



DEM Roundtable News

January 11, 2001 Update

WETLANDS TASKFORCE RESULTS

DEM's Wetlands Program has undergone several program evaluations including: an extensive review by a Governor's Advisory Committee on Wetlands, an audit by the consulting firm of KPMG and a stakeholder review conducted by DEM. DEM formed a Wetlands Task Force last year at this time to investigate specific administrative, policy, regulatory and statutory changes that can be used to further streamline program operations, increase customer satisfaction and meet the mandates of the law. As a result of these meetings, DEM is moving forward with the following changes to the program:

Regulatory Changes

- ◆ Implementation of the new DEM-CRMC jurisdictional boundary.
- ◆ Fee reductions for water quality improvement projects, wildlife habitat projects, and land reuse/ redevelopment projects.
- ◆ A simpler, clearer fee schedule intended to reduce calculation errors, improve application quality and speed staff review time.
- ◆ Clarification of application requirements, review criteria and approval process.
- ◆ Facilitation of pre-application meetings with applicants.
- ◆ Explanation of the significance of areas bordering wetlands in scientific terms.
- Improved clarity and predictability of the review process by the development of new tiers of applications.

Wetlands Policy Changes

- ◆ Implementation of a coordinated review process for ISDS applications for single-family residences adjacent to wetlands.
- ◆ Development of a policy to facilitate water quality and wildlife habitat improvement projects.
- ◆ Development of new policies for pre-application and field meetings with the Wetlands Program.
- ◆ Development of a Memorandum of Agreement between DEM and CRMC that clarifies the responsibilities of the two agencies regarding freshwater wetlands in the vicinity of the coast.

Administrative and Outreach

A common theme of the Wetlands Task Force was that DEM needed to make the process understandable to the public and the consulting community. Simplification of the rules and conducting outreach activities is critical in having the regulated community understand and increase compliance with the regulations. DEM will significantly expand its outreach effort with the goal of improving application quality and minimizing review time. The Office of Water Resources will develop new guidance materials and conduct workshops for consultants, applicants and municipalities.

The full report can be viewed at the Ombudsman Homepage located at:

www.state.ri.us/dem/wettask/index.htm

For additional information about the report, contact [Tom Getz](#) at 222-4700 X 2417.

WASTE STREAMLINING TASK FORCE

We want to hear from you!

DEM will begin to evaluate its Waste Management Program to look for opportunities to streamline the existing environmental review process. As with the Wetlands and ISDS Task Forces this new initiative will give stakeholders an opportunity to help create change and to understand the rationale for the existing system. If you, or anyone you know is interested in working on this Task Force, please contact [Tom Getz](#) at 222-4700 X2417. The kick-off meeting is February 6, 2001, Room 450, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, 3:30-5:00 PM.

PERMIT STREAMLINING – An opportunity to have input into the system design

DEM is starting to implement a permit streamlining/tracking system this winter. This system, provided under contract by Kyran Research Associates, Inc., will speed up the permitting process and allow for better tracking of projects that require multiple permits. When fully implemented the system will allow applicants to search for information about their pending permits. In addition, selected information about application status, environmental data and mapping information will be available without restriction over the Internet.

You are invited see the system as it currently operates and to have your input on the future design of our web-based information system. A demonstration of the system will take place on March 6 from 3:30 to 5:00PM in Room 300 of the Foundry Building. If you have any questions, please call Pam Annarumo at 222-4700 x7204.

DEM WORK PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

DEM has developed a report that summarizes the status of its efforts to meet the goals and objectives in its work plans. The report also covers major changes and initiatives for FY 2001. (Posted at www.state.ri.us/dem/plans/wpupdate.pdf).

• Open Space Preservation

DEM, assisted by a variety of public and private partners, preserved 1,427 acres in the year 2000. This represents an increase from the prior year of

65%. The year also was marked by the passage of a new \$34 Million Open Space bond issue which will allow the program to continue and expand to keep pace with the goal of acquiring and protecting 29,000 acres by 2010.

Additional information concerning the land acquisition programs of DEM can be viewed on our website located at:

www.state.ri.us/dem/org/plan&dev/landacq/index.htm

• Fisheries

Despite success in rebuilding the stocks of striped bass and weak fish and some others, further work is necessary to rebuild lobsters, winter flounder and others in accordance with the 1996 federal Sustainable Fisheries Act requirements. This Act mandates rebuilding stocks by 2006. The Department released 300,000 lobsters into the Bay this summer, well in advance of the December 31st deadline, as part of its program to replenish 1.5 million lobsters over 5 years with funds from the North Cape Oil spill.

DEM is working with the legislature, commercial fishing industry, and environmental groups to address commercial fisheries issues - with particular focus on restructuring the State's commercial fishing license system - in a process facilitated by the new URI Coastal Institute.

• Restoring Habitat and Water Quality

DEM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Coastal Resources Management Council, formalizing the collaborative coastal habitat restoration program. Water quality restoration strategies for the Runnins, Barrington, and Hunt Rivers, and Fry and Scabbletown Brooks were completed. Others in development and expected to be completed this year include: Narrow River, Gilbert Stuart Brook, Palmer River; Sakonnet River/Island Park Cove; Kickemuit Reservoir, Saugatucket River and Pond; Mitchell and Rocky Brooks; Ninigret and Green Hill Ponds.

To help restore freshwater wetlands, DEM collaborated with URI to identify and prioritize wetland restoration opportunities. The procedures were tested in a 3.5 by 3.5-mile area in the Woonasquatucket River watershed and are now

being applied to the entire watershed. Once prioritized, restoration funding will be sought from the newly formed Rhode Island Corporate Wetlands Restoration Project.

• **Permit Backlog Reductions**

DEM achieved significant reductions in permitting, processing and complaint response backlogs. The most significant were in the RIPDES program that regulates wastewater treatment plant operations. The backlog of major RIPDES permits declined from 19 in December of 1999 to 9 in September 2000. The Department has also nearly eliminated the 350 case backlog in wetland complaints by reassigning staff and filling a vacancy.

ARSENIC POLICY - STATUS UPDATE

The DEM arsenic policy establishes an approach for determining soil remedial objectives for arsenic at sites regulated by DEM. The policy is being adopted to alleviate difficulties encountered at sites where the concentrations of arsenic exceed existing Residential or Industrial / Commercial Direct Exposure Criteria. It is DEM's intent to and to facilitate acceptable and timely remediation of contaminated sites.

The Arsenic Policy is currently in a six-month review period, as presented to the regulatory community on 21 November 2000. During this time the Department will continue to accept comments on the Policy. At the conclusion of this six-month period, the Department intends to re-evaluate the policy.

Comments on the policy have been received, and responses to comments have been distributed. The Office of Waste Management is also posting responses to comments on the DEM Web Page: www.state.ri.us/dem/regs/waste/aspolicy.pdf

For further questions concerning the Policy, contact Gary Waldeck at 222-2797 X 7107 or gwaldeck@dem.state.ri.us.

SEPTIC SYSTEM HANDBOOK

DEM has published the *Septic System Checkup*, an inclusive guide to inspecting and maintaining septic systems. The handbook, available to the public, is written for both lay people and professionals in the field.

About 150,000 Rhode Island households, or one-third of the state's population, use some form of septic system for sewage disposal. Those systems discharge some seven billion gallons of wastewater into the ground each year. When used properly, septic systems function very well. If mismanaged or ignored, they can cause a number of serious problems such as disease or water pollution. Inspection and maintenance are key to ensuring properly function systems.

Septic System Checkup is an easy-to-understand, detailed protocol for inspection and maintenance, useful to homeowners and buyers, as well as to professionals who maintain septic systems. The handbook provides newly developed standards for septic system inspection and maintenance. It describes two types of inspection: a maintenance inspection to determine the need for pumping and minor repairs, and a functional inspection for use during property transfers. It includes detailed instructions for locating septic system components, diagnosing in-home plumbing problems, flow testing and dye tracing, and scheduling inspections.

The handbook was developed in conjunction with DEM's Septic System Maintenance Policy Forum. The policy forum is a roundtable group comprising approximately 100 representatives from federal state and local government, private associations, businesses and private citizens who work for the efficient use of septic systems.

The handbook is available free on-line at www.state.ri.us/dem/regs/water/isdsbook.pdf at no charge. Copies of *Septic System Checkup* may be purchased for \$10 with inspection report forms or \$7 for the manual without forms from DEM's Office of Technical and Customer Assistance at 222-6822. For additional information contact [Jim Riordan](#) at 222-4700 ext. 4421.

ENFORCEMENT GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

The Department has developed new Guidelines for Administrative Inspections available on the web at: www.state.ri.us/dem/insguide.pdf. Monthly enforcement and settlement summaries are also posted at: www.state.ri.us/dem/enforce.htm.

WETLANDS MAPPING SURVEY

DEM is trying to gage how useful people find existing wetland maps and how maps could be improved to better meet users goals. To do this a survey was developed and mailed in November to over 400 municipal officials, builders, consultants, watershed stakeholders, professional boards, agency staff, etc. Nick Miller, Research Associate at URI's Department of Natural Resources Science, currently is busy tabulating the results. Thanks to Gary Ezovski, co-chair of the Business Roundtable for assisting DEM by sending an electronic version of the survey to Roundtable members. Thanks also to all those who participated. DEM will provide a summary of the results to the Business Roundtable. For more information contact Carol Murphy, Office of Water Resources cmurphy@dem.state.ri.us.

DAM SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE TASK FORCE UPDATE

The Governor's Dam Safety and Maintenance Task Force established last May, has wrapped up its bi-monthly meetings and will present its final report to the Governor later this month. The Task Force, comprising dam owners, representatives of dam associations, and government officials, has developed specific regulatory, statutory, and administrative recommendations to ensure that the 510 dams across the state are effectively maintained. DEM Director Jan Reitsma and Major General Reginald Centracchio, Director of the RI Emergency Management Agency, have served as the co-chairs.

The Task Force's recommendations address a wide range of important issues such as public safety, financial constraints of dam owners and emergency planning. Recommendations to emerge from the task force include: the creation of a grant/loan program to provide financial assistance to dam owners for repairs, the development of emergency action plans for all significant and high hazard

dams, and a comprehensive dam registration and inspection program.

STORMWATER PHASE II UPDATE

Polluted storm water runoff can enter municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) and ultimately be discharged into local rivers and streams without treatment. DEM is in the process of developing a Storm Water Phase II Rule that establishes a MS4 storm water management program. The goal of the Phase II program is to preserve, protect and improve water resources from polluted storm water runoff through the development of successful storm water management programs.

The Storm Water Phase II Rule extends the coverage of the NPDES Storm Water Program to include "small" MS4s that are not already covered under the NPDES Phase I Regulations. Of the thirty-nine municipalities in Rhode Island, twenty-nine municipalities are automatically designated; however, ten of these designated municipalities may be eligible for waivers. DEM must develop and apply criteria for the ten remaining municipalities by December 8, 2002. Also included under the Phase II Rule are Federal, State, and Quasi-State facilities including those owned by the Department of Transportation.

To date, the RIPDES Program has mailed outreach to greater than 300 interested parties (municipal officials, environmental organizations, watershed groups, and other various stakeholders), developed a DEM RIPDES Phase II Storm Water website, surveyed municipal officials, and established a Phase II Storm Water Workgroup. The objectives of the workgroup are to identify and address issues regarding development of the RIPDES Phase II Regulations. It is anticipated that the draft regulations will be available for public review the week of February 5, 2000. A public meeting and formal hearing will be scheduled during the public comment period.