



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Earth Day, Wednesday, April 22, 2020

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GOVERNOR RAIMONDO, DEM MARK 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH DAY BY NOTING PROGRESS BUT ACKNOWLEDGING CHALLENGES TOWARD CLEAN AIR, CLEAN WATER & REVITALIZED LANDS

Governor and DEM Director urge Rhode Islanders to ‘be proud of the aggressive steps we’ve taken to protect our environment for future generations’

PROVIDENCE – This week, as Rhode Island joins the world in marking the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, Governor Gina M. Raimondo and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) are reflecting on the progress Rhode Island has made in protecting our state’s natural resources – from Narragansett Bay to local waters and green spaces to the air we breathe. Since 1970, efforts to improve air and water quality, clean up contaminated lands, conserve open space, increase recreational opportunities, and take action to confront climate change have greatly enhanced Rhode Islanders’ quality of life.

“On the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, I encourage all Rhode Islanders to step outside – close to home – and take a moment to appreciate the tremendous natural resources we have here in the Ocean State,” said Governor Raimondo. “While we must be clear-eyed about the challenges we face, particularly around climate change, Rhode Islanders should be proud of the aggressive steps we’ve taken to protect our environment for future generations.”

“Rhode Island has made great strides in improving the health of our lands and waters since the 1970s, and we must continue on this trajectory,” said DEM Director Janet Coit. “Climate change is the major environmental issue of our time, and we must press forward and do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote the resilience of our communities. In recognition of Earth Day, I urge all Rhode Islanders to take steps to reduce their carbon footprint and live more sustainably. As the Ocean State, we



know and see the direct impacts of climate change. Taking stock of our individual actions and making concrete changes in our own behavior are meaningful ways to reduce emissions and preserve our environment today and into the future.”

A wide range of improvements have been made over the past five decades, including:

- The quality of the air that we breathe has improved dramatically since the inception of the Clean Air Act in 1970 due to emissions reductions, increased automobile fuel efficiency and cleaner-burning cars, power sector improvements, a shift from coal to natural gas, and stricter emissions limits for manufacturing facilities. A steady decrease in air pollutants and stricter air quality standards mean less exposure and lower health risks for Rhode Islanders.
- Once overwhelmed by raw sewage and other pollution, today our bays, rivers, and coastal waters are cleaner and healthier as a result of strong environmental laws and significant investments to improve wastewater treatment facilities and undertake combined sewer overflow projects. As an example of progress, in 2017, shell-fishing restrictions were lifted on portions of upper Narragansett Bay that had been in place for the past 70 years, allowing DEM to welcome shellfishermen back to harvesting clams in historic waters.
- The remediation and redevelopment of brownfields – vestiges of Rhode Island’s industrial past – have mitigated the threat to public health and the environment from exposure to uncontrolled contamination. Since the establishment of the federal brownfields program in 2002, RI has received more than \$40 million in federal support for cleanup work, job training, and site assessment work. In 2014, \$5 million in state brownfields cleanup funding resulted in the cleanup of 24 sites spanning 142 acres. An additional \$12 million in Green Economy Bond funding through DEM’s Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund has since capitalized 54 projects in communities across Rhode Island, helping build new schools, businesses, affordable housing, and green energy projects throughout the state.
- Rhode Island has seen the recovery of many imperiled bird and wildlife species such as the wood duck, wild turkey, snowy egret, and bald eagle since the 1970s. Fish passage restoration projects including dam removals, traditional fishways, and nature-like fishways on rivers throughout the state have increased spawning and nursery habitat for migratory fish and benefited our freshwater fisheries.



- Since 1970, DEM has protected almost 50,000 acres of land and invested almost \$75 million in grants for more than 500 recreation projects in all 39 Rhode Island communities. This includes protection of iconic places like Rocky Point in Warwick and Tillinghast Pond in West Greenwich, as well as dozens of open spaces enjoyed by people and wildlife alike protected by municipalities, land trusts, and conservation organizations.
- Effective fisheries management measures have improved the stock sizes and status of the Atlantic striped bass and sea scallop fisheries. In the 1970s and 1980s, the striped bass population crashed due to overfishing and environmental issues. The collective effort of states to reduce harvest allowed the striper population to rebuild by the late 1990s. This success story had a positive impact on commercial and recreational fishing through the 2000s. Atlantic sea scallops also experienced a comeback around the same timeframe. Similarly, Atlantic sea scallops were declared overfished in 1997. A suite of management tools – including closed areas, effort reduction, gear and crew restrictions – led to rebuilding the population by 2001.

Take action to confront climate change!

Climate change is the major environmental issue of our time. It is affecting the health, safety, and prosperity of our communities. RI has so much at stake — we are grappling with problems and seeing impacts from climate change. The enormous challenge action on climate change have distinguished the issue as the most pressing topic for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Rhode Island is a leader in climate change action through its work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase clean energy and energy efficiency, grow the clean energy economy, increase the number of electric vehicles on our roadways, protect land, and support climate change resiliency projects in local communities.

Progress in the battle against climate change requires action at all levels, and Rhode Island has been a leader at the state and regional levels. Still, scientists are clear that more reductions are needed faster to prevent disaster, and stronger laws are needed to drive down emissions more quickly. DEM strongly supports amendments to the Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 calling for tighter emission goals and mandatory enforceable standards. Current legislation before the General Assembly includes amendments to bolster Rhode Island in the fight against climate change and institute economy-wide, enforceable, mandatory greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and advance the state's ability to meet those targets.

“Effectively and urgently tackling climate change is core to the mission of this Department — protecting, managing, and promoting Rhode Island’s environment and natural resources to preserve and improve our quality of life,” Director Coit said. “While DEM works across the board on efforts to reduce emissions and help communities adapt, it is clear that we need more tools to reduce emissions across all sectors of the economy.”

Learn more about how RI is working to strengthen its resilience to climate change and to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions at <http://climatechange.ri.gov/climatesnapshot/>

Climate change, water contamination, stormwater runoff, air quality alert days, fish kills, trash, and plastic pollution are among the environmental problems that adversely affect public health and harm our environment. Rhode Island and the country continue to grapple with these issues, many of which have

diffuse sources. Although we've curtailed many large sources of pollution, our environment continues to be impacted by pollution from failing septic systems, runoff from large parking lots, rooftops, and other impervious surfaces, and exhaust from tens of thousands of tail pipes. Taken together, these seemingly small sources of pollution scattered across the state add up to big environmental problems. And, while progress requires strong laws, cleaner energy, conservation, and a change in business practices, the solutions also lie in part with decisions that we all make each day at home, on the road, at work and at play.

In this time of social distancing, DEM asks Rhode Islanders to commit to taking steps in their everyday lives to protect the planet. "Think Globally, Act Locally" is a principle that many Rhode Islanders will follow this Earth Day by making small changes to help limit our impact on the environment. There are plenty of changes people can make from home — like reducing plastic consumption and waste — that help to reduce harmful impacts and promote sustainability:

Kitchen

- **Start composting:** When you compost, you cut down on waste and what you have left over you can use to fertilize your garden. Simply deposit food scraps into a bin and empty it once a week. Coffee is a rich source of nitrogen for plants, both indoor and outdoor. Outside, sprinkle old coffee grounds around your plants, working the old grounds into the mulch — the grounds can help keep slugs and other plant pests away, too.
- **Ditch paper towels for cloth:** Instead of buying more paper products, switch out paper towels for cloth rags. You can make your own rags out of old t-shirts.
- **Reduce, reuse, and recycle:** Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three "R's" to conserve natural resources and landfill space.
- **Green your cleaning products:** Don't send chemicals into our waterways. Choose non-toxic chemicals in the home and office. It's easy to make your own cleaning products out of vinegar, lemon and some water. When cleaning and sanitizing for COVID-19 purposes, make sure to use products approved by EPA for this purpose.
- **Choose sustainable food:** Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.seafoodri.com.

Hygiene

- **Use less water:** The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that end up in the ocean. You can do your part by keeping your faucet low when you wash your face and using a low-pressure showerhead. However, don't worry about conserving water with washing your hands. [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- **Use sustainable beauty products:** There are many eco-friendly beauty brands. Using products that don't include harsh chemicals isn't just good for your skin, it's good for the earth.

Electronics

- **Purchase rechargeable batteries:** Instead of tossing batteries when they're out of juice, invest in some rechargeable batteries for your devices.
- **Use long-lasting light bulbs:** Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room.

- **Unplug electronics:** You will save a lot of energy if you unplug electronics when they're not in use. Big TVs take up lots of energy and make your utility bill more expensive. Turning off items such as TVs and computers is good for your wallet and the environment.

Shopping

- **Shop wisely:** Single-use disposables such as plastic shopping bags, bottles, cups and straws – along with items like six-pack rings and balloons – are unsightly, dangerous and an all-too-familiar litter on land and in coastal waters. Buy fewer products packaged in or with plastics.

Other Ideas

- **Recycle your car:** You can donate your car to many charities or recycle it at your local automotive recycling center. You could even receive a tax deduction for recycling your old vehicle.
- **Buy a houseplant:** Certain houseplants, like spider plants, help purify the air of harmful toxins. Put one in your bathroom, hallway — anywhere!
- **Plant a tree:** Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change. But make sure to pick the right tree for your yard!
- **Educate:** When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.

Pledge to make five small changes that contribute to a healthier planet: conserve water and energy, reduce waste, support local farms, and join conservation efforts.

For a full list of ideas, view <http://www.dem.ri.gov/earthdayx3.pdf>. Join the conversation on social media, using #Pledge5.

Since its inception in 1970, Earth Day has served as a yearly catalyst for action and advocacy, environmental education, and positive change. Activities surrounding the day are focused on broadening public involvement in protecting natural resources and promoting a healthier environment for future generations.

Follow DEM on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) or Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM for more information on recreational opportunities in Rhode Island as well as other timely updates.

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