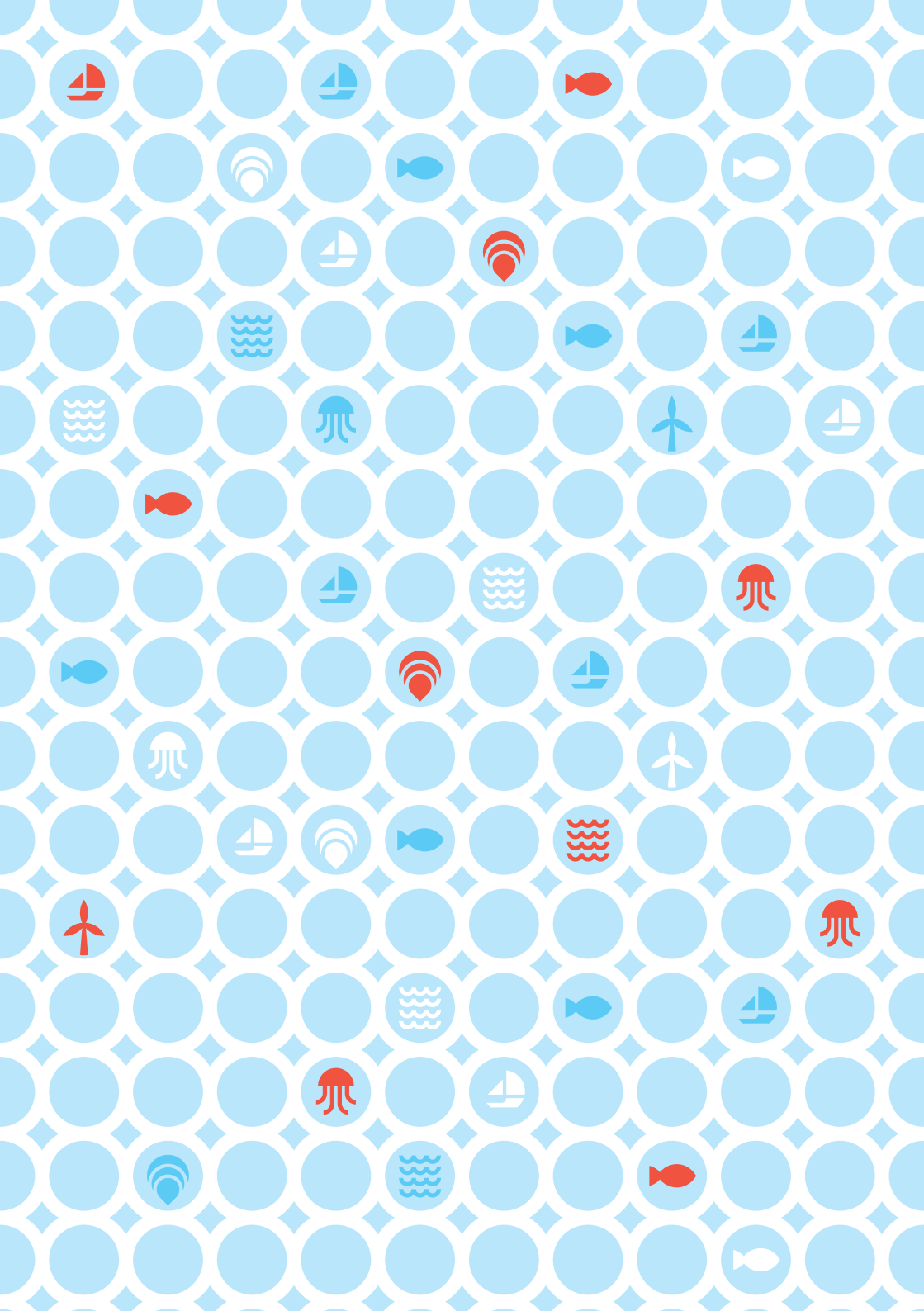
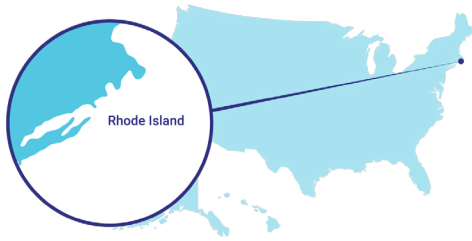


# MULTI-USE BLUEPRINT

Aquaculture, Recreational Fishing and Boating  
in Rhode Island, United States



## Location



Located in the New England region of the Northeastern US is Rhode Island, the smallest (by area) yet the second most densely populated U.S. state, that borders the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and the Atlantic Ocean. Its official nickname is the "Ocean State", a reference to its 400 miles (640 km) of coastline and the large bays and inlets that comprise about 14% of the state (169 sq miles (438 kilometers)). From high-tech defense spurring innovation, to world-class marine trades and composites contributing to the state's reputation as the sailing capital of the world, to internationally respected oceanographic research and strategic military educational institutions tackling complex issues and training future leaders to solve local and global challenges, Rhode Island's economy, culture, and society significantly depends on the ability to access and share its healthy ocean and coastal resources. The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is obligated under its state enabling legislation to "preserve, protect, develop, and, where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state." – basically to balance all these often-competing uses, encourage synergies, including protecting the fragile natural resources. An example of this undertaking is CRMC's efforts to minimize conflict and encourage appropriate economic growth and synergies between traditional uses, such as recreational fishing and boating, with the aquaculture

## Description

Aquaculture, primarily for oysters run by local farmers, is one of the state's fastest growing enterprises with a nearly \$6.07 million value of aquaculture products for consumption and seed sales in 2019 covering more than 340 acres of the coastline. Farmers and community members often disagree about whether and how the industry should operate in these pristine waters, and what farms should look like above and below the surface. Most aquaculture farmers implement best management practices, such as keeping their farms tidy and clean and only working on their farms during certain times of the day and/or year to minimize conflict. There is recognition by many about the habitat and water quality benefits of shellfish aquaculture, however issues including the use of some gear types, such as floating gear, and the growth of aquaculture development is escalating the concern by other resource users and coastal property owners about loss of Bay use and visual aspects. CRMC, with input from other state agencies, The University of Rhode Island (URI), property owners, and resource users is working to minimize these conflicts and offer ways to synergistically share these areas.



## Enabling conditions and tools

In accordance with its regulatory policy, the CRMC supports commercial aquaculture in locations where it can be accommodated among other uses of Rhode Island waters and recognizes that responsible shellfish aquaculture has a net positive effect on the environment. R.I. General Laws specify that aquaculture should only be conducted within state waters in a manner consistent with the best interest of the public, specifically in terms of impacts on the free and common fishery, navigation, and the marine environment. CRMC has developed other strategies that support the sustainable aquaculture growth and when possibly synergies between other resource users:

### 5% rule

In the early 2000's CRMC organized a working group made up of resource users, environmental organizations, academics, resource managers and regulators to respond to the potential environmental and social impacts taking place due to the growing aquaculture industry. The group made several suggestions that allowed for the continued growth of the aquaculture industry while protecting the environment and decreasing the possible conflicts with other user groups. The most wide-ranging recommendation of the group was a limit on the area allowed to be occupied by aquaculture of 5% within the state's Salt Ponds. This limit was arrived at by studying the available peer-reviewed scientific literature on ecosystem carrying capacity and adapting examples from other parts of the world and adapted to RI specific conditions and has contributed to easing the tensions between the aquaculture industry and other resource users.

## Resource user involvement

The Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council, made up of the state's natural resources management agency (serving as chair) and eight private citizen members all who have the skill, knowledge, and experience in the commercial fishing industry, sport fishing industry, and the conservation and management of fisheries resources, advises CRMC potential impact of aquaculture applications on wild-harvest fisheries.

## Narragansett Bay Special Area Management Plan (Bay SAMP)

With the expansion of aquaculture in Narragansett Bay, in 2020 CRMC undertook the development of the Bay SAMP initiative that engages the public in the gathering, synthesizing, and sharing Bay science and best management practices for the purpose of updating state policy to guide Rhode Island's use and management of Bay resources and activities. The Bay SAMP Aquaculture Element has led to implementation of administrative changes that contributes to the shared use of the Bay resources. Specifically, it: 1) enhances the aquaculture notification process; 2) Provides additional support and detail during the preliminary phase of the permit application process; 3) and Implements guideline recommendations regarding low-profile growing gear. In addition, CRMC has contracted URI to work with the recreational fishing community to develop a sustainable and stakeholder supported tool that will assist CRMC to better understand recreational fishing use throughout Narragansett Bay. URI will also develop recommendations for draft CRMC policies to assist in minimizing user conflict and guide future Bay decision-making.



## Impacts and positive changes

While multi use, in the form of co-existence, is supported, there continues to be tensions amongst the different Bay resource users. The aquaculture industry encourages fishermen and boaters to fish and travel through the farm if they don't damage the gear or animals. While some enjoy and appreciate fishing and "touring" through these structures, others consider the shared use of these areas as a threat to their traditional use of this area. There also has been studies and discussion around the concept of harvesting the mussels growing on the Block Island Wind Farm platform (located in state waters), however this has not been pursued in part due to the offshore wind energy developers concern about safety and liability. Applying a public and transparent process, CRMC recognizes the need to continue to develop policies, tools, and relationships to find multi use solutions towards minimizing conflict between these resource users.

## Links

- **Partners:** Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center, Rhode Island Sea Grant
- **Benjamin Goetsch**, Aquaculture Coordinator, RI Coastal Resources Management Council
- **Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council**  
<http://www.crmc.ri.gov/>
- **CRMC Aquaculture**  
<http://www.crmc.ri.gov/aquaculture.html>
- **Narragansett Bay SAMP**  
<https://web.uri.edu/crc/narragansett-bay-samp/>

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## Imprint

Author: Jennifer McCann, University of Rhode Island, Coastal Resources Center

Date published: 20 September 2022

*Suggested citation: McCann, J. 2022. Ocean Multi-Use Blueprints Collection. Aquaculture, Recreational Fishing and Boating in Rhode Island, United States.*

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