



FACT SHEET

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WETLANDS # 22-2

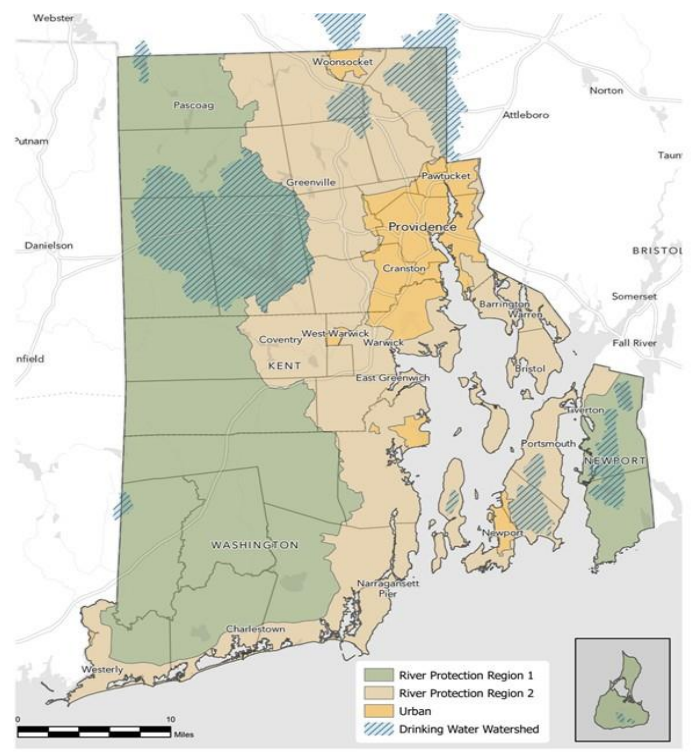
Buffer Regions

Freshwater Wetlands Rules (250-RICR-150-15-3)

Regional Framework for Tiered Protection

Under the tiered approach, the state has been divided into regions to facilitate the application of a range of buffer standards that reflect a gradient of watershed conditions. The regions consist of urban areas and non-urban areas, the latter of which is further divided into two regions to distinguish certain river buffer zones. In addition, requirements in drinking water supply watersheds are incorporated as an overlay in the non-urban regions (see map). The tiered protective buffer zone distances were based on assessments of watershed protection needs, wetland resource characteristics and existing land use. About 19% of vegetated wetlands resources were prioritized for the greatest protection (100-foot buffer zones).

Freshwater wetlands buffer regions map (2020)



River Protection Region 1 - This Region includes watershed areas that are generally the highest priorities for conservation of fish and wildlife habitat. The Region encompasses areas in the western and southeast portions of the state as well as Block Island. The watersheds exhibit low density of development, lower percentages of impervious cover and contain larger tracts of unfragmented habitat. Within this Region, in March 2019, a number of river segments in the Wood-Pawcatuck River watershed were federally designated as “wild and scenic.” River Protection Region 1 covers 52% of Rhode Island’s area (coastal waters excluded).

River Protection Region 2 - This Region includes areas of the state that exhibit a mix of land uses and watershed characteristics including urban, suburban and rural settings. Existing land use patterns have resulted in greater fragmentation of buffers within the jurisdictional areas in this Region including crossings of rivers. The Region includes much of the suburban development that exists adjacent to the Urban Region areas. River Protection Region 2 covers 40 % of Rhode Island’s area (coastal waters excluded).

Urban Region – This Region includes densely developed, urbanized areas of the state including portions of watersheds that contain high percentages of impervious cover and areas that are already highly developed or altered. This includes the Providence metropolitan area as well as portions of Woonsocket, Newport, Middletown, North Kingstown, West Warwick and Westerly. The Urban Region covers 8% of Rhode Island (excluding coastal waters).

Drinking Water Supply Reservoir Watershed Overlays – Within the watersheds of Public Drinking Water Supply Reservoirs, greater protection of the reservoirs, rivers, and ponds contiguous to the rivers, is considered warranted due to the increased risk of transporting pollutants to drinking water supplies. Buffer zones for the reservoirs and such rivers and ponds are therefore afforded more protection regardless of what Region the watershed is located within.

A complete copy of the RIDEM Freshwater Wetlands Rules, fully effective on July 1, 2022, can be found at the RIDEM website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/newwetlandrules>. They may also be obtained from the RIDEM Office of Customer and Technical Assistance located at the Foundry Corporate Office Complex at 235 Promenade Street, Providence (401 222-6822).

Disclaimer: This Fact Sheet is for general information purposes and is not meant to be used as a substitute for the Freshwater Wetlands Act (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 2-1-18 et. seq.) or the *Rules and Regulations Governing the Administration and Enforcement of the Freshwater Wetlands Act* (250-RICR-150-15-3).