

**Part Two.**

**Areas  
Under Council  
Jurisdiction**

## **Section 200.**

### **Tidal and Coastal Pond Waters**

#### **A. Introductory Findings**

1. Rhode Islanders have a deep commitment to their coastal environment. Their concern for Narragansett Bay and the South Shore coastal ponds has been voiced in numerous ways, including support of landmark legislation in 1971 that created the Coastal Resources Management Council, endorsement of many of the efforts of environmental organizations such as Save the Bay and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, and passage of the largest bond issue in the state's history in order to relieve chronic pollution in upper Narragansett Bay caused by the antiquated Providence municipal sewage treatment plant. The concerns of the public have in large measure been responsible for decisions not to build oil refineries in Jamestown and Tiverton, and to halt the indiscriminate destruction of salt marshes and the improper disposal of dredged spoils. Narragansett Bay is widely accepted as the state's greatest resource, and our coastal waters and shoreline are the focus not only of tourism but of efforts to attract new businesses into the state. Rhode Island strives to maintain the image of a desirable place to work and raise a family, and these attributes are inextricably bound to a varied and beautiful shoreline, where water quality and, no less important, visual quality are excellent and well protected. The qualities that make Rhode Island's coast beautiful and an unparalleled recreational resource are fully as important as the more readily quantifiable commercial and industrial water-dependent activities. The designation of large stretches of waters or coastline for conservation and low-intensity use by this Program recognizes these facts and will help maintain a high quality of coastal environment for future generations of Rhode Islanders.

2. The six categories of waters defined in this Program are directly linked to the characteristics of the shoreline, since the activities on the adjacent mainland are the primary determinant of the uses and qualities of any specific water site. Thus, Type 1 waters abut shorelines in a natural undisturbed condition, where alterations, including the construction of docks and any dredging, are considered by the Council as unsuitable. Type 2 waters are adjacent to predominantly residential

areas, where docks are acceptable, but more intense forms of development, including more marinas and new dredging projects (but not maintenance dredging), would change the area's character and alter the established balance among uses. Alterations such as these would bring more intensive uses and are therefore prohibited in Type 2 waters. The waters along some 70 percent of the state's 420 miles of shoreline have been assigned to Type 1 and Type 2, and should be expected to retain their high scenic values and established patterns of low-intensity use. Type 3 waters are dominated by commercial facilities that support recreational boating. Here, marinas, boatyards, and associated businesses take priority over other uses, and dredging and shoreline alterations are to be expected. Type 4 areas include the open waters of the Bay and the Sounds, where a balance must be maintained among fishing, recreational boating, and commercial traffic. Here high water quality and a healthy ecosystem are primary concerns. The last two water use categories are assigned to areas adjacent to ports and industrial waterfronts. In these waters, maintenance of adequate water depths is essential, high water quality is seldom achievable, and some filling may be desirable. Within Type 5 ports, a mix of commercial and recreational activities must co-exist, while in Type 6 waters, water-dependent industrial and commercial activities take precedence over all other activities. The water categories described in this section are complemented by policies for shoreline types (Section 210), and the two must be combined to identify the Program's policies for a specific coastal site.

3. More than 90 percent of Rhode Island's tidal waters are classified by the R.I. Department of Environmental Management as SA, the highest water quality rating. Water pollution, however, is a major concern, with eutrophication and bacterial contamination a growing concern in the salt ponds and with all major indicators of pollution showing strong gradients down the Bay from the Providence metropolitan area. Despite the pollutants and intense fishing pressure, Rhode Island's tidal waters support large seasonal populations of a variety of finfish. In the Bay, the quahog supports a large and important commercial fishery. Recreational fishing for flounder, bluefish, and striped bass is important nearshore.

4. Rhode Island has a rich history of maritime commerce and industry. In this century, however, the once-booming urban waterfronts of the upper

Bay have stagnated and declined despite major infusions of public funds to deepen the access channel to Providence to 40 feet and build new terminal facilities. During the postwar decades, oil imports have dominated waterborne commerce, but this sector has declined sharply since the mid-seventies. In 1973, the U.S. Navy announced a major pullout from its extensive facilities in the lower Bay, and by 1980 hundreds of acres of port facilities at Quonset, Davisville, Melville, and Coddington Cove had been turned over to the state. The State of Rhode Island now owns a large inventory of unutilized or underutilized port facilities. As commercial shipping has declined, recreational boating has increased. Facilities for the in-water storage of boats are in short supply, but with very few exceptions expansion of marinas into new areas could only be accomplished if remaining salt marshes and other important natural features were sacrificed. Since this is considered unacceptable by the Council, the emphasis must be on the more efficient use of existing facilities, recycling of underutilized but already disturbed sites, and improvements to public launching facilities.

5. Activities that are dependent on Rhode Island's tidal waters generate substantial economic benefits to the state. Nearly one billion dollars are generated each year by such water-related activities as marine industry, transportation and education, commercial fishing and marine recreation (Farrell and Rorholm, 1981). Substantial additional economic benefits are generated by water-enhanced residential development, tourism, and the importance of an attractive marine environment in drawing high-quality businesses to Rhode Island.