

Environmental Journal by Peter Lord: Governor proposes improvements for R.I. waterways

01:00 AM EDT on Sunday, July 25, 2004, Providence Journal Bulletin

Just as true beach weather struck Rhode Island last week, Governor Carcieri announced a shopping list of improvements he proposes for Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island bathing beaches and the South County salt ponds.

Carcieri made the proposals in response to a series of recommendations in a report from the Governor's Narragansett Bay and Watershed Planning Commission, which he appointed last year after the big Greenwich Bay fish kill.

In a news conference Thursday with former Gov. J. Joseph Garrahy, who chaired the commission, Carcieri thanked Garrahy for his work and announced plans to keep the former governor busy.

He said Garrahy has agreed to serve as interim chairman of a special coordination team representing 10 state agencies that address water conditions in Rhode Island. The coordination team was mandated in legislation recently passed by the General Assembly.

Carcieri also appointed Garrahy to be chief negotiator of agreements with Connecticut and Massachusetts to better coordinate their efforts to protect common watershed and to garner federal financing for projects.

Carcieri said work is already under way to modify the stormwater system at Scarborough Beach, in Narragansett, so it will pollute the water less. He said he is making similar pollution-reduction strategies a priority at Warren Town Beach, Conanicut Point, Oakland Beach, Barrington Town Beach, Bristol Town Beach, King Park Swimming Area, City Park Beach, Goddard Park Beach and Easton's Beach, in Newport.

Previously, the governor announced plans for a \$19-million bond issue to address various pollution projects and make improvements at sewer plants.

On Thursday, Carcieri also announced that he has:

Asked the Coastal Resources Management Council to allocate \$968,000 to restore the salt ponds. The council has been preparing dredging projects for the ponds for some time.

Directed the state Department of Environmental Management to spend \$100,000 restoring 20 acres of tidal salt pond and salt marsh in Portsmouth and to look for other, similar projects.

Issued an executive order forming a Bay Assessment and Response Team, which will respond the next time there is an incident such as the fish kill.

Formed the Rhode Island Marine Water Monitoring Collaborative to develop a statewide strategy to monitor water quality.

Directed the DEM to work with sewage-treatment-plant operators around the state to lower their discharge of nitrogen into the Bay.

Asked the state's Clean Water Finance Agency to provide up to \$2 million annually for special 10-year, 2-percent loans for people replacing cesspools. The governor said he will try again next year to win legislative support for his goal to phase out cesspools, which contribute pollution to nearby waterways.

Directed DEM to seek federal money to improve public access and use of the state's reserve on Prudence Island and the Department of Transportation to help pay for a dock at Save the Bay's new headquarters at Fields Point so it can provide Bay tours for urban residents.

Ordered DEM to spend \$75,000 to develop up to 12 additional shoreline access sites, focusing in particular on new fishing piers.

Ordered the Coastal Resources Management Council to convene a summit to discuss how to increase public and private aquaculture ventures in Rhode Island.