

Vision and Mission

Vision

Vibrant, healthy coastal communities and marine environments that are resilient in the face of change.

Mission

Improve understanding and management of Rhode Island's coastal and marine ecosystems.

Methods

- Apply scientific, policy, and legal research findings to coastal and marine issues.
- Create a neutral forum for debate and discussion.
- Foster stewardship of local resources.
- Transfer our learning to others.
- Mentor the next generation of environmental leaders.

Introduction

Rhode Island residents are greatly impacted by the health and services provided by coastal and marine resources—everyone lives within a 30-minute drive of the coast, and two thirds of the population lives in the state's 21 coastal municipalities. Narragansett Bay, one of the world's best-studied temperate estuaries, is a living laboratory for the study of interactions between ecological, social, economic, and political-governance systems.

Based at the University of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Sea Grant College Program is a partnership between the university, the National Sea Grant College Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the state of Rhode Island. Rhode Island Sea Grant is one of 33 programs across the nation that work locally, regionally, and nationally to improve management and understanding of coastal and marine resources through research, education, extension and outreach programming.

Rhode Island Sea Grant recognizes that the future economic prosperity of Rhode Island, and the Northeast, is dependent upon enhancing the ecological integrity and stewardship of the region's marine and coastal environments. In this strategic plan, Rhode Island Sea Grant sets out a framework to help address the needs of the state's coastal communities, ecosystems, and economy.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Research results, new strategies, ideas and understanding, and more, is brokered between Sea Grant and its stakeholders via a broad array of media. Communications is therefore built into every Sea Grant effort to achieve program goals and objectives. During this strategic planning period Rhode Island Sea

Grant will continue to utilize existing communications portals, as well as develop new ones in its quest to enhance understanding and improve the use of knowledge in the decision-making process.

In synchronization with the National Sea Grant College Program and its 33 affiliated state programs, Rhode Island Sea Grant will focus its efforts in four thematic areas: 1) Healthy Coastal Ecosystems, 2) Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture, 3) Resilient Communities and Economies, and 4) Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development. Development of this strategic plan includes input from the Rhode Island Sea Grant Senior Advisory Council, members of other Sea Grant programmatic advisory groups, the National Sea Grant Program, business and non-profit groups, diverse government stakeholders, and the public at large. Responsiveness to evolving priorities of stakeholders is a core strength of the Sea Grant model and requires that this strategic plan be adaptive to changing local conditions. To this end, this plan is designed to accommodate change in response to emerging issues and trends, and as such will be reviewed and amended, as appropriate on an annual basis, by program staff and Senior Advisory Council.

Crosscutting Themes

Law and Policy

Rhode Island Sea Grant has the distinction of being one of only four Sea Grant programs in the country with a legal program component, and the only one serving the New England region. In partnership; with Roger Williams University School of Law and the Department of Marine Affairs at the University of Rhode Island, this unique program provides research, extension and outreach regarding marine law and policy issues. The education component of our legal program is unique in that it provides students hand-on opportunities as Law Fellows to hone their legal skills in researching issues for constituents, and the opportunity to simultaneously earn a master's degree in marine affairs during their time in law school through the joint degree program between RWU and URI. The Law Fellow Program provides valuable information to a broad range of constituents looking for legal research assistance on a myriad of coastal and marine topics. Rhode Island Sea Grant will build and expand the capacity of the legal program during this strategic planning period to more fully integrate across programmatic activities, both locally and regionally. We believe that incorporation of legal information into the decision-making process is critical to improving efficiency and effectiveness in marine resource management.

Northeast Sea Grant Consortium

The Northeast Sea Grant Consortium is a partnership of the seven Sea Grant programs extending from New York to Maine. This partnership exists to foster collaborative efforts around issues and problems that are best addressed at a regional scale. The Consortium has funded research projects addressing regional issues in fisheries and climate change. This strategic planning period will see continued engagement by Rhode Island Sea Grant with its Consortium partners to address issues and problems of concern to regional stakeholders and at regional scales.

Healthy Coastal Ecosystems

Human prosperity is intimately linked to the health of coastal ecosystems. They provide economic and recreational opportunities, clean water, seafood, and inspiration. Sea Grant works to integrate science into the decision-making process of coastal communities locally, regionally, and nationally, to improve management of finite coastal resources. Many activities, ranging from coastal development and working waterfronts to sea level rise and renewable energy, are all important issues that affect coastal ecosystem health and that need to be considered in the decision-making process. During this strategic planning period, Rhode Island Sea Grant will help local communities and state agencies develop sound plans of use for coastal and ocean-based resources through the application of spatial planning tools and techniques that are based on scientific research findings. Sea Grant will improve and enhance the decision-making process by incorporating legal and policy research as a part of its projects and programs to ensure that legal issues are considered before litigation becomes necessary and to enhance effectiveness of developed policy, guidance, and regulations.

GOAL: Agency and municipal officials, private sector leaders, and non-governmental entities incorporate best available scientific and legal policy information into the decision-making processes directed at coastal resources management.

Objective 1. Fund research projects in the natural and social sciences, and the legal and policy fields, which are directly applicable to coastal marine issues in Rhode Island.

Objective 2. Develop ecosystem-based management tools for use in resource management and decision-making processes.

Objective 3. Work with key constituencies to incorporate legal and research findings into resources management or policy and guidance development.

Performance Measures

- Number of Sea Grant tools, technologies and information services that are used by our partners/customers to improve ecosystem-based management.
- Number of ecosystem-based approaches used to manage land, water and living resources in coastal areas as a result of Sea Grant activities.
- Number of acres of coastal habitat protected, enhanced or restored as a result of Sea Grant activities.

Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

Seafood is a critical component of the amount of food consumed in the United States and the world. Wild fisheries and aquaculture are necessary to meet demand and are important to the nation's social and economic fabric.

Issues of stock abundance, regulatory structure, marine diseases, and consumer safety greatly impact the stability of a fishery and can be supported through research that aids management decisions and improves husbandry practices. Sea Grant's role is to support sustainable, ecosystem-based management of wild fisheries, to improve aquaculture techniques, and to develop and implement methodologies for handling and storage of seafood products that ensure safety for human consumption. Sea Grant also plays a role in the promotion of local, sustainable species to diversify consumption and take advantage of currently underutilized, local species of fish.

In this current strategic plan, Rhode Island Sea Grant will work on increasing local consumer knowledge and use of local species that help promote local fishermen which in turn promotes healthy local economies. Sea Grant will also work with the shellfish industry to promote sustainable management of shellfish stocks, and to enhance economic viability, as well as continue its commitment to training seafood processors in safe handling and storage techniques, and will apply these concepts at the consumer level to promote safe seafood consumption. Finally, Sea Grant will support more effective, sustainable, ecosystem-based fishery management.

GOAL: Rhode Island fisheries are sustainably managed, its products safely processed, and residents readily use and support locally caught and produced seafood products.

Objective 1. Train seafood processors and handlers, and seafood consumers, in seafood safety/HACCP techniques that promote consumption of fresh, high quality seafood products.

Objective 2. Educate consumers about local, sustainable, and/or underutilized seafood choices, the nutritional value of seafood, and about economic and ecological benefits of buying local seafood products.

Objective 3. Work with key constituencies in the commercial and recreational fisheries to incorporate legal and research findings into management, and policy and guidance development, to improve fisheries management and industry sustainability.

Performance Measures

- Number of Sea Grant tools, technologies and information services that are used by stakeholders and decision-makers to improve sustainable, ecosystem-based fisheries management.
- Number of fishermen, seafood processors and aquaculture industry personnel who modify their practices using knowledge gained in fisheries sustainability and seafood safety as a result of Sea Grant activities.
- Number of seafood consumers who modify their purchases using knowledge gained in fisheries sustainability, seafood safety and health benefits of seafood as a result of Sea Grant activities.

Resilient Communities and Economies

It is important that coastal communities be proactive and forward looking. Well prepared communities are better able to address and adapt to ever changing economic, social, and environmental conditions because they are able to strategize and apply appropriate tools and techniques. Rhode Island Sea Grant's role in this regard will be to help communities organize and increase capacity for learning and improving the decision-making process.

GOAL: Coastal communities develop hazard resilient approaches that reduce the social, economic and ecological impacts associated with natural disasters, sea level rise, and changing climate.

Objective 1. Assist coastal communities in developing and implementing policies and guidance that preserves and enhances working waterfront.

Objective 2. Provide technical and legal assistance to local communities and state entities that promotes adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change-induced sea level rise and/or storm impacts.

Performance Measures

- Number of communities that implemented sustainable economic and environmental development practices and policies (e.g., land-use planning, working waterfronts, energy efficiency, climate change planning, smart growth measures, green infrastructure) as a result of Sea Grant activities.
- Number of communities that implemented hazard resiliency practices to prepare for, respond to or minimize coastal hazardous events as a result of Sea Grant activities.

Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development

Society is faced with rapidly changing conditions—environmental, social, and economic—and future leaders must be able to understand, and explain to others, the threats and opportunities inherent in the coming change. The future shows a clear need for scientists who possess a higher degree of comfort in practical application of their research findings to greater benefit humankind, and for expressing what they are doing and why, in ways that are meaningful to the public. There is also the need for a more enlightened and knowledgeable public that understands the issues and threats, and the science that reinforces or rebukes information available through various media outlets. Sea Grant synthesizes and interprets scientific and legal research results for resource managers and the general public, and assists in application of research and legal findings into policy and management. Sea Grant also empowers the next generation of scientists and policy makers to better understand the need for sound science in the policy area, by supporting graduate, undergraduate, and life-long learning initiatives.

GOAL: People better understand the relationships between vibrant, healthy marine ecosystems and vibrant, healthy coastal communities and economies, and use their knowledge to improve quality of life.

Objective 1. Mentor law, graduate, and undergraduate students in research, outreach, extension, communications, and education endeavors.

Objective 2. Engage people in better understanding coastal, ocean, and law and policy research findings, and applying these findings to improve natural, social, political, and economic systems.

Performance Measures

- Number of Sea Grant facilitated curricula adopted by formal and informal educators.
- Number of people engaged in Sea Grant supported informal education programs.
- Number of Sea Grant supported graduates who become employed in a career related to their degree within two years of graduation.
- Number of peer-reviewed publications produced, and number of times each peer reviewed publication is cited.
- Economic (market and non-market; jobs and businesses created or retained) benefits derived from Sea Grant activities.