



Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition

Education Workshop

February 28, 2026



8:30 AM

Welcome

- Andrew Ely; Executive Director, Project Oceanology
 - R.T. Brown; Deputy Director, seCTer & Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition (CBEC)
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9:00 AM

Introduction to the Blue Economy and CBEC

Why Education is Vital to the Blue Economy Mission

- Andrew Ely; Executive Director, Project Oceanology
 - Syma Ebbin; Professor-in-Residence, Maritime Studies Program & Dept. of Agricultural and Resource Economics; Research Coordinator, Connecticut Sea Grant UConn Avery Point
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9:20 AM

Blue Education Panel

Introduction to Experiential Educational Resources and Organizations

- Ben Moon; **Moderator**, Groton Public Schools, Director of STEM and Magnet Programs K-5
 - Andrew Ely; Executive Director, Project Oceanology
 - Amy Gollenberg; Mystic Aquarium, Director of School Programs
 - Megan Strand; New England Science & Sailing Foundation (NESS), Managing Director of Program Administration
 - Chuck Mulligan; Science Teacher; Sound School
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9:50 AM

Break

10:00 AM

Workforce Development Panel

Industry Experts Discuss Workforce Needs and Desired Skills

- R.T. Brown, **Moderator**; Deputy Director, seCTer & Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition
 - Stephanie Montejano; Workforce Development Specialist, Electric Boat
 - Maria Hanna; President & CEO, Survival Systems
 - Rebekah Coffey; Executive Director, Connecticut Marine Trades Association
 - Kevin Lopes; Vice President of Business Development, Thayer Mahan)
 - Mike O'Connor; Executive Director, Connecticut Port Authority
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Experiential Education & Demos (Session 1)

- **NESS Mobile Classroom:** Megan Strand, Managing Director, Program Administration and Program Director, NESS
 - Location: Ness Trailer - Outside

Beep Beep! Coming soon to a waterbody near you; make way for the NESS Mobile Classroom! Decked out in science tech from bumper to bumper, learn about the Long Island Sound through tried-and-true hands-on NESS lessons. Discover what features "drive" this unique ecosystem of flora and fauna. From freshwater to salt, get ready to experience the local watersheds like never before.

- **Watersheds at Work:** Experiential Education on Nonpoint Source Pollution; Meghan Trujillo, Conservation Technician, Eastern Connecticut Conservation Districts
 - Location: Bio Lab

This session introduces K–12 and informal educators to an experiential approach for teaching watersheds and nonpoint source pollution and their connection to coastal and marine systems. Participants explore how everyday land-use decisions affect water quality through a hands-on watershed model and guided discussion. The session also highlights school- and community-based green infrastructure projects, such as rain gardens and rain barrels, as accessible, real-world learning opportunities for students. Emphasis is placed on adaptable activities that support marine literacy, environmental stewardship, and place-based learning across grade levels.

- **Becoming a Marine Scientist:** Learning through Lendable Kits; Larissa Graham, Education Coordinator, UConn Avery Point, Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve (CTNERR)
 - Large Classroom

Learn about the Connecticut Reserve's new lendable kits that provide educators with the teaching materials needed to conduct hands-on experiments and activities about water quality monitoring, eelgrass restoration, and oyster reef and restoration. These kits will be set up so you can see everything included, while we walk you through the lessons.

- **Kelp in the Classroom:** How to grow seaweed in a small-scale nursery system; Clayton McGoldrick and Zach Gordon, UConn Avery Point – Connecticut Sea Grant
 - Location, Bio Lab, then Kelp Trailer Outside

We will teach participants about the kelp aquaculture industry in CT and show them how we have set up a small-scale mobile kelp nursery that is used for demonstration and educational purposes. We have tools and resources to help anyone grow kelp in their classrooms.

- **Shipboard Education:** Integrating Citizen Science into your Curriculum; Amanda Fall, Debbie Sayer, Amy Stockburger; Marine Science Educators, Project Oceanology
 - Envrolab II

Step aboard Project Oceanology's research vessel, *Enviro-Lab II*, to experience how Long Island Sound serves as a primary classroom for inspiring the next generation of the Blue Economy workforce. Participants will use oceanographic equipment to see how students collect and analyze real-world environmental data. Learn how these shipboard experiences support environmental literacy essential for Connecticut's coastal resilience and maritime industries. Discover how getting students out on the water transforms their understanding of our local watersheds and provides professional opportunities for high school and college-aged students. Leave with a sample data set to share with your students and start integrating marine science into your classroom!

- **MyCoast:** Tracking high tides, flooding, and storm damage for a more resilient shoreline; Falyn McQuarrie, UConn Avery Point, Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve, Education Coordinator
 - Geo Lab

Interested in collecting real-world data in your community? If so, this is the session for you! We'll provide an overview of the MyCoast project, which allows community members (including students) to collect high tide and flood data by submitting photos through an easy-to-use, free app. These photos are used to support local planning, increase awareness, and build a stronger, more resilient shoreline for all.

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- **Sound Resilience:** Nicki Rosenfeld, Director of Vessel Operations and Programs and Lisa Wu, Program Manager: K-12 Marine Science Pathway, The Maritime Aquarium
 - Water Quality Lab

Coastal habitats have an outsized impact on us, providing ecosystem services such as erosion protection, carbon storage, and home for wildlife. Model coastal storm conditions using an interactive “beach-in-a-box” then test and evaluate different methods of making the coast more resilient. Observe a live plankton sample and discover why plankton are vital to us and the living planet. Leave understanding how salt marshes and nearshore waters are both threatened by our changing climate and key to creating vibrant, resilient communities in our new era.

12:00 PM

Participant feedback and discussion on enhancing maritime / blue economy educational resources.

12:15 PM

Networking, tabling event, lunch, and raffle.

- New England Science & Sailing Foundation (Megan Strand)
 - The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk; Programs available for schools (Nicki Rosenfeld)
 - UConn Maritime Studies Program (Mary K Bercaw Edwards)
 - University of Connecticut Admissions, especially focused on Maritime Studies and Marine Sciences (Janice Lamb)
 - Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve; Stop by to learn about the resources that the Reserve has to offer, such as loanable teaching kits, online lesson plans, and opportunities to collect real-world, local data with your students. (Falyn McQuarrie)
 - Connecticut Sea Grant; Aquaculture Workforce Development - CTSG Aquaculture Educational/Workshop Opportunities (Mike Gilman)
 - Connecticut Sea Grant; Connecticut's Sandy Shores book, plus wildlife stickers and other giveaways (Judy Benson)
 - Project Oceanology
 - Mystic Aquarium; Programs & resources for schools/students (Amy Gollenberg)
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Global Ocean Monitoring and Observing Program (GOMO) Ocean Acidification Program (OAP); Sharing about GOMO and OAP and specifically educational materials from GOMO and OAP including the Adopt a Drifter Program (Heather Heenehan)
 - Long Island Sound Partnership (Maggie Cozens) Provide general information and an overview of the LIS Partnership. We will also collect initial feedback on the new LIS Environmental Education Guide and recruit interested teachers to the revision process.
 - Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (Megan Trujillo) Programs & resources for schools/students
 - Marine Science Magnet School (Tara Amatrudo)
 - Southeastern Marine Educators Association (Valerie Cournoyer)
 - Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed Maggie Favretti
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Blue Education Panel

Introduction to Experiential Educational Resources and Organizations
9:20 a.m.



Ben Moon: Moderator

Groton Public Schools

Director of STEM and Magnet Programs, K-5



Biography

Ben has over 20 years of experience in public education serving as a classroom teacher, STEM Specialist, and now district administrator. In addition to working with students, Ben has provided professional development, built strong partnerships with community organizations, and created numerous programs that include experiential learning.



Andrew Ely

Project Oceanology

Executive Director



Biography

Andrew developed his interest in the marine environment while studying Marine Affairs at the University of Rhode Island in the early 1990's. He spent a semester during this period at Sea Education Association, sailing and conducting research on oil pollution aboard the S.S.V. Westward in the Caribbean Sea. This experience led him to pursue a career in the United States Coast Guard. After 28 years of service focused on search and rescue, environmental protection, and interagency operations Andrew joined the Project Oceanology team in January of 2022. He brings leadership, program management, and education experience to the team. Andrew received his M.S. from the National Graduate School in Quality Systems Management, M.A. from the Naval War College in National Security and Strategic Studies, M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Connecticut, and B.A. in History and Social Science from Thomas Edison State University.

In his spare time, Andrew enjoys spending time with his family, sailing, camping, and volunteering in the community.



Amy Gollenberg

Director of School Programs

Mystic Aquarium



Biography

Amy Gollenberg became the Director of School Programs for Mystic Aquarium in 2015. She works closely with teachers and education leaders in both CT and RI while expanding on Mystic Aquarium's school programming and their grant supports. Prior to that, she was the Science Manager for a high school STEM program of the CT RESC Alliance EdAdvance. Amy has enjoyed over 25 years of teaching and managing education in the ocean realm. She started out in the field as an informal educator at Dolphin Research Center in the Florida Keys, eventually became their Director of Education. She moved to Hawai'i Island to be the Education Manager for Dolphin Quest, helping to inspire and teach locals, tourists, and school children. Amy obtained a B.S. in Natural Resources and Marine Ecology from Cornell University and spent summer semesters at Shoals Marine Laboratory on Appledore Island, Maine. Throughout her career, Amy has participated in field research in the Everglades, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and cetacean studies in Florida, Hawai'i, and Japan.



Megan Strand

New England Science & Sailing

Managing Director of Program Administration



Biography

Megan is the Managing Director of Program Administration with New England Science & Sailing. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Coastal Studies (now Marine Science) from the University of Connecticut and a master's in environmental education from Southern Connecticut State University. She also has her United States Coast Guard 100 Ton Captains License, is an ACA Coastal Kayak Level II Instructor, and is a Connecticut certified school teacher in Biology for 7-12th grade.

Megan has worked in informal education for 18 years with a primary focus on outdoor experiential programs aimed on getting students out on the water.



Charles Mulligan

The Sound School
Science Instructor



Biography

Originally from Florida, I got my start in Science as a hard clam aquaculture scientist with the University of Florida. Before that, while working on my MS I spent two years as an NSF-GK12 fellow developing high school inquire-based science curriculum. Since jumping to education in 2009 I've worked in three different districts between Florida and Connecticut working hard to blend the best of research with educational outreach as I firmly believe for last knowledge to stick, kids have to see it in action and answer the age old question, when will this matter? I have a passion for connecting students to the environment around them and also to the folks in the community who study and care about that same environment. I've been at Sound for the past 6 years, teaching AquaScience, ECE Oceanography and spearheading an after school research and outreach Program (Environmental Justice Program). After all these years, one of the biggest things I will continue to take the most pride in is my students success post high school in whichever field they pursue!

Workforce Development Panel

Industry Experts Discuss Workforce Needs and Desired Skills

10:00 a.m.



R.T. Brown: Moderator

Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition
Chair



Biography

R.T. Hamilton Brown is the Deputy Director of the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer) and Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition Chair. In the field of entrepreneurship development he's been the primary author / architect of a US EDA Build to Scale Capital Challenge award to create an angel seed fund, won awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) for entrepreneur ecosystem creation, started micro-lending operations, served as an advisor for IEDC's new Entrepreneur Academy, and is a certified Ice House Entrepreneurship Facilitator. At seCTer, he designed the small business grant program seCTerRise and the Economic Impact Grants. He has a B.A. in English from Fordham University (go Rams) and M.S. in Economic Development from the University of Southern Mississippi. He's passionate about regional economic development, education, the blue economy, sailing, and pickleball.

Please connect with R.T. if you would like to learn more or be part of CT's first Ocean Innovation Week in September, 2026.



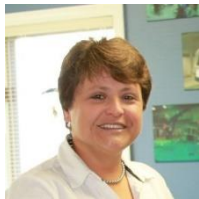
Stefanie Montejano

General Dynamics Electric Boat
Workforce Development Specialist
GENERAL DYNAMICS
Electric Boat

Biography

Stefanie Montejano is a defense industry workforce development professional with a strong commitment to education and community engagement. Currently serving as a Workforce Development Specialist at General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB), Stefanie leads initiatives to enhance employment opportunities by addressing barriers such as language, transportation, and childcare. She also collaborates on educational outreach projects to attract youth and under-employed adults to careers in the Maritime Industry and works closely with the Navy Talent Pipeline Program, sharing best practices for recruitment, onboarding and retention.

Stefanie's extensive background in education, coupled with her experience in program development, makes her a valuable asset in fostering workforce skills and opportunities within her community.



Maria Hanna

Survival Systems
President/CEO



Biography

Prior to her appointment as President and CEO in 2007, Ms. Hanna served as the Executive Director for Survival Systems USA since 1999. Responsible for ensuring operational readiness across 7 locations, she has presented extensively at various venues in over 40 states for various aviation and renewables clients. She has conducted instructor and student training around the world and has consulted as a Subject Matter Expert in various liability suits related to training preparedness as well as R&D programs with the Department of Defense and various civilian spaceflight agencies. Most recent efforts include underwater egress, surface water survival and offshore wind training and equipment as well as workforce development for the offshore wind industry. Ms. Hanna holds a BS in Nuclear Engineering and an MBA from the Pennsylvania State University. She is certified as a private pilot and holds Instructor Trainer qualifications across multiple disciplines.

Maria has served on the board for the Boys & Girls Club of Southeastern Connecticut. She currently sits on the board for the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer) – the region's designated private, non-profit Economic Development Organization that supports economic development and diversification within

Southeaster Connecticut. She also sits on the board for the Connecticut Wind Collaborative – a pivotal component of Connecticut’s Offshore Wind Strategic Roadmap poised to catalyze growth, attract investment and foster innovation across Connecticut. Maria is a past recipient of the Ballast Award presented by the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, acknowledging her long standing support of the region.



Rebekah Coffey

Marine Trades Association
Executive Director



Biography

Rebekah Coffey serves as Executive Director of the Connecticut Marine Trades Association, a role she began in August. Since stepping into the position, she successfully organized and led the Hartford Boat Show at Mohegan Sun.

Prior to CMTA, Rebekah spent five years with MarineMax in Westbrook, CT and Rhode Island, where she served as Sales & Marketing Coordinator and Operations & Service Coordinator. She is also an active member of the Newport Maritime Alliance, supporting initiatives that strengthen the regional boating community. Earlier in her career, she was the School Age Program Director at the Valley Shore YMCA, focusing on youth development and community engagement.

In her free time, Rebekah enjoys coastal living with her husband Eric, their daughters Camryn and Kylie, and their two dogs. As a family, they love exploring the Long Island Sound and creating lasting memories on the water.



Michael O'Connor

Connecticut Port Authority
Executive Director



Biography

Michael J. O'Connor, Executive Director of the Connecticut Port Authority, is a longtime Connecticut resident and Navy veteran, committed to growing the maritime economy on Connecticut’s coastline.

Prior to joining the Connecticut Port Authority, O'Connor completed a 32-year career in commercial nuclear power, most recently as the vice president at Dominion Energy's Millstone Nuclear Power Station in Waterford, Connecticut. He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of New Haven and a master's degree in business management from the University of Connecticut. O'Connor's work in nuclear started in the United States Navy where he completed a 10-year enlistment and attained the rank of chief petty officer.

O'Connor is an elected member of the town of Bozrah's Board of Finance and has been the chairman for 26 years. He is vice chair of the Mitchell College Board of Trustees and is a past member of the Southeastern Connecticut Water Authority.

Participating Blue Economy Organizations and Resources

[Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed: https://www.alliancemrw.org/](https://www.alliancemrw.org/)

[CT Blue Economy Coalition: https://ctblueeconomy.org/](https://ctblueeconomy.org/)

[CT Marine Trades Association: https://ctmarinetrades.org/](https://ctmarinetrades.org/)

[CT National Estuarine Research Reserve:](https://estuarineresearchreserve.center.uconn.edu/)

<https://estuarineresearchreserve.center.uconn.edu/>

[Connecticut Port Authority: https://ctportauthority.com/](https://ctportauthority.com/)

[CT Sea Grant: https://seagrant.uconn.edu/](https://seagrant.uconn.edu/)

[Eastern CT Conservation District: https://conservect.org/eastern/](https://conservect.org/eastern/)

[Electric Boat: https://www.gdeb.com/](https://www.gdeb.com/)

[Groton Public Schools: https://www.grotonschools.org/](https://www.grotonschools.org/)

[Long Island Sound Partnership: https://lispartnership.org/](https://lispartnership.org/)

[Marine Science Magnet High School: https://msmhs.com/](https://msmhs.com/)

[Mystic Aquarium: https://www.mysticaquarium.org/](https://www.mysticaquarium.org/)

[National Marine Educators Association: https://www.marine-ed.org/](https://www.marine-ed.org/)

[New England Science & Sailing Foundation: https://nessf.org/](https://nessf.org/)

NOAA

Global Ocean Monitoring and Observing Program: <https://globalocean.noaa.gov/>

Ocean Acidification Program: <https://oceanacidification.noaa.gov/>

[Project Oceanology: https://www.oceanology.org/](https://www.oceanology.org/)

[Sound School: https://sound.school/](https://sound.school/)

[Southeastern CT Enterprise Region: https://www.secter.org/](https://www.secter.org/)

[Southeastern Marine Educators Association: https://seneme.wildapricot.org/](https://seneme.wildapricot.org/)

[Survival Systems: https://www.survivalsystemsinc.com/](https://www.survivalsystemsinc.com/)

[Thayer Mahan: https://www.thayermahan.com/](https://www.thayermahan.com/)

[The Maritime Aquarium: https://www.maritimeaquarium.org/](https://www.maritimeaquarium.org/)

[UConn Avery Point Campus: https://averypoint.uconn.edu/](https://averypoint.uconn.edu/)

[UConn Maritime Studies Program: https://maritimestudies.uconn.edu/](https://maritimestudies.uconn.edu/)

Other Blue Economy Resources

Funding for a Blue Economy Field trip and NMEA conference registration: <https://www.marine-ed.org/conference/2026>,

Expenses for one teacher from the SENEME region.https://www.marine-ed.org/conference/2026/blue-tech?utm_medium=email&utm_source=GovDelivery

NOAA's [Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute](#) (OECI), hosted out of the University of Rhode Island, is pleased to announce its 2026 Blue Economy Career Exploration Fair (virtual via Zoom). This FREE event aims to connect community college, undergraduate, and graduate students, as well as other stakeholders, with individuals across various Blue Economy (BE) sectors (Defense, Marine Trades, Aquaculture, Fisheries, Tourism and Recreation, Ports and Shipping, Marine Policy, etc), and raise awareness about the different career opportunities available and the diverse skills required for these positions. By the event's end, we hope participants may see a career opportunity for themselves in a BE field that they otherwise may not have considered/did not think their skills and interests were applicable. The event has received positive feedback over the last 5 years, and based on responses received, has been successful in broadening individual understanding of what the Blue Economy is and the opportunities it affords.

- **URI Coastal Resources Center, “The Value of the RI Blue Economy”:**
 - Summary: <https://web.uri.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/916/BE-Executive-Summary-BLEEDS.pdf>
 - Full Report: https://web.uri.edu/gso/wp-content/uploads/sites/916/BE-Report_2020_FINAL_edited-3-14-24-1-compressed.pdf
- **URI, Blue Economy Research:** https://web.uri.edu/gso/blue_economy/
- **URI Magazine, “Thinking Blue”:** <https://www.uri.edu/magazine/issues/summer-2022-cat/thinking-blue/>
- **NOAA Ocean Service, Blue Economy Strategy webpage:** <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/economy/blue-economy-strategy/>
- **NOAA’s Blue Economy Strategic Plan, 2021-25:**
 - Summary: <https://aambpublicoceanservice.blob.core.windows.net/oceanserviceprod/economy/Blue-Economy-Handout.pdf>
 - Full Plan: <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/economy/Blue-Economy%20Strategic-Plan.pdf>

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