



Charlestown Breachway Repairs Complete

By Alicia Schaffner, SPC Executive Director

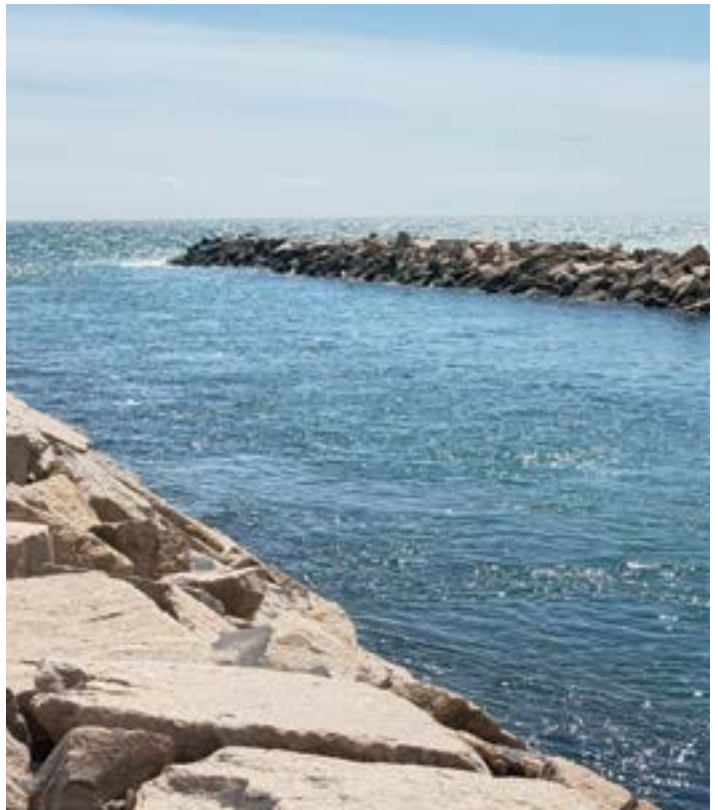
Repairs to the Charlestown Breachway are complete!

Why were repairs needed?

The Charlestown Breachway as we know it today officially opened in April of 1952. With some maintenance dredging to the breachway channel, it remained pretty strong without need of much repair for over 70 years. However, in December of 2023 and January of 2024, that changed. During that winter, a series of storms caused the western wall of the breachway to falter, leading to a change in water flow that inundated the breachway with sand, made navigation of the breachway difficult, and had the potential to impair water quality. In October 2024, the first stage of the breachway rehabilitation was completed. This was an emergency repair to stabilize a section of the western wall that had been damaged in the aforementioned storm. But that was far from the end of what was needed to once again make the breachway whole.

Funding and Partnership

This was truly a multi-partner process that was years in the making. The Town of Charlestown really took the lead to make this project happen and has partnered with the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank, the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant, and SPC to secure funding for this project. There were also a handful of state legislators who have been helpful in securing funding for the project. The majority of the funding, \$5 million, was obtained by RIDEM and was allocated by the state through CRMC. Another \$2 million is money from CRMC from funds that are designated for dredging. And finally, \$1.4 million came from the Town of Charlestown Beach and Pond Preservation Fund. SPC was not only



VIEW LOOKING OUT ON BLOCK ISLAND SOUND

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Message from the President

Dear Members,

Finally, we have emerged from an old-fashioned New England winter! This was one of the most severe winters we have had in years with the highest snowfall ever and most of the salt ponds frozen. But now it is time to look forward to warmer weather and time out on the ponds.

Despite the winter weather, repair and dredging of the Charlestown Breachway went off without a hitch! A huge thanks to Steve McCandless who has shepherded this project to completion. We still have projects on Point Judith, Green Hill and Winnapaug in progress so keep a look out for updates throughout the summer.

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Alicia was recently voted onto the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program's (NBEP) Steering Committee. NBEP brings together stakeholders to improve water quality, protect habitats, and enhance climate resilience through science-based

solutions throughout Rhode Island. Alicia will be a representative of the coastal ponds' region on the committee. Related to this, Alicia has been working with NBEP on a new water quality dashboard which debuted at the Rhode Island Land and Water Summit and will be added to our website in the coming months.

We are gearing up for a busy season. Pond Watchers began their sampling in mid-May. Field trips, safaris, and paddle tours will all be happening this spring and summer. If you are interested in volunteering, please let us know.

Also, I can't express enough how much we appreciate the support of members and the local community. During 401Gives, we raised just over \$3,000. I hope you will be able to join us at The Coastal Social, our annual fundraising event held every July. This year we are looking forward to hosting it at a new venue, the Point Judith Country Club. If you are interested in donating an auction item or helping to sponsor the event, please reach out to Angie.

As always, a great big THANK YOU to Alicia and Angie who keep SPC running! ♦



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OUR MISSION

Salt Ponds Coalition's 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.

WE ♥ OUR VOLUNTEERS!



Joan Pavlinsky, a (mostly) retired psychotherapist with a background in integrative medicine, is fascinated with how our health and well-being relates to the world around us. Joan has been a Pond Watcher since 2022, when asked why it was so important to her to start volunteering with SPC, here is what she said. "I've been a Charlestown resident since 2017, and it was a

deadly cancer diagnosis that led me away from the rolling hills of Goshen, Connecticut. When I was told to 'get my affairs together,' I had been meditating on the poem *People Who Live* by Erica Jong (see box) and decided to come down to East Beach two days before my surgery."

On the way up north, I made a pact with myself that if I lived, I would find a way to explore my connection to the sea and make South County my home. A year later, I bought my cottage by-the-sea. I have been a Pond Watcher on Green Hill Pond/Indigo Point for the past four years. My initiation to Green Hill Pond was during the showing of my home. However, when I inquired

about swimming in the salt pond, the real estate agent informed me it was not clean enough for shell fishing or swimming; I was devastated! So, I made it my mission to learn more about this natural resource which eventually led me to the Salt Ponds Coalition. We love the beauty and the endless open water in addition to the swimming, kayaking, cycling and hiking opportunities. And we are grateful to have so many great environmental stewards amongst us.

Thank you, Joan, for your dedication to Green Hill Pond and the Salt Ponds Coalition! ♦

Here's just one part of the poem. We encourage you to look it up in its entirety:

People who live by the sea
understand eternity. [...]
They know that the house of flesh
is only a sandcastle
built on the shore,
that skin breaks
under the waves
like sand under the soles
of the first walker on the beach
when the tide recedes

WELCOME BACK, ELISE

We are excited to welcome Elise Torello back onto the SPC Board! Elise was a member of the Board some time ago and even served as the Executive Director prior to our current ED, Alicia Schaffner. Elise lives surrounded by woods and wildlife in South Kingstown, where she raised her two sons. She is a two-time URI graduate, with a BS degree in Wildlife Biology and an MS in Computer Science. She was introduced to SPC when she attended a Point Judith Pond paddle on a whim in 2007 and continued to be involved over the years as a Pond Watcher (2008-2022), board member (2008-2012), executive director (2012-2014), and ongoing volunteer. A lifelong conservationist, she has been employed by and volunteered with the US EPA laboratory in Narragansett, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, the RI Rivers Council, the former Friends of the Saugatucket, and the South Kingstown Land Trust, on which she currently serves as Board Secretary. She is locally "famous" for her trail camera videos and always has several cameras deployed in the nearby woods. What started as her hobby has become a source of enjoyment and connection with nature for friends, family, and community members who watch her videos online. Elise is devoted to conservation and hopes to turn people into cheerleaders for nature and wildlife through her photography and videos. ♦



Breachway Repairs Complete, continued from page 1

a supporter of this project, but alongside URI Sea Grant helped to host many of the outreach opportunities to provide the public with information about the project as well as multiple forums in which to ask questions.

Rebuilding the Breachway

In late September 2025, the Town of Charlestown Town Council accepted contractor bids. With permits in hand and plans finalized, work began in early November after the RIDEM campground adjacent to the breachway closed for the season. With Blue Shutters Town Beach acting as the staging area, large boulders were delivered that would eventually make their way down the East Beach Barrier to the breachway's western wall. Around 7,000 tons of stone would ultimately be used to rebuild the western wall to a height of approximately 9 feet. This height along with the dunes that were built behind the breachway should allow the breachway to withstand large storms and changes to the ecosystem for the next 75 years.

The dunes behind the breachway were created using dredged material from the channel. Just under 30,000 cubic yards of sand was placed to the west of the breachway creating the aforementioned dunes which make both the western wall of the breachway and the barrier beach more structurally sound. Just over 60,000 cubic yards of sand were placed to the east of the breachway, widening the beach and improving the shoreline on that side of the breachway as well. The breachway had its first real test before it was even completed and it withstood Winter Storm Hernando which dropped nearly 40 inches of snow in the area. The restoration site experienced little to no damage at all.

Looking to the Future

Project partners and supporters of the project gathered on April 7, 2026 at the breachway to celebrate the completion of the breachway restoration project. RIDEM Director Terry Gray, CRMC Executive Director Jeff Willis, as well as local legislators Rep. Tina Spears and Sen. Victoria Gu all spoke about the importance of the breachway and the teamwork that it took to make this project happen. The Town of Charlestown's GIS Coordinator, Steve McCandless, who was the driving force behind this project also spoke, thanking not only the project partners but also the contractors and engineers who made the planning become reality.

There is still more to be done though. Contractors will



LOOKING TOWARD NINIGRET POND.

return in Fall 2026 to inspect the completed work and perform any needed improvements. Additionally, in either the fall of this year or spring 2027, sand fencing will be installed and dune grasses will be planted to further stabilize the area for the long-term.

This project was beneficial in a multitude of ways as it will restore the breachway's structural integrity which has remained relatively maintenance free since it was built nearly a century ago. It made navigation of the breachway safer, stabilized the coastline, preserved the tidal flow in and out of Ninigret Pond which helps maintain water quality and a healthy habitat for the flora and fauna that rely on the ponds. Quonochontaug Pond's breachway is also in need of this kind of repair. The work done on Ninigret serves as an excellent template for future work on Quonnie as well.



Links

For a timeline of all of the work done at the restoration site, visit the breachway project page on the Town of Charlestown's website. It has lots of great photos and videos from both before and during the project's timeframe. Scan the QR code to access the website or visit charlestownri.gov/breachwayinformation.



For the official press release about the completion of the Charlestown Breachway Project, scan the QR code or visit dem.ri.gov/press-releases/long-term-repair-charlestown-breachway-completed. ♦



SPC was not only a supporter of this project, but hosted many of the outreach opportunities to provide the public with information.



ABOVE, SHORED UP DUNES WILL REINFORCE THE INTEGRITY OF THE WESTERN WALL OF THE BREACHWAY.

OPPOSITE PAGE: STEVE MCCANDLESS, TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN'S GIS COORDINATOR, SPEAKS AT THE BREACHWAY CELEBRATION.



JOIN SALT PONDS COALITION!

**SEE OUR MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS ON PAGE 11 OR
VISIT SALTPONDSKOALITION.ORG**

Establishment of the Winnapaug Pond Public Access & Conservation Area

Last year, we mentioned that Salt Ponds Coalition (SPC) supported the Town of Westerly's acquisition of the old "Water Wizz" property which is adjacent to Winnapaug Pond and was notable for the large slides and gift shop that were present for many years on the parcel. The property is approximately 7.31 acres. This project was funded by a \$2.635 million grant award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Coastal Zone Management Program which was sponsored by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This award allowed Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to buy a conservation easement from the Town of Westerly for six acres of undeveloped marsh on the property.

Throughout the latter half of 2025, the Town of Westerly and RIDEM's Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR) were responsible for developing both management and restoration plans for the area. SPC was included as a partner in this process, and the parcel has also now been renamed the Winnapaug Pond Public Access & Conservation Area. If you drive past the property located on Atlantic Ave, you will see a new sign commemorating the project (pictured right), and keep an eye out as work continues to conserve this area. ♦



SPC HELPS CLEAN UP SAUGATUCKET RIVER

On April 25, SPC partnered up with the Wakefield Village Association (WVA) to host a clean-up of the Saugatucket River in downtown Wakefield. The Saugatucket River flows into the northern part of Pt. Judith Pond. Keeping upstream areas clean helps to prevent pollution from entering into Pt. Judith Pond and beyond. Friends of the Saugatucket has hosted this clean-up in previous years, and we were happy to carry on that tradition with their guidance. We had just about 25 volunteers join us for the clean-up including a few South Kingstown high school students from the Interact Club who helped us to promote and set up the event. We also had two kayakers out on the pond cleaning out trash from the river itself, including current SPC Board Member Elise Torello and former FOS Board Member Jay Taranto. After nearly five hours of hard work, we were able to fill a truck trailer full of trash (see picture). We are so grateful for all those who came out to help! ♦

A BRITISH DELEGATION VISITS NINIGRET POND

By Alicia Schaffner, SPC Executive Director

Back in February, I had a unique opportunity to meet with visitors from the British Consulate in Boston as well as three British officials who travelled from the UK as part of a larger University of Rhode Island (URI) Blue Economy event. A blue economy is the sustainable use of our ocean and coastal resources to help create jobs and drive a local economy while at the same time protecting the health and long-term sustainability of the marine ecosystems on which this economy relies. Rhode Island has an over \$5 billion blue economy which employs more than 6% of Rhode Islanders across seven business sectors such as fishing and aquaculture. Rhode Island's coastal ponds are a part of this economy as they are the home to many aquaculture leases, the state's fishing fleet, marinas, and more.

A large part of URI's involvement in the Blue Economy is the connection of researchers all around the world sharing new discoveries as well as innovative practices and technology. To that end, the most notable aspect of the visit for me was the lunchtime round table. Our visitors from the UK shared how they are tackling certain environmental and coastal issues, and we had the opportunity to share some of our experiences as well. One of the key projects that was highlighted by

RIDEM Director Terry Grey and CRMC Director Jeff Willis was the Charlestown Breachway wall repair and dune restoration project. After a brief overview of the project, there was a field trip to the breachway itself where the visitors were able to see restoration of the area firsthand. I was happy to be there to answer questions that they had about Ninigret Pond, its health, what SPC does as an organization to protect the pond, and why this project was so important to its long-term health.

Scan the QR code below or visit uri.edu/news/2026/02/united-kingdom-and-rhode-island-celebrate-blue-economy-partnership-at-university-of-rhode-island/ to read an article about the event published in *Rhody Today*. The photo below was taken during the event. I am standing with members of the British delegation as well as various members of URI's Coastal Resources Center, Rhode Island Sea Grant, and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. ♦



Upcoming Programming

As the seasons shift and the ponds come alive again, we're excited to welcome back a full lineup of programs. This year, we'll continue hosting our beloved Salt Pond Safaris and guided paddles, offering new opportunities to get out on the water and experience the beauty of these special places up close.

We also hope to continue some of our newer offerings, including our art program and guided bird walks, which have quickly become wonderful ways to connect people to the ponds through creativity and observation.

And of course, we're already preparing for our signature annual fundraiser, The Coastal Social, a celebration of community and support for the work that keeps our salt ponds healthy and thriving. We are always on the lookout

for new items, excursions, services, and experiences to offer as auction items in our fundraiser. If you would like to contribute, please contact Angela at angela@joinsaltponds.com. We encourage you to think out-of-the-box, new auction opportunities keeps our fundraiser fresh and interesting!

Be sure to scan the QR code to visit our calendar page, which will be updated regularly with upcoming events, details, and RSVP information throughout the season. ♦



The poster features a background image of a coastal town with a large ferry boat in the water. In the top left corner is the Salt Ponds Coalition logo, which is a circular emblem with a bird and a plant. The text "Save the Date" is written in a large, bold, blue font, with "July 9, 2026" below it in a smaller, blue font. The main title "Join us for the Salt Ponds Coalition's Coastal Social" is written in a blue, serif font. In the bottom left corner, there are logos for "THE COASTAL SOCIAL" (with wavy lines below) and "PJCC 1894" (with a lighthouse icon). In the bottom right corner, the event details are listed: "DATE: July 9, 2026", "TIME: 6 pm", and "PLACE: Point Judith Country Club". At the very bottom of the poster, it says "Visit saltpondscoalition.org for more event information. If you have any questions, please contact angela@joinsaltponds.com."



VOLUNTEER WITH SALT PONDS COALITION!

LET US KNOW YOU ARE INTERESTED – VISIT SALTPONDS Coalition.ORG AND FILL OUT THE VOLUNTEER FORM



Summer Schedule 2026



SALT POND SAFARIS

Join us for a **hands-on experience** which introduces children and their families to a variety of aquatic creatures living in the salt ponds. Program is free. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Capacity is limited. Please pre-register.

SATURDAYS:

June 27

July 11

July 25

August 1

August 15



TIME:

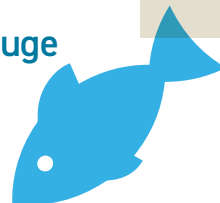
10 am

PLACE:

Ninigret Wildlife Refuge

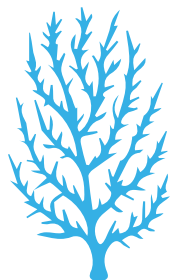
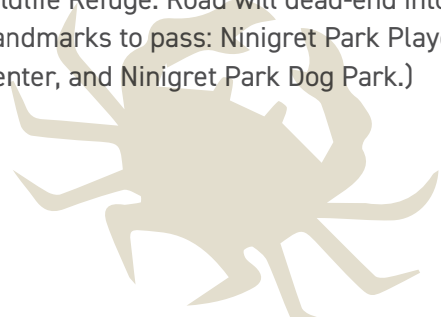


To Register,
Scan QR Code



To get to Ninigret Park:

Enter at GPS: 5 Park Lane, Charlestown, RI. From there, continue to follow signs for the Wildlife Refuge. Road will dead-end into Wildlife Refuge Parking lot. (Landmarks to pass: Ninigret Park Playground, Frosty Drew Nature Center, and Ninigret Park Dog Park.)



Questions? Contact Us

401-322-3068 | angela@joinsaltponds.com. Visit our calendar at saltpondscoalition.org

Lion's Mane Jellies in the Salt Ponds

This spring we have seen quite a few Lion's Mane jellies in the salt ponds. While most of the ones that I have seen have been on the smaller to medium sized, there have been reports of larger ones spotted.

Lion's Mane jellies are typically seen in Rhode Island in the early spring and into summer. Different jellies bloom at different times based upon water temperature and conditions. Lion's Mane tend to bloom earlier in the year when the water is cold, and then they tend to decline as the water gets warmer in the summer months. As a cold-water species, they prefer to float in the ocean as opposed to the salt ponds. Its name is derived from its color – its orange, hair-like tentacles resemble that of a lion's mane.

They are a true jelly, and are an invertebrate closely related to corals and anemones. In general, jellies are planktonic animals which means that with a limited ability to swim, they are carried through the water by the wind and tides.

While they only have a lifespan of about a year, they can grow quick and quite large. They are one of the largest species of jellies: their bell can reach a diameter of six to

seven feet with tentacles extending over 120 feet long. For context, Blue whales which are the largest known animals to have ever lived, typically measure between 80 to 100 feet in length. When found in Rhode Island, the jellies tend to be much smaller, typically under 12 inches, and rarely larger than 3 feet. The largest recorded Lion's Mane jelly was not too far from Rhode Island. It was found in Massachusetts in 1865 with a bell diameter of 7 feet and 120 foot tentacles.

These jellies do have a moderate sting and should be handled with caution. Avoid touching the tentacles as that is where their nematocysts (stinging cells) are located. Jellies that are no longer

alive can still sting as the nematocysts structure is maintained even after death. ♦

Fun Fact: Many people call jellies “jellyfish”; however, this is an inaccurate term as jellies are invertebrates that lack a backbone, brain, heart, blood, and gills. True fish are vertebrates.



SPOTTED IN THE WILD

Here we have members John and Robin Stronk on their trip to Scotland. Robin sported her SPC hat on the highest peak in the United Kingdom- Ben Nevis in the Scottish Highlands!

We love sharing our members' adventures. As always, we encourage you to send photos of you wearing your SPC hat “in the wild” to angela@joinsaltponds.com. ♦

GIFTS FOR ANYTIME!

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!



BALL CAP \$20

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 GROMMETS. 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 (*please check box*):

- Contributor: \$55-\$149
- Supporter: \$150-\$274
- Advocate: \$275-\$524
- Steward: \$525-\$999
- Benefactor: \$1,000-\$2,499
- Patron: \$2,500+
- I want to be a Water Quality Monitoring Sponsor! (\$750+ membership to cover lab fees.)
- Check if you would like a hat with your \$275+ membership (circle color):
blue, red, khaki, pink, coral, white, green

Visit **SALTPONDS Coalition.ORG** to sign up online, or complete the form below and mail it to:

Salt Ponds Coalition
PO Box 875
Charlestown, RI 02813

Name _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Address _____

City _____

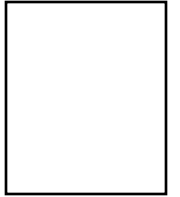
State _____ Zip _____

Your information will never be shared. Salt Ponds Coalition is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Your membership donation is tax-deductible.

QUESTIONS? CALL 401 322-3068



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WATERSHED COUNCIL FOR RI SALT PONDS, ESTABLISHED 1985

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