

2026 -- H 7991

LC003490

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESILIENCE -- NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR EROSION CONTROL, WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, AND EXPEDITED PERMITTING

Introduced By: Representatives Cortvriend, Speakman, Boylan, Carson, Bennett, Handy, and Spears

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings.

2 The General Assembly finds and declares that:

3 (1) Nature-based solutions, including living shorelines, wetland restoration, floodplain
4 reconnection, and green infrastructure, have been demonstrated to be proven, mature, and effective
5 strategies for managing erosion, flooding, and other water resource challenges.

6 (2) The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) incorporates living
7 shoreline principles in its regulatory programs, prioritizing natural erosion control methods that
8 protect coastal ecosystems.

9 (3) The Ocean State Climate Adaptation and Resilience Fund supports projects that utilize
10 nature-based solutions to enhance community and environmental resilience.

11 (4) Efficient, coordinated, and timely permitting is critical to advancing nature-based
12 projects that address climate adaptation and resilience goals.

13 SECTION 2. Title 46 of the General Laws entitled "WATERS AND NAVIGATION" is
14 hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

15 CHAPTER 23.5

16 COASTAL RESILIENCE – NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR EROSION CONTROL,

17 WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, AND EXPEDITED PERMITTING

18 46-23.5-1. State policy on nature-based solutions for coastal resilience.

1 (a) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state to encourage and prioritize the use of
2 nature-based solutions as a preferred means of enhancing climate resilience, mitigating natural
3 hazards, and protecting public health, safety, and welfare.

4 (b) Covered municipalities and relevant state agencies shall, to the maximum extent
5 practicable and consistent with existing law, consider nature-based solutions as preferred
6 alternatives to solely structural or hard-engineered approaches when reviewing, approving, or
7 funding projects subject to their jurisdiction.

8 **46-23.5-2. Definitions.**

9 For purposes of this chapter:

10 (1) "Director" means the director of the department of environmental management (DEM).

11 (2) "Nature-based solution" means a project that uses, restores, or mimics natural processes
12 to manage erosion, flooding, or water quality including, but not limited to, living shorelines, marsh
13 restoration, floodplain reconnection, urban green infrastructure, dune restoration, and riparian
14 buffers.

15 (3) "Qualifying project" means a nature-based solution certified by the director of the
16 department of environment management, or designee, to meet criteria for ecological benefit,
17 resilience enhancement, and alignment with state climate goals.

18 **46-23.5-3. Integration with existing programs.**

19 (a) Effective January 1, 2027, the department of environmental management (DEM) and
20 the coastal resources management council (CRMC) in consultation with the chief resilience officer
21 (CRO) designated pursuant to § 46-23.4-2, shall update its rules, regulations and permitting criteria
22 to prioritize nature-based solutions and incorporate expedited review procedures for qualifying
23 projects submitted pursuant to this chapter.

24 (b) The DEM, CRMC and any other relevant state agencies shall align their permitting and
25 funding programs to support the expedited permitting process pursuant to this chapter.

26 (c) The ocean state climate adaptation and resilience fund shall, from funds appropriated
27 pursuant to this chapter, allocate resources for project support, technical assistance, and monitoring
28 of funded nature-based solutions approved pursuant to this chapter.

29 **46-23.5-4. Coordination.**

30 (a) The DEM in consultation with the CRMC and the office of the chief resilience officer
31 (CRO) shall serve as the central coordinating entity for expedited permitting of qualifying projects
32 and shall:

33 (1) Accept applications for expedited review status;

34 (2) Coordinate review among involved municipal governments and state agencies

1 including, but not limited to, the CRMC, DEM, and department of health;

2 (3) Facilitate pre-application consultation to identify and resolve potential permitting
3 issues; and

4 (4) Track and report annually on expedited permitting activities to the governor and general
5 assembly.

6 (b) Municipal and agency review deadlines for qualifying projects under this chapter.

7 (1) Municipalities to the extent applicable and any relevant state agencies shall provide an
8 initial completeness determination or list of substantive deficiencies for qualifying projects within
9 thirty (30) calendar days of receiving an application pursuant to this chapter.

10 (2) Municipalities to the extent applicable and any relevant agencies shall complete their
11 permit decision (approval, conditional approval, or denial) within ninety (90) calendar days of
12 receipt of a complete application.

13 (3) Municipalities and agencies shall work collaboratively to avoid duplicative review
14 processes and coordinate public comment periods when practicable.

15 (c) Regulations and guidance. Municipalities and agencies involved in the permitting
16 process for projects under this chapter shall adopt necessary regulations or guidance to implement
17 this expedited permitting process by January 1, 2027.

18 **46-23.5-5. Rules and regulations.**

19 The director shall promulgate rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this
20 chapter.

21 **46-23.5-6. Reporting.**

22 Effective January 1, 2027, the director shall submit an annual report by March 1, to the
23 governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and president of the senate detailing all
24 applications received and expedited permits issued, all project outcomes and ecological benefits,
25 and any recommendations for statutory or regulatory improvements.

26 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESILIENCE -- NATURE-
BASED SOLUTIONS FOR EROSION CONTROL, WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT,
AND EXPEDITED PERMITTING

1 This act would provide that DEM and CRMC in consultation with the chief resilience
2 officer shall update regulations to prioritize nature based solutions for coastal resilience projects
3 that would be coordinated by DEM using an expedited permitting process.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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