



Connecticut
NATIONAL ESTUARINE
RESEARCH RESERVE

eNewsletter

Spring Updates 2025



Photo by Larissa Graham

A note from Kevin O'Brien, our Reserve Manager

A few words on the current state of affairs....

It's often said that the only constant is change and that's certainly true now more than ever. Changes are occurring frequently at the federal level that are having broad and sweeping impacts across many aspects of our everyday lives. For over 50 years, the **National Estuarine Research Reserve System** (NERRs) has been advancing coastal science, conducting long-term environmental monitoring, providing place-based education, and protecting and stewarding important coastal areas that support a balance of natural resource and human uses. This is a cooperative effort, with states working closely with a team of federal partners within NOAA. Now, that partnership is in peril. Cuts in NOAA staffing are draining decades of expertise and knowledge, and budget reductions are putting support for science and environmental programming in a state of great uncertainty – both on amounts of funding and when funds may be provided.

What's being done? Part of the answer to that lies in strategic planning and trying to assess and address potential scenarios and efficiencies. Another part is making sure that leaders – especially those in Congress – understand the value of funding programs that support

environmental science, monitoring, education, and conservation. These efforts are directly tied to a healthy, productive, safe, and sustainable Long Island Sound estuary, which provides extraordinary local and regional benefits – something we can all agree on. (You can read about more about the value of Long Island Sound [here](#), and economic value of estuaries in general [here](#).) We're extremely fortunate here in Connecticut to have state partners and a congressional delegation that "get it" and support programs like the CTNERR and the NERR system, as well as institutions like Sea Grant, the Coastal Zone Management Program, the Integrated Ocean Observing System, and EPA's Long Island Sound Study to name a few.

But perhaps the most important thing being done right now is continuing the work we've set out to do as part of the CTNERR mission: to collaboratively integrate science with conservation, learning, recreation, and economic viability using ecologically diverse sites in southeastern Connecticut. Please read on to see what we've been up to and some of the great things we have planned for this summer!

We need your feedback!

We're conducting a survey to better understand professional development needs and interests on topics such as storm preparedness, habitat, and water quality. Your response will help Reserve staff plan education and training opportunities that are most valuable to you and your colleagues. If you take the survey, you'll also be entered to win some great prizes! [***Learn more.***](#)

[***Click here to take the survey***](#)

Protecting eelgrass in the Sound

Did you know - the Reserve includes nearly half of the eelgrass beds in Connecticut waters and one-third of the eelgrass beds in the Sound?

Since eelgrass is such an important part of the Reserve, we will soon be embarking on an ambitious project to restore eelgrass in Long Island Sound (LIS). This project will build infrastructure and develop staff capacity to eventually distribute seven to eight million eelgrass seeds per year. We'll be starting small (one million seeds per year) but hope to scale up quickly over the next five years.



Supported by EPA Long Island Sound Study and NEIWPCC, we will be working with partners from the Department of Marine Sciences at University of Connecticut, the Marine Program at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, Connecticut College, Remote Ecologist, and Save the Sound.

We will be collecting seeds from existing beds in the Sound and distributing to likely locations to assist eelgrass expansion - similar to how you seed your lawn, we'll be seeding the Sound!

These facilities will become hubs of activity for restoration - not only supporting the activities of CCE, UConn, and the Reserve but also providing seeds to other groups involved in the

Piloting a community reporting tool to track coastal flooding and high tides



Working with **Connecticut Sea Grant (CTSG)** and the **Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA)**, we've officially launched a **MyCoast Connecticut** pilot project in New London, Groton and Stonington with funding from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund

MyCoast is a tool for reporting coastal events such as storms, floods, and extreme high tides. The goal of this pilot project is for flood photos taken by people in these three communities to help with local storm preparedness and planning while raising public awareness about the need for coastal resilience.

A project kickoff webinar was held on April 10, 2025. [Click here](#) to view a recording and find slides from this event. Stay tuned for more information about how you can use the tool to help address flooding in your community.

Volunteer & Community Events

Upcoming events ([Learn more](#))

CT Trails Day (June 8 @ Bluff Point State Park) - Join the Reserve, CT Sea Grant, the Town of Groton, and GOSA for a CT Trails Day of family fun! We'll provide all the information you need to choose your own adventure. Enjoy a scavenger hunt along with other exciting activities for adventurers of all ages. Bring your hiking boots and/or bikes to explore the park at your own pace. Register here: <https://trailsday.org/events/trails-day-family-fun/> Looking for a more challenging hike? Check out the other CT Trails Day events happening at Bluff [HERE](#).

Paddling the Poquonnock (June 28 @ Bluff Point State Park) - Join the Reserve, CT Sea Grant, and CT DEEP Boating for a day of fun paddling on the Poquonnock river. All experience levels are welcome and kayaks and canoes will be available to use for free. Registration is encouraged so a kayak or canoe is available when you plan to arrive. More details coming soon. For now, save the date!

Past events

Explore Midway Yard - We had two full walks as we explored remains of Midway Yard at Bluff Point with historian Joe Baril. The Yard was built in 1904, declined beginning in the late 1920s, and was abandoned in 1939. The turntable pit, roundhouse foundation, and other remains still exist inside the park. This walk was very popular so we're hoping to offer it again next winter.

Groton Litter Cleanup - A BIG thank you to our volunteers that helped to clean up Sparkle Lake and Birch Plain Creek Wildlife Area this month. We removed a lot of litter to help keep Birch Creek clean. Also, a special thanks to the Baker Cove Watershed Committee (BaCWaC), Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD), Mystic Aquarium, Town of Groton, and City of Groton for making the cleanup possible.



Educator Workshops

Upcoming summer workshops ([Learn more](#))

Pollinators Workshop (Aug 12) - Join the Reserve, CT Sea Grant, Connecticut Audubon

for a fun day learning about pollinators. This workshop, designed for informal educators who teach at summer camps, nature centers, and nonprofit organizations, will provide the training and resources needed to monitor pollinators each summer. ***Learn more.***

Tale of Two Rivers (Aug 18-20) - Join us for our 2025 Teachers on the Estuary (TOTE) workshop where we'll be learning about the history and ecology of the Thames River and Connecticut River. Artist and author Pat Lynch will kick off the workshop with a presentation on a Tale of Two Rivers. Over the next two days we'll explore the Thames and Connecticut Rivers through boat rides, observational activities, and hands-on sampling you can do with your students. ***Learn more.***

If you are interested in learning more, contact ***CTNERR_Education@uconn.edu.***

Past Workshops

Urban Waters: Become a Water Detective - On Thursday April 24th, the Reserve partnered with The Sound School and Mystic Aquarium to host 17 educators during an *Urban Waters* workshop. We shared activities and lesson plans for the classroom and the field so students could be Water Quality Detectives and make a difference in their communities. Loanable kits with all of the materials needed to collect and analyze water and plankton samples are available from the Reserve.



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