As a steward of our nation's coastal and marine environments, NOAA addresses immediate and long-term environmental threats through its Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R). Scientists are on call around-the-clock to provide the U.S. Coast Guard and other emergency responders with critical information to help minimize environmental damage caused by oil and hazardous chemical spills. Environmental experts assess ecosystems compromised by historic or ongoing contamination and work with other organizations to conduct remediation, restoration, and monitoring of critical natural resources.

Protecting and Restoring Rhode Island's Coastal and Marine Areas

NOAA trust resources in Rhode Island include over 500 miles of coastline bordering Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, with important habitats and natural resources that provide recreational and economic benefits for millions of people. An active oil transport route exists in Narragansett Bay, with ships transporting oil to the Port of Providence through relatively narrow passages in the bay, creating the potential for oil spills to damage sensitive salt marshes, sandy beaches, shellfish in shallow waters, and rocky shoreline habitats. Coastal hazardous waste sites also threaten natural resources, particularly fishery resources and their habitats. The state map on the reverse page shows key response and restoration activities in the past year.

Emergency Response

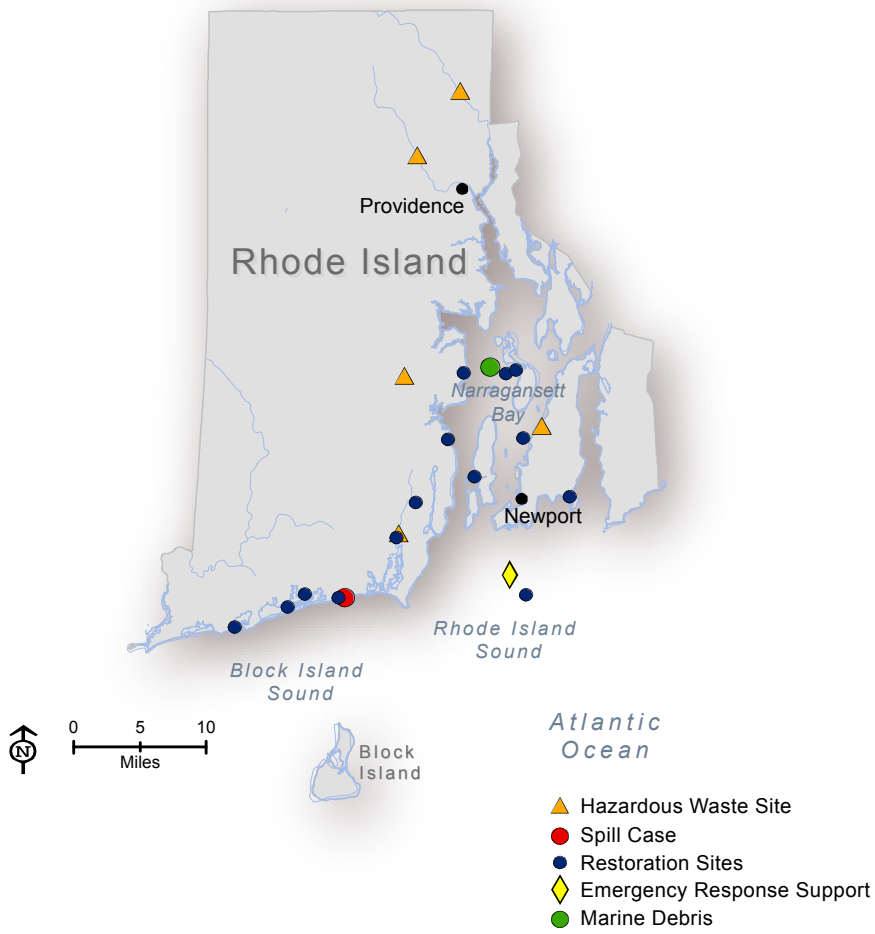
On January 19, 1996, the tank barge *North Cape* and the tug *Scandia* grounded on Moonstone Beach, spilling an estimated 828,000 gallons of home heating oil. NOAA provided weather information, overflight maps, and spill trajectory projections to aid in spill response. Oil spread throughout a large area of Block Island Sound, resulting in the closure of a 250-square mile area for fishing. Hundreds of oiled birds were recovered in the weeks following the spill and large numbers of dead lobsters, surf clams, and sea stars were found on area beaches. NOAA managed shoreline assessment teams and provided scientific expertise on fish tainting and seafood contamination issues for several months after the barge was removed from the beach. NOAA subsequently worked with co-trustees to implement ecosystem restoration, including the release of more than one million adult female lobsters and over seven million shellfish into Rhode Island waters, construction of a fishway to help migrating alewife gain access to spawning habitat, and protection of nesting habitat for over 50 pairs of piping plovers on Rhode Island beaches.

Female lobster release following North Cape *oil spill*

Assessment and Restoration

The Rose Hill Landfill is situated adjacent to the Saugatucket River in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, approximately five miles west of Narragansett Bay and nine miles north of the Atlantic Ocean. The abandoned sand and gravel quarry was used for the disposal of domestic and industrial wastes from 1967 until 1983. The Saugatucket River, Mitchell Brook, and Saugatucket Pond, which provides substantial spawning and nursery habitat for alewife and blueback herring, have been contaminated by metals from the landfill. With partner natural resources trustees, NOAA reached a cooperative settlement with responsible parties to conduct protective cleanup and improved river herring passage at two dams on the Saugatucket River.

Rose Hill Landfill, South Kingstown



Marine Debris

Through a 2006-7 project funded by the NOAA Marine Debris Program's community-based grants, and administered by the NOAA Restoration Center, over 1,000 tons of debris have been removed from the shores and waters of Narragansett Bay, R.I. This Rhode Island Clean Sweep project team, which includes over 458 volunteers to date, received a second year of funding in 2007, with which it plans to clean an additional 100 miles of shoreline through 2008. The project highlights a successful partnership between NOAA, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Clean the Bay, and has been one of the largest partnerships funded over the past two years.

Research

NOAA collaborates with other federal, state, and local programs to develop innovative approaches to protecting marine and estuarine environments through research and synthesis of information. The Coastal Response Research Center (CRRC) brings together the resources of a research-oriented university and the field expertise of OR&R to conduct and oversee basic and applied research, conduct outreach, and encourage strategic partnerships in spill response, assessment, and restoration.

NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment

For further information about NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration, please call (301) 713-2989 or visit our Web site at response.restoration.noaa.gov

Banner photo courtesy of Mr. Ben Mieremet, NOAA, OSD