



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



**Topic:** Forest Invasive Pest Survey  
**Date:** Friday, May 21, 2010  
**Location:** Alton Jones Campus, Office

## Background

In a partnership funded by a \$673,000 federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS) will protect and restore forest health by surveying for and eradicating invasive plants that threaten priority forest areas.

The two agencies have partnered to address forest invasive plants on a state-wide level through the *Forest Health Works Project*. Beginning this spring and continuing over the next year and a half, the project will inventory, manage, and restore up to 50,000 acres of Rhode Island's forests for key invasive plants.

The *Forest Health Works Project* will create or preserve approximately 12 full-time jobs or a greater number of part-time jobs for Rhode Islanders in the environmental management, nursery and landscaping industries. The project will also establish a commercial market for native, locally-sourced plantings for restoration efforts. Rhode Islanders have a long history of support for conservation initiatives. The federal funding provides a prime opportunity for the state to move to the next stage of conservation, which is active stewardship of our communities, and a way for many Rhode Islanders to become involved in the protection of the health of our forest ecosystems.

At present, Rhode Island's forest habitat covers nearly 400,000 acres, which is over half of the state. Rhode Island's forests serve as an important economic resource, and it is critical that we protect this resource. This grant will serve to counteract the harmful impact of non-native invasive plants on our forests, and further the work of the *Forest Health Works Project*.

The future health of the state's forests is in jeopardy due to the growing presence of non-native invasive plants. Invasive plants such as Japanese barberry, which is native to Asia, are now reproducing in Rhode Island to the detriment of the state's natural forests and the valuable economic, environmental, and recreational benefits they provide.

A recent study counted over seven million board feet of lumber and 126,000 cords of fuel wood being produced annually in the state. Beyond timber production, Rhode Island forests are a

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principal attraction for the tourist industry. They support fish such as brook trout and game including deer and turkey. Hunting and freshwater sport fishing industries in the state are valued at over \$48.3M per year.

Unfortunately, invasive plants threaten the future productivity of these forests. Garlic mustard, Japanese stiltgrass and other introduced species are increasingly invading forests. These species, away from the natural enemies found in their home range, easily out-compete native species and alter the ecology of forests. As forest environments provide a substantial value to Rhode Island, it is important that we act against threats to forest health to allow for continued benefit.

Individuals and groups interested in the project should contact James Barnes via email at the RINHS at [jbarnes@rinhs.org](mailto:jbarnes@rinhs.org), or via phone at 874-5807 for more information.

**Interviews:**

**Brian Tefft**, DEM Fish and Wildlife staff

**James Barnes**, project manager