

Land Conservation in Rhode Island

Fiscal Year 2003



Aker Property, Exeter/West Greenwich

Department of Environmental Management
Frederick J. Vincent, Acting Director
December 8, 2003

Land Acquisition & Conservation Program

Fiscal Year 2003 Report

INTRODUCTION

Fiscal Year 2003 marks another successful year in land protection in the State of Rhode Island. Statewide, conservation interests preserved 3,938 acres of land in FY03.

The State, working through its Land Acquisition Program, Local Grants Program, and the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission protected 1844 acres in twenty-five separate projects. Of that number, the Agricultural Program protected over 200 acres of important active farmland through the purchase of development rights.

The State's municipal and private Land Trusts participated in the preservation of 1304 acres of land. The Nature Conservancy, exclusive of their work with Federal, State and local projects, protected another 576 acres of land in FY03. These projects included significant acquisitions in the Queen's River watershed and acreage on Block Island. The US Fish and Wildlife Service added a total of 214 acres to its refuges at Ninigret, Block Island, and the Chafee Refuge at Pettasquamscutt.

Based upon new goals set when the Open Space 2000 Bond was promoted and approved, all conservation programs combined achieved protection levels at 31% over the stated goal of protecting approximately 3000 acres of land per year. See the following chart for a breakdown of acres acquired by group.

PROTECTED LANDS – FY2003

LOCAL LAND TRUSTS	1304 acres
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS	576 acres
RIDEM	1643 acres
FARMLAND (ALPC)	201 acres
US F&W SERVICE	214 acres
TOTAL ACREAGE	3938 acres

FUNDING and LEVERAGING

The State's Land Acquisition Program attempts to maximize its leveraging potential through combining funding of various programs for many of the acquisition projects. Our programs work together and with other local and federal programs to stretch each State bond dollar. In Fiscal Year 2003, \$11.4 million in land value was preserved. Of this amount, approximately \$1 million was donated land value from private property owners. Of the remaining \$10.4 million, only \$4.5 million was from State bonds for State land acquisition, farmland preservation, or local matching grants. Federal funds totaled \$866,500 and the remaining \$4.9 million came from other sources including The Nature Conservancy through grants from the Doris Duke Foundation and The Champlin Foundations, and municipal assistance. Overall, the State's bond dollars were matched at 2.5 other dollars for every 1 State dollar. This matching is up from last year's 1:1 ratio.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are the most critical element to the State's success in protecting lands throughout the past decade. Due to numerous fiscal constraints, this reliance on partnership and multiple funding sources will remain strong in the coming years. It will be increasingly important for all funding partners to be able to contribute and participate to each project at some level.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS – FISCAL YEAR 2003

Kilmartin Property - Located in the Town of Gloucester, this 227 acres parcel was combined with another 130 acres of Kilmartin land to provide a connection between the State's Durfee Hill Mgt. Area and the Gloucester Land Trust's Sprague Farm. All told, approximately 2700 acres of contiguous land is now preserved in this corridor. The project was funded primarily with funds from The Nature Conservancy and the State Open Space Bond Program, DEM Fish and Wildlife, and the Gloucester Land Trust, whose funds went towards the 130 acres that has been added to Sprague Farm.



Knight Farm Property - The Knight property contains over 250 acres of farmland and forested lands. The property is located in Cranston along the City's Historic Farm loop and was protected through the State's Agricultural Land Preservation Program and the Local Matching Grants Program. The City of Cranston owns the property and it is managed by the West Bay Land Trust.



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 11,045 acres of land, representing 55% of the total acreage goal for State conservation from the Plan.

FUTURE OF CONSERVATION

The future of land conservation in Rhode Island will be largely dependent on the ability of the State's conservation groups to maintain support in light of the economic climate and competing needs. There is a critical need to secure major important lands for preservation before they are lost to fragmentation due to development. Fewer large parcels remain and the competition for funding is very strong. Land acquisition needs to be complemented with programs to encourage conservation development approaches to land subdivision. In addition, a strong Brownfields Program can help by creating and enhancing opportunities to focus development and redevelopment in areas with the necessary infrastructure and capacity to support high density development.

A new bond issue has been proposed for FY 2004 to allow current land acquisition and conservation programs to continue to operate at existing capacity. The passage of a significant bond issue will play a key role in the continued success of the State conservation program.



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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