

## 2016 Climate Change Statement

Rapid climate change is a global phenomenon caused by the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and other human activities. The causes and effects of climate change are global in extent and impact all aspects of our lives, including economic, social, and political systems, as well as overall environmental conditions. Given the scope of climate change, addressing its causes and impacts requires understanding and action at local, regional, national, and global scales.

Save The Bay recognizes rapid climate change as an underlying condition that must be factored into our strategic efforts to protect and improve Narragansett Bay and adjacent coastal waters. Every aspect of our work, from environmental education and habitat protection to public policy and government oversight, should be informed by the best available science on climate change.

Save The Bay pursues a focused mission (“to protect and improve Narragansett Bay”) and operates with limited human and financial resources. Our strategic plan guides our efforts and sets goals over the near and intermediate term. Our staff expertise and organizational capacity needs are determined by our long-term commitment to water quality, habitat & biodiversity, government oversight & public policy, and environmental education. Save The Bay acknowledges that limited resources may at times constrain our ability to lead on environmental issues that lie outside these core areas of focus.

### Climate Change and Narragansett Bay

Changing climate conditions are adversely affecting the health and resilience of Narragansett Bay today, and the pace of climate change is expected to accelerate. Looking ahead, climate change poses profound threats to the ecological health of the Narragansett Bay region and the diversity and resilience of natural habitats and native species. Likely changes include:

- Higher temperatures and changing weather patterns may increase the frequency, severity and duration of harmful algal blooms, low oxygen levels, loss of native species, and increased presence of non-native species.
- Rising sea levels will degrade the health of coastal wetlands and cause accelerated rates of coastal erosion, resulting in habitat loss, beach erosion and an associated loss of public access along the shoreline.
- Increased vulnerability of public and private infrastructure – roads, sewer systems, onsite wastewater treatment, electric utilities, port facilities, and real estate – to coastal and riverine flooding and storm surges.
- Loss of many of the commercial and recreational benefits provided by the Bay and a significant risk that important progress in the clean-up of the Bay in recent decades is undermined by changing climate conditions.

## Save The Bay and Climate Change

In our role as steward of Narragansett Bay, Save The Bay is deeply concerned about climate change and the risks it poses to the future health and resilience of the Bay. We recognize that our primary focus must be on both the immediate and long-term impacts of changing climate conditions on the natural systems and native species that exist in the Narragansett Bay region. As an organization our priorities are:

- Strengthening the resilience of the Narragansett Bay ecosystem
- Promoting adaptation to changing climate conditions
- Enhancing public understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change
- Supporting public policies, investments, and initiatives which will lead to reductions in pollutants, including greenhouse gas emissions.

## Environmental Advocacy

As climate change relates to our three core advocacy areas (as described in our 2020 Strategic Plan: water quality, habitat & biodiversity, government oversight & public policy), Save The Bay plays **a leadership role** in:

- Monitoring the health of the Bay and coastal habitats, and advocating for Bay-related research to identify emerging climate change-related ecological threats.
- Securing investments in water quality and habitat protection that anticipate future climate conditions.
- Advocating for strategies to improve the sustainability and resilience of coastal habitats and native species.
- Pushing for regulatory changes, public policies, and investments that promote conservation of our natural shorelines and encourage, where possible, relocation of public infrastructure from vulnerable and dynamic coastal areas.
- Evaluating the potential impact of proposed coastal development and infrastructure projects, including energy facilities, on the environmental health of the Bay and its watershed, and on public access to the Bay and adjacent coastal waters.

Given resource constraints, Save The Bay concentrates its efforts on its three core areas of focus (water quality, habitat & biodiversity, government oversight & public policy) and plays a supportive role in the advocacy community with respect to a broad range of environmental issues that may also have a bearing on the health of the Bay. Examples include land conservation, transportation, recycling, brownfields redevelopment, and energy policy. Given the long-term threat posed to the Bay by greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, Save The Bay plays **a supportive role** in:

- Advancing government initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions locally and regionally (e.g. the Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative).
- Evaluating the direct and indirect impacts of proposed energy infrastructure projects on overall regional greenhouse gas emissions.
- Promoting public policies and programs designed to encourage energy conservation and the development of renewable energy resources, properly sited.

## Environmental Education

In order to improve public understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change and to promote public policy solutions to the many environmental challenges posed by climate change, Save The Bay plays **a leadership role** in:

- Encouraging thoughtful policy solutions to anticipated climate impacts through public discourse, education and outreach.
- Promoting awareness and understanding of climate change and its local impacts through our communications efforts, volunteer programs, and public education programs.
- Developing innovative school curricula through standardized or custom educational programs. Examples include: Carbon Cycle Challenge and the Greenhouse Effect; Ocean Acidification; Climate Change in Narragansett Bay; Sea Level Rise and Coastal Erosion.
- Offering professional development opportunities for teachers and educators to improve fluency in the latest climate science and improve communication skills on the causes and effects of climate change.
- Setting an example of sustainable building and site design by showcasing passive solar and renewable energy generation at its award-winning Bay Education Center at Fields Point in Providence.