

**Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management  
Land Conservation and Acquisition Program  
Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2010**



State of Rhode Island - Donald L. Carcieri, Governor  
Department of Environmental Management - W. Michael Sullivan, Ph.D.  
Division of Planning and Development - Joseph G. Dias, Chief



# **State of RI Land Conservation Commissions/Committees**

## **DEM Land Acquisition Committee**

W. Michael Sullivan, Director

Lisa Primiano, Chair, Deputy Chief of Planning and Development

Kenneth Ayars, Chief, Division of Agriculture

Joseph Dias, Chief, Division of Planning and Development

Larry Mouradjian, Associate Director of Natural Resources

Robert Paquette, Chief, Division of Parks and Recreation

Catherine Sparks, Chief, Division of Forest Environment, Fish and Wildlife-Freshwater Fisheries and Wildlife

## **Agricultural Land Preservation Commission**

Everett Stuart, Chair

Kenneth Ayars, DEM Director's Designee, Chief of Division of Agriculture

George Mason, Public Member

Kevin J. Nelson, Supervising Planner, Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program

David Wallace, Public Member

William Wright, Public Member

Martha Neale, Public Member

## **Natural Heritage Preservation Commission Advisory Board**

Representative from the Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Governor's Office

Jared Rhodes, Chief, Division of Statewide Planning, RI Department of Administration

W. Michael Sullivan, Director, RI Department of Environmental Management



Report prepared by Michelle Sheehan, Division of Planning and Development

# State Land Conservation

**The State of Rhode Island is extremely rich in natural resources.** The beauty of its beaches, bays, forests, farms, and rivers helps to sustain its economy and provides residents with a high quality of life. Despite its small size and its high housing densities, still nearly 60% of its land remains forested. Nearly all of the development and infrastructure in the state is contained in a forty mile urban/suburban corridor running along the Narragansett Bay. And so despite its high population and rapid growth, **Rhode Island has made great strides to preserve its rural character, water resources, open space and forests, and farm land.**

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Land Conservation Program works to preserve the state's natural areas to guarantee the permanent protection and proper management of land having high intrinsic resource value. With an emphasis on the following critical elements: **working farms, forests, drinking water protection, recreation, and natural heritage/biodiversity**, DEM works to ensure these resources remain available for future generations. The Program prioritizes parcels of land whose resource value, size, location, and relationship to existing conservation land and the greenway system recommended in the State Guide Plan make them significant to the state's welfare.

DEM's Division of Planning and Development manages and supports statewide land conservation programs. The division operates to assess and develop plans and to acquire land consistent with the DEM's responsibility to **provide recreation land, save the state's natural areas for future generations, and preserve working agricultural land.** This office also coordinates land conservation activities with other state, federal and non-profit programs. It works to preserve land consistent with state plans and state regulations and to develop funding sources for these projects.

## Three programs accommodate Rhode Island's public land acquisitions:

### State Land Conservation Program

This program is administered by the DEM Land Acquisition Committee, which makes recommendations to the Director regarding real estate transactions. It makes decisions about land acquisitions for parks and recreation, for fish and wildlife use, and for forest lands.

Funding for the program is provided by State Open Space bonds, from municipalities and land trusts, from local partners such as The Nature Conservancy and the Champlin Foundations, and from various federal programs including the U.S. Forest Services' Forest Legacy program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund. In addition, this program combines its funding with the Local Open Space Grants Program and the Agricultural Land Preservation Program to complement its conservation projects.

### Local Open Space Grant Program

Rhode Island Open Space Grants support cities and towns, land trusts, and non-profit organizations in their protection and acquisition of natural areas that are priorities on the municipal level. This critical partnership works to leverage funds from municipal, non-profit, and federal agencies for the protection of Rhode Island's resources. The DEM provides up to 50% funding to successful applicants and adds a layer of protection to the conserved parcels to ensure they remain undeveloped in perpetuity.

All grant applications are reviewed and scored by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Preservation Commission Advisory Committee according to the following criteria: habitat protection, greenway or regional linkage, planning consistency, resource protection, water resource protection, and multi-community application. Final awards are determined by the Natural Heritage Commission. The State's share of funding is provided by State Open Space Bonds.

### Agricultural Land Preservation Program

This program, run by the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) and staffed by the DEM, preserves agricultural lands through the purchase of farmland development rights. Purchasing development rights from farmers enables them to retain ownership of their property while protecting their lands for agricultural use. At the same time, it provides farmers with a financially competitive alternative to development. The State's farming industry, valued at \$100 million, is dependent on access to productive land. This program helps to ensure that farming remains viable in the state.

All program applications are reviewed and scored by the ALPC according to parcel size; soil quality; agricultural operation and viability; protection of water supplies and quality; open space, cultural and scenic features; flood protection; relative development pressure; and consistency with state and local plans.

Funding for this program is obtained through the Open Space Bond; The Nature Conservancy, through grants from the Champlin Foundations; the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program; and through the leveraging of land trust and municipal funds.



*Indian Pipes on the former Ladd School property*

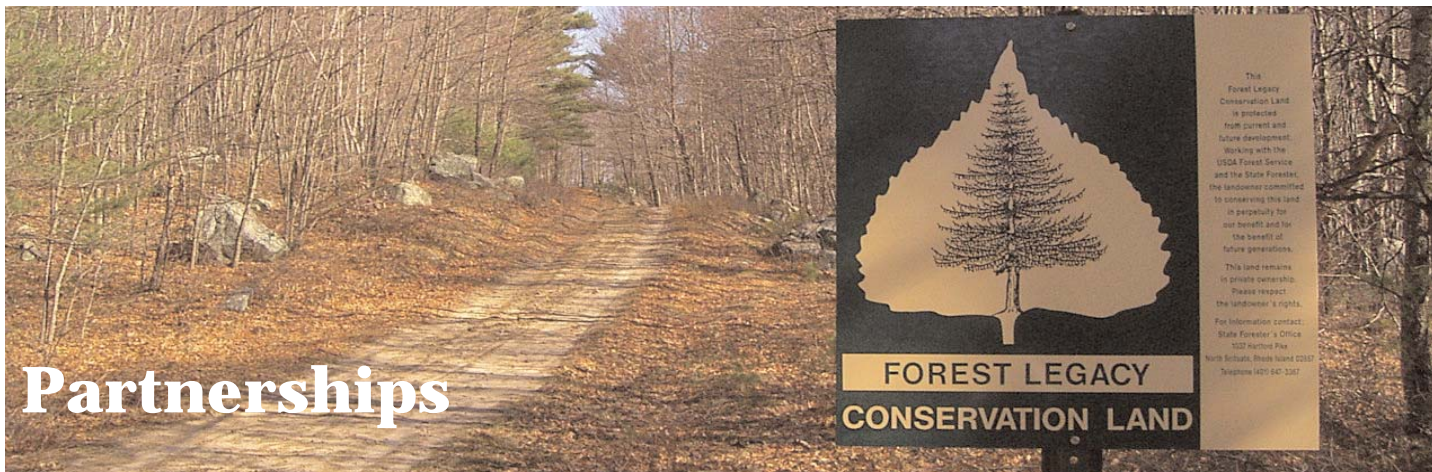


photo credit: Paul Ricard

The DEM works with many partners as a way to both stretch state dollars and ensure that as much land is being preserved as possible. The State Open Space Bond plays a major role in acquiring land. But the department has also been very successful in using the bond money to leverage private landowner donations and funds from other sources. Most properties were acquired through the collaboration of several different groups.

Many major fiscal partners were active this year. They include The Nature Conservancy, the Champlin Foundations, the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, the Federal Highway Administration and the RI Department of Transportation, NOAA's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, and local land trusts.

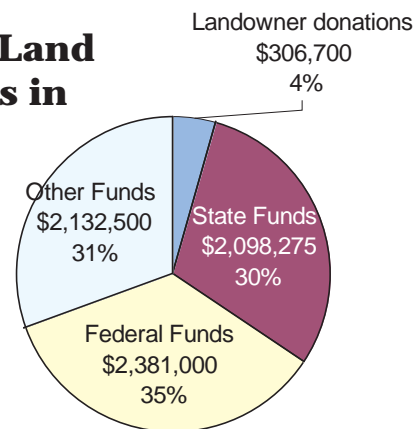
**We would like to thank our FY 2010 conservation partners:**

- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Forest Service
- RI Department of Transportation
- The Champlin Foundations
- Private Donors
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Tiverton Land Trust
- Town of Hopkinton
- Westerly Land Trust
- Federal Highway Administration
- Quonset Development Corporation
- The Prudence Conservancy
- RI Department of Administration

# FY 2010 Accomplishments

*“Over the past 4 years, the Land Acquisition Program has been able to leverage significant federal funding - and averaged only 27% state contribution to its land acquisition projects.”*

## Funding Sources for Land Conservation Projects in FY 2010



### Achieving land conservation goals

In 1994 the State Greenways Plan (State Guide Plan, Element 155) set a goal to preserve 17,850 acres of land through State programs over the next 25 years. Since 1994 the State has managed to preserve 22,003 acres, exceeding the goal by 4,153. As of this year more than 20% of the state has been preserved as open space, for recreation, or for agricultural use. Over the past 4 years, the Land Acquisition Program has been able to leverage significant federal funding - and averaged only 27% state

contribution to its land acquisition projects. As the DEM looks forward to another year of tight state budget constraints, it has begun to strategize land acquisition to further maximize federal dollars. Federal assistance for land conservation has been increasing and the Department is working to ensure that Rhode Island gets its share.

### Leveraging Funds

In Fiscal Year 2010 the DEM preserved over \$8 million in land value. Of this amount, approximately

\$300,000 was donated land value from private property owners. Of the remaining \$7.7 million only \$2.1 million was from State Bonds for state land acquisition, farmland preservation, or local matching grants. Federal assistance totaled \$2.4 million and the remaining \$2.1 million were contributions from local land trusts and non profits. All totaled, in FY 2010 alone the state was able to leverage \$4.8 million from an expenditure of \$2.1 million from the Open Space Bond.

The following projects were completed by the Land Conservation Program in Fiscal Year 2010 (July 1st 2009 - June 30th 2010) for a grand total of 1,625 acres.

PROPERTY	CITY/TOWN	PURPOSE	ACRES
Sandywoods	Tiverton	Open Space/ recreation	96
Ballard	Portsmouth	Habitat/ passive recreation	124.5
Goff	Hopkinton	Habitat/ recreation	40
King	Exeter	Watershed protection/ habitat	116
Crandall Swamp	Westerly	Habitat	305.9
Hoxsie	Hopkinton	Habitat/Forest Management	117
NIP, LLC	Charlestown	Recreation	.14
Ladd / Queen's River	Exeter	Watershed protection/ habitat	95.5
Tai-O Associates	Central Falls	Fish passage/ river access	.36
Blais	Coventry	Habitat	15
Grills Preserve II	Hopkinton	Habitat/ recreation	635
Arnolda II	Charlestown	Habitat	2.29
Cullion	Cranston	Public recreation/flood protection	17.5
St. Dominic Savio	South Kingstown	Active recreation	4.14
Judson Farm	Smithfield	Habitat/ recreation	63
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>1,625</b>





*Oak Tree - Judson Farm property*

## Greenways and Trails

Hoxsie property - Hopkinton

Sandywoods property - Tiverton

Judson Farm property - Smithfield

## Habitat and Biodiversity

Ladd School property - Exeter

Grills II Preserve - Hopkinton

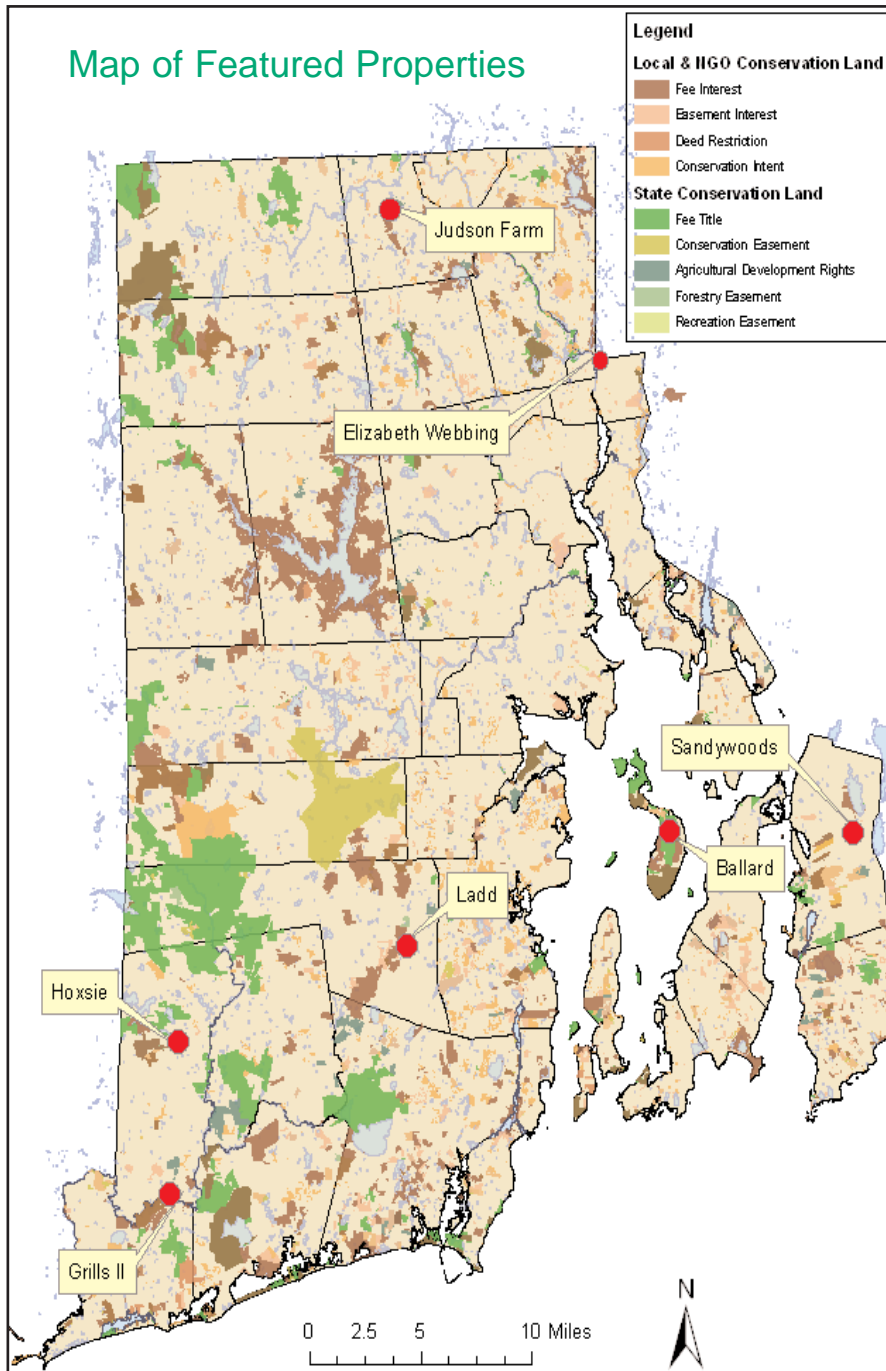
Ballard property - Portsmouth

## Fish Passage

Elizabeth Webbing - Central Falls



## Map of Featured Properties





## Greenways...

The network of bikepaths and hiking trails that traverse Rhode Island provide access to the state's open space and recreation land. They also form an important part of the strategic targeting of conservation lands in their own right.

*Old stone foundation on the Hoxsie property.  
Photo credit: Paul Ricard*

### **Hoxsie**

#### **117 acres in Hopkinton**

DEM's Rockville Management Area, Connecticut's Pachaug State Forest, and The Nature Conservancy's Canonchet Brook Preserve make up one of the largest natural areas in southeastern New England. The Hoxsie 117-acre property sits at the southeastern extent of this area and contains an impressive array of historical stone foundations, walls, even an old root cellar and mill all within a mixed oak and red maple forest. In addition, Canonchet Brook and its associated tributaries and wetlands run through the property and contribute to a sole source drinking

aquifer. The Hoxsie property has been managed responsibly for its timber by the same family for over 200 years.

These resources will now be protected through a partnership with DEM, the US Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, and The Champlin Foundations. DEM purchased a Conservation Easement over the property, funded entirely through the US Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. The Nature Conservancy intends to purchase the fee to the property with funding from the Champlin Foundation and will manage it in accordance with a Forest Management Plan consistent with the

rest of the Canonchet Preserve. The addition of the Hoxsie property to the Preserve will result in more than 1,300 acres of contiguous preserved land open to the public and managed for passive recreational activities.

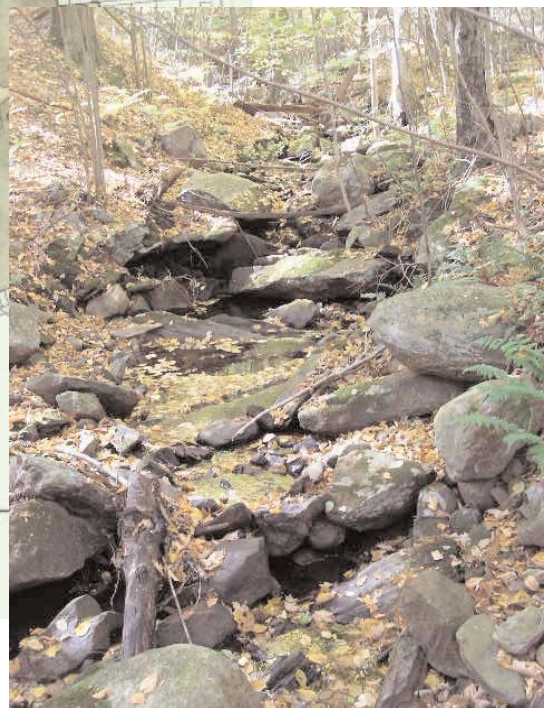
### **Sandywoods**

#### **96 acres in Tiverton**

A globally rare oak-holly wetland forest, a headwater stream flowing to the biologically significant Westport River, and upland forest with a planned series of walking trails open to the public make the Sandywoods property an excellent public resource. Located on Bulgarmarsh Road in



## and Trails



*Plans for the Sandywoods property and adjoining village*

*Stream running through the Judson Farm property*

Tiverton, this 96-acre wooded property is the open space element of a larger project coordinated by Church Community Housing Corporation that will involve an artist/farming community with affordable housing, open space, and a new town library. The project will also include a wind turbine that will generate electricity for the housing units.

The planned trails will link to the abutting 11-acre Stafford Heights park. Additionally, 1/3 of the property is contained within the Stafford Pond watershed, a public drinking water supply for parts of Tiverton and Fall River.

This project was awarded a Local Open Space Grant in 2009 and involved a partnership between DEM's Grant Program, The Tiverton Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy.

### **Judson Farm 63 acres in Smithfield**

This former farm contains 25 acres of open fields, a small piece of frontage on the Woonasquatucket Reservoir, a red maple swamp, stone outcroppings, and an oak-hickory forest. Additionally, three streams occur on the property, one of which is crossed by a colonial granite slab bridge. Judson Farm will add to existing

protected land for a total of 222 acres of contiguous open space. With sweeping views of the fields from the road, and down to the reservoir from the fields, the property presents excellent scenic and recreational opportunities.

Existing trails on the property will be maintained and connected to the trail system on the abutting conservation land.

The Smithfield Land Trust was awarded a DEM Local Open Space Grant to help the town purchase the property. DEM holds a Conservation Easement over the land.



*Butterfly on the Ladd School property*

## Habitat...

Rhode Island's animal and plant communities face continued threats to their habitat. In such a small state, fragmentation of forests and wetlands is leaving small patches of green space not large enough to support healthy populations. The DEM recognizes the need to protect sizable swaths of land capable of providing the necessary shelter and open space.

*Ladd School property*

### **Ladd School** **95.5 acres in Exeter**

The Queen's River is one of the most pristine rivers in the state and contains a number of rare elements that depend upon clean, cold, running water. Native brook trout, freshwater mussels, and rare dragonflies thrive here, in this healthy river system.

The state-owned former Ladd School property contains direct frontage on the Queen's River and is sandwiched between substantial properties protected by The Nature Conservancy and The Audubon Society of Rhode Island. The property sits above a portion of a groundwater aquifer

which is the only source of drinking water for much of South County.

The Department of Administration, which oversees the property, agreed to transfer a Conservation Easement over a portion of the property to DEM in order to protect its important water resources. This portion is open to the public for passive recreational opportunities. The Easement contributes to the more than 2,650 acres of contiguous protected land along the Queen's River.

### **Grills II** **635 acres in Hopkinton**

This important property sits along the

Pawcatuck River in Hopkinton and encompasses hundreds of acres of important wetland and forest habitat. Included within the boundaries of this diverse parcel are marshes, extensive forested wetlands, bog and fen habitats and over 4 miles of river frontage. A significant wetland, known as Phantom Bog, is the central feature of the property. Identified by the RI Natural History Survey as an exemplary natural feature, it supports an array of rare species. An extensive high-quality Pine Barren and a White Cedar wetland are also home to many rare species.

Together with other abutting protected land, including Burlingame

# and Biodiversity



*Phantom Bog - Grills II property*

*Rocky beach - Ballard property.  
Photo credit: Robin Weber*

Management Area and the Grills I Preserve held by the Westerly Land Trust, this project will result in over 5,200 contiguous acres of protected property.

The DEM owns the 251 acre Phantom Bog parcel with The Nature Conservancy holding a Conservation Easement. The remainder 381 acres of the property are owned by the Town of Hopkinton with DEM holding two separate Conservation Easements. DEM's acquisition costs were funded by a grant from the US Fish & Wildlife Service's State Wildlife Incentive Grant (SWIG) Program. Other partners included the Hopkinton Land Trust and the US Fish and

Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act program.

## **Ballard**

### **124 acres in Portsmouth**

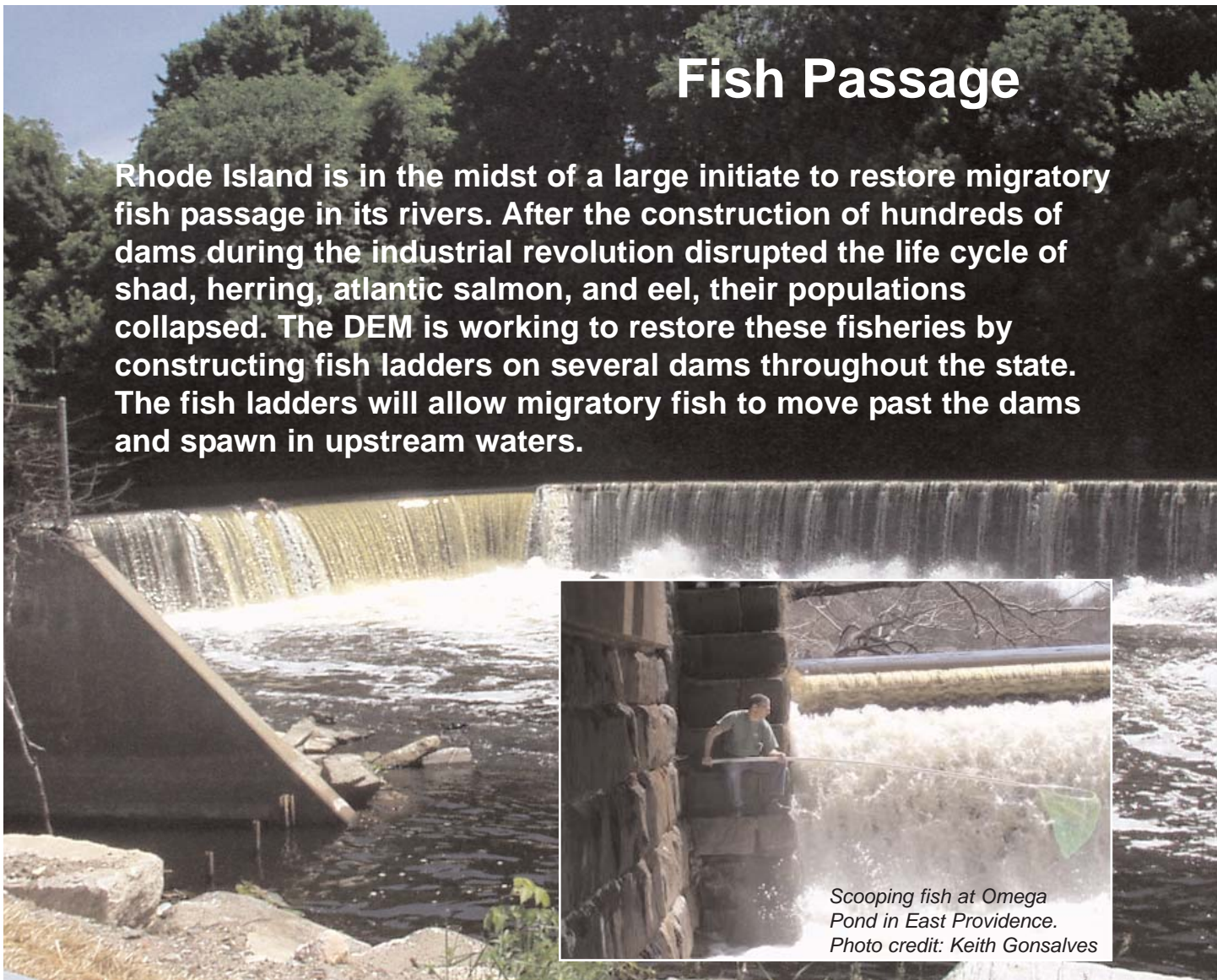
The acquisition of this parcel on Prudence Island, which abuts the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, consists of Pine Barren forests and freshwater wetlands. Its protection is important to the Indian Spring well, a major source of drinking water for Prudence Island. The Ballard property will also serve to protect habitat for three regionally rare species of tiger beetles and other animals that depend on Pine Barren habitat.

The property has been incorporated into and is managed as part of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The Prudence Conservancy, who helped protect the parcel, will develop a series of trails on the property that will connect to existing trail systems on abutting parcels.

The Ballard acquisition brings the total acreage of contiguous protected land to over 2,900 acres. More than 80% of Prudence Island is now permanently protected. The purchase was funded by NOAA's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP), The Prudence Conservancy, and DEM's Open Space Bond.

# Fish Passage

Rhode Island is in the midst of a large initiative to restore migratory fish passage in its rivers. After the construction of hundreds of dams during the industrial revolution disrupted the life cycle of shad, herring, atlantic salmon, and eel, their populations collapsed. The DEM is working to restore these fisheries by constructing fish ladders on several dams throughout the state. The fish ladders will allow migratory fish to move past the dams and spawn in upstream waters.



*Scooping fish at Omega Pond in East Providence.  
Photo credit: Keith Gonsalves*

*Elizabeth Webbing Dam*

## **Elizabeth Webbing 15,750 square feet in Central Falls**

This property, located on the Blackstone River in urban Central Falls, provides an excellent opportunity both for enhanced public access to the Blackstone River and for re-establishing migratory fish passage on the river, blocked since the early 1800s. At the site of the former Elizabeth Webbing Mill and associated dam, this project includes the planned construction of a fish ladder, part of a larger goal of restoring herring, alewife, and eel

populations in Blackstone. The acquisition of this property has been identified by the Department, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service as one of the primary impediments that prevents fish from migrating from Narragansett Bay to the Blackstone River. This fishway is one of several planned fish passages on Blackstone that will allow migratory fish to move past the dams and spawn in upstream waters of Valley Falls Marshes.

The project includes permanent public access to view the fish ladder.

Funding for the project was provided by an environmental Settlement Agreement and the State Open Space Bond.

# The Future of Conservation

The land conservation community is facing a unique situation - a combination of record low real estate prices for farmland and open space, but significantly reduced state budgets. Compared to recent years, finding great deals on important open space is much easier, but finding the money to buy the land is much more difficult.

The Land Acquisition Program will need to continue to creatively strategize the leveraging of federal dollars and work with non-profits, municipalities, and local land trusts to take advantage of the favorable market.

**For more information about DEM's Land Conservation Program please call (401) 222-2776 or visit the Division of Planning and Development's website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bpoladm/plandev/index.htm>**



Path through the Ballard property.  
Photo credit: Robin Weber