Old Saybrook Coastal Resilience Coalition (OSCRC)

Quarterly Newsletter – October 2026



In this edition:



CTDOT Plans Major Route 154 Seawall Repairs

The Connecticut Department of Transportation is planning extensive restoration of the seawall protecting Route 154 in Fenwood and Knollwood. Portions of the seawall not restored following Superstorm Sandy in 2012 have experienced ongoing degradation. The restoration will also improve shoreline access.



Project Update – Old Saybrook/Westbrook Marsh Restoration and Erosion Control Study

The towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook are undertaking a marsh restoration and erosion control study of the shoreline from Chapman Beach in the west to the Indian Town jetty to the east. A range of mitigation measures is under consideration. The study is expected to be completed in early 2027.



OSCRC Searches for Sand Source

The OSCRC has engaged an engineering firm to identify potential source of beach nourishment sand and provide grant writing assistance. The OSCRC is searching for grant opportunities to permit and design a sand dredging project to nourish Old Saybroook's beaches. If you wish to help, please contact us by email at oscrcinc@gmail.com.

Also in this edition: A Historical Perspective – The 15th Anniversary of Hurricane Irene

Connecticut Department of Transportation Plans Major Route 154 Seawall Repairs in Fenwood and Knollwood

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) is planning to extensively refurbish the seawall in the Fenwood and Knollwood sections of Old Saybrook to prevent undermining by storms and rising sea levels. The environmental degradation of the seawall threatens the integrity of State Route 154 (Maple Avenue), an emergency evacuation route. Sal Aresco, CTDOT Principal Engineer for Pavement & Highway Asset Design, said that the approximately $20 million project will reinforce the seawall base using sheet piling and concrete.



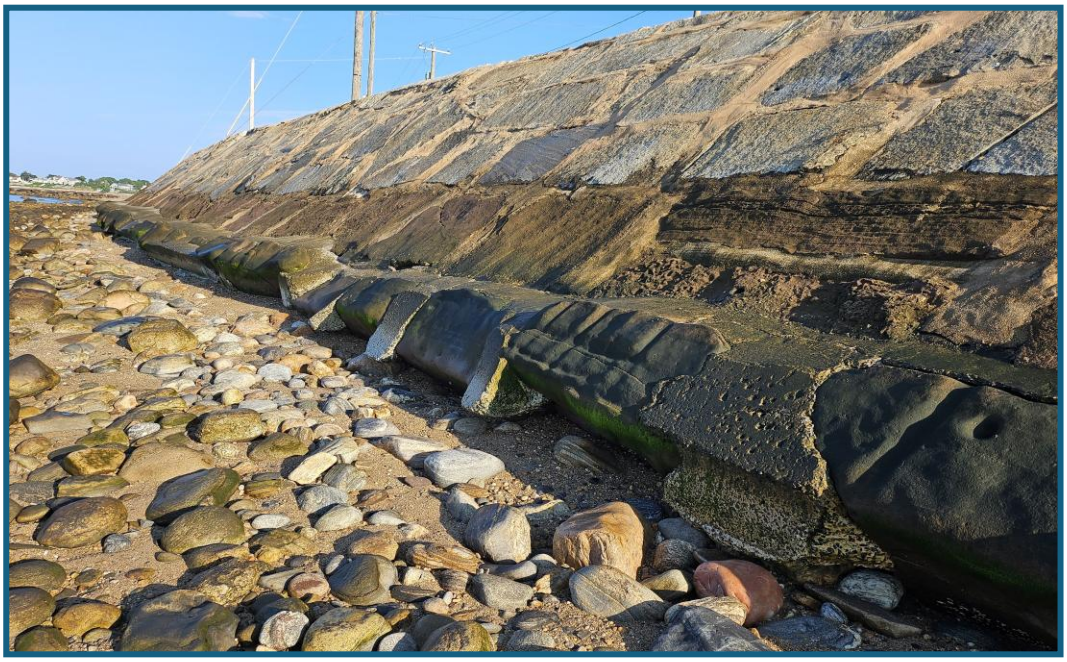
Source: Connecticut Department of Transportation

In 2023, after noticing some undermining of the seawall, the Old Saybrook Coastal Resilience Coalition (OSCRC) brought this to the attention of CTDOT, the Town of Old Saybrook, state legislators (Devin Carney, Martha Marx, Norm Needleman) as well as our member of Congress, Joe Courtney. All responded positively, and CTDOT developed a project to strengthen the seawall.

The project construction activities will probably commence after Labor Day 2028 to avoid the “beach season.” As part of the planning process, CTDOT will solicit public input and provide technical details beginning in fall 2026.

According to a CTDOT press release, an in-person public information meeting concerning the seawall rehabilitation along Route 154 will be held at the Old Saybrook Middle School Auditorium, located at 60 Sheffield Street in Old Saybrook on Wednesday, November 4, 2026. The meeting location is ADA accessible. An open house for individual discussions with CTDOT project staff will begin at 6:00 p.m., followed by a formal design presentation at 7:00 p.m. A question and answer (Q&A) session will immediately follow the presentation.

For instructions on accessing the meeting and ways to provide comments and ask questions, please visit https://portal.ct.gov/DOTOldSaybrook0105-0222.



Erosion at the toe of the Fenwood seawall
Photo by J. Greacen 7-30-26



Foreground - Deterioration of the seawall that was not restored following Superstorm Sandy
Background – Portion of the seawall restored following Superstorm Sandy
Photo by J. Greacen 7-31-2026

Project Update

Old Saybrook – Westbrook Marsh Restoration and Erosion Control Study

The towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook are undertaking a study to identify strategies to control flooding and erosion along a one-mile stretch from Chapman Beach in Westbrook to Indian Town in Old Saybrook. The study focuses on three priority areas to improve resilience against sea level rise and the increasing frequency and intensity of storms:

- restoring the environmentally degraded Chalker Beach Marsh,
- mitigating erosion of the Cold Spring Brook Marsh and adjacent shorelines, and
- mitigating flood hazards within the residential neighborhoods abutting the Cold Spring Brook, Chalker Beach Marsh, and Hagar/Mud Creek Marshes

The primary goal of the study is to develop the documentation necessary to design site-specific restoration plans to a level that can be used to acquire funding for permitting and detailed design.

On September 24, 2026, Fuss & O'Neill, the engineering firm hired to complete the study, held the second of two public information meetings. The firm provided a project update and presented potential approaches for each of the three focus areas.

The first phase of the project, now complete, consisted of collecting water level data and performing an ecological survey of the three marshes within the study area. Water level data are being used in a numerical model to simulate marsh conditions under potential mitigation scenarios. Primary conclusions of the ecological survey included the following:

Old Saybrook – Westbrook Marsh Restoration and Erosion Control Study Area



Source: Old Saybrook/Westbrook Marsh Restoration and Erosion Control Study Grant Application

- Chalker Beach Marsh was determined to have the greatest levels of degradation, with the largest areas of vegetation dieback and invasive plant species.
- Three acres of Cold Spring Brook Marsh have been lost to coastal erosion over the past 25 years.
- Hager Creek Marsh was identified as the healthiest of the three marshes.

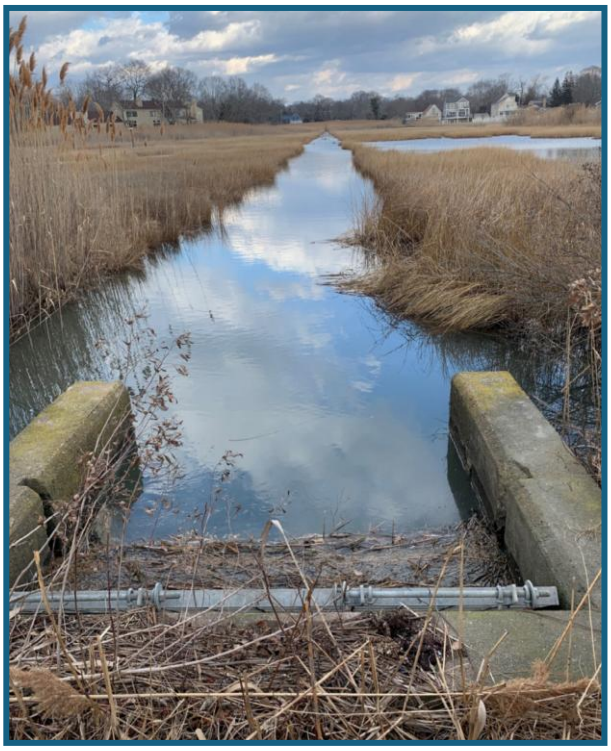
Fuss & O'Neal solicited public comment on its proposed mitigation options for each of the three focus areas. The presentation compared the advantages, disadvantages, and estimated costs of each option to help assess its feasibility.

Chalker Beach Marsh Restoration

The approaches presented to restore Chalker Beach Marsh focused on improving drainage and replacing the existing undersized tide gate. Improving drainage would restore ecological function of the marsh and reduce neighborhood flooding. Under consideration are constructing an open channel to improve drainage, enlarging the existing tide gate, and supporting the recovery of stressed marsh vegetation.

Flood Mitigation

There are no easy answers to addressing the flooding that occurs with regularity in neighborhoods within the study area. Few homeowners want to give up their home and move to higher ground, and other viable alternatives require buy-in and participation from residents. One option is to raise the roads so that they are passable during flood events. This option, however, would modify stormwater runoff patterns affecting some properties more than others and would require residents to raise their driveway aprons to meet the elevated roadways. Another option involved constructing a raised roadway along the western boundary of Indian Town that would serve as both an access road and dike preventing Hager Creek Marsh floodwaters from entering the neighborhood.



Chalker Beach Marsh Tide Gate
Courtesy of the Old Saybrook Land Use Department

Cold Spring Brook Erosion Control

Options for Cold Spring Brook focused on restoring the shoreline between Chapman Beach and Chalker Beach. For decades the shoreline in this area has eroded hundreds of feet encroaching on Cold Spring Brook Marsh and adjacent neighborhoods. Approaches under consideration are combinations of sand addition and other methods to reduce erosion such as a shoreline sill consisting of a low-lying strip of rock cobbles in the intertidal zone to dampen wave action or constructing and vegetating a dune behind the added sand.

Next Steps

The towns of Old Saybrook and Westbrook will review the proposed options and identify practicable mitigation measures that align with the towns' Hazard Mitigation Plans. The towns will be equipped with the up-to-date and site-specific data needed to apply for grant funding to permit and design these projects.

OSCRC is Searching for Sand to Support Beach Nourishment

In June 2025 the Chalker Beach Improvement Association completed a study to evaluate beach nourishment alternatives from Chalker Beach to the Indian Town jetty. Beach nourishment is the placement of sand from an off-site source to replenish sand lost to erosion. Beach nourishment does not stop a beach from eroding, but it can increase the length of time a beach and the structures behind it remain stable.



Chalker Beach looking east
Photo by J. Greacen

Each of the alternatives identified require volumes that make delivering sand by truck impractical. Instead, beach nourishment would utilize sand dredged from offshore and delivered by barge or in a pipeline as a slurry.

OSCRC has hired an engineering company to identify grant opportunities and help us take the next steps toward finding an offshore sand source and permitting its placement onto Chalker and nearby beaches.

These are the first phases in what could be a large-scale project to gird Chalker and nearby beaches against inevitable sea level rise.



Chalker Beach looking west
Photo by J. Greacen

A Historical Perspective

Looking Back – The 15th Anniversary of Hurricane Irene



Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) image of Irene making landfall near New York City. Photo courtesy of NOAA.

After passing over the Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, Irene became a major Category 3 hurricane on August 24, 2011. A Category 3 hurricane generates maximum wind speeds of between 111-129 mph. Irene then turned north up the Eastern Seaboard arriving east of New York City as a tropical storm late in the morning of August 28.

Although Irene was no longer a hurricane when it made landfall, it caused considerable damage to the Connecticut shoreline and inland areas. Arriving at high tide with winds up to 55 mph. Irene pushed water into western Long Island Sound. Five- to fifteen-foot waves riding a 3½-foot storm surge drove water inland damaging structures and causing extensive flooding.



Cornfield Point 10:48am October 28, 2011
Photo courtesy of the Old Saybrook Historical Society

Inland, significant flooding and erosion occurred due to the large physical size of the storm and the higher-than-average level of rainfall earlier in the month that saturated soil prior to Irene's arrival. The absence of any major wind events since Hurricane Gloria in 1985 lead to a significant overgrowth of trees leaving them vulnerable to damage by storm events. One to two percent of the state's trees were lost due to Irenes flooding and strong winds.



Photo courtesy of CTDEEP Inland Water Resources Division Flood Management Program and the Old Saybrook Land Use Department

The Dock and Dine Restaurant on Saybrook Point was the worst hit of Old Saybrook's business community. Irene ripped open the roof and left 18 inches of water in the building. Following the storm the restaurant was restored with an entirely new kitchen and interior. The restaurant reopened in September 2012, just one month before Hurricane Sandy would arrive in Old Saybrook.

www.oscrcct.org

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

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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.