RI Department of Environmental Management

Land Conservation and Acquisition Program

Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2013

State of Rhode Island *Lincoln D. Chafee, Governor*
Department of Environmental Management *Janet L. Coit, Director*
Division of Planning and Development *Joseph G. Dias, Chief*

STATE OF RI LAND CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES

DEM Land Acquisition Committee

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Lisa Primiano, *Chair*, Deputy Chief, Planning and Development
Kenneth Ayars, Chief, Division of Agriculture
Joseph Dias, Chief, Planning and Development
Larry Mouradjian, Associate Director of Natural Resources
Robert Paquette, Chief, Parks and Recreation
Catherine Sparks, Chief, Forest Environment, Fish and Wildlife- Freshwater Fisheries and Wildlife

Agricultural Land Preservation Commission

George Mason, *Chair*
Kenneth Ayars, DEM Director's *Designee*, Chief, Division of Agriculture
Kevin J. Nelson, Supervising Planner, RI Statewide Planning Program
Everett Stuart, Public Member
David Wallace, Public Member
William Wright, Public Member
Martha Neale, Public Member

Natural Heritage Preservation Commission Advisory Board

Representative from the Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Governor's Office
Jared Rhodes, Chief, Division of Statewide Planning, RI Department of Administration
Janet L. Coit, Director, RI Department of Environmental Management

Report prepared by Michelle Sheehan, Division of Planning and Development

STATE LAND CONSERVATION

Rhode Island's beaches, bays, forests, farms, and rivers help to sustain the state's economy and provides residents with a high quality of life. Thanks to robust public investment in Open Space Bonding over the past several decades, the state has made great strides in preserving its rural character, water resources, open space and forests, and farm land. This investment has enabled the tourism industry to thrive, has protected the quality of life for all residents, and has preserved Rhode Island's critical habitat resources.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Land Conservation Program, operating through the Division of Planning and Development, acquires property and interests in land as a way to preserve the state's natural areas, to guarantee their permanent protection, and to ensure proper management of land having high intrinsic resource value. With an emphasis on the following critical elements: working farms, forests, drinking water protection, recreation, and natural heritage/ biodiversity, DEM works to ensure these resources remain available for future generations. The Program prioritizes parcels of land whose resource value, size, location, and relationship to existing conservation land make them significant to the state's welfare.

DEM's Division of Planning and Development coordinates land conservation activities with other local, state, federal and non-profit programs and works to preserve land consistent with state plans and state regulations.

Three programs accommodate Rhode Island's public land acquisitions:

State Land Conservation Program:

This program is administered by the DEM Land Acquisition Committee, which makes recommendations to the Director regarding real estate transactions that will enhance DEM's Management Areas, Parks and Forest Lands.

Funding for these real estate acquisitions is provided by State Open Space bonds, with contributions from municipalities and land trusts, from local partners such as The Nature Conservancy and the Champlin Foundations, and from various federal programs including the U.S. Forest Services' Forest Legacy program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, 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 natural areas that are deemed priorities on the municipal level. This critical partnership works to leverage funds from municipal, non-profit, and federal agencies for the protection of Rhode Island's resources. DEM provides up to 50% funding to successful applicants and adds a layer of protection to the conserved parcels to ensure they remain undeveloped 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. Final awards are determined by the Natural Heritage Commission. The State's share of funding is provided by State Open Space Bonds.

Agricultural Land Preservation Program

This program, run by the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) and staffed by the DEM, preserves agricultural lands through the purchase of farmland development rights. Purchasing development rights from farmers enables them to retain ownership of their property while protecting their lands for agricultural use. At the same time, it provides farmers with a financially competitive alternative to development. The State's farming industry, which contributes $170 million annually to the local economy, is dependent on access to productive land. This program helps to ensure that farming remains viable in the state.

All program applications are reviewed and scored by the ALPC 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 Nature Conservancy, through grants from the Champlin Foundations; the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program; and through the leveraging of land trust and municipal funds.

P A R T N E R S H I P S

DEM is fortunate to work with many strong conservation partners as a way to both stretch state dollars and ensure that as much land is being preserved as possible. The State Open Space Bond plays a major role in acquiring land. But the department has also been very successful in using the bond money to leverage private landowner donations and funds from other sources. Most properties are acquired through the collaboration of several different groups.

Many major fiscal partners were active this year. They include The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the Federal Highway Administration and the RI Department of Transportation, and local land trusts.

The Land Conservation Program also receives vital internal support from many other DEM staff members. The Divisions of Management Services, Fish & Wildlife, and Legal Services all provide countless hours of assistance to the program and enable it to function efficiently.

We would like to thank our FY 2013 conservation partners:

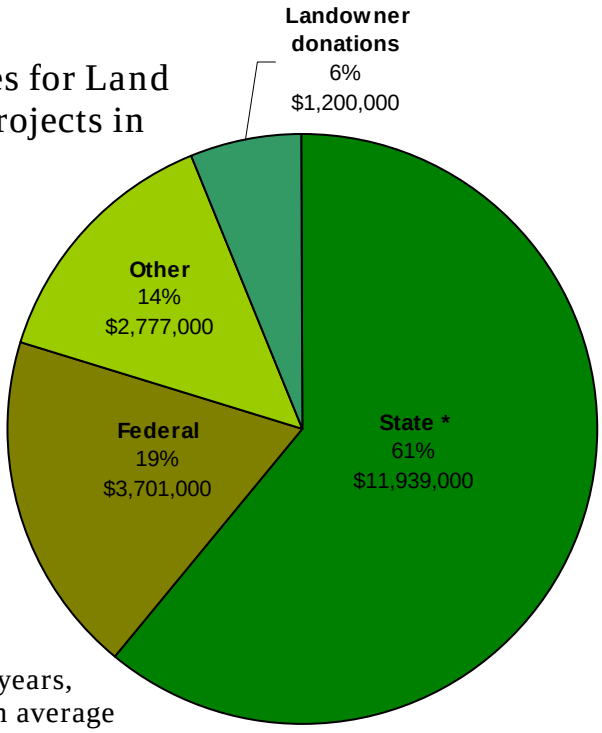
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Champlin Foundations
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- The USDA NRCS Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program
- RI Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration
- Town of North Kingstown
- The Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust
- The Tiverton Land Trust
- The City of Central Falls
- The City of Warwick

LEVERAGING FUNDS

As the state open space bond account dwindles in size, DEM increasingly relies on partner funding to help fund its acquisition projects. This fiscal year, DEM preserved more than $19.5 million in land value and used only $11.9 million in state funds – leveraging 30% funding from federal and local partners.*

The hard work that goes into leveraging these partner funds has ensured that the public bond investments over the years have been stretched to their utmost potential – protecting an impressive 14,770 acres over the past 10 years alone.

Funding Sources for Land Conservation Projects in FY 2013



*In the previous 10 years, DEM contributed an average of **27%** of total land conservation project costs. The increase this year is due to the $9.65 million Rocky Point acquisition which was funded entirely by a State Open Space bond that was passed specifically to secure this property. Discounting the Rocky Point acquisition, this year's State contribution rate is just 24%, with 76% contributed from federal and local sources.

ACHIEVING LAND CONSERVATION GOALS

Since 1994 the State has managed to preserve 23,622 acres. To date, more than 20% of the state has been preserved as open space, for recreation, or for agricultural use.

F Y 2013 A C C O M P L I S H M E N T S

The following 12 projects were completed by the Land Conservation Program in Fiscal Year 2013 (July 1st 2011 - June 30th 2012) for a grand total of 715 acres.

Property	Town	Purpose	Acres
Baier	Tiverton	Open space, habitat	21.8
Cabot Farm	Little Compton	Agriculture	23.6
Wucik	Westerly	Public fishing/boating access	3.8
Pezza Farm	Johnston	Agriculture	29.0
Smith, Edward	West Greenwich	Habitat	48.0
Buckley	West Greenwich	Habitat	29.0
Rocky Point	Warwick	Public recreation access	80.0
DelBonis Sand & Gravel Co.	Richmond	Habitat, public access	245.7
Camp Meehan II	North Providence	Recreation	16.4
Central Falls Landing	Central Falls	Recreation	0.9
St. Pierre	Little Compton	Agriculture	17.2
Marvell	Tiverton	Habitat, public access	131.0
Carpenter	Foster	Habitat, public fishing access	68.2
TOTAL			715

THE YEAR IN REVIEW
Featured Properties

Public Access

Rocky Point, 82 acres, Warwick

Marvell, 131 acres, Tiverton

Wucik – 4 acres, Westerly

Farmland

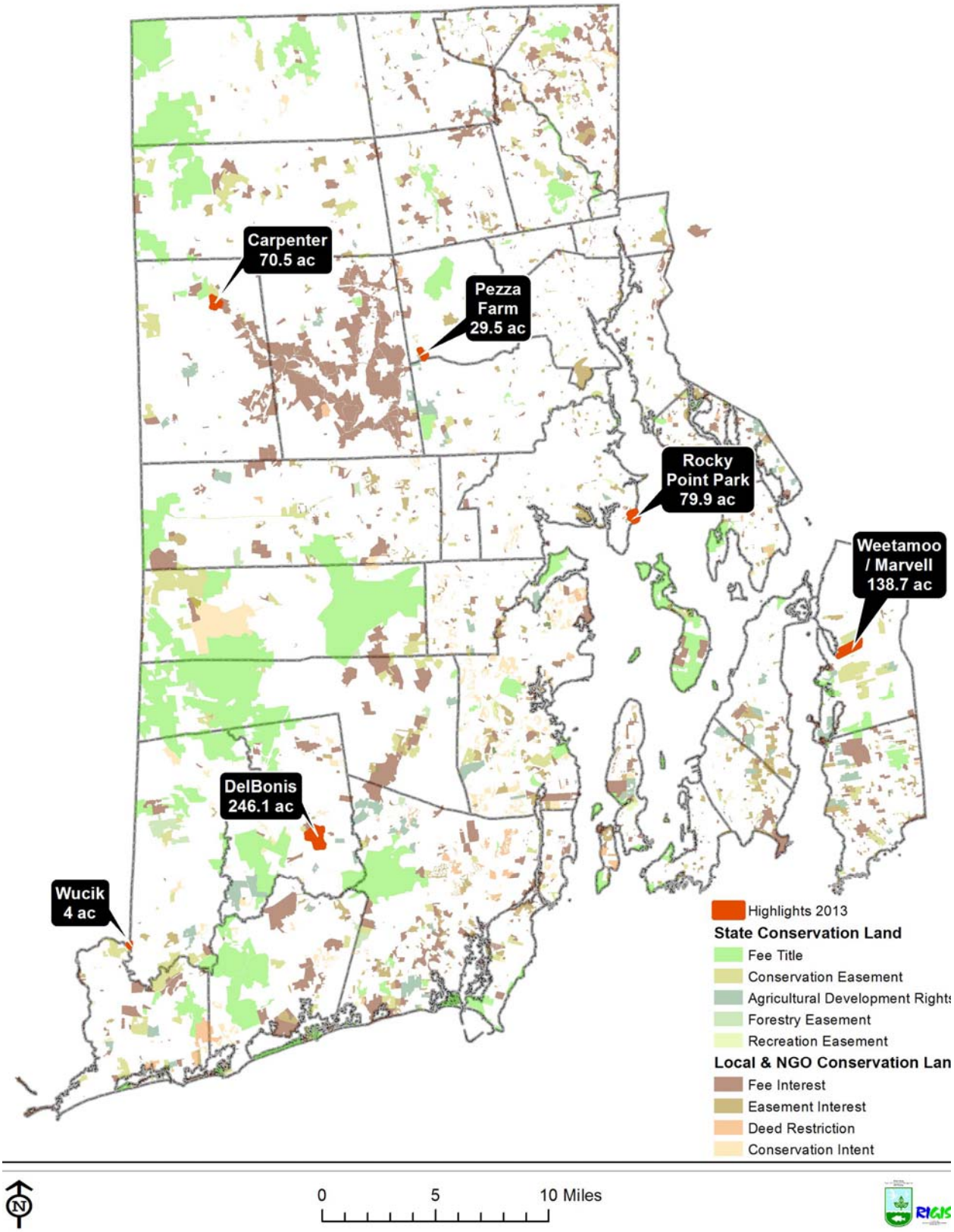
Pezza Farm – 29 acres, Johnston

Habitat and Biodiversity

Carpenter – 61 acres, Foster

Delbonis – 245 acres, Richmond

MAP OF FEATURED PROPERTIES



PUBLIC ACCESS

Providing public access to our state's great natural gems serves to enhance the quality of life of life for all Rhode Islanders and engages people in the natural world.

Rocky Point then…… …….. and now.

ROCKY POINT

80 acres, Warwick

In December of 2007, DEM partnered with the City of Warwick to acquire 41 acres of the former Rocky Point Amusement Park. But it wasn't until March of this year that the remaining 82 acres were secured, ensuring that the entire historic property, loved by generations of Rhode Islanders, will be part of the public domain and enjoyed as a new coastal State Park. Situated directly on Narragansett Bay and with sweeping views from its rocky promontories, this property is a valuable resource for the public.

"This is truly a landmark acquisition. Now, every Rhode Islander owns a piece of Rocky Point. This is a special place and we want to ensure future generations can share this beautiful area with their families" - Senator Jack Reed

The future development of the 123-acre Rocky Point Park will be a collaborative process, involving many stakeholders and partners. Possible features of the new coastal park include a system of walking paths, fields, fishing access – and currently include a plan to incorporate some remaining elements of the former amusement park.

Rocky Point Amusement Park operated from 1849 until 1996. Since then the property has sat abandoned and inaccessible to the public. Its many resources will now be open for exploration – its freshwater wetlands, rocky beaches, ledges, mature forests with species such as lowbush blueberry, eastern red cedar, bay berry, shadbush, black cherry, and red maple.

Funding for the $9.65 million acquisition was provided from the State Open Space bond approved by Rhode Island voters in 2010.

Overlook on Marvell property
Photo credit: J. Berg

MARVELL

131 acres, Tiverton

The Marvell property is contained within the Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area in Tiverton, a 2,000 acre coastal forest tract, the largest in eastern Rhode Island and 60% of which is conserved. With much needed frontage on Main Road, this property will provide public access to an additional 365 acres of this conservation land.

The Marvell property, complete with a towering cli- yielding expansive views of the surrounding forest, farm fields, and the distant Sakonnet River, consists of a high quality coastal forest. Many rare species, particularly migratory birds, and a globally rare oak-holly forest community exist on the property.

A variety of soils and rocky outcrops in this area contribute to a great diversity of plant communities on the property. The tract extends across a watershed divide - its eastern portion drains to Borden Brook, which empties into a salt pond and estuary, while its western portion drains to Quaket Creek, which empties to a tidal embayment of the Sakonnet. Securing the Marvell property as open space serves to protect the quality of these important water bodies.

The Nature Conservancy purchased the property for $600,000. DEM acquired a Conservation Easement over the property for $300,000 from Open Space Bond funds. Remainder funding was contributed by The Champlin Foundations.

Bridge on the Wucik property
Photo credit: M. Sheehan

WUCIK

4 acres, Westerly

The 4 acres of land that makes up the Wucik property sits at a key bend in the Pawcatuck River. Just upriver is the Potter Hill Mill dam, and below it lie several linear miles of river that open to the Atlantic Ocean. Currently, no safe public access exists between Bradford and Westerly on the Pawcatuck. Thanks to this acquisition, DEM will be able to make this spectacular site and several miles of the river readily accessible to recreational paddlers, duck hunters, fishermen, and bird-watchers.

A popular recreation spot, the Pawcatuck River is located in the southwest corner of the state and flows through a relatively rural area of forest, farmland, and small towns. The Pawcatuck's water quality is excellent and supports a diverse population of freshwater fish. Cold water streams in the headwaters support both wild and stocked trout, along with warm water species and stocked trout in the lower reaches of the river. Fish ladders have been installed at the remaining dams along the river to encourage sustainable populations of diadromous fish such as shad and river herring.

The property was purchased for $205,000 from Richard Wucik, Jr. with funds provided through State Open Space bonds.

Using federal funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, DEM will proceed with building demolition and site development to create a public access area and parking amenities on site.

***"Acquisition of this property ....is a boon for the Pawcatuck River and for those who use the river for recreational purposes,"* - Chris Fox, Executive Director for the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association.**

AGRICULTURAL LAND

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

Cows and crops at Pezza Farm
Photo credit: M. Sheehan

PEZZA Farm

29 acres, Johnston

Pezza Farm is a fourth generation family-run farm. The property, with its familiar red barn that graces Plainfield Pike, was purchased in 1947 by Michael Pezza's father, Michael Sr. Today, the entire Pezza family is involved in the daily operation of the working farm where they produce nursery stock, flowers, vegetables, and silage. The farm also raises Hereford cows and is a member of the RI Raised Livestock Association, which sells beef to local customers.

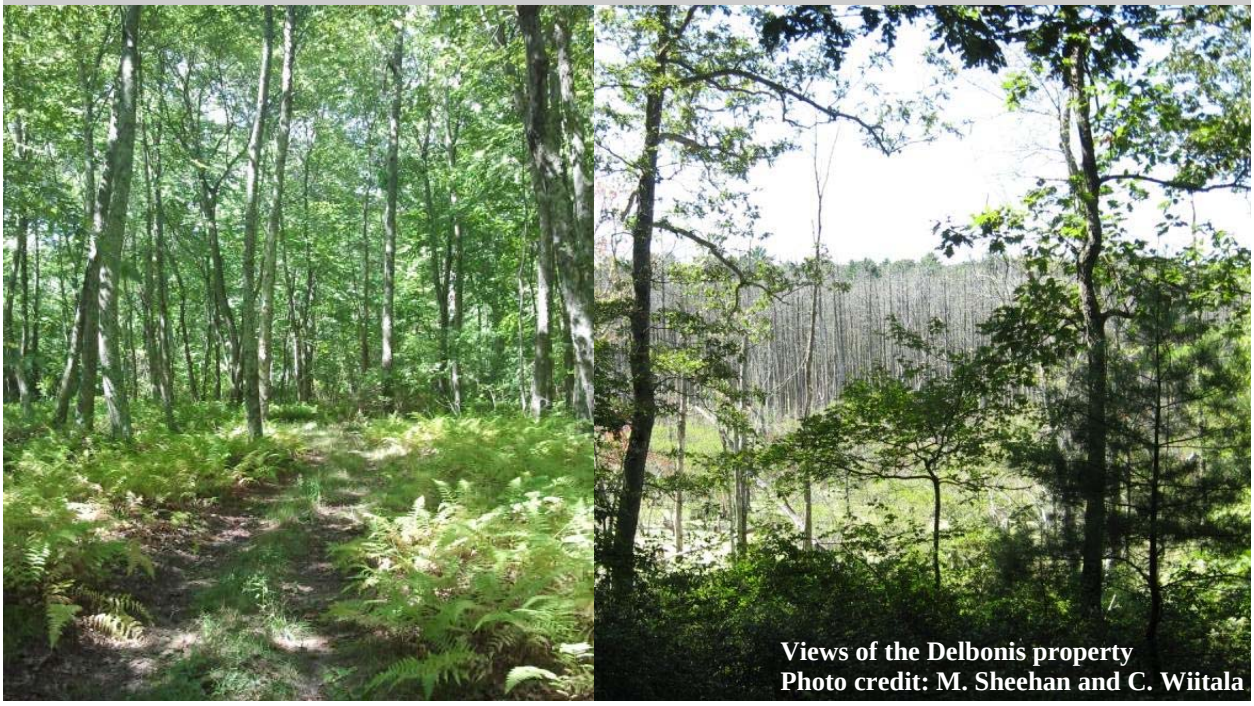
Throughout the year, Pezza Farm offers numerous agri-tourism programs such as children's birthday parties, school field trips, and fall hayrides. The Pezza family offers free educational programs to the public on-site at the farm, including Master Gardeners and beekeeping programs, and participates in six farmers' markets during the year in Cranston, Scituate, Providence, and Pawtucket. Pezza Farm also is an active participant in the Farm to School program which distributes locally-grown fruits and vegetables to Rhode Island school districts.

Pezza farm is located in the "Cranston farm loop" which boasts a total of 570 acres of protected farmland. The farm abuts the protected Salisbury Farm on Plainfield Pike and is adjacent to the DEM-owned and protected Urban Edge Farm operated by the Southside Community Land Trust. This concentration of important farmland just outside Providence, showcases the proximity of Rhode Island's food sources to our dense population centers.

Funding for the $1.2 million Pezza Farm acquisition included $271,000 from Rhode Island's Agricultural Land Preservation Commission's State Farmland Bond funds, and $714,000 from the USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and $215,000 from The Nature Conservancy and The Champlin Foundations.

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 a problem. The DEM recognizes the need to protect sizable swaths of land capable of providing the necessary shelter and open space.



Views of the Delbonis property
Photo credit: M. Sheehan and C. Wiitala

DEL BONIS

245 acres, Richmond

"This beautiful forest is now available for the public to use for hiking, bird-watching, and just being outdoors enjoying nature. I am so pleased that the Department was able to protect another part of a priority habitat near the state's Carolina and Great Swamp Management Areas. I hope lots of folks will get out there to explore this gorgeous piece of land and the stunning views from its many ledges." - DEM Director, Janet Coit

The Del Bonis property is critically located in a core habitat area, adjacent to the 180-acre Grass Pond Preserve and near the State's 2,300-acre Carolina Management Area and the 3,300-acre Great Swamp Management Area. The property contains one of the best examples in the state of a coastal plain quagmire, featuring peaty soils and floating sphagnum mosses, and provides habitat for five globally declining and state-endangered species. Elsewhere on the property, rocky ledges provide incredible over-looks to the south.

The Del Bonis property will be managed jointly by DEM and The Nature Conservancy. A network of trails will connect the property to the abutting Grass Pond Preserve. It will be open for hunting and passive recreational opportunities.

DEM purchased the property for $1 million from Delbonis Sand and Gravel, with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation ($500,000), The Nature Conservancy ($300,000), and State Open Space Bonds ($200,000). The Nature Conservancy acquired a conservation easement on the land with a grant from The Champlin Foundations, providing additional legal protection and land management rights.

Carpenter Property
Photo credit: M. Sheehan

CARPENTER

68 acres, Foster

This property abuts existing conservation land along the banks of the Ponagansett River – a high quality cold-water stream that drains to the Scituate Reservoir. The property contains several tributaries to the river and a mature white pine forest as well as some deciduous areas with ash, hickory, white oak, birch, and red maple. Public access will be maintained on the property to provide for recreational use including hiking and fishing.

The Ponagansett River Corridor, made up of properties protected by DEM, The Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Foster Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy, now consists of over 900 acres of land. It serves the multiple functions of protecting an important and popular cold-water fishing resource, providing a buffer for the headwaters of the Scituate reservoir – a water body that provides drinking water to most Rhode Islanders, and providing passive recreational opportunities via its trail network.

The purchase price for this property is $350,000, which was funded through a combination of DOT's Federal Highway Enhancement project (SAFETEA-LU) ($250,000) and DEM Open Space Bonds ($100,000).