

Rhode Island's Relationship with the Land: ecoRI News roundup

When the Wind Blows ...

Local demand for offshore wind power continues to grow, as Rhode Island recently announced plans to buy up to 600 megawatts of new offshore wind energy to meet its renewable-energy targets.

The offshore power grab aligns with Gov. Gina Raimondo's goal to source 100 percent of the state's energy from renewable projects by 2030, either by paying for the electricity from renewable-energy projects or buying renewable-energy credits, known as RECs.

"Offshore wind will help us achieve that bold, but achievable goal, while creating jobs and cementing our status as a major hub in the nation's burgeoning offshore wind industry," Raimondo is quoted in an Oct. 27 press release.

Rhode Island energy commissioner Nicholas Ucci noted that new offshore wind energy will bolster the regional power grid. The added electricity will aid the transition from oil and gas heat to low-carbon heat sources such as heat pumps.

"Importantly, offshore wind can also help our electric system meet winter peak demand with stability-priced clean electricity, helping temper power price spikes faced by local homes and businesses," Ucci said.

Statehouse Fails to Make the Grade, Again

The Environment Council of Rhode Island (ECRI) isn't pleased with the environmental results at the Statehouse, so much so that, rather than issue grades, it simply gave lawmakers and Gov. Gina Raimondo an "incomplete and lacking leadership."

The organization's 2019-2020 Green Report Card admonishes state representatives and senators for passing next to nothing to protect the environment and public health during the last two General

Assembly sessions.

“During two years in which the need for action was clearer than ever, both the administration and the General Assembly failed to take concrete steps towards environmental protection and climate justice in Rhode Island,” according to ECRI, a coalition of some 60 Rhode Island organizations and individuals.

A Return to the Land that Was Always Theirs

“If you follow your food, you can tell a lot about who you are,” said Cassius Spears, a Narragansett Tribe member.

Cassius and his wife, Dawn, spearheaded tribal efforts to be self-sustaining in 2015, launching the now-defunct Narragansett Food Sovereignty Initiative at Crandall Minacommuck Farm. The 150-acre farm in Westerly is surrounded by wetlands, a white cedar forest, and contains sites of historic and cultural significance for the Narragansett Tribe.

“As indigenous people, we don’t really separate ourselves from food because in order to do that, you would have to separate yourself from your culture and the very identity of who you are,” Cassius said.

But throughout history, many tribes were forcibly ripped from the land and their traditional foods, and in replacement, given government-provided commodity goods that were a far cry from the venison and flint corn of their ancestors.

But while the terrors of the past have destroyed the lives of many Indigenous communities, there will always be hope, and food sovereignty is one path forward.

Plan to Break up Kennedy Plaza Roils Riders

Overlooking disapproval from public-transportation advocates, Gov. Gina Raimondo held a recent call to boost a plan that shifts most bus stops from Kennedy Plaza to new terminals at the train station and within the Jewelry District, despite unresolved objections.

“In my mind,” Raimondo said during a Nov. 5 online meeting, “this project and the fact that we are all here holding hands announcing that we are moving forward to make this a reality, means we’re

together taking one big step towards a more resilient, connected, sustainable Rhode Island.”

Transit advocates, however, strongly disagree.

Public-transportation proponent Randall Rose noted that there hasn't been a hearing for riders to speak directly with the designers of the multi-station plan.

“The main problem is getting rid of the central transit hub at Kennedy Plaza means that things will be a lot worse in our transit system,” Rose said. “Any system with no central transit hub is going to be dangerous for riders, it's going to be difficult for the disabled. It's going to be destroying the value of public transit in our state and making it difficult for people around the state.”

Grow Smart Rhode Island is exploring legal and legislative options to challenge the Kennedy Plaza bus realignment.

“We just believe the administration's plan is fundamentally flawed,” John Flaherty, Grow Smart's deputy director, said.

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