



# Six Strategies for Protecting Coastal Habitat Areas

*Protecting our critical Long Island Sound coastal habitats might seem like a job for Congress, the state legislature, state and federal agencies—or all of the above. And while each of these entities has its role to play, it is a basic truth that protecting coastal habitats begins at home, with your town. Here's how:*

## 1. Identify Your Coastal Resources

In order to protect coastal habitats, you have to know what and where they are! We suggest that you catalogue your priority coastal habitat areas, as part of a more comprehensive community resource inventory. NEMO has a Community Resource Inventory presentation that can get your town started on the overall process. As for coastal resources, *Focus on the Coast* suggests that at a minimum you should include seagrass beds, tidal marshes and migratory fish runs. Please

visit the *Focus on the Coast* website (see back page) to explore what data is available. Of course, your town may have particular habitat areas that are a local priority. Talk with local experts to see what these might be, and where they're located. How do you map them? Any way you can, from hand-drawn overlay maps to high tech GIS wizardry. The important thing is to do it, and to provide this information to all town land use boards. You might also want to provide the information (via a mailing, educational forum or website) to nearby property owners.





## 2. Protect Coastal Resources Through Regulation

Before you get irritated, let us assure you that we don't mean *new* regulations, we mean to maximize the effectiveness of *existing* regulations. Coastal review, tidal wetland, inland wetland, harbor management, subdivision and zoning regulations can all be brought to bear on the issue of protecting coastal habitats. Your town's CT DEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs liaison can help you review many of your regulations, and NEMO has workshops and publications that address how local land use regulations can be changed to better protect natural resources (see also recommendation #5).

## 3. Preserve Critical Areas Through Land Protection

Some of your most valuable and/or most threatened habitat areas should be considered for protection as permanent open space. Again, doing the inventory is the first step, followed by incorporating these areas into your open space plan. NEMO can help educate your town about the inventory and open space planning process. The Nature Conservancy can also lend its resource expertise, and expertise in the acquisition of open space. The CT DEP Watershed and Open Space Acquisition Program is a state program that provides matching funds for

communities that wish to protect priority natural lands. Links to all these programs are on the *Focus on the Coast* website. And remember, once they are protected many coastal habitats such as migratory fish runs and eelgrass beds may need some form of active management by the town—an important “up front” consideration when determining priorities.

## 4. Restore Degraded Habitat Areas

Chances are that once you've identified your coastal habitat areas, you'll find that some of them are not in the best of condition. Fortunately, there are number of CT DEP programs in Connecticut that can help your town restore degraded areas. Undersized culverts or faulty tide gates can be fixed,

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restoring adequate salt water flow to salt marshes. Invasive species like the common reed *Phragmites* or Purple Loosestrife can be reduced and even eliminated by a number of techniques. Migratory fish runs can be restored by building fish ladders over obstructing dams. The *Focus on the Coast* website will link you to these programs and

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provide ideas on where the funding to conduct them might come from.

See the *Focus on the Coast* website for a link to the NEMO program and other resources.

## 5. Adopt Resource-based Community Planning to be Proactive About Resource Protection

Not all your present problems will be easy to resolve, and not all your future problems may be easy to predict. The Connecticut coast is urbanizing, and in addition to the more obvious impacts of continued development come more subtle impacts to habitat quality. Increased stormwater runoff generally means increases in water quantity and decreases in water quality, both of which can impact coastal resources. Natural resource based planning can help put your community in the driver's seat, providing a clear vision of the natural resources that need to be protected, and consequently the areas in town that are most suited for development. Placing development in the most suitable places, and then going the extra step of designing development to have minimal impacts on natural resources, will help your community avoid problems in the future. Good comprehensive planning provides the overall framework for some of the other strategies already mentioned in this sheet, including resource inventories, open space plans, and putting teeth to plans through regulations.

## 6. Foster Stewardship of Coastal Habitats Through Education

Education is the most powerful tool to ensure the completion, success and long term effectiveness of the other strategies. Education of local leaders on town boards will help the town understand the need for resource-based planning and protection of coastal habitats during the land use decision making process. Education of property owners nearby and adjacent to coastal habitat areas will help protect those areas

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from unknowing improper management. Education of the general public, including school children, will help to generate support for your coastal resource protection initiative. *Focus on the Coast* partners can suggest various educational programs and techniques. And, of course, all of the *Focus on the Coast* partners provide educational programs, including *Focus on the Coast*.





# Focus on the Coast Website

[nemo.uconn.edu/coastal](http://nemo.uconn.edu/coastal)



To get started on protecting your coastal resources, visit the website at: [nemo.uconn.edu/coastal](http://nemo.uconn.edu/coastal). On the *Focus on the Coast* website you'll find:

- A **step-by-step tutorial** on conducting a coastal resource inventory;
- **Maps** and more maps: 3 (count 'em!) 3 ways to access and download maps of coastal land cover and resources;
- **Links** to agencies and organizations that can help.

Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) is a University of Connecticut educational program for land use decision makers that addresses the relationship of land use to natural resource protection.

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*Focus on the Coast is a multi-media educational project that educates local decision makers about the priority coastal resources of the Connecticut coastline. Focus on the Coast is a collaboration of the University of Connecticut NEMO Program, the Connecticut Sea Grant College Program, The Nature Conservancy Connecticut Chapter and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Office of Long Island Sound Programs. Major funding for Focus on the Coast provided by a grant from the NOAA Coastal Services Center.*

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