about the RHODE ISLAND SHELLFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN

Shellfishing in Rhode Island is a historic and iconic pursuit, with the quahog serving as the Ocean State's informal symbol and official "state shell." Also, shellfish aquaculture is one of the few "green growth" industries in the state. There is a critical need for a comprehensive look at the shellfishing industry—including commercial and recreational harvesting, as well as aquaculture—its future management, and the status of the resource itself.

Responding to this demand, Rhode Island Sea Grant, the Coastal Resources Center at the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography are helping the state create the first Rhode Island Shellfish Management Plan (SMP). This plan is being developed with wide-ranging public input from concerned citizens, organizations, and industry members. It will provide comprehensive policy guidance regarding management and protection measures for shellfish in state marine waters. It will also promote the vibrancy and health of the shellfishing industry.

Many concerns have been raised throughout the SMP process; a major concern expressed at the outset was





the need for clearer communication between and among regulators regarding the rules that govern shellfish and the roles and responsibilities of each agency. Other issues include the decline in numbers of shellfishermen, regulations preventing shellfishers from directly selling their product to consumers, inadequate stock assessments, human-use interactions on the Bay and coastal salt ponds, and overarching definitions regarding what aquaculture is and what it means to the state.

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 to be presented to state agencies 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.

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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 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, 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.



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 2012 totaled nearly \$3 million in revenue. The R.I. Coastal Resources

PROJECT FUNDERS

The Prospect Hill Foundation The Rhode Island Foundation The Sharpe Family Foundation/Henry and Peggy Sharpe The University of Rhode Island Coastal Institute The quahog is the most economically important resource harvested from Narragansett Bay. Harvested commercially by tongs, bull rakes, and even divers, quahogs in Rhode Island once supported the largest outboard motor fishing fleet in the world. Many have said the quahog fishery a model for sustainable harvest, remaining largely un-mechanized. However, the price



of quahogs hasn't changed a great deal 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. Other commercially harvested species include conchs (whelks), bay scallops, oysters, razor clams, and soft-shelled clams.

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.

OUR PARTNERS

- The University of Rhode Island
- R.I. Department of Environmental
- Management
- R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council

Roger Williams University

GET INVOLVED

The success and utility of the SMP depends on active public participation. We invite you to attend stakeholder meetings and expert-led seminar series, visit **www.rismp.org**, or contact Azure Cygler.