



Connecticut
NATIONAL ESTUARINE
RESEARCH RESERVE

eNewsletter

Spring Updates 2026

A note from Sam Stadnick, our Fiscal Officer

Happy spring! I'm Sam Stadnick, our Fiscal Officer, and am responsible for controlling our financial resources as part of NOAA and the UConn system. From processing payroll to buying test tubes, I help our staff manage the various awards we have received over the years. This time of year, I am gearing up our staff for the summer field season with waders, boots, bug nets, and all sorts of unique equipment to use – both under the water and on land. The summer is also an opportunity for the Reserve to offer internship opportunities to UConn students and recent graduates. I am particularly proud to help prepare these young adults for their first professional steps in the research world!



I grew up in Old Lyme, CT at the mouth of the Connecticut River and have been an avid hiker and fisherman in the Reserve watershed my whole life. I graduated from UConn and used my political science degree to work at the Connecticut General Assembly in Hartford doing constituent service and legislative tracking in the House of Representatives. I found myself particularly interested in environmental protection and conservation issues, and following a move back home to the shoreline, was the first new employee hired by the Reserve in July of 2022. Since then I have seen us grow from three people to a dozen full time staff.

While I may not do the flashiest work at the Reserve, I take tremendous pride in doing that work to protect such a vital natural area and with a great team of dedicated people! Thank you for your continued support of the CTNERR and our mission. Enjoy the outdoors these next few months – take only pictures and leave only footprints!

Welcome our new staff member

Francesca Holland
Stewardship Technician II

As the newest member of the Stewardship team, Francesca will be engaged in green stormwater and shoreline resiliency work, invasive species management, and various community, fieldwork, and mapping initiatives. With her, she brings about a decade of multidisciplinary work experience as a systems engineer, environmental activist and researcher, entrepreneur and artist. Francesca earned a Bachelor of Science from UConn in Chemical Engineering and her senior design project focused on horseshoe crab conservation in Long Island Sound. Francesca completed a Master of Arts in Design Engineering with a focus on environmental systems through a joint-degree program at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design. Francesca's lifelong fascination with the ocean and passion for complex systems led her to a five-year career at General Dynamics Electric Boat specializing in corrosion mitigation systems engineering for marine structures. She is greatly excited to learn from and contribute to the CTNERR mission!



Upcoming Reserve Events

Rocky Neck State Park Celebration Series

Various events, various dates

Trails Day (June 6th) - Join us for a morning of learning and fun! We'll have guided hikes to learn about the geology, plants, and trails of Rocky Neck State Park and kid-friendly activities including a scavenger hunt, geocaching, art and games, and crafts. Thank you to our partners that helped organize this event: Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve, The Nature Conservancy, CT DEEP, CT Sea Grant, the Long Island Sound Partnership, and the Niantic Children's Museum. Register [here](#).

History Day (June 25th) - Join us for a day learning about the history of Rocky Neck State Park. Experts will share the love story that gave Bride Brook its name, provide a walking tour of the Ellie Mitchell Pavilion, and the restoration work that is planned to improve the Brook and Park. Learn more and register [here](#).

Nature Day (July 23) - Join us for a day learning about the nature of Rocky Neck State Park. Experts will help us identify birds and teach us about wetlands. We'll also catch and identify fish in Bride Brook and learn about glass eels (baby American eels). Learn more and register [here](#).

Inclusive "On the Water" Storytime

July 18th - 10:30A-12:30P @ UConn Avery Point (1084 Shennecossett Rd, Groton)
Join us for an inclusive reading of *The Quest for the Cockle Implant* followed by crafts, a touch tank with critters, and fun with friends. This free event is open to the public and a welcoming space for D/deaf, hard of hearing, hearing, and all languages. The book will be read in spoken English and ASL. Sponsored by UConn Avery Point, The Hello Lab, and the Reserve. Learn more and register [here](#).

Program Updates

Education

We've been busy with many events including community walks, litter cleanups, and educational programming (more in our "Recap" below). This spring we also kicked off some new projects, including [monitoring glass eels](#) (first-year American eels) at a few riverine sites and installing [chronolog stations](#) at Bluff Point to document flooding. We're planning a series of Celebration events at Rocky Neck State Park that will focus on hiking, history, and nature of this beautiful park ([more here](#)).

We're also working with CT Sea Grant and educators to reimagine the Long Island Sound Curriculum Resource Guide. The new Guide will be made for the field with lessons developed by teachers and an interactive database where teachers can access reliable and local data. Our Teachers on the Estuary workshop is still being developed but will be held in August and focus on eelgrass. If you're an educator and interested in learning more, please reach out to us at CTNERR.Education@uconn.edu.

Training

This spring, our Reserve's Training and Education Sectors continued working with CT Sea Grant and the CT Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation to bring the [MyCoast app](#) to Stonington, Groton, and New London. MyCoast is an app that allows people to use their smart phones to take photos and document areas in their community that flood during extreme high tide and storm events. April marked the one year anniversary of the app's implementation in these three pilot project communities – so we titled our spring webinar, "April showers, bring...MyCoast!"

During this event, participants learned about new outreach materials and how MyCoast photos are being used to inform flood planning and grant writing in Branford and the Town and City of Groton. If you're interested in learning more, you can visit the [MyCoast Connecticut project page](#) or read a recent article written in [Sea Grant's April WrackLines](#). And if you experience flooding in your neighborhood, on local roads, or know of businesses that flood, there are [now flyers available online](#) to help promote the use of this app.

Please let us know if you have questions or would like to bring MyCoast to your community, since our team is hoping to get a grant next fall to expand the use of this app statewide!

Stewardship

The stewardship sector continues to be very busy engaging with grant based restoration work with our partners. The winter tends to be a slower time for field based restoration, but allows us to plan, write grants for future work, and engage in presentations of our work to various audiences. But we are excited to be coming into field season!

This coming season we will be finalizing permitting, and beginning pre-restoration monitoring for a restoration project at Bluff Point, and working with our partners at The Nature Conservancy on data collection and modeling for a restoration planning project at Rocky Neck State Park. We are also working with The Nature Conservancy on a project assessing the ecological status of "coastal crossings," areas where tidally influenced waters pass under human infrastructure (roads, train tracks, etc.). We will also be working with the Narragansett Bay, and Waquoit Bay NERRS to pilot test a reserve wide monitoring protocol for upland forests, which, in conjunction with the NERRS Uplands Working Group, we hope to implement nationwide over the next few years.

Needless to say, it's going to be a busy spring and summer. Thankfully, we have been able to expand our staff, and are very excited to welcome Francesca Holland to the Reserve as our first full time permanent Stewardship Technician! We are also bringing back recent UConn graduate and former Reserve intern Christopher Santoro to assist with summer fieldwork. Welcome Francesca and Chris!

Research

The Research & Monitoring Team has an exciting summer coming up - including welcoming 5 undergraduate interns, 3 part time research/monitoring assistants and introducing our

research scientist, Lauren Barrett to her first full field season with the Reserve!

This field season our team has several exciting focus areas. Lauren Barrett and Jamie Vaudrey are eelgrass focused, making big strides towards the establishment of an eelgrass processing facility to help expand seed-based restoration in Long Island Sound. They are also assisting with deploying instruments and collecting sediment samples to evaluate habitat conditions that support models predicting eelgrass restoration potential.

Shelby Larubina is getting marshy as the field lead on several marsh monitoring efforts - including utilizing Marsh Rapid Assessment Methods (MarshRAM) and implementing a suite of field monitoring techniques in collaboration with the Maritime Aquarium led by Dr. Sarah Crosby and Dr. Chris Elphick of UConn's Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department. Together, this work will help establish standardized, statewide marsh monitoring protocols, which will act as the foundation for CTNERR's long-term marsh vegetation monitoring program.

And Ashley Hamilton is focused on water quality. With the help of research assistant Hazel Levine, we have expanded our effort within the [*Pathogen Monitoring Network*](#) by adding a fourth waterbody to sample: the Poquonnock River alongside Lieutenant/Duck River, Baker Cove, and the lower Thames River. Research assistant Josie Mottram continues to develop our nutrient analysis methods on our new SEAL AA500 autoanalyzer in preparation for the System Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP). SWMP also continues to gain momentum as installation designs for our future water quality and meteorological stations move closer to deployment.

We look forward to the next newsletter, where we can update you with the progress!

Winter Recap



Quahog Bowl - The 2026 Quahog Bowl was hosted at UConn Avery Point in partnership with Project Oceanology, UConn Marine Science Department and the Avery Point Campus. As part of the larger National Ocean Science Bowl, the competition brings high school students together to test their knowledge of marine science. Teams from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York went head-to-head on Saturday, with Bridgeport Aquaculture School earning first place, E.O. Smith High School in second and Ledyard High School in third!

Blue Economy Workshop - On February 28th, the Reserve attended the Blue Economy Workshop hosted by CT Blue Economy Coalition. Our Education Coordinator, Larissa Graham, presented a series of loan kits. These kits are lesson plans that educators can borrow for free to bring hands on experiences into their classrooms

Bird walk with Joe Attwater - On March 21st Joe Attwater from The Connecticut Audubon joined the Reserve for a spring walk to observe birds at Haley Farm State Park. We had a beautiful morning and counted 27 species including some yellow-rumped warbler and osprey! Thank you again to everyone that joined us for a great walk.

Midway Yard Walk with Joe Baril - The Reserve was joined by local historian Joe Baril to learn more about the large rail yard called the Midway Yard that was built in 1904 at Bluff Point. We had a great afternoon with two walks learning about the history of the railroad visiting the abandoned turntable put and roundhouse foundation.

Clean up at Bushy Beach - To give them a warm welcome back to the Piping Plovers, 27 volunteers headed out to Bushy Beach to clean up before the piping plover, common tern, least tern, and oystercatcher arrive and start nesting. Volunteers gathered more than 10 bags of trash including some abandoned fishing gear and bike tires. Thank you to all our volunteers for their hard work!

BaCWaC Groton Park Clean-up - We had a beautiful morning cleaning up three locations across the city and town of Groton. Thank you to all 36 volunteers who helped and our partners - Baker Cove Watershed Committee (BaCWaC), Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD), State Representative Bumgardner's office, Mystic Aquarium, Town of Groton, and City of Groton – for sponsoring the event! We'd also like to extend a special thank you to the offices of Representatives Courtney and DeLauro for acknowledging the volunteers with Certificates of Congressional Recognition.



Email us at: ctnerr@uconn.edu

[Visit our Website](#)

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