

# News Release

## *Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex*

Block Island NWR □ John H. Chafee NWR at Pettaquamscutt Cove □ Ninigret NWR □ Sachuest Point NWR □ Trustum Pond NWR  
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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Fish and Wildlife Service Develops Restoration Strategy for the Narrow River Estuary, Seeks Public Comment**

Charlestown, RI – In October 2012 Hurricane Sandy made landfall on the eastern seaboard and made apparent the need to enhance the resiliency of coastlines and estuarine habitat against future storms. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) was awarded funding under the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 (Public Law 113-2) to enhance habitats, resource values, and their resiliency within the Narrow River Estuary, located within the towns of South Kingstown and Narragansett, Washington County, Rhode Island.

A Draft Environmental Assessment which describes the Service's proposed action (Alternative 2) of restoring estuarine conditions in the Narrow River to enhance resiliency against sea level rise, climate change and future storm events is now available for public review.

Copies are available for review at the Kettle Pond Visitor Center in Charlestown, RI, or can be downloaded from the Refuge Complex Website at [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/john\\_h\\_chafee](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/john_h_chafee)

We expect that implementation of the proposed action will have the following effects:

Public use of the river will be improved by eliminating a navigational restriction which funnels motorized and non-motorized craft into a restricted channel, causing user conflicts and a safety hazard. Temporary marking of the channel will help boaters adjust to the widened channel and allow them to pass further from saltmarsh shorelines. While project activities will disrupt winter time uses on a temporary basis, the project will not have impacts during the busy summer season. Mosquito production from degraded saltmarsh areas will be reduced.

Water quality will be enhanced with application of best management practice sites to abate pollution from stormwater runoff, and from enhanced flushing in Pettaquamscutt Cove.

Saltmarsh conditions will be improved across 65 acres, returning degraded areas to productive and diverse marshlands. Roughly 14 acres of marsh vegetation lost due to entrapment of excess water on the marsh surface will be restored, and two acres of low marsh will be created where it was present historically. Stabilizing nearly 7% of the saltmarsh shorelines where accelerated erosion threatens additional marsh loss will better protect these sites, improving habitat diversity and shellfish habitat while doing so.

Enhancing “elevation capital” on 15 acres of saltmarsh will aide in allowing the marsh to keep pace with sea level rise in the near term, and will help prevent the catastrophic loss of saltmarshes from just incremental sea level rise. Planting of these sites following application of material will enhance stability, recovery, and lessen short term aesthetic impacts of the action.

Creating over seven acres of habitat suitable for the expansion of eelgrass beds will also provide cool water refugia for marine fish species of conservation concern and improved foraging conditions for other species. Unclogging of marsh channels will improve access to the marsh surface on 17 acres for marine fish. Enhancing three acres of tidal flats will insure key habitat for shellfish and shorebirds will be maintained in the estuary.

Management controls will limit the temporary impact of project activities on water quality, fish and wildlife, and public uses. Dredging activities will only occur during the winter season to minimize effects on marine fish; seasonal restrictions are applied to some activities during the nesting season for wildlife, and all activities are designed to occur outside of the busy summer season or have no impact. Adherence to best management practices for erosion control and water quality protection will minimize temporary effects on water quality from project activities.

The project represents an opportunity to learn from, test and monitor techniques for estuarine improvements, including the use of locally available equipment for dredging, living shoreline installations, saltmarsh surface drainage strategies, and methods to improve saltmarsh migration into adjacent upland sites. This will provide important information on the successfulness of these actions and their applicability for use in other areas.

The public is encouraged to provide written comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment by no later than November 30, 2014. Written comments can be sent to the following address:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Attn: Narrow River Restoration  
50 Bend Road, Charlestown, RI 02813

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