



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

March 13, 2023

To Chairman Shanley and the members of the House State Government and Elections Committee

Re: BHA Support for RI-2023-H6034 – An Act Relating to Waters and Navigation – CRMC Re-Organization

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Our members consider access to public lands and waters and the protection of natural resources top priorities, recognizing that both things are essential to our participation in, and the perpetuation of, our outdoor traditions.

In Rhode Island - The Ocean State - there is arguably no natural resource more important than our coastal zone. BHA members hunt for waterfowl, fish for striped bass, rake for quahogs, and enjoy many other recreational pursuits along the 400 miles of Rhode Island shoreline and coastal waters that RI's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is assigned jurisdiction over.

Recognizing that Rhode Island's Constitution charges the General Assembly with managing the natural resources in the state as a "public trust", and that in most cases this responsibility is further assigned through legislation to agencies, councils and departments, it is concerning that the public's faith in CRMC to uphold its duties has degraded to the point that the legislature has taken up the issue of re-organizing the Council's structure and statutory authority. BHA participated in the 2021 House Study Commission on Re-organization of CRMC, and we support the Commission's top long-term recommendation: to *"empower the executive director to make all permitting decisions, and require all appeals to be heard by a hearing officer, similar to the process at the Department of Environmental Management. Change the CRMC from an empowered council to an advisory council"*.

The Committee, and ultimately the General Assembly, must make a change to uphold its Constitutional obligation as the trustee responsible for Rhode Island's natural resources. We urge the Committee to **support H6034**, which seeks to transfer CRMC's decision-making authority to a new "department of coastal resources" and to make the Council an advisory body, effectively writing the Study Commission's recommendation in to RI General Laws. Further, we see no reason for this to be a "long-term" goal, as it was described by the Study Commission, and we urge the Committee to enact this change immediately by passing H6034.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

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