

**Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Coastal Training Program  
2011-2016 Strategic Plan**

**I. Introduction**

This Strategic Plan (Plan) provides a framework to guide the activities of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR) Coastal Training Program (CTP) from 2011 to 2016. The Plan outlines the goals and objectives, partnerships, priority issues and audiences, training delivery systems, monitoring and evaluation tools, staffing and infrastructure, and marketing strategy of the CTP. While it presents specific objectives it is also designed to provide flexibility in responding to needs and opportunities as they arise. The CTP Coordinator received input on this Plan from its Advisory Committee (see Appendix A for a full list of committee members) and from the NBNERR Education, Stewardship, and Research Coordinators.

**II. Program Context**

***Programmatic***

The CTP provides coastal decision-makers (decision-makers) with the science-based information and skills that are necessary to make informed decisions about how to best protect Narragansett Bay and its watershed. Decision-makers are individuals who, through their professional or volunteer positions, make decisions that directly or indirectly impact the health of the Narragansett Bay and its watershed. CTP trainings and products benefit a wide range of decision-maker audiences such as municipal staff and officials, regulators, land developers, community groups, environmental non-profits, and businesses.

To aid in the successful implementation of its programs, ongoing market analyses and needs assessments, both formal and informal, are conducted to help guide CTP activities. Market analyses identify the topics offered to decision-makers by other local training organizations and the formats and educational methods that are being used to reach target audiences. Needs assessments help to identify gaps in information delivery and the education needs of program participants. The CTP also maintains an Advisory Committee comprised of members who provide guidance and support for the CTP. The roles and responsibilities of the CTP Advisory Committee may be found in Appendix A.

***Ecological and Social***

The Narragansett Bay watershed is one of the most urbanized major watersheds in the northeastern United States. With almost two million people living in the 1,657 square mile watershed (40% of which lies in Rhode Island and 60% in Massachusetts), human impacts to Narragansett Bay are substantial. While significant water quality improvements have been made through stricter standards regarding wastewater treatment facility discharges, nonpoint source pollution- namely stormwater runoff- is now the vehicle that transmits most of the pollutant load to Narragansett Bay.

Sprawling human development in the Narragansett Bay watershed is the major contributor to stormwater runoff. This growth pattern of low-density and large-lot development creates

excessive amounts of impervious surface, which is the direct cause of stormwater runoff. Rhode Island has an average impervious cover of 12%, exceeding the 10% impervious cover threshold above which environmental impacts become significant (CWP 2003). However, while the metropolitan Providence area has the greatest extent of impervious cover within the watershed at an average of 25%, there are large tracts of land outside of this area that are 4% impervious cover, which is below the 10% threshold. To help keep these areas below the 10% threshold, the RI Statewide Planning Program estimated an “urban services boundary” (USB) that encompasses the metropolitan Providence area and selected areas in other communities. It is recommended that future growth be directed within these areas since the impervious cover is already high and the infrastructure needed to support new growth is already in place. If development does occur outside of these areas it should follow lower impact techniques such as conservation development and compact mixed-use (village-style growth) while connecting greenways. These approaches can achieve smart growth objectives, including environmental protection, while balancing resident needs.

Climate change is another major issue when considering the future of Narragansett Bay and its watershed. Climate change impacts are already occurring in Rhode Island. Average air and water temperatures have increased, storms and resultant flooding are more intense, and sea level is rising measurably. Even if greenhouse gas emissions decrease in the near future, the negative impacts we are already experiencing are here to stay, and will intensify if no mitigation efforts are pursued; therefore communities must work to adapt to these impacts. As local community leaders face declining budgets, more and more resources will need to be directed to them in the future to help address local infrastructure adaptation to sea level rise and other climate change impacts.

### **III. Outcomes and Objectives of the NBNERR CTP**

The overarching goal of the CTP is to improve decision-making so that the natural resources of Narragansett Bay and its watershed are preserved and protected. The following anticipated outcomes and associated objectives will guide the development and implementation of future CTP trainings and products.

**Outcome:** Decision-makers throughout the Narragansett Bay watershed increase their knowledge and skills related to priority issues.

**Objectives:**

- Specific decision-maker training needs will be identified through informal needs assessments (e.g., as part of post-workshop evaluations) on an ongoing basis.
- A minimum of five trainings per year on priority issues such as stormwater management, coastal and watershed development, invasive species management, and natural resources management will be delivered to decision-maker audiences.
  - *Low Impact Development Site Planning and Design*: at least one per year
  - *Strategies to Protect Farms and Forests*: two in 2012, at least one per year thereafter
  - *Village Development*: two in 2012, at least one per year thereafter
  - *Conservation Development*: at least one per year
  - *Conservation Easements and Open Space Management*: at least one per year

- *Marine and Estuarine Invasive Species*: at least two in 2012, at least one per year thereafter
- *Collaborative Learning for Ecosystem Management*: one in 2012
- “*Water Words That Work*” and “*More than a Message*”: one of each in 2012
- Whenever possible, American Institute of Certified Planners certification maintenance credits will be offered at trainings through a NERRS/NERRA partnership with the American Planning Association.
- For each training event, at least 90% of the participating decision-makers will report that their knowledge increased as a result of attending the training.

**Outcome:** The knowledge and skills acquired by decision-makers are applied effectively.

**Objectives:**

- The level of application of Low Impact Development Site Planning and Design information by training attendees will be assessed in late 2012.
- Whenever necessary, follow-up information and products for past training participants will be prepared and available (e.g., fact sheets and other informational products, enhancement of the CTP website, etc.)
- By 2015, 75% of surveyed training participants will indicate they have applied science-based knowledge or skills gained through a CTP program or service in their decisions or professional actions.

**Outcome:** Decision-makers are aware of opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

**Objectives:**

- Contact information of all participants and speakers at all events will be provided to the event participants so that they may follow up on partnership opportunities.
- All training events will provide time for networking and professional sharing among training participants.
- At least once per year, the CTP will partner with professional associations and/or other groups to provide audiences with opportunities that promote inter-state, inter-regional, and inter-community networking.

**Outcome:** Training organizations within the Narragansett Bay watershed collaborate, coordinate, and communicate to best serve decision-maker audiences.

**Objectives:**

- CTP will share results of market analyses and needs assessments on an ongoing basis to help efficiently meet decision-maker needs in partnership with others.
- The online community calendar [www.communityconnectionri.org](http://www.communityconnectionri.org) will be utilized and promoted on a continuous basis to avoid scheduling conflicts and duplication of effort among training organizations.
- Meetings with partner organizations will be coordinate when working on particular priority issues.

#### **IV. Contribution to the Goals and Objectives of the NBNERR**

The vision of the NBNERR is to be a valued leader, partner and resource helping to sustain a healthy Narragansett Bay and its watershed through the collection, synthesis, interpretation and

application of research and monitoring data. The CTP contributes directly to the following Reserve objectives under Goal 3:

- Enhance peoples' ability and willingness to make informed decisions and take responsible actions that affect coastal communities and ecosystems.
  - Increase the knowledge and skill levels of decision-makers so their decisions may better preserve and protect the natural resources of Narragansett Bay and its watershed.
  - Enhance collaboration, coordination and communication among trainers who provide decision-makers with training and technical support on issues related to Narragansett Bay and its watershed.
  - Facilitate networking and information exchange between decision-makers.
  - Ensure that the knowledge and skills acquired by decision-makers are applied effectively.

The CTP will continue to integrate with the NBNERR research, education, and stewardship sectors to carry out priority programs and projects wherever possible. Over the 2011-2016 time frame, the CTP and Research Coordinator and staff will explore future projects that could build on a collaborative research study conducted in 2010 and 2011 on breeding bird responses to land preservation within southern New England cluster developments. Additionally, the CTP and Stewardship Coordinator will look into the possibility of expanding activities and outreach related to Prudence Island's groundwater resource, a topic they have worked extensively on in the past. The CTP will also work with the Education Coordinator and staff to incorporate aquatic invasive species information into student and teacher programs.

## **V. Current and Anticipated Partnerships**

Partnerships are a key element of implementing the goals and objectives of the NBNERR CTP at the local, state, and national levels. Partners include organizations identified by formal and informal market analyses as able to assist the CTP in providing quality trainings and products to decision-makers. A market analysis helps to identify the priorities and capabilities of other local and regional programs that offer the same or similar services along with the potential audiences for those services, reducing the potential of duplication of effort among various groups. Partnerships for specific training events will be based on the specific decision-maker audiences and priority issues identified. While the list of Reserve partners is long, several organizations work regularly with the Reserve to share resources, implement programs and facilitate contracts. Partnerships with state regulatory programs in particular are important in educating local officials on regulatory components of priority issues. For example, several trainings will be delivered in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), including Conservation Development, Conservation Easements and Open Space Management, Village Development, Strategies to Protect Farms and Forests, and Low Impact Development. Additionally, the CTP will work with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) on marine and estuarine invasive species outreach. New partnerships are always being considered based on the goals and objectives as well as the priority issues and audiences of the CTP. Current and anticipated partners of the CTP are listed in Appendix B.

## **VI. Priority Issues**

The CTP will address priority issues identified in the NBNERR 2010-2015 Management Plan, which include:

- stormwater management;
- coastal and watershed development;
- invasive species management; and
- natural resources management.

These priority issues align with those of the NERRS overall, which include habitat protection, water quality, and climate change, as outlined in the NERRS 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. They also help meet the goal of creating and fostering “Resilient Coastal Communities and Economies,” one of the four long-term goals identified in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Next Generation Strategic Plan. Additionally, the priority issues and specific topics to be addressed by the CTP directly correlate with the goals and objectives of particular State plans, such as the 2009-2013 Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Systems Level Plan (BRWSLP). The following specific key recommendations of the BRWSLP, in specific, will be addressed by the CTP:

- “Promote revision of community development standards to ensure application of Low Impact Development (LID) standards and techniques...”;
- “Work with local governments to establish their most important priorities for protecting natural resources with strategies such as regional greenspace protection”;
- “Expand local and statewide protection of riparian buffers...”; and
- “Minimize impervious cover to reduce stormwater runoff that impairs water quality and habitat”.

The issues and topics to be addressed by the CTP also correlate with the goals outlined in the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program’s “Land Use 2025: Rhode Island State Land Use Policies and Plan,” which include:

- “build the greenspace and greenways system”;
- “protect critical natural resources”;
- “protect shoreline areas”;
- “preserve special places”;
- “protect rural character”;
- “avoid negative environmental impacts from development”; and
- “train and support municipal planning officials”.

The following specific topics within the aforementioned priority issues that will be addressed by the CTP over the next five years were determined from the results of a 2008 Needs Assessment along with ongoing informal needs assessments. The 2008 Needs Assessment was conducted by the CTP and Grow Smart Rhode Island on behalf of 26 organizations within the state of Rhode Island that offer education and training programs on topics related to smart growth and natural resources protection. Even though the Needs Assessment was conducted in 2008, the CTP Coordinator will conduct ongoing informal needs assessments (e.g. via post-workshop evaluations) to ensure that the information is as up-to-date as possible.

## **Stormwater Management**

### ***Low Impact Development***

Respondents to the 2008 Needs Assessment rated “reducing stormwater/low impact design” as the most important topic in the “Water Resources” category of the survey. The CTP will address

this topic by delivering workshops on the *Rhode Island Low Impact Development Site Planning and Design Guidance Manual* (Manual), developed by DEM and CRMC. The Manual provides examples for local planning officials of how their ordinances may be amended to avoid and reduce the impacts from development and encourage the more effective implementation of Low Impact Development (LID) practices so that the negative impacts of stormwater runoff can be avoided and reduced. Informal needs assessments helped determine what specific techniques outlined in the Manual are of particular interest to participants for future workshops. Based on the input provided, the CTP will work with partners to develop workshops on LID landscaping, site clearing and grading standards, and riparian buffer standards. Workshop participants will learn strategies for preserving as much natural vegetation as possible on development sites and how to implement low-maintenance native landscaping. Participants will also learn about the numerous functions and values of riparian buffers and how to create community buffer programs that supplement and expand upon existing minimum state requirements. The CTP will also develop and deliver workshops on roadway design and parking guidance. Workshop participants will learn how roadways and parking areas can be designed in a way that results in the least amount of impervious cover, contributing greatly to better stormwater management.

### **Coastal and Watershed Development**

#### ***Strategies to Protect Farms and Forests***

Due to strict zoning standards that segregate residential and commercial uses of land, large landowners who historically were allowed to use their land to make a living are now limited in that use, resulting in the conversion of farms and forests into house lots. The CTP will address this topic by delivering workshops based on the outcomes of a project led by DEM that will assess the appropriate business uses of farms and forests to provide economic incentives for large landowners to maintain undeveloped land. The CTP will educate decision-makers on the performance standards and model zoning language to be developed by DEM so that appropriate ordinances can be adopted by communities to help preserve important natural and cultural resources.

#### ***Village Development***

The CTP and partners will educate decision-makers on how village-style (compact mixed-use) development may reduce watershed impervious cover to help protect water quality while providing economic benefits and preserving community character and quality of life. Workshops will present participants with options for encouraging and containing village development and how comprehensive plans can be amended and ordinances created to accommodate village development. Lessons learned from communities will be shared to help workshop participants understand and overcome any obstacles in moving forward with establishing villages in their towns.

#### ***Conservation Development***

The CTP will continue to deliver workshops on Conservation Development, a creative land use technique that enables communities to guide growth to the most appropriate areas of a parcel to help protect important natural, cultural, and recreational resources and to create continuous greenspace corridors. Conservation Development is also a LID technique that was ranked as highly important by participants of past LID workshops.

## **Natural Resources Management**

### ***Conservation Easements and Open Space Management***

Respondents to the 2008 Needs Assessment rated “establishing priorities for municipal/regional open space protection” and “management/stewardship of protected open space” as the two most important topics in the “Natural Resources/ Habitat” category of the survey. These issues are particularly relevant as there have been several sources that have found that some conservation easements in older cluster developments were not properly recorded; this is of particular concern as communities move forward with the adoption of Conservation Development where 50% or more of the land in such developments must be preserved as meaningful open space to be protected in perpetuity by a conservation easement. To address these issues, the CTP will continue to deliver trainings on the *Rhode Island Conservation Easement Manual*. The trainings will help to ensure that target audiences, particularly attorneys and planners, thoroughly understand the appropriate Rhode Island legal foundation and proper procedures for preparing, recording and enforcing conservation easements to guarantee that conservation parcels will remain protected in perpetuity. They will also help to ensure that the target audiences understand the options for the ownership and management of conservation parcels as well as the elements of an effective stewardship program for protected lands.

## **Invasive Species Management**

### ***Marine and Estuarine Invasive Species***

Public concern with aquatic invasive species (AIS) in the marine and freshwater environments of Rhode Island has been growing, as the introduction and spread of AIS pose serious threats to native ecosystems and the local economy. To this end, CRMC and others led in the development of the Rhode Island Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan (RIAIS Plan), of which the overall goal is to “implement a coordinated approach to minimizing the economic, environmental and social impacts of AIS on the marine and freshwater ecosystems and resources of Rhode Island”. There are seven strategies outlined in the plan; the CTP will address the “education, outreach, and training” strategy by carrying out specific tasks in partnership with other organizations. These tasks include the development and delivery of workshops and materials to stakeholder groups regarding their role in helping to prevent the introduction and transport of AIS in the marine environment.

The efforts to be carried out by the CTP will assist stakeholders groups across various sectors, including maritime transportation, aquaculture operations, nursery and water garden businesses, commercial and recreational fisheries, the aquarium/pet shop trade, and others to better understand the impacts of marine and estuarine invasive species on Narragansett Bay and actions they can take to mitigate those impacts. For example, through CTP programs scuba divers will learn to identify invasive species in an effort to aid in the early detection and rapid response of AIS, and recreational boaters and fishers will learn proper hull cleaning, bilge pump discharge, and bait disposal so that the likelihood of introductions can be significantly reduced and the environmental and economic costs of damage and remediation avoided. The CTP will inform stakeholders of financial assistance options, such as the RI Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund, to help secure grants for habitat restoration and other projects.

## ***Emerging Issue: Climate Change***

### ***Community Adaptation to Climate Change***

Evaluation results from a “Planning for Community Climate Change Adaptation” workshop delivered by the CTP and partners in 2010 indicated that the workshop participants are interested in learning more about how to conduct vulnerability assessments and develop adaptation strategies for their communities. The CTP coordinated a meeting with partner organizations that are working on climate change issues to help determine what the CTP’s role could be in moving forward with such activities. It was concluded that it would be most effective for the CTP to determine what the most effective outreach strategies would be once the results and recommendations of current state-wide efforts, including the activities of a newly created Climate Change Commission (Commission) and a statewide risk and vulnerability assessment, emerge.

## **Social Science and Communication**

### ***Collaborative Learning for Ecosystem Management***

Comments provided in past CTP workshop evaluations reflect the issue of poor coordination and communication among different boards and commissions in particular municipalities. To address this issue, the CTP will offer a “Collaborative Learning” training to increase participants’ understanding and application of interdisciplinary approaches to overcoming communication barriers in municipal decision-making. The presentation of innovative tools for environmental communication, stakeholder engagement, public participation and collaborative problem-solving techniques will help facilitate a shared understanding and appreciation of complex environmental issues.

### ***“Water Words That Work” and “More than a Message”***

The 2008 Needs Assessment identified “speaker expertise” as the most important factor influencing the respondents’ decisions to participate in a training program. However, the content and delivery of information presented by many of the expert speakers- often physical, chemical, and biological scientists- has been rated quite low. It has been expressed that these speakers need to communicate scientific information in a clearer and more concise way to target audiences. To address this issue, the CTP will offer two courses entitled “Water Words That Work” and “More than a Message”. In addition to learning what motivates everyday citizens to protect natural resources, workshop participants will be guided through a four-step method they can use to translate scientific information and professional language into communications that are meaningful and compelling for everyday citizens. Participants will also learn messaging skills they need to handle controversial situations through a module entitled “Combat Communications for Conservationists.”

## **Conference Sponsorships**

### ***Rhode Island Land & Water Conservation Summit***

Dependent on future funding, the CTP will continue to support the annual Land & Water Conservation Summit as it has done over the last six years. The Summit, hosted by the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, and the Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions, is a daylong conference that features sessions on various topics of interest to land trusts, watershed councils, municipal staff and volunteers and others. In addition to co-sponsoring the CTP will display an exhibit the day of the Summit.

### ***Power of Place Summit***

Dependent on future funding, the CTP will continue to support the biennial “Power of Place” Summit as it has done over the last three years. The daylong Summit, hosted by Grow Smart RI, attracts over 400 opinion leaders, state and local officials, development professionals and others and features numerous sessions on various smart-growth related topics. In addition to co-sponsoring the CTP will display an exhibit the day of the Summit.

## **VII. Target Audiences**

Results of formal and informal market analyses, the 2008 Needs Assessment, and input from the members of the CTP Advisory Committee helped to identify the primary decision-maker audience to be targeted by the CTP, described below:

### ***Municipal Staff and Officials***

Since land use planning decisions are made at the local level in Rhode Island, it is critical that municipal staff and elected and appointed officials receive the best scientific information possible to make informed decisions that inevitably and ultimately impact the health of Narragansett Bay. Members of this primary CTP audience include planning board, town council, and zoning board members along with planners, solicitors, public works directors, engineers, and other municipal staff.

### ***Other Audiences***

Many of the CTP workshop topics are of interest and value to other audiences such as private sector representatives such as designers, developers, real estate agents, engineers, landscape architects, and attorneys. State and federal regulators and non-profit organizations such as land trusts and watershed councils also benefit from CTP events and products. It is important to note that the CTP will maintain enough flexibility to include other audiences highlighted by ongoing market analyses and needs assessments in its outreach efforts, and it will be open to partnership opportunities that address the needs of these groups.

## **VIII. Training Delivery System**

Results of formal and informal market analyses, the 2008 Needs Assessment, and input from the members of the CTP Advisory Committee helped to identify the following main delivery method for CTP trainings:

### ***Workshops***

The training programs to be offered by the NBNERR CTP over the next five years will be delivered mainly in the form of half-day workshops with a hands-on component. These trainings will be designed to educate decision-maker audiences on key issues in addition to incorporating an individual or group activity or other exercise to ensure that participants are prepared to apply the knowledge and skills presented to them once they leave the workshop. Continuing education credits will be offered to workshop participants whenever possible.

## **IX. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The CTP will ensure that the knowledge and skills acquired by decision-makers are applied effectively by continually evaluating individual trainings and products. At the NERRS CTP Sector level, training and technical assistance will be monitored and evaluated through the performance measures developed by the CTP community. To collect this information, evaluation

forms will be distributed to all training event attendees to determine overall satisfaction with training and to establish training effectiveness. The evaluations also provide an opportunity for attendees to indicate on which topics they are interested in receiving more information and/or training. This information greatly assists the CTP Coordinator in determining what future trainings it will address and the most appropriate audiences to target. In addition, carrying out long-term evaluations (six to twelve months post-training) will inform the CTP Coordinator of any outcomes that might be related to information presented at past trainings and/or of barriers encountered when training attendees attempt to incorporate the information presented into their land use planning processes or other programs or projects.

## **X. Staffing and Infrastructure**

Full-time staff for the CTP includes one program coordinator employed through the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI). The CTP Coordinator position is federally funded, and also receives assistance from the Administrator of the Sustainable Watersheds Program who is a State employee (DEM). Dependent on annual funding the CTP Coordinator will pursue opportunities to employ a part-time assistant or intern. Office space is available at the NBNERR on Prudence Island, RI as well as at the DEM headquarters building in Providence, RI, with meeting space available at both locations. Costs associated with the training programs as well as website maintenance and consulting services and fees are covered by federal funds allocated to the CTP.

## **XI. Marketing**

Increasing the visibility of the CTP via various marketing mechanisms is important in promoting programs available to decision-makers throughout the Narragansett Bay Watershed. Respondents to the 2008 Needs Assessment identified workshop-specific emails as the most useful method of receiving announcements about workshops/training opportunities, followed by electronic newsletters/e-briefs from various organizations. Therefore, the CTP Coordinator will send training announcements directly to each contact in its database of past event attendees as well as interested parties who have requested to be added to the CTP mailing list. Event descriptions and/or articles will be sent to partner organizations with a request to distribute the information through their electronic newsletters, as well as distributed to media outlets throughout the state.

While the original CTP market analysis took place in 2003, a second, smaller analysis was conducted in concurrence with the 2008 Needs Assessment described earlier in the document. This most recent analysis of other institutions that provide training programs and products to decision-maker audiences was consistent with the results of the 2003 analysis. Therefore, the CTP has not made any changes to its 2003 Marketing Plan as it continues to fill an important niche by targeting appropriate audiences and providing them with much needed information on priority issues. Results from both analyses revealed that there are many opportunities for the CTP to partner with existing organizations on producing and delivering high quality, science-based trainings and products to decision-maker audiences throughout the Narragansett Bay watershed.

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