capacity to mobilize people for Narragansett Bay in 2019. With resources from our 50th anniversary campaign, we created a new position, Advocacy Coordinator, and brought Jed Thorp on board to work with you—the people of Narragansett Bay—to safeguard progress and organize your community to deal with climate change and polluted stormwater runoff, while building the political will that is essential to protect and improve Narragansett Bay for the next fifty years. ■

Community members join Save The Bay at a 2018 rally to oppose an off-shore drilling proposal. Photo by E. Meier.

WHO SAVES THE BAY? STAFF PROFILE

Wenley Ferguson's 30 Years at Save The Bay

BY KATY DORCHIES,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

In 1990, Save The Bay passed over a Volunteer Coordinator application from a young Wenley Ferguson. Shortly after, she applied again, for the now-obscure title of Land Use Specialist. This time, she got the job and, three decades later, her enthusiasm for mobilizing communities to protect and improve Narragansett Bay has become the stuff of Save The Bay legend.

How did you first get involved with Save The Bay?

I started as a Land Use Specialist in 1990, coordinating the Land Use Conference Save The Bay ran at that time. We'd discuss ordinances to help manage growth and different tools communities could use to assess growth in their regions.

How did "Land Use Specialist" become "Director of Habitat Restoration"? In 1993, Save The Bay began a volunteer monitoring program and I became the Citizen Monitoring Coordinator. For the first time, we started training volunteers to be our eyes and ears, and to help us monitor Bay conditions. At the time, our habitat restoration program hadn't been established. Once it was, in 1996, I began working with community partners on habitat restoration projects.

What do you do as Save The Bay's Habitat Restoration Director? I help communities identify impacts to coastal habitats, identify partners, develop restoration plans, find funding, write permits, and collaborate with implementation. Sometimes, like with our ongoing salt marsh adaptation projects, I work on the project from start to finish, and monitor the marsh before and after restoration. Other times—like with the stormwater management projects in Stillhouse Cove and Sabin Point—I identify areas for stormwater management practices and help communities connect to funding resources. Every project is a little different.

What changes have you seen in Narragansett Bay or its watershed over the last three decades? In the late 1980s, we published a special report, "Promise for the Pawtuxet," focused on improving the Pawtuxet River by upgrading wastewater treatment plants. As the plants were upgraded, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management monitored the river. In the early 1990s, dissolved oxygen levels in the lower Pawtuxet didn't support fish, but within a decade we saw enough improvement in water quality to target the river for fish passage restoration. Because of Save The Bay's early advocacy, DEM's enforcement of regulations, and investments in wastewater treatment improvements, we were able to remove the Pawtuxet River dam and support migratory fish by connecting them to their spawning habitat.

What is an important habitat issue you're working on today? Over the last decade, a lot of our focus has been on the effects of sea level rise on coastal habitats. Ten years ago, as we completed several large-scale, long-term salt marsh restoration projects, we noticed that marshes that had been healthy in 1996 were degrading because of sea level rise. We identified accelerated sea level rise as the cause. We started assessing salt marshes around Rhode Island and working on ways to help the marshes adapt.

What's the most exciting project you've worked on with Save The Bay? In 2000, R.I. DEM asked us to do a spawning habitat assessment on horseshoe crabs. We sent volunteers to monitor crab counts during their spawning season in May and June. They counted as few as six crabs on beaches where local residents could recall historical counts in the hundreds. Until then, there had been no regulations for collecting horseshoe crabs. That same year, DEM issued an emergency closure of the horseshoe crab fishery. Later, regulations closing the fishery during the spawning season were promulgated. It was a wonderful experience to be able to assess, advocate for and get regulations that protect life in the Bay.

What's your biggest concern for the future of Narragansett Bay? The most challenging thing for me is going to salt marshes that will not be there during my kids' lifetime due to accelerated sea level rise. Fifteen years ago, we thought climate change was its own issue, separate from water quality or habitat work. But it's not like that. Climate change is the overarching impact affecting everything in Narragansett Bay and around the world. But if we restore the health and function of salt marshes and coastal habitats around the Bay today—by removing asphalt, adding fringes of natural habitat in areas that are built up—we're taking steps toward empowering our community to adapt to our rapidly changing climate. ■

Save The Bay Action Updates

Restoration

- We collaborated with the Town of Tiverton to complete a coastal adaptation project at Grinnell's Beach. The project involved removing a gas station, replacing the beach's cesspool with a tight tank to control sewage, moving the parking lot inland, creating and planting a small dune to act as a buffer and planting native shrubs between Main Road and the beach. Grinnell's Beach reopened to the public in June 2019.
- Salt marsh planting at our Quonochontaug Marsh restoration site in Charlestown engaged four schools, whose students planted classroom-grown salt marsh plants, and enlisted the help of 80 volunteers who planted approximately 16,000 salt marsh plants at the newly-elevated salt marsh.

Advocacy

- The University of Maine has been awarded a five-year, multi-million dollar grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's Southeast New England Program. The grant will support the creation of a network of resources designed to support local communities in their efforts to meet their stormwater management obligations under the Clean Water Act. Save The Bay is a subcontractor under this grant and will be a key partner in facilitating community engagement in Rhode Island.
- Construction on the Draka Dam fish ladder in the Three Mile River began September 2019. Save The Bay is leveraging funds through the Massachusetts Environmental Trust to help finance the fish ladder in the Taunton River watershed. The Massachusetts Department of Marine Fisheries is the lead project manager on the installation of the ladder, slated for completion this fall.

Education

- Nearly 800 campers participated in Save The Bay's 48 BayCamps this past summer. The camps took place over a 12-week period, with locations in Providence, Wickford, Westerly, Bristol and Newport.
- The Exploration Center and Aquarium in Newport had its busiest day on record this summer, welcoming 599 guests in a single day. The venue ultimately connected 17,514 guests to the marine life of Narragansett Bay over the course of the 2019 summer season.

Thank You...

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Grasses, Marshes and Streams

The History of Save The Bay's Habitat Restoration Program

BY CINDY M. SABATO,
SPECIAL PROJECTS CONSULTANT

Results from Save The Bay's first 20 years' work propelled us into a new direction in the 1990s. "We were beginning to see the positive impacts of our advocacy to improve water quality, which was pretty exciting, and we could now focus on trying to reverse the damage of past human impacts on coastal habitats" said Wenley Ferguson, who joined the Save The Bay staff in 1990 and now serves as our director of habitat restoration.

In 1995, a growing national focus on estuary health led to generous funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts and Save The Bay's Habitat Restoration Program was launched. We unveiled an "ambitious and unprecedented project to restore critical habitat to Narragansett Bay," specifically, salt marshes, eelgrass beds and historic fish runs to support our vision of a Bay "replete with underwater meadows of eelgrass beds, self-sustaining tidal marshes, and free-flowing rivers and streams," according to a 1996 Save The Bay newsletter.

1999: Almost 90 people from around Rhode Island volunteered to help Save The Bay's first-ever, hands-on salt marsh restoration project at Little Mussachuck Marsh in Barrington.

Eelgrass

Eelgrass beds, rooted in the sandy or muddy bottom of near-shore waters, are among Narragansett Bay's most vital habitats, supporting fish and wildlife populations and water quality while reducing wave energy, preventing coastal flooding and erosion. Our Bay-wide mapping efforts revealed that 90 percent of Narragansett Bay's eelgrass beds had been lost, mainly due to pollution and poorly-managed coastal development.

For the next 15 years, our Habitat Restoration Program engaged numerous partners and hundreds of students, community members, and SCUBA divers in a determined effort to restore eelgrass beds. The project raised broad community awareness of the importance of protecting this underwater habitat, and, even as the eelgrass beds failed to thrive due to poor water quality and other factors, elevated the long-term conversation about the need for continued water quality improvements in Narragansett Bay.

Salt Marshes

Salt marshes are wetland areas between the land and the ocean characterized by plants that can tolerate regular tidal flushing of salt water. Like eelgrass beds, they play critical roles in the ecosystem by providing shelter, food, and nurseries for fish and shellfish, by filtering pollution, and by providing natural flood water storage for coastal communities. In 1996, we tapped our trained citizen-scientists to survey 130 marshes and found that the majority had been degraded by human activity.

"Instead of hiring consultants or training staff, we did what Save The Bay does best; we engaged community members and trained citizen scientists. They became part of the restoration team and our local advocates," Ferguson said.

Volunteer Sandra Wyatt of Barrington identified the Allin's Cove marsh as a prime candidate for restoration. Talking with neighbors, meeting with town officials, and bringing environmental leaders to the marsh, her assessment and advocacy united Save The Bay, the Barrington Conservation Land Trust, the Coastal Resources Management Council, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Town of Barrington to remove old fill from the marsh and plant thousands of marsh grasses to restore it.

Ferguson calls the Allin's Cove project "the crown jewel" of Save The Bay's early salt marsh restoration work, as it laid the groundwork for other community-based salt marsh restoration projects, like those at Gooseneck Cove in Newport, Silver Creek in Bristol, Jacob's Point in Warren, Walker Farm in Barrington, and Stillhouse Cove in Cranston.

Save The Bay's Summer 1996 Newsletter

HABITAT

COMMUNITIES TAKE ACTION AT SALT MARSH WORKSHOP

Saltmeadow Cordgrass (Spartina patens)

As part of its Habitat Protection and Restoration Initiative, Save The Bay held a series of hands-on training sessions designed to teach volunteers to evaluate the health of salt marsh habitats throughout Rhode Island. These workshops joined participants from conservation commissions, land trusts and community activists, provided them with an overview of salt marsh ecology and taught each volunteer how to determine the health and restoration potential of their community's marshes.

The first salt marsh workshop, held on April 27, was an overwhelming success, drawing more than 80 people to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Beach in Barrington. Individuals came with a genuine interest in salt marsh ecology and left with the necessary tools and a commitment to survey at least one salt marsh in their community. By the end of Spring, many other workshops were held and a total of 100 volunteers-turned-evaluators are now busily investigating the current condition of salt marshes in their area.

Data has already been submitted to Save The Bay, and all information will be compiled by year's end. The data collected by these dedicated volunteers will be used by Save The Bay staff and local community groups to assess possible salt marsh restoration sites for Narragansett Bay and determine restoration priorities.

☎ For more information about the workshops and how you can identify salt marshes in your community, please contact Andy Lipsky at 401-272-3540. ■

Rivers and Streams

Dams, originally built to provide local industries with hydropower, have had far-reaching negative effects on the ecosystems around them. Migratory fish, like herring and shad, live in salt water but spawn in freshwater and depend on free-flowing streams and rivers. Our efforts to reconnect the Bay to the rivers that flow into it focused on restoring habitat for these fish through fish ladders and dam removal.

"Bringing a migratory fish back to its spawning grounds brings life and vitality back to rivers. The return of migratory fish enhances freshwater and saltwater fish populations, improves recreational and commercial fishing, brings back osprey and herons that feed on these fish and increases the biodiversity of Bay tributaries," Ferguson said.

The 1999 Mussachuck Creek fishway project, our first and Rhode Island's first in 20 years, entailed the installation of a 25,000-pound concrete fish ladder to connect the tidal creek to Echo Lake. It involved planning, engineering, and the help of more than 100 Barrington High School student volunteers who filled 800 sandbags to hold back creek waters during installation. The project established Save The Bay's role in bringing community members and partners together and securing funding. Similar projects followed, including the installation of a fish ladder at Shad Factory Pond on the Palmer River, and the Ten Mile River project—a 20-year, three fish ladder effort that opened hundreds of acres of habitat to the first unassisted run of herring on the river in more than 100 years.

On some rivers, the wisdom of dam removal has not only opened up more spawning ground for more fish species, it's restored natural habitat and environmental benefit of free-flowing tributaries. Our 2018 removal of the dam at Shady Lea Mill in North Kingstown extended the herring run of the Mattatuxet River system, reduced flood risk downstream and is restoring natural riparian wetlands along the river. Save The Bay is now working with the Bristol County Water Authority to remove an obsolete dam on the Kickemuit Reservoir, which is suffering from degraded water quality.

RIGHT: Matt Ortoleva and son Nicholas participate in eelgrass planting in 2008.

The Evolution of Restoration

In the last decade, rapidly changing climate conditions have led Save The Bay to shift our focus from marsh restoration to marsh adaptation, specifically through elevation and migration.

"We noticed marshes that we assessed in 1996 and considered relatively healthy, well-buffered, and without a lot of human impacts, experiencing a loss of vegetation. We pulled together a scientific advisory committee, developed a methodology, and did another statewide marsh evaluation from 2011 to 2013. When we shared it with colleagues elsewhere in the region, we all began to realize these signs of degradation were happening in marshes throughout southern New England, and that they were the effects of accelerated sea level rise," Ferguson said.

Historically, marshes have been able to keep pace with sea level rise naturally, building their elevation a few millimeters a year through plant growth and trapped sediment. But they aren't able to keep pace with the accelerated rate of sea level rise. At Ninigret Pond and Quonochontaug in Charlestown, the Coastal Resources Management Council and Save The Bay have been testing marsh elevation strategies, placing sand or dredge material atop degraded marshes and replanting marsh grass.

Salt marshes will also naturally migrate inland with rising seas, when surrounded by gently sloping, undeveloped land. But the Bay's steep coastline topography and dense coastal development, give most of our marshes little room to migrate. In Bristol, Narragansett, and Tiverton, Save The Bay is working with land trusts, coastal communities and state agencies to identify the few marshes that do have space to migrate and to take necessary steps to create conditions for that migration.

"We hope that by artificially elevating these marshes and by preserving surrounding land, we can buy them some time and give them space to migrate," Ferguson said.

Leading the Way

Save The Bay has shared our marsh adaptation techniques with restoration practitioners in southeastern Massachusetts, Connecticut, Long Island, and Nova Scotia. "If there is one beneficial outcome of climate change, it's that our restoration and natural resource community has become more cohesive and coordinated in sharing information and strategies," Ferguson said.

"Coastal habitats are resilient, but we have to give them space to migrate inland as sea levels rise. We are moving roads, walls and pavement to provide this space and to preserve public access. If we put up sea walls to protect every shoreline from erosion and sea level rise, we will have a big, deep swimming pool, and no shoreline for marshes, mud flats, or beaches," Ferguson said. She's encouraged by conversation at a recent resiliency planning workshop, in which town leaders acknowledged long-range environmental changes and are planning for salt marsh migration. ■

ABOVE: In 2014, DEM's low-ground pressure excavator came in useful during a salt marsh adaptation project at Round Marsh in Jamestown. LEFT: The 2012 Mill River dam removal project in Taunton.

Inspiration Grows When Students Plant the Seeds

What better way to teach young people about the importance of coastal habitats than by getting them outdoors and digging in the mud? As Save The Bay's habitat restoration program developed alongside our education program, engaging K-12 schools in our eelgrass and salt marsh grass planting efforts was a natural fit.

In the late 1990s, we modeled a Seagrasses in Classes program after a similar program at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Students at the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography gathered eelgrass seeds and gave them to participating high school science classes for planting.

While a few schools found success—growing eelgrass by seed was difficult—all of the students learned about eelgrass biology and habitat. Though short-lived, Seagrasses in Classes established the salt marsh nursery program which continues today.

In 2003, Habitat Restoration Director Wenley Ferguson approached Ponaganset High School biology teacher Loren Andrews, a partner in the eelgrass effort, seeking collaboration on another pilot program: growing salt marsh grasses in the classroom. Andrews agreed, and so began the Salt Marsh Nursery program that is fully integrated into Save The Bay's education program and many local schools' science curricula.

"All of a sudden all these students were planting, and we saw an opportunity to develop a much more in-depth, school-year-long program," said Bridget Prescott, Save The Bay's director of education. "What better way to teach students and educators about the importance of salt marshes and build up the next generation of Bay stewards?"

Students participating in the Salt Marsh Nursery program join Save The Bay in a local marsh in September to learn about salt marshes and their roles as pollution filters, storm buffers, and wildlife nurseries.

"While they're out there feeling it in their hands and smelling it, they also collect seeds from the Spartina alterniflora grasses, and take them back to their classroom to hibernate them over the winter, just as a marsh goes dormant during the winter.

"In mid-winter, Save The Bay educators return to classrooms, bringing seeds out of hibernation and preparing them for planting. The students plant the seeds and monitor seedlings from February-April, scientifically testing various growing conditions.

"It's a learning experience, so regardless of the success or failure of the seedlings, our educators, the teachers and the students talk about environmental factors—sunlight, salt tolerance, temperature—that affect growth," Prescott said.

In May, Save The Bay educators and students plant the seedlings in a marsh that our habitat restoration team is already working in. Over the years, the program has involved Mt. Hope High School at Silver Creek Marsh; Rogers High School at Gooseneck Cove and Sachuest Marsh; Charlestown schools at Winnapaug Marsh; and Chariho High, the Lincoln School, East Providence Career and Technical School, Roberston Elementary, and others at Ninigret, Quonnie, and Barrington Beach marshes.

"This high-impact program teaches students about the importance of salt marshes in our environment, shows them real-world science right in their own backyard, and, we hope, leads them to feel empowered to make a positive change in our struggling marshes," Prescott said.

Not only does data show that the program has helped restore health and function of salt marshes to date, but the impact on the students is also clear.

"After growing the salt marsh grasses in their greenhouse this winter and spring, Len Baker's Cranston High School West class, many of whom were seniors, came out to the Quonnie marsh in Charlestown, at 9 a.m. on a Sunday, the morning after graduation, to plant their seedlings," Ferguson said. "I was impressed by the commitment of these students, who eagerly volunteered to plant the salt marsh grasses in the newly restored marsh. That says it all."

COVER STORY

The Wastewater Wars

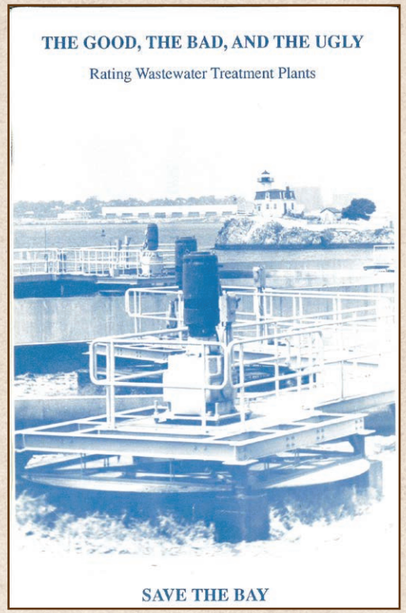
BY TOPHER HAMBLETT,
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY

During Save The Bay's first decade, our founders staved off full-scale industrialization and laid the groundwork for a Bay that would support a wide range of uses for years to come. With those victories secured, we spent the next two decades tackling the real and present danger of water pollution in Narragansett Bay. Armed with the federal Clean Water Act and a fierce determination to save the Bay from becoming an open sewer forever, Save The Bay took to the courts, the Statehouse and the streets.

The Good, The Bad And The Ugly

The 1972 Clean Water Act sought to eliminate the discharge of untreated municipal and industrial wastewater, envisioning American waterways that are safe for swimming and fishing. While the CWA distributed billions of dollars in grants for improvements nationally, progress was slow. In 1981, attempting to raise awareness of wastewater treatment facility progress, Save The Bay began publishing annual reviews of local plants. By 1985, this "report card" became a full-blown report. "The Good, The Bad and the Ugly" reviewed and rated the 19 plants across Rhode Island on permit compliance, which limited the amounts and types of discharge produced, as well as efficiency. The results were announced annually during a press conference—an event anxiously-awaited by treatment plant staff.

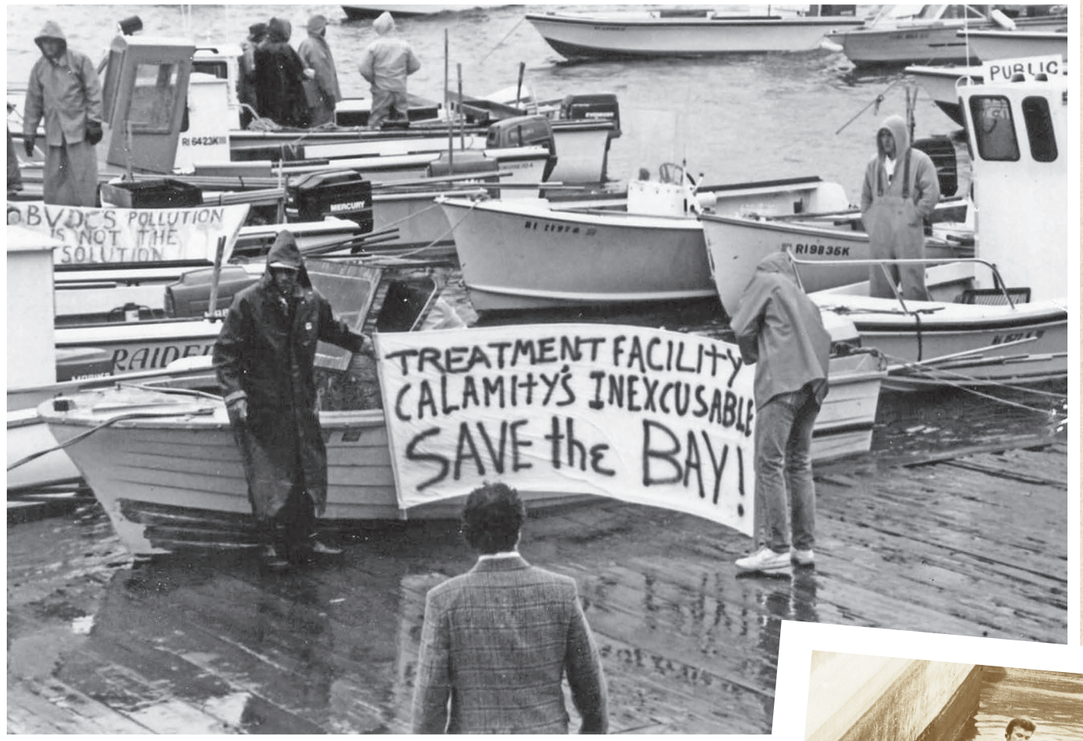
"The Good, The Bad and The Ugly" was the first report of its kind and a highly-effective tool in the battle to end sewage pollution. It provided a powerful incentive for wastewater plant operators to comply with the law and be publicly credited with a "Good" rating. By 1997, virtually all of the wastewater treatment plants had achieved compliance and Save The Bay stopped publishing the report. It had served its purpose.



Facing Ailing Facilities

Cited as one of the worst wastewater treatment facilities in the United States, Providence's Fields Point plant found itself in the crosshairs of the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1979. The agency ordered the city to fix its aging facility, which was in such disrepair that globs of waste, or "greaseballs," regularly washed up on the shores of the Providence River and Upper Bay.

When Providence refused to comply with the EPA order, Save The Bay participated in a lawsuit against the city citing Clean Water Act violations and supported legislation that transferred control of the plant from the city to a newly-created, quasi-public agency: the Narragansett Bay Commission. In the ensuing decades, NBC turned the chronic pollution source—and national embarrassment—into an award-winning wastewater treatment facility, and took on the challenge of tackling the raw sewage overflow problem that had plagued the upper Bay for nearly a century.



ABOVE: Shellfishermen join Save The Bay on the Seekonk River to rally against pollution from the Blackstone Valley District Commission.

Leading the charge for wastewater infrastructure improvements Bay-wide, Save The Bay reminded our readership in a June 1979 newsletter that, without significant public investments in these facilities, "it would take Rhode Island 32 years to bring its sewer systems to acceptable operational capacity," and that, "With 62 million gallons of partially treated sewage entering the bay each day, we simply don't have this kind of time. It looks like citizen activism at the state and local levels will have to be the leader."

Rhode Island voters embraced the challenge, first voting in favor of a $15 million ballot question for statewide wastewater treatment facility improvements in 1979, and then approving another $87.7 million for upgrades to the Fields Point plant the following year.

Despite public enthusiasm for improvements, another major polluter was still at large: the Blackstone Valley District Commission, a regional wastewater plant dumping more than 500 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Seekonk River each year. Like Fields Point, the BVDC used a combined sewer overflow system, or CSO, that merged sewage pipes with stormwater pipes. During rainstorms, these pipes would overflow, belching a foul mix of raw sewage and polluted runoff into the river. Tides and currents carried the pollution into the Upper Bay, causing frequent closure of thousands of acres of shellfishing grounds.

PROVIDENCE SEWAGE, 1970s

In 1990, Save The Bay and the Rhode Island Shellfishermen's Association united to end the BVDC's overflows. As described in our July/August 1990 newsletter, during a rally on the Seekonk River, "More than 200 angry shellfishermen braved rain and rough seas to bring their banner-laden vessels from up to 16 miles away to the rallying point at the Narragansett Boat Club" where the two organizations announced the filing of a lawsuit against the BVDC, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and the cities of Pawtucket and Central Falls for violations of the Clean Water Act.

DEM responded by permitting the BVDC yet another 18 months to study potential solutions; and Save The Bay vowed to "continue to fight for deadlines to stop raw sewage discharges into the Seekonk River, despite the DEM's issuance of a lax permit for the state's worst sewage treatment facility."

In the days before a public hearing on the BVDC's permit, Save The Bay staff hung a net over a Pawtucket discharge pipe, capturing the contents of a sewage overflow event. On the day of the hearing, staff placed the net—containing garbage, condoms, tampon applicators, and toilet paper— on the steps of the Rhode Island Department of Health, dubbing it "A Day's Catch on the Seekonk River." Citizens packed the hearing and demanded action.

In 1991, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation merging the BVDC with the Narragansett Bay Commission. In our November/December 1991 newsletter, we noted "The takeover by NBC – one of Rhode Island's best-run sewer districts – was one of STB's highest legislative priorities."

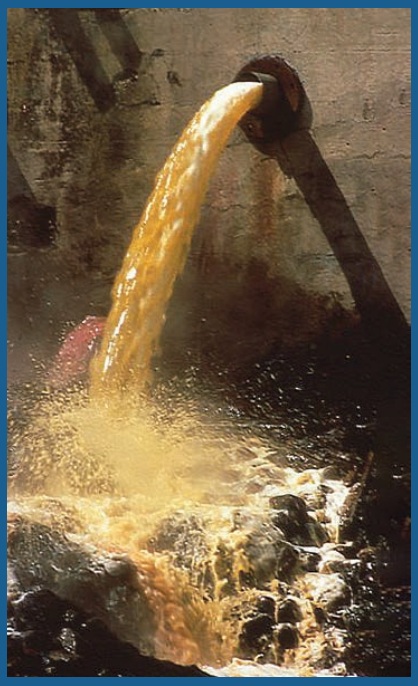
Overflow Crises

By the early 1900s, the Cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport and Fall River had constructed "state of the art" wastewater facilities to move sewage and runoff away from city streets and directly into the Providence River, Mount Hope Bay and Newport Harbor. While this innovative solution assumed, or hoped, the pollution would simply wash out to sea, in reality it lingered, choking the Upper Bay and rivers with raw sewage.

By the 1980s, these systems' 90 pipes regularly discharged billions of gallons of untreated waste into the Bay,

BEYOND SEWAGE:
The Industrial Pollution of Narragansett Bay

The concept of "the solution to pollution is dilution," was truly the motto of the 19th and 20th centuries. In addition to municipal dumping by way of raw sewage, the manufacturing industries of the era—drawn to local waters partially for the hydropower—were also using Narragansett Bay and the rivers throughout its watershed, as a dumping ground for their waste. Local rivers would run purple, red or orange, depending on the dye manufacturing companies were dumping on a given day, and decades of unchecked pollution left sediments in the Bay laced with heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium, nickel and zinc, as well as arsenic and petroleum. The Blackstone River was so polluted that, in the 1970s, the EPA dubbed it the most-polluted river in the country.



The Fields Point wastewater treatment plant in the 1970s was frequently cited as one of the worst facilities in the country.

and a mere half-inch of rain was enough to trigger sewage overflows. As a result, certain shellfishing areas were closed 200 days per year, costing Rhode Island's fishermen an estimated $1.5 million. Save The Bay's special report, "A Raw Deal," called attention to these startling facts, demanding the City of Fall River, the City of Newport, and the NBC take action.

Save The Bay then joined the NBC's stakeholder group, which worked with engineers to identify solutions for raw sewage overflows. Some stakeholders called for acceptance of pollution in urban waters, but our position was unequivocal: no matter who you are or where you live, you have a right to a clean Bay. Period.

In 2001, the NBC broke ground on a massive, three-phase project to reduce overflows; in 2018, plans for the final phase of the project were announced. The NBC estimates that, since 2008, over 9 billion gallons of sewage and polluted runoff have been captured and treated. Thousands of acres of upper Bay shellfish beds have already reopened.

Similar shellfishing improvements have been noted in Mount Hope Bay, where long-awaited improvements to Fall River's CSO system finally began in 1993. The improvements were spurred by a 1987 Clean Water Act lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation, a 1989 EPA order, a 1992 federal court mandating a solution to the city's CSO problem, Save The Bay's "Hope for Mount Hope Bay" report, and, finally, citizen approval of a $115 million bond referendum.

Citizen support was equally critical for initiating improvements in Newport in 2008. After the city's CSO system had been fouling the waters of Newport Harbor for decades, Environment Rhode Island, joined by a group of local residents, filed a Clean Water Act lawsuit and finally forced attention to the issue. The EPA joined the effort in 2010, and the next year, the city and plaintiffs signed a consent agreement. The city established a steering committee, including Save The Bay, to develop a long term solution and has embarked on a plan to correct its CSO problems by 2033.

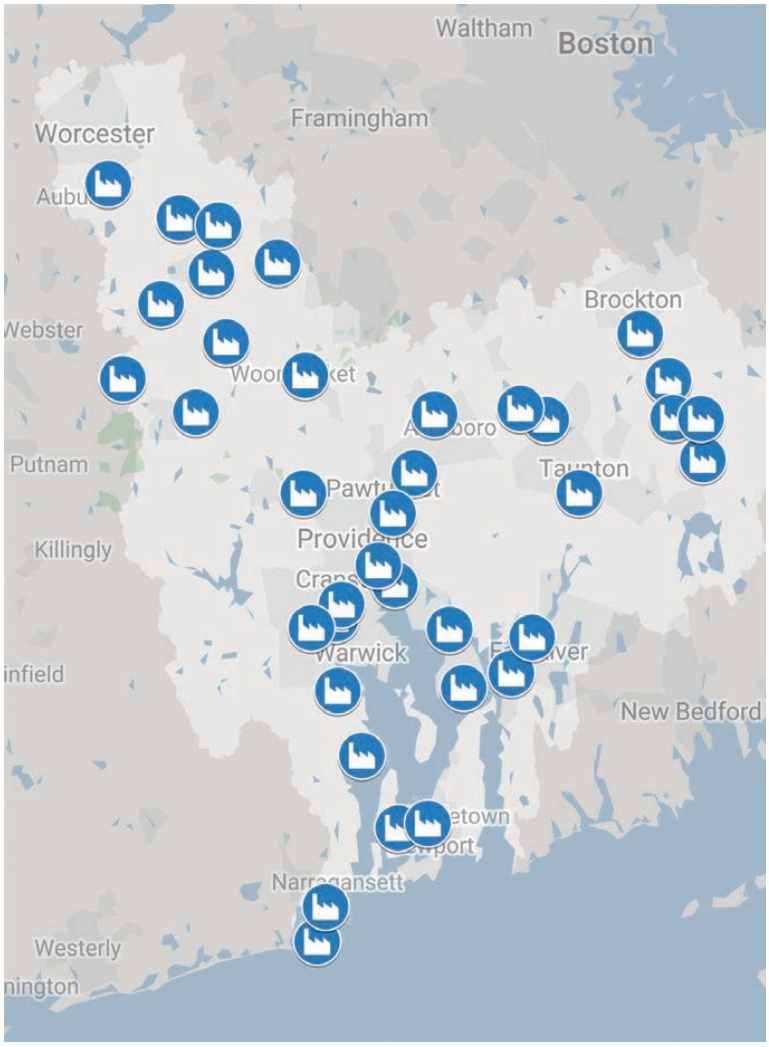
Other Sewage Sources

Large, centralized wastewater plants aren't the only contributor to sewage pollution in the Bay watershed. Residents in many communities, like Portsmouth, use "on-site"

systems, like septic systems and cesspools, for their homes and businesses. When improperly-sited or poorly-maintained, these systems guide pollution through groundwater and into recreational waters used for swimming and shellfishing.

In 1988, Sherwood Park, a 33-home development, relied on a community septic system. Since 1969, the system had been discharging nearly 15,000 gallons of untreated sewage per day, resulting in the closure of 20 acres of local shellfish beds. In December 1988, Save The Bay, Friends of the Sakonnet, and R.I. Attorney General James O'Neill sued the owners of Sherwood Park, demanding construction of a new community septic system. After three years in court, a settlement to stop this highly-visible and embarrassing problem was reached, finally ending 20 years of pollution.

While well-functioning septic systems successfully treat waste, cesspools are simply open pits that do not provide treatment to the waste flushed into them. In 2014, after years of determined advocacy, Save The Bay championed the Rhode Island Cesspool Act, requiring cesspools to be removed upon the sale or transfer of a property. Working closely with Clean Water Action and members of the General Assembly, we won passage of the bill through relentless advocacy in cities, towns, and at the Rhode Island Statehouse.



The 37 wastewater treatment facilities, shown here, are our first line of defense against pollution. (Map created by Save The Bay with data provided by the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program.)

Persistent Pollution

"The Bay is so much cleaner than it used to be" is the most common observation we hear from our members. Indeed, the reclamation of Narragansett Bay is a local, national, even global, success story and a point of pride for the people of Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. But, despite the dramatic reductions in wastewater pollution over the past 40 years, there is no room to let our guard down. The 37 wastewater treatment plants that dot Narragansett Bay treat 200 million gallons of wastewater per day and are our first line of defense against pollution. But climate change brings rising, warming seas and increased storm intensity that increase the impacts of wastewater pollution and puts the very existence of these facilities at risk.

Rising sea levels introduce salt water to septic systems causing them to fail, while flooding and storms take their own toll. In the midst of the 2010 floods, Warwick's plant was submerged and sewage backed up into homes and businesses; and during Superstorm Sandy in 2012, septic systems were ripped out of the ground by storm surge and hurled into coastal ponds. Warming waters mix with polluted nutrients, like those discharged from wastewater treatment plants, increasing the likelihood of algal blooms and high bacteria counts, the results of which we see in the form of fish kills and beach closures.

In the face of climate change-related pollution threats, Save The Bay continues to champion legislation to protect the Bay. These efforts include taking the lead on 2003 legislation to establish a statewide goal to reduce wastewater nutrient discharge, and 2018's $47.3 million "Green Economy & Clean Water Bond," which included investments to protect wastewater treatment plants from climate change impacts. Like all clean water questions since 1979, the 2018 bond was overwhelmingly approved by Rhode Island voters.

Persistent pollution from wastewater serves as a sobering reminder that protecting the Bay requires vigilance. As we celebrate the remarkable progress in restoring the waters of Narragansett Bay, we urge local residents to guard against complacency, and recommit to protecting the hard-won achievements of the past 50 years. ■

WHO SAVES THE BAY? VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Richard Sherman

BY KATY DORCHIES,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

In the early, formative years of Save The Bay, when full-time staff was limited, our work was particularly dependent on the charitable volunteerism of our community and board. Motivated by the efforts and mission of a fledgling organization, early Save The Bay board members like Richard Sherman took the reins on initiatives that would shape, not only the organization, but environmental discourse at large for years to come.

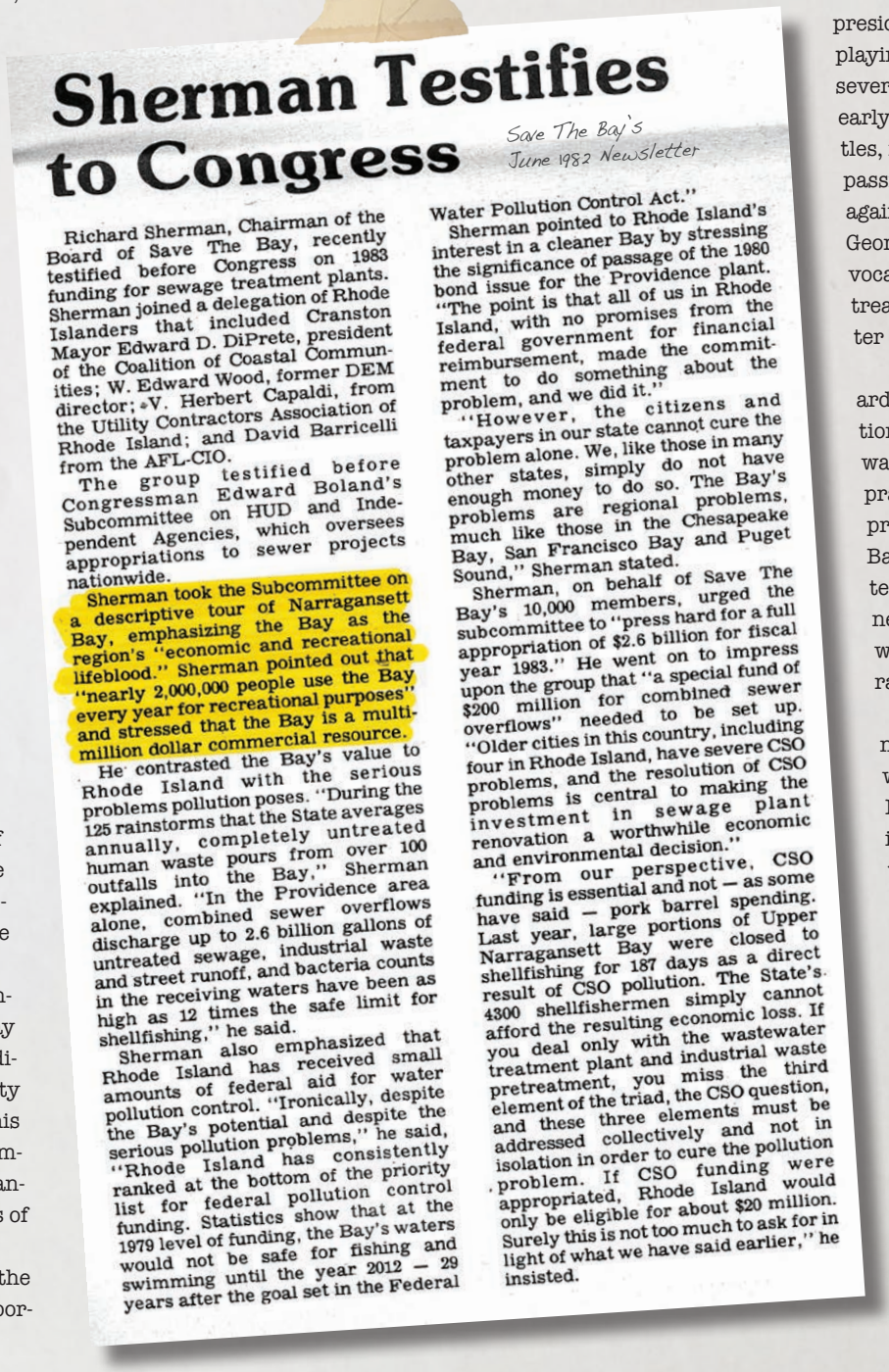
For Richard Sherman, a Providence native, a particular interest in environmental issues was sparked during his service in the United States Navy.

"I first became aware of the pollution in the oceans after seeing the discharges that went overboard from our destroyer, whether it was garbage or fuel or sewage," said Richard. "Up until 1970, there were relatively few statutes that regulated discharges and pollutants into the air and water."

Determined to play a role in the emerging era of environmental regulation, Richard studied environmental law, a relatively new course of study at the time, at the University of Denver before returning to Rhode Island.

Richard became involved with Save The Bay when he joined as board director in 1977 for a variety of reasons, including his understanding of the immeasurable role Narragansett Bay plays in the lives of all Rhode Islanders.

"The presence of the Bay is, I think, more important to the people who live here than anything else," Richard explained. "Over the years, Save The Bay has done an extraordinarily good job educating people about why it's important to have that resource. It's not just about fishing or swimming; it's also about the psychological impact of a clean body of water that you can live around."



Sherman Testifies to Congress

Save The Bay's June 1982 Newsletter

Richard Sherman, Chairman of the Board of Save The Bay, recently testified before Congress on 1983 funding for sewage treatment plants. Sherman joined a delegation of Rhode Islanders that included Cranston Mayor Edward D. DiPrete, president of the Coalition of Coastal Communities; W. Edward Wood, former DEM director; V. Herbert Capaldi, from the Utility Contractors Association of Rhode Island; and David Barricelli from the AFL-CIO.

The group testified before Congressman Edward Boland's Subcommittee on HUD and Independent Agencies, which oversees appropriations to sewer projects nationwide.

Sherman took the Subcommittee on a descriptive tour of Narragansett Bay, emphasizing the Bay as the region's "economic and recreational lifeblood." Sherman pointed out that "nearly 2,000,000 people use the Bay every year for recreational purposes" and stressed that the Bay is a multi-million dollar commercial resource.

He contrasted the Bay's value to Rhode Island with the serious problems pollution poses. "During the 125 rainstorms that the State averages annually, completely untreated human waste pours from over 100 outfalls into the Bay," Sherman explained. "In the Providence area alone, combined sewer overflows discharge up to 2.6 billion gallons of untreated sewage, industrial waste and street runoff, and bacteria counts in the receiving waters have been as high as 12 times the safe limit for shellfishing," he said.

Sherman also emphasized that Rhode Island has received small amounts of federal aid for water pollution control. "Ironically, despite the Bay's potential and despite the serious pollution problems," he said, "Rhode Island has consistently ranked at the bottom of the priority list for federal pollution control funding. Statistics show that at the 1979 level of funding, the Bay's waters would not be safe for fishing and swimming until the year 2012 — 29 years after the goal set in the Federal Water Pollution Control Act."

Sherman pointed to Rhode Island's interest in a cleaner Bay by stressing the significance of passage of the 1980 bond issue for the Providence plant. "The point is that all of us in Rhode Island, with no promises from the federal government for financial reimbursement, made the commitment to do something about the problem, and we did it."

"However, the citizens and taxpayers in our state cannot cure the problem alone. We, like those in many other states, simply do not have enough money to do so. The Bay's problems are regional problems, much like those in the Chesapeake Bay, San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound," Sherman stated.

Sherman, on behalf of Save The Bay's 10,000 members, urged the subcommittee to "press hard for a full appropriation of $2.6 billion for fiscal year 1983." He went on to impress upon the group that "a special fund of $200 million for combined sewer overflows" needed to be set up. "Older cities in this country, including four in Rhode Island, have severe CSO problems, and the resolution of CSO problems is central to making the investment in sewage plant renovation a worthwhile economic and environmental decision."

"From our perspective, CSO funding is essential and not — as some have said — pork barrel spending. Last year, large portions of Upper Narragansett Bay were closed to shellfishing for 187 days as a direct result of CSO pollution. The State's 4300 shellfishermen simply cannot afford the resulting economic loss. If you deal only with the wastewater treatment plant and industrial waste pretreatment, you miss the third element of the triad, the CSO question, and these three elements must be addressed collectively and not in isolation in order to cure the pollution problem. If CSO funding were appropriated, Rhode Island would only be eligible for about $20 million. Surely this is not too much to ask for in light of what we have said earlier," he insisted.

By 1985, Richard also served as board president and chairman, playing pivotal roles in several of Save The Bay's early cornerstone battles, including providing passionate testimony against oil drilling in Georges Bank, and advocating for secondary treatment of wastewater discharges.

But one of Richard's pivotal contributions took place after wastewater treatment practices began to improve, when Save The Bay staff and volunteers began asking new questions about water quality in Narragansett Bay.

"The Aquidneck Island project, which Save The Bay started working on in 1982, was the first big project where we tried to analyze and report on the effects of land use on water quality within a finite system."

At a time when land use and water quality plans simply didn't exist within Narragansett Bay, the Aquidneck Island Pol-

lution Prevention Project sought to establish as fact the idea that, "water supply is partially determined by water use, water quality is affected by wastewater disposal, and land use is the factor which connects the two."

The project received funding from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Beinecke Foundation and the Prince Charitable Trusts, that allowed for three new project hires, specialists in the areas of urban planning, coastal planning and communications. The entire project was executed under the direction of a three-member board subcommittee that included Richard Sherman.

"Up until 1970, there were relatively few statutes that regulated discharges and pollutants into the air and water."

The final report—which synthesized data on population, water quality, water supply, wastewater disposal, housing, soils, vegetation and land use—unequivocally confirmed early hypotheses:

"We were able to conclude that—whether it's run-off or air pollution or direct discharges—water quality is entirely dependent on how land is used," said Richard.

"The project helped shift everybody's thinking. It helped us to start looking at the impacts on the Bay using a much wider perspective than before. The question of water quality was no longer necessarily determined by this industrial facility discharging here, or that wastewater treatment facility not using secondary treatment there."

The project established a different scope for the mission of Save The Bay, motivating staff to look, for the first time, inland for answers to questions regarding water quality issues.

Richard's time, commitment and contributions to Save The Bay span decades of environmental advocacy and have helped shape the way we think about local environmental issues. He continues to support Save The Bay's efforts on our program and policy committee, regularly bringing his insight and expertise to our work.

"Richard brings passion, knowledge and experience to the table," said Executive Director Jonathan Stone. "His ability to tackle complex issues while caring deeply about our mission makes him a valued participant in our advocacy. We're fortunate to have him involved."

Richard, however, is loathe to accept much in the way of either flattery or credit. In fact, out of all the battles, all the planning, all the testimony, and all the research he's been a party to, there's only one victory he's willing to accept credit for, even then sharing it with Quentin Anthony: establishing the East-West Save The Bay Swim route that has been in use since 1978. ■

LEFT: Richard Sherman sets sail in 1982.
BELOW: Sherman and wife Jane O'Farrell enjoy globetrotting in their spare time.

RESTORATION

Saving the Swamp

PROTECTING THE WETLANDS OF THE NARRAGANSETT BAY WATERSHED

BY KATE MCPHERSON, RIVERKEEPER

In the years before federal wetland regulations existed under the 1970 Clean Water Act, hundreds of millions of acres of wetlands were destroyed nationwide. We may never know the full extent of the historical loss of wetland in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, but estimates report a loss of at least 40 percent in Rhode Island and 30 percent in Massachusetts. By 1997, about 52 percent of freshwater wetlands across the country were ditched, drained, filled or otherwise ruined. Federal, state and local laws and ordinances now regulate land use in the watershed's remaining wetlands.

Massachusetts and Rhode Island were ahead of their time with wetland protection. Massachusetts was the first state to pass a Wetlands Protection Act in 1963 and Rhode Island the second in 1971. To enforce the Wetlands Protection Act, Rhode Island has Freshwater Wetlands Regulations that specify where and how the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management protects wetlands in Rhode Island. The regulations require careful consideration of applications to avoid and minimize alterations to wetland functions and values. Those early laws, however, were not very protective in practice and opened the door to decades of disputes.

In the economic boom of the 1980s, new businesses and developers sought more and more permits from the Freshwater Wetlands Program. Developer complaints regarding wait times mounted, the program's staff struggled to keep up. Concerned citizens groups and DEM staff members complained the Freshwater Wetlands Program was becoming increasingly "pro-development."

In a controversial move, the DEM announced in 1986 the transfer of the Freshwater Wetlands Program from the Department of Land Resources to the Department of Water Resources, and the appointment of a new program director. Save The Bay sought clarification regarding the changes with concern for the future of the program. DEM's response, published in Save The Bay's April/May 1986 newsletter, ignored many of our questions, but included a pledge to take wetland enforcement seriously—promising new staff positions and severe penalties for the state's Wetlands Protection Act violators. This drew the ire of land developers and others who wanted to easily develop lands regardless of environmental consequences.

Over the next few years, DEM felt growing pressure from the development community to review wetland applications more quickly and even faced a lawsuit over delays. In 1992, the Rhode Island Senate and House heard bills that proposed to make it easier for projects that were denied by DEM to get approval through the courts. The bills would have removed common-sense

A 2018 view of a local wetland in Pulaski State Park in Burrillville.

Save The Bay's Jan/Feb 1994 Newsletter

EDITORIAL

Protecting Wetlands Protects Our Bay

WETLANDS PROTECT OUR BAY, our rivers and our drinking water from the harmful effects of pollution. As our most efficient and least expensive water pollution filters, they are much more costly to restore or replace than to protect.

More than 100 species of birds and 140 species of fish depend on wetlands for food and shelter. Environmentally and economically, wetlands are a priceless part of our world.

Lately, wetlands have been the setting for fierce turf wars. Too often, lines are drawn through the marsh grass as state and federal regulatory agencies square off against private interests.

In the past two years, legislation which seriously compromised wetlands protection was introduced in the Rhode Island State House. This legislation was defeated through the efforts of Save The Bay and other friends of our economy and our environment.

As we enter the new year, we again hear the sound of rattling sabers. This year, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management is updating its wetlands regulations. While the new regulations streamline the wetlands permitting process, private interests are rumored to be ready to file suit to stop implementation and fight to roll back existing protection.

Save The Bay asks all those who appreciate the joys of a clean and healthy Bay to support wetlands protection.

Please call your State Senator and Representative before the 1994 legislative session begins to express your support for Bay, river and wetlands protection. Your voice is needed and it will be heard. ■

review criteria, and allowed destructive projects denied by DEM's biologists to be appealed to the Rhode Island Superior Court without proof of meeting key pieces of the Freshwater Wetlands Regulations, effectively stripping the regulations of their power. Save The Bay responded again, with executive director Curt Spalding testifying against the bills, calling them "thinly-veiled attempts to promote private gain at the expense of the state's environment and economy." Save The Bay worked with partners and community members to vocalize opposition to the legislation, ultimately defeating it.

When rumors of regulation rollbacks emerged in 1994, Save The Bay rallied the community again, asking members to contact their senators and representatives to voice their support for "bay, river and wetlands protection;" and when some groups used Governor Lincoln Almond's 1996 commission to streamline the wetland permitting process as a forum to advocate for reduced wetlands protection, we fought back. Save The Bay expressed support for the commission's goal of an improved permitting system, but opposed a new wetlands classification system that oversimplified the nature of wetlands, a proposal that was not grounded in wetland science and which could have opened large areas of wetland up to development. Fortunately, this legislation was defeated as well.

The conflicts surrounding wetlands regulations exist at all levels of government. Many states still do not have their own wetlands protection regulations and the federal Clean Water Act is the only mechanism by which wetlands are protected. In 1991, President George H. Bush dealt a severe blow to this protection, redefining the federal definition of "wetland" and opening the door for tens of millions of acres of wetlands to be developed. A similar story unfolded this year, when the Trump administration attacked the Clean Water Act by changing the definition of "Waters of the United States," proposing to remove federal protection of rivers, streams, and other water bodies.

Since 1971 the Coastal Resources Management Council had been charged to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations. In 2002, changes to the regulations gave CRMC authority to regulate freshwater wetlands in the vicinity of the coast. Coastal wetlands are some of the last lines of defense to improve water quality and provide habitat for wildlife in Narragansett Bay.

Throughout all these changes to state and federal regulations, Save The Bay has remained steadfast in our support for effective, science-based wetland regulations and permitting processes that protect river and wetland functions and values. We will continue to critically review proposed changes to the Freshwater Wetlands Regulations, provide critical feedback to the RIDEM and CRMC, call on watershed groups and towns, and stand by our wetlands for the next fifty years, and beyond. ■

The Value of Wetlands

Once considered "waste spaces," wetlands play an important role in a healthy watershed.

- Wetlands provide habitat for **obligate species**, or plants and animals that need wet areas to live. You can thank wetland habitats for **spotted turtles, wood frogs, dusky salamander, brook trout, spotted sandpipers, common yellowthroat, river otter,** and the **ringed boghaunter dragonfly**.

eastern red spotted newt

- Wetlands are also incredibly important for **facultative species**, or species that use wetland habitats when they are available but don't necessarily need wetlands for a critical point in their life cycle; **mammals with large home ranges** use wetlands as travel corridors to get to new habitat, and **migrating songbirds** use brushy cover in wetlands for cover and to feed and rest before continuing on their journeys.
- Wide upland buffers adjacent to wetlands protect water quality in the Bay by filtering stormwater, physically slowing it down.
- Vegetated wetlands uptake and neutralize nutrients, toxic materials, and pathogens before they can reach the Bay.
- Wetlands have educational and scientific value and form beautiful scenery in our landscape.

ADVOCACY

The Battle for Black Point

BY CINDY M. SABATO,
SPECIAL PROJECTS CONSULTANT

Save The Bay's vision is a "fully swimmable, fishable, healthy Narragansett Bay, accessible to all." That "accessible to all" part sometimes flies under the radar of broad awareness about our 50-year-old organization. But the right to shoreline access is not simply a Save The Bay ideal; it's embedded in the Rhode Island Constitution:

"The people shall continue to enjoy and freely exercise all the rights of fishery, and the privileges of the shore, to which they have been heretofore entitled under the charter and usages of this state." (Article 1, Section 17)*

In 1986, Save The Bay fought to preserve this very right in a heated, five-year battle that helped define public access issues for decades to come.

Black Point in Narragansett offers 40 acres of scenic view, footpath and rocky coastline north of Scarborough State Beach. This last stretch of undeveloped shoreline along the western Bay has been used for outdoor recreation for generations, but in 1985 it was nearly replaced by a condominium development that threatened to close Black Point's beloved footpath forever.

For the next five years, Save The Bay "committed itself solely to the issue of public access in order to: (1) protect and preserve a traditional, historic pathway along the ocean, and (2) establish a much-needed precedent for public access so that our efforts to clean up Narragansett Bay can be enjoyed by all," according to a 1988 newsletter.

Local allies joined us in front of the Narragansett Zoning Board, demanding the developer, Downing Corp., alter site plans to protect coastal waters from residential runoff and maintain public access to the shoreline.

Save The Bay's May/June 1989 Newsletter

BLACK POINT SAVED!

BLACK POINT - PRISTINE FOREVER. That's the goal of the State of Rhode Island, as Governor Edward DiPrete announced that this vital coastal resource would be saved from the bulldozers through the state's condemnation process. The 42-acre tract was the proposed site of 80 condominiums to be built by the Downing Corporation, before DiPrete stepped in with a $6.4 million offer for the property to the delight of the Rhode Island public. With bipartisan support evident for preserving Black Point and its Narragansett Cliff Walk, action will soon be taken to let the state purchase the land. Photo by Kevin Neel.

Making good on a 1988 campaign promise to acquire 42 acres of shoreline property at Black Point in Narragansett and retain it as open space, Governor Edward DiPrete announced on May 18 that the state will spend $6.4 million to take the land through condemnation. Slated for development by the Downing Corporation, which planned to build 80 condominiums on the property, DiPrete's move to obtain the property will forestall building, which would not only disturb the area, but raise the price of the property if it was bought at a later date. Although the Downing Corporation will contest the $6.4 million figure in Superior Court, the deal is essentially done, and the state will inevitably take over Black Point.

"We must act swiftly on this once in a lifetime opportunity to preserve one of our most invaluable natural resources - our shoreline," said DiPrete in announcing the condemnation. He also cited the support for the move of Save The Bay, the Coalition for Consumer Justice, and the oversight committee to evaluate the state's appraisal of Black Point's worth, which included Save The Bay vice president John Rector.

"Save The Bay is delighted with the governor's action," commented executive director Trudy Coxe. "This, combined with the state's recent purchases of adjoining beach properties, will provide Rhode Islanders with a nearly two-mile stretch of marvelous coastline. People fifty or a hundred years from now are going to look back and say, 'What a tremendous thing they did back in 1989!'."

Money for the acquisition of the property will be obtained from a state recreation fund and remaining monies from a 1987 open space bond issue. Laws governing condemnation proceedings demand that the full price of the property be presented when the notice is filed, following an offical property survey, not unlike a title search for a house.

The funds are expected to be paid back from a $50 million coastal access bond proposal spoonsor by the governor which is currently in the General Assembly, or from a possible merged bill with an open space bond entered by Lt. Governor Roger Begin. In any case, bipartisan political backing of coastal open space preservation is evident, and public support for previous bond issues has been nothing less than overwhelming, indicating that passage of any sort of proposal is virtually assured.

If the Downing Corp. appeals the price, the scenario would be roughly as follows: Downing appeals to Superior Court; the judge is offered a counter-appraisal by Downing and the state's appraisals (a second figure, "percentage-wise, not substantially higher" according to DiPrete, was also obtained by the state); if none are acceptable to the parties involved, the court would appoint its own appraiser, who would return with a fourth figure. Generally, the court would accept its own assessment of the property's value at that stage.

**In 1941, the Rhode Island Supreme Court further added that "privileges of the shore" includes "fishing from the shore, taking seaweed from the shore, leaving the shore to bathe in the sea, and passage along the shore."*

ABOVE: Black Point, depicted in this historical postcard, has been a treasured tourist site dating back decades. RIGHT: The Black Point footpath today.

To make our case, we presented historical articles from local newspapers and the New York Times that indicated the path had been used by the public since the Civil War; travel brochures from the turn of the century that boasted the pathway's natural beauty; records referencing the public's right to the path; evidence that the waters off Black Point were protected under state law; and more. We also presented videotaped witness testimony of people who had observed the use of the path over decades, and a petition including 480 resident signatures.

Responding to "overwhelming response by town residents," the board voted to require Downing Corp. to maintain public right of way along the shoreline. Downing Corp. appealed the decision in Washington County Superior Court. While the court upheld the appeal, it also affirmed the Coastal Resource Management Council as the agency ultimately responsible for determining public rights-of-way.

Save The Bay took the fight to CRMC by calling for a rights-of-way hearing in order to demonstrate long-term public use and implied dedication of right-of-way—a two-step process that would take another four years.

The Conservation Law Foundation, the Town of Narragansett and Rhode Island Attorney General Jim O'Neill joined the battle. During increasingly-contentious hearings, we fought through appeals and overturns, emergency moratoriums, contradictory expert testimony—even Downing Corp.'s attempt to cripple Save The Bay by sending letters to our corporate sponsors, claiming we had become an 'obstructionist' organization and suggesting they reconsider their financial support. (The attempt backfired; Save The Bay received more than $5,000 in donations following the attack.)

As the case moved before the Rhode Island Superior Court, Gov. Ed DiPrete, encouraged by Save The Bay, announced the state's intention to buy Black Point for use as a state park, "as a symbol for the fight to ensure shoreline access."

After several more months, delayed by the developer's reluctance to cooperate, Gov. DiPrete made good on his promise in May 1989, claiming a hard-won victory in one of the greatest public access battles of the time.

"The Black Point case was an emphatic, pro-access outcome that resonated statewide," said Save The Bay Advocacy Director Topher Hamblett.

But public access to the shoreline continues to be tested.

In 2014, the Rhode Island Attorney General filed a lawsuit against Misquamicut homeowners who had installed fences limiting public access to the beach along Atlantic Avenue. In 2017, the Cranston City Council issued an ordinance banning fishing from a public access point; the same year, three property owners installed illegal snow fences blocking public access to Narragansett's Wheeler Beach.

In every case, Save The Bay battled to preserve access. We've met with community and city council members, filed briefs, and worked with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to clarify the agency's exclusive role in managing outdoor activities, like fishing.

Today, Rhode Island has 226 state-designated rights-of-way. The CRMC has had the responsibility of identifying these access points since 1978, but, as noted in a 1986 Save The Bay article, "many of these sites do not provide safe, convenient access, and some are impassable."

Save The Bay has partnered with CRMC in an effort to ensure state-designated rights-of-way are in fact, safe, convenient and passable. Our Waterkeepers and volunteers have visited and inspected all rights-of-way for accessibility, obstructions, parking availability, path conditions, and more, photographing and mapping their findings along the way.

More than 30 percent of Rhode Island's rights-of-way are at least partly obstructed by vegetation, property encroachment, or purposeful obstruction, like boulders or gates. Another third are threatened by coastal flooding and stormwater erosion. Only half provide parking, and almost half need maintenance.

These findings were compiled in a report delivered to Rhode Island communities, asking for support in ensuring public rights-of-way are clear.

"We hope that communities will step forward, like they've done in the past," says Save The Bay Staff Attorney Kendra Beaver. "We are ready to assist volunteers with clearing existing access points."

After 50 years of advocacy for Narragansett Bay, we continue to stand at the forefront of protecting the public access rights of all Rhode Islanders. Perhaps we put it best in our 1988 Save The Bay newsletter, when we said:

"The public has enjoyed a longstanding right to shoreline access… and Save The Bay will defend that right from those who want to take it away for only the enjoyment of a select few." ■

50 WAYS WE'VE SAVED THE BAY:

Improving Dredge Policy

BY CHRIS CASSADAY,
COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

Commercial and recreational vessels rely on shipping channels and marinas for safe navigation and use of Narragansett Bay. As the size of vessels using the Bay increased, channel depth had to increase with it, and the natural depths of the Bay no longer allowed vessels to reach Providence. By the 1990s, the Providence River shipping channel had silted in, making navigation significantly more dangerous. When Save The Bay learned about dredge disposal plans that posed a direct threat to the Bay, we sprang into action. Our advocacy against these plans, and for alternatives that would better protect the Bay, forever changed the way dredging projects take place throughout Rhode Island. Now, rather than being dumped throughout the Bay, dredge material is reused when possible, and properly disposed of in other cases.

A Unique Habitat Near Hog Island

Nestled in the middle of the Bay between Bristol and Portsmouth, Hog Island is surrounded by benthic (bottom) habitats that dot the mid and upper Bay. Benthic habitats support a diverse community of invertebrates, crustaceans, and shellfish that live in and on the sediments. A 70-foot depression southwest of Hog Island, roughly 30 feet deeper than the surrounding area, provides a unique refuge for many species that rely on colder, deeper water. The Hog Island habitat is intensively fished, and knowledgeable fishermen point to the site as a critical habitat for juvenile tautog.

In 1998, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was planning to dredge 5.6 million cubic yards of the Providence River and dump nearly all of it into the depression, creating a mound 430 acres—roughly 325 football fields—wide and 25 feet thick. The Corps predicted that the disposal area would recover over time, but Save The Bay and our allies met that prediction with great skepticism.

The Army Corps plan was met with stiff opposition from Save The Bay, as well as several East Bay communities, fishermen and environmental groups. Senator John Chafee, Congressman Patrick Kennedy and Governor Lincoln Almond joined the rising tide of opposition. "I am gravely concerned about the possible threats to our natural habitat," said Congressman Kennedy. "...the proposal to dump dredge material into the so-called Hog Island site… is simply unacceptable."

New Alternatives, New Policy for Dredge Disposal

Several important events followed. First, an offshore dredge open-water disposal site, known as "69B," was established nine miles south of the Rhode Island coast to accept dredge material deemed environmentally safe for disposal. But state and federal regulatory agencies deemed much of the Providence River shipping channel material too contaminated for open water disposal. As the river continued to silt in, pressure mounted for an alternative. Finally, the Army Corps of Engineers proposed a new approach: creating giant pits below the Providence River shipping channel, where the contaminated dredge spoils would be dumped and then covered up with cleaner, suitable material. These subterranean sites, known as Confined Aquatic Disposal cells, or CADs, became the solution.

The CAD solution also provided short term relief for marinas, saving them the time and money it would have taken to barge their dredge material out to 69B. But CADs did not address the underlying challenge of preventing future "Hog Island" proposals. So Save The Bay set out to change dredging policy so that Narragansett Bay would be

ABOVE: A view from the surface of waters surrounding Hog Island today.
RIGHT: A historic Save The Bay chart approximates the proposed 1998 disposal area.

the absolute last resort for dredge disposal. A years-long standoff between Save The Bay and the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association ended when the two organizations worked together with the Rhode Island General Assembly to establish, in law, a "hierarchy" of dredge disposal options. At the top of the hierarchy was "beneficial use" of dredge material on land, for landfill cover and other projects. For example, dredged material was used as a base for the athletic fields of Johnson and Wales University near the Save The Bay Center in Providence

Dredging shipping channels is essential for the maritime economy. Done correctly, with the environment in mind, it can be done in a way that protects Bay habitat and water quality, while also providing material for other projects. Save The Bay has fought to protect the Bay from dredge plans that would have damaged the environment for many years, and will continue to do so to protect the Bay and its habitats from being buried in sedimentary spoils. ■

The Value of Sand

BY DAVE PRESCOTT, COASTKEEPER

If you've spent time sitting on a beach in Rhode Island's South County on a hot, sunny day, it's hard to imagine that we could ever run out of sand. However, sand is a finite resource that many of us take for granted. In fact, in other parts of the county (the mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic, the West Coast, and internationally), sand is imported to help rebuild eroding beaches.

In Rhode Island, sand is a very valuable resource. During dredging projects, if the sediment to be removed tests clean for contaminants, the best use of this material would be to beneficially reuse it. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act offers the opportunity to reuse this clean material in an environmentally-friendly manner. Examples of beneficial reuse of dredge material include beach replenishment and habitat creation, restoration and adaptation projects.

Along the southern coast of Rhode Island, several of these types of projects have occurred over the past few years. In both Ninigret and Quonochontaug Ponds in Charlestown, clean sand from the breachways has been dredged and placed on the salt marsh surface to increase the elevation of the marsh. But why the need?

Based on the historic tide gauge in Newport, sea levels have risen nearly eleven inches since 1930. These increases in sea level not only challenge our built environment, they impact our natural environment as well. There is perhaps no coastal habitat more impacted by these changes than our local salt marshes. Due to increased and prolonged flooding of these areas, our salt marshes are literally drowning in place, causing native vegetation to die off and mud flats to form, before eventually becoming open water. When this happens, our marshes lose many of the important natural functions that they provide: a wildlife nursery, a buffer against storms, a natural filtration system, habitat, and much more.

Dredge projects, such as those that occurred in Charlestown, capitalize on the use of tens of thousands of cubic yards of sand from the dredged breachway to help build up the elevation of these salt marshes. After the dredged material was pumped and spread across the marsh surface, Save The Bay staff and volunteers worked to reestablish drainage creeks as well as plant native salt marsh vegetation (grown from local seeds collected in Rhode Island) to help with the recolonization of the marsh.

Breachway dredging also helps to improve flushing of the salt ponds and navigation for safer boating access. In addition, through the beneficial reuse of this material on the marsh surface, we can help protect and support the important ecological functions that salt marshes provide. None of this is possible without the strong support of government agencies, local municipalities, and local organizations. We hope that through ongoing efforts like these, we can continue to learn, adapt, and help make our marshes more resilient to future sea level rise.

DEVELOPMENT

Our 50th Anniversary Campaign
The Bay Defense Fund

BY KENDRA BEAVER,
STAFF ATTORNEY

When a scrap yard began discharging contaminated stormwater into the Providence River, Save The Bay needed funds to analyze the chemicals contained in the discharge. With funds, we could have quickly hired a consultant to both take samples of the discharge and document control and analysis of the samples to support future action, such as complaints to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management urging them to act, or initiating legal proceedings.

Time is critical in stopping and preventing damage to our coastal resources; however, serious environmental threats rear their ugly heads without warning. It is not possible to plan for these unanticipated environmental threats, or budget for funds that may be needed to combat challenges that may arise during any fiscal year.

Times are tough for the environment. For decades, our state leaders have failed to adequately fund the agencies that protect our environment. The legislature has not only starved the agencies of resources, but during the last session, legislators began to roll back laws promulgated to protect our natural resources, as evidenced by delaying the requirement for communities to tie into sewers, allowing waivers from requirements to properly close septic tanks and cesspools, and exempting professional engineers from training requirements for designing onsite wastewater management systems. The DEM and Coastal Resources Management Council now face increasing demands, including those resulting from wind power, solar development, and climate change. Staff is limited, enforcement is resource-intensive and timely enforcement is, too often, simply not a priority.

Brenton Point wave. Photo by Marc Bond.

Developers often present proposals that request reductions in coastal buffers, filling of wetlands, or other actions that impact our resources or public access to the shore. When there is a serious threat to our waters, Save The Bay's position would be buttressed by experts who could review the plans, inform our review, and at times testify in support of our position at hearings.

Save The Bay wants to be ready to document violations and follow through in court when agencies do not, or cannot, respond to reports of serious, deliberate or recurring violations of the Clean Water Act and wetlands regulations.

That is why, as part of Save The Bay's 50th Anniversary Campaign, we have established the Bay Defense Fund. The Fund will allow us the financial resources needed to rapidly respond to unanticipated threats to Narragansett Bay.

The Bay Defense Fund will be dedicated to:

- Hiring experts to prepare reports, evaluate specific impacts, inform our positions and testify at hearings on applications and discharges as well as documenting damage to the environment and public health. Examples of these experts include surveyors, appraisers, title searchers, engineers, wildlife biologists, environmental scientists, coastal geologists.
- Collecting and/or analyzing water and sediment samples for pollutants
- Maintaining financial support for an environmental attorney position
- Paying court costs, transcription fees and retaining outside legal counsel and support, when needed, for citizen suits and other resource intensive cases
- Hiring additional staff or contract support to address urgent or complex advocacy issues

As the staff attorney for Save The Bay and a donor to the fund, I am excited that we are establishing a fund to draw upon, when needed, to strengthen our advocacy efforts to protect the Bay and its watershed in the years to come. ■

Passion for Protection

AN INTERVIEW WITH WARREN PRELL

BY KATY DORCHIES,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND MARKETING

Warren Prell was aware of Save The Bay for years before becoming involved with our Program and Policy Committee, or the P&P, in 2007. In the years since, he has also served as Chair of the same committee and on our Board of Directors.

Prell's 43-year-long residence near Barrington Beach, recreational activities, and oceanographic insight, helped bolster his decision to support our 50th Anniversary Campaign's Bay Defense Fund.

What's your connection to Narragansett Bay?
Deborah and I moved to Rhode Island in 1976 and proximity to the Bay was one of our criteria for where we wanted to live. Personally, we enjoy the beach and the access to the Bay. Some of our best memories come from walking the shoreline, the bluefish blitzes, watching our kids and grandkids playing in the Bay, the serenity of making water quality measurements at night.

"Efficient and effective advocacy, even in the face of changing threats, is at the heart of Save The Bay's work, and it needs to be continually appreciated and supported."

I am an avid recreational fisherman and a professional oceanographer. Over the past two decades, I have been involved in reconstructing environmental history using the Bay sediments and measuring the water quality, especially oxygen and chlorophyll levels. I see the diversity of the Bay, and I see it as a constant reminder of how much we have to protect.

What do you perceive to be the greatest threats to the Bay? To me, there are two major threats. The first is how vulnerable the upper Bay infrastructure—all of the scrap, wastewater treatment, petroleum storage and transportation operations—is to sea level rise and storm surge. The second is the transportation of nutrients and pollutants to the Bay through both the wastewater infrastructure and, increasingly more important, stormwater runoff from across the watershed.

Warren Prell and wife Deborah have enjoyed living near the Bay for more than four decades.

Why did you choose to contribute to the Bay Defense Fund? As a member of the P&P for over a decade, I've seen the evolving threats to the Bay.

And I've seen Save The Bay evolve to address changing threats and challenges. I appreciate the importance of an active Advocacy Team and the role they play in tracking various threats and addressing them with direct and legislative action, and the Bay Defense Fund supports that.

What would you tell someone considering supporting the Fund?
Save The Bay is recognized as the organization that speaks for and is committed to maintaining and improving Narragansett Bay. Efficient and effective advocacy, even in the face of changing threats, is at the heart of Save The Bay's work, and it needs to be continually appreciated and supported. ■

SAVE THE DATE

Nature Cruise & Seal Watches
October-December
Viking Marina, 19 Margin Street, Westerly
savebay.org/seal

Seal Tours and Seal & Lighthouse Tours
November-April
Bowen's Ferry Landing, 30 Market Square, Newport
savebay.org/seal

Artists for The Bay Show & Sale
Opening reception: Thursday, December 5, 2019
6:00-8:30 p.m.
Save The Bay Center, 100 Save The Bay Drive, Providence
savebay.org/art

Earth Day Birthday
Saturday, April 25, 2020 | 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Easton's Beach, 175 Memorial Blvd., Newport
savebay.org/earthdaybday

Annual Meeting & Taste of The Bay
Thursday, June 11, 2020 | 6:00-8:30 p.m.
Save The Bay Center, 100 Save The Bay Drive, Providence
savebay.org/taste

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Save The Bay is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WordPress. Follow along, share your stories and pictures, plan a visit and spread the word about the importance of a healthy Narragansett Bay.

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