



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Using Sewage Compost to Restore Healthy Environments and Wildlife Habitats

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Rhode Island's Wastewater Treatment Facilities treat some 100 million gallons of sewage daily generating 28,000 dry tons of sewage sludge annually, a byproduct of the wastewater treatment. To avoid burning or dumping all this waste, some of the sludge is composted to produce "biosolids" which can be beneficially used as fertilizer or soil amendment. DEM's Fish and Wildlife division and Office of Water Resources have been using biosolids to rehabilitate abandoned gravel banks and restore them into productive wildlife habitat.

Biosolids are made from sludge, an organic by-product of the sewage treatment process and must have reduced levels of pathogens and heavy metals to meet EPA and DEM standards for land application.

In 2004, DEM began a relationship with the West Warwick Sewer Authority, using their treated waste as compost for habitat restoration. The Carolina Management area, in Richmond, is now flourishing as a diverse grassland habitat of high value to birds, mammals, and various insects. Other treated areas include Nicholas Farm WMA near Carbuncle Pond, and 3 additional sites in Arcadia WMA in Exeter and Eight Rod Farm in Tiverton. DEM reports that approximately 65 acres have been restored through this program up to this point, with plans to restore another 25.

The biosolids created at the West Warwick facility, called WonderWorks, is high quality, Class A Biosolids which improves soil structure, increases soil moisture-holding capacity, improves soil aeration, and improves fertility providing nutrients necessary for plant growth. The designation as Class A Biosolids means that it is of "Exceptional Quality" and treated through a high



Views of the Carolina Management Area which has been restored with Class A biosolids from the West Warwick Wastewater Treatment Facility.

temperature process and transformed into a fertilizer product. The Office of Water Resources requires all Biosolids intended for land application to be tested by an independent laboratory prior to application to ensure it meets all standards of the DEM and EPA.. For those of us with sensitive nostrils, any land application project must comply with DEM's Office of Air Resources Air Pollution Control Regulation, pertaining to odors.

By reusing waste, DEM helps communities cheaply dispose of sewage sludge by using it for environmentally friendly projects. A waste becomes a resource and the state, the community, and the environment are all winners.

Interviewees:

- Brian Tefft, Principal Wildlife Biologist, DEM (Below, on left being interviewed by Channel 10 Reporter R.J. Heim)
- Janine Burke, Asst. Superintendent, West Warwick Wastewater Treatment Facility (Below, on right)

