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CRMC approves Ocean SAMP

October 19, 2010, PROVIDENCE – The R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council has approved the Ocean Special Area Management Plan, a national model for marine spatial planning and the first SAMP in the state to zone offshore waters for future uses and preservation.

The Council unanimously approved the landmark document, the largest SAMP ever developed by the CRMC and University of Rhode Island, at its October 19 meeting. The Ocean SAMP spans approximately 1,467 square miles over portions of Block Island Sound, Rhode Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. The CRMC, together with the URI Graduate School of Oceanography and Coastal Resources Center, Rhode Island Sea Grant, Roger Williams University and numerous stakeholders, organizations, federal and state agencies, developed the 946-page document in two years.

"The CRMC is extremely lucky to have a respected institution of higher learning at its collective fingertips," said CRMC Chairman Michael M. Tikoian at a press conference on October 21, celebrating the completion of the SAMP. "Through the University of Rhode Island and its Graduate School of Oceanography and Coastal Resources Center, the CRMC has formed a priceless partnership with an unparalleled team. The resources and people at URI have allowed the CRMC to realize many of its programmatic and policy efforts over the years, and were integral to the creation and realization of the Ocean SAMP. I thank the team of researchers and staff at URI for all they did and continue to do."

A team of 47 URI staff – including scientists, policy makers and educators – worked on the SAMP's creation with CRMC staff and others. The SAMP team held monthly stakeholder meetings to vet chapter content, research findings and keep the public involved in the process. It also conducted workshops on each of the SAMP chapters, where members of the public could comment and provide suggestions and feedback to chapter authors and CRMC staff.

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 SAMP provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex and rich ecosystem of Rhode Island's offshore waters. The document covers topics including ecology, global climate change, cultural and historic resources, fisheries, recreation and tourism, marine transportation, navigation and infrastructure, renewable energy and other offshore development, future uses, existing statutes, regulations and policies, and policies of the Ocean SAMP.

"This day has been two years in the making, and as chairman, I'm proud to say that the Coastal Resources Management Council now has a landmark document to show for the monumental efforts of so many," Tikoian said. "I'd like to recognize our Executive Director Grover Fugate and URI CRC's Jennifer McCann and the other members of the Ocean SAMP team, as well as the members of the Ocean SAMP Subcommittee – Paul Lemont, Don Gomez, David Abedon and our legal counsel Brian Goldman – and the other members of the Council. Thank you all."

Next Steps

For state waters adoption, the Ocean SAMP will be submitted to the R.I. Secretary of State. The CRMC will then seek approval from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for formal inclusion of the SAMP into the federally-approved R.I. Coastal Resources Management Program (RICRMP). Securing this adoption – something the CRMC does with all applicable SAMPs – will allow the CRMC to exercise federal consistency within state waters, as provided for in the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA).

For federal waters adoption, the CRMC will request a geographical boundary expansion to its federal consistency boundary by documenting in advance that certain licenses, permits, leases, etc., will have a foreseeable effect on the state's coastal zone. The CRMC Will also establish formal agreements with key federal agencies by obtaining the geographical boundary extension approval from NOAA; continuing close coordination with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE, formerly MMS) through the Atlantic Governor's Consortium; and establishing a formal working relationship with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

The full Ocean SAMP document is available online in its draft form at www.crmc.ri.gov, under Spotlight, or on the official SAMP web site: <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/>. The final version of the document will be

available online in early November.

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