

Old Saybrook Coastal Resilience Coalition (OSCRC)

Quarterly Newsletter – July 2026



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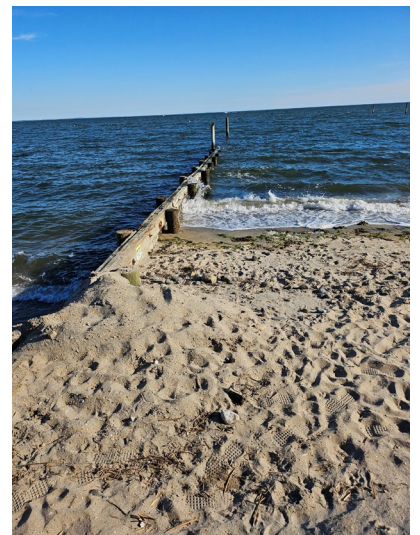
The Montauk Beach Nourishment Project – Could Something Like That Happen in Old Saybrook?

The Town of East Hampton, NY is adding 450,000 cubic yards of sand along 6,000 feet of shoreline to restore its eroded shoreline and protect it from future storms. Could Old Saybrook do something similar?



Taking Care of Old Saybrook's Shorefront and Riverfront

Lying at the crossroads where the Connecticut River meets Long Island Sound, Saybrook's shorefront and riverfront are unique natural assets to our community. We provide some suggestions for how to be good stewards for these ecologically significant resources.



Chalker Beach Fights Back

Chalker Beach faces many challenges when it comes to coastal erosion and flooding. Here is what one beach association in doing to mitigate the impacts of storm surge and flooding.



Also in this edition:

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Taking Care of Old Saybrook's Shorefront and Riverfront

Old Saybrook sits at a unique ecological crossroads where the Connecticut River meets the salty expanse of Long Island Sound. The Connecticut River tidelands from Middletown to Long Island Sound was designated by the Nature Conservancy as one of the Western Hemisphere's "40 Last Great Places" due to its exceptional biodiversity, tidal marshes, and ecological significance as a migratory bird stopover. Old Saybrook's shoreline features a combination of sandy beaches, tidal flats, and coastal headlands.

Understanding the Ecosystem

The first step in coastal care is recognizing that the shorefront and riverfront are living systems. Our beaches and dunes work together to protect the mainland. Dunes act as natural buffers, absorbing wave energy and preventing inland flooding during high-tide events and storms. These areas are often home to specialized plant and animal communities, such as beach grass and piping plovers, which are adapted to survive in challenging, salt-sprayed environments. When we disturb these areas, we lose a vital line of defense.



Back River Marsh - June 2026 (photo by M. Cerino)

The tidal marshes of Old Saybrook are among the most productive ecosystems in the region. They serve as:

- habitat for many species including ospreys and the diamondback turtle, the only marine turtle species native to Connecticut,
- nurseries for fish and critical stopovers for migratory birds,
- flood buffers, absorbing tidal and storm surges to protect adjacent upland areas, and
- an important carbon sink. Coastal wetlands store significantly more carbon per acre than upland forests.

What You Can Do to Protect Our Shorefront and Riverfront

Threats to our shorelines and riverfronts such as storm surge, sea level rise, and coastal erosion are global and require universal action to address. These are some steps we as individuals can take.

- Maintain riparian buffers - Allow native plants along the riverbank to act as a natural filter, catching pollutants before they reach the water.
- Reduce chemical use such as fertilizer that fuels algae blooms that deplete oxygen in the water. Switch to organic lawn care.
- Plant native species such as Switchgrass and Dogwoods or Milkweed for landscaping.
- Remove invasives such as phragmites, which can choke out native grasses and reduce the marsh's ability to function.
- Stay off of what few dunes we have. Walking on dunes destroys the beach grass that holds the sand in place, leading to rapid erosion.
- Respect Wildlife - Keep a respectful distance from nesting birds and other animals. Many of Connecticut's coastal species are sensitive to human presence, especially during breeding seasons.
- Support Conservation – Engage with the Old Saybrook Land Trust, Conservation Commission, and Coastal Resilience Coalition to support shoreline and riverfront preservation efforts.

What are Riparian Buffers? - In Old Saybrook riparian buffers are vegetated areas situated along the Connecticut River and at the edge of our tidal and inland wetlands. They act as a natural transition zone between land and water filtering pollutants, stabilizing banks, reducing erosion, and providing wildlife habitat. Their functions include:

- Water quality protection – filtering up to 80% of excess nutrients, sediments, fertilizers, pesticides, and animal waste from runoff before they enter waterways,
- Bank stabilization – plant roots hold soil in place, reducing erosion and land loss,
- Habitat creation – providing food and shelter for wildlife, and shade to keep water temperatures cool for aquatic life, and
- Flood control – slowing the velocity of runoff, absorbing water to reduce flood damage.

Old Saybrook has adopted a 100-foot riparian buffer requirement for all development.

Old Saybrook's unique geography and ecosystems deserve our respect and attention. Ultimately, protecting our riverfronts and shorefronts requires some understanding and appreciation of our environment. By implementing everyday practices like establishing vegetative buffers, reducing pesticide use, and managing stormwater, we can preserve what makes Old Saybrook a unique and special place. Learn more by reviewing the [Town of Old Saybrook Coastal Resources](#) guide to help preserve this ecosystem for ourselves and for future generations.

The Montauk Beach Nourishment Project

Could a Similar Project Protect Old Saybrook's Coastline?

The Town of East Hampton, NY is undertaking a massive beach nourishment project to restore Montauk's eroded shoreline and protect against future storms. The project entails placing 450,000 cubic yards of sand along 6,000 feet of shorefront. The design will create a 100-foot-wide dry beach but also will deposit much of the sand below the water line to create a more gradual slope that will dampen the erosive effects of storm-driven ocean waves. The sand will be sourced from areas of the sea floor where ample supplies of beach-compatible sand have been identified. A slurry of sand and sea water is conveyed through temporary piping and discharged onto the beach where it is spread by bulldozers. The Montauk beach nourishment is part of a larger project undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge channels and harbors along Long Island's south coast and use the sand for beach nourishment where it is needed the most.

The regulatory and financial hurdles to conduct beach nourishment of this type are significant, but the resulting protection of Old Saybrook's coastal communities and enhancement of our scenic shoreline are the payoff. Sand for beach nourishment projects in Connecticut currently come from harbor dredging projects or inland sand pits. Harbor dredging projects occur only intermittently, and the volume of sand required to protect Old Saybrook's



A slurry of sand and water pumped onto Gilgo Beach on Long Island (Army Corps news story 1-24-25)

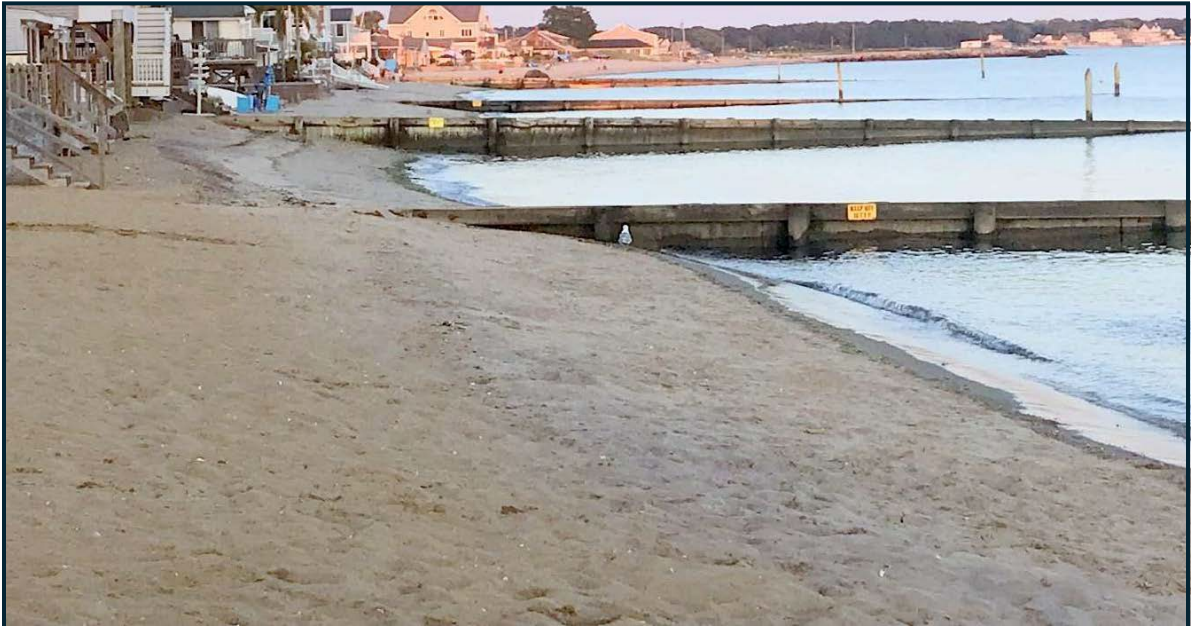
shoreline would require thousands of truckloads if it used an inland source of sand. Instead, a Montauk-type beach nourishment project for Old Saybrook would utilize sand dredged from offshore and carried by barge to its eroded shoreline. Such a project has never been undertaken in Connecticut. While the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEEP) has encouraged the reuse of sand from dredging projects for beach nourishment it has discouraged dredging solely for that purpose. DEEP concerns are primarily based on benthic (sea floor) habitats and other ecological impacts. Mitigation of these impacts can be addressed using the guidance of aquatic biologists during selection of a sand source and evaluating methods for placement of the dredged sand. As sea level rise and the frequency and intensity of storms increase each year, new ways of thinking and larger mitigation measures are needed to protect our coastline.

Chalker Beach Fights Back

The Chalker Beach Association is nearly 100 years old, having been founded in 1931. By 1934 its beachfront was developed with summer homes constructed just above high tide on filled land adjacent to a tidal marsh. Later, additional homes were built adjacent to the tidal marshes behind the beachfront along access roads to Route 1. In those days, little consideration was given to the damage that could result from storm surges and coastal flooding and Chalker Beach has been battling these problems ever since.

This writer walked with Chalker Beach Association residents Michael Cohen and Gary Albanese so that they explain the erosion and flooding problems Chalker Beach is experiencing and what the beach association is doing to address them. Over the years, residents have added sand to the beach from off-site sources and constructed

structures intended to retain the sand along the beach front. Sometime before 1974 three groins (low walls perpendicular to the shoreline) were constructed to hold sand and protect the shore from erosion. By 2000 the number of these structures increased to eight.



Chalker Beach groins at high tide June 9, 2026 (photo by J. Greacen)

The effectiveness of the groins is unknown,

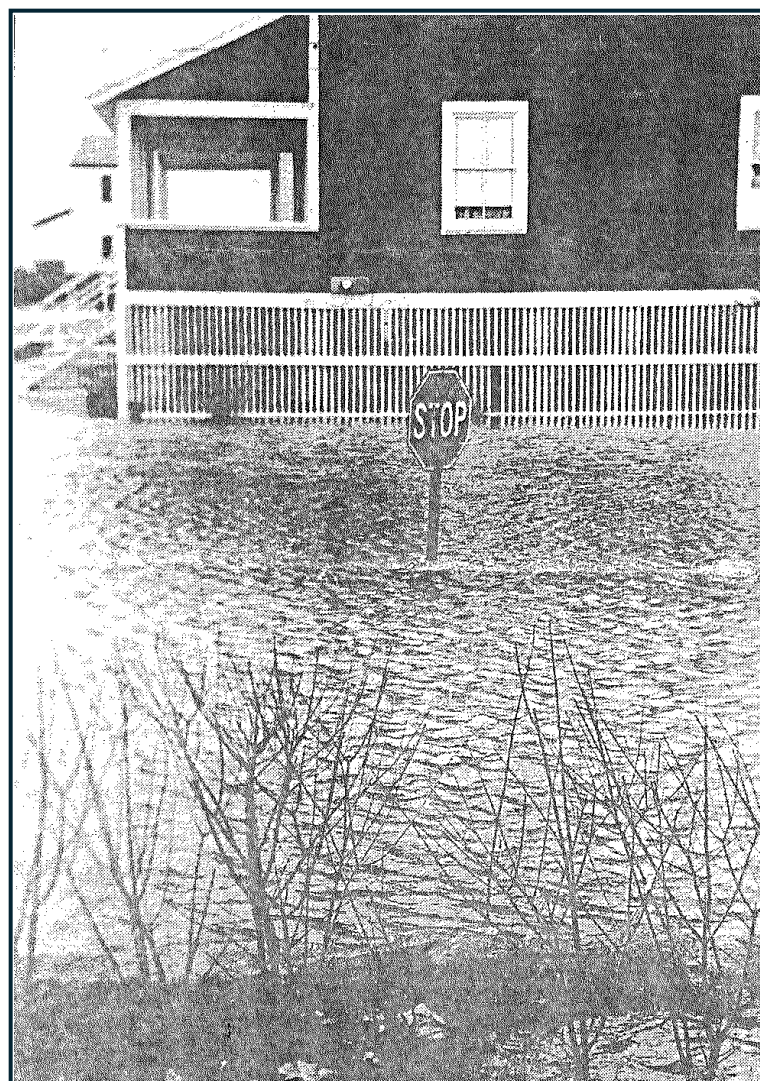
and the addition of sand from off-site sources, often unsatisfactory for recreational use, represents a significant expense for Chalker Beach. Seeking a different approach, Micheal Cohen, on behalf of the Chalker Beach Association, met with representatives from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in November of 2018. He requested and was granted a modification to the existing permit. This revision expanded the approved area for the harvesting of sand, which resulted in greater opportunity for beach nourishment. This regrading broadens the upper portion of the beach and raises the level of the beach to protect the homes lining Chalker Beach from storm surge.

With permit in hand the Chalker Beach Association just needed someone with construction experience to coordinate the effort and ensure that it meets permit requirements. Enter Gary Albanese of the Chalker Beach Association (and OSCRC Vice Chair) who currently coordinates the beach regrading program. In addition, for beachfront homes electing to participate, he hires a construction company to create temporary piles of sand, artificial dunes, to further protect the houses from storm surge. Each fall the sand gets pushed up into large berms in front of the homes to protect them against winter storms, and each spring the sand is spread back out to leave a broad sandy beach sloping gently to the water.

Behind the beach, Chalker Beach Marsh routinely floods into the streets and neighborhoods during high tides and storms. In 2016 a tide gate was installed to prevent rising tides from entering the marsh and flooding the areas along the marsh. The tide gate was constructed with a flow restrictor installed at the end of a 24-inch diameter pipe that fills and drains the marsh. Unfortunately, the drainage pipe is too small to effectively drain the marsh so that when flooding does occur, it takes several days for the floodwater to drain. Until funding can be obtained to construct a larger tide gate, Chalker Beach residents (and OSCRC members) Terence McGrath, Gary Albanese, and Michael Cohen worked with Old Saybrook's Public Works Department in coordination with other stakeholders from town and state agencies as well as the surrounding neighborhoods to find a temporary solution to the problem. The result is a drainage swale (shallow channel cut into the ground) to allow floodwaters to drain from the marsh into Long Island Sound much more quickly than it had in the past. The swale, constructed in the fall of 2025, has proven to be effective in reducing Chalker Beach's flooding problems.

A longer-term solution is anticipated to be developed as part of a study currently underway to develop marsh flooding and erosion mitigation strategies. A grant from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund and contributions from the towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook are funding a study aimed at restoring Chalker and Chapman Beach marshes and mitigate marsh-associated flooding from Chapman Beach to Indiantown. The study, scheduled to be completed by the end of the year, will provide marsh restoration plan alternatives and flood mitigation strategies for the towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook to implement as funding allows.

Sometimes common sense leads to solving problems more quickly and efficiently than detailed investigations and feasibility studies. As we returned to the Chalker Beach parking lot to conclude our walk, Gary showed me a catch basin next to the parking lot. The catch basin once led to a dry well that leached flood water to the subsurface. Flooding often exceeded the capacity of the dry well leaving the road and adjacent properties under water for days. Last year Gary worked with the Old Saybrook Public Works Department to connect the catch basin to an existing storm drain several hundred yards away. Storm water entering the catch basin now discharges directly out into the marsh and subsequently to Long Island Sound. As Gary was showing me the catch basin a neighbor across the street shouted out to say hello and "that drain has made all of the difference. It's much better now. Thank you!"



Chalker Beach Road – March 1984
(courtesy of the Old Saybrook Historical Society)

A Historical Perspective

The Old Saybrook Recessional Moraine



For this issue's Historical Perspective we go way back, back to 20,000 years ago as the Pleistocene Ice Age was coming to an end. It peaked some 25,000 years ago when the continental ice sheet extended to Long Island and covered Old Saybrook with over 1,000 feet of ice. As the climate warmed, the melting of the ice sheet was not a smooth continuous process. Glacial retreat was punctuated with occasions of stillstands (when the rate of ice flowing forward matches the rate of melting back). One such stillstand occurred in Old Saybrook 20,000 years ago leaving a ridge of sediment and boulders that can be seen today. The ridge is most prominent where Knollwood and Fenwood face South Cove, and the bluff in Cornfield Point facing the Sound. The largest of the boulders remaining from the recessional moraine are present along the southern shore of South Cove at Fenwood and at the end of Atlantic Avenue in Knollwood. Segments of the Old Saybrook Recessional Moraine can be traced in Connecticut from the Rhode Island line in North Stonington to the Hen and Chickens Reef off Cornfield Point in Old Saybrook.



The Old Saybrook Coastal Resilience Coalition (OSCRC) coordinates responses to sea level rise and climate change by documenting vulnerabilities of local beachfront and riverfront communities, educating the public on these vulnerabilities and, through governmental and commercial partnerships, identifying and implementing intermediate and long-term, science-based, mitigation solutions.

Our response to sea level rise is going to be costly, time-consuming, and socially challenging. We are looking for partners, funding sources, skilled professionals, and individuals who can assist us to sustainably fortify the infrastructure along the Connecticut coastline.

Please email us at oscrcinc@gmail.com or go to <https://oscrcct.org> or <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61563259214783> to support our efforts.

Links we like:

Connecticut Institute of Resilience & Climate:
<https://circa.uconn.edu/>

The Long Island Sound Resilience Resource Hub
<https://www.lisresilience.org/>

The Nature Conservancy's Coastal Resilience:
<https://coastalresilience.org/>

Old Saybrook Land Use Department Coastal Resilience:
[Coastal Resilience | Old Saybrook, CT](#)

NOAA Office for Coastal Management:
[Natural and Structural Measures for Shoreline Stabilization](#)

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The OSCRC Newsletter is published quarterly. Please email the OSCRC Newsletter editor at oscrcinc@gmail.com to receive the newsletter. We would like to hear from readers of this newsletter about your concerns regarding the effects of climate change and sea level rise. How are you affected? What would you like to see done to prepare Old Saybrook for increasing frequency and intensity of coastal storms and flooding? Contact us at oscrcinc@gmail.com or go to <https://oscrcct.org>

A special shout out to Chef Rick for providing space for our monthly meetings. You can enjoy a variety of Chef Rick's tasty offerings at Mindy K's on Boston Post Road in Old Saybrook.