

**Testimony Provided to a Joint Meeting of the  
Senate Committee on the Environment and Agriculture  
&  
Senate Committee on Government Oversight**

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**Peter V. August, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>  
Chair, Rhode Island Environmental Monitoring Collaborative**

Senator Sosnowski, Senator Lenihan, and distinguished committee members, it is my distinct pleasure to brief you on the work of the RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative. Let me preface my remarks with a sincere thanks to you and your colleagues for your commitment to protecting Rhode Island's marine and terrestrial environments. I have worked at URI for 20 years to develop and deliver credible scientific data and Geographic Information System information to our resource managers and decision-makers. The package of "Bay and Watershed Bills" you and the Governor approved last legislative session is the most future-looking and visionary legislation to protect our environment that I have seen in my two decades working in this field. Please accept my personal thanks for your commitment and leadership.

I have been privileged to serve as the Chair of the Rhode Island Environmental Monitoring Collaborative. The members of the Collaborative were challenged by the charges you gave us and have worked diligently to meet the deadlines before us. I also want to say how privileged I am to work with the staff of the Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team to whom the Monitoring Collaborative reports. Governor Garrahy, the interim Chair of the Coordination Team, has inspired all of us with his statesmanship and commitment to doing what is best for our environment. Jim Boyd, Chip Young, and Rich Ribb have done an exceptional amount of work for the Coordination Team and much of what you will hear today is a product of their efforts.

I have provided you a copy of our annual report to the Coordination Team. We are required to file a report in January of every year and we accomplished this requirement. I will now quickly highlight our work to date in meeting the charges listed in R.I.G.L Chapters 46-23.2 and 46-31.

The institutions comprising the Monitoring Collaborative were identified in the statute and the members are listed in our report. We immediately invited a number of other partners to assist us in our work. These are the RI Natural

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<sup>1</sup> *Professor of Natural Resources Science and Director, Coastal Institute, University of Rhode Island*

History Survey, Save the Bay, The Environmental Protection Agency, The United States Geological Survey, NOAA's Estuarine Research Reserve Program, The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, The Rhode Island Sea Grant, the National Park Service Environmental Monitoring Program, and the interim Chairs of the Coordination Team's Public Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Committee.

The work of the Collaborative has been a 24-7 operation from the first moment of our deliberations in the summer of 2004. We are committed to operating in an efficient, transparent, and open manner.

- ❖ We immediately developed a web site ([www.ci.uri.edu/projects/ri-monitoring](http://www.ci.uri.edu/projects/ri-monitoring)) to provide Internet access to our documents, deliberations, and meeting notes.
- ❖ We established an electronic bulletin board to serve as a public forum for discussion of Collaborative issues. All the postings -- nearly 100 of them -- are archived on the web and available for anyone to review.
- ❖ We met three times over the past 6 months.

About a week after the signing of the Bay Bills I contacted House and Senate staff and sought their advice on how best to make the Collaborative meet your vision. On 23 July 2004 I met with the Senate Policy Office to learn more of the history and intent of the Bills. On 17 August 2004, the Collaborative met and commenced its work.

The work of the Monitoring Collaborative was described in two separate bills. Having met with both House and Senate staff to ensure we clearly understood our charges, the Collaborative prepared a statement of our unified "Purpose and Principles" extracted from the two pieces of legislation that created us. The Principles statement is in our annual report and guides our work.

The Narragansett Bay Summit held in 2000 identified monitoring as a major issue that needed work, just as you found last year in your Senate hearings on the Bay. Through the Partnership for Narragansett Bay, a great deal of work was initiated to better define our environmental monitoring needs. The Collaborative was able to hit the ground running as many important activities were well underway when we began our work.

The number one objective of the Collaborative's deliberations the first six months was to systematically address the specific tasks required of us in the legislation. Our report to the Coordination Team addresses each task in detail and I will summarize our results here.

- ❖ We were charged to provide a monitoring strategy in our first six months. This will take years, not months to complete. However, working with the Department of Environmental Management, we were able to help define a very complete monitoring framework for water resources. The DEM has been working for three years on a comprehensive monitoring plan for fresh and marine waters. The Collaborative spent considerable energy reviewing and commenting on multiple iterations of the DEM plan. It is an excellent piece of work and the Collaborative unequivocally supports the DEM plan.
- ❖ We were charged with inventorying monitoring programs in the State. We did this in 2001 and over the past six months we updated the inventory to be current. Appendix A of our report describes 102 separate monitoring activities in Rhode Island. Our inventory is the most complete synopsis of environmental monitoring programs in Rhode Island.
- ❖ We were charged with developing a list of additional monitoring programs for Rhode Island. We focused on describing additional monitoring that was not included in the DEM plan. Specifically, we provide recommendations for monitoring:
  - Riparian (along rivers and lakes) and coastal buffers in the whole Narragansett Bay watershed
  - Benthic (underwater bottom) habitats in the Bay
  - Invasive and nuisance species
  - Fish and shellfish
  - Algae in the Upper Bay and shallow lagoons

Together, our supplemental monitoring recommendations and the DEM plan provide very complete monitoring of the indicators you specifically asked us to address. We will work with the Science Advisory Committee of the Coordination Team to refine these monitoring recommendations. We will also continue working with DEM to finalize their strategy.

- ❖ We were asked to develop a mechanism to enhance data sharing among the agencies monitoring our environment. We propose to inventory the data sharing capacity using the Internet of major monitoring agencies in RI, and recommend that the Collaborative provide technical assistance to agencies who are unable to put their data on the Internet for general access. The Collaborative has considerable knowledge and capacity for this among its members.
- ❖ We were asked to provide data that would be used in environmental emergency response and damage assessment. We worked with the DEM

emergency response office on this charge and recommend an inventory of critical data be conducted this calendar year. We are making great strides in this area. Last summer we saw the monitoring community come together and carefully track conditions in the Bay that might lead to low oxygen conditions that would possibly cause another fish kill. On the DEM BART (Bay Assessment and Response Team) web site, data and information provided by DEM, the Bay Commission, URI, NOAA's Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Bay Window Partnership Program were integrated to provide a weekly report on the condition of the Bay. We have a lot to do, but we are on the right track.

- ❖ We were asked to develop a communications strategy to provide public access to monitoring information. We feel this is one of the most important challenges before us. If the monitoring data are not getting to the users, and if the information is not synthesized and communicated to scientists, citizens, resource managers and decision-makers, we have failed! Our recommendations include regular publication of monitoring information in the Narragansett Bay Journal and 41°N, a Sea Grant publication for Rhode Island. We also recommend hosting an annual conference on monitoring the Bay and watershed. And finally, we will work closely with the Public Advisory Committee of the Coordination Team to ensure we have a coordinated and unified communications strategy that embraces all possible audiences.
- ❖ We made a number of very explicit recommendations that are critical to monitoring the Bay and watersheds. These include ensuring adequate support for the RI Water Resources Board to enhance monitoring by the USGS in the rivers in our state. We support the update of the RIGIS land use dataset by the Statewide Planning Program in 2006. Current and accurate data on development, habitat conditions, and land use change is critical baseline information for almost every state agency and municipality in Rhode Island.
- ❖ We recommend a small grants program to support the development of better technologies and methods to monitor the condition of the Bay, coast, and watershed. We are surrounded by expertise in monitoring and environmental technology. URI, Brown, Roger Williams University, EPA, NOAA, USDA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USGS, and NUWC are world leaders in these fields. A small grants program would help harness this knowledge and put it to work in our monitoring programs.

There are costs associated with many of our recommendations and we provide estimates in our report to the Coordination Team. It is important to note that we are not building a monitoring program from scratch. Agencies such as DEM, the

Health Department, the Bay Commission, EPA, and the local universities are making substantial investments in monitoring. Our recommendations will go far in integrating these activities.

The Monitoring Collaborative has addressed every issue required of it in its first six months and we have filed our report to the Coordination Team. The Coordination Team is, as we speak, developing a process to review our report and transmit to you, the House, and the governor its recommendations.

The work accomplished by the Collaborative has been done by its members who are, across the board, extended to capacity. The Collaborative requires a modest level of staff support to continue. We hope you can see from what we have accomplished to date, we are committed to making the RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative the key player in establishing and maintaining an effective program to determine if our environmental conditions are improving. We are doing our very best to make the Collaborative the effective institution you had in mind when you drafted the legislation that created us.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.