



# RHODE ISLAND STATE PARKS

## ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS STUDY



A PATH FORWARD TO SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING RHODE ISLAND'S HISTORIC PARKS, BEACHES, BIKEWAYS, AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

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*Beach area on Olney Pond at Lincoln Woods State Park*

*Cover Photos clockwise from top: East Matunuck State Beach, East Bay Bike Path, Fort Wetherill State Park, Pulaski State Park, Lincoln Woods State Park, Farmers Market at Goddard Memorial State Park*

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Brenton Point State Park in Newport



Burlingame State Park & Campground in Charlestown

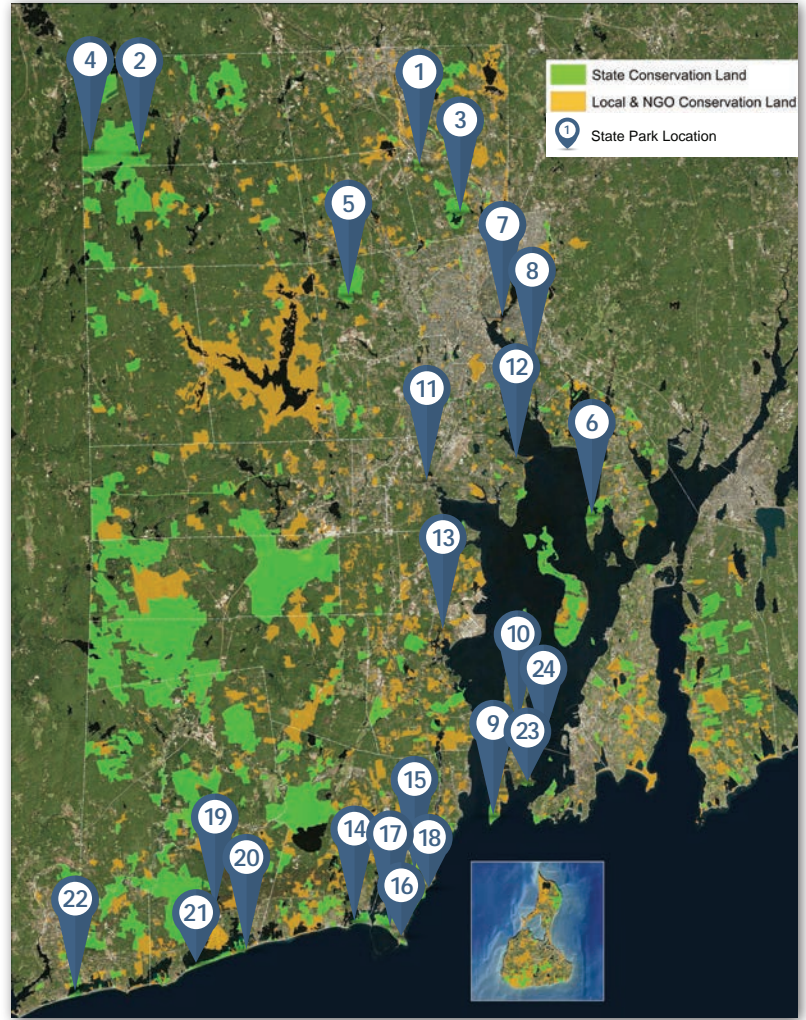


Fort Wetherill State Park in Jamestown

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## Legend

	Baseball		Jogging/Walking Trail
	Bike Paths		Mountain Biking
	Boating		Performing Arts
	Camping		Picnicking
	Concert		Playground
	Cross Country Skiing		Road Race
	Freshwater Fishing		Rugby
	Game Fields		Sailing
	Golfing		Saltwater Fishing
	Hiking Trails		Scuba Diving
	Horseback Riding		Shellfishing
	Horseshoeing		Sightseeing
	Hunting		Snowmobiling
	Ice Fishing		Soccer
	Ice Skating		Swimming
	In-Line Skating		Tennis



*This list represents major facilities. It does not include numerous roadside and small areas managed by DEM Parks & Recreation. Location markers are for representation only and are not exact.*

1 Blackstone Valley Bikeway & Visitor Center



2 George Washington State Campground



3 Lincoln Woods State Park



4 Pulaski State Park



5 Snake Den State Park



6 Colt State Park



7 East Bay Bike Path



8 Haines Memorial State Park



9 Beavertail State Park



10 Fort Wetherill State Park



11 Goddard Memorial State Park



12 Rocky Point State Park



13 John H. Chafee Nature Preserve



14 East Matunuck State Beach



15 Fishermen's Memorial State Park



16 Roger Wheeler State Beach



17 Salty Brine State Beach



18 Scarborough State Beach



19 Burlingame State Park & Campground



20 Charlestown Breachway State Beach



21 East Beach State Campground



22 Misquamicut State Beach



23 Brenton Point State Park



24 Fort Adams State Park





Beavertail State Park in Jamestown

## Overview

This report examines staffing and operations in Rhode Island State Parks conducted by PROS Consulting, Inc. and CHM Government Services. It identifies key challenges and opportunities facing the Rhode Island State Park System today. The recommendations reflect the consultant's experience in working with national, state, and local parks and recreation agencies who are using best practices to deliver sustainable, relevant, and purposeful recreation programs and services to the people they serve. Successful implementation of key recommendations will protect iconic landscapes, natural resources, and cultural heritage; help engage Rhode Islanders in healthy lifestyles; and sustain a major economic driver and tourism engine for the State.



*Our state's world-class beach facilities, parks, and green spaces are beloved by residents and tourists alike and generate millions of dollars for the local and state economy every year."*

- DEM Director Janet Coit

2016 SNAPSHOT:



**9.4**  
MILLION  
VISITS



**\$38.8**  
MILLION  
TAX REVENUE



**\$311.9**  
MILLION  
CONSUMER SPENDING

**3,709**  
JOBS  
SUPPORTED/CREATED  
ANNUALLY



Newport Folk Festival at Fort Adams State Park in Newport



**123 → 42**

FULL TIME STAFFING HAS DECREASED BY 67% SINCE 1989



**1:67**

EXISTING STAFFING LEVELS EQUATE TO 1 FULL TIME EMPLOYEE FOR EVERY 67 MAINTAINED ACRES. BEST PRACTICE IS 1:30



**> \$800,000**

ANNUAL COST FOR CONTRACTED SERVICES



**> \$50 MILLION**

INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS IDENTIFIED DUE TO AGING FACILITIES AND DEFERRED MAINTENANCE



**37.2% INCREASE**

IN BEACH VISITATION ALONE FROM 2010 TO 2017. 9.4 MILLION VISITORS ANNUALLY TO THE PARK SYSTEM



Guided nature hike at Pulaski State Park

## BACKGROUND

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM Division of Parks and Recreation manages over 8,200 acres of land, including parks, beaches, campgrounds, bike paths, historic sites, picnic areas, trails, athletic fields, dams, fishing access, and boat ramps. The State's parks offer ample and diverse recreational opportunities for Rhode Island families and tourists, whether taking a family camping trip, finding seashells or building a sandcastle at the beach on a warm summer day, catching the biggest fish ever, or simply finding the ideal spot to relax and read a favorite book.

Rhode Island State Parks attract upwards of nine million visitors each year and host high-profile national and international events such as the Newport Jazz Festival, Newport Folk Festival, and Volvo Ocean Race. The State parks are highlighted in Rhode Island's "Fun-Sized" marketing campaign because of the variety of experiences they provide and their close-proximity to each other. People can easily visit places like George Washington Campground tucked deep in the woods of Glocester, or Lincoln Woods which is a short commute from downtown Providence, or sandy beaches in Narragansett, South Kingstown, and Westerly. The parks contribute an estimated \$312 million of economic output and support over 3,700 jobs. The parks system is vitally important to the State's environment, economy, and well-being of its citizens.

However, over the past 15 years, budget and staffing cuts, combined with heavy and increasing visitor use, aging facilities, and expanded responsibilities, threaten DEM's ability to provide residents and tourists with well-maintained and accessible recreation facilities and opportunities.



Golf Course at Goddard Memorial State Park



Educational program by Coggeshall Farm Museum at Colt State Park in Bristol



THESE CONSTRAINTS HAVE LED TO:

- **CRITICALLY LOW LEVEL OF STAFF** in some areas, at certain times.
- **UNDER-PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY-TO-DAY MAINTENANCE** and cleaning tasks that visitors expect.
- **THE INABILITY TO ATTRACT MORE OR DIVERSE VISITORS** and tourists through extended programming, special activities, events or expanded hours of operation at some facilities.
- **A REDUCTION IN SERVICES AND PUBLIC OPPORTUNITY FROM PREVIOUS LEVELS**, such as dedicated park police officers and education and interpretive programming.
- **A SEVERELY LIMITED LEADERSHIP PIPELINE AND TALENT POOL** to ensure leadership continuity and succession planning.
- **OVER-RELIANCE ON SEASONAL EMPLOYEES** to operate multi-million-dollar facilities.
- **OVER-RELIANCE ON CONTRACTORS** for grass cutting, plumbing, and electrical services that are expensive and may not provide an adequate level of service or be available when needed.
- **BURDENS OF GREATER ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES** that reduces the amount of time managers spend on facility planning, maintenance, and staff oversight.





Clamming at Rocky Point State Park

The Rhode Island State Park system is at a critical crossroad. Without a concerted effort to increase staffing and funding, the system will continue to deteriorate, and the Department will be unable to keep some facilities open and adequately staff and maintain others.

In January 2016, Governor Gina Raimondo signed an executive order that created the Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC) and charged the group with developing a strategic plan to grow and promote recreation in Rhode Island. In its December 2016 report, *A New Vision for Outdoor Recreation in Rhode Island*, the ORC envisioned a recreation system that would support economic prosperity, promote healthy people, encourage stewardship of outdoor resources, and inspire a recreation culture that connects people to each other and to nature.

The ORC recognized the State Park system as a highly valued provider in Rhode Island’s outstanding network of outdoor recreational resources and programming. The ORC noted that reductions in funding combined with heavy and increasing use were having significant impacts and recommended a comprehensive staffing and operations study of Rhode Island State Parks to ensure that the assets and resources are properly stewarded for future generations.

This study represents the staffing and operations analysis recommended by the ORC. The report provides an objective assessment and corresponding recommendations to support continued investment in and preservation of Rhode Island State Parks. The intent is to guide in the delivery of excellent parks, trails, public facilities, activities, programs and services that will contribute to public health and enjoyment, location, community prosperity, and quality of life, while also enhancing statewide tourism capabilities and opportunities.



Mountain biking at Lincoln Woods State Park



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



# A new vision for Rhode Island State Parks, Beaches & Campgrounds

Scarborough State Beach in Narragansett  
Opposite page: State Parks maintenance staff at Goddard Memorial State Park



By adopting recommendations, Rhode Island can ensure stewardship of State parks, beaches, and other recreational assets.

The following outlines key recommendations based on a review of staffing levels, operations and maintenance practices, and system financing and funding mechanisms.

## INVEST IN OPERATIONS & STAFFING

The number of full-time staff in Rhode Island State Parks has declined by 67%, from 123 in 1989 to 42 in 2018. At the same time, visitation and the number of facilities managed by DEM have increased. Climate change, with warmer temperatures year-round, combined with increasing popularity of outdoor recreation, has also extended the length of the outdoor season beyond the typical April to October timeframe. Parks employees take pride in welcoming visitors to clean, well-maintained facilities, but are hampered by low staffing levels, expanded responsibilities, an outdated organizational structure, and under-investment in technology and business tools. Investing in operations and staffing is critical to transforming the system.

The following recommendations will allow the Department to meet nationally accepted park maintenance standards and will equip the staff with the tools and resources they need to provide adequate, responsive stewardship and enhance visitor services, programming and amenities.

This report specifically recommends:

- **INCREASE THE NUMBER OF MAINTENANCE TECHNICIANS** to meet industry best practice maintenance standards of 1 FTE (full-time equivalent) per 30 maintained acres for routine maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment. For Rhode Island this means increasing maintenance technicians by 12. Providing adequate personnel to maintain facilities will also reduce the need for major repairs and will eliminate over-reliance on seasonal labor who do not have adequate skills, knowledge or experience.
- **ADD APPROPRIATELY SKILLED FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES TO REDUCE OUTSOURCING OF MAINTENANCE.** This investment would reduce the approximate \$245,000 the Department spends each year for outsourcing plumbing, electrical, and arborist services. Adding six skilled labor positions will also facilitate appropriate routine and preventative maintenance and allow faster response to emergency repair needs.

- **PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT STAFF TO RELIEVE MANAGERS OF ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS** and increase their ability to appropriately supervise and support operational and maintenance functions. The consultants recommend adding three administrative positions.
- **CREATE TWO TO THREE POSITIONS DEDICATED TO OVERALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES** (see discussion Financial Sustainability Recommendation below).
- **REALIGN THE DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION INTO FEWER REGIONS** to help facilitate a coordinated approach to park management, focus on functional requirements, minimize administrative responsibilities, and promote resource sharing of skilled staff and equipment.
- **EXPAND DEM'S LEAN INITIATIVE** to develop unified approaches to park oversight and management that will increase efficiency and effectiveness in areas such as staff management, training, and recruitment, and communicate the approaches across all regions.
- **ESTABLISH BEST PRACTICE MAINTENANCE STANDARDS** that reflect each facility's level of use and public profile and meet visitor expectations, along with appropriate performance indicators for each facility.
- **EXPLORE AN INTEGRATED WORK ORDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM** that tracks assets and costs and preventative and routine maintenance to maximize the useful life of Park assets and to minimize maintenance costs for buildings, vehicles, grounds keeping, and other equipment routinely used in the parks.



Parks staff performing maintenance work on the East Bay Bike Path

NATIONALLY, RHODE ISLAND PARKS RANK



#1 VISITOR PER ACRE



#1 VISITS PER FULL TIME STAFF



#47 EXPENDITURE PER VISIT

## INCREASE THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF STATE PARKS

The outdoor recreation industry is thriving. According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, a preliminary look at the United States gross domestic product (GDP) for 2018 shows that growth in the outdoor industry continues to outpace the growth of the economy as a whole and accounts for over 2% of the entire US GDP. Many jurisdictions now recognize the economic value and revenue generating potential of public parks. Rhode Island State Parks have the same potential but are not necessarily recognized as such. The system plays an important role in Rhode Island's outdoor recreation economy, and, with the right fiscal philosophies and practices, has the opportunity to capitalize on the growth of the industry. The recommendations below make good business sense and have the ability to enhance the State Park system's economic potential and to increase revenue generating opportunities for the State.

This report specifically recommends:

- **ESTABLISH A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OFFICE** with two to three FTEs who could concentrate on revenue generating strategies including cost accounting, sponsorship and donor development, grant opportunities, fees, concessions, leases, and fiscal entrepreneurship as recommended in the staffing and operations section.
- **ESTABLISH NEW PRICING AND FEE SETTING POLICIES** for special events, site rentals, special uses, etc. based on the market value, cost of service, and the classification of the service depending on essential, important, or value-added criteria.
- **WORK WITH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET (OMB) TO DEVELOP A NEW BUDGET PROCESS** that includes: incentives to increase revenue by allowing earned revenue, or a percentage thereof, to be re-invested in state parks to enhance services for visitors, rather than be absorbed into general state fund; and, a consistent minimum annual capital funding level that DEM can count on for facility and infrastructure needs.
- **EVALUATE EXPANSION OF RECREATION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN EACH PARK** with a strategic program and business plan to increase revenue generation and visitor experiences as appropriate. Include in analysis an assessment of which type of entity is best suited to develop and manage operations (e.g., State Parks, nonprofit, and/or private sector).



Goddard Memorial Farmers Market



Campground at Fishermen's Memorial State Park



Tour group at Fort Adams State Park in Newport



Tulip farm at Snake Den State Park in Johnston

## PROTECT STATE PARK ASSETS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A preliminary RI Department of Administration Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) study of 218 buildings and structures in the State Park system estimates that more than \$47.1 million is needed to address State Park capital needs over the next 10 years. DEM engineers believe estimates may be even higher based on recent bids for capital improvement projects. It is also important to note that the DCAMM assessments evaluated buildings only. They did not include infrastructure such as roads, bridges, guardrail systems, and water supply and septic systems, which will significantly increase the amount needed for deferred capital and maintenance. Most private sector and innovative public agencies follow a regular schedule of investment in facilities and infrastructure each year to optimize operating conditions and to keep the assets in good repair. It is critical to have consistent capital funds to properly maintain infrastructure (beyond general maintenance) to ensure that assets reach their anticipated lifecycles. The goal of the following recommendations is to create a lifecycle management approach that protects critical State Park infrastructure and assets and prepares for future renovation and upgrades.

This report specifically recommends:

- **WORK WITH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND OMB TO ENSURE A REGULAR AND CONSISTENT CAPITAL FUNDING STREAM** to support State Parks deferred and capital asset needs.
- **UTILIZE A PRIORITY SYSTEM TO REDUCE MAINTENANCE BACKLOGS** by creating 5-year allocation plans that demonstrate reductions in the existing maintenance backlog while also accounting for new development as appropriate.
- **ADOPT DESIGN STANDARDS FOR THE ENTIRE PARK SYSTEM** (e.g., buildings, color scheme, signage, interpretation, etc.) to minimize operations and maintenance costs after development, using Total Cost of Facility Ownership practices.
- **INCORPORATE CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCY STRATEGIES** into facility design and development as recommended in the 2018 Resilient Rhody report.
- **EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS** through the business development office to identify partnerships, concessions, and other opportunities to support State Park assets.
- **USE LEAN, ESTABLISH STANDARDIZED PROTOCOLS** to maintain facilities and systems such as opening and closing facilities, winterizing buildings, etc.



Misquamicut State Beach in Westerly

## MOVING FORWARD

Now is the time to transform Rhode Island State Parks into a modern and dynamic system with the resources, structure, and tools needed to advance its mission and protect its assets to better serve the Rhode Islanders and tourists who visit them. With several foundational and philosophical shifts, the Rhode Island State Park system will be well-positioned to continue leveraging public assets while demonstrating the system's significance to the state's economic landscape. Moreover, these recommendations address the key challenges and opportunities that will have the most impact on sustainable park operations. Working together, Rhode Island's decision makers can optimize the value and benefits of the incredibly diverse system and create a model for public agency excellence and innovation.



East Bay Bike Path



*Beavertail State Park in Jamestown*

To learn more

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