
NARRAGANSETT INDIAN TRIBE



Project Title: Enhancement Project to Develop Office of Environmental Protection

Award Amount: \$457,074

Type of Grant: Environment

Project Period: 9/1/2004 – 12/31/2006

Grantee Type: Tribe

PROJECT SUMMARY

- 3 jobs created
- 5 elders involved
- 95 youth involved
- 2 people trained
- 2 partnerships formed
- 3 products developed
- 2 environmental codes/ regulations/ ordinances developed

BACKGROUND

The Narragansett Indian Tribe is a federally-recognized tribe located in southern Rhode Island. The current population consists of approximately 2,500 members, the majority of whom live in Rhode Island. The Narragansett Reservation spans approximately 2,000 acres of mostly undeveloped lands with very sensitive water resources (91 percent wetlands and 2.5 percent open water). Currently, only about 2 percent of the reservation is used for residential or agricultural purposes.

The Tribe's Natural Resources Department has identified four key factors threatening the environmental health of the reservation. The issues included: potential water pollution of both surface and ground water sources; incremental non-point source

pollution from surrounding residential and Tribal development and run-off from highways bordering Tribal lands; long range air pollution, hazardous waste, illegal dumping, lead paint and the presence of Radon; and biological and chemical contamination of drinking water

The Natural Resources Department's mission is to maintain the reservations natural resources. No infrastructure existed to address the environmental issues facing the Tribe.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The Project successfully created the Office of Environmental Protection, which hired and trained staff, developed the necessary policies and procedures and created an elder and youth Environmental Work Group. They developed and implemented hunting, fishing and camping ordinances and are drafting other codes to present to the Tribal Council.

Another Project activity planned was to conduct environmental protection and improvement activities with the Tribal Council, tribal elders and appropriate staff and train the same groups in those issues discovered by the assessment. The elders and youth indicated that they enjoyed participating in the Project's activities. Many of the environmental education

activities sparked an interest in science for some of the youth. The Project staff has developed excellent environmental learning materials including bookmarks, pictures of animals and plants to be identified and games to assist students in learning about the environment. Youth and elders enjoyed taking hikes during which elders shared stories and family histories. The Project staff is very dedicated to teaching environmental classes and is already looking at ways to continue the classes, even if additional funding is not procured.

The Project encountered several challenges that it was able to overcome. First, the tribal government changes slowed the approval process of many activities, policies and codes that the Office of Environmental Protection had planned to implement. The Office overcame these hurdles by continuing to communicate with the Council at every opportunity. In addition, the Project's scope was overly ambitious. With the ANA Technical Assistance Provider's help, the Project was able to work through this challenge. The grantee requested, and was awarded, a four month no-cost extension including revisions to some activities. Lastly, poor community attendance was resolved by planning activities for weekends and school holidays.

As a result, several of the key objectives (i.e., assessment of the Narragansett Reservation) were delayed.

The Office of Environmental Protection managed the assessments, including a wetlands plan, forest management plan and groundwater assessment. The final non-point source assessment and groundwater assessment were completed in October 2006.

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

The Office of Environmental Protection's staff members shared positive impressions about the project and highlighted the tribal members' enjoyment in the educational activities. Many stated that they would like to see more activities of this nature in the future. One member of the Project staff remarked, "The teaching taking place is based on traditional values and culture." Another staff member exclaimed, "Everything we do revolves around the environment. You can't do anything without affecting the environment."

Community members felt that the Project revitalized traditional values related to the natural environment and brought youth, parents and elders together. It also increased the community's awareness and knowledge of local natural resources and methods to preserve and conserve those resources. Elders stated that they enjoyed participating because it helped them remember their own childhoods and where they were raised. The youth have greatly appreciated their stories as well. Some younger children felt they were helping to provide food for the tribe by picking blueberries as part of the educational activities. Others remarked they enjoyed the opportunity to get out into nature because in today's society that has become a rare event. The Project promoted intergenerational activities that helped to reconnect the youth, their parents and elders with the natural environment.