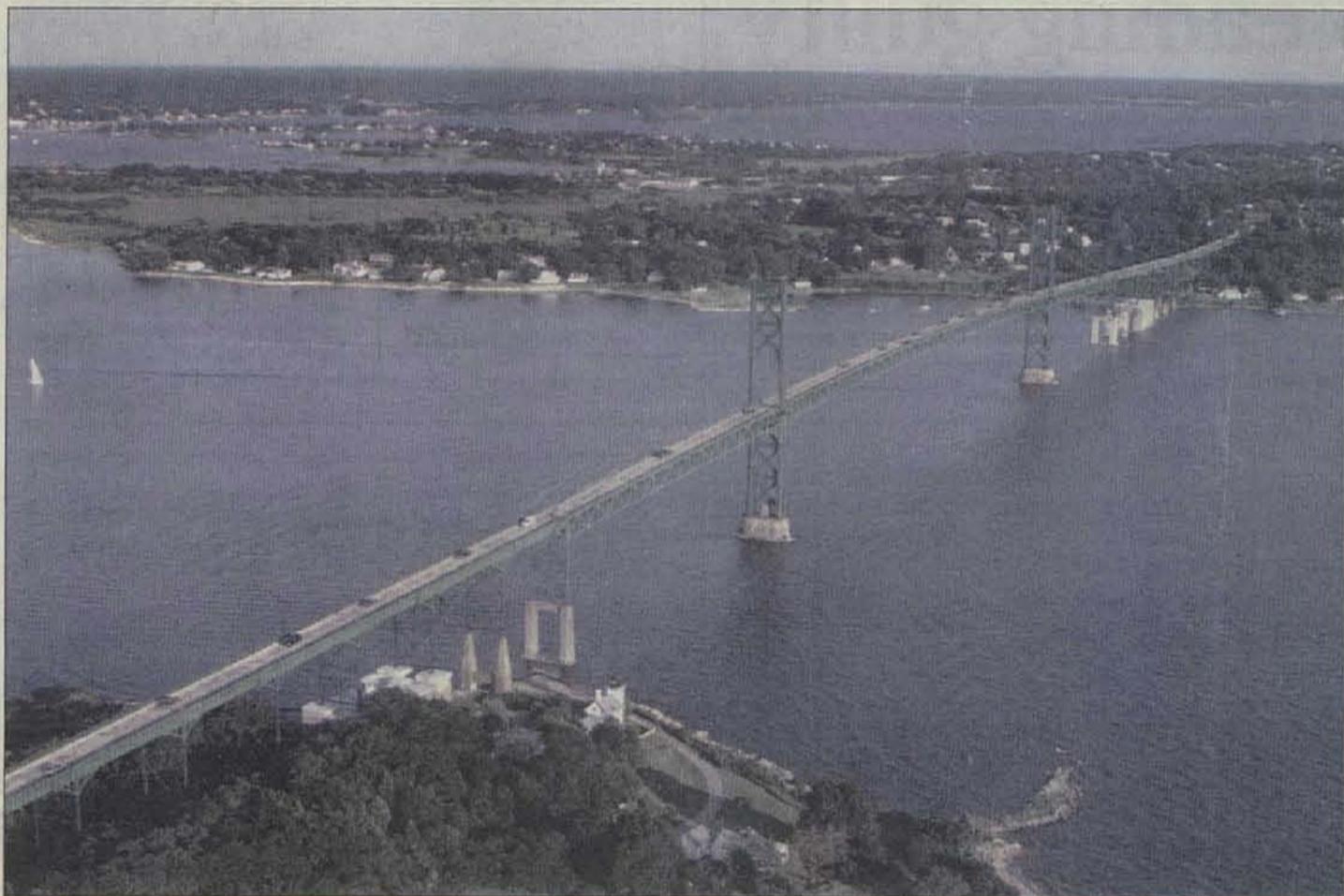


The Newport Daily

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NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR



David Hansen/Daily News photos

There has been an 87 percent decline in the population of finfish in Mount Hope Bay, traversed above by the Mount Hope Bridge, since 1986, according to the environmental group Save The Bay. The Brayton Point Station power plant in Somerset, Mass., which draws 1 billion gallons of water a day

from the bay to cool its generators and releases warm water back into the bay, has been blamed for the decline. Rhode Island Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse plans to sue the power plant, accusing it of dirtying the air and water around Mount Hope Bay, a major lobe of Narragansett Bay.

Group calls for bay cleanup

■ A Save The Bay official says that an overabundance of nutrients is the biggest threat to Narragansett Bay.

By Wendy M. Fontaine
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — The Brayton Point Station power plant in Somerset, Mass., and a proposal to build a container port at Quonset Point in North Kingstown may threaten the health of Narragansett Bay, but nutrient pollution is the largest problem facing Rhode Island waters, a Save The Bay spokesman said Thursday.

John Torgan, baykeeper for

the environmental group, said the bay's most serious ecological threat is an overabundance of nutrients caused by failing septic systems, increasing development along the shoreline and polluted water running into the bay from roads and agricultural lands.

High nutrient levels, he said, are "tipping the balance of the bay's ecology."

Environmentalists are concerned about the levels of nitrogen that get into the bay and cause blooms of harmful algae. As the algae decompose, they deplete the oxygen levels and kill fish, a process called eutrophication.

Common Fence Point and The Cove, both in Portsmouth, and Greenwich Bay are well-known eutrophic areas.

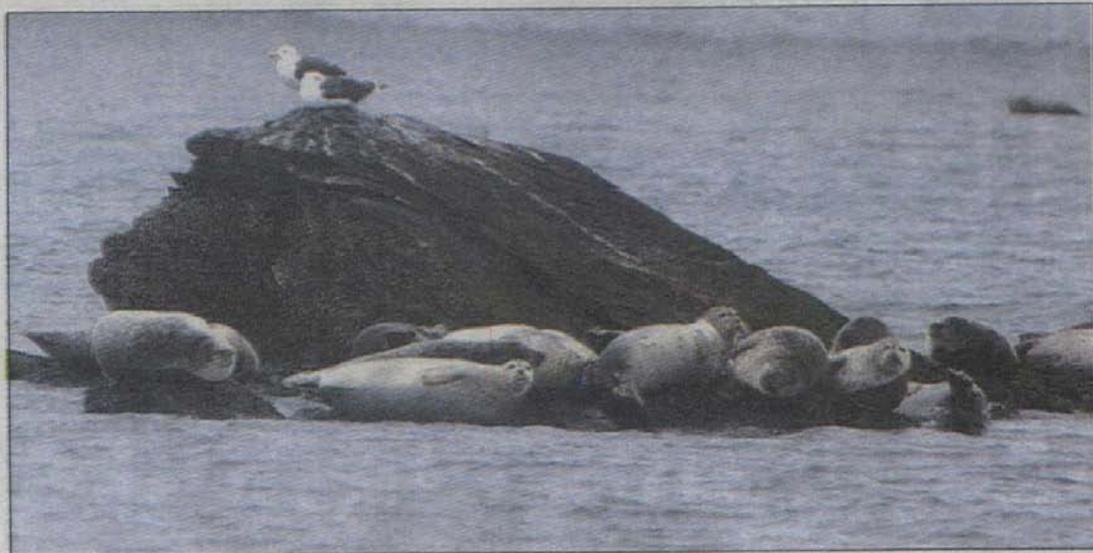
"When too much nitrogen gets into the bay, it is like dumping fertilizer into your



The area off McAllister Point in Middletown was the site of an oil spill two years ago. The land, owned by the Navy, contains a capped landfill.

swimming pool," he said. "Brayton Point we can fix and we are going to fix it. But this nutrient problem, not only is it an increasing problem but it is something people do not understand."

Torgan spoke about a wide range of pollution problems facing the bay to members of the Maritime Preservation Alliance Thursday night at the



Daily News file photo

Harbor seals wintering in Newport can be seen gathering at Citing Rock during a recent tour on Save The Bay's educational vessel, the *Alletta Morris*. Save The Bay officials say an overabundance of nutrients, caused by failing septic systems, increasing development along the shoreline and polluted water running into the bay from roads and agricultural lands, poses a major threat to fish and wildlife in Narragansett Bay.

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Newport Yacht Club on Long Wharf. Besides nutrient levels and algae blooms, he talked about two issues that made news in the past week: dredging the Providence River and taking legal action against the owners of Brayton Point.

Last week, Rhode Island Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse notified the owners of the plant that he intends to file a lawsuit against them within the next 30 days for polluting Mount Hope Bay.

Save The Bay officials say the plant's process of drawing in 1 billion gallons of bay water each day to cool its generators and releasing the warmed water back into the bay has caused an 87 percent decline in the population of finfish in Mount Hope Bay since 1986.

"This is totally inexcusable," Torgan said. "They make a lot of

money and they make it at the expense of the bay."

The Army Corps of Engineers recently approved a plan to dredge the Providence River shipping channel. The project, which could begin as early as next fall, will cost an estimated \$90.7 million but, so far, only \$8.2 million in federal funds have been allocated for it. Supporters of the plan say dredging is necessary to open up the shipping channel and make it safe for navigation.

The plan calls for disposing most of the removed sediments in a pit, called a confined aquatic disposal cell, that will be dug under the shipping channel. The rest would be dumped off Block Island or used to cover landfills.

Torgan said there are many signs the health of the bay has been improving over the last 10 years: oysters are growing on the

hurricane barrier in Providence and striped bass are traveling up river to Water Place Park. But more work needs to be done, particularly to address diffused sources of pollution, he said.

To fight against dangerous levels of nitrogen, Save The Bay advocates restoring marshes, wetlands and other coastal habitats to buffer pollution from the bay. The group also urges wastewater treatment facilities to conduct nitrogen removal, a process that would require an extra step for most plants.

"Here in Newport, the ability to swim, have clean water and take shellfish should be a basic human right," Torgan said. "When the bay is healthy and it's clean and we can all recognize the benefits — then the bay is saved."