

The Committee for the Great Salt Pond

Member Newsletter Fall 2015

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear members and friends -

Thank you for your interest in the Committee for the Great Salt Pond. The CGSP has been working on many fronts this year in addition to water quality testing and the Champlin legal battle that still goes on! We have been leading or active in the discussions regarding access to Beane Point; plans for storm protection on Corn Neck Road; storm water run-off in the Pond's watershed; potential new zoning regulations; septic wastewater regulations; analysis of rising sea level; dune restoration; creation of an education platform at the Solviken property; and improvement of New Harbor facilities and services for boaters. Each of these may be relatively small but collectively they are significant in protecting the pond.

We are coordinating our work with many different committees, agencies and trusts, and are often asked to participate in projects of community concern. For example, the CGSP was recently asked by the Town Council to work with landowners, scientists, and the Town to ensure that proposed improvements at Champlin's Farm will include proper buffers and will manage storm water runoff. Similarly, we are directly partnering with The Land Trust and BI Conservancy on the Solviken land to improve outreach and education.

As true stewards, we are ready to defend the pond against the next egregious marina expansion or development while also focusing on finding solutions to all the issues impacting the pond in order to keep the Great Salt Pond GREAT. But to do this there are costs and we need your help.

Please consider giving generously to CGSP so that we can continue our stewardship of the pond. In advance, thank you very much for your support.

Regards

Sven Risom, President CGSP

Important Dates

August 13, 2016

The Great Salt Pond Swim 2
Andy's Way - 11 am

go to:

www.CGSPBlockIsland.org,
click on "2016 Swim" where you
will see the "Register" link and
"Participant Packet" link

We need volunteers and

sponsors. If you would like to
be a volunteer, know of a
sponsor for this event, or just
have questions about the swim,
contact: Cheryl Moore at
CGSPBlockIsland.org, click on
the "contact" link and mention
2016 Swim.

UPDATE ON THE CHAMPLIN'S MARINA EXPANSION CASE

The Champlin's Marina application for its marina expansion, after almost 10 years of hearings and appeals, was denied in 2010 by the CRMC by a 10-0 vote. Normally this would mean that the applicant would have to come back to the CRMC with a new application, for a new marina expansion plan, to receive consideration.

In 2012 Payne's Dock applied for a much smaller expansion (80' dock length extension and 12 boats vs. 240' dock length extension and nearly 100 boats for Champlin's). It was approved by the CRMC in the fall of that year. Champlin's subsequently filed a suit against the CRMC in RI Superior Court claiming that the approval of the Payne's Dock marina expansion application, and the denial of the Champlin's Marina expansion application, amounted to disparate and discriminatory treatment.

The RI Superior court ordered the CRMC to hold hearings and collect evidence on the above and to determine if, in fact, the CRMC had discriminated against Champlin's Marina when it approved the Payne's Dock application. A number of hearings were held, at which the Committee for the Great Salt Pond board members Sven Risom and Henry duPont testified. They held that because of the significantly greater impact of the proposed Champlin's expansion as compared to the proposed Payne's Dock expansion, the CRMC was justified in denying one and granting the other.

In August of 2013 the CRMC finally found, in a 6-2 vote, that both applications had been duly considered under the same criteria and no disparate treatment was involved. The case has now been sitting at the superior court for final disposition. We expect that this will end this challenge to the CRMC with regard to the Champlin's Marina application, but would not be surprised if other challenges are forthcoming.

The Good News is, that with CGSP's active participation in the process – and after 12 years of opposing this project – the proposed Champlin's Marina expansion still has not taken place.

3RD ANNUAL FIREWORKS PICNIC

This year's picnic was a social and financial success. Contributions of goods and services were very generous, and income increased significantly due to a major sponsorship by Deepwater Wind, great raffle ticket sales, and a great silent auction. The weather was perfect, and the fireworks were spectacular !

WHY DOES IT MATTER? WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Stewards on an Island

Being a steward of Block Island's Great Salt Pond is our job, our focus, the mission for which the Committee for the Great Salt Pond was created a quarter-century ago. Recognizing that the Pond is a unique asset of the island, we work to keep it environmentally healthy and to protect it from overdevelopment.

But one steward is not enough. The challenges facing the Great Salt Pond are complex and interrelated, and the task of dealing with them is not always easy. It calls for knowledge and perspective from many organizations, private and public. Building consensus is often a messy process, and slow. The single-actor solution is usually simpler and neater, but it also often turns out to be wrong. Another inconvenient fact is that while many organizations come to the table with a genuine desire to help, agency boundaries and bureaucracy often work as blinders, blocking the wider view that is needed. Several recent events remind us of that.

This past summer the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that a dirt road be built on Beane Point, along the west side of the island. It owns buildings and some of the land there. The intent was to provide access for maintenance equipment and work crews. A straightforward solution: Need access; build road. Bad idea. Not factored into the proposal was the likelihood that the road and its construction would accelerate an already serious problem of erosion along this strip of land that separates Block Island Sound from the Great Salt Pond. The strip is narrow and barely above mean sea level. It is disappearing year by year as a result of wave action and storm surge. Should this neck be breached, with the sea flowing freely into the Pond, there could be a drastic environmental impact.

The potential damage was pointed out by us, by the Town Council, and by other organizations. We argued that what is needed is not an access road but a plan to strengthen natural barriers and reverse or block erosion. As for the maintenance crews and equipment, we suggested that they get to Beane Point by boat, as was done in the past.

A second example threatens the other side of the Pond, along Corn Neck Road, and it also revolves around climate change, sea level rise, and what meteorologists call "severe weather events." This is an area particularly vulnerable to storm damage, as we have learned more than once. Most recently, due to Hurricane Sandy Corn Neck Road lost a sizable stretch of its paving and subsurface. A future storm generating an even larger surge could have far more devastating consequences. It could easily join the ocean to Harbor Pond and the Great Salt Pond, bisecting Block Island.

Because it is a state road, the state Department of Transportation could come up with a plan to simply rebuild Corn Neck Road. However, what is needed is an all-island strategy to cope with all of the issues wrapped around sea level rise and the increased frequency of major East Coast storms. We are obliged to think about everything from short-term disaster relief to long-range planning for transportation, electrical power, sewage disposal, and fire, police and medical services. We are forced, as well, to deal with such political hot buttons as where people should be allowed to build or rebuild houses, how much risk is too much, and who pays how much for flood insurance.

In October a meeting at Town Hall was convened to talk about such matters. We congratulate the organizers, the staff of the Coastal Resources Management Council, for the way they handled it. The vulnerability of Corn Neck Road was the centerpiece for discussion. But they had the foresight to invite stakeholders of all sorts – Town Council members, state and local planners, nonprofit conservation and environmental groups (CGSP included), university coastal resources experts, emergency management specialists, community development officials, and interested citizens. They asked everyone not just to listen but also to participate. We did.

No one expected this meeting to produce a master strategy, but it brought together the agencies and individuals with the ability to do so. That was an important step in the right direction, and a pointed reminder that whether we are talking about a stretch of road or something bigger, we are all in this together. **We are all stewards, and doing our job means working with one another.**

THE GREAT SALT POND SWIM - 1

This past summer, on a beautiful August 15th day, 78 swimmers lined up on the shore of Andy's Way Beach in anticipation of the one-mile swim that would take them out into the Great Salt Pond and back. This was a resoundingly successful event because of the swimmers and the generosity of our sponsors and volunteers. Their support made it all possible. In addition, spectators lined the shore and cheered on the swimmers as they came out of the water to receive swim medals and beach towels. There were expressions of relief and huge smiles on the faces of those completing the swim - they were amazing! Already planned for next year, The Great Salt Pond Swim - 2 is scheduled for Saturday, August 13, 2016. So mark your calendars and sign up **NOW!**

CGSP 2015 ANNUAL MEETING - CAITLIN CHAFFEE AND STEVE LAND, SPEAKERS

On September 13, the Committee for the Great Salt Pond held its annual meeting at the Block Island Maritime Institute. Board members provided a summary of ongoing work and successful fundraising projects that took place during the year. These included continuing to contest the expansion of Champlin's Marina; hosting the third annual Fireworks Picnic and inaugurating the first annual Great Salt Pond Swim; and providing a water quality update along with a potential project to map the bottom of the Pond. In addition, two new board members, Diane Robina and Tricia Foley, were elected.

Harbormaster Steve Land then spoke about the current and future needs of the people who use the Pond: the status of our harbor, services, and the island's ability to meet boater needs. Land stated that safety was the priority of his department, and with no adverse weather this summer, the harbor was in good shape. The one problem that occurred this summer was the excavator that had been dropped into the channel. There were also a few challenges before the season began, one being a lost water line at the Boat Basin and the second, a condemned building housing the Harbormaster department. A new water line was installed by the Town; and fortunately, Land was able to shore up the building for the summer season. A new facility is needed however, and Land suggested that it could include a dinghy dock and bathroom/toilet facilities along with a new office. Land feels that the addition of showers would encourage boaters to use them instead of using cramped boat showers, helping to keep the wastewater out of the Pond.

The second speaker, CRMC Coastal Policy Analyst Caitlin Chaffee, presented information about planning for sea level rise over the coming years, what to expect, and how to mitigate its effects. Chaffee noted that the rate of sea level rise is definitely increasing along with storm erosion along many shorelines and the destruction of salt marshes. Some of the state's solutions to the sea level rise include coastal buffers, the building of a green infrastructure, and habitat restoration. After looking into ways to protect the shoreline, it was found that sea walls can actually cause more problems than they prevent. One alternative solution is the use of coconut fiber logs, where sand is wrapped with a coconut fiber fabric and rolled into a log or tube shape. A slope can then be built using multiple logs, and covered with sand and plants.

The use of these coconut fiber logs is a good solution in some places and has been successfully done at Warwick City Park. Another solution to flooded streets or "nuisance flooding" is to replace roads that are repeatedly flooded by marshes. In Warwick, where many small neighborhood roads extend to the shore and have been repeatedly damaged by flooding, some of the streets have been removed and replaced by marshes. The question was asked about the best steps to take to restore the dunes on Corn Neck Road destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. According to Chaffee, there are presently no plans to restore this area. Sven Risom, CGSP President, pointed out that the restoration of these dunes is critical to maintaining the Pond.



WATER QUALITY



In July we received the Summary Report for 2001 through 2014 from our partner URI Watershed Watch. We are pleased to announce that the summary indicates that the overall health of the Pond is good. However, we are also aware that, "during the fourteen years of monitoring, increases in nutrients have been detected, and a number of tributary streams have had high levels of both nutrients and bacteria, particularly following rain events." We also know that our results have levels of variability. As a result, "Continued monitoring of both the Great Salt Pond and its tributary streams is essential in order to determine whether apparent nutrient increases are an actual trend in water quality, or due to natural variability in response to weather patterns and the degree of associated uses of this well-used and beloved ecosystem."

We have a long-standing commitment to continue our work to monitor this environmental asset which is available to islanders and our visitors alike. The Committee's Water Quality Program is also committed to exploring *all* upland non-point sources of pollution that may be degrading the health of the Pond. As the Town Council and various other boards and committees continue to discuss and consider how to properly address non-point sources of pollution, this Water Quality Program will maintain its position to support sustainable solutions for our island community.





Our Facebook Page - [cgsplblockisland](#)
Learn more about us and our activities to
protect and preserve the Great Salt Pond.

Our Website - [cgsplblockisland.org](#)
Visit our website where you can catch up
on activities for the coming season, pay
your annual dues or make a donation.
There is a page dedicated to the second
BI Swim in the Great Salt Pond on
August 13th. You will be able to read all
the details about the event, including
registration for the swim.

The Committee for the Great Salt Pond
P.O. Box 1092
Block Island, Rhode Island 02807



OUR MISSION

To protect and enhance the environmental quality of the Great Salt Pond, including its shorelines and wetlands, and to promote appropriate and productive uses of the Pond's resources by residents, visitors and local businesses.

ABOUT US

Directors:
Sven Risom, President
Carl Kaufmann, Vice President
Jean Taber, Treasurer
Cheryl Moore, Secretary
Peter Baute
Henry duPont
Tricia Foley
Kevin Hoyt
Bruce Johnson
Jane Musky
Betsy Pyne
Diane Robina

Members:
Approximately 450

Governance:
Up to 16 Directors

Funding:
Individual contributions, membership dues, special events, program grants. IRS 501(c)3 non-profit.
Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.