

**Retrospective Analysis of a Multidecadal
Phytoplankton Time Series in Narragansett Bay:
Ecological Threshold Responses to Climate and
Nutrient Stressors**

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ECOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF THRESHOLDS INVESTIGATED

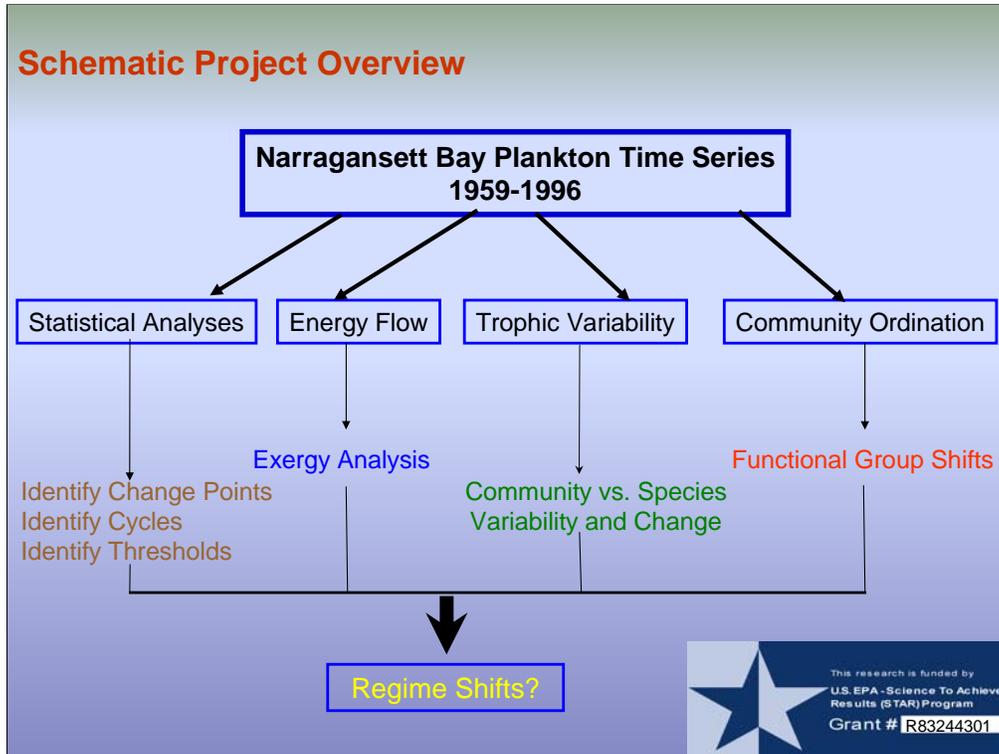
- To facilitate understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change on a representative temperate estuary using the climate change indicators, such as temperature, North Atlantic Oscillation Index, Gulf Stream Index
- Quantifying the role of short- and long-term changes in nutrients and their ratios on phytoplankton functional group selection and linked trophic processes
- Establishing importance of external vs. internal ecosystem drivers on plankton processes

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IMPACTED BY THRESHOLDS

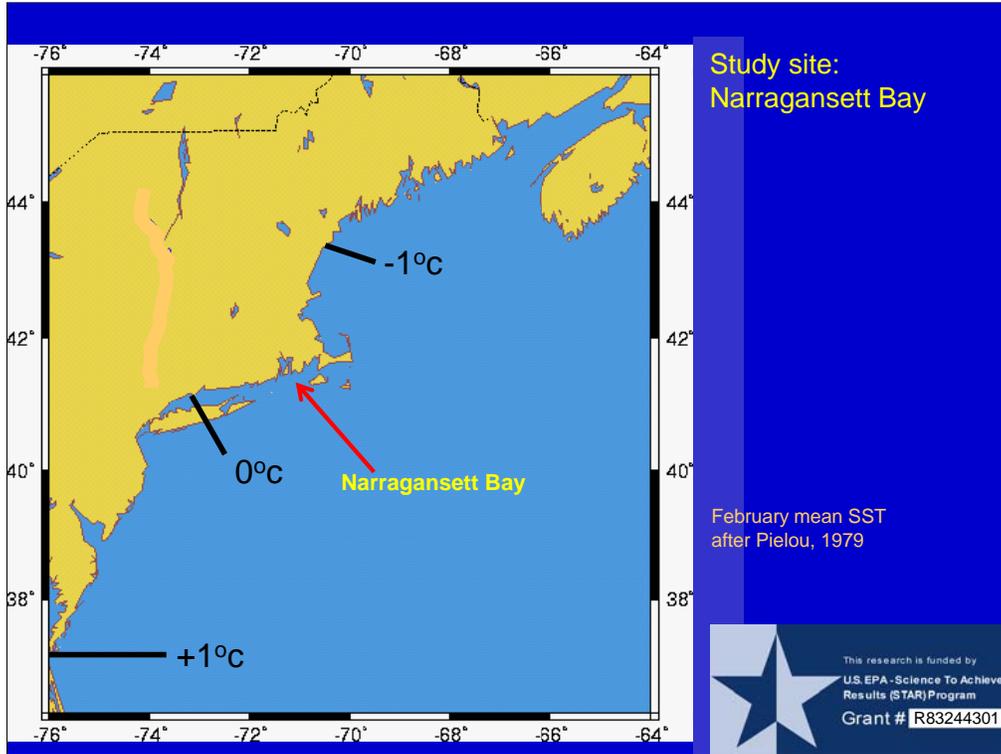
- Nutrient Cycling, Water Quality
- Plankton Dynamics, Harmful Algal Blooms, Fisheries



This research is funded by
U.S. EPA - Science To Achieve
Results (STAR) Program
Grant # R83244301



This is the longest dataset of its type. Measurements are taken weekly. It is important to remember that many different processes occur on a daily or even hourly basis.



Narragansett Bay is at a biogeographical junction. The area is particularly vulnerable to climate change.



Aerial photo of Narragansett Bay
(Courtesy of R. L. Wilke)

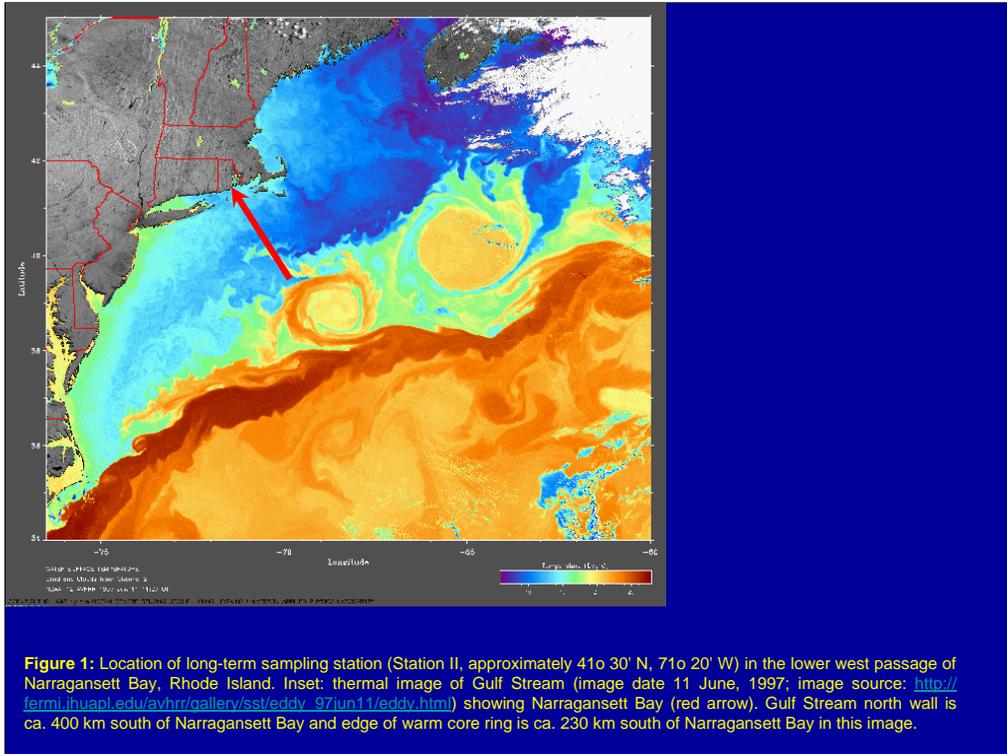
Narragansett Bay

ca. 328 km²

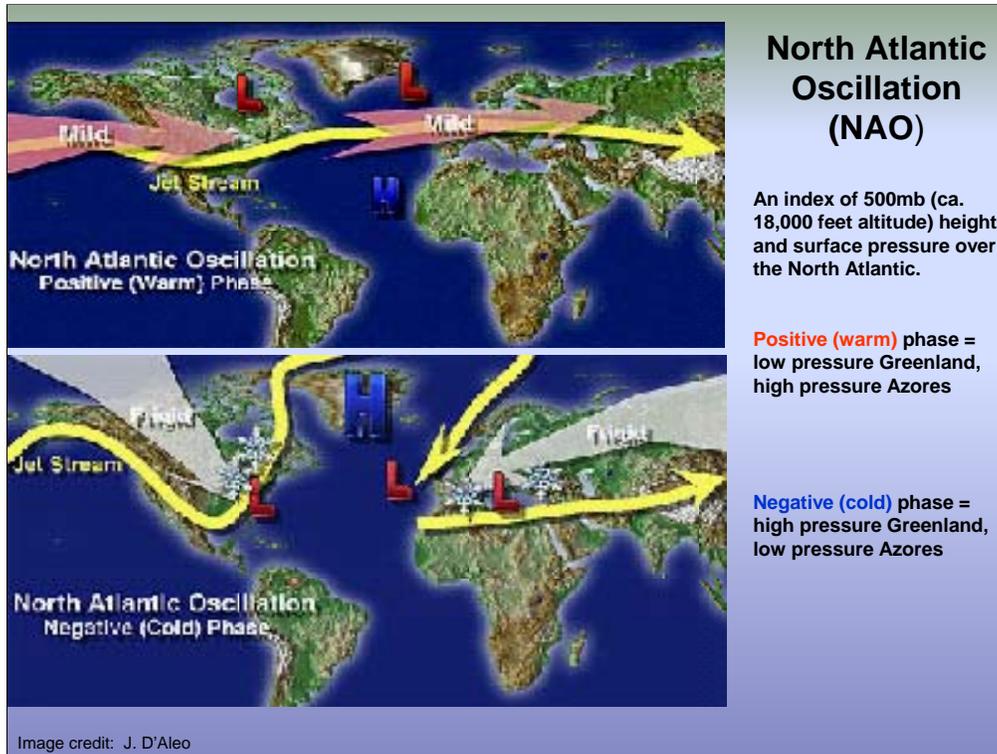
Mean depth: 8m (~60m maximum)

Salinity range: 20-32

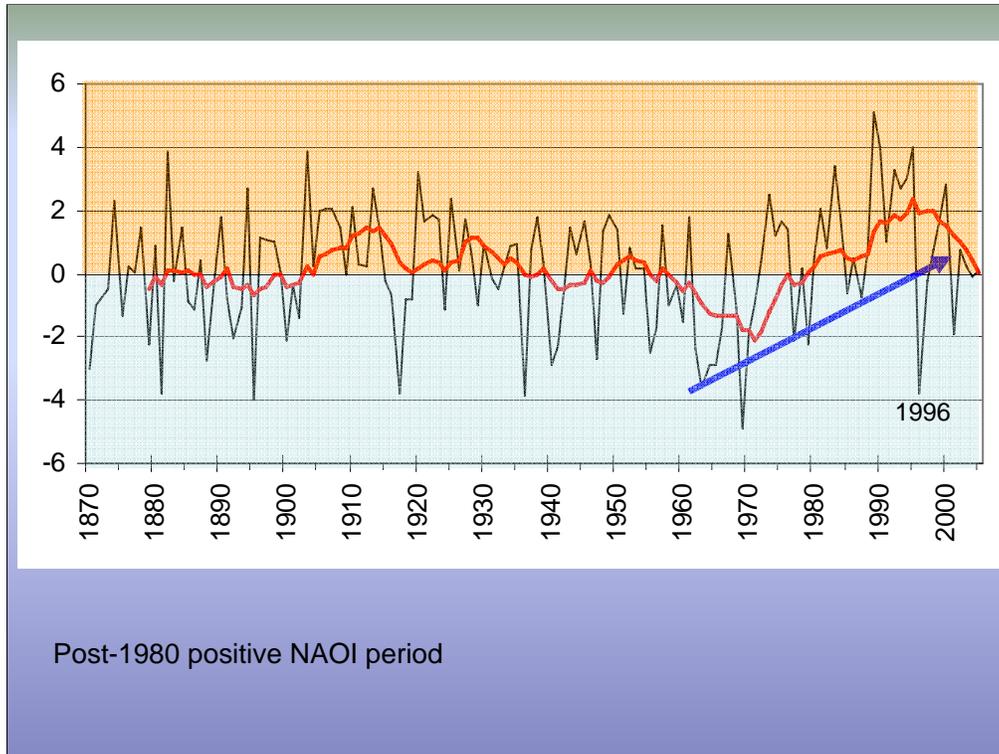
Temperature range: -2 to 25 C



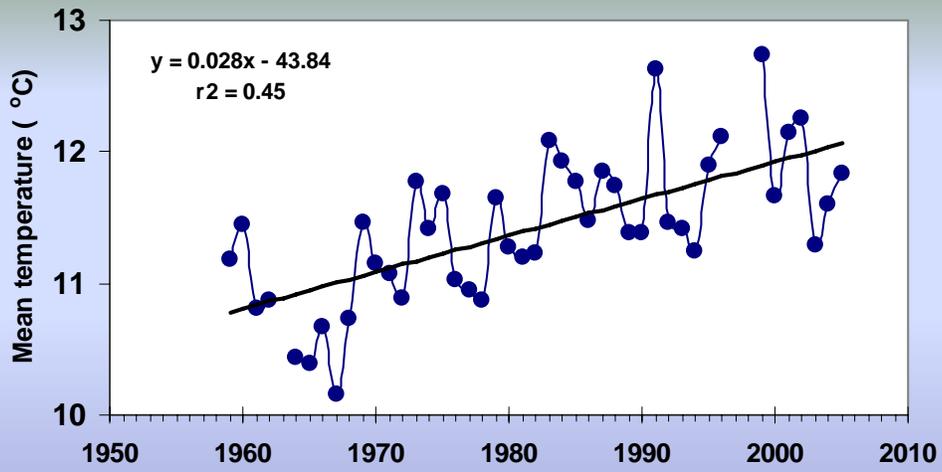
The researchers are studying the role of the Gulf Stream Index.



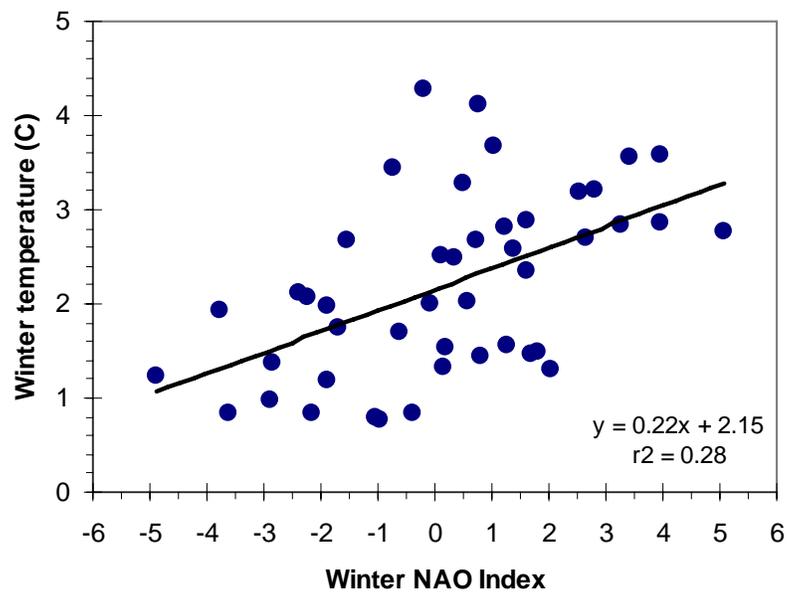
The North Atlantic Oscillation alters the temperature, wind, and amount of snow and/or rain.



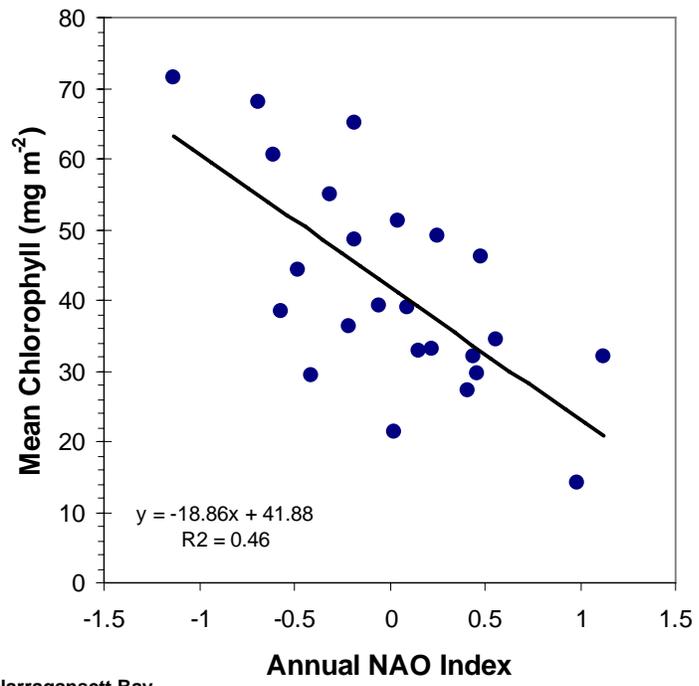
The period from 1960 to the present has been a period of warming.



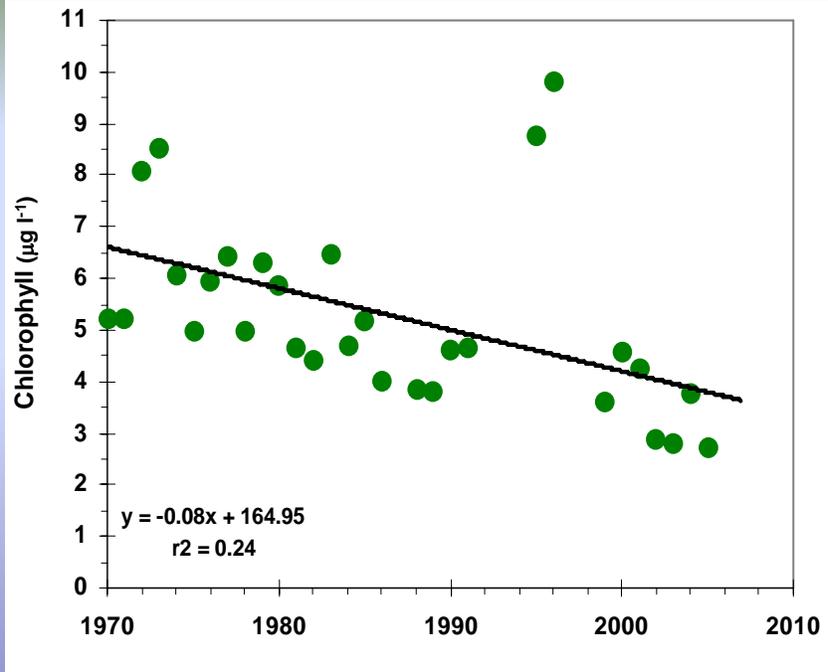
Narragansett Bay



Narragansett Bay



Narragansett Bay



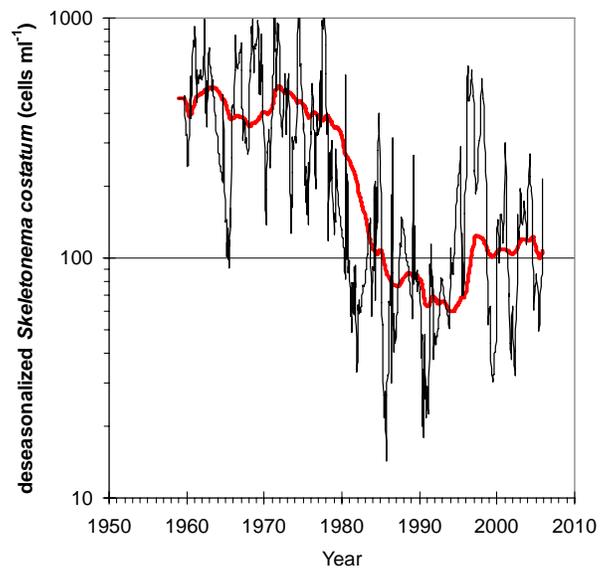
Skeletonema level declined :

400 cells ml⁻¹ pre-1980

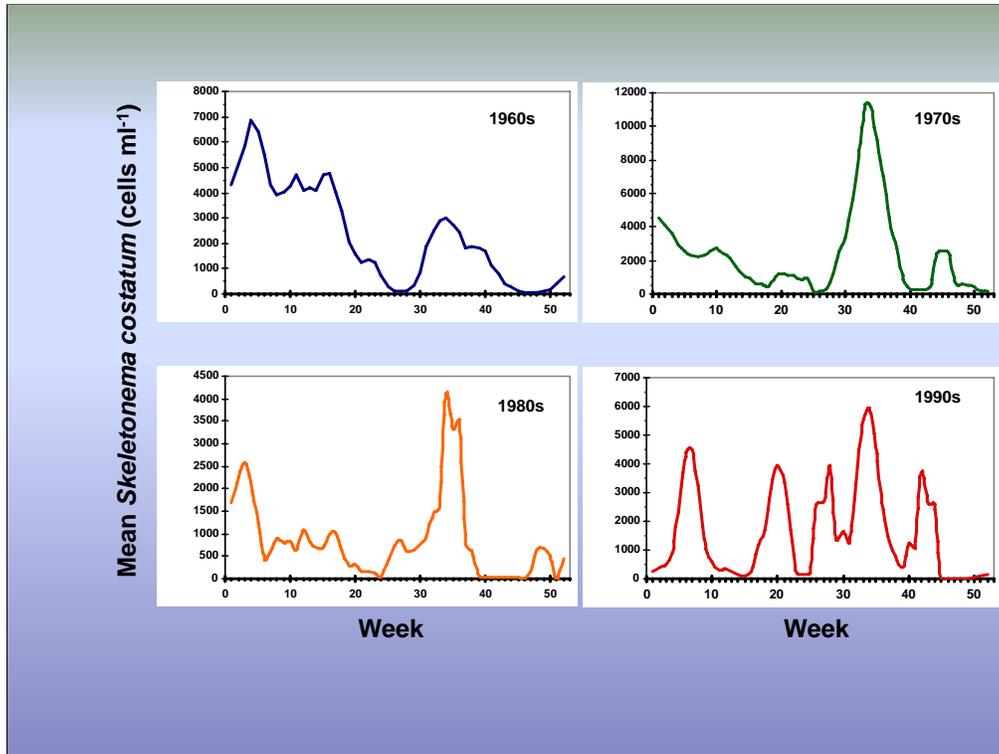
90 cells ml⁻¹ 1980-96

Updated:

111 cells ml⁻¹ 1997-2005



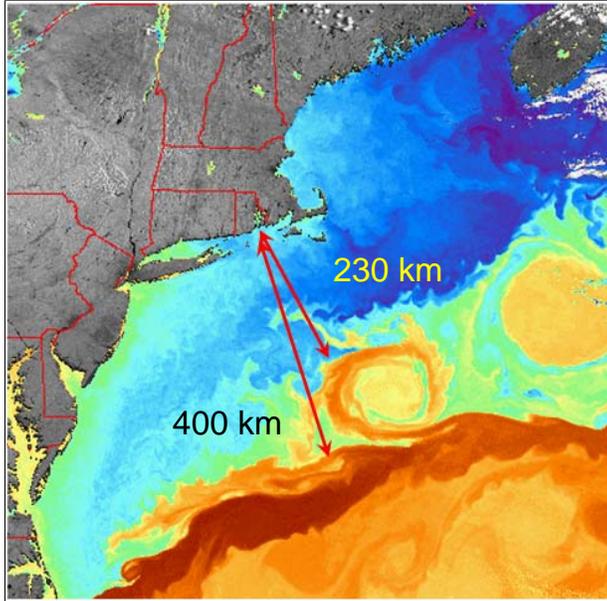
The early 1980s appear to be a change point.



In the 1960s, Narragansett Bay had a classic biological ocean environment, with a winter-spring bloom. In the 1970s, the winter-spring bloom disappeared; instead, the Bay had a summer bloom. An attempt to resurrect the winter-spring bloom appears in the 1980s. In the 1990s, blooming occurred across the seasons.

**Narragansett Bay *Skeletonema* bloom timing, magnitude
and duration - NAOI effects**

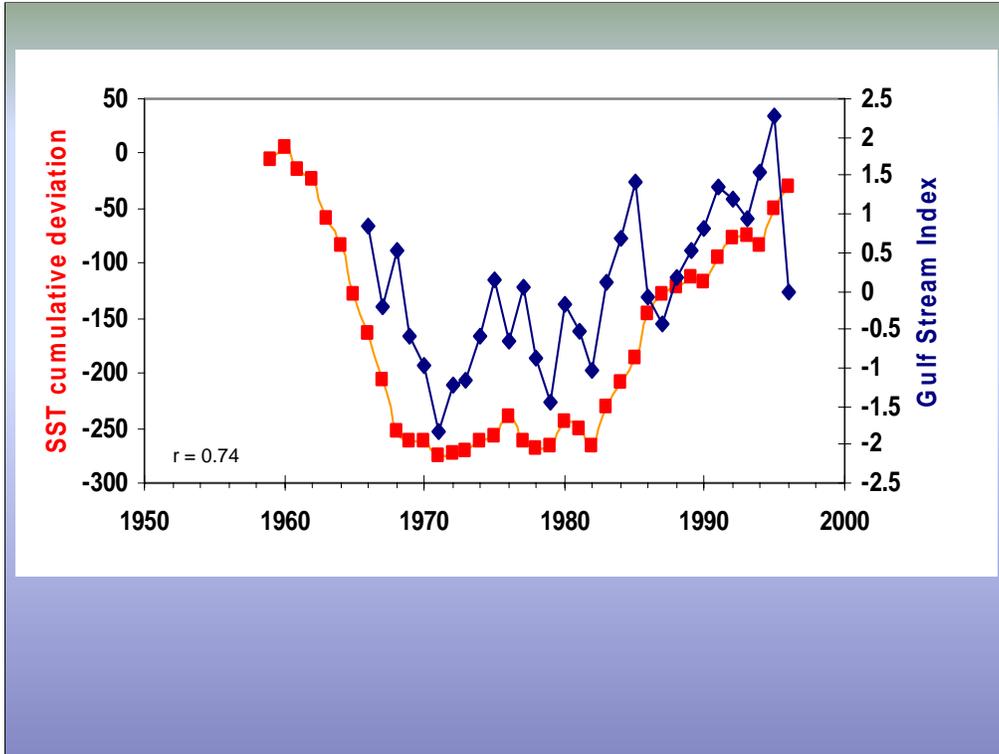
<u>Bloom response</u>	(cold) (-) NAO Years	(warm) (+) NAO Years	<u>p value</u>
Annual maximum week	13	30	0.046
W-s bloom duration (weeks)	9	4	0.025
Maximum w-s abundance (cells ml ⁻¹)	24,967	1,713	0.009
1Q mean abundance (cells ml ⁻¹)	5,536	399	0.016
2Q mean abundance (cells ml ⁻¹)	2,578	166	0.009
% weeks >500 cells ml ⁻¹	0.43	0.23	0.028



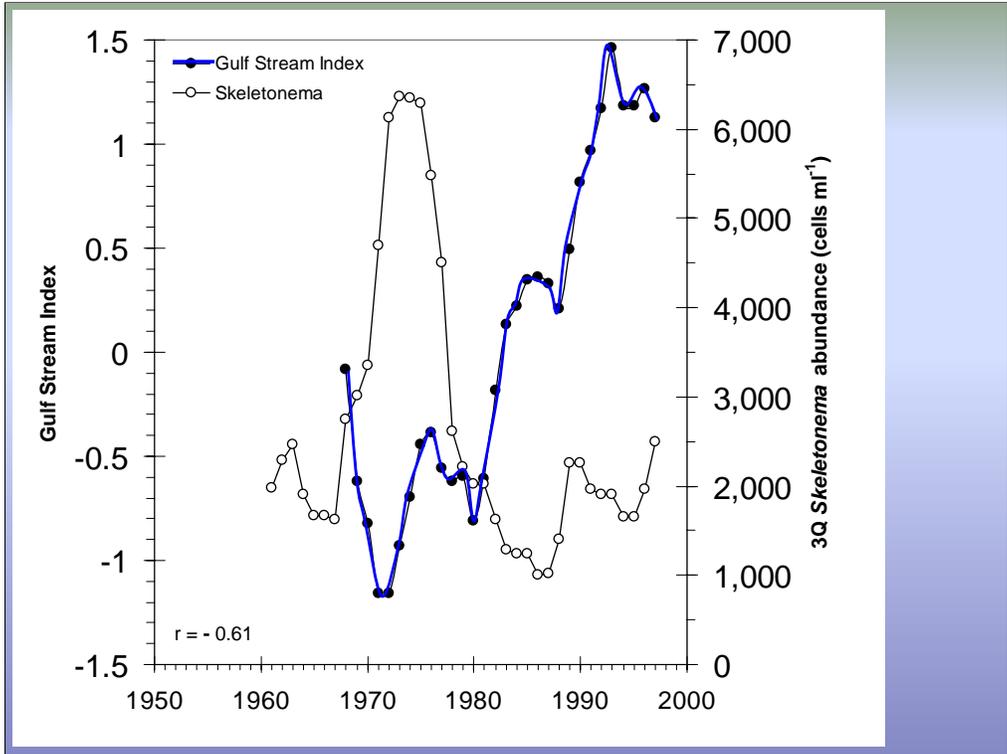
Gulf Stream influences on Narragansett Bay.

- Direct
 - Transport fish
 - gelatinous zoopl
 - macrophytes
 - phytoplankton
- Indirect
 - Temperature
 - Salinity
 - Weather

Image date:
11 June, 1997



SST = Sea Surface Temperature



Skeletonema bloom features during different Gulf Stream Index (GSI) states (1966-1996) as tested by Mann-Whitney test. GSI <0 corresponds to southerly displacement of Gulf Stream path; GSI >0 to northward displacement. Significant differences at $p < 0.10$ shown.

Gulf Stream Position differences:

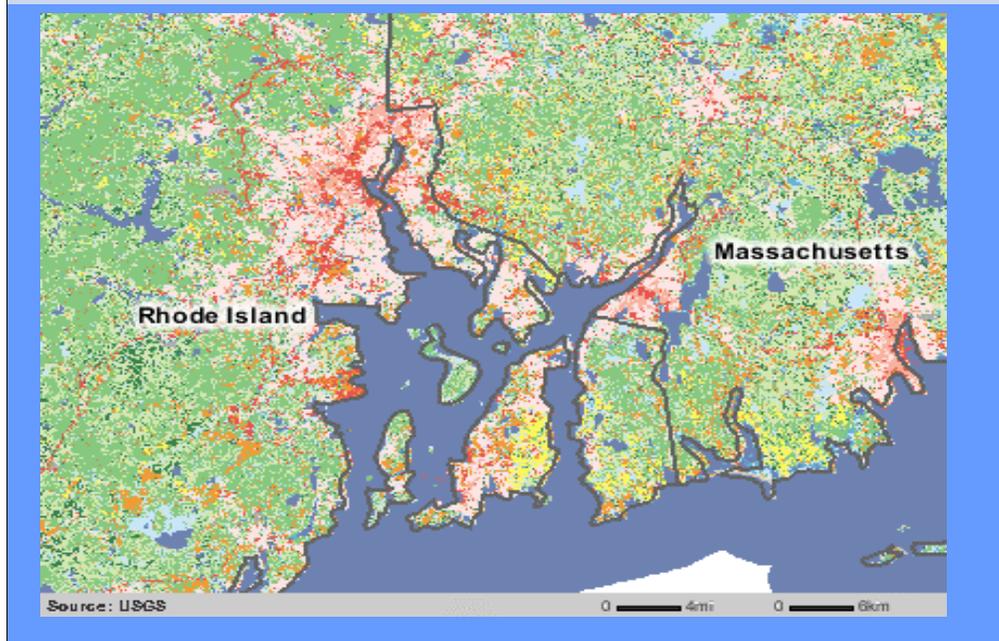
Bloom Character	GSI (-) Mean (n)	GSI (+) Mean (n)	p-value
Extreme (+) vs. (-) Gulf Stream years, i.e. most extreme North and South positions			
3Q mean (cells ml ⁻¹)	5,120 (5)	1,563 (5)	0.0283
S-f bloom peak (cells ml ⁻¹)	33,500(5)	14,480 (5)	0.0758
% weeks <10 cells ml ⁻¹)	0.15 (5)	0.41 (5)	0.0749
Gulf Stream < -1 vs. > +1			
W-s bloom peak (cells ml ⁻¹)	5,090 (5)	534 (3)	0.0253
% weeks <10 cells ml ⁻¹)	0.15 (5)	0.48 (3)	0.0512
Gulf Stream < -0.5 vs. > +0.5			
S-f bloom start (week)	28.0 (10)	31.6 (8)	0.0731
3Q mean (cells ml ⁻¹)	4,376 (9)	1,313 (8)	0.0161
S-f peak (cells ml ⁻¹)	24,754 (10)	10,664 (8)	0.0410
% weeks <10 cells ml ⁻¹)	0.20 (10)	0.36 (8)	0.0683
Gulf Stream < -0.1 vs. > +0.1			
% weeks <10 cells ml ⁻¹)	0.19 (13)	0.36 (10)	0.0233
Gulf Stream < 0 vs. > 0			
% weeks <10 cells ml ⁻¹)	0.20 (14)	0.33 (11)	0.0747

w-s = winter-spring, s-f = summer fall bloom

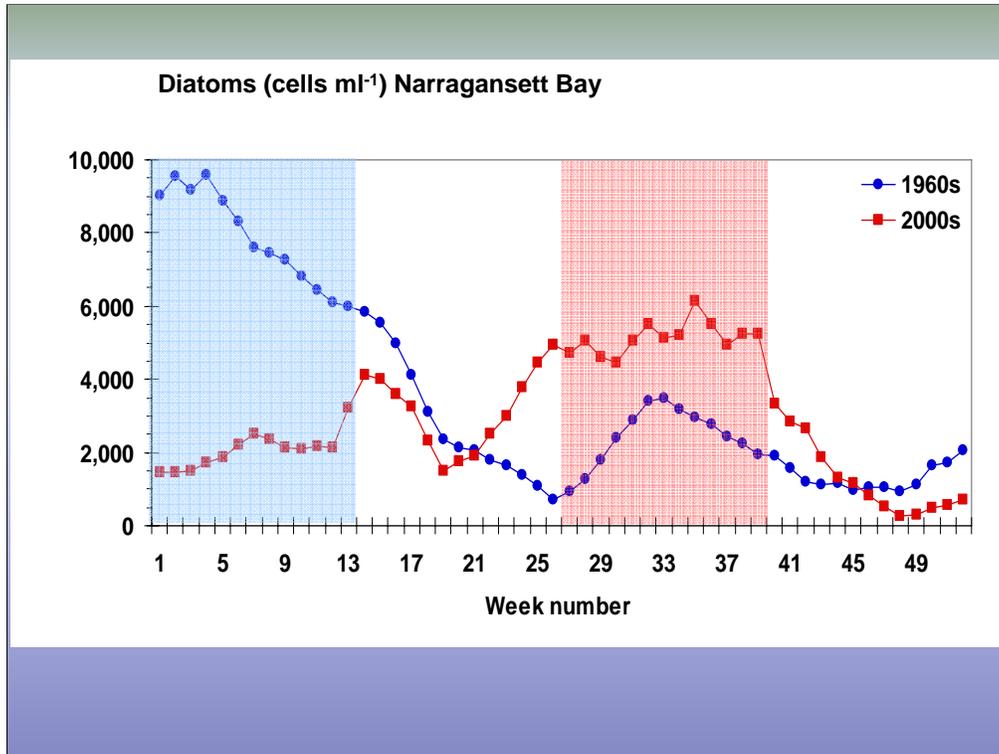
***Skeletonema* bloom thresholds**

- **NAO**
 - < - 0.7 → winter-spring bloom
 - > - 0.7 → summer bloom
- **Winter (1Q) temperature**
 - < + 2°C → winter-spring bloom
 - > + 2°C → summer bloom
- **Winter (1Q) wind speed**
 - > 5 m s⁻¹ → winter-spring bloom
 - < 5 m s⁻¹ → summer bloom
- **Gulf Stream**
 - < - 0.5 (= south) → large summer bloom
 - > + 0.5 (= north) → small summer bloom

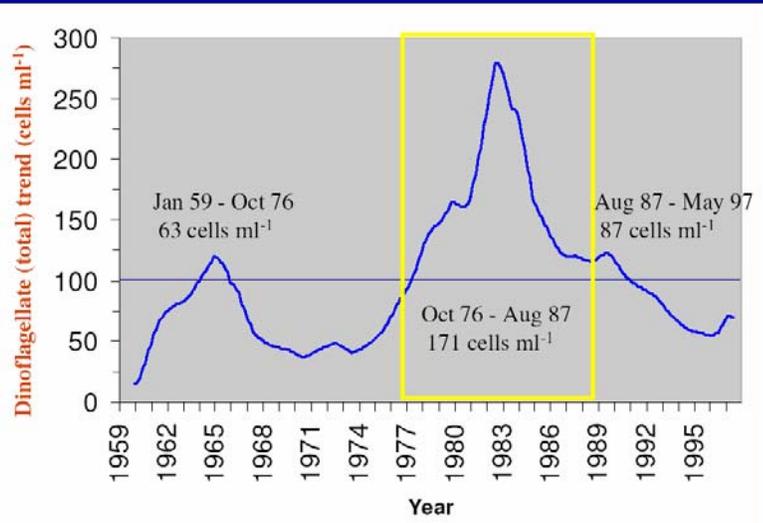
Internal Driver

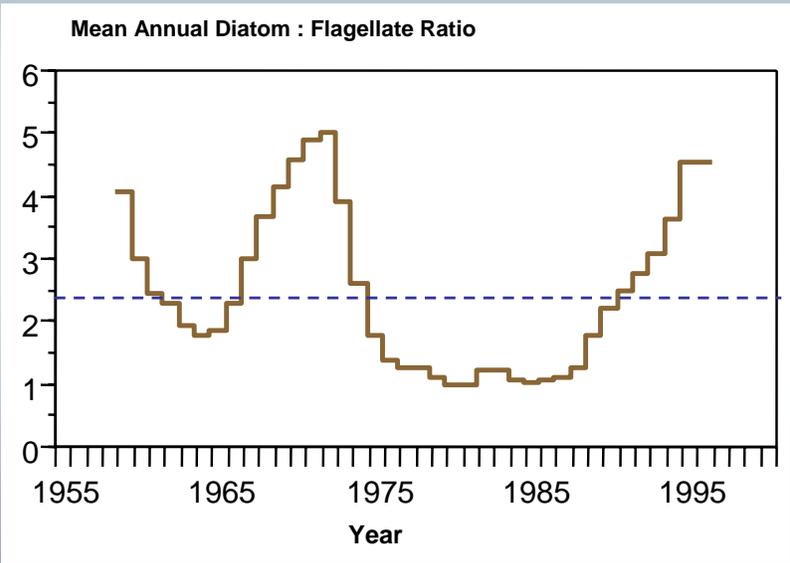


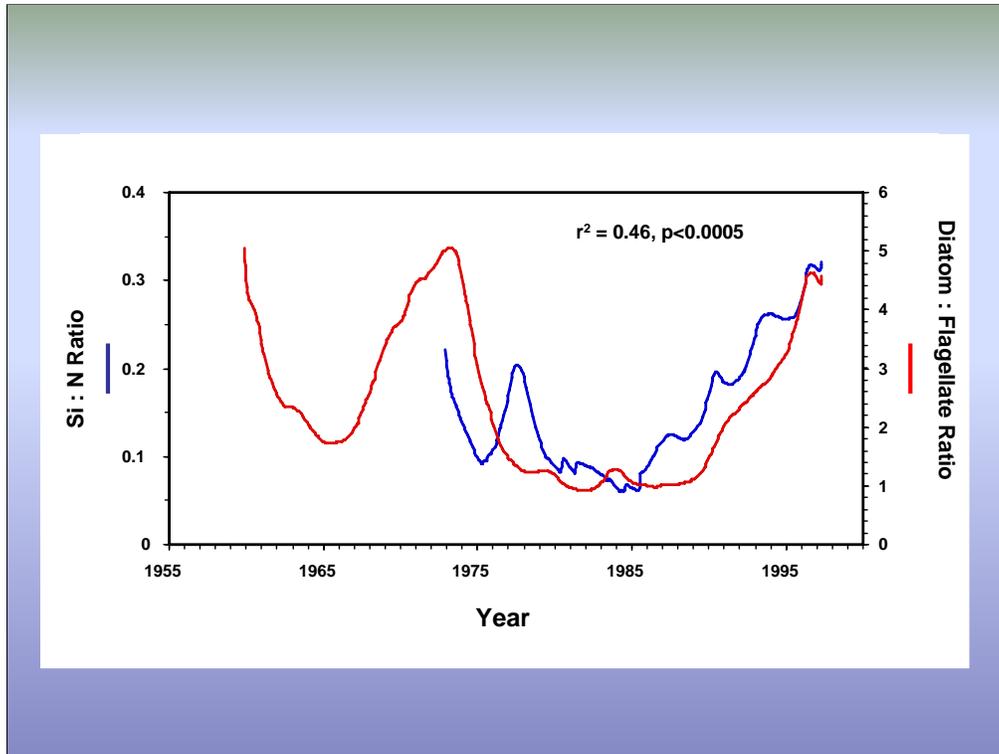
The red dots represent urbanized areas.



The impact nutrients may have on changes in abundance is a concern.

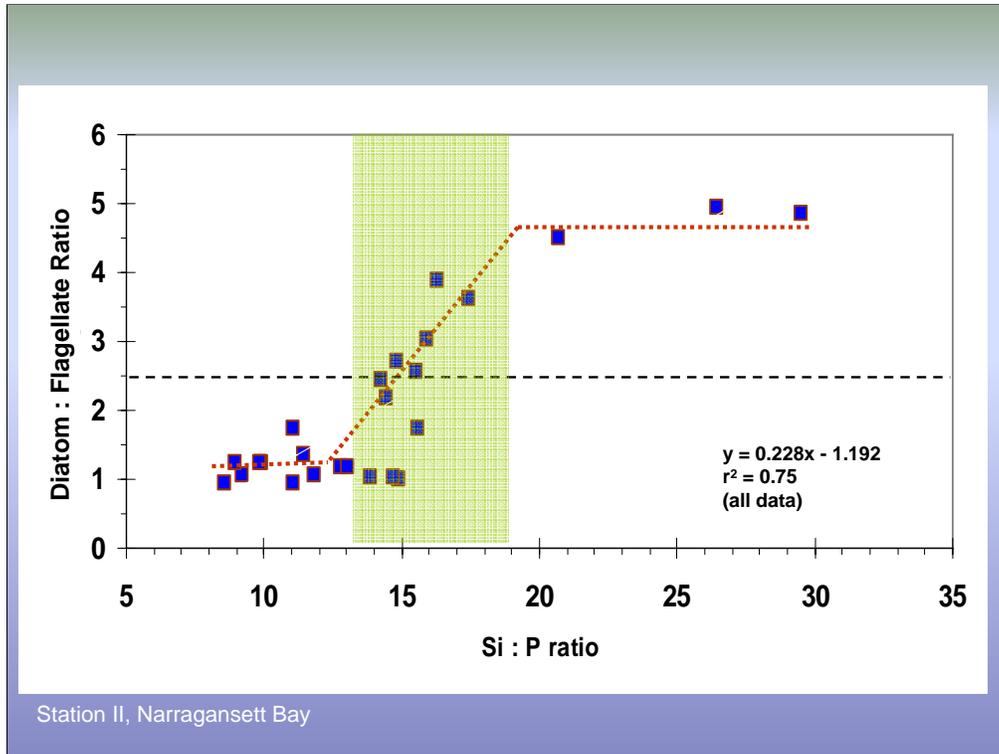






This graph shows the silicon-to-nitrogen ratio and the diatom-to-flagellate ratio.

Diatoms require silicon for metabolism and growth. Flagellates do not require silicon. The researchers hypothesize that the change in the silicon-to-nitrogen ratio over time initially will favor abundance and growth in diatoms.



This graph shows the silicone-to-phosphorus ratio and the diatom-to-flagellate ratio.

As the silicon-to-phosphorus ratio increases, diatoms become more predominant. The green area represents a potential threshold.

SURPRISING RESULTS; “LESSONS LEARNED”

- **Occurrence of rhythmic behavior**
- **Subtle external and internal driver effects**
 - **External: NAO; Gulf Stream position**
 - **Internal: Nutrients and their ratios**
- **Nutrient ratio effects were detected**



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MANAGEMENT APPLICATION OF THRESHOLD RESULTS

- **External drivers: difficult to manage, but have forecast potential**
- **Internal drivers (e.g., nutrients): more manageable; “resource” can be regulated**
- **Uncertain how external and other internal drivers might modify the “resource mitigation”**



SPIN-OFF BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH

- **Assisting Rhode Island Sea Grant in developing a Narragansett Bay Ecosystem-based Management Strategy**
- **Collaborating with fisheries biologists in evaluating linkages between parallel long-term changes in fish stocks and plankton in Narragansett Bay**
- **Chapter on Nutrient and Plankton Gradients prepared for book "Ecosystem-based Management : A Case Study of Narragansett Bay" to be published in Springer Series On Environmental Management**



A question for future study is, "Is it possible that external drivers set the boundaries and internal drivers work within that system?"

Discussion



A participant asked if fisheries biologists have biomass data. Dr. Smayda responded that they do not. They are using a numerical metric, not a size metric.

Another participant commented on the shift of the bloom time in the early 1980s. When this occurred, it appeared that the number of species also decreased.

Another participant pointed out that the long-term data collected could be used to identify metrics and, ultimately, potential thresholds. Dr. Smayda agreed. He added that changes in temperature may be connected to recycling. The difficulty lies in determining when a parameter is a surrogate and when it is a mechanism.

One participant commented that the peaks for diatoms have changed over time and asked if the curve had changed annually in terms of productivity of the diatoms under the different temperature regimes. Dr. Smayda responded that he did not know if this was the case for diatoms as a whole. There was, however, one species that was important previously, but no longer is important. The calculations suggest that its disappearance represented a loss of 15 to 20 percent of the production during the winter. For the rest, the annual production appears to be relatively stable.