

Environment Council of Rhode Island



Membership Meeting, Dept. of Admin. Bldg., Conference Room B
October 7, 2019, 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Attendees: Greg Gerritt, Sue Korte, Laura Landen, Meg Kerr, Polly Barey, Barry Schiller, Paul Roselli, Jerry Elmer, Mal Skowron, Grant Dulgarian, Paul Beaudette, Judee Burr, Angie Koziara, Greg Schultz, Katherine Gibson, Kai Salem, Priscilla De La Cruz, Charles Clarkson

Agenda:

1. Approval of minutes
2. Office report (Greg Gerritt)
3. President's report (Priscilla De La Cruz)
 - a. Vacant ECRI officer seats
 - b. Continue scheduling meetings with state agencies working on energy and environment
 - c. Development work
4. Presentation: Charles Clarkson "The Rhode Island Bird Atlas 2.0: A Tool for Conservation and Land Management"
5. Reports: Pol Comm (Kai Salem)
6. Invenegy update (Jerry Elmer)
7. Presentation on Vineyard Wind (Erich Stephens)
8. Reports from ECRI fiscal agency projects
 - a. Green Infrastructure Coalition
 - b. Energize Coalition
9. Announcements (all)

Minutes

Minutes unanimously approved.

Office Report (Greg Gerritt)

- 50th earth day event – Greg discusses holding a 50th earth day event at RIC with the main event being speakers
- There are many events around the state for earth day, including Sunrise Movement
- Greg spoke with Terry Grey at DEM
- He has spoken to a number of people, generated speaker ideas
- Open to partnering with other organizations, universities
- Contact Greg if you would like to volunteer to help plan this effort
- National NWF Convergence: We've introduced the resolution "No New Fossil Fuel Infrastructure" last few years

President's Report (Priscilla De La Cruz)

- Nominating committee to fill vacant ECRI officer seats
- Priscilla is working to schedule meetings with state officials to talk about ECRI – had conversations with the RI Food Policy Council; attended a “Toxic Tour” at the Port of Providence with Julian, DOH; Jesus is the new executive director of EJ League of RI
- Next meeting NWF regional affiliate representative will be talking about offshore wind along with someone from the environmental justice league of Massachusetts
- Looking for grassroots organizers to talk about grassroots campaigning to us
- Priscilla’s three goals for ECRI during her tenure as President:
 - Climate Action Subgroup to organize on climate crisis view
 - Equity, diversity and inclusion
 - Development work

Presentation Charles Clarkson "The Rhode Island Bird Atlas 2.0: A Tool for Conservation and Land Management"

- Federal grant, in last year of the grant
- Bird atlasing started in Great Britain – establishing a baseline dataset of bird distribution. Great Britain & Ireland were the first country-wide.
- Massachusetts first state atlas
- Standardized the way data are collected – establishing a grid, volunteers, having a set timeframe to look
- First bird atlas in RI 1982-1987, recommended repeat every 20 years (69 volunteers, 164 breeding species)
- Bird atlases have great power in change analysis – showed example of Carolina Wren in NY, very noticeable range expansion
- What is different about RI Bird Atlas 2.0?
 - We are collecting standard data so we can do a change analysis
 - We are small and we have more access to volunteers (244) and we can track year-round. We’re looking at breeding birds, but also migratory birds and winter birds
 - We are the most comprehensive bird atlas on earth!
- Other states that are larger have to rely on probabilistic models to make predictions about where the birds are. We’re small enough to survey it all.
- New species like the bald eagle – at least 4 active bald eagle nests in RI
- Common raven another example of a new species
- We have lots of decline – most of these are birds associated with grassland habitat and early successional habitat
- Increases in forest species – pileated woodpecker has a huge increase when compared to 30 years ago; red-bellied woodpecker expanding range northward, biggest increase
- In RI we’re also doing density estimates based on point-count data; counted birds at breeding season
- Plot the birds’ habitat associations – what kinds of habitats are birds most commonly associated with based on their peak density data? Example of chipping sparrow and song sparrow
- This is a huge dataset.

- How has Charles used the atlas to date?
 - Ovenbird associated with mature woodland – more urbanized, fewer ovenbirds. Very impacted by habitat fragmentation.
 - Mapped out proposed solar farms and existing solar fields – 431 acres. Only ~130 acres in oak forest habitat. Would only lose 276 individuals (minus 0.2%) of Ovenbird with these proposed solar farms.
 - Could do similar analysis for other forest dependent species.
 - Also help inform land use decisions by land trusts – show how many species are on their parcels of land.
 - Aquidneck Island – is the open space they’re helping to conserve doing anything for the bird populations? Yes
- This establishes new baseline data for Rhode Island – something RI is going to be able to share with others
- Overall diversity hasn’t changed, but far fewer individuals within each species.
- Book and website coming September 2020
- What can Rhode Islanders do to stop bird decline? Stopping urban sprawl is a big one. Not using neonicotinoids in their yards; Keeping brush piles
- States have partnered with e-bird (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) to make atlas a constant thing, maps created in real time, year round phenomenon
- Racing to figure out what impacts are of new technologies like solar farms
- ribirdatlas.com

PolComm Update (Kai Salem)

- PolComm met last month
- Formed a separate committee – climate campaign committee. Long-term strategy for the environmental committee.
- Other groups will be actively involved in this committee
- 3-5pm Regency Plaza – building next door to the Green Energy Consumers Office

Report from Green Infrastructure Coalition (Meg Kerr)

- Funding to help create innovation center at Roger Williams Park
- GIC event coming up
- Impacts of work done by end of the calendar year
- Get to know providence parks

Report from Energize Coalition (Priscilla De La Cruz)

- Had a successful retreat with coalition members and coalition partners
- Meeting tomorrow to finalize planning decisions

Meeting adjourned at 7pm.