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# RHODE ISLAND SHELLFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN



Rhode Island Sea Grant and the Coastal Resources Center at the University of Rhode Island are facilitating for the state the creation of the first Rhode Island Shellfish Management Plan (SMP). This document will provide comprehensive policy guidance regarding management and protection measures for shellfish located in state marine waters. The effort involves multiple state agencies, including the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council, which manages aquaculture leasing, and the R.I. Department of Environmental Management (DEM), which manages shellfish in state waters. It also engages stakeholders in identifying policies and practices to restore shellfish resources and enhance the economic vitality of the shellfishing industry.

It is important to note that while the term “shellfish” includes numerous species, the SMP will address gastropods and bivalves, mainly quahogs, mussels, soft clams, bay scallops, whelks, and oysters.

A draft SMP is scheduled for completion in late 2013, with final policy



recommendations presented to DEM in 2014. While the SMP cannot dictate policy, the recommendations will be thorough and created under an extensive public engagement process with state agencies present throughout.

## GET INVOLVED

The success and utility of the RI SMP depends on active public participation. We invite you to attend stakeholder meetings and expert-led seminar series, and to stay informed by visiting the website [www.rismp.org](http://www.rismp.org) or contacting Azure Cygler.

## PRIMARY CONTACTS

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# SHELLFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN TOPICS

The RI SMP will focus on aquaculture, wild harvest, and restoration and enhancement. Stakeholders have identified specific issues to address in regard to these topics. More information is available on the [www.rismp.org](http://www.rismp.org) website.

## AQUACULTURE

Global aquaculture production is growing, and approximately 50 percent of global seafood consumed is cultured. The U.S. aquaculture industry produces \$1 billion in seafood, but this is less than 5 percent of the seafood consumed in the U.S. Studies have shown that, done properly, shellfish aquaculture is a sustainable method of food production that also provides important ecosystem services, such as providing critical habitat for juvenile fish and also removing nitrogen from the water.

In Rhode Island, aquaculture is one of the few growth industries with the number of farms increasing substantially since the mid-1990s. Shellfish aquaculture is largely oysters, and in 2011 totaled nearly \$2.5 million in revenue. The R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council is the lead agency involved in permitting aquaculture.

## WILD HARVEST

As Rhode Island has become increasingly populous, shellfish resources have fluctuated in abundance and distribution. The shellfish fishery has in turn fluctuated and includes times of large shellfish markets and profitability, and times of low prosperity for harvesters.

The quahog, Rhode Island's official state shell, is the most economically important resource harvested from Narragansett Bay. Harvested commercially by tongs, bullrakes, and even divers, quahogs in Rhode Island once supported the largest outboard motor fishing fleet in the world. Many have said it's a model for sustainable harvest, remaining largely un-mechanized. However, the price of quahogs hasn't changed much over the years, making it more and more difficult for quahoggers to stay in the business and offering little encouragement for the next generation to join the trade. With fewer than 100 fulltime quahoggers left in Rhode Island today, it is uncertain how long the commercial industry will hold on.



## RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Shellfish restoration is an important way of improving ecological health and enhancing shellfish populations. In Narragansett Bay and the south shore salt ponds, local, state, and federal agencies, as well as environmental organizations, are investing in restoring habitat, including oyster reefs, marshes, and seagrass beds, as well as the shellfish populations themselves, such as quahogs, oysters, and scallops. Programs that pair school children, volunteers, and community groups with restoration efforts add an element of education and public investment.



## COORDINATING TEAM

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