

# **SPC** in the Community

By Ann Whaley-Tobin

his spring and summer was a busy time for SPC!
An integral part of our mission is to connect people to the salt ponds so that they can see what amazing habitat these ponds are and how our everyday actions can impact their health.

In May and early June, we hosted FOUR FIELD TRIPS with about 170 total students from 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. This year we hosted students from North Stonington Public Schools, Kingston Hill Academy, Chariho Public School, and Glen Hills Elementary School. We covered topics such as water quality, storm water runoff, and animals' inherited traits. All of our trips were hosted at

the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge. The students' favorite activity was seining in the salt pond of course!

As always, we hosted our SALT POND SAFARIS during the summer months for children and their families. This program is open to the public and completely free of charge. We seine by dragging a 30 ft. net through the pond and do a catch and release pro-

gram to show everyone what lives in the ponds. This year we were able to host eight safaris and worked with over 150 children between our public safaris and camp programs with the Weekapaug Yacht Club and the Clark Street School in Westerly. The participants get to see various kinds of crabs, including blue crabs, green crabs, spider crabs, and horseshoe crabs, as well as many fish,

such as silversides, flounder, mummichogs, puffer fish, needle nose, pipefish, and even some tropical fish that have come in from the gulf stream toward the end of the summer season.



Additionally, we did two in-classroom programs this past summer for children at facilities in Smithfield and North Providence whose camps did not have the resources to bring them down to the refuge. Alicia (SPC's Executive Director) brings shells and other specimens that students can touch and make obser-

vations about from horseshoe crabs to oysters and clams. This year we worked with approximately 60 children.
We are thankful to all those who made our outdoor programming possible including

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# Message from the President

### Dear Members,

2024 has certainly flown by! Reflecting on our accomplishments in the past year, it couldn't have been done without the dedication of so many volunteers. As they say, it takes a village! We completed our 39th year of water quality monitoring. Many thanks to our dedicated Pond Watchers, some old timers but also several new faces. Julia Murphy and Sheila Andrew did a great job coordinating the effort. Overall, the ponds seem to be generally better than last year; there were lower bacteria levels, and the macro-algae was a bit less invasive though still very persistent. We will have a complete set of results once the URI Watershed Watch lab completes its analysis.

upgrade the Harbour Island causeway and restore flow in sections of Point Judith Pond, and keeping up-to-date on development plans along Winnapaug Pond in Westerly. We are co-sponsoring many community efforts, most recently a water quality summit in South Kingstown and information sessions regarding the Charlestown Breachway project in partnership with URI.

As always, we are trying to increase our membership, both to spread awareness and to ensure that we will be able to continue to do the work we do. Thanks to Angie's hard work we are securing quite a few new members in the Green Hill and eastern Charlestown areas.

If you know anyone who might have a love of the salt ponds, and wants to become a member, please encourage them to support SPC.

This year we had a full slate of field trips and salt pond safaris, as well as two paddle trips and our first ever bird walk. We are able to deliver all of our programming free of cost thanks to the wonderful volunteers who help us with these programs. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer for our education programs, please sign up on our website. Last month we celebrated our volunteers at the Haversham Inn. Many thanks to our Board, education helpers, and Pond Watchers!

SPC has been involved in several projects including the continuing septic system upgrades to reduce nitrogen with the Charlestown Wastewater Department, efforts in Narragansett to

SPC is finding itself in a period of organizational growth, and we are doing more. At the same time, many of our costs have gone up as well. We are working to recruit more members in the communities that surround the salt ponds. If you know anyone who might have a love of the salt ponds, and wants to become a member, please encourage them to support SPC. Also please consider us in your end of year giving.

Thank you for your continued support. •

Out ganz

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# WE OUR VOLUNTEERS!

ach year as our busy season closes, we take a moment to acknowledge the dozens of volunteers who keep our ship sailing smoothly. With work ranging from Board and committee positions to water quality sampling, field trip assistance, and even help at our fundraising event, no task was too small nor too big for our team of dedicated volunteers. We celebrated their hard work with a lovely gathering at The Haversham.
While there, we gave a
nod to our Pond Watchers
who have hit milestone
years with their service:

TEN YEARS Ray Gradale

FIFTEEN YEARS Kim & Paul Hooper, and Louise Nicolosi

To all of you who give your time and energy to further our mission, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. •



This year also brought the election of three new Directors onto our Board. We are pleased to introduce you to them!

# SHEILA ANDREW Sheila was born in RI, but her work took her around the country. Sheila and

her husband

returned



to Charlestown in 2017. She is a recently retired Professor of Animal Science at the University of Connecticut and spent her career supporting the economic and environmental sustainability of dairy farmers and the health and welfare of dairy herds in New England. She serves on the Town of Charlestown Zoning Board of Review and is also a SPC Pond Watcher co-coordinator.

### TIMOTHY KENEFICK

Tim has enjoyed the southern RI salt ponds for over 30 years windsurfing, sailing, and

kayaking such that he has become a permanent resident for the past four years. Tim has many years of experience in the PC Insurance industry in Actuarial, Financial and Management roles. He also has experience in volunteer public service roles in Charlestown as well as in his prior hometown in CT. He looks forward to contributing to SPC.



Julia, a New England native and a full-time resident of Quonochontaug, has enjoyed coastal



RI with her family since the mid-1980s. Julia began her involvement with SPC by volunteering at the Salt Pond Safaris. She is committed to SPC's mission to protect the salt ponds and serves as a co-coordinator of the Pond Watchers water sampling program. Julia recently retired from NYU College of Dentistry, where she served as Assistant Dean for many years.



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# Update on the Charlestown Breachway

By Art Ganz

ne of the most significant issues in South County this year was the impacts that winter storms had on our coastline; one place most impacted was the Charlestown Breachway in Ninigret Pond. Efforts to repair the breachway required a unified and dedicated group of town, state, and federal officials working nonstop. Their work to date has hopefully reduced both future ecological and economic damage. Although the breachway is in state waters and under the jurisdiction of both CRMC and RIDEM, Charlestown is indeed more impacted by the shoaling and blocking flow into the pond. Charlestown Breachway was built in various stages since the early 1900s and its current form was completed in the 1950s. Channel dredging has been done numerous times without any significant maintenance to the sea walls themselves. Part of the west wall was built into a large sand dune which served as its cornerstone. A few years ago, Hurricane Sandy flattened the dune and began a wash-over that worsened over time. Attempts to rebuild the dune were negatively impacted by the use of recreational vehicles on the dune itself.

Nor-easter storms during the winter of 2023 – 24 continually pounded the shoreline and eventually broke through the west wall. From then on high tides and storms pumped sand into the breachway channel forming a sand bar which filled and blocked it. To make matters worse, the out-going tide washed sand out of the channel creating a massive sandbar at the mouth of the breachway.

Many boaters avoided passing through the breachway altogether; however, several did and were successful, though notably three boats tried and failed. Fortunately, there were no fatalities, only a few injuries.

Charlestown's GIS (Geographic Information System)
Coordinator Steve McCandless and a geologist have been working on the problem almost nonstop. He secured a grant for design and permitting from the R.I. Infrastructure Bank And worked with RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) to secure permits for a short-term fix. However, funding for the project has been the major stumbling block. Senators Reed and Whitehouse, along with US Representative Magaziner, pledged

federal support when Congress passes a budget. State Representative Spears worked tirelessly to gather support from RIDEM and other state agencies. Fortunately, Charlestown budgets funds annually in the Beach and Pond Preservation Fund for local match for projects such as breachway dredging. The Town Council approved the use of these local funds and DEM provided funds as well for a temporary fix to the hole in the sea wall.

Repairs were completed at the end of October, but that isn't the end of the story. The total repair of the sea wall will require approximately \$6M to complete. When funded the total repair will raise and expand the sea wall northward to Elbow Beach. Core logs (huge burlap sacks filled with sand) will be placed to form a base for a new dune west of the wall. Once completed the channel will be dredged and the material will be used to form the dune over the core logs. The new dune will be vegetated as well. If funding is available and all goes as planned the breachway will be restored during the winter 2025 dredge window.

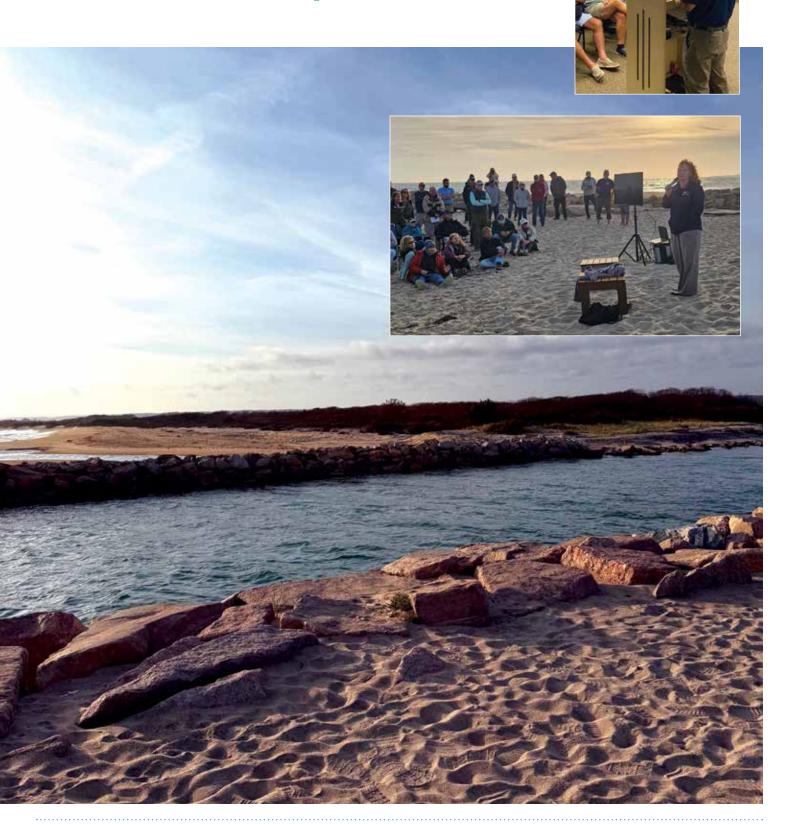
Steve came to our annual meeting in August and gave approximately 100 attendees an update on the breachway situation at that time; this was before any of the initial repairs. Subsequently, in late October we, along with partners, hosted over 120 people on the beach near the breachway for a discussion and tour to mark the completion of the first phase of repairs to the breachway which included an emergency repair to the western wall. If you missed either of these programs and would like more information, scan the QR codes below for more information.

Recently, we have had some inclement weather and storm advisories. We are happy to report that as of now, the repairs are holding and the breachway has continued to recover. •





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s the leaves have changed and we prepare for the holidays, we want to take a moment to reflect on the impact we've made together over the past year. Your generous membership contributions and support of our mission have allowed us to represent nearly every salt pond in our care through important projects and advocacy work. To note just a few examples:

- ♦ WINNAPAUG Voiced opposition to the large development at the Country Club which could impact water quality in the pond
- ◆ QUONOCHONTAUG Engaged with RIDEM to advocate for the improvements to the resiliency of the Quonnie Breachway
- ♦ NINIGRET Actively promoting Charlestown Breachway remediation
- ◆ GREEN HILL Partnering with the Southeast New England Program (SNEP) via a grant for nutrient pollution reduction
- ◆ POINT JUDITH Continuing the Harbour Island causeway improvement project

These campaigns are ongoing, and even more are on the horizon. Over the past few years our operational expenses have increased. We are asking you, **as a supporter who shares our vision**, to please consider making an end-of-year donation today to help us continue this important work.

End-of-year gifts, which are separate from annual membership contributions, are fully tax deductible and add an extra boost to our funding. You can donate online using the QR code or you can mail a check using the envelope provided here.

Thank you. Together, we can create lasting change. •



mission is to protect and enhance the health of the salt ponds for the benefit of wildlife and people. We are the official State-designated watershed council for RI Coastal Ponds. SPC was founded in 1985 with the creation of our water quality monitoring program, and multiple local groups coming together to protect the ponds more concertedly. We monitor six salt ponds in southwestern Rhode Island: Pt. Judith, Potter, Green Hill, Ninigret, Quonochontaug, and Winnapaug Ponds. Our organization is nearly 100% member-funded and is supported by amazing volunteers who serve as Board Directors, Committee Members, Pond Watchers, and Educators for our programs.

Glucia Schaffrer

# **Update: Nitrogen-Reducing Initiative**

by Alicia Schaffner and Matt Dowling (Town of Charlestown Onsite Wastewater Manager)

### Introduction

As reported in the last few newsletters, in Fall 2021 the Town of Charlestown, with partners Salt Ponds Coalition, Save the Bay, and the New England Onsite Wastewater Training Program (University of Rhode Island), were awarded \$749,999 from the US EPA Southeast New England Program to holistically manage pollution (especially nutrients) from onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) and stormwater in the subwatershed of Greater Allen's Cove and Eastern Ninigret Pond (the Pilot Watershed). Since our last newsletter, there has been a great deal of progress on this project.

### **Community Outreach**

Really listening to the concerns of the community and increasing awareness about the pollution problems in the Pilot Watershed was a big focus of our efforts. We kicked off the year with an online information session open to anyone interested in learning more about water quality in the area as well as our latest nutrient reducing efforts.

centralized place for more watershed management information, data, and guidance for individual homeowners. To address these needs, our project partners are actively developing a community-based learning and certification program entitled "Salt Pond Smart". This program is a voluntary assessment that homeowners can undertake for their property to understand how their existing OWTS, landscaping, and stormwater management impact their drinking water, community health, and salt pond health. Additionally, we are developing video training modules and accessible information for achieving tiered levels of "Salt Pond Smart" certification.

# Other Developments in OWTS and Stormwater Management

Nearly 80% of groundwater nitrogen in the densely developed coastal ponds region of Charlestown originates from OWTS effluent. Since 75% of septic systems in this region still utilize older conventional and substandard technologies that do not treat nitrogen, the majority of

With the OWTS modernized under this program over the past couple of years, there has been a total net annual reduction of nitrogen loading to the Pilot Watershed of approximately 317 pounds per year!

Over the course of the year, we had additional outreach events including a two-hour paddle tour of the Green Hill side of the Pilot Watershed. About 20 participants including homeowners from the local community came to learn more about the sources of nitrogen pollution as well as its impacts on human health and the environment. The Town of Charlestown's Office of Wastewater Management also developed relevant watershed management modules and hosted a weekly booth at the Charlestown Land Trust Farmer's Market this summer. Town staff collaborated with each of the grant partners to discuss topics relating to nutrient pollution, public health, and pond health in order to have both meaningful activities and conversations with market attendees.

Based on feedback from residents and visitors at these events, a theme emerged indicating public interest for a

impact to groundwater resources originates from these systems. The Town of Charlestown has continued to use their risk-based assessment of groundwater nitrogen loading to locate high risk systems to assist with replacement that would have the largest impact on the watershed. This year alone, through grant cost sharing, five high-risk, substandard polluting systems have been replaced with efficient modern nitrogen reducing technologies. With the OWTS modernized under this program over the past couple of years, there has been a total net annual reduction of nitrogen loading to the Pilot Watershed of approximately 317 pounds per year! Overtime, as more homes upgrade their systems, we will start to see the effects this will have on both ground water and pond water quality. This program could serve as a model to implement future cost sharing of OWTS modernization if

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board members Susan Carr, John Crandall, and Julia Murphy, SPC education committee member Fred Seebeck, and SPC members Kent Kreutler, Joan Crawford, Bill McCusker, Elise Torello, Lori Keough, intern Ben Peters, Kelly Leveillee, and student volunteers Andrew Gay and Sky McCabe.

We debuted a new program this year focused on BIRD-ING; it started with approximately 40 participants attending a Zoom presentation by Barbara Seith and Maria Bloom, who are both avid birders in the salt pond area. Intern Ben Peters helped to write multiple articles about local birds which were published over the course of the



spring and summer. To cap off the birding programing, we did an early morning bird walk at the Quonochontaug Breachway with approximately 10 attendees.

This year, SPC along with the Town of Charlestown, URI, and Save the Bay hosted a few public programs with funding from a SNEP Pilot Watershed grant which is focused on the REDUCTION OF NUTRIENT POLLUTION in the Eastern Ninigret-Green Hill Pond Watershed. In January, we co-hosted an online information session with about 50 attendees focused on the completed septic upgrades, water quality trends, and the development of the Salt Pond Smart Program. Then in June we led a paddle trip on Green Hill Pond with the assistance of Bill McCusker where approximately 20 participants were

able to ask questions about the project and see first-hand where things such as storm water improvements could be made.



Our last outdoor event of the summer was our PADDLE OF QUONOCHONTAUG POND co-hosted with the Quonochontaug Conservation Collaborative with about 20 participants. This paddle focused on the natural history of the pond, changes that have been seen over the years, and conservation efforts such as the acquisition of Bill's Island.

At our **ANNUAL MEETING** in early August, and again in October, we hosted events that related to the Charlestown Breachway repair on Ninigret Pond. The first event had approximately 100 people in attendance and the latter over 120. For more about these events, and our efforts there, check out the article on page 4.

This year we reached hundreds of people with outreach efforts — and this doesn't include the countless other presentations and meetings that SPC attends to ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THE HEALTH OF THE SALT PONDS. We hope to see you out on the ponds at one of our events next year! ◆

*Update: Nitrogen-Reducing Initiative, continued from page 7* future funding sources are identified, similar to successful programs on Long Island.

OWTS are only one part of the puzzle. Another, albeit smaller, source of nitrogen in the water system is stormwater runoff which includes excess fertilizers that wash away during storms. One way to manage this problem is to use limited amounts of lawn fertilizer or none at all. Additionally, the use of coastal plantings can help to catch excess nutrients before they make their way into the pond. This past year, several sites were evaluated by the Town of Charlestown and Save the Bay as potential areas for coastal planting installations; these sites are located on private, public, and neighborhood association properties. Coastal plantings near the water line also deter Canada Geese from foraging in those areas and help to eliminate goose waste from entering the salt pond. Salt Ponds Coalition continues to monitor three surface water sites in the Pilot Watershed as well as other sites in both Green Hill and Ninigret Ponds. Nitrogen is one of the key factors that we test for, and we will look for evidence of nitrogen reduction in the future. At present, we are gathering baseline data for the area as these systems continue to come online.

This project doesn't just have long term impacts on the Pilot Watershed, but the lessons that we learn here can be used in other similarly challenged areas (whether coastal or not). Both Matt Dowling (Town of Charlestown) and Alissa Cox (URI/NEOWTP) have on several occasions presented at a national level about their findings in our watershed to their industry peers. For more information on their most recent conference, scan the QR code below. While so much has already been done, there is still a lot left to do. You can follow the Town of Charlestown's Onsite Wastewater Department's Instagram (@ charlestown.ri\_owts\_program) for updates about the program. More information about participating in the

Salt Pond Smart Program will also be forthcoming. If you live near the Pilot Watershed and are interested in getting more involved, please email Alicia (alicia@joinsaltponds. com) for more information.



# **BACTERIA 2024**

While we don't have our full Water Quality results back from URI Watershed Watch, we can report on the bacteria concentrations exhibited in the ponds in 2024. Overall, this was a good year throughout the ponds. While we did have some major rainstorms, those acute events seemed to be the driver behind high bacteria numbers at most sites. There are some sites that are consistently high, particularly in Green Hill Pond and the upper parts of Pt. Judith Pond. The latter is resultant from high numbers in the Saugatucket River as it flows

southward into the pond. For more details, scan the QR code to see 2024's Bacteria Data.





# SPC HAT IN THE WILD

We always enjoy seeing our hats around South County, but it's a special treat when they make it beyond the confines of lil' Rhody. SPC's own Advancement Coordinator, Angela, wore her SPC hat to South Africa this year! Knowing the special place that South African Penguins hold in Executive Director Alicia's heart, she made sure to send this picture back home from the Simon's Town penguin colony. Send us your SPC hat in the wild pictures and a little information about the place that you visited and we will make sure to publish it in one of our next newsletters!

# **AUCTION RECAP**

'his year's fundraiser brought us to the historic Kinney Bungalow in Narragansett, a first for us. It was a beautiful day with a refreshing summer breeze floating in from across the fields, the perfect setting to celebrate and share in our mutual enjoyment of South County's salt ponds. We are pleased to report that we had roughly 120 in attendance at the event itself (with many more participating digitally) and net close to \$13,000. We thank you to all who attended and bid on this critical, annual fundraiser!

The Coastal Social is certainly an evening of fun but also a labor of love and would not have been possible without the countless hours of work put in by our volunteers behind the scenes. Additionally, our items and experiences would not exist without the generosity of our local businesses and community. To all of you, thank you. Please take the time to look over our list of donors and consider supporting those businesses who support SPC and prioritize the health of our salt ponds. •















IRISH JIG CHARTERS







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# Gifts for the Holidays

Looking for a gift for the pond-lover in your life and want to support SPC at the same time? EMAIL ANGELA@JOINSALTPONDS.COM TO ORDER!





KEEP THE SUN OUT OF YOUR EYES WITH OUR CLASSIC BALL CAP AVAILABLE IN CORAL, RED, WHITE, GREEN, KHAKI, PINK, AND BLUE.



**BANNER MAP \$20** 

BANNER MAP OF THE SALT PONDS, SURROUNDED BY POND WILDLIFE. 100% VINYL, WASHABLE. SUITABLE FOR FRAMING OR ADDING GROM-METS. MEASURES 3.5X2.5'.



MINI-TOTE, \$15

THIS 11X11" TOTE IS PERFECT FOR FARMER'S MARKETS, BEACH TRIPS, AND MORE. IT ALSO EASILY FOLDS TO FIT INTO A PURSE OR POCKET.



POLO SHIRT, \$30

THIS BLUE SHORT-SLEEVED POLO IS EMBROIDERED WITH THE SPC LOGO, AND COMES IN BOTH MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SIZES.

# JOIN US TODAY!

Because it takes a coalition to protect RI Salt Ponds

YES! I want to show my support for Salt Ponds Coalition and my commitment to protecting the irreplaceable salt ponds that make Rhode Island so special. To ensure our salt ponds are always protected, cared for, and shared, I am joining SPC with a generous membership contribution at the following level:

Contributor	\$45-\$74
Supporter	\$45-\$149
Sustainer	\$150-\$249
Advocate	\$250-\$499
Steward	\$500-\$999
Benefactor	\$1,000-\$2,499
Patron	\$2,500+
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Visit **SALTPONDSCOALITION.ORG** to sign up online, or complete the form below and mail it to:

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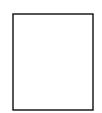
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**QUESTIONS? CALL 401 322-3068** 





WATERSHED COUNCIL FOR RI SALT PONDS, ESTABLISHED 1985

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