Protecting the Bay from plastic

Rhode Island uses hundreds of millions of disposable plastic shopping bags every year, and too many of them end up in places like Narragansett Bay, where they could remain for generations—harming wildlife and littering our beaches.

Luckily, the solution is simple. Banning plastic bags is a common-sense policy to protect Narragansett Bay and coastal areas from plastic pollution.

Building crucial momentum

In the now-closed 2013 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly, Environment Rhode Island spearheaded the advocacy effort behind a bill to ban plastic bags statewide. Like most pieces of legislation, the bag ban did not pass in its first session—but it did take important initial steps in the legislative process, including committee hearings.

With the General Assembly on recess until January 2014, Environment Rhode Island is busy laying groundwork to give the bag ban the broad support it will need to pass in the next session.

Focus on grassroots outreach

“Given the entrenched opposition from the plastics and packaging industries, passing the bag ban will not be simple or easy,” said Channing Jones, campaign director with Environment Rhode Island. “But with the public on our side, we can win this for Narragansett Bay.”

Over the summer, Environment Rhode Island’s outreach team collected more than 10,000 petitions from around the state in support of banning plastic bags. “The next step is to take this grassroots pressure to the next level,” said Jones.

Call for activists

Environment Rhode Island is seeking volunteers either in the office, on the phones, or in Rhode Island neighborhoods educating and engaging the public about plastic pollution in the Bay. Let us know how you’d like to get involved!

Email us at: Action@EnvironmentRhodeIsland.org.

Or are you a local business owner? Send us a message and we’ll add you to our list of “Businesses for the Bag Ban.”
You don’t need me to tell you why you should care about the environment. Each of us has a special place we love, whether it’s Narragansett Bay, a favorite beach, or a forest, river or park near home. Each of us wants to breathe the air without worrying about pollution, drink the water without fear of contamination, and know that we’ll leave future generations a cleaner, greener and healthier Rhode Island.

Yet our environment faces threats too big for you or me to tackle alone. In order to protect our air, our water, and the places we love, we need like-minded people joining in a spirit of shared purpose and determination—especially when powerful politicians or corporations stand in the way.

That’s where Environment Rhode Island comes in, and why your membership is so important.

Thanks for being there with us,

John Rumpler
Senior Attorney

Lawmakers deliver mixed bag on clean energy

In the 2013 legislative session, the Rhode Island General Assembly considered an array of renewable energy laws, including tax credits and financing options for renewable energy, a proposed expansion in the state’s most important solar program, and a global warming pollution cap.

Disappointingly, few of these measures made it past the finish line by the end of the session. Among the few victories was a bill to significantly expand opportunities for Ocean State homeowners to invest in clean energy options. It will establish a Property Assessed Clean Energy financing program to give homeowners financing for the upfront costs of energy improvements like energy efficiency and rooftop solar.

Environmental advocates also succeeded in fending off attacks on good energy policy, including legislation that would have secured carve-outs for a large Canadian hydro-corporation—which would have come at the expense of clean, local resources like wind and solar.

With right policies, state can catch up on solar

This summer, Environment Rhode Island Research & Policy Center released “Lighting the Way,” a new report highlighting the solar energy boom across the country. The report outlines the 12 states that have made a considerable contribution to the nation’s rise in solar power. Rhode Island, however, missed the cut and failed to rank among the top 12.

According to the report, it is not availability of sunlight that makes states solar leaders, but the degree to which state and local governments have created effective public policy for the development of a solar industry.

“The sky’s the limit on solar energy,” said Environment Rhode Island’s Channing Jones. “The progress of other states should give us the confidence that we can do much more. By setting a bold goal of 10,000 solar rooftops by 2020 and 50,000 by 2030, and adopting strong policies to back up that goal, Rhode Island can follow in the footsteps of the top solar states.”
New plan to address increase in extreme weather

New bill to help Rhode Islanders invest in clean energy
In July, Gov. Lincoln Chafee signed a bill that will significantly expand opportunities for Ocean State homeowners to invest in clean energy options. The bill establishes a program that will provide Ocean State homeowners with financing for the upfront costs of energy improvements like energy efficiency and rooftop solar, and will save us money over time by lowering or even eliminating fuel costs.

“The bill will play an important role in helping homeowners make energy saving investments and ease access to pollution-free solar energy,” said Channing Jones with Environment Rhode Island.

Record weather continues to affect Rhode Island
The president announced a climate plan that will set limits on carbon pollution from power plants, advance energy efficiency, and increase the nation’s commitment to renewable energy. By 2030, this plan is expected to have cut carbon pollution by more than 1,000 tons each year.

After another year of extreme weather and another summer of record heat in Rhode Island, the president’s plan to address global warming was loudly applauded by Environment Rhode Island and others across the country.

“President Obama has responded to the millions who have spoken out on behalf of their communities and their families, urging him to lead on climate,” said Jones. “All of us who have felt the effects of global warming, or are simply worried about what’s in store for our kids, can take comfort in knowing that President Obama has put the nation on a path toward a cleaner, healthier and safer future.”

Left unchecked, global warming is projected to bring more intense storms and flooding. Scientists have warned that the window is rapidly closing for making the necessary cuts in carbon pollution to protect future generations from the worst consequences of global warming.

To respond to this threat, the president’s plan contains several key components, including:

A limit on carbon pollution from new and existing power plants, investments in energy efficiency, a plan to build more renewable energy, more support for affected communities, and an effort to rebuild U.S. leadership internationally.

Focus on carbon pollution
Environment Rhode Island offered special praise for the president’s pledge to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants, given that they are the single-largest source of carbon pollution in the country.

More than 3.2 million Americans submitted public comments last year in support of the president setting limits on carbon pollution from power plants.

Gina McCarthy: New EPA administrator
On July 18, in a bipartisan vote of 59 to 40, the U.S. Senate confirmed Gina McCarthy as administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The confirmation came within a month of President Obama instructing the EPA to cut carbon pollution from power plants as part of his plan to fight global warming.

In response, Channing Jones, campaign director with Environment Rhode Island, released the following statement:

“Gina McCarthy’s confirmation is long-awaited good news for the planet and Rhode Island and should not surprise anyone remotely familiar with her record. McCarthy’s stellar work under both Republican and Democratic governors, coupled with her track record at the EPA, proves that when it comes to protecting our families’ health and environment, it isn’t about which party or who you work for. It’s about whether you can get the job done. Gina McCarthy can get the job done.

“Working with a variety of stakeholders over the past four years, McCarthy was integral to several historic initiatives, including new, cleaner car standards that represent the biggest step the U.S. has ever taken to get off oil and tackle global warming; the first-ever federal limits on mercury pollution from power plants; and the first-ever proposed federal limits on carbon pollution from new power plants.

“I am confident that McCarthy will continue to use her professionalism and commitment to solve the formidable environmental challenges we still face.”

To learn more about our work to curb global warming and read the full report, “In the Path of the Storm,” visit:
www.EnvironmentRhodelsIsland.org
Rhode Islanders urge 10,000 solar rooftops in state

As Gov. Lincoln Chafee and state officials consider changes to Rhode Island’s renewable energy policies, Environment Rhode Island announced an open letter signed by 27 clean energy businesses and organizations asking Gov. Chafee to set targets of 10,000 solar rooftops in Rhode Island by the year 2020 and 50,000 by 2030.

Rhode Island lags in renewable energy production compared to other Northeast states, with more than 97 percent of the power the state generates coming from natural gas, a fossil fuel imported from out of state. Burning fossil fuels creates air pollution and contributes to global warming, an imminent threat for a low-lying coastal state like Rhode Island.

“Despite the rapid growth of solar across the country, Rhode Islanders are beginning to miss out on the benefits of this energy source, which produces no pollution and incurs no fuel costs,” said Channing Jones, campaign director with Environment Rhode Island. “We are counting on Gov. Chafee and state leaders to take bold action to expand access to solar for homeowners, businesses and community programs.”