



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Land Conservation Program
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2007

State of Rhode Island
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Division of Planning and Development
Joseph G. Dias, Acting Chief

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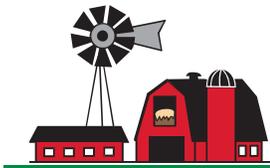


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Report prepared by Michelle Sheehan, intern, Division of Planning and Development with assistance by Paul Jordan, Supervising GIS Specialist.

State Land Conservation Program

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) preserves land to guarantee the permanent protection and proper management of areas having high intrinsic resource value, whose size, scarcity, location, or relationship to a statewide greenspace and greenway system recommended in the State Guide Plan make them significant to the state's welfare and whose vulnerability to permanent loss is real.

DEM's Division of Planning and Development manages the state's land conservation programs. The division operates to define, assess, develop plans and acquire land consistent with the DEM's responsibility to provide recreational lands and save environmentally sensitive open space for future generations.

This office also coordinates land acquisition with other state, federal and non-profit land acquisition programs. It works to acquire land consistent with state plans and state regulations for the acquisition of property, and to develop funding sources for these acquisitions. The annual review and maintenance of all leases on DEM property is also performed by the office.

Rhode Island has a unique urban rural balance. Its housing densities are among the highest in the country but still nearly 60% of its land remains forested. A 40 mile urban/suburban corridor running along the Narragansett Bay contains nearly all of the development and infrastructure in the state. And so despite its high population and rapid growth, Rhode Island still has the potential to preserve its rural character, water resources, open space and forests, and agricultural lands.

The DEM preserves open space with an emphasis on the following critical elements: agriculture, forests, drinking water protection, recreation, natural heritage/biodiversity. Three programs accommodate Rhode Island's public land acquisitions:

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. It receives funding from State Open Space bonds, and from various federal programs including the Forest Legacy program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, 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 valuable open space in the state. 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 as green space 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.

Agricultural Land Preservation Program

This program preserves agricultural lands through the purchase of farmland development rights. Purchasing development rights from farmers enables them to retain ownership of their property and protects their lands for agricultural use. At the same time it provides farmers with a financially competitive alternative to development.

All program applications are reviewed and scored by the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and through the leveraging of land trust and municipal funds.

Partnerships

In addition to state programs, other conservation interests work hard to protect our natural resources.

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.

We would like to thank our FY 2007 conservation partners:

*Barrington Land Conservation Trust
Foster Land Trust
Glocester Land Trust
The Nature Conservancy
Smithfield Land Trust
Tiverton Land Trust
Tiverton Open Space Commission
Town of Charlestown
Town of Lincoln
Town of Exeter
Town of North Kingstown
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
West Greenwich Land Trust*

Conservancy, the USDA Farmland Protection Program, the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, and local land trusts were active this year.

Land Trusts and Non-profits

Local land trusts and non-profits, most notably The Nature Conservancy and The Audubon Society of Rhode Island, have played a vital role in preserving Rhode Island's open space and agricultural lands, not only in partnership with the state but also with large projects of their own.

FY 2007 Accomplishments

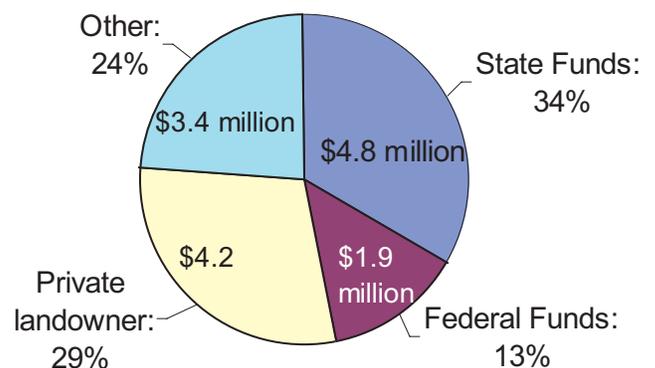
Achieving Land Conservation Goals

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 16,800 acres, representing 94% of the goal. As of this year, 20% of the state, or 141,682 acres, has been preserved as open space, for recreation, or for agricultural use.

Leveraging Funds

In Fiscal Year 2007 the DEM preserved \$14.2 million in land value. Of this amount, approximately \$4.2 million was donated land value from private property owners. Of the remaining \$10.1 million only \$4.8 million was from State Bonds for state land acquisition, farmland preservation, or local matching grants. Federal assistance totaled \$1.9 million and the remaining \$3.4 million were contributions from local land trusts and non profits. All totaled, in FY 2007 alone the state was able to leverage \$9.5 million from the \$25 million 2000 Open Space Bond. The Land Conservation Program has not yet tapped into the 2004 Open Space Bond.

Funding and Leveraging FY 2007



Total Land Value: \$14.2 million

The following projects were completed by the Land Conservation Program in Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1st 2006 - June 30th 2007) for a grand total of **1,531.73 acres**.

Name	Town	Purpose	Acreage
Schneider	Foster	Preserves land fronting North/South trail	158
Berlinsky	West Greenwich	Recreation/ Public drinking water/ Habitat	167
Pereira	Tiverton	Protects large and unfragmented forest	49.3
Kennedy	Exeter	Habitat and public recreation *	3.38
Northern Green Land	North Smithfield	Preserves working farm and open space	81
FWA Heirs/ Old Post Rd	Charlestown	Preserves open space in historic village district	12.8
Almy, Dugan, Babcock	Tiverton	Protects large and unfragmented forest	99.46
Arnolda Improvement	Charlestown	Protects fragile beach front and dunes	50
Almonte/Della Grotta	West Greenwich	Recreation/ Public drinking water/ Habitat	99.3
Peck	Exeter	Recreation/ Public drinking water/ Habitat	170.3
Sowam's Road	Barrington	Open space protection in developed area	12.3
Narr. Elect./ Weetamoo Woods	Tiverton	Protects large and unfragmented forest	101.2
Tucker, Hope	Foster	Habitat and public drinking water protection	9.65
Tucker, Hope	Glocester	Habitat and public drinking water protection	59.98
LeBreux	Tiverton	Habitat and watershed protection	148.2
LeBreux/Middle Acres	Tiverton	Preserves historic working farm	88.14
Bissell/ Killingly	Glocester	Habitat and Public Recreation *	26
Camp Meehan	Lincoln	Creates greenbelt in dense residential area	25.73
Hyde Tree Farm	Smithfield	Greenway connection between conservation areas	60
Kwandrans	Glocester	Protects wilidlife habitat	86.04
Salisbury Farm	Johnston	Preserves working farm and open space	30

* Adds acreage to existing State Management Area

Land Protection Totals - Fiscal Year 2007	
Local Land Trusts _____	738 acres
Non-Profit Organizations _____	1,348 acres
Open Space Grant Program _____	1,088 acres
Land Conservation Program _____	250 acres
Agricultural Land Preservation Program _____	199 acres
Total _____	3,623 acres

The Year in Review: Featured Properties

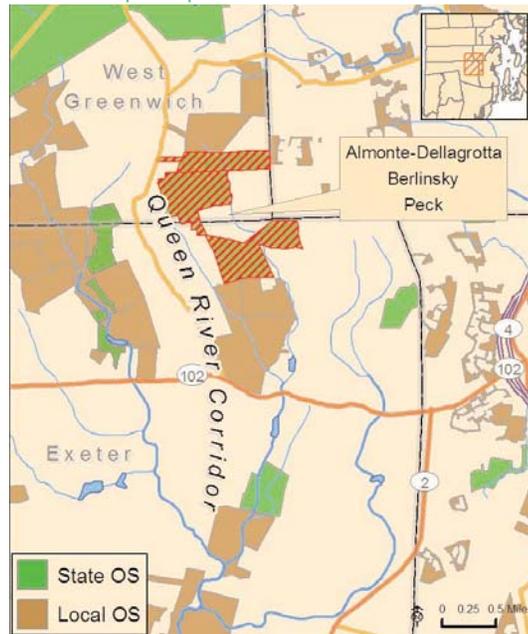
Water Resource Protection

As development in RI continues to encroach into the state's green spaces the pressure on our water resources intensifies. The DEM prioritizes acquisition of properties in watershed recharge areas and wetlands that affect drinking water supplies, critical marine and fresh water habitat, and recreational opportunities.

Berlinsky, Almonte/DellaGrotta, and Peck: Exeter and West Greenwich 436.3 acres

These three contiguous acquisitions in the Queen's River headwater region in Exeter and West Greenwich form part of a 900 acre preserve which will both provide excellent passive recreation opportunities and protect South County's sole source aquifer. The Queen's River is one of the most pristine in the state and region, containing species that indicate exceptional water quality such as native trout and freshwater mussels. The river also supports rare dragonflies such as Brook Snaketail and Zebra Clubtail. Just downstream from these properties is the

Preserved Open Space in the Queen's River Corridor



The Queen's River as it exits the Peck property

Audubon Society of Rhode Island's Eppley Wildlife Refuge which contains rare species of beetles and moths and a large tract of Atlantic white cedar swamp. Both the Queen's River and the Eppley Swamp's rare species depend on pristine conditions to survive. The protection of the watershed's headwaters is integral to the health of this community.

Additionally, the Queen's River is part of the Pawcatuck Basin sole source aquifer that much of South County – including 60,000 residents -

relies on for their drinking water. These three properties collect and filter water for aquifer providing a vital service extremely important in a region where populations (in Exeter and West Greenwich) are rapidly increasing. This acquisition was made possible through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the West Greenwich Land Trust, and the town of Exeter. Seepage swamps, intermittent and permanent streams, riparian forest, and vernal pools characterize the protected prop-

erties. Existing trails are also present and the area will be open to the public for passive recreation.

Berlinsky -167 acres: West Greenwich

Almonte/DellaGrotta - 99.3 acres: Exeter

Peck -170 acres: West Greenwich

Hope Tucker Property: Glocester and Foster
70 acres:

This property was purchased in partnership with The National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund. \$281,000 came from this fund and \$274,000 was contributed by the State Open Space Bond. It is a mostly forested tract

located in the Ponaganset River Greenway Corridor, which now contains more than 800 acres of protected lands. This particular parcel adds to a previously protected section and creates 140 acres of contiguously preserved land.

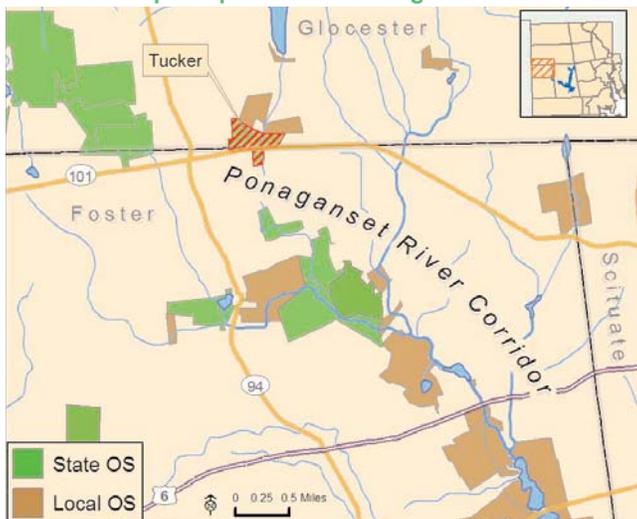
The Ponaganset River runs north to south through this property with 1,500 feet of frontage. This river is one of the most popular recreational



View of the Ponaganset River as it flows through the Hope Tucker property

fishing rivers in the state and is a main tributary of the Scituate Reservoir, which provides drinking water for more than 600,000 residents. The forested lands in the greenway corridor, including this parcel, filter the water that flows to the Scituate Reservoir and are integral to the health of ecosystem that keeps the reservoir clean. Additionally, an existing system of trails on the property provides excellent access for recreation and fishing.

Preserved Open Space in the Ponaganset River Corridor



Habitat and Biodiversity

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 often not adequate to support healthy populations. The DEM recognizes the need to protect sizable swaths of land capable of providing the necessary shelter and open space.

Arnolda Improvement (East Beach): Charlestown 50 acres

This property has been protected through a conservation easement donated by Arnolda Improvement Corporation. The land is adjacent East Beach State Beach - a 3 mile stretch of undeveloped barrier beach front - and abuts the 1,700 acre Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge and Ninigret Pond. The property is characterized by beach face, fragile dunes, marshy areas, and some high land. Over 250 bird species visit this area seasonally, and 70 species nest in the abutting Ninigret which contains salt marshes, kettle ponds, freshwater wetlands, maritime shrublands



Aerial view of the Arnolda Improvement property. Ted Truslow

and forests dominated by oak or maple. Linked to the sea by a man-made breachway, Ninigret Pond's brackish waters support blue crab, bay scallop, quahog and winter flounder in addition to the many water birds.

The property will be managed for wildlife habitat conservation.

Narragansett Electric/TNC (Weetamoo Woods): Tiverton 101 acres

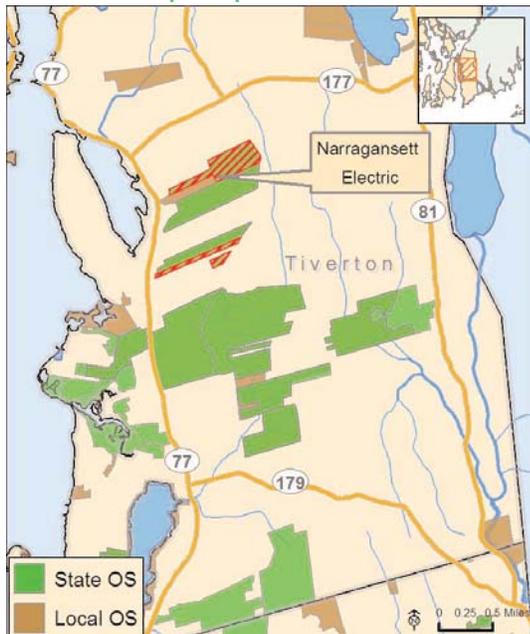
This acquisition of three noncontiguous parcels was purchased in partnership with the Nature Conservancy, the USDA's Forest Service Forest Legacy Program, the Tiverton Open Space Commission, and the Tiverton Land Trust. The properties are located on Tiverton's Pocasset Ridge overlooking Nannaquaket Pond and add to the protected area within the largest undeveloped and unfragmented forest in the Rhode Island East Bay region. These forested parcels, together with the Town's Weetamoo Woods and the adjoining Pardon Gray Preserve, preserve over 2,000 acres of contiguous forest area.



Weetamoo Woods

The unfragmented forest in this area creates excellent habitat for sensitive species, including canopy nesting birds that require deep woods.

Preserved Open Space in Weetamoo Woods



Whitetail deer, opossum, raccoon, fox, coyote, chipmunk, eastern grey and red squirrels also live in this forest. Small streams provide breeding grounds for Spring Peepers, Green Frogs, Spotted Salamanders, Fairy Shrimp and other animals.



Spotted Salamander

These three parcels drain to Nannaquaket Pond and the Sakonnet River and thus contribute to the marine productivity of these coastal estuaries.

These properties, along with several other proximate parcels, are subject to a forestry stewardship plan to be carried out by The Nature Conservancy, The Tiverton Land Trust, and the Tiverton Open Space Commission. The plan requires maintenance of public access and controlling invasive species.

Greenways and Trails

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.

Schneider Property: Foster

158 acres

The Foster Land Trust acquired this 158 acre property with the assistance of a DEM Open Space Matching Grant. This forested property contains a fragile wetland that flows seasonally to the Moosup River. As such, is it vital to the Moosup River watershed. It contains upland hardwood forest typical to RI. The property is part of a 1,800 acre forest block that has no vehicular



The North/South trail going through the Schneider property

roads, has prime forest-interior habitat (most of property is more than 300 meters from any vehicular road) which is rare in RI due to increasing fragmentation. It has 2,000 feet of frontage along the North-South trail, a walking trail that extends 75 miles through the entire length of the state. Potential exists for loop trails from the North-South trail through the Schneider property.

Sowam's Road: Barrington

12.3 acres

Purchased by the Barrington Land Conservation Trust with support from DEM's Open Space Matching Grant Program, this property is an important acquisition for such a densely populated suburban area where property values run



Sowam's Road property

high. In close proximity to the East Bay Bike path, this parcel is easily accessible by the public. It abuts Echo Lake and contains swampland as well as two vernal pools classified as forested wetlands. Echo Lake is a stopover for migratory birds and eventually drains to Narragansett Bay via Big

Mussachuck Creek and the Providence River. The majority of the property is densely forested upland interior and contains areas of white pines. Protection of this property was deemed critical to preserve the habitat of amphibians and to enable the migration of alewives and eels.

Additionally, the property provides a link for protected natural areas connecting the Pic-Wil Nature Preserve and conservation easements along the shore of the Narragansett Bay. The town owns several large parcels near the property, including Brickyard Pond, Volpe Pond, and Veteran's Memorial Park.

Archaeological resources have also been found on the property including intact crescent shaped hearths - found nowhere else in the state.

Recreation

Providing public access to state lands and actively managing these properties for recreational opportunities continues to be a priority of the land acquisition program. Properties that abut existing management areas or that present opportunities for recreational use are actively pursued.

Susan Bissell Property (Killingly Management Area): Gloucester

26 acres

The Killingly Management Area is 703 acres of forest and wetlands in Gloucester, RI. The Bissell property abuts the area and will be incorporated into its management. It was purchased through the State Land Acquisition Program from the conservation minded owner. Killingly Management Area is characterized by the dominant Eastern



Stone wall on the Bissell property

Hemlock evergreen which forms a dense canopy uncommon in Rhode Island, providing winter habitat for white-tailed deer. Other game mammals and birds common to the area include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hare, wild turkey, muskrat, ruffed grouse, mink, woodcock, fox, and coyote. The area is also home to numerous non-game wildlife species and abuts Killingly Pond.

Agricultural Lands

Rhode Island's agricultural resources are in threat of being lost to development. The DEM works with farmers and conservation interests to conserve farmland both for agricultural production and for the open space and habitat resources it provides.

LeBreux-Middle Acres: Tiverton

236 acres

This historic farm was protected with a combination of support from the DEM, the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, The USDA's Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, The US Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and the Nature Conservancy.

Part of the property was protected through purchase of development rights. This will keep the land in agricultural production in perpetuity and in accordance with a conservation plan prepared with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Much of this property has been farmed

since 1825 and the farm is still a viable enterprise with hay, corn, Christmas trees, beef cattle, and cranberries currently produced on the land.

The 88.1 acres under agricultural restriction are part of a larger 236 acre parcel which will be held under conservation easement by the RI Natural Heritage Preservation Commission and the Nature Conservancy. The LeBreux property contains forested wetlands and uplands valuable for their habitat protection and water resource conservation. Upland forest, hardwood swamp, vernal pools, and a large freshwater wetland characterize this property. Also, an Oak and Holly forest



View of Middle Acres farm - John Berg

border the wetlands. The wetlands support Wood Duck, Glossy Ibis, Marsh Wren, Acadian Flycatcher, marbled salamander, northern leopard frog. The Lebreux property contains a large portion of the Tiverton Great Swamp, a 400-acre swamp which flows to the Westport River, and subsequently into Buzzards Bay, MA. Native brook trout are supported in this wetland system.

Provisions of this easement will require that the forest be managed and maintained for its wildlife. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service will maintain the quality of the waterways on the property.

In addition to agricultural and open space value, this property also has significant historic importance. The farmhouse was built in 1837 and the

buildings and land contribute to the rural character along Crandall Road. Furthermore, an old roadway, the Saw Mill Path crosses the property which originally went from Westport to a ferry landing at Punkateest Neck. Just five miles from the center of Fall River, MA (pop 91,000), this

property represents a significant conservation achievement in close proximity to densely populated areas.

Salisbury Farm: Johnston

30 Acres

This farm, on Johnston/Cranston line and 11 miles from Providence, was protected through the purchase of development rights. A combination of state and federal funding made this transaction possible. The State Open Space Bond contributed \$365,000 and the US Department of

Agriculture Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program contributed \$635,000. Additionally, the owners of the farm sold the property at a bargain price, saving the state \$270,000.



Aerial view of Salisbury Farm's Corn Maze

The farm consists of a combination of open space and prime agricultural soils. Founded in the 1800s, the farm has been in operation by 5 generations of the Salisbury family since the 1860s. The farm currently operates as a small

Preserved Farmland near Salisbury Farm



fruit and vegetable farm growing strawberries, raspberries, corn, and pumpkins. The Salisbury's also run a pick-your-own operation, a corn maze, and hay rides.

The farm is across the street from another protected 50 acre farm and is surrounded by other agricultural tracts. The addition of this protected farm brings the total protected farm acreage in the area to nearly 750 acres and total protected open space to 1,080 acres.

The Future of Land Conservation

In addition to the 21 DEM projects completed in FY 2007, land trusts and private non-profits protected over 2,000 acres of land throughout the state. The hard work and dedicated efforts of our conservation partners is a critical element in preserving our state's natural resources.

Currently, the state has 10 active Local Open Space Grants, 12 active State Conservation projects, and nine active Agricultural Land projects. These projects total an anticipated approximately 3,200 acres to be preserved in FY 2008.

As the real estate market levels off, we expect that an increasing number of opportunities to preserve land will arise. We need to work together, with support from the public, our political leaders, and other state conservation interests, to take advantage of this favorable climate for preserving the state's agricultural and open space resources.

For more information about the 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>



