

Northeast Great Waters Habitat Restoration & Conservation Initiative

Increasing the Pace of Ecosystem Restoration in Rhode Island, Buzzards Bay, Cape Cod, & Gulf of Maine

Ecosystems and Economy at Risk

The coastal ecosystems of the northeast states and their abundant biological diversity are vital to human health and the region's economy. Millions of people depend on the Gulf of Maine, Cape Cod, Buzzards Bay, and the bays and coastal waters of Rhode Island for food, recreation, transportation, and their way of life. It is a unique region, whose beauty and bounty enrich the lives of all who live, work and visit here. Yet each day, the waters of these critical watersheds — their streams, lakes, bays, and beaches — are damaged by untreated sewage, toxic pollution, invasive species, loss of wildlife habitat, and the long-range threats of climate change. Many diverse initiatives are underway addressing some of the problems, but until now there has been no unified and comprehensive approach. Further, the pace of restoration and conservation efforts has been hampered by a lack of federal investment in the region. There are manageable solutions, but if we wait the problems only get worse and the solutions more expensive.



Solutions to the most pressing of these problems are outlined in a pair of recent studies conducted by state and federal agencies in the four northern New England coastal states (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island). The identically formatted studies, *US Gulf of Maine Habitat Restoration and Conservation Plan*, and RI's *Bays, Rivers and Watershed-wide Plan*, document some \$3.4 billion in restoration and conservation program work that needs to be implemented over the next five years, with sustained investment for at least 20 years (\$14 billion) to ensure vibrant ecosystems and a strong regional economy for future generations.

The Economy Will Benefit

The benefits of implementing the Gulf of Maine and Rhode Island plans go far beyond just fixing environmental problems. Implementation will have an enormous positive impact on the region's economy. A recent Brookings Institution report on the economic impacts of implementing a similar plan for the Great Lakes showed a return on investment in the form of jobs, economic growth, tourism, recreation, property values, and other economic indicators of at least 2:1 in the short term, and up to 3:1 over a number of years.

The new plans focus on five basic "issue areas" (the cost estimates shown are combined from both plans and cover the first five years of implementation):

Protect and Restore Fish and Wildlife Habitats and Populations:	\$ 279,138,000
Provide Clean, Healthy Coastal Waters:	\$2,964,626,000
Conduct Science, Planning, and Communication Required for Regional Ocean Management, Marine Spatial Planning, and Ecosystem-Based Management:	\$ 41,425,000
Promote Resilience to Climate Change:	\$ 44,175,000
Prevent and Detect Invasive Species, and Restore Affected Habitats:	\$ 10,870,000
Total estimated need in first five years:	\$3,340,234,000

It should be noted that these figures are conservative. In some cases, such as non-point source pollution for storm water runoff for which reliable estimates were not available, the actual cost of mitigation is likely to be many times higher than indicated. Further, five-year estimates for programs administered by federal agencies without state involvement were not included. It is expected that when a detailed implementation plan is developed, many of these unaccounted costs will be determined.

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