



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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EXPANDED SHELLFISHING OPPORTUNITIES ANNOUNCED FOR R.I. WATERS; CHANGES TAKE EFFECT THIS WEEKEND

Restrictions for portions of Upper Narragansett Bay lifted for first time in 70 years

PROVIDENCE - The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) today announced access to prime shellfishing areas has been expanded under the Department's annual shellfish harvesting reclassification. Among the changes, which take effect at sunrise on Saturday, restrictions on portions of Upper Narragansett Bay – in place for the last 70 years – will be lifted; all of Cormorant Cove on Block Island will be open to shellfishing for the first time in a decade; and the seasonal closure of Greenwich Bay will be eliminated. Annual seasonal closures will also go into effect on Saturday at sunrise.

"Through the efforts of DEM, the Narragansett Bay Commission and many partners, we have made incredible progress in cleaning up Rhode Island's waters," said DEM Director Janet Coit. "Once overwhelmed by raw sewage and other pollution, today our bays, rivers, and coastal waters are cleaner and healthier. The benefits of this to our environment, economy, and families are immeasurable. As a result of strong laws and investments such as the combined sewer overflow project, fishers and families have expanded opportunities to harvest and enjoy delicious, wild shellfish. This is a momentous day for Rhode Island, a day we celebrate progress in restoring water quality, and welcome shellfishermen back to historic waters. I look forward to our continued work together to reduce pollution and address other threats to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have access to a healthy and productive Narragansett Bay."

Rhode Island is known for its food and diverse food cultures. The state's booming local food sector supports more than 60,000 jobs, and the local fishing industry has been, and continues to be, a vital part of the equation. Last year, more than 100 million pounds of seafood arrived to a local port – with an export value over \$1 billion. A significant contributor to Rhode Island's commercial fishing industry, wild harvest shellfish support the livelihoods of hundreds of fishers year-round and provide nourishment and enjoyment to Rhode Islanders and tourists. More than 28 million quahogs were harvested from Narragansett Bay and local coastal waters last year, contributing some \$5.5 million to the economy; a value that increases significantly as the product hits the market.

In recognition of the economic and cultural value of shellfish, last month, Governor Raimondo, along with many partners, launched the Rhode Island Shellfish Initiative. Through it, state agencies, industry, academia, and community partners will further efforts to sustainably manage local shellfish stock, promote economic growth and jobs, and celebrate Rhode Island's unique food cultures.

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Removing and modifying conditional closures in Upper Narragansett Bay is made possible, in large part, due to the completion of Phase I and II of Narragansett Bay Commission's combined sewer overflow (CSO) project. This investment has led to dramatic improvements in water quality throughout the lower Providence River and upper bay. As part of the reclassification of shellfishing waters, Conditional Area B – 3,712 acres in the upper bay – will change from conditional to approved status. The Conimicut Triangle Conditional Area will also be merged with Conditional Area A.

The area previously identified as Conditional Area B, encompassed the waters north of a line from Warwick Point to the Providence Point on Prudence Island, to Poppasquash Point in Bristol, and south of Conditional Area A. The new Conditional Area A generally includes upper bay waters south of the Providence and Warren Rivers and north of a line from Rocky Point pier to Colt State Park pier.

Also effective on Saturday at sunrise, the new Conditional Area A will close after 1.2 inches of rain. Previously, Conimicut Triangle waters closed at 0.5 inches, and Conditional Area A waters closed at 0.8 inches. A review of historic rainfall data indicates this change will likely increase shellfishing opportunities in the former Triangle area by 85 days annually, and the remaining waters by 35 days.

Water quality monitoring, combined with shellfish tissue data, also shows that the lower portion of the Providence River holds potential as a new conditional area in the near future. Shellfishing has been prohibited in the river for more than 70 years. DEM, along with its partners, will develop a management plan for the area before it is opened to shellfishing; this is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the shellfish stock. This work is expected to continue into 2018.

“This news is a great testament to water quality benefits enjoyed by the entire State of Rhode Island thanks to the investments of our ratepayers,” said NBC Executive Director Raymond J. Marshall, PE. “In less than ten short years since Phase I of the CSO project went on-line, we have seen water quality in Narragansett Bay improve substantially, and now we witness the end to a seventy year restriction on shellfishing. The future looks bright for the Bay, and we at the NBC are proud to play a major role in the Bay's recovery.”

Investments in infrastructure upgrades have brought marked improvements in water quality. Phases I and II of NBC's CSO abatement plan has collected and treated eight billion gallons of dilute sewage that would have been discharged to the Bay and urban rivers. NBC is finalizing its plan for Phase III of the CSO project. Upon implementation, further improvements to Upper Narragansett Bay and the Providence, Seekonk and Blackstone Rivers are expected.

“The Rhode Island Shellfisherman's Association would like to thank the Narragansett Bay Commission, its ratepayers, and DEM for their efforts to clean and monitor the waters of Narragansett Bay,” said Mike McGiveney, RISA President. “The improvement in water quality will have a tremendously positive effect on our industry and allow greater access to some of the most important shellfish grounds in the Bay. It is an economic and environmental win for all Rhode Islanders.”

Under this annual notice, the seasonal closure of western Greenwich Bay will also be lifted. As a result of reclassifying 1.1 acres, all of Cormorant Cove on Block Island will be open to shellfishing.

Seasonal Shellfish Closures Effective at Sunrise on Saturday, May 27

Consistent with federal requirements, DEM closes some local waters to shellfishing on a seasonal basis due to potential water quality impacts associated with marinas and mooring fields. The following areas will be closed from sunrise this Saturday through sunrise on Tuesday, October 10:

- Bristol Harbor
- Dutch Harbor Area, Jamestown
- Fishing Cove, Wickford Harbor
- Great Salt Pond and Trims Pond, Block Island
- Potter Cove, Prudence Island
- Sakonnet Harbor, Little Compton

In addition, the smaller marina closures in the south coastal ponds and the Kickemuit River will go into effect, along with a new seasonal closure that affects one acre of shellfishing grounds at the marina at Fort Wetherill in Jamestown.

For more information on the shellfish harvesting reclassification, review the [annual notice](#) available at www.dem.ri.gov. A new, [interactive shellfishing map](#) is also available.

For information on emergency and conditional area shellfish closures, call DEM's 24-hour shellfishing hotline at 401.222.2900. Follow DEM on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) or Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM for timely updates.