

PLANNING IN DEMOCRACY:
A Management Study of Narragansett Bay

by

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Thesis

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Narragansett Bay is Rhode Island's most valuable resource. How can the Bay be utilized to maximize its potential, to accommodate growth while still protecting the environment? It is possible to achieve both objectives, but not by coincidence ; long range planning is necessary. Legislation created the Coastal Resources Management Council and mandated it to formulate policy based on the public interest. Can there be a public interest? How has the mandate been interpreted? Typically, a gap exists between a mandate and actualized policy. How can that gap be closed for more effective management?

This thesis examines an aspect of democracy and the decision making process. Specifically it studies the increasingly large role that agencies have in policy creation. "Bureaucratic politics are the dominant theatre of decisions in the modern state."¹ Agencies are not dependent on the ultimate democratic tool, the vote. What then legitimizes agency action? What role does planning have in a democracy? One of the challenges to democracy is to find techniques that will justify the expansion of bureaucratic power. A new conception of government is necessary to reconcile the discrepancy between agency effectiveness and constitutionality.

¹ Ertel, p. 115.

Studying the mechanisms devised to manage Narragansett Bay will uncover some management problems and the reasons behind them. This thesis advocates a plan as a solution for making agency action accountable to the public and accommodating to competing interests.

There is no plan as yet for Narragansett Bay. Although ineffectively managed, the problems in the Bay have been attributed to a lack of strict standards. This is only part of a more fundamental problem. Planning must be recognized as a way to ensure that equitable decisions are made on the agency level. Before this recognition occurs, the obstacles to planning will remain in tact and prevent adequate management of Narragansett Bay.