



## East Lyme's Overlook Park Progress Report #50

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The two halves of the reconstructed Niantic Bay Boardwalk took a total of 55 months to complete. They are now joined to recreate the 1.1 mile long walkway with the added benefit of a new 14 acre beach along its eastern half created as a consequence of little known federal and state environmental law. First was the coincidence of the railroad electrification of the Northeast Corridor by Amtrak in the 1990's. This led Amtrak public relations to work with local groups in 1994 that included the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation. Amtrak donated \$75,000 to the Foundation as well as all of its Railroad Beach on which to build the Boardwalk. The remaining land (10% of the total) was donated by 6 local residents and the Town of East Lyme. These gifts created the 1.1 mile long parcel of coastline on which the Boardwalk stands. That land was valued in 1996 at \$2,270,000. It cost the Foundation \$1.00.

The Second essential condition of the project was the required federal oversight of Amtrak by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). That oversight required Amtrak to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in 1978 that was updated in 2002, to implement its long delayed replacement of the Niantic River railroad bridge. In that updated environmental permit, FRA agreed and signed with Amtrak that "...the Environmental Impact for the bridge replacement project includes a commitment that FRA and Amtrak will comply with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's request for in-kind or better replacement of any impacted Boardwalk components." This required Amtrak to rebuild the eastern half of the Boardwalk thus protecting it from 100 year storm damage. It also required that Amtrak build a stone groin along the Niantic River channel, and that Amtrak create the adjacent 14 acre beach that the groin protects and stabilizes. All this is a result of compliance insisted upon by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, now the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP).

The third environmental factor that made this project a reality relates to the storm destruction of the western half of the Boardwalk due to flawed design elevation used for the western Boardwalk. It was too low and thus certain to fail against even minor storm waves. The Town of East Lyme recovered funds from settlement with the design engineer and was also granted Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) monies in compensation for storm damage to that western half.

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