

News Release

Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Block Island NWR □ John H. Chafee NWR at Pettaquamscutt Cove □ Ninigret NWR □ Sachuest Point NWR □ Truston Pond NWR



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Maidford River Saltmarsh Restoration Project- Public Comments Sought

What are the restoration purpose and needs?-In Rhode Island, the saltmarsh ecosystem has been under constant threat from development, water quality issues, and drainage of wetlands. These managed wetlands are critical buffers to protect the surrounding communities against strong storms, and the effects of sea level rise. In addition, the Maidford River and associated saltmarshes are critical to many species of wildlife for food and cover and provide vital nesting and stopover sites for many migrating birds. This project will address the drainage issues by identifying how to prevent the blockage of the Maidford river outlet, which in turn affects the marshes, flooding of roads and human health and safety.

What are the planned restoration activities?-

- Clearing the buildup of sand at the mouth of the Maidford River to allow for water to flow unimpeded into the Sakonnet River.
- Utilizing sand to provide a layer of sediment onto the marsh to restore the saltmarshes at the confluence of the Maidford and Sakonnet Rivers.
- Restore and improve flow in the marshes by cleaning saltmarsh ditches and pools that have become clogged and are currently providing habitat for breeding mosquitos.
- Control of invasive giant reed (*Phragmites*).
- Raise a portion of Third Beach Road and construct a T-crossing from the segmented road.
- Removing and replacing a deteriorating concrete culvert and formed cement “bridge”. Replacement in the same location with a modern box culvert or similar structure that will allow for road travel and water flow.

What are the benefits of restoration?- Maintaining a consistent flow at the mouth of the Maidford River is intended to improve drainage and alleviate flooding of the roads and saltmarshes that occurs when the channel becomes clogged with sand. Saltmarshes support a wide diversity of native plant and animal species dependent on these areas. Sand deposited on the marsh will improve marshes ability to grow saltmarsh plants that are critical nesting and foraging habitat for fish and wildlife, including migratory birds such as the Saltmarsh Sparrow, whose population has been declining for many years. The additional sediment and vegetation will also assist with making the marshes and associated communities more resilient against

future storms by providing a reinforced buffer to further protect against wind and waves. The ditches are an important component to allowing saltwater to flow freely in the marshes. This flow is integral to allowing salt water to access the fringes of the marshes in order to provide a natural control of invasive species as well as providing habitat for fish to migrate in order to feed on the mosquito larvae that carry West Nile Virus. Elevation of the road will also reduce the likelihood of future road flooding. Removing the deteriorating concrete culvert and formed cement “bridge” and replacing with larger structure will provide more water flow in order to keep sand from blocking the Maidford River outlet in the future.

Who are the partners?- A cooperative effort between the Town of Middletown, the Norman Bird Sanctuary, the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge and other partners is being undertaken to improve drainage of the Maidford River at Third Beach in Middletown, RI and restore the adjacent saltmarshes. The Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge staff, partners and volunteers have been gathering scientific information in order to identify the volumes and velocities of water, water level changes, and direction of flow for the Maidford River and associated marshes. This information will further guide a multi-partner panel to determine future restoration actions.

Through this project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners are expecting to address flooding issues as well as assess, restore, and enhance the Maidford River saltmarsh and adjacent wetlands and beaches and other natural systems to better protect the marsh and surrounding community. The added benefit would protect fish and wildlife species and habitats from the impacts of future storms and naturally occurring events. Prior to completing any work, it will be important to consider any public comments, including any issues and concerns. Written public comments will be accepted from November 4th, 2014 through December 3th, 2014 and can be mailed or dropped off at:

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

The Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, a diverse network of lands managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that includes 556 national wildlife refuges and more than 150 million acres of public lands and waters set aside for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. The Refuge System works to foster public awareness and appreciation of the natural world through wildlife-dependent recreation, including wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, fishing and hunting.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service is both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation. Visit www.fws.gov to learn more.

For additional information, contact Juancarlos Giese at 401-364-9124, extension 18.

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