



NINIGRET BARRIER BEACH (EAST BEACH) HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and Save The Bay are restoring dune and marsh habitats at Ninigret Barrier Beach to protect wildlife habitat and public recreation.

The project will remove invasive plants and restore tidal creeks in nearby salt marshes. Barrier beaches are meant to shift and change naturally with wind, waves, and storms. Restoring natural processes strengthens coastal resilience, improves habitat for beach-nesting birds and other wildlife, and helps protect the shoreline and coastal communities.

The project is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's "America the Beautiful" program and carried out with RIDEM, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Save The Bay.

Why remove the pine trees?

Beginning in the 1970s, non-native Japanese Black Pines were planted to stabilize dunes and prevent erosion. Over time, they crowded out native plants and transformed the landscape from a coastal barrier-beach dune system into a mostly forested environment that no longer provided adequate habitat for beach-nesting birds and reduced the natural function and resilience of the barrier-beach system. In winter 2026, the black pines were cut and mulched to allow native plants that provide berries for migratory birds to recolonize the area.

Why use herbicide to treat invasive plants?

Cutting and mulching doesn't always stop invasive plants, especially aggressive ones like Asiatic sand sedge and Japanese knotweed. Aquaneat, an aquatic-safe herbicide registered by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is applied to the leaves and stems of individual plants, where it's absorbed into the roots, stopping new growth and killing the plant.

What precautions are in place to prevent herbicide treatments from affecting unintended areas?

Licensed professionals will apply small amounts of diluted aquatic-safe herbicide directly to individual invasive plants in strategic areas identified by habitat biologists. The treatment dries within four hours of application. Work is done in suitable weather, avoiding rain and high winds. These methods are widely used to control invasive species while protecting surrounding native plants, wildlife, and water resources.

When will the work be finished?

Initial restoration work is nearly complete. Follow-up cutting and treatments of invasive plants will continue through 2027, and future adaptive management and monitoring will continue by project partners.

Is the beach still open to the public?

Yes. Work areas are posted, and most areas remain open to visitors. Permitted sand trail vehicles must remain on designated trails and within parking areas.

Restoring the barrier beach helps nesting birds such as piping plovers and least terns, as well as migratory songbirds, while healthier salt marshes provide vital habitat for fish, shellfish, and birds like saltmarsh sparrows and reduce mosquito breeding habitat.



PIPING PLOVER



SALTMARSH SPARROW



GREAT EGRET



PROJECT INFO
RIPARKS.RI.GOV/EAST-BEACH-PROJECT

