

Land Conservation in Rhode Island

Fiscal Year 2002



A.P.L. Realty, Inc. Property, Exeter/Hopkinton, Arcadia

Department of Environmental Management
Jan H. Reitsma, Director
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Land Acquisition & Conservation Program *Fiscal Year 2002 Report*

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, in partnership with statewide conservation interests, is very pleased to report a new record for the number of acres of land preserved in a Fiscal Year- a total of 6537 acres.

Of this record number, the State's Open Space Program and the Local Grants Program protected 2593 and another 236 acres were protected by the State Agricultural Land Preservation Commission through its purchase of development rights program. Local Land Trusts continued their impressive work by conserving 1856 acres using local funds, donations and funds from other conservation agencies. The Nature Conservancy, which was a partner in many of the State and land trusts projects, also protected 1411 acres exclusive of the acres noted above. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island was the recipient of 441 acres of donated land in the last fiscal year.



Land Conservation in Rhode Island this past fiscal year has far exceeded program goals and expectations set by the Department. The level of activity and the quality of projects continues to increase as we become more aware of the importance of protecting our shorelines, farm fields, forest lands, scenic vistas, natural habitats, and water supplies. The following chart shows the breakdown of acres by group. Please note that although acreages may be attributed to a specific group, most of these projects involved more than one entity working together to accomplish a project.

PROTECTED LANDS

LOCAL LAND TRUSTS	1856 acres
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	1852 acres
RIDEM	2593 acres
FARMLAND (ALPC)	236 acres
TOTAL ACREAGE	6537 acres

FUNDING and LEVERAGING

Funding of land acquisition in Rhode Island continues to rely on partnerships and leveraging. State bond funds play a major role in the funding of RIDEM land projects and the Agricultural Land Preservation Program; however, both of these programs have had great success in attracting foundation funds and non-profit support. The Nature Conservancy, through grants from The Champlin Foundations and the Doris Duke Charitable Trust contribute significant funding towards State land protection projects. In addition, over \$2 million in federal funds from the USDA's Farmland Protection Program, the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Program were used in this past fiscal year's acquisition projects. Expenditures of State funds were higher this past year due to the acquisition of a few large land parcels, including the Hopkinton Associates, Inc. property which added 180 acres to Arcadia and the Eight Rod Farm Management Area which created a new Fish and Wildlife Management Area consisting of over 400 acres. State dollars were matched at just over a 1:1 ratio, not including those projects of which the State was not a partner. Municipalities and land trusts were responsible for contributing millions of dollars towards land protection this past year, utilizing funds from local bond issues, capital campaigns, and documentary stamp fees which were designated for land protection in many communities around the State.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships and the role of land trusts in open space conservation in Rhode Island remains strong. With expert technical assistance from The Nature Conservancy and funding assistance from varied sources, land trusts have become increasingly adept at packaging land transactions, securing open space funds from public and private sources, and winning support from local officials. The Nature Conservancy, with grants from The Rhode Island Foundation, The Land Trust Alliance, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, will continue to provide technical support to local land trusts in Rhode Island.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS – FISCAL YEAR 2002

Cate/Taber/O'Reilly – These three contiguous parcels are located in the Towns of Gloucester and Foster. Its combined acreage of 345 acres, almost doubled the size of the State's Killingly Management Area. The parcels include a ready-made trail as well as old stone walls, open fields, and a spectacular canopy of eastern hemlock.



Cate/Taber/O'Reilly, Gloucester/Foster

Eight Rod Farm Management Area – This newly created management area, located in the Towns of Tiverton and Little Compton, will provide for varied uses including fishing, hunting, hiking, and farming. The 412 acre property was acquired with funds from The Nature Conservancy, The Champlin Foundations, State Open Space Bonds, and a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act.



Eight Rd. Farm Mngmt. Area, Tiverton/Little Compton

Kenyon Farm – This 172 acre farm in South Kingstown, was protected through cooperative efforts of the State Local Open Space Program, the Agricultural Land Conservation Program, the South Kingstown Land Trust, and the Town of South Kingstown. The land is a combination of forested land and farmland - primarily hay crop and pasture.

Sabetta, West Warwick – This 34.3 acre forest is interspersed with low density housing. Greenbush Elementary School is located directly across the street, and it is foreseen that a small environmental education program will be incorporated, using the parcel as an “outdoor classroom.” There are walking trails through the site and benches will be added as well.

Waypoysset Preserve, Bristol – This preserve will be home to 7,000 feet of trails with a boardwalk along the Kickemuit River which will connect residential areas north, south and east, to the shore and other green areas. The trails will include interpretive signs highlighting the ecology and history of the area. Users of the trails will be educated about wetland benefits, Native American camp sites, and archeological dig sites.

ACHIEVING LAND CONSERVATION GOALS

In November of 1994, the State Greenways Plan (State Guide Plan, Element 155) determined that 17,850 acres of land should be preserved through State programs over the next 25 years. According to the Plan, an additional 17,850 acres should be protected through other federal, local and private acquisition programs and via creative development. In the year 2000, the Governor, with the support of the Legislature, proposed a \$34 million Open Space and Recreation Bond Issue to support the implementation of the Greenways Plan and to step up the pace of land preservation to accomplish the Plan in a ten year time frame. An overwhelming 73% of the voters approved this expenditure. In addition, eleven municipalities passed their own local bond issues to support open space preservation; adding another \$17 million of funds available for land protection. The Department has been tracking the progress of its acquisition program and of its ability to meet the goals set forth in the Greenways Plan. Since 1994, the Department has acquired over 8700 acres of land, representing 48.8% of the total acreage goal for State conservation from the Plan.

FUTURE OF CONSERVATION

Land conservation efforts are expected to remain strong throughout the next fiscal year. The Department’s State Land Acquisition Program currently has 1250 acres under contract for purchase and another 2000 acres in potential acquisitions. The Department has also received 43 applications for its Open Space Matching Grants Program and will award approximately \$4 million towards these open space projects later this calendar year. The Nature Conservancy, local land trusts and municipalities will continue their great efforts to protect open space and conservation areas in the State; although funding for land conservation will be more competitive. A new effort to gain support for open space bond funds is likely to begin over this next year since the State’s existing bond authority is nearing an end.

This report was prepared by Lisa Primiano, Supervisor, Land Conservation Program, Division of Planning and Development, under the direction of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Land Acquisition Committee.

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