



DEM Environmental Roundtable Newsletter

May 8, 2002

RI Drought Management Plan

Climate models predict increased occurrences of weather extremes in the future. Although average precipitation levels may not change significantly in New England because of global warming, Rhode Island can anticipate more frequent periods of drought. The state needs to take steps to reduce vulnerability to periods of reduced precipitation. One means is by increased efficiency of water use and allocating high quality water first to uses that require that quality. Rhode Island should have in place programs that insure efficient use by all types of water consumers. Each category of water consumer requires programs tailored to each situation.

The Rhode Island Drought Management Plan is an element of the State Guide Plan and is intended to coordinate the efforts of the various state, federal and local entities with responsibilities relevant to drought management. These include duties for gathering data, responding to drought conditions and mitigating the effects of drought. The intent is to anticipate drought conditions, respond early and coordinate resources to effectively manage water resources during drought.

The plan vests state responsibility for coordination of its drought management process in the Water Resources Board and plan implementation in the Drought Management Steering Committee. Members of the Steering Committee include federal and state agencies as well as local water suppliers. The Water Resources Board is responsible for maintaining a current contact list, monitoring conditions and convening the Steering Committee when necessary.

The plan outlines five levels of drought, consistent with the National Weather Service's Watch/Warning system and those used by neighboring Massachusetts. Each level requires increased action and coordination of the Steering Committee member agencies.

The Steering Committee assigns drought levels based on hydrological indices such as precipitation, groundwater and stream flow and the Palmer Drought Index, as well as local supply indices such as static groundwater levels and reservoir levels. The Normal, Advisory and Watch levels are issued statewide. The Warning and Emergency levels are issued on a regional basis and consider local conditions, source of supply and local capacity issues.

Additional information about the drought management plan can be viewed at the following website:

<http://webster.wrb.state.ri.us/droughtplanshrt.pdf>

(This article was condensed from the RI Drought Management Plan.)

2002 Alfred Hawkes Award Recipient

For the tenth consecutive year, DEM is honored to acknowledge outstanding leadership and service in the preservation and enhancement of Rhode Island's Environment. The 2002 Alfred Hawkes Award is being presented to Dr. Harold Ward. Over the years, Dr. Ward has focussed attention and resources to many environmental issues including lead poisoning and asthma rated in the inner city, air pollution, blighted land development, climate change and watershed planning.



Dr. Ward will be presented with the award at a luncheon that will be held at the Radisson Airport Hotel at 2081 Post Road, Warwick on Wednesday, May 22, 2002 at 12 noon. If you are interested in attending this function, please contact Rayna Santoro at 222-6677 extension 2409 before May 16.

Wetlands Open House

By: Susan Ely

In honor of American Wetlands Month, the DEM Wetlands Program will be hosting an Open House for the public on May 14th from 4-8 p.m. in the 3rd floor Cafeteria. The objective is to provide the opportunity for people to 'get to know' the program and staff.



Stations will be set up to help attendees learn about wetlands, wetland rules, the permit process, and to check the status of both wetlands and ISDS applications. A new presentation on the functions and values of Rhode Island's wetlands, with many terrific photographs, will be featured. The Open House will also target teachers and have a display of sample wetland-related curriculum and watershed models.

Wetland staff from DEM and CRMC will be present to answer questions, help people locate their houses on aerial photographs, and explain the worth of wetlands. The ISDS and Watersheds programs will also have tables and the DEM Internet map server will be demonstrated.

The first open house, which was held in May of 2000 and targeted the same groups had an attendance of nearly 200 people. The same number is expected to attend this year.

For more information on the open house, click <http://www.state.ri.us/dem/wetldday.htm>, or you can contact Susan Ely at 222- 4700 ext. 7205 or Leanne DeCosta at ext. 7218. Hope to see you there.

Water Quality Report

By: Michelle Freestone

DEM's 2002 water quality assessment report titled "*State of the State's Waters*" will be made available for release in early May. The report, required on a biennial basis by the federal Clean Water Act, contains a significant amount of informative data about the water quality in Rhode Island and the programs at DEM that manage and protect it.



The report reflects available water quality data from numerous sources, including state and federal agencies, universities, environmental organizations and citizen volunteers. The data is used in establishing and reviewing the state's water quality standards to measure progress toward achieving state and federal water quality goals, and to supply information for use in development of permit limits for wastewater discharges and water quality restoration plans. The report reviews and assesses a total of 99% of the 156.29 square miles of estuarine waters, 79% of the 20,917 lake acres, and 36% of the 1,498 river miles in the state.

The 2002 assessment information reveals that:

- 66% of river miles, 78% of lake-acres and 69% of estuarine waters assessed support all designated uses.
- Approximately 80% of waters designated for shellfishing are open.
- Bacterial contamination continues to be among the leading cause of impairments in all waterbody types.
- Excess nutrients and low dissolved oxygen are among the leading causes of impairments in lakes and estuarine waters.

The report documents the progress made in controlling point sources of pollution such as

that coming from wastewater treatment plants. However, it clearly shows that the state faces challenges in abating water quality pollution from diffuse non-point sources such as stormwater runoff. DEM has identified 129 lakes, river segments and coastal waters that fail to meet water quality standards and that will be targeted for restoration activities.

For additional information regarding the content of this report, contact Connie Carey at ccarey@dem.state.ri.us or at 222-3961. The report will also be available on the DEM website at www.state.ri.us/dem and at various libraries around the state.

Rare Native Plants Report

DEM's Natural Heritage Program updated its rare native plants list that identifies those members of the native flora which are the rarest in Rhode Island and most in need of conservation.



This program is tracking all plant taxa listed through comprehensive mapping and computerized databases. Information regarding the location and status of rare elements, including plants, animals and natural communities, is used to establish priorities for land preservation and provide guidance within the environmental review process.

The Natural Heritage Program began to gather information in 1978 from many sources, particularly herbaria, published reports, and botanical field notes to refine the Rhode Island state list. The author, along with several other professional and amateur botanists, has also spent considerable time verifying the locations and identities of rare plants throughout the state. This combined effort has made the Natural Heritage Program's database the largest repository of rare plant information in Rhode Island.

The rare plant list is amended annually to reflect the most up-to-date knowledge of plant distribution, status, and taxonomy. Although the number of plants on the rare list has remained relatively constant, certain species have been deleted when found to be more common or less vulnerable to extinction than originally thought, while others have been added following similar status assessment, or when newly discovered in Rhode Island. The January 2002 edition of the *Rare Native Plants of Rhode Island* includes 309 plants, or approximately 24% of the state's native flora.

For more information concerning this report, contact Richard W. Enser at (401) 222-2776, extension 4308. This report can also be located on the DEM Website in Publications / Natural Heritage Program.

DEM Offers On-line Boating Registration

As of May 3, 2002, Rhode Island's 40,000 boaters will be able to renew their boat registrations online through RI.gov. It is the first public service offered by RI.gov, the state's centralized web portal, and one of the first government sites nationally to offer boat registration renewal services. This is the first step toward offering a number of online services from DEM, which in the future will allow customers to apply for and check the status of permit applications on-line. Eventually the portal will be used to apply for hunting and fishing licenses, beach passes and campground reservations.



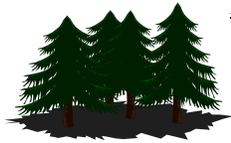
Boat owners interested in renewing their registrations online can visit www.RI.gov, click on the renewal service and, with a credit card, complete the renewal process from beginning to end. A printable temporary registration can be used until the new registration is mailed within 10 days of the online transaction. There is a

graduated fee scale for the transaction, ranging from \$1 to \$12 depending on boat size and length of renewal, which is used to fund RI.gov.

RI.gov is a collaborative effort of the state Department of Administration and New England Interactive (NEI) to create an Internet gateway for business and individuals to obtain government-related information as well as to interact with Rhode Island government electronically. The state last year signed a long-term, zero-dollar contract with NEI to provide the e-Government services. Funding comes solely from transaction and/or subscription fees associated with the services.

DEM Asset Management Plan

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Forestry Asset Management Plan evaluates outdoor recreational facilities and forests managed by the Division of Forest Environment which are located in the 23 state management areas. The Division of Forest Environment's ability to manage forests and outdoor recreational areas is hindered by a lack of funding for repair or replacement of buildings, equipment, roads, trails and vehicles exacerbated by chronic shortages of full and part-time staff. Funding levels between Fiscal Years (FY) 1994 and 2001 for asset management, state staff, capital development and operations failed to keep pace with inflation. The Division has an estimated backlog of \$4.58 million in high-priority repairs, replacements and renovations for 44 percent or 105 of its assets.



This plan recommends that the Department develop additional sources of funding to supplement tax dollars by investing revenue from timber sales in asset repair, replacement, renovations and enhancement, and by creating incentives for managers to increase revenues generated at outdoor recreational facilities.

Additionally, the plan recommends options to enhance asset management for the Division of Forest Environment and other Bureau of Natural Resources Divisions within the Department. Options include pay-as-you-go replacement of assets (routine replacement of motor vehicles, maintenance and communications equipment etc.), and streamlining the asset management processes.

This report will be available on May 8 and will be posted on the DEM website. For more information concerning this report, contact Jamie Tosches at 222-3434 extension 4406 or jtosches@dem.state.ri.us.

Rhode Island Beach Openings Schedule

Well it's that time of year again, the days are getting longer and the water temperature is slowly rising and people's thoughts are running to the ocean. DEM beaches are opening in May according to the following schedule:



- ◆ Scarborough North - May 1st - weekends only, weather permitting
 - ◆ Roger Wheeler - May 1st - weekends only, weather permitting
- Beginning Memorial Day Weekend, all our beaches will be open 7 days a week.

Visit the DEM website located at: <http://www.riparks.com> for additional information concerning recreational opportunities in the Rhode Island state parks and beaches.