Victory for Narragansett Bay

Barrington is the first R.I. town to ban plastic bags

Following months of advocacy and outreach by Environment Rhode Island, Barrington became the first town in Rhode Island to ban plastic bags. The town’s ordinance went into effect on January 1—an auspicious start to 2013 for Narragansett Bay.

Single-use plastic bags are among the most common types of debris found in Narragansett Bay cleanups. This plastic litter never biodegrades, posing a direct threat to wildlife and accumulating in the Bay and other waterways. That’s why the Ocean State should take the lead on eliminating plastic bags. And with our success in Barrington, we are now one step closer to that goal.

A model that works
If there was any doubt about the power of a single community standing up for the Bay, it wasn’t from the plastics industry. They knew one town could make a difference, and they bombarded the Barrington Town Council with emails, and even flew up a lobbyist from Washington, D.C., to oppose the ban.

And that’s why, even for a commonsense step like a local ban on plastic bags, the grassroots work of Environment Rhode Island proved critical.

“Our victory in Barrington showed that our model works,” said Channing Jones, Program associate with Environment Rhode Island. “By training local leaders, working with businesses, educating decision-makers, and mobilizing the public, we were able to overcome the power of the plastics industry and score a victory for Narragansett Bay.”

The next steps on plastic pollution
Already, there are activists in other communities seeking to follow Barrington’s bag ban lead, and Environment Rhode Island is teaming up with Save Bristol Harbor and the Jamestown Conservation Commission to reach out to businesses and leaders in Bristol and Jamestown, respectively.

Meanwhile, Environment Rhode Island is working with supportive state lawmakers to harness this local momentum to ban plastic bags statewide.

Jones is optimistic that, ultimately, the Ocean State will become a leader in eliminating plastic pollution.

“People in Rhode Island know that nothing we use for five minutes should pollute the Bay for generations to come.”
Recent action

Holding the line on global warming

Superstorm Sandy has served as a much-needed wake up call for political leaders to put climate change back on the agenda. And yet, with the memory of Sandy still vivid, Rhode Island’s best tool for tackling global warming is in danger.

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is one of the nation’s most effective programs for reducing global warming pollution. The 10-state program requires power plants to pay for the global warming pollution that they release, and then invests the funds in clean energy.

Already this program has led to investments of more than $17 million for clean energy and energy saving projects in Rhode Island. But if RGGI is going to achieve the emissions reductions needed to tackle global warming, the program must be strengthened.

State officials met in November and December to discuss the future of the program, but to the dismay of environmental advocates, none of the options on the table were good enough to reach the carbon emissions reductions science tells us we need to address the reality of global warming. In response to outcry from the environmental community—including hundreds of emails from Environment Rhode Island members—state officials went back to the drawing board and came back with a new proposal that would achieve a 20 percent emissions reduction by 2020.

Environment Rhode Island applauds Governor Chafee’s administration for helping lead the way toward a clean energy program that addresses the reality of global warming. Strengthening RGGI is one of the best ways Rhode Island can lower the emissions that cause global warming, and Environment Rhode Island looks forward to working with Rhode Island officials to ensure the new improvements are adopted.
We are on the cusp of seeing the first offshore wind farms spinning in the United States off the Atlantic Coast. Offshore wind has the potential to be a major player in moving our country away from polluting fossil fuels.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimates that we have enough feasible offshore wind potential off the Atlantic Coast to power 55 million households, equivalent to the energy produced by more than 200 good-sized coal plants. But despite this potential, offshore wind power remains completely untapped in the U.S.

However, thanks in part to our advocacy, the Obama administration made huge strides last year. The Department of the Interior announced in December the first two areas off the Atlantic Coast to be leased for wind development—an area off the coast here in Rhode Island, as well as off the coasts of Massachusetts and Virginia, and urged Congress to extend critical federal incentives for wind power.

The report called on United States lawmakers to commit to renewable energy by renewing the wind incentives that have helped grow wind significantly in the U.S. Thanks in part to the advocacy of Environment Rhode Island and our supporters; Congress saved the incentives—and the future of American wind energy—in 2013.

Like taking 1,000 cars off the road in R.I.

America has more than doubled its use of wind power since the beginning of 2008 and is starting to reap the environmental rewards. Wind energy now displaces about 68 million metric tons of global warming pollution each year—and in Rhode Island, power generation from wind energy projects currently under construction will displace as much global warming pollution as taking 1,000 cars off the road per year. In addition to eliminating air pollution, wind energy helps conserve water.

In Rhode Island, wind energy represents an important resource to help the state meet its goal of producing 16 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2019, a target made possible in part by key federal tax credits—the production tax credit (PTC) and the offshore wind investment tax credit (ITC).

Victory for offshore wind power

When key federal wind incentives were set to expire at the end of the year, Environment Rhode Island and its allies around the country went to work. Fortunately, with strong support from President Obama and our House and Senate allies—and thanks in part to the hundreds of Environment Rhode Island activists who raised their voices on the issue—Congress renewed critical wind power tax credits as a part of the beginning-of-the-year deal to avert the "fiscal cliff."

Without these tax credits, wind power projects would have been put on the sidelines this year, meaning less clean energy, more pollution, and the loss of 37,000 American jobs. Instead, these tax credits will continue to help make wind power a true American success story.

Like taking 1,000 cars off the road in R.I.
Applause for life-saving soot standards

On Dec. 14, the Obama administration strengthened air quality standards for soot pollution by approximately 20 percent.

Soot pollution is the deadliest of all the common air pollutants, causing thousands of premature deaths every year across the country through a variety of cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. It also contributes to haze that hangs over many of our cities, towns and parks. Sources of soot pollution include power plants, diesel trucks and buses.

The strengthened standards, which were strongly supported by Environment Rhode Island, better reflect the latest scientific research. The new standards outlines how much soot pollution can be in the air and still be safe to breathe.