

Chafee/HUD Project Overview

Narragansett Bay is special. The Bay is the basis for many elements of the economic portfolio of Rhode Island and southern New England. These include the marine trades, the Newport Naval Station, commercial fisheries, and tourism. Some economic evaluations (Tyrrell, 2003) suggest that the Bay might provide up to \$2 billion dollars each year in goods and services to the citizens of Rhode Island.

The economic vitality of Narragansett Bay is truly a function of its ecological condition. Water pollution disrupts commercial and recreational fisheries, tourists do not visit beaches that are closed because of elevated fecal coliform levels, and so on. The ecological condition of the Bay is, in large part, a mirror of the quality of freshwater flowing into the Bay. The timing of flows, the amount of freshwater, and levels of pollution from river, stream, and groundwater inputs to the Bay all effect the health of the Bay. Moreover, the quality of freshwater flowing into the Bay is a function of human activities in the watershed around those rivers and streams. Therefore, to maintain the economic and ecological vitality of the Bay we need to carefully monitor and manage human activities in the Bay's watershed. This is no small challenge!

As a result of the April 2000 Bay Summit, the Partnership for Narragansett Bay (PNB) determined that a more integrated management approach was necessary to improve water quality and restore ecosystems throughout the bay and coastal watershed areas. This integrated approach will provide an improved decision-making process by which the environmental, economic, and social implications of complex resource management issues can be evaluated in a more comprehensive and effective manner. To that end, the URI Coastal Institute, on behalf of the PNB, received a \$100,000 grant last year from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to begin development of a strategic planning process for Narragansett Bay. Senator Lincoln Chafee was instrumental in securing the HUD funding for this project.

The Chafee-HUD funding has allowed us to begin work along four themes that the Bay Summit deemed critical: 1) review the planning history of Narragansett Bay, coastal Rhode Island and their watersheds; 2) consolidate and review all major environmental/economic assessments of marine and coastal resources; 3) measure and report the collective vision for Narragansett Bay and its watershed among major stakeholder groups, and establish a set of core principles and objectives of a decision-making framework; and 4) develop an ecological monitoring framework for the Bay and watershed. Three of the four project elements have been completed and the investigators of these studies have prepared brief overviews of their work for the Bay Journal. The fourth project -- a vision for the Bay -- will be completed this Fall.

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