National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) System:

The Connecticut Approach for Site Selection

CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
Office of Long Island Sound Programs,
NOAA Office for Coastal Management,
CT Sea Grant, &
University of Connecticut Marine Sciences Program

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CT NERR Overview

Key Steps:

- Letter of Interest
- ***Site Selection and Nomination***
- Draft EIS and Draft Management Plan
- Final EIS and Management Plan
- Findings, Record of Decision and MOU
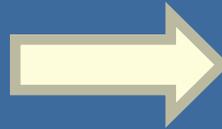
What's a site?

Site Selection *Criteria*

Site Selection *Process*

CT NERR Overview - Site

What do we mean by "site?"

- Within a "project area" defined by the CT Coastal Area and the CT River to Cromwell/Portland

- An area with a representative mix of land and water (coastal or riverine)

- Would ideally be a single entity, but could consist of multiple parts

- Would already exist in some form of protection/preservation (i.e., not as private property to purchase)

   - *Cannot be more than 50% Federal property.*

CT NERR Overview - Site

- Variety of land under protection that could be considered
  - Orange (Lite color) = State, Federal, or Land Trust parcels within ~ 1 mile of the coast or major rivers
  - Purple (Dark color) = subset of larger parcels adjacent to coast/major rivers
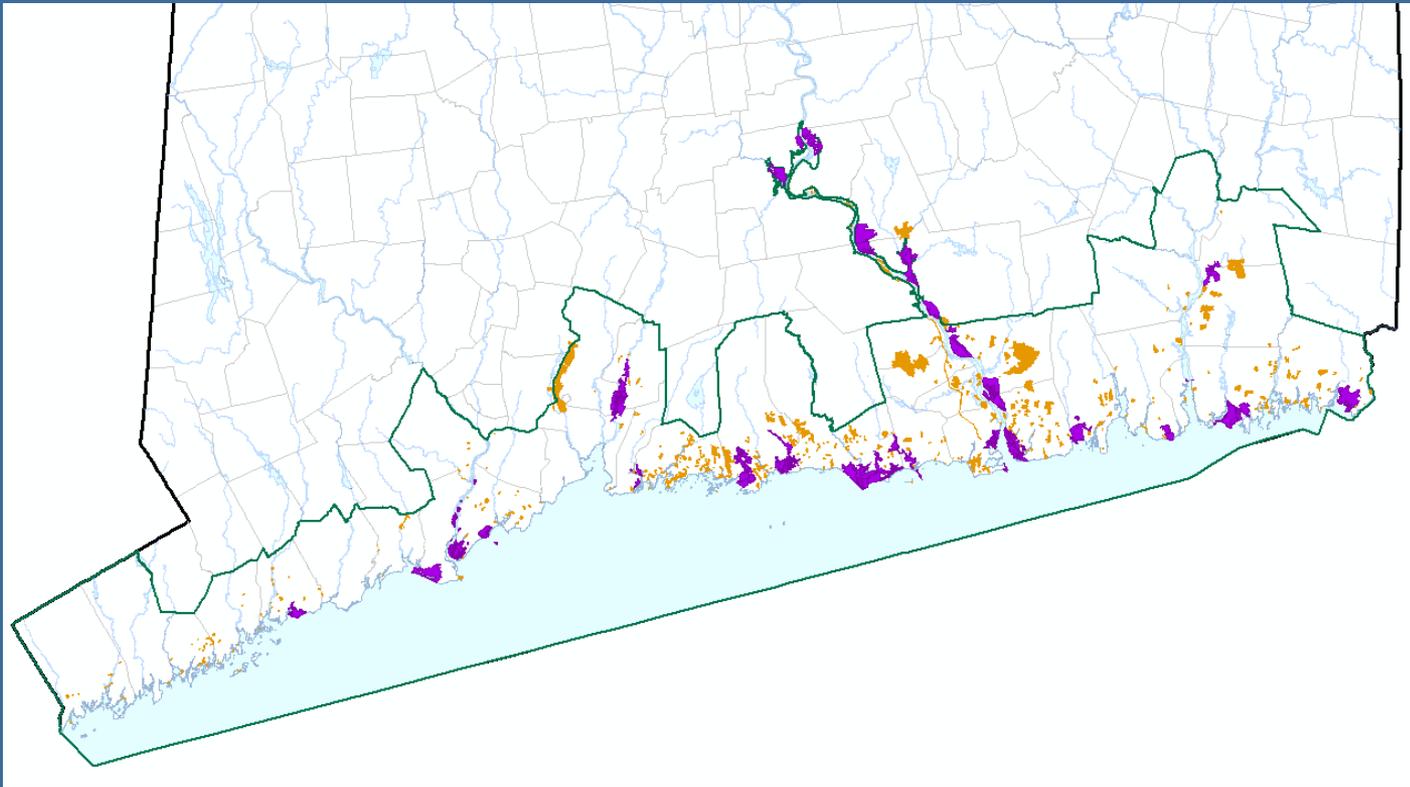
CT NERR Overview - Criteria

Preliminary Criteria:

- Basic means to distill potential candidates for more detailed evaluation.

- 7 general metrics taken from NOAA guidance addressing degree of suitability a site might be when considering the context of what a NERR is designed to do.
  - Is it accessible?
  - Is it suitable to conduct research and education activities?
  - Can it address relevant coastal management issues?

- Goal is to identify ~ 3-5 sites.

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CT NERR Overview - Criteria

Detailed Criteria:

Category	Number
Environment Characteristics	11
Meshes with NERR System Goals	9
Management Considerations	12

Habitat Composition/Complexity: This is a measure of the diversity of habitat types present within the major ecosystem type found within the boundaries of the site. This criterion is based on the assumption that sites that have a high diversity of habitat types are of higher relative "value" for protection and management than those with a low diversity of habitat types. Major ecosystem type is defined here as that type that comprises approximately 40% of the site. Use the habitat designation listed above for "ecosystem composition".

Table 1.3: *Habitat Composition/Complexity Scoring*

3 points	The candidate site has a **high diversity** of habitat composition within its major ecosystem type, i.e. it contains three or more habitat types or subtypes within its major ecosystem type (e.g. site consists of a combination of swamps, coastal marshes, and mud flats) or has a combination of multiple coastal marsh types (e.g., high, mid, and low marsh zones).
2 points	The site has a **moderate diversity** of habitat composition within its major ecosystem type, i.e., it contains only two habitat types or subtypes within its major ecosystem type (e.g., consists of a combination of swamps and a single coastal marsh type).
1 point	The site has **a low diversity** of habitat composition within its major ecosystem type, i.e., its major ecosystem type consists of a single habitat type (e.g., maritime forest or Juncus marsh).

CT NERR Overview - Criteria

Detailed Criteria:

- Developed by using guidance from the national NERR program as a master "framework" and then customized to reflect CT specific aspects.

- Proven, thorough, and reasonable means for evaluation.
  - Provide objective not subjective measures

Teaming Approach:

- Developed in consultation with NOAA NERR Program staff and NERR sites recently designated (WI & TX.)

- 4 primary teams tasked with specific goals – overall management, guidance/advisory, site evaluation

1. CT NERR Partnership Team (CNPT): OLISP, UCONN, SeaGrant

  – *Primary Functions:*

    • *Process Management, Communication/Outreach.*

  – Goal: Coordinate all aspects of the Site Selection process, ensure that any site meets Federal NERR goals and Connecticut's needs.

2. Federal NERR Team: NOAA OCM-NERR

- *Primary Functions:*
    - *Advisory/Guidance*
- Goals: Provide general guidance to the CNPT on Site Selection process requirements; assist with communication/education of NERR system.

3. Regional NERR Team: NE/SE NERR volunteers

- *Primary Functions:*
    - *Advisory/Guidance*
- Goals: Provide insight and experience on NERR site selection and daily on-the-ground Reserve operations, challenges, etc.

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4. Site Selection Team (SST):

- *Primary Functions:*
  - *Evaluation/Recommendation of CT NERR site*
- Goals:
  - To understand & apply screening criteria;
  - Identify and engage outside experts where needed;
  - Review and address public comments;
  - Present findings via workshops, meetings, & reports.

4. Site Selection Team (SST):

- Core composition:
  - Identified by the CNPT plus a general invite to interested parties.
  - Preferred make-up is balanced among organizations / expertise at a manageable size (mid-teens to mid-twenties)
- External Experts:
  - External experts provide feedback, insight, opinions, information;

Core SST Members will formally apply criteria and score final sites.

External Experts are involved in site discussion, but not scoring.

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CT NERR Overview – Next Steps

- Finalize Site Selection Team Core Membership
- Convene SST organizational meetings
  - Outline process/screening criteria
  - Internal planning and logistics
- Begin site evaluation process

CT NERR Overview – Next Steps

What	Who	By When
NERR Project Kickoff Meeting	**CNPT, Federal NERR Leadership Team, invitees, public**	**April 2016**
Preliminary Site Screening	SST, Regional NERR Team	June 2016
Preliminary Site Screening Public Meeting	**All Teams, public**	**July 2016**
Detailed Site Selection	SST, Regional NERR Team, outside experts	August 2016
Detailed Site Selection Public Meeting	**All Teams, public**	**July 2017**
Public Comment Period	**public**	**August 2017**
Formal Nomination Announcement	CNPT, Governor's office	October 2017

If interested in being part of the SST, or to be a subject matter expert contact:

- **Kevin O'Brien, Sr. Environmental Analyst,**
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Visit the NERR web site **www.ct.gov/deep/NERR**

- Access copies of fact sheets, event calendars, meeting minutes, and other information.
- Join the listserv set up to distribute updates/announcements from the selection process