

1. What kinds of coastal features are on or near the property, and what kinds of setbacks or regulations apply?

In addition to municipal zoning conditions, properties in coastal areas are subject to coastal zone management classifications that may carry building and permitting ramifications. These classifications are based on both the water the property abuts and characteristics of the shoreline on or near the property.

Coastal or shoreline features such as coastal barriers, dunes, and wetlands have specific regulations and protections under the CRMC. These regulations include structural setbacks, buffers, and rules pertaining to construction and renovating or remodeling older structures. Depending on the property's proximity to coastal features, there may be implications for new construction, home improvements, and structural alterations.

CRMC Shoreline Feature Classifications	
Areas of Historic/Archaeological Significance	Rocky Shores
Beaches and Dunes	Manmade Shorelines
Coastal Wetlands	Developed Barriers
Headlands, Bluffs and Cliffs	Moderately Developed Barriers
Tidal Waters	Undeveloped Barriers



Examples of shoreline features in Rhode Island (clockwise from top left): coastal beach, coastal dunes, coastal wetlands, and shoreline protection structures along a manmade shoreline.

For freshwater wetlands, the R.I. Department of Environmental Management has jurisdiction – to determine whose jurisdiction the property is under, you can check the [CRMC/RIDEM Wetland Jurisdiction Maps](#)³. For more information about freshwater wetlands management, please see the [DEM's Wetlands FAQ](#)⁴.

Why it matters: A CRMC permit is required for any construction or alteration activity on a shoreline feature or within 200 feet of a shoreline feature. Additionally, setbacks are required for all new structures along the shore. The minimum setback from coastal features is 50 feet, but in areas with erosion, setbacks are determined using the rates of change found on the shoreline change maps (see below).

Distances for setbacks are 30 times the calculated average annual erosion rate for less than four dwelling units, and 60 times the average annual rate for commercial, industrial, or more than four units. Note: Setbacks and buffers are always measured from the most inland edge of the shoreline feature. If there is a coastal buffer zone⁵, an additional 25-foot setback is measured from the inland edge of the buffer zone.

For example, if the erosion rate is 2.5 feet per year, and you are planning to build a single-family home, the setback from the inland edge of the coastal feature would be 75 feet (2.5 feet x 30 = 75 feet).

Setbacks that are larger than these requirements will provide the property with a greater level of protection against the impacts of coastal erosion and other hazards.

To identify the shoreline features and find out more: The CRMC's Guide to [Coastal Shoreline Features](#)⁶ will help you begin to identify the shoreline features on the property. Additionally, you can consult with CRMC staff for shoreline feature verification and applicable setback requirements. For more information about setbacks and shoreline features, please see Sections 140 and 210 of the [CRMC regulations](#).⁷

The CRMC's [shoreline change maps](#)⁸ depict past coastal erosion, and include the calculated rates of change used to determine setbacks. When siting for coastal construction, the CRMC recommends that property owners exceed the minimum setback requirements in order to better protect the structure, as shoreline change is an ongoing process influenced by coastal storms.

Using the CRMC Shoreline Change Maps

The CRMC Shoreline Change Maps (see example on the following page) were created using aerial photography and are intended to show past erosion and the shoreline rates of change that are applied to pertinent sections of the Council's regulatory programs to address issues including setbacks of activities from coastal features.

The colored lines along the coast represent past and more recent placements of the shoreline – the blue line represents the shoreline in 2004, while the red line demonstrates where the shoreline was in 1939. The white numbers show *total change* in feet and meters in shoreline location between 1939 and 2004. Yellow numbers show a *rate of change* in feet or meters in shoreline location between past and present.

Please note: Coastal erosion does not occur slowly over time at a constant rate, but is instead the result of abrupt changes due to storms. For that reason, the rates provided within the Shoreline Change Maps should be used with caution.

³ Wetland Jurisdiction Maps: www.dem.ri.gov/maps/wetjuris.htm

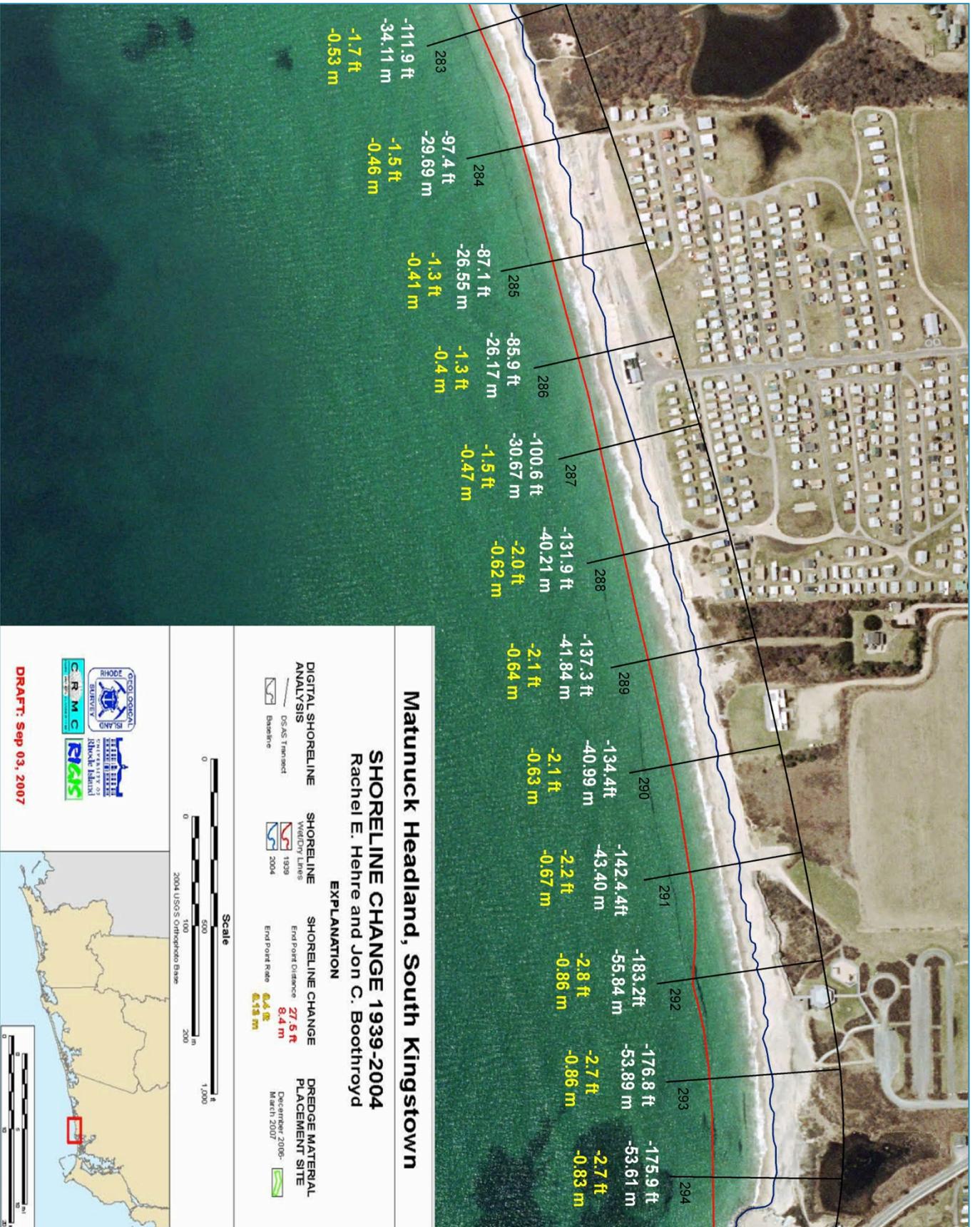
⁴ R.I. DEM Wetlands FAQ: www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/wetlands/pdfs/realtor.pdf

⁵ Coastal Buffer Zone: a land area adjacent to a coastal feature that is vegetated with native shoreline species and acts as a natural transition zone between the coast and adjacent upland development.

⁶ Coastal Shoreline Features: www.crmc.ri.gov/guidesreports/CRMC_Coastal_Shoreline_Features.pdf

⁷ R.I. CRMC Regulations: www.crmc.ri.gov/regulations/RICRMP.pdf

⁸ R.I. CRMC Shoreline Change Maps: www.crmc.ri.gov/maps/maps_shorechange.html



2. Are there restrictions on the property due to the adjacent CRMC water classification?

All coastal waters in Rhode Island are categorized into six water types according to the characteristics of the adjacent shoreline, water use, and density of use. Conservation, recreation, transportation, and industrial activities all occur along the shore, and influence the shoreline policies and regulations based on water types. The six water type classifications, as designated by the CRMC, are:

CRMC Water Type Classifications

Type 1: Conservation Areas	Areas of natural habitat or scenic value of unique or unusual significance, or areas that have been deemed unsuitable for structures due to their exposure to severe wave action, flooding, and erosion.
Type 2: Low Intensity Use	Areas with high scenic value that support low-intensity recreational and residential uses.
Type 3: High Intensity Boating	Intensely utilized water where recreational boating activities dominate and where the adjacent shorelines are developed as marinas, boatyards, and associated water-enhanced and water-dependent businesses.
Type 4: Multipurpose Waters	Large expanses of open water in Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island and Block Island sounds that support a variety of commercial and recreational activities with adjacent shorelines that may be used to support water-dependent commercial, industrial, and/or high-intensity recreational activities.
Type 5: Recreational and Commercial Harbors	Areas adjacent to waterfront areas that support a variety of tourist, recreational, and commercial activities.
Type 6: Industrial Waterfronts and Commercial Navigation Channels	Areas that are used to accommodate commercial and industrial water-dependent and water-enhanced activities.

Why it matters: Though all areas along classified waters are subject to coastal zone management, properties located along certain water types may have more strict regulations for development. Some of the activities or structures that are regulated in the coastal area include:

- *Filling, removal, and grading along the shoreline*
- *Construction of residential or recreational structures, including docks*
- *Construction of public infrastructure*
- *Individual sewage disposal systems*
- *Installation of shoreline protection structures*
- *Beach nourishment (replenishment)*
- *Prohibition of new construction on undeveloped barriers*

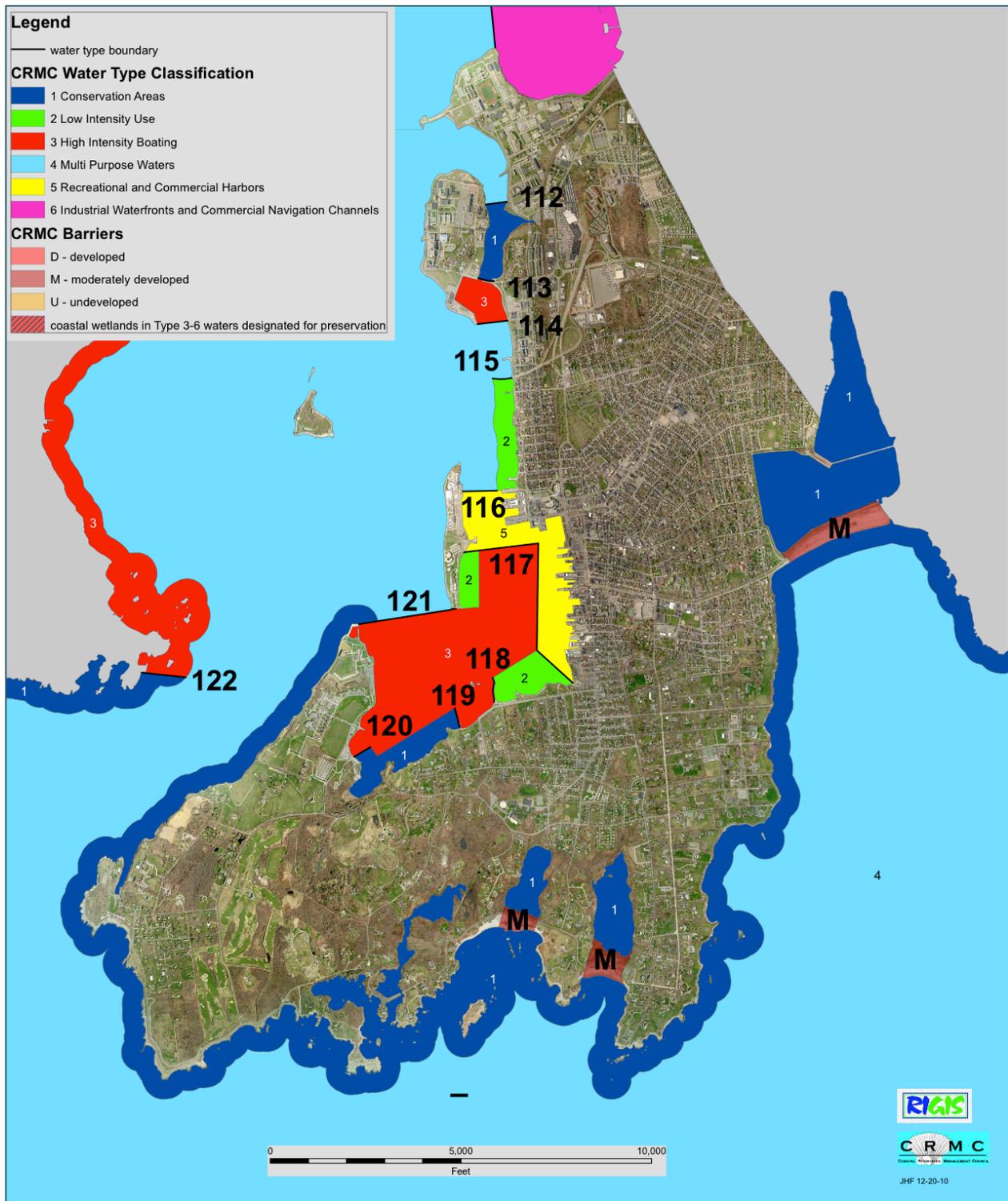
Identify the adjacent water type and find out more: For each coastal municipality, maps of water types and other shoreline classifications are [available online](#)⁹. Information about restricted activities, prohibited activities, and permitting processes can be found in the [CRMC regulations](#)¹⁰.

Some coastal areas are governed by CRMC Special Area Management Plans, and as such, have area-specific regulations. To determine if the property is included under a Special Area Management Plan, visit the [CRMC SAMP page](#)¹¹.

⁹ R.I. CRMC Water Use Maps: www.crmc.ri.gov/maps/maps_wateruse.html

¹⁰ R.I. CRMC Regulations: www.crmc.ri.gov/regulations/RICRMP.pdf

¹¹ R.I. CRMC SAMPs: www.crmc.ri.gov/samps.html



The CRMC Water Use map for the City of Newport, Rhode Island. The water use maps show the six different water types, or classifications, as determined by CRMC along Rhode Island's coast. Maps for all of the coastal municipalities are at www.crmc.ri.gov/maps/maps_wateruse.html.