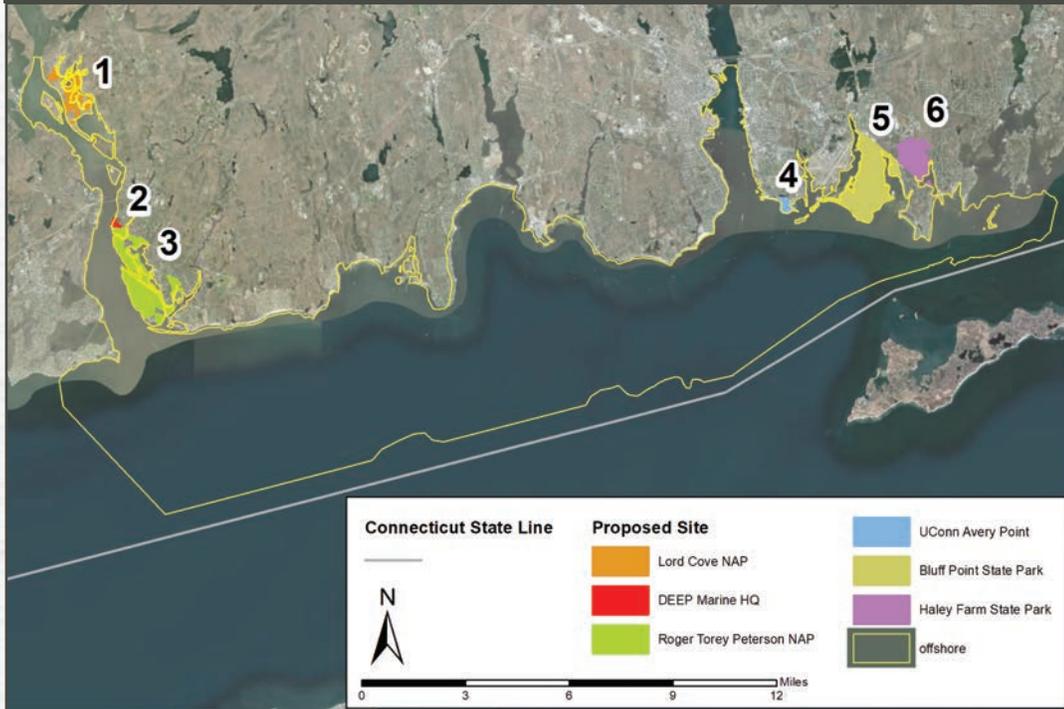


*Spanning 2 rivers, urban and rural zones and many habitats,*

# CT NERR nears official designation



By Judy Benson

Connecticut River some 23 miles to the west, with the lower Thames River in between. The variety of habitats throughout the reserve includes salt marshes, brackish coves, eelgrass and shellfish beds, two river mouths, sandy beaches, coastal forest, upland woods, fields and rocky islands.

There are also sharp contrasts. The Connecticut River portions are sparsely populated areas favored by fishermen and waterfowl hunters, with limited access by boat. The lower Thames is heavily developed and busy with commercial and recreational boat traffic. Bluff Point and Haley Farm are visited by thousands of hikers, bikers, recreational clammers and birders annually. But none of the uses

Kayaks, waders and seine nets will be the equipment of choice for experiences in what is set to become the nation's 30<sup>th</sup> federally designated estuarine research reserve. Estuaries are the rich zones where rivers meet the sea.

Hiking boots, snowshoes and bicycles will have their place there, too. But the area marked for the 50,000-acre CT NERR—Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve—is a mostly watery world.

“The majority of our reserve is aquatic,” said Jamie Vaudrey, assistant research professor of marine science at UConn and one of the leaders of the CT NERR project. “The land components of the reserve are all connected to each other by the waters of Long Island Sound and Fishers Island Sound.”

A collection of state lands and surrounding submerged areas of the lower Thames and Connecticut rivers will comprise the CT NERR. These two rivers supply most of the fresh water that mixes with the salty Atlantic Ocean in Long Island Sound. Now, after a years-long process, the groups leading the CT NERR project with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are approaching the finish line. An announcement that the CT NERR will join the national network of NERRs could come early in 2022.

“We’re much closer to the end than we are to the beginning,” said Kevin O’Brien, supervising environmental analyst leading the project for DEEP. “It’s been a long time coming, and it’s something that other states have received a lot of benefit from.”

The CT NERR footprint extends from Bluff Point and Haley Farm state parks in the east, to the Lord Cove and Roger Tory Peterson Natural Area Preserves (previously known as Great Island) in the

currently enjoyed by the public in these places will change with the NERR designation. Like all NERRs nationwide, the CT NERR will follow existing state rules and regulations for management of the lands, waters and how they are used.

“There is lots of habitat diversity, and that provides a lot of different opportunities for outdoor education, research and monitoring,” O’Brien said.

CT DEEP, UConn Marine Sciences, Connecticut Sea Grant and the Connecticut Audubon Society led the CT NERR designation, and UConn’s Avery Point campus in Groton is slated to house its headquarters. Once established, the CT NERR will receive federal dollars and matching state resources to support staff, research, conservation, monitoring, education and volunteer opportunities, and connect with the other NERRs to share data and resources.

“This will be a very interesting place for people of all ages, including scientists and lay persons, to come and learn in a beautiful outdoor setting,” said Sylvain De Guise, director for Connecticut Sea Grant.

## MORE INFORMATION:

[www.ct.gov/deep/NERR](http://www.ct.gov/deep/NERR)

Above: Map showing the proposed CT NERR sites courtesy of the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Right, Project Oceanology staff use a seine net to collect samples of marine life as part of an activity at Bluff Point. Photo: Callie Scheetz

