RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
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Quonnie Breachway Improvement Project
January 2026 Update

Background

Throughout the conceptual and design phases for the Quonnie Breachway Fishing Area Improvement Project, RIDEM engaged with stakeholders including municipal and public safety officials, The Nature Conservancy, Save The Bay, the Saltwater Anglers Association, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and the Salt Ponds Coalition. RIDEM hosted two public engagement sessions on the topic. The first was held virtually in 2021 and the second was held at the Kettle Pond Visitor's Center in Charlestown on June 24, 2025. RIDEM's consultant, GZA Geoenvironmental, presented conceptual design plans (dated May 2025) at this meeting.

The conceptual design plans included the following major project elements:

- Restoring and increasing height of revetment along the eastern side of the breachway channel;
- Raising the elevation of the access road;
- Restoring and increasing height of revetment and dune nourishment on the western side of the channel.

Public Comment & DEM Response

A few key themes emerged during in the public engagement process. These are summarized and addressed below.

Parking: ***There was a general request for more parking spaces, with particular focus on parking for boat trailers but space for cars with small craft-car top boats is also a concern.***

In response to these concerns, the design has been revised to incorporate 10 additional trailer parking spaces and 5 additional car-top parking spaces.

Eastern Revetment: ***General concern that the extent and height of the proposed revetment will limit safe public pedestrian and fishing access to and from the breachway channel.***

Repairing and raising the revetment will help protect the recreational functions of the site, including access to the boat ramp and to the coastal salt pond. In response to safety and access concerns, the design has been revised to shift the revetment landward. This design allows for access to the intertidal

area along the eastern channel, reduces the overall volume of stone required to construct the revetment, and minimizes the potential for concentrated flows along the landward side of the breachway that could lead to additional scour and erosion during high water events. Steps will be included to provide access over the revetment to the intertidal area.

Roadway: ***General questions on the need to raise the surface elevation of the roadway.***

The existing access road ranges from elevation 3 to 4 feet (NAVD 88 datum) and is subject to routine flooding during coastal storms. Raising the elevation of the road to a consistent 4-foot elevation would help the site be more resilient to flooding. While raising the elevation of the road will be included in the final design, its construction is contingent upon available funding. Critical components of the project, such as the western revetment and dune, will be prioritized for construction.

Western Revetment and Dune Nourishment: ***The proposed restoration of the western revetment and dune nourishment was generally well-received. Comments and questions on this component of the project included questions on the height of the revetment and the impact of vehicles on the dune stability.***

The proposed height of the western revetment - 4.5 feet (NAVD 88) provides resilience to "sunny-day" or non-storm conditions for up to 3 feet of sea level rise. Storm-related flooding will continue, however the revetment will be more resilient to erosive force and the proposed dune nourishment will provide an additional layer of protection. The dune is proposed to be restored to a height of 19 feet. The dune is designed to be sacrificial and is expected to erode during storms. The proposal includes a geotextile wrapped coir log pyramid as a visual indicator of erosion, triggering additional dune nourishment when exposed. Vegetation, particularly American beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata)*, will be planted to stabilize the dune.

This approach allows for flexibility in response to changing conditions on a barrier beach in the face of sea level rise. Barrier beaches move inland in response to rising sea level, as over wash from storms move sand further inland. The approach strikes the appropriate balance of investment to protect the breachway in the near to mid-term and allows for future adaptation in response to changing conditions.

In response to the concerns expressed about vehicle impact on the dunes, RIDEM is reviewing this policy. Temporary dune fencing will be included to protect the restored and planted dune.

Timeline
The project is in the permitting phase. At this time, construction funding has not been identified.

Questions/Comments
Questions/comments may be directed to DEM.Projects@dem.ri.gov