Restoring Upper Narragansett Bay Through CSO Abatement – A Progress Report Following Phase II

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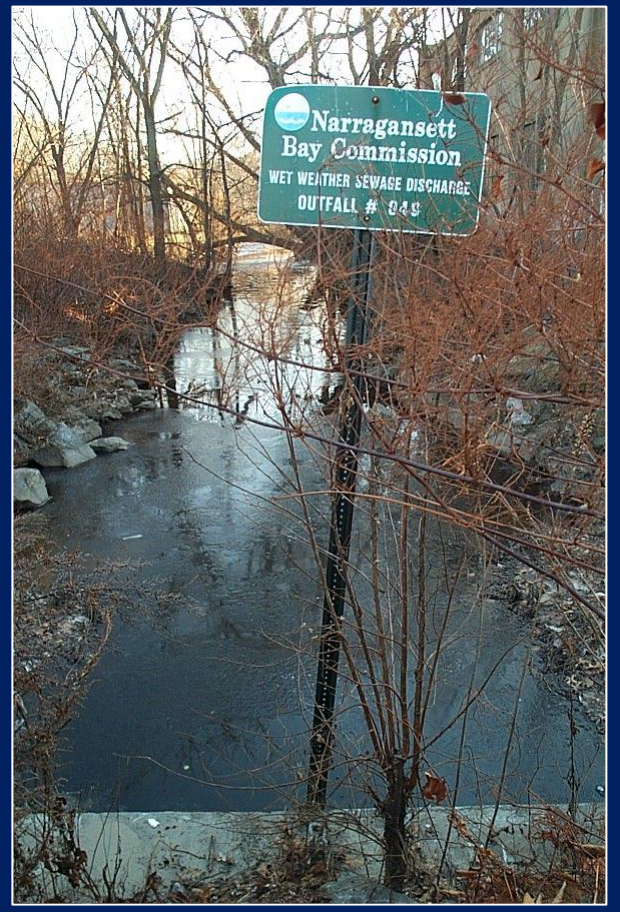
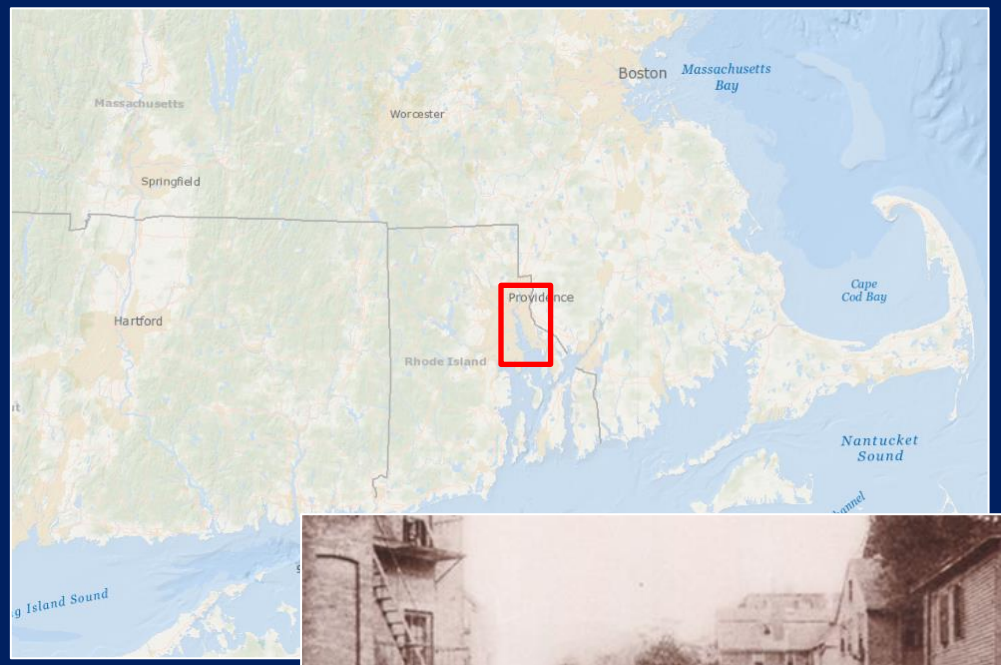


September 10, 2020
Restore America's Estuaries
2020 Virtual Summit

Narragansett Bay Commission

- Own and operate two largest WWTFs in Rhode Island, USA
- Serving Providence and surrounding towns
- Located at the headwaters of Narragansett Bay
- Sewage collection system portions date to 1870s



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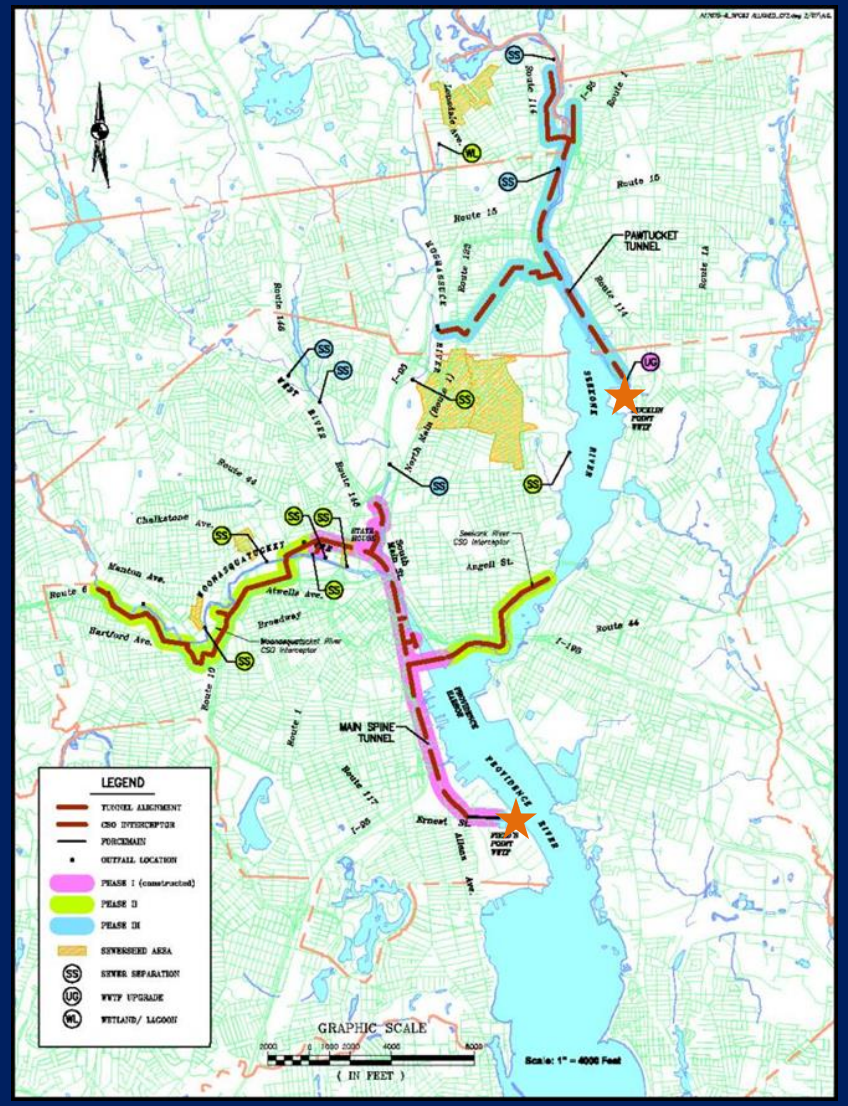
What are CSOs?

- Combined sewers – stormwater and sewage in the same collection system
  - Common in New England, prior to centralized WWTFs – combined pipes transport waste from households and streets to rivers
  - Discharge through combined sewer outfalls (CSOs)
  - As centralized WWTFs became necessary, CSOs intercepted and flows directed to WWTF
  - CSOs remain as emergency discharge points
  - Violate the CWA and create public health problems
- CSO Abatement – reducing overflows to protect public health and water quality

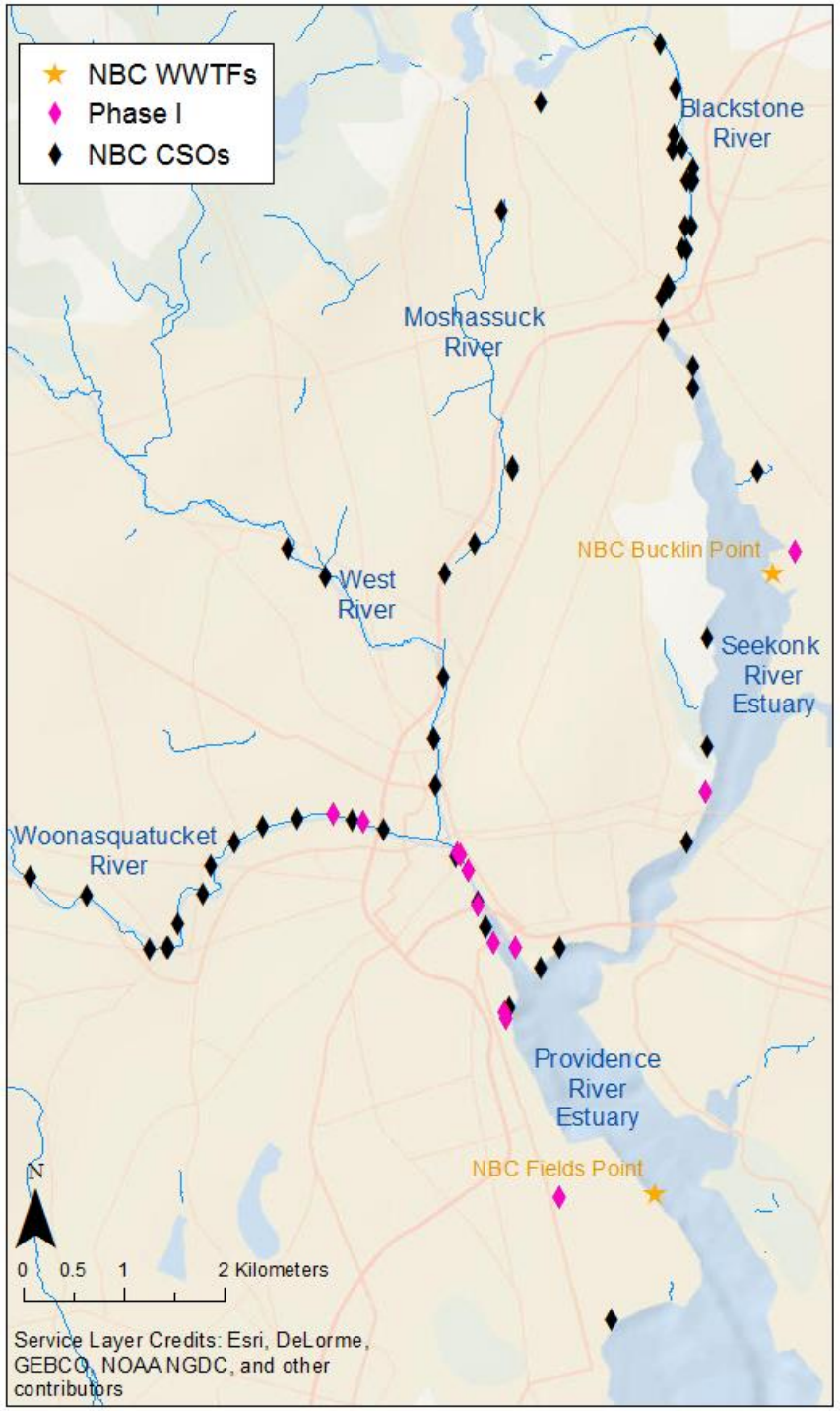
Providence, 1896
(Providence Journal Co.)

NBC CSO Abatement Project

- Three phases
- $1.2 billion
- Goal: reduce CSO discharges and restore water quality to support goals of “fishable” and “swimmable” waters
  - Currently, receiving waters are impaired (excess bacteria) and shellfishing is prohibited



Early planning schematic illustrates 3 phases



CSO Abatement Phase I

- Completed Oct. 2008
- Addressed CSOs along the Woonasquatucket, Providence, and Seekonk Rivers
- “Addressed” – sealed or modifications made to reduce discharge frequency

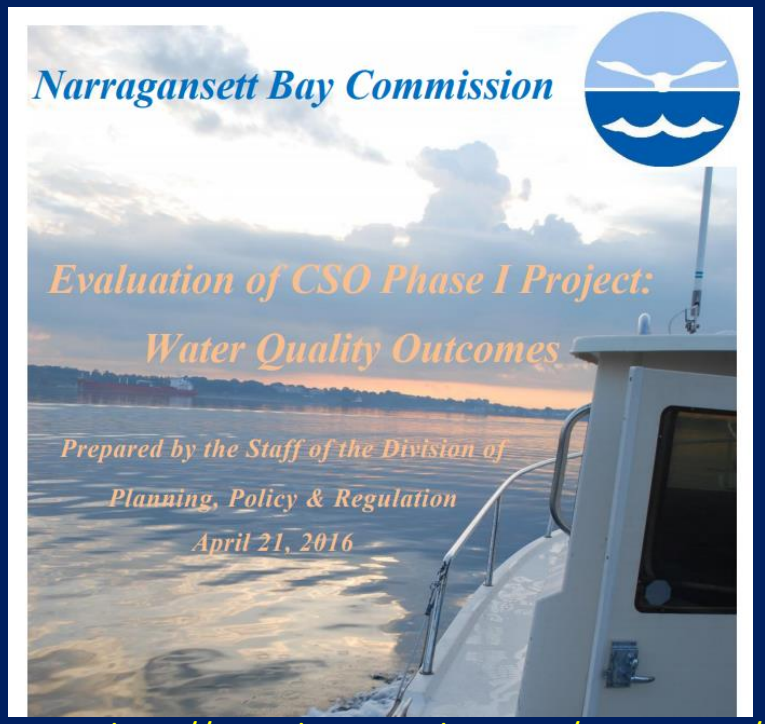
CSO Abatement Phase I

- Phase I Tunnel
  - 26-ft diameter deep rock tunnel, 3-mile long, 300 ft. below ground
  - 65-million-gallon capacity
  - Stores flows for eventual treatment at Field's Point WWTF
  - Captures "first flush"

Phase I
Water Quality Improvement

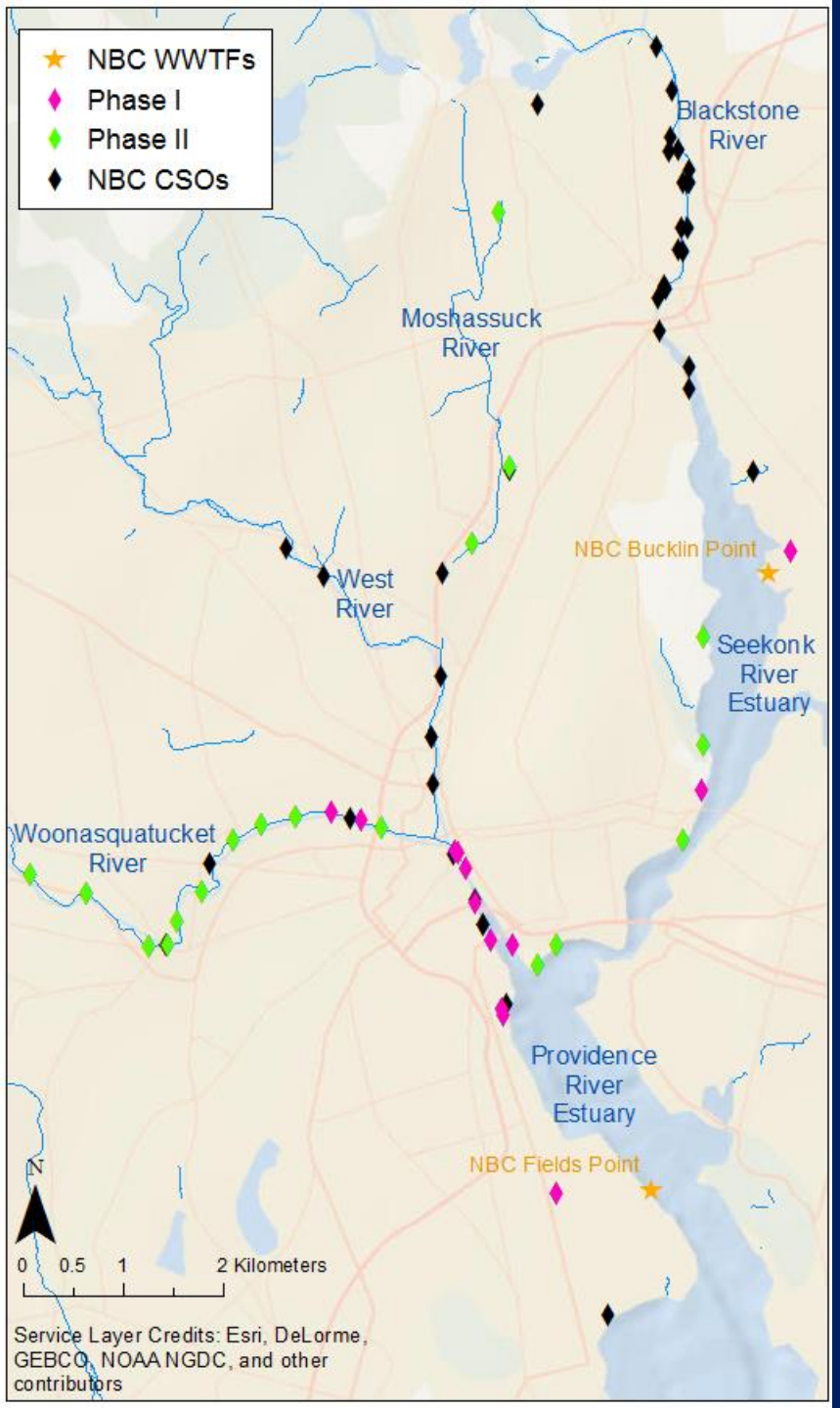
- Phase I Tunnel captures an estimated 50% of CSO flows
  - "first flush" presumably captures more than 50% of pollutants!
- Shellfishing regulations relaxed in 2011
  - Increased rainfall threshold to trigger closures in conditional areas
  - ~50-65 additional days open for shellfishing per year


Image: newenglandhistoricalsociety.com



http://snapshot.narrabay.com/LearnMore/WaterQualityReports

~$5 million dockside value of quahogs (2012)
54% of the quahog harvest came from conditional areas (2013)
(The Rhode Island Shellfish Management Plan, 2014)



CSO Abatement Phase II

- Completed June 2015
- Additional tie-ins to the Phase I tunnel
- Sewer separations (separate sewage from stormwater)
- Constructed wetland facility

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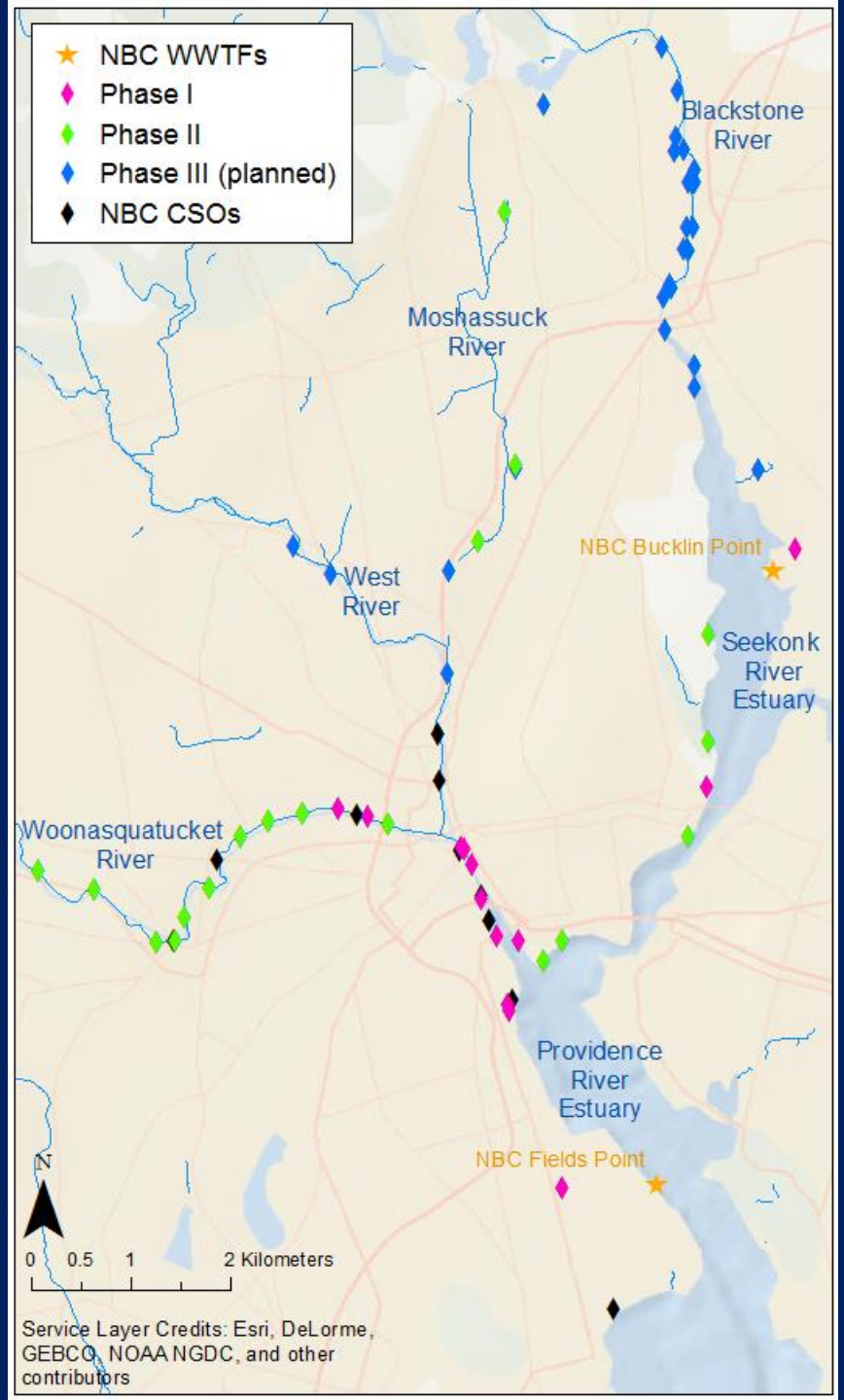
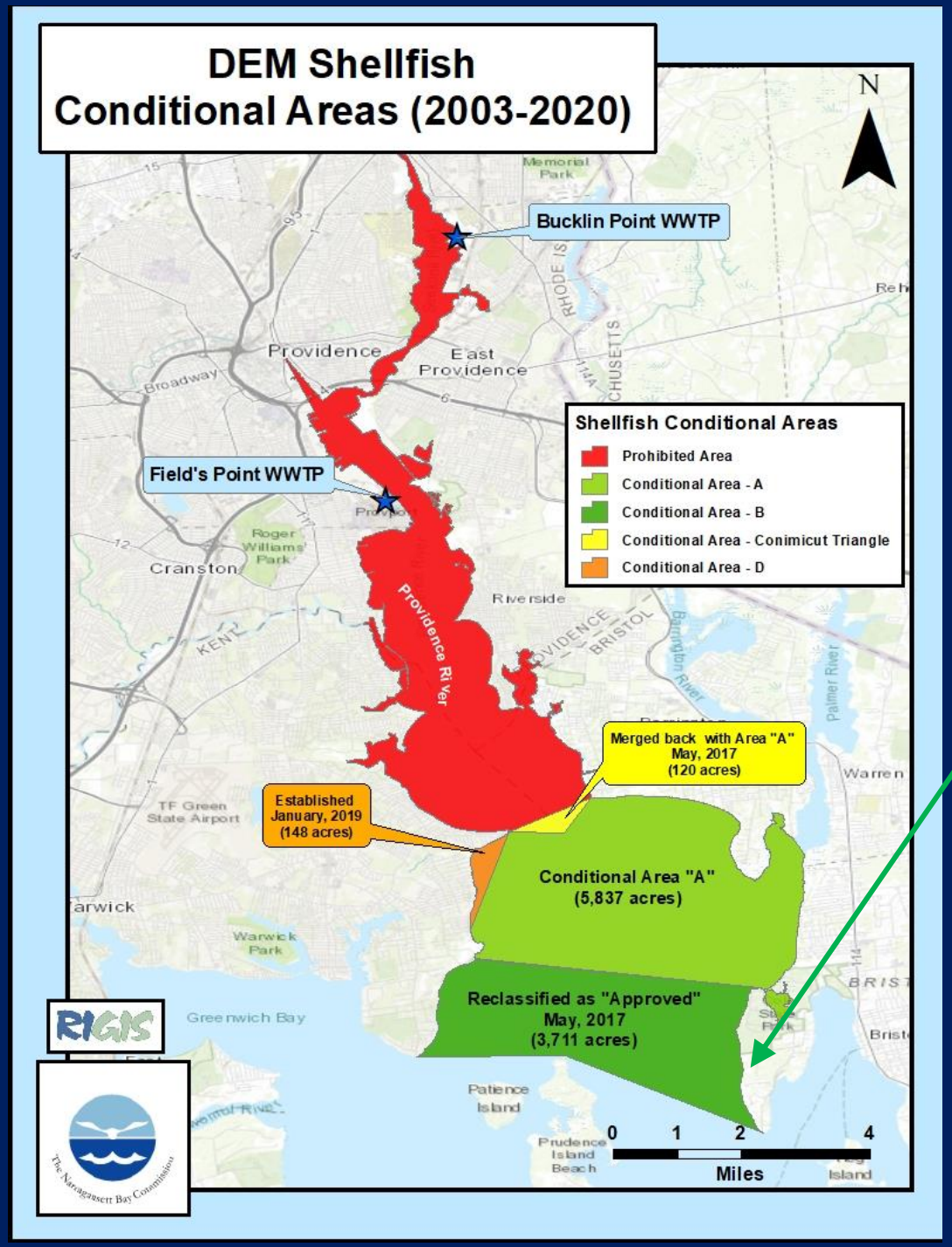


CSO Abatement Phase III

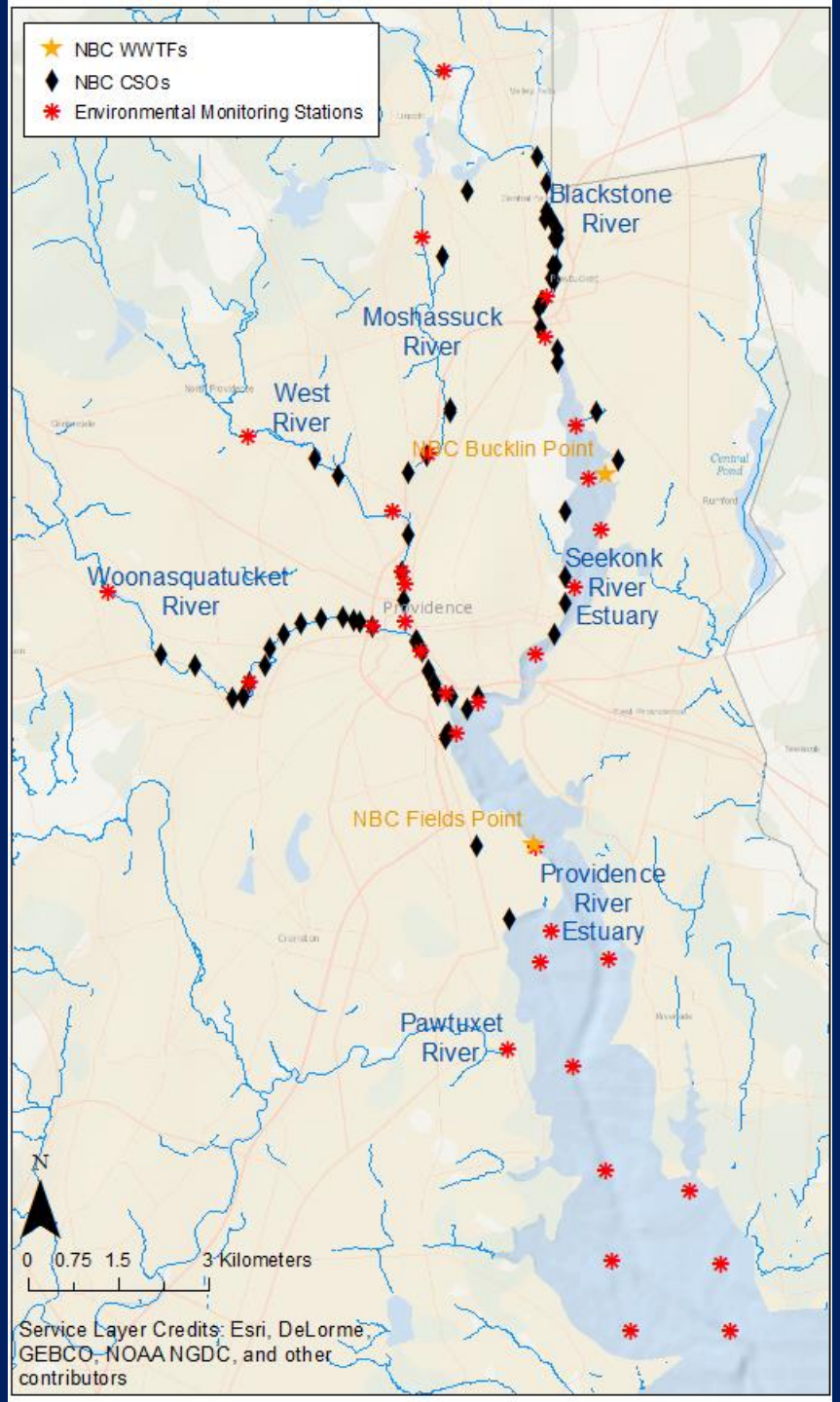
- Breaking ground soon
- Focus on Bucklin Point WWTF District
- Second deep storage tunnel
  - CSOs along Blackstone River
- Green infrastructure projects



Phase II
Water Quality Improvements

- Comprehensive report in preparation!

- 3,711 acres of conditionally-open shellfish areas reclassified to “APPROVED” in 2017
- Further relaxation of rainfall limits to initiate closure of “conditional” areas
  - Gain of up to ~40 additional days open to shellfishing per year!



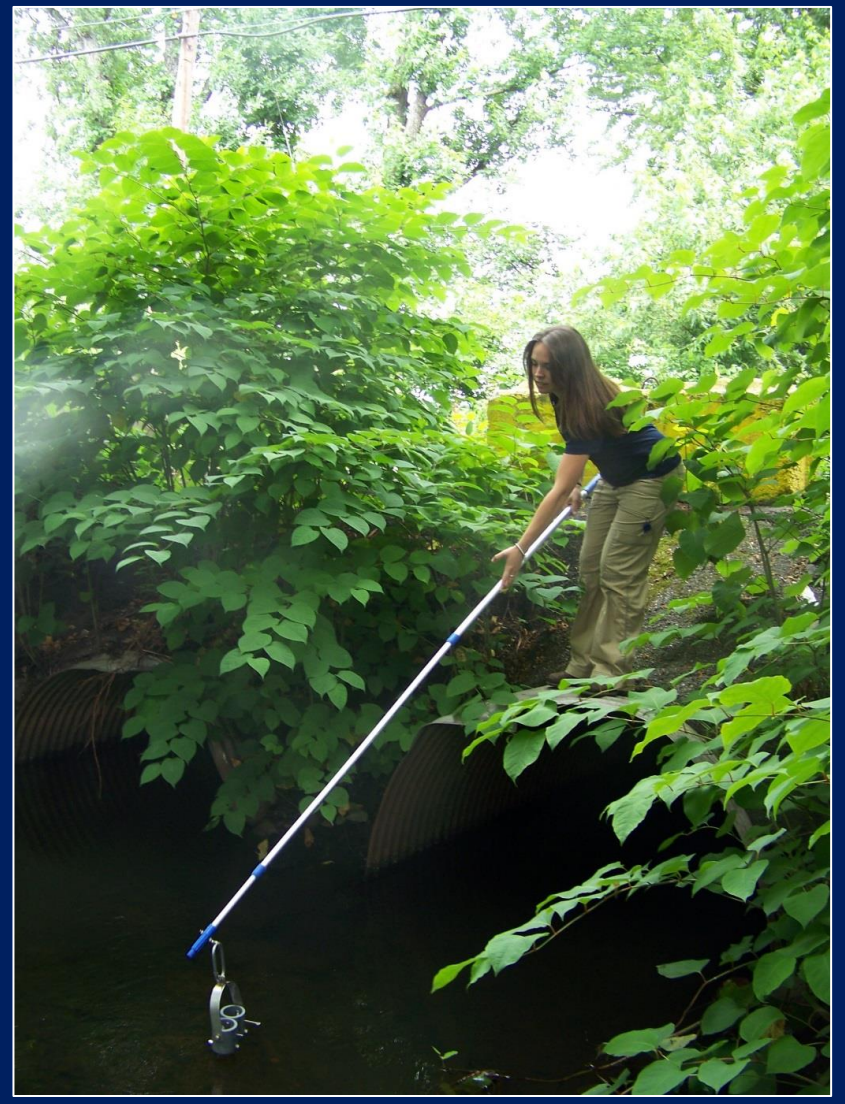
Bacteria Monitoring

- NBC monitoring program
  - Fecal coliform and enterococci
  - Freshwater rivers – sampled 1-2x per week
  - Seekonk and Providence Rivers (Bay) – sampled 2x per month

Data Analysis

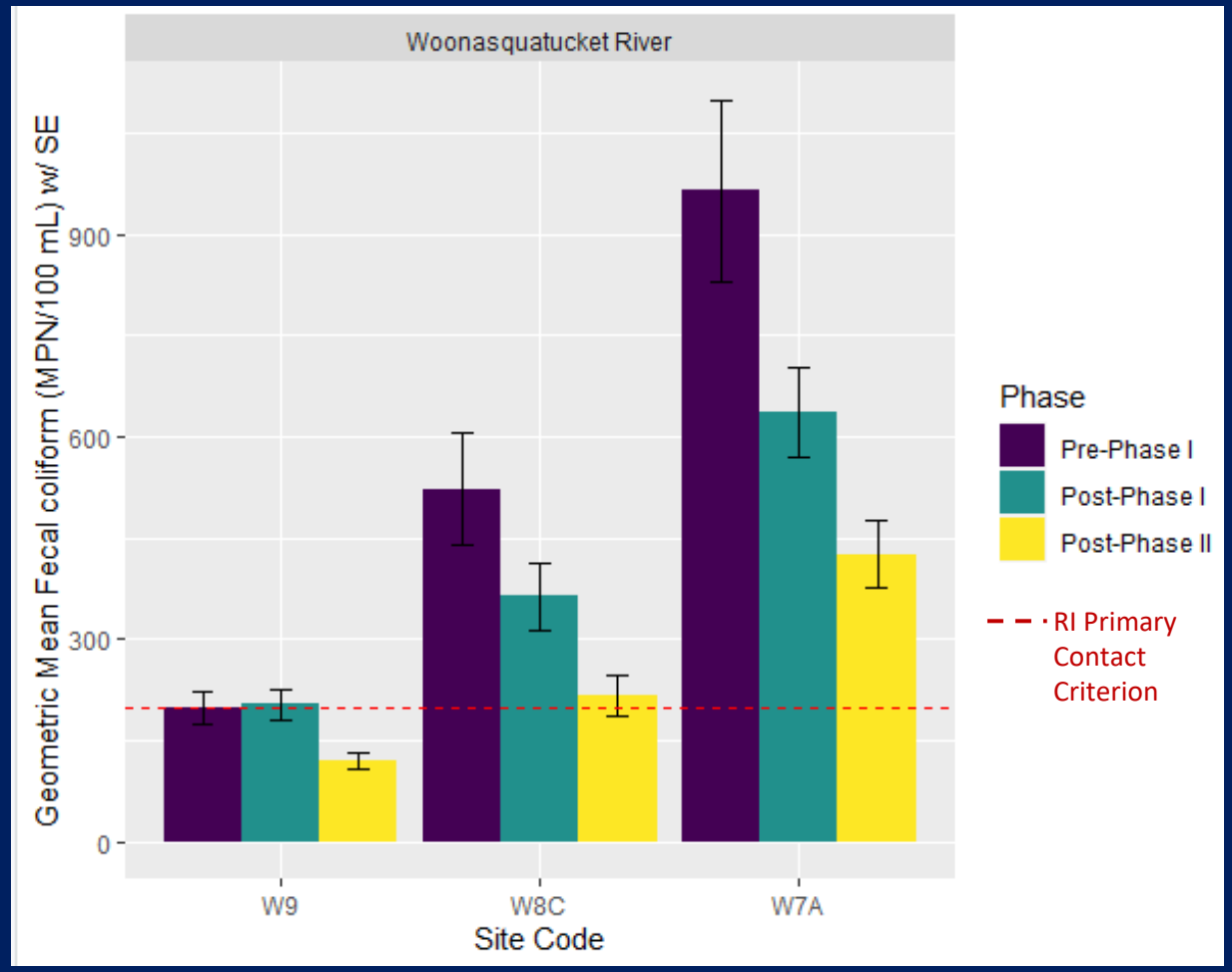
- Preliminary results
- Geometric mean fecal coliform counts with standard error
- Phase:
  - Pre-Phase I: March 2004 – October 2008
  - Post-Phase I: November 2008 – June 1, 2015
  - Post-Phase II: June 2, 2015 – December 2019
- Weather:
  - Wet: Sample day + 3 prior rain total ≥0.1 inches (TF Green NWS Station)
- Comparison to state primary contact criteria*

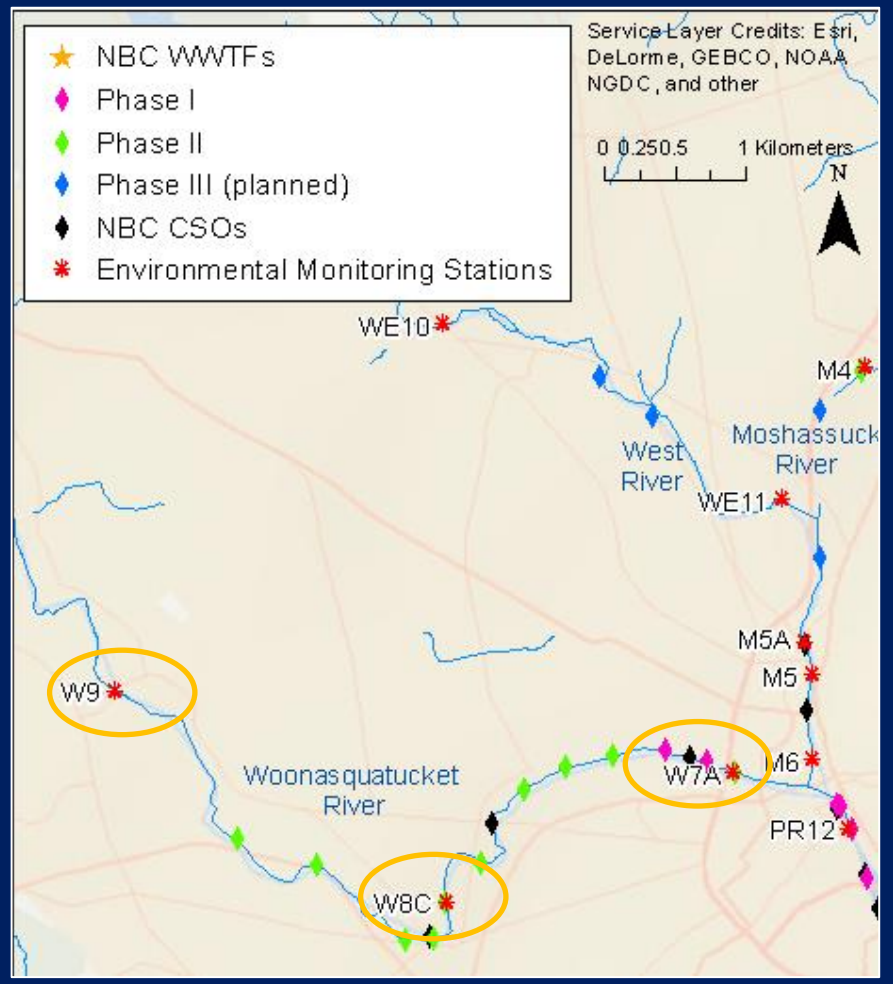
*For point of comparison only, actual compliance measured through different analysis methods



Woonasquatucket River

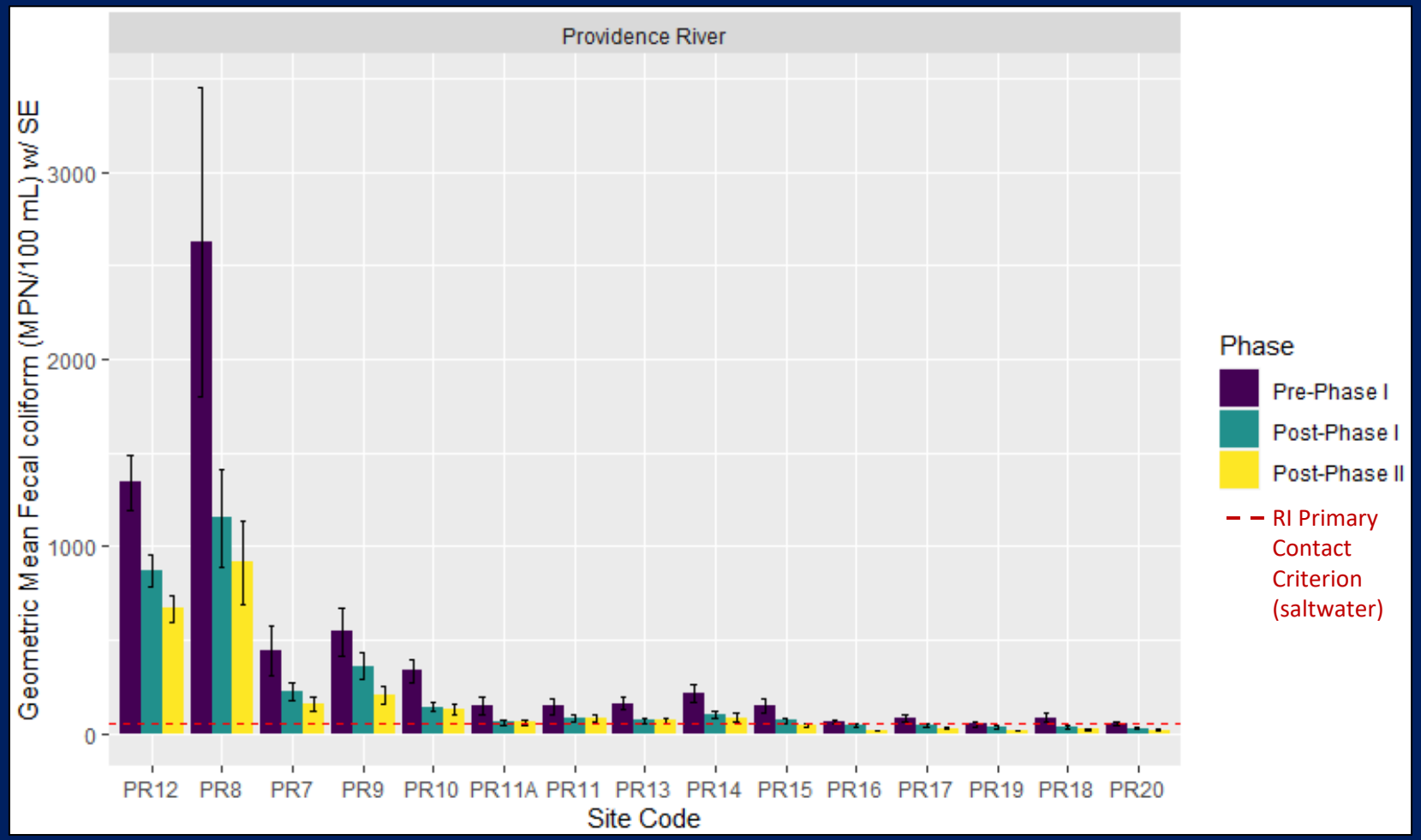
No further abatement planned,
some sites still exhibit elevated bacteria counts;
continued impairment due to stormwater? Illicit connections?

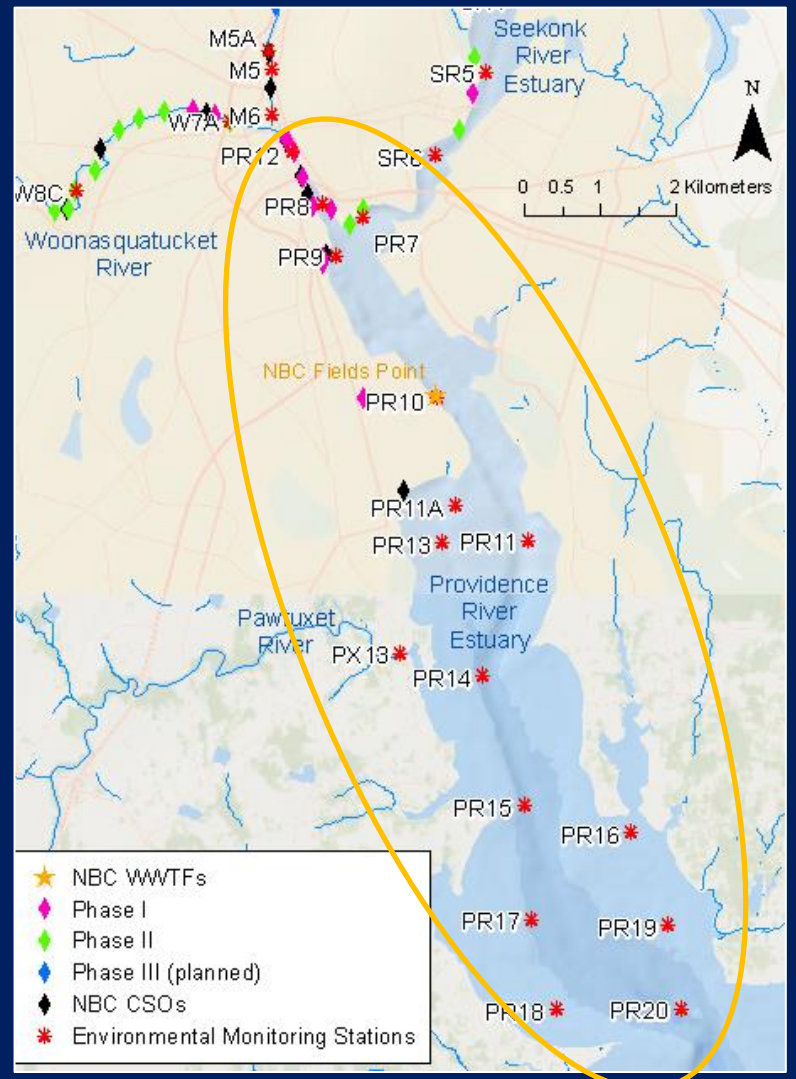




Providence River Estuary

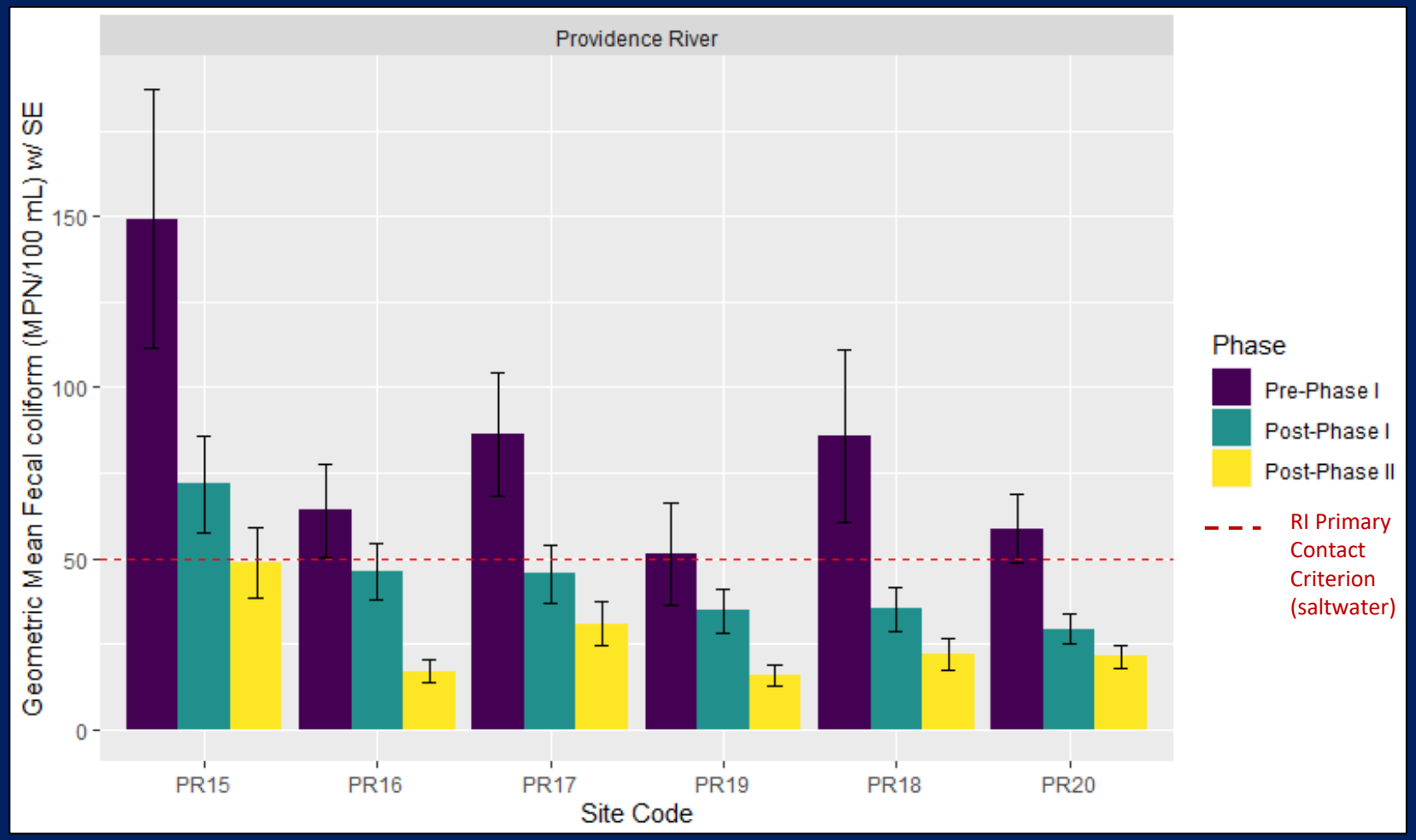
Most dramatic change after Phase I; bacteria still elevated at northernmost sites (located in city center)

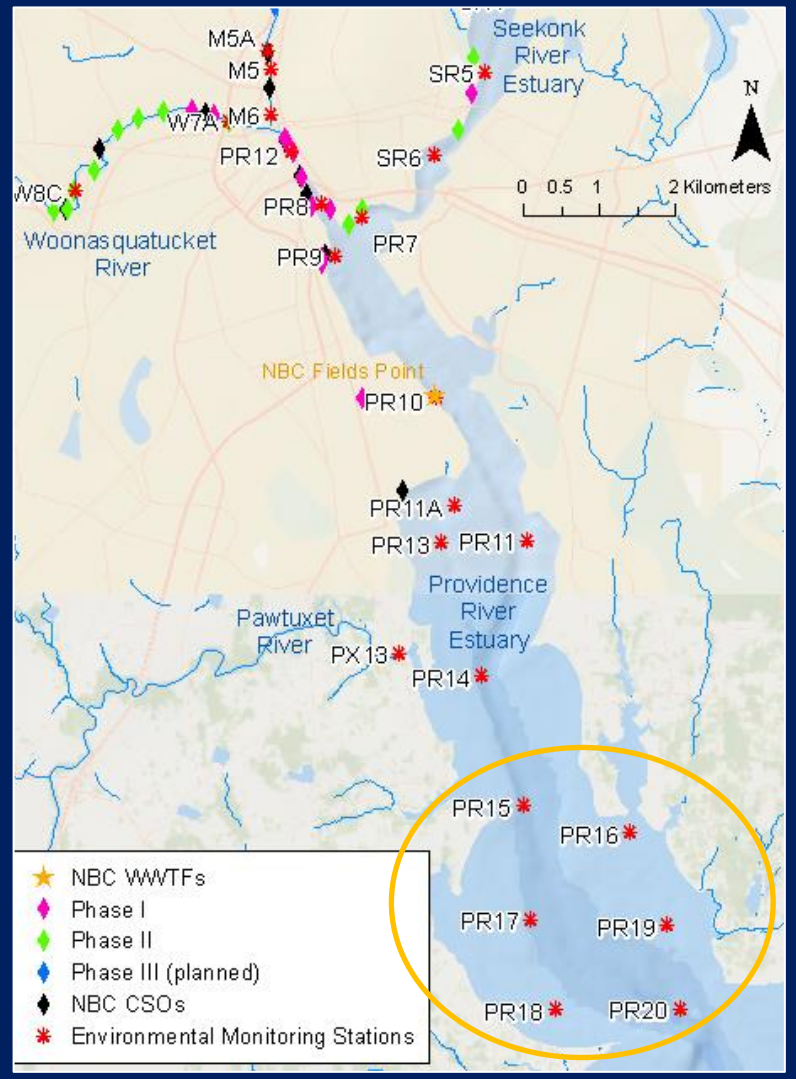


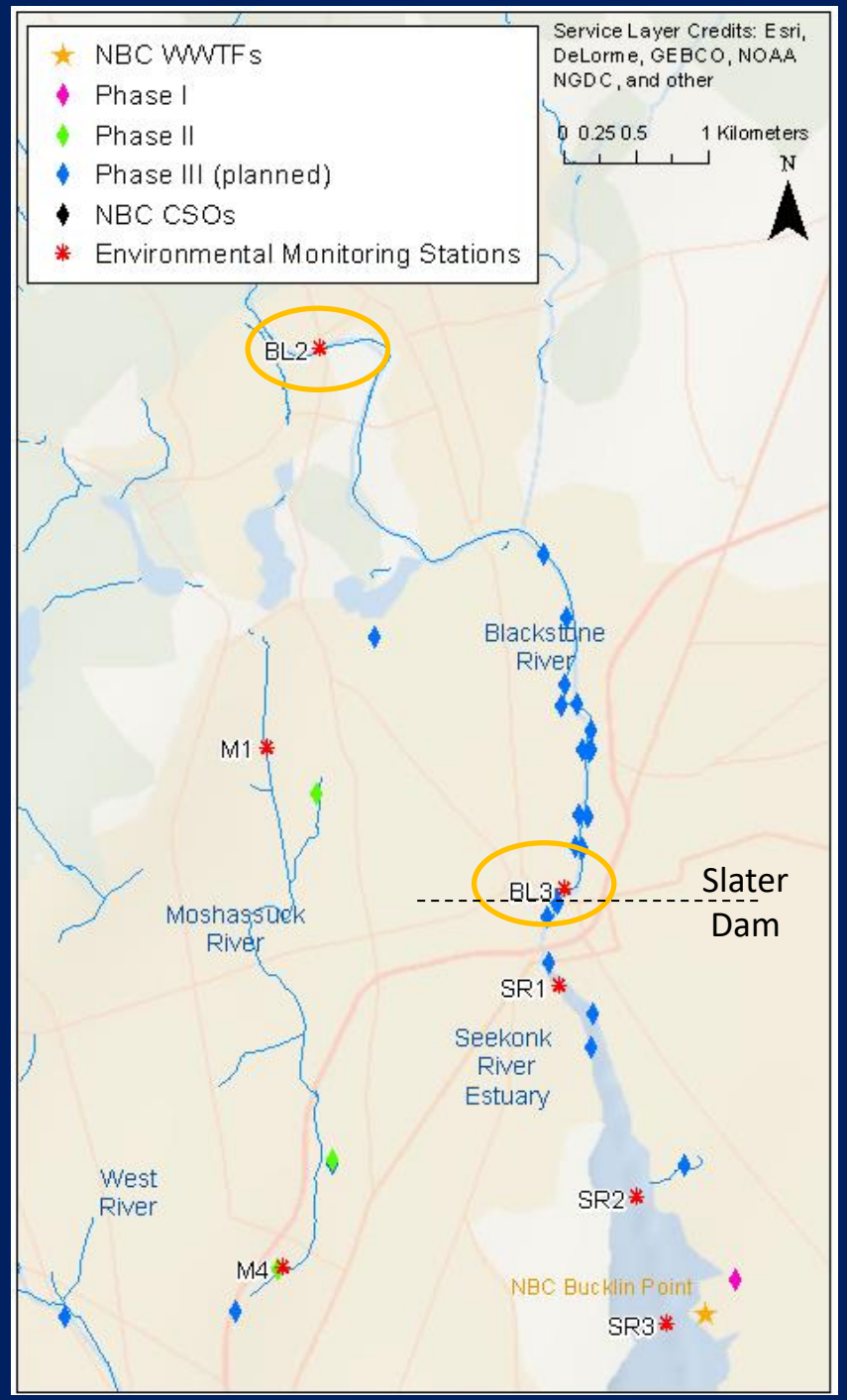


Providence River Estuary (lower)

Bacteria counts following Phases I and II frequently below state water quality criteria for primary contact

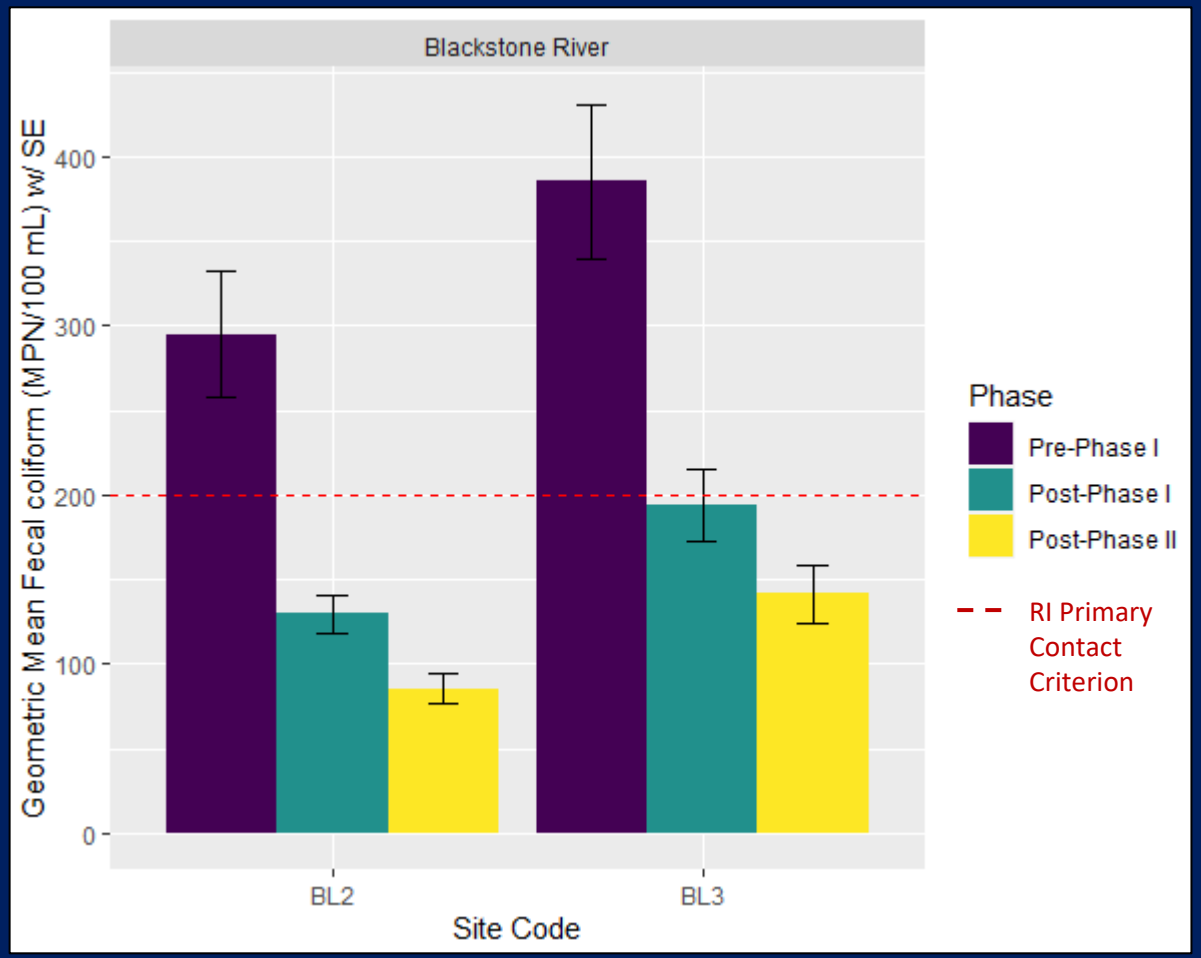






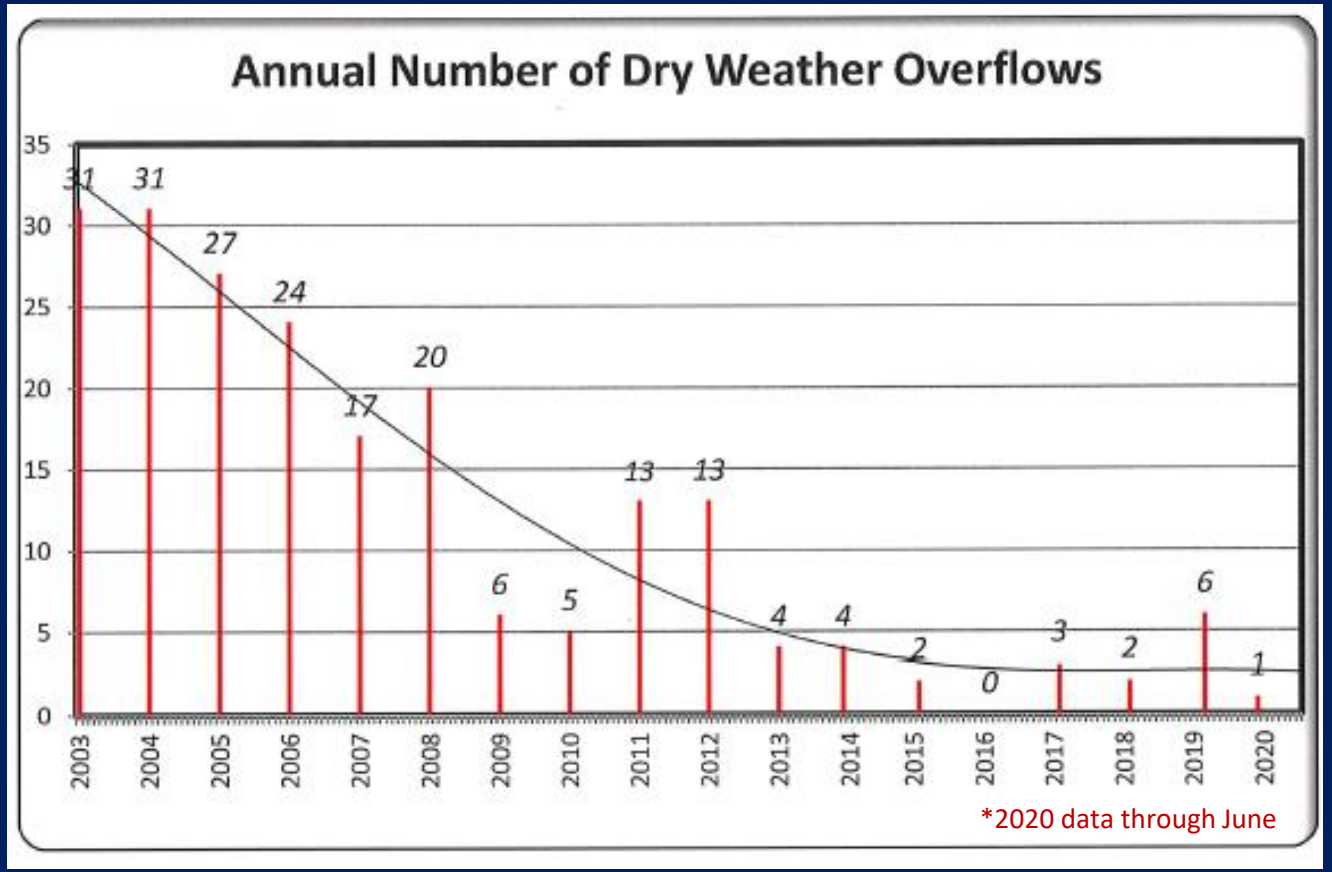
Blackstone River

Fecal coliform counts dropped post-Phase I at sites not impacted by CSOs or CSO Abatement



Mitigating Stormwater and Reduced DWOs

- NBC (and others) Stormwater mitigation plans concurrent with CSO abatement
- Dry Weather Overflows dramatically reduced concurrent with CSO abatement



Closing Thoughts

- Phases I and II have contributed to the restoration of water quality, shellfishing access, and recreation in the urban upper reaches of Narragansett Bay
- Best Practices
  - Begin water quality monitoring before you need it
  - Invest in CSO flow monitoring technology
- Lessons Learned
  - Concurrent efforts to improve water quality complicate isolation of the CSO story
  - CSOs are not the only source of bacteria impairment
- Comprehensive Phase II report will include:
  - Further exploration of “wet weather” (alternate rain gauges, antecedent rain amounts)
  - Site-by-site evaluation of infrastructure changes and impacts to water quality

Thank you!

- Many staff & depts at the NBC, notably:
  - Environmental Monitoring Dept.
  - NBC Laboratory
  - Technical Analysis & Compliance Dept.
  - Engineering Dept.
  - Interceptor Maintenance Dept.

- Questions: emoore@narrabay.com
- Data: http://snapshot.narrabay.com/app/