



MEDIA RELEASE

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“WATERSHED COUNTS” REPORT ON RI ENVIRONMENT SHOWS BAY AND BEACH IMPROVEMENT; LAND USE TRENDS DOWN

Water quality in Narragansett Bay and at Rhode Island beaches is improving, but land development in coastal buffer zones and flood plains, and climate change impacts are causes for concern, said the 3rd Annual "Watershed Counts" Report on the condition of the Narragansett Bay Watershed. The findings were released today at a media conference at the Rhode Island State House.

This multi-organization report shows the science-based trends in the health of the Narragansett Bay Watershed, and what management efforts will be needed in the future to help protect and preserve the watershed's abundant natural resources.

“Land and water resources are central to the quality of life in Rhode Island and a critical component of the state's economy,” said Watershed Counts co-coordinator Meg Kerr.

“Tourism alone is a \$5.2 billion industry, making it the fourth largest economic engine for Rhode Island and a key job generator, which supports more than 41,000 jobs in the state. This industry, among many others, relies upon a quality natural environment, and this year's report shows we have some work to do in improving management efforts in the watershed.”

As in past years, Watershed Counts, the collaborative effort among 60 partner organizations and local environmental experts including federal and state agencies, public advocacy groups, scientists and researchers from the state's top academic institutions, and the business community made comprehensive, science-based assessments in monitoring

the status and trends of environmental issues: land use; fresh water quality; fresh water flow; marine water quality; bay and ocean beaches; and climate change.

The announcement of the 2013 Watershed Counts Report included presentations by RI Land Trust Council Director Rupert Friday on land use trends; Narragansett Bay Commission Director of Policy, Planning and Regulation Tom Uva on Narragansett Bay water quality; URI Watershed Watch Director Linda Green on river water quality; RI Department of Health's Amie Parris on beach closures; Kathy Crawley of the RI Water Resources Board on stream flow; and RI Coastal Resources Management Council's Janet Freedman on climate change. Governor Lincoln Chafee and RI Department of Environmental Management Director Janet Coit also gave remarks before the presentation of results, trends and management guidance.

The good news was that the number of beach closures continued to go down 2012, and wastewater and stormwater loadings of nutrients into Narragansett Bay, which can produce low levels of oxygen needed for marine life to survive, have been reduced.

The news that causes concern was that land use for development continues to increase, even with minimal population growth, and Rhode Island is facing the need to adapt to future climate change impacts such as increased temperatures, more intense storms, and sea level rise, including measures such as coordination among agencies and the need for increased public awareness.

“How we develop on the land affects water quality in the Bay and at beaches, which has a major impact on our economy,” said Kerr. “The legislature has an important role to play across the board by supporting policies that can reduce sprawl and promote smart growth; continue with upgrading wastewater and stormwater discharges; and encourage and mandate state agencies to proactively plan for climate change challenges.”

The full 2013 Watershed Counts Report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.watershedcounts.org/>.