

**Site Review Team's  
Review of the  
Rhode Island Sea Grant Program**  
July 27-28, 2010

*Sami Grimes*

09/01/2010

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Sami Grimes, Chair, Federal Program Officer

Date

*G. Ross Heath*

09/01/2010

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G. Ross Heath, Co-Chair, National Sea Grant Advisory Board Member

Date



## INTRODUCTION

The Site Review Team (SRT) review of the Rhode Island Sea Grant (RISG) Program took place from July 27-28, 2010.

The SRT members included:

Sami Grimes (Chair, NSGO Program Officer) National Sea Grant Office Silver Spring, MD	G. Ross Heath (Co-Chair, Advisory Board Member) Dean and Professor Emeritus, University of Washington, WA
Ruperto Chaparro Serrano Puerto Rico Sea Grant Director Mayaguez, PR	Dale Baker NY Sea Grant Extension Leader (retired) Ithaca, NY
Christine Blackburn NOAA Senior Policy Advisor Washington, DC	Chelsea Lowes, Observer National Sea Grant Office Silver Spring, MD

Prior to the beginning of the SRT visit, and in conformance with National Sea Grant College Program guidelines, the Rhode Island Sea Grant issued a public notice of the upcoming SRT visit by inviting interested parties to send written comments to the SRT Chair. The public notice was distributed by posting the notice on the RISG website. The SRT Chair received 7 letters in response to the public notice from: Newport Waterfront Commission, City of Newport, RI Department of Planning Zoning, Development and Inspections, the Coastal States Organization, the Executive Director of Aquidneck Land Trust, Newport's Friends of the Waterfront, NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management and the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association. All of the letters were highly supportive of the RISG Program, and expressed their gratitude for a program that provides credible and objective advice to its stakeholders in the state.

The SRT review took place at the Sea Grant office in the Ocean Technology Center at the University of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay Campus, in Narragansett, RI. The SRT was welcomed to the University of Rhode Island (URI) on the first day by the Dr. David Farmer, Dean, Graduate School of Oceanography followed by a program introduction by the Sea Grant Director, Dr. Barry Costa-Pierce. During the review, the SRT had the opportunity to hear from and have one-on-one discussions with a subset of members of RISG's Senior Advisory Council (SAC), University Officials and RISG's Leadership Team and staff. The SRT also had the opportunity to hear from a variety of stakeholders and partners from the Town of Bristol's Director of Community Development to Deputy Director of Policy of the Rhode Island Senate to the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Coastal Recourse Management Council. On the evening of the first day, the SRT attended a reception that was well attended by university officials, partner institutions, members of the SAC, and RISG staff. A more detailed agenda and the people who presented can be found in Appendix A.

The agenda was organized to review and discuss issues related to: 1) Organization and Management of the Program; 2) Stakeholder Engagement; and 3) Collaborative Network Activities. Within each of these areas, the SRT report presents the findings and recommendations of the SRT.

# **I. ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE PROGRAM**

## Management Team and Program Structure

RISG has a dynamic and entrepreneurial management team, with strong, committed and involved leadership. Their success is illustrated by their generation of \$2.60 in operating funds per \$1 of core federal SG funding. The leadership team is very active at local, regional, national, and international levels.

The program is very visible to the university's upper management and is well respected and appreciated by the administration, which sees it as playing a key role in URI's broader engagement strategy.

Relative to other large SG programs, the RISG program has a relatively loose management hierarchy, which allows components of RISG to take advantage of state and federal funding opportunities (a high priority where state support is very limited and federal support, in real terms, is decreasing). Entrepreneurial activities are backed with core funds when they contribute to strategic goals, but are not discouraged by management, when they do not. The management style works well for the state with its complicated array of environmental activities and organizations.

The overall entrepreneurial attitude of RISG has created a very agile program that has been able to respond quickly and effectively to major new State (for example, Ocean SAMP) and Federal (for example, Sector Management of Fisheries) initiatives.

The program continues its long tradition of building "sea-grant-like" institutions that are able to grow and become more autonomous as they fill niches in the URI marine domain. At one end of the spectrum, the SG Legal Program is still under development, while at the other, the Office of Marine Programs (OMP), which evolved from RISG's educational program, is fully autonomous, although it collaborates with RISG when appropriate. The Coastal Resources Center (CRC) and new URI Fisheries Center (FC) share extension staff with RISG, but encompass more (much more, in the case of CRC) than SG. This institution-building strategy greatly strengthens RISG's reach and effectiveness, but adds complexity to the management of the program. For example, the creation and growth of OMP has provided the State with excellent marine education for K-12 students, but has left RISG with little presence in this area and no real justification for committing scarce resources to it. The result is a Sea Grant program that appears weak in one aspect of education, purely because of its earlier success.

Institution building is an interesting experiment that deserves serious discussion at the national level. This approach helps address the lack of state and federal support for RISG, and could be an approach other Sea Grant programs may wish to adopt.

We commend the program for saying "no" to a number of strategic areas in order to address higher priority needs of the state. These areas the program strategically said "no" to include: K-

12 marine education, watersheds, restoration, and monitoring.

As mentioned above, the “institution-building” approach extends to extension, with agents having their primary affiliations with the satellite organizations, rather than with a central RISG extension line. This works well, but we do suggest that one member of the extension group be given responsibility for staying aware of all the RISG extension activities and representing the program at the network-wide level. We also suggest that an annual meeting of all RISG outreach personnel to share results and experiences and look for potential synergies would be useful.

The Senior Advisory Council (SAC) is very active and engaged and represents an important addition to the program since the last PAT. The SAC review of the program at the end of the 2006-2010 strategic plan, which is nearing completion, is providing a broad assessment of the full program. We suggest that incorporating some perspectives (perhaps interviews) from outside beneficiaries of RISG activities next time would add texture and specificity to the report.

**Suggestion** – Appoint one (perhaps rotating) member of the extension group to be RISG’s point person for extension at the national level. This recommendation is not intended to imply that the point person should have additional management responsibilities at the state level.

**Suggestion** – Future SAC reviews should consider including interview or other inputs from outside stakeholders who have benefitted from RISG’s programs.

### Strategic and Implementation Plans

The RISG 2006-2010 Strategic Plan and the process used to develop it were very well planned and very successful. This plan has been aligned with the 2010-2014 national plan by providing goals and objectives that extend through the period covered by the national plan. Due to major changes in program direction such as the loss of staff, reshaping their communications portfolio, starting the Legal Program as a fully fledged RISG institution, and consideration of newly burgeoning Sustainable Seafood Initiative, the program initiated an internal review conducted by the Senior Advisory Council to figure out how to best move forward and the direction that RI SG wanted to take in the future. Because RI SG wanted to wait for the results of this review, the initiation of the next strategic plan was delayed. Rather than create a new 4-year plan that is out of synch with the rest of the network, we recommend that the new plan (or an extension of the 2006-2010 plan) should run only to 2014.

**Recommendation** – Either extend (with minor corrections to align with the National plan) the 2006-2010 strategic plan until 2014 or write an abbreviated strategic plan to cover the 2011-2014 period. Then get in synch with the national and other state plans by developing a 2014-2018 strategic plan.

### Research Priorities and Objectives

The procedures used to develop the RFP and solicit and select research projects are listed on page 6 of the revised Site Review Briefing Book. These procedures fully meet NSGO requirements for independence, quality assessment and absence of conflict of interest. We

commend the program for reorganizing and tightening its administration so as to ensure that the proportion of funds allocated to competitive programs (primarily research) remains in the 45-65% range.

## II. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Rhode Island Sea Grant Extension, Outreach and Legal Programs (RISGE) are non-traditional to Sea Grant, and unique to Rhode Island. The Outreach and Extension Programs have been designed to fit within in the URI structure, and the SRT determined that the programs were very effective.

The Legal Program, at Roger Williams University School of Law, has become an effective part of the State's outreach effort. The number of Knauss fellows coming from the Legal Program in recent years is especially impressive. The outreach individuals at RISGE are well respected within the State, and have local as well as national and international impacts and reputations. Their programming activities were relevant to the many audiences that they served. They clearly are trusted, and perceived by the coastal public, as honest brokers of coastal information.

RISGE has close ties to State and Federal agencies (their ties with NOAA and USAID are especially impressive). The amount of grant and contract funds received by the program have a major positive impact, and allow the program to have a much more larger outreach program effort than if it were funded solely by National Sea Grant resources. Clear and obvious examples of successful stakeholder engagement were demonstrated by the Coastal Extension effort with the Ocean SAMP. The key RI State Agencies were totally supportive of RISG role in the SAMP effort, and the involvement of the coastal public in development of the documents chapters was impressive.

The annual Baird Symposia were seen by the Site Team to be an effective mechanism to identify each year a key public policy issue within Rhode Island, and then give it broad attention. This effort was seen as a mechanism that could well serve other Sea Grant Programs. The RI Communications effort was also seen by the Site Team as excellent, even though the effort had been scaled back in recent years. The newsletter "41°N" is of very high quality with key information on coastal issues facing RI. The micro-newsletters are an innovative idea and seen as a very good communications technique.

RISGE is able to continuously come up with innovative and unique ways to reach new audiences. One new way discussed with the Site Team was working through the RISG Visual Arts Program in collaboration with the Department of Fine Arts at URI.

**Suggestion** - Having the three thematic centers/institutions (Sustainable Coastal Communities, Sustainable Fisheries and the Legal Program) may not allow for issues to be considered across RISGE. These extension efforts appeared to the Site Team to be three independent outreach efforts with minimal cross coordination took place. The program may want to think about ways in which better connections can be developed across these institutions. For example, a program that a fisheries extension agent develops may be relevant to both the sustainable coastal and the

legal centers, but since each operates within its own “stovepipe” the connection may not be made.

**Suggestion** - Consider holding at least an annual meeting where all of the Sea Grant outreach personnel get together to discuss their projects and programming, and opportunities for coordination.

Overall the RISG program is well engaged with numerous partners at the state, regional, and national level. In addition, the staff is well integrated with national and regional Sea Grant Network activities. The review team particularly liked the partnership principles they have adopted as a way to ensure that cooperative efforts are useful to all entities involved and that they don’t just create “partnerships on paper”.

### **III. COLLABORATIVE NETWORK/NOAA ACTIVITIES**

RISG continues to provide leadership in ocean and coastal activities. This includes planning and cooperative work with local, state, regional, and Federal agencies, other Sea Grant Programs, and non-Sea Grant universities.

#### Sea Grant Network

The members of the leadership team participate and lead activities that support the overall Sea Grant Network. Dr. Costa-Pierce is a co-chair of the Healthy Coastal Ecosystem Focus Area and Alan Desbonnet serves as chair of the research coordinators. RISG Extension Agents also contribute to the larger Sea Grant Network: Dr. Kathy Castro was the national chair of the Fisheries Extension Enhancement Coordination Committee and Pam Rubinoff is a Leader in the Nation Sea Grant Smart Growth Committee and Co-chair of the Northeast Regional Climate Network.

The Rhode Island program is engaged with two regional Sea Grant Regional efforts – the New York Bight Regional Planning Initiative and the Gulf of Maine Regional Planning Initiative. They collaborated with the Gulf of Maine region to host a workshop in April 2010 on Climate Literacy, which was designed to increase the capacity of NOAA representatives to clearly communicate current climate change science. Dr. Costa-Pierce has also taken a leadership role in the Northeast Sea Grant Consortium, an agreement among the northeast programs to develop regional priorities and all contribute funding to a common pool to support research in these areas. Finally the program has engaged with individual Sea Grant programs on specific issues, for example, with Hawaii, Michigan, and Puerto Rico Sea Grant on climate change issues and with New Hampshire on fishing gear research.

#### State and Regional Partners

RISG is very responsive to the needs and processes of the state government and has proven that it can act as the honest science broker in very contentious stakeholder processes and policy issues when the state agencies lack credibility, thereby serving a very useful function. This is exemplified by the efforts and outcomes in the Ocean Special Area Management Plan, where

RISG was able to bring data into the process and created a process that built trust among the participants. The communication and working relationship between the program and the state legislators and regulators seems very conducive to quickly responding to new issues and directly addressing the needs of managers.

The program seems to be in the process of defining its role with Northeast Regional Ocean Council– the Northeast state’s regional ocean partnership. Nationally, more efforts are taking a regional approach to ocean and coastal management solutions, such as the President’s new Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning framework. Based on their past effort, RISG is well positioned to play a key role in regional CMSP efforts; opportunities will certainly exist for RISG to transfer their tools and lessons learned from the planning process to similar efforts nationwide. However, RISG will need to carefully define its role in regional efforts to ensure that unrealistic demands are not put on the program as these regional efforts grow in number and related obligations.

#### NOAA and other Federal Agency Cooperative Efforts

RISG extension has successfully partnered with numerous NOAA offices, working on a variety of issues, including climate change. These partnerships have not only resulted in useful products, but have also allowed the program to diversify its funding so that it does not only rely on the National Sea Grant program for funding. The priorities of the RISG program are well aligned with those articulated in NOAA draft Next Generation Strategic Plan, so additional opportunities seem likely to arise in the future. The program seems well integrated with the Rhode Island state coastal management program, but the opportunity exists for RISG to increase its partnership with NOAA CZMA programs, such as the Coastal Services Center. The RISG program has produced some cutting-edge tools and data that directly support coastal decision making – but numerous other states and NOAA programs are also developing similar tools. All parties could benefit from more robust collaboration and data sharing. RISG has also successfully partnered with other federal agencies on topics of joint concern. One great example is the Smart Growth for Coastal and Waterfront Communities manual, which was completed in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency.

**Suggestion** - The program should carefully define its role in regional management efforts, which could become very demanding in terms of time and resources. The program should consider creating engagement or partnership principles specific to regional efforts (as they already have for partnerships within the state) and ensure that they pursue projects and initiatives that support NOAA’s and Sea Grant’s regional priorities.

## **IV. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS and SUGGESTIONS**

### **Findings**

- RISG has a dynamic and entrepreneurial management team, with strong, committed and involved leadership.
- The program is very visible to the University's upper management and is well respected and appreciated by the administration, which sees it as playing a key role in URI's broader engagement strategy.
- The RISG program has a relatively loose management hierarchy, which allows components of RISG to take advantage of state and federal funding opportunities.
- RISG has created a very agile program that has been able to respond quickly and effectively to major new State and Federal initiatives.
- The program continues its long tradition of building "sea-grant-like" institutions that are able to grow and become more autonomous as they fill niches in the URI marine domain.
- Rhode Island Sea Grant Extension, Outreach and Legal Programs (RISGE) are non-traditional to Sea Grant, and unique to Rhode Island. The Extension Program has been designed to fit within in the URI structure, and the Site Team determined the programs were especially effective. This structure means that Sea Grant extension agents have their primary affiliations with the satellite organizations, rather than with a central RISG extension line.
- The Senior Advisory Council (SAC) is very active and engaged and represents an important addition to the program since the last review.
- RISGE is able to continuously come up with innovative and unique ways to reach new audiences
- RISG provides leadership in ocean and coastal activities including coordinated planning and cooperative work with local, state, regional, and Federal agencies, other Sea Grant Programs, and non-Sea Grant universities.

### **Recommendations (items the Program must consider)**

- Either extend the 2006-2010 strategic plan until 2014 or write an abbreviated strategic plan to cover the 2011-2014 period. Then get in synch with the national and other state plans by developing a 2014-2018 strategic plan.

### **Suggestions (ideas the Program may want to consider)**

- Appoint one (perhaps rotating) member of the extension group to be RISG's point person for extension at the national level. This recommendation is not intended to imply that the point person should have additional management responsibilities at the state level.
- Future SAC reviews should consider including interview or other inputs from outside stakeholders who have benefitted from RISG's programs.
- Consider holding at least an annual meeting where all of the Sea Grant outreach personnel get together to discuss their projects and programming, and opportunities for coordination.

## **V. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

- A possible Best Management Practice for the RISG program may include their development of "partnership principles." These principles were developed in conjunction with RISG's Advisory Council. They are a set of principles developed to help determine which programs are ripe for partnering and possible investment by Sea Grant. A listing of these principles can be found in Appendix B.

# Appendix A

## RHODE ISLAND SEA GRANT SITE VISIT AGENDA

### Tuesday, July 27, 2010

- 7 a.m. Breakfast at Hampton Inn with Rhode Island Sea Grant Director  
*Dr. Barry Costa-Pierce*
- 7:45 a.m. Depart for Rhode Island Sea Grant, University of Rhode Island  
Narragansett Bay Campus, Ocean Technology Center
- 8 a.m.–8:15 a.m. **Welcome to the University of Rhode Island**  
*Dr. David Farmer, Dean, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island*
- 8:15 a.m.–8:45 a.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Program Overview**  
*Dr. Barry Costa-Pierce, Director, Rhode Island Sea Grant and Professor of Fisheries & Aquaculture, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, University of Rhode Island*
- 8:45 a.m.–9:15 a.m. **Operations of the Rhode Island Sea Grant Senior Advisory Council**  
*Dr. Barry Costa-Pierce*  
*Guests: Senior Advisory Council Members; Members of the Senior Advisory Council Self-Evaluation Committee*
- 9:15 a.m.–10:30 a.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Senior Advisory Council, Self Evaluation Committee Report**  
*Dennis Esposito, Esq., Chair*
- 10:30 a.m.–10:45 a.m. **Break**
- 10:45 a.m.–12:15 p.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Coastal Extension Program**  
*Jennifer McCann, Leader for Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems Extension Program, Rhode Island Sea Grant and Team Leader for U.S. Coastal Program, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island*  
  
*Guests: Grover Fugate, Executive Director, Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council; Kelly Mahoney, Deputy Director of Policy, Rhode Island Senate; Jared Rhodes, Chief, Rhode Island Statewide Planning, Department of Administration*
- 12:15 p.m.–1:30 p.m. **Lunch, Ocean Technology Center Conference Room**  
*Discussion with members of Rhode Island Sea Grant Leadership Team*

- 1:30 p.m.–2 p.m. **Site Visit Team Break**
- 2 p.m.–3:30 p.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Program**  
*Laura Skrobe, Co-Leader for Sustainable Fisheries Extension Program, Rhode Island Sea Grant and Research Associate, Department of Fisheries, Animal and Veterinary Science, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, University of Rhode Island*
- Dr. Kathy Castro, Co-Leader for Sustainable Fisheries Extension Program, Rhode Island Sea Grant and Director, University of Rhode Island Fisheries Center, Department of Fisheries, Animal and Veterinary Science, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, University of Rhode Island*
- Guests: Dr. Rick Rhodes, Associate Dean, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, University of Rhode Island; Fred Mattera, Vice President, Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, Commercial Fisherman; Dr. Ken La Valley, Assistant Director for Extension, New Hampshire Sea Grant*
- 3:30 p.m.–3:45 p.m. **Break**
- 3:45 p.m.–4:45 p.m. **Education and Communications Information Session**  
*Alan Desbonnet, Assistant Director, Rhode Island Sea Grant*
- 4:45 p.m.–5 p.m. **Site Visit Team Break**
- 5 p.m.–7 p.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Site Visit Reception**

### **Wednesday, July 28, 2010**

- 8 a.m.–9 a.m. **Research Operations & Accomplishments**  
*Dr. Barry Costa-Pierce*  
*Guests: Dr. John King, Professor, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island; Peg Petruny-Parker, Executive Director, Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, Saunterstown, Rhode Island*
- 9 a.m.–10:15 a.m. **Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program**  
*Susan Farady, Leader, Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program, Director of Marine Affairs Institute and Adjunct Faculty, Roger Williams University School of Law*
- Guests: Professor Jonathan Guttoff, Roger Williams University School of Law, Bristol, Rhode Island; Ms. Wendy Waller, Staff Attorney, Save The Bay, Providence, Rhode Island; Ms. Diane Williamson, Director of Community Development, Town of Bristol, Rhode Island*
- 10:15 a.m.–10:30 a.m. **Break**
- 10:30 a.m.–11:00 a.m. **The University of Rhode Island Sustainable Seafood Initiative**  
*Dr. Cathy Roheim, Professor, Department of Environment and Natural Resource Economics, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, University of Rhode Island*

- 11 a.m.–12 p.m.      **Closed Session with University Administrators**  
*Guests: Dr. Donald DeHayes, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, University of Rhode Island; Dr. David Farmer, Dean, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island; David A. Logan, Dean and Professor of Law, Roger Williams University School of Law; Dr. Rick Rhodes, Associate Dean, College of the Environment and Life Science, University of Rhode Island; Dr. Ron Baird, Rhode Island Sea Grant Senior Advisory Council Representative*
- 12 p.m. – 2 p.m.      **Site Visit Team Working Lunch—Closed Session**
- 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.      **Site Visit Team Report Out**  
*Dial in: 866-246-6862 (code: 1471373)*
- 3 p.m.–5 p.m.      **Site Visit Team Closed Discussion and Writing Session**
- 5 p.m.      **Conclusion and Site Visit Team Return to Hampton Inn**

Thank you



## **Appendix B**

### **Rhode Island Sea Grant's Partnership Principles**

1. **Scientific Expertise and Track Record:** Program is proven commodity with an excellent record of follow through on commitments. Program is grounded in sound science with proven knowledge and links to a larger body of academic marine and environmental science expertise.
2. **Commonality:** Program shares common goals or common audience with Sea Grant.
3. **Leveraging:** Program has proven capacity to deliver applied research and/or outreach so that Sea Grant's investment will pay incremental costs rather than bear the full costs of programs.
4. **Two—Way Street:** Both programs can articulate the mutual benefits (both strategic and specific) derived from a Sea Grant partnership, and have a mutual understanding of the mandates of the parent organizations.
5. **Responsible Cadre of Interested Partners:** Groups have a cadre of qualified, responsible partners who express a strong interest in partnering with Sea Grant on a strategic, long-term basis.
6. **Fiscal Stability:** Program has stable staff and funding base, assuring that Sea Grant investments will not be wasted through short term project collaborations that end due to a fiscal crisis of the new partner.
7. **Joint Evaluation:** Partners express strong interest in incorporating evaluation and outcome criteria into joint activities from the outset in order to rigorously assess whether the partnership has been successful and has had beneficial impacts on Sea Grant and its stakeholders.