



News Release

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NORTH CAPE OIL SPILL TRUSTEES AND INDUSTRY SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE NORTH CAPE LOBSTER RESTORATION PROGRAM

PROVIDENCE – Governor Donald L. Carcieri, Senator Jack Reed, federal officials, and representatives from the fishing and oil shipping industries gathered today at the Department of Environmental Management’s Marine Fisheries Center in Jamestown to celebrate the completion of the *North Cape* Lobster Restoration Program and to “v-notch” the programs last lobster. The event was the culmination of more than six years of effort to restore Rhode Island’s lobster population, which was significantly impacted by the 1996 *North Cape* oil spill.

The 1996 *North Cape* oil spill occurred when the 340-foot *North Cape* oil barge ran aground off Moonstone Beach, after its tug caught fire during a severe winter storm. Over 828,000 gallons of home heating oil spilled into local waters, killing an estimated nine million lobsters, millions of surf clams, fish, birds, and other organisms. DEM and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists recommended that the notching and protection of female lobsters was necessary to eventually replace the estimated nine million lobsters killed by the oil spill.

The *North Cape* Lobster Restoration Program began in 2000, and was completed in June of this year. The project manager, Ocean Technology Foundation, hired and trained observers and worked with over 150 fishermen in RI and MA to complete the project. The restoration involved cutting a v-shaped notch in the tail of 1.248 million female lobsters and restocking them into RI and southeastern MA coastal waters. These female lobsters are now protected from harvest for an additional one to two years while the v-notch is still visible; harvesting of v-notched lobsters is prohibited by law. Allowing

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lobsters to live longer gives them more opportunity to reproduce, yielding increased numbers of offspring.

“This partnership between Rhode Island’s fishermen and marine biologists has been a tremendous success. It has helped to restore our lobster population, and it has ensured that this important piece of our economy will continue,” Governor Carcieri said. “Restoring the lobster population represents part of a larger effort to restore our coastal habitat. We have worked closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to increase our shellfish population, protect sensitive wetlands, and allow piping plovers to flourish.”

“This project was a tremendous success for the lobster resource and for those who depend on it for their livelihood,” said Patricia Kurkul, administrator of NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Region. “The cooperative effort between the state and federal government, K-Sea Transportation, and the fishing industry is a terrific model for similar oil spill restoration activities.”

After extensive scientific assessment of oil spill damages, trustee agencies under the authority of the federal Oil Pollution Act reached a settlement with the responsible party, K-Sea Transportation, in June 2000. The terms of the settlement required the responsible party to implement and manage the lobster restoration program and to pay to the trustee agencies:

- \$1.6 million for land acquisition adjacent to Rhode Island's coastal salt ponds
- \$1.5 million for a multi-species shellfish restoration project
- \$3 million to purchase and protect loon nesting habitat
- \$400,000 to purchase and protect eider nesting habitat
- \$140,000 to manage and protect piping plover nesting habitat
- \$160,000 to implement an anadromous fish restoration project
- \$800,000 to oversee and monitor the lobster restoration project

“I commend all the Rhode Islanders and federal agencies who pulled together to clean up our coastal environment and rebuild our state’s lobster and shellfish populations after the *North Cape* oil spill,” said U.S. Senator Jack Reed. “The *North Cape* settlement set a national precedent for restoring the environment after oil spills. Today we celebrate how far we have come in restoring our fisheries and we renew our commitment to preserving these natural resources for future generations.”

The Trustees and the Responsible Party began restoration in 2000. Key accomplishments to date:

- Completed the v-notching and protection of 1.248 million legal-size female lobsters in Rhode Island Sound
- Purchased a conservation easement and secured permanent protection for 60 acres of land adjacent to Ninigret Pond

- Contributed to the acquisition and protection of 1.5 million acres of land in Maine to protect over 125 loon nesting pair and their habitat
- Acquired and protected a 42-acre island off the coast of Maine to conserve over 600 nesting pair of eider
- Constructed a fish ladder on Indian Lake in South Kingstown, opening up 220 acres of spawning habitat for migrating alewife
- Increased the number of piping plover nesting pairs on Rhode Island's South County beaches by 60%
- Increased populations of oysters, bay scallops, and quahogs in numerous locations in Narragansett Bay and the coastal salt ponds.

“Today's celebration highlights an immensely successful program that restored fish and wildlife from Rhode Island to Maine,” remarked Michael Thabault, assistant regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 5. Government, industry, private organizations and foundations, and hundreds of volunteers worked together to protect and improve natural resources destroyed by the North Cape oil spill.”

“The completion of the *North Cape* Lobster Restoration Project is a perfect example of industry working together with state and federal agencies to accomplish a positive outcome for the resource,” noted Lanny Dellinger, President of the Rhode Island Lobstermen's Association. “The Rhode Island lobster industry is optimistic that this positive co-management relationship will continue, including the process of determining future management decisions that are vital for the future of a sustainable fishery. The Rhode Island Lobstermen's Association has purchased v-notching tools for its members to encourage the industry's continuation of this program. With the continued support of state and federal agencies working together with industry, we can leave this resource in a better condition for future generations to come.”

Additional information on NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program is available online at <http://www.darrp.noaa.gov/>. Fact sheets on the North Cape Oil Spill Restoration Program are available on DEM's website, www.dem.ri.gov, by clicking on Hot Topics on the News page.