

State Agencies Work to Improve Weekapaug Public Access



The Coastal Resources Management Council of Rhode Island (CRMC) and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) are improving public access along the Weekapaug Breachway in Westerly, following concerns voiced by local residents and other Rhode Islanders.

This summer, the state agencies became aware that the public was having difficulty accessing what had been an historically used path from the DEM fishing lot down to the beach.

Traditionally the footpath – which begins at the public lot, goes through a small vegetated area, then through the Weekapaug Fire District’s private lot, down to the water – has been used for decades by fishermen. This summer access was closed off, forcing the public to traverse the rocky breachway.

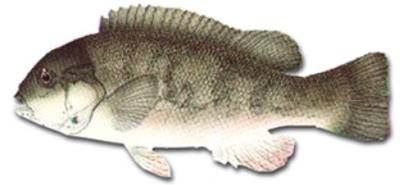


The CRMC and DEM have discussed this matter with members of the town and Weekapaug Fire District. Two recent surveys of the area confirmed a significant swath along the Breachway is state property, within which planners believe they can create a suitable access path. CRMC and DEM staff have evaluated the site and are evaluating plans to establish a clear and well-defined path for public access entirely on state property.

“The CRMC always knew it was a public access point, and the surveys confirmed our institutional knowledge of this well-used area,” said CRMC Executive Director **Jeffrey Willis**. “When I walked the site with DEM staff it was clear to all of us on-site that there was enough room within the state-owned land to create a better public access solution, and we’re pleased all of the parties could come to agreement.”

“Maintaining public access to the shore for fishing is central to DEM’s mission,” said DEM Director **Janet Coit**. “I am pleased that our recent exploration has led to a solution, and I look forward to working closely with CRMC to design the path on our property. I hope this clears up some misunderstandings, and that everyone can respect this important right-of-way.”

Within the state property on the eastern side of the breachway, the state agencies will be able to construct a walking path while retaining a small buffer of existing vegetation along the breachway. Signage will be installed to guide the public from the DEM parking lot to the shore. The agencies hope to have the work done this fall.



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