

Executive Summary

1. Through the Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP), the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) commits itself to uphold both its obligations to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations, and to ensure that the preservation and restoration of ecological systems shall be the primary guiding principle upon which environmental alteration of coastal resources will be measured, judged and regulated.
2. For thousands of years the waters off Rhode Island's coasts have served as an important and highly valuable environmental, economic and cultural hub for the people living in this region. The natural beauty of these offshore waters, along with its rich historic and cultural heritage, provides aesthetic, artistic, educational, and spiritual value and is part of the appeal that draws people to live, work, and play in Rhode Island. Rhode Island's offshore waters are an ecologically unique region and host an interesting biodiversity of fish, marine mammals, birds, and sea turtles that travel throughout this region, thriving on its rich habitats, microscopic organisms, and other natural resources.
3. As a means to promote, protect, enhance, and honor these existing human uses and natural resources of Rhode Island, while encouraging appropriate marine-based economic development, and facilitating the coordination of state and federal decision making, the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has produced the Ocean Special Area Management Plan (Ocean SAMP). Using the best available science and working with well-informed and committed resource users, researchers, environmental and civic organizations, and local, state and federal government agencies, the Ocean SAMP provides a comprehensive understanding of this complex and rich ecosystem as well as describes how the people living in this region have used and depended upon these offshore resources for thousands of years. To fulfill the Council's regulatory responsibilities, the Ocean SAMP lays out enforceable policies and recommendations to guide CRMC in promoting a balanced and comprehensive ecosystem-based management approach for the development and protection of Rhode Island's ocean-based resources within the Ocean SAMP study area.
4. Since 1983 the CRMC has successfully applied marine spatial planning (MSP) to achieve ecosystem-based management along Rhode Island's coastline. CRMC's six existing SAMP's, as well as the state's water classification program, successfully apply MSP. Through the Ocean SAMP, CRMC builds on this success and applies this same MSP technique to effectively manage Rhode Island's offshore waters.
5. Ecologically, economically, and culturally, Rhode Island is unavoidably linked to the ocean and therefore faces a number of challenges from climate change that are specific to the coastal and marine landscape. The Ocean SAMP intends to contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, global climate change. CRMC believes that with advanced planning and coordination, the harm and costs associated with these potential impacts can be reduced and may be avoided.

6. There is an increased demand for the potential placement of many structures and activities, including liquefied natural gas infrastructure, aquaculture, and artificial reefs, in Rhode Island's offshore waters. However, the major driver for the development of the Ocean SAMP was the determination by the Rhode Island's Office of Energy Resources (OER) in 2007 that investment in offshore wind farms would be necessary to achieve Governor Donald Carcieri's mandate that offshore wind resources provide 15 percent of the state's electrical power by 2019. In response, the CRMC proposed the creation of a SAMP as a mechanism to develop a comprehensive management and regulatory tool that would proactively engage the public and provide policies and recommendations for appropriate siting of offshore renewable energy.
7. The process to both develop the Ocean SAMP as well as establish policies and regulations are guided by goals and principles that were developed in coordination with the Ocean SAMP researchers and stakeholder group. The Ocean SAMP Goals highlight the commitment by CRMC to: foster a properly functioning ecosystem that is both ecologically sound and economically beneficial; promote and enhance existing uses; encourage marine-based economic development that considers the aspirations of local communities and is consistent with and complementary to the state's overall economic development, social, and environmental needs and goals; and build a framework for coordinated decision-making between state and federal management agencies.
8. The Ocean SAMP Principles commit CRMC to: develop the Ocean SAMP in a transparent manner; involve all stakeholders; honor existing activities; base all decisions on the best available science; and establish monitoring and evaluation that supports adaptive management.