

Join MyCoast Connecticut in helping shine a light on vulnerable places

By Judy Benson
Special to The Day

Published: Dec 18, 2025 12:02 AM **Updated:** Dec 17, 2025 7:40 PM

Talons gripping a squirrel carcass, a bald eagle swooped a few feet over my head. It was early afternoon on a recent busy workday near the UConn main campus. The appearance of such a wild and visceral scene seemingly out of nowhere jarred me out of my preoccupations with unanswered emails and unfinished projects.

How lucky I felt to see the eagle, especially so close to me, and especially since I knew the history. Their populations were decimated by the widespread use of the pesticide DDT. Once it was banned in 1972, eagles and other birds of prey began to rebound. It's a major conservation victory not to be taken for granted.

The change happened because enough people started paying attention to nature and caring about how humans were impacting it, many after reading Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring." In today's world, though, responding to one nature crisis at a time isn't enough, nor is a single quick fix.

As the longest night in the Northern Hemisphere arrives at the winter solstice this Sunday, perhaps there's a lesson to be learned from our ancient ancestors. They marked the new cycle in Earth's orbit around the sun with fire-lit ceremonies to welcome the turn from darkness back to

advancing daylight. Taking such a pause from our overstimulated culture, especially amid the holiday lights and bustle, may seem quaint and corny.

But instead of dismissing the idea, how about thinking about a modern way to mark the solstice? How about joining a local community engaged in paying attention to what nature is trying to tell us, and by doing so helping your neighborhoods and downtowns? The folks at Connecticut Sea Grant, the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation, all based at the UConn-Avery Point campus, have created such an opportunity for residents of Groton, New London and Stonington with the April launch of the Connecticut MyCoast pilot project.

Joining this participatory science project is free and easy. The MyCoast app gets downloaded to a cell phone. As rising seas and more frequent intense storms bring increasing flooding and damage to our roads, coastlines and neighborhoods, MyCoast participants document the events with photos and share them through the app. The images go to a database and platform where the images are organized and displayed. By bearing witness to what's happening, MyCoast members help their communities by giving their municipal leaders the information and evidence they need to respond, plan resilience projects and obtain funding to execute them. This can also help raise awareness more generally about current and future environmental challenges locally.

Organizers of the MyCoast pilot hope to build the project into a statewide initiative, like it already is in other states including Rhode Island and New York. To create the momentum needed, more residents of the pilot communities need to become MyCoast partners, joining the 194 participants so far who've contributed 147 photos. Think of it as a way of

turning towards the light of acknowledging the truth that the threats of extreme weather and higher tides aren't going to go away on their own. We're all in this together to help pave the way for solutions.

To learn about the MyCoast Connecticut project and the MyCoast app, visit: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/?p=12802>.

Judy Benson, a former reporter at The Day, is the communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant.