

RHODE ISLAND OCEAN MANAGEMENT

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Big Solutions in Ocean Management

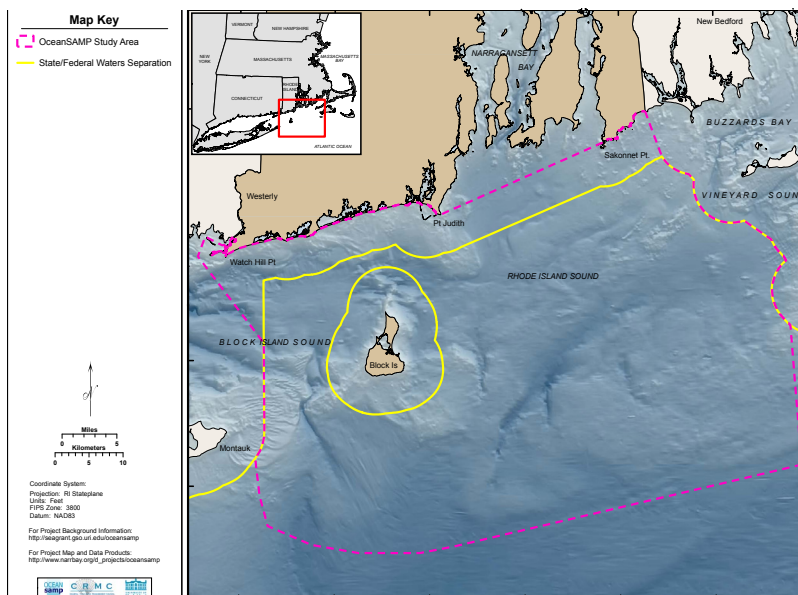
The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is charged with managing human uses of the ocean while preserving, protecting, developing, and restoring the coastal resources of Rhode Island under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. To do this, the CRMC established use categories for the state's ocean waters, including those in the SAMP planning area, which contains approximately 1,500 square miles of portions of Block Island Sound, Rhode Island Sound, and the Atlantic Ocean. The planning area begins in state waters and extends out into federally managed waters, with the farthest boundary set at thirty miles from shore. The SAMP mapped and considered resources and uses in the ocean waters beyond the state boundary because the activities that occur in these waters will have a foreseeable effect on the people and state of Rhode Island.

RHODE ISLAND: A NATIONAL LEADER IN OCEAN PLANNING

The state's ocean is a vital source of jobs, food, recreation, transportation, and a key resource in its transition to developing clean renewable energy. To protect existing uses and preserve this important resource, Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) started a process in 2008 to create an Ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). The SAMP was developed through a public process founded on extensive involvement of scientists, fishermen, business leaders, coastal communities and other ocean users to balance the protection of vulnerable marine habitats and wildlife with responsible ocean uses, including the development of renewable ocean energy.

While Rhode Island's neighbor Massachusetts was the first state to create a comprehensive plan for its ocean waters with the release of its Ocean Management Plan in January 2010, Rhode Island was the first state to extend its ocean planning into federal waters and receive standing "consistency review" authority from the federal government over listed projects and activities proposed for the area of federal waters it mapped. The federal government approved the SAMP in July of 2011.

The intensive data collection and analysis that went into creating the SAMP allowed strong protection for Rhode Island's
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Roseate Terns

The SAMP was careful to protect the habitat of the endangered roseate tern, an important seabird. Here, a roseate tern chases a common tern.



sensitive underwater habitats, which are critical to the great variety of plants and wildlife that inhabit the state's ocean waters. Another example of scientific research put to good use involves the habitat of diving ducks, which forage only in waters 65 feet deep or less. To protect diving ducks, these waters were identified as protected and all development is prohibited in them. The SAMP establishes a tough standard of environmental review to discourage harmful ocean uses, such as sand and gravel mining, dredging, and other ocean development activities that could threaten important ecological areas such as the rocky moraine areas known to be biodiversity hotspots. The SAMP also identifies a renewable energy zone for the first time in Rhode Island waters, which will enable the State to capitalize on its substantial ocean wind resources to produce clean renewable energy and offset the expensive and dirty sources of energy relied on by Block Island.

SAMP: Comprehensive Planning Process

Recognizing the importance of an open, inclusive and transparent process in making decisions regarding public resources, the CRMC followed a thorough public outreach and approval process in drafting and finalizing the SAMP. A stakeholder group with a vested interest met regularly and included representatives from the municipalities that about the project boundary, the Narragansett Indian Tribe, fishermen's organizations, recreation and tourism interests, environmental organizations, marine trades, commercial interests, and others. An additional effort was made to integrate fishing community stakeholders into the planning process, while members of the public were invited to attend meetings, issue public comments and comment on draft chapters of the SAMP both in person and online. Each chapter of the SAMP was published online for viewing and public comment. These bodies will play a critical role in managing the ocean waters offshore Rhode Island.