

May 1 and the day after Labor Day). In 2007 wardens informed visitors of the times that dogs were allowed, and of the requirement that they be leashed. The change was met with some resistance, as the Town ordinance had never been enforced and therefore had been widely ignored, but once aware of the impact of dogs on the beach, most owners willingly complied.

Litter control is equally important. Food scraps attract predators, which then threaten eggs and nesting young. Nesting birds can become entangled in litter, or inadvertently feed bits of plastic to their young, causing starvation. The Napatree Point wardens and naturalists collect trash, remind visitors of the impact that litter has on wildlife, and ensure the pristine character of the beach.

## “It’s Not Just About Open Space”

Watch Hill includes fine examples of American architectural styles from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially the Shingle Style and Colonial Revival. Together, they and various distinguished eclectic structures contribute to Watch Hill’s identity as a seaside resort community that has evolved over time, with a diversity of styles, textures, and materials. Retaining that identity through thoughtful change is key to both preserving the character of Watch Hill and planning for its future.

The architectural landscape of Watch Hill is changing. In recent years, we’ve seen substantial alterations, demolition, replacement, and new construction, and that is expected to continue. What impact will these changes have on the unique visual character of the community?

The Watch Hill Historic District, encompassing most of the Watch Hill Fire District, has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1985, but that designation has no legal “teeth.” The possibility of enacting historic district zoning (which would have the force of law) has been considered by Watch Hill in the past, but the Fire District has not chosen to seek such regulations. The Watch Hill Conservancy asserts that the built environment

contributes to our sense of place just as does the natural environment, and is actively seeking ways to raise awareness and preserve it.

Richard Youngken, a professional preservation planner from Wakefield, R.I., addressed the Annual Meeting of the Conservancy last summer, emphasizing that our stewardship must include Watch Hill’s distinctive architecture as well as its natural areas. His illustrated presentation “It’s Not Just About Open Space” has been published

and is available through the Conservancy office.

*Watch Hill Vision 2012* addresses the need to preserve and enhance the architectural, natural, and scenic elements of the area, stating that together they are significant character-defining attributes. “But at the moment, except on Bay Street, there

is nothing in place to protect the built environment, to guide change, or to ensure that alteration or new construction is in keeping with the ‘look and feel’ of Watch Hill as we know it,” states Youngken. “We’re looking at ways to define what gives Watch Hill its unique look, and ways to help direct change so it enhances the community.”

The new Conservation Program includes naturalist-led nature walks and educational offerings for local school groups. In the view of its operators and much of the public, in just its first year, the program has proven effective.

Nesting birds are better protected, the beach and dunes are cleaner, and visitors are not disturbed by unrestrained dogs.

The Watch Hill Conservancy and the Watch Hill

Fire District, partners in the Napatree Point Conservation Program, have called upon a number of other conservation organizations to identify areas of concern on the point, educate visitors, protect habitat, and ensure that natural change and human impact, while inevitable, will do as little harm as possible. Partners include: The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island, The Audubon Society of

Rhode Island, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Watch Hill Conservancy is committed to the awareness of Napatree Point as a remarkable area, while working with other agencies to protect it. Maintaining the delicate balance between access and conservation is a challenge, but Frederick B. Whittemore, Chairman of the Conservancy, is confident that it can be done. “Napatree is an accessible area of great natural beauty. Despite the number of people who come, there is always open space and peace, and the excitement of the natural. The Conservancy’s greatest accomplishment so far has been in taking the leadership role, with the Fire District, to provide a simple management program to preserve an area, which, if left unprotected, faced the potential of degradation.”

## SEA LEVEL RISE

Rhode Island is the first state to take a leading role in attempting to mitigate the effects of rising sea levels in the not too distant future.

The question of the impact of climate change on sea level rise has been hotly debated for decades. Most experts now agree: it’s not a question of *if*, but of *how fast* and *how high*. Estimates vary, but most agencies addressing this issue, including the University of Rhode Island’s Graduate School of Oceanography and the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), believe that by the year 2100, sea levels could rise as much as 3-5 feet in Rhode Island. According to a recent article in the *Providence Journal* (10/17/07), John King of the URI Graduate School of Oceanography asserts that “...sea levels are already rising. And they are rising faster than the most pessimistic computer models predicted.”

If anything approaching that magnitude should occur, for coastal communities, including Watch Hill (which, despite its name, has significant areas of lowlands and beaches), the environmental, cultural, and economic impact of such a rise would be devastating. Barrier beaches such as Napatree Point would become islands or disappear altogether. Fresh water aquifers would become contaminated with salt water. Many coastal lowlands would be submerged, and the profile of much of the coast would change from shallow to steep. Low-lying recreation areas would be lost, and coastal residents and business owners would be displaced. As a result of discrete events such as hurricanes, property damage and loss would be almost immeasurable. Projections are based on gradual change, but variables such as significant storms, failure to reduce greenhouse gases, and failure to plan can accelerate the process.

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council has proposed new regulations designed to prevent or mitigate damage from sea level rise. An ambitious mapping and modeling program will identify areas at greatest risk, and allow CRMC to determine new guidelines for conservation and regulate development in coastal areas. Among the first agencies in the country to propose such regulation, CRMC will also address building elevations in coastal zones and new standards for septic systems.

*Watch Hill Vision 2012: A five-year strategic plan*, initiated by the Watch Hill Conservancy and adopted by the Watch Hill Fire District in September, 2007, mandates that the Watch Hill Fire District, Watch Hill Conservancy, East Beach Association, and Town of Westerly “monitor issues regarding sea level rise, including potential impacts to the Village area and Watch Hill’s beaches and waterfront properties [and] engage qualified professionals to explore appropriate mitigation policies and initiatives.” *The Watch Hill Conservator* will keep its readers informed as this issue is studied further.

## SAVE THE DATES!

### Watch Hill Chapel, 5 Bluff Avenue

#### Sundays

June 29 – September 7

Non-denominational “Union” services, 10:00 a.m.

(Communion Services July 20 and August 17)

July 6 – August 31

Roman Catholic Mass, 8:30 a.m.

July 27 and August 24, 5:00 p.m.

Community Hymn Sing

### Watch Hill Memorial Library and Improvement Society

#### July and August

Story Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. (Except 7/10 and 8/14)

Library Hours: July 7 – August 29, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

### Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum

July 1 – August 28, Mondays and Thursdays, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Saturday, June 28**, Conservancy Annual Gala, Misquamicut Club Beach Club, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

**Friday, July 4**, Annual Children’s Bicycle Parade

Meet Memorial Library, 3:30 p.m. decorating, 4:00 parade

**Wednesday, July 9**, Westerly Band Concert, Village Park, 7:00 p.m.

**Friday, July 11**, “Make your own summer first aid kit”, ages 3 – 10 Memorial Library, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

**Saturday, July 12**, Watch Hill Fire District Annual Meeting  
The Firehouse, 222 Watch Hill Road, 9:30 a.m.

**Tuesday, July 15** “The Basics of Flower Arranging”  
Chapel Undercroft, 4:00 p.m.

**Friday, July 18**, Movie Night at the Library, ages 3 – 6.  
Memorial Library, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, July 22**, Photojournalist, Susannah H. Snowden, “Journey to South Africa”  
Chapel Undercroft, 6:00 p.m.

**Friday, July 25**, Roger Williams Zoomobile, ages 2 and up  
Memorial Library, 11:30 a.m.

**Friday, July 25**, East Beach Association Annual Meeting  
Manatuck Avenue, entrance to East Beach, 5:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, July 29**, “Taking the Mystery out of Raising Orchids”  
Chapel Undercroft, 4:00 p.m.

**Friday, August 1**, Art Show Opening Reception,  
Chapel Undercroft, 5:30 p.m.

**August 1 – August 10**, Art Show,  
Chapel Undercroft, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**August 1 – August 2**, Jewelry Sale for benefit of the Watch Hill Conservancy “Samoset”, 11 Water’s Edge Road, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**Wednesday, August 6**, Westerly Band Concert  
Village Park, 7:00 p.m.

**Friday, August 8**, “Bug Out! Exploratorium” ages 3 – 6.  
Memorial Library, 10:00 a.m.

**Saturday, August 9**, Watch Hill Conservancy Annual Meeting  
The Misquamicut Club, 10:00 a.m.

**Friday, August 15**, “Regal Reptiles”, ages 3 and up  
Memorial Library, 10:00 a.m.

**Tuesday, August 19**, “Scenes, Sweets, and Songs”  
Marion Markham and Joan and Ed Franklin  
Chapel Undercroft, 7:00 p.m. – 8:15 p.m.

**Friday, August 22**, Movie Night at the Library, ages 6 – 10  
Memorial Library, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

**Friday, August 29**, Summer Tea Party, ages 3 – 8.  
Memorial Library, 10:00 a.m.

**August 31 – September 1**, Pantry Donations for Area Shelters  
Memorial Library, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

FOR MEMBERSHIP IN  
THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY

Member name: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & email: \_\_\_\_\_

INDIVIDUAL: \$25

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

BUSINESS: \$75

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY: \$100

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPORTER: \$250 - \$499

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SPONSOR: \$500 - \$999

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PATRON: \$1,000 - \$2,499

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

BENEFACTOR: \$2,500 - \$5,000 or more

No: \_\_\_\_ Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER CONTRIBUTION Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:  
THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY  
222 Watch Hill Road  
Watch Hill, R.I. 02891

Please include names of family members 18 and under. If you are making gifts of memberships, please include the names and addresses of those to receive these gifts.





*The following includes late-breaking information, received only at press time, as well as short items of note; further updates will appear periodically on the website of the Conservancy.*

The Conservancy and the Fire District appeared on May 5 at a Westerly town Council hearing on the legal status and ownership of **Fort Road** Napatree. Despite a title search ordered by the Westerly Town Council which found no evidence of Town ownership or control of the road, the President of the Council has proposed declaring the road a public town road. Since the right of way known as Fort Road has been under the sole jurisdiction of the Fire District since the District purchased most of Napatree in 1945, the two groups gave the Council to understand that such a declaration was inappropriate and would not go unchallenged. They pointed out that the District has always granted public access to the area.

Responding to an initiative on the part of two Village business owners, acting under the umbrella of a newly incorporated organization, the Westerly Coastline Alliance, the Westerly Town Council recently approved Town participation in a program of the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), to encourage the adoption of beach access points by local entities. The Fire District and the East Beach Association (EBA), neither of which had been consulted on this matter, affirmed to the Town Council that the EBA had successfully maintained **East Beach** and beach access points from Bluff Avenue to Atlantic Avenue, for 38 years, and should therefore be exempted from the CRMC program.

As of press time, the Westerly Town Council had yet to enact a proposed amendment to its ordinance relating to **dogs on beaches** of the Town, expanding the hours when dogs (leashed and under the control of their walkers) can be on the beach during the summer months. Since this period includes the nesting season of the federally designated *threatened* piping plovers, the Conservancy and the Fire District have expressed their concern for the safety of the resource and about the liability which the owners of Napatree, primarily the Fire District, might face under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, for any damage which uncontrolled dogs might do to the plovers and their nests.

The Conservancy is undertaking a major project to remove the 68 unsightly **utility poles** located in and around the Village of Watch Hill, along the loop of Bay Street, Fort Road, Larkin Road, Bluff Avenue and Plimpton Road, and to bury the wires and relocate the transformers. Initiated in the fall of 2007, the project will be undertaken in two phases, the first of which will be Bay Street and Fort Road. The Fire District is a partner in the project.



**THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY**  
222 Watch Hill Road  
Watch Hill, Rhode Island 02891

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## Introducing *The Watch Hill Conservator*

*The Watch Hill Conservator* is the newsletter of the Watch Hill Conservancy. It is intended to provide important information about issues and concerns relating to Watch Hill, especially to its natural and historic character. Publication dates are scheduled for June and August 2008 and February 2009. Circulation is free, but we invite you to become a member of the Conservancy to support this and other programs of the Watch Hill Conservancy.

It is the mission of The Watch Hill  
Conservancy to:

- promote the preservation of the natural and built environments of Watch Hill,
- conserve, maintain and enhance its scenic open space and historical values and character,
- support the vitality and sustainability of the community.

The Conservancy is a Rhode Island non-profit corporation and is recognized as a public charity by the Internal Revenue Service under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Further information about the Conservancy may be found at [www.thewatchhillconservancy.org](http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org).



Richard Youngken©

# Napatree Point Conservation Area

Napatree Point Conservation Area, one of the most important – and fragile – natural features of Watch Hill, reaches its long, slim finger westward from the village toward Stonington, Connecticut and Long Island Sound; the ocean and Fisher’s Island Sound are to its south and Little Narragansett Bay to its north. Walking the one and a half miles of its length, one is aware of being in an almost timeless place, removed from the day-to-day world.

But Napatree Point is anything but frozen in time. Its natural, cultural, and architectural landscape has changed dramatically, a victim of the very elements that make it so appealing as a recreational site. Battered by wind and sea, the old growth of trees (from which Napatree took its name in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century) and thirty-nine substantial summer houses which followed have been obliterated. The few remaining structures



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In 2005, the Rhode Island Natural History Survey prepared a report for the Watch Hill Fire District and Watch Hill Conservancy that identified fifty-two species, “of which 14 have been designated as rare, threatened, or endangered by the state or the federal government. Three of these are the roseate tern (federally *endangered*), piping plover (federally *threatened*), and the least tern (state *threatened*).”

Dunes and dune vegetation are key elements in this fragile system. Napatree is essentially a shifting beach, vulnerable to wind and sea. The dunes provide windbreak, shelter, habitat, and food for birds, wildlife, and insects. Over time, the public has cre-

ated pathways that cross the dunes, segmenting habitat and reducing the mass and volume of the dunes. The Watch Hill Fire District (owner of more than 90% of the area), with approval from the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, uses snow fences to mitigate erosion and define pathways. The district makes efforts to re-establish dune vegetation, ensure safe nesting places and provide a firm foothold for dune vegetation. The district also owns property on Watch Hill, the State of Rhode Island, the Watch Hill Foundation, and eight private owners.

Free-running dogs present one of the greatest risks to the unique bird population of the point. In the summer of 2007, the Watch Hill Conservancy, in partnership with the Watch Hill Fire District, established a new Napatree Conservation Program, which incorporated the Town of Westerly's ordinance, limiting the hours during which dogs are permitted on beaches during the summer months, (only from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. between

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Lyn Traver, *Administrative Assistant*

For information about community events, lectures, concerts, nature walks, educational programs for children, and others, see the Conservancy's website at [www.thewatchhillconservancy.org](http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org).

**The Watch Hill Conservator**  
Joan Youngken, *Contributing Editor*  
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