



# DEM Environmental Roundtable Newsletter

## July 2001

### The Partnership for Narragansett Bay Monitoring Workshop

The Partnership for Narragansett Bay (PNB) sponsored a Monitoring Workshop on June 21, 2001, held at URI's Coastal Institute. The Partnership for Narragansett Bay is a diverse bay-stakeholders' organization formed under the auspices of the URI Coastal Institute. It serves as a continuing forum to build consensus regarding the future of Narragansett Bay and its watershed, is grounded in good science, and is shaped by the widest possible public input.

Narragansett Bay has often been called one of the most studied estuaries in the United States. However, those who study and work on the Bay know that much of the investigative work has been done on a localized, one-time or short series basis. This has given us a set of "snapshots" of different aspects of the Bay.

The Monitoring Workshop had four purposes:

- (1) Inventory current and past environmental monitoring programs in Rhode Island and make this program information accessible to the public via a website database;
- (2) Identify strengths and gaps in the ability of these monitoring programs to track and assess ecosystem conditions;
- (3) Identify steps that can be taken to increase coordination and effectiveness of monitoring programs; and
- (4) Report the workshop results to all interested parties.

In conjunction with the workshop, a Monitoring Database has been created with information on program purpose, methods, sampling cycles, location of stations, variables measured, and program contacts. Check out the [workshop website](#) (for additional workshop information and to access the newly compiled Monitoring Database).

Building on the results of the Monitoring Workshop, the PNB is planning an Environmental Indicators Workshop tentatively scheduled for late September. Those who registered for the Monitoring Workshop will receive workshop information later this summer and a notice will also be posted on the PNB page on the [Coastal Institute's Website](#). This workshop will focus on the development and use of environmental indicators for the Bay and watershed and will feature guest speakers from organizations that are successfully using indicator indices to report on ecosystem status.

### Pollution Prevention

DEM's Office of Technical & Customer Assistance (OTCA) will celebrate Pollution Prevention Week during the week of September 17-23. Pollution Prevention, or P2, puts into practice the common sense idea that the best way to manage waste is to avoid generating it in the first place. This year's P2 week theme, which will also be commemorated in the other New England states, as well as in New York, New Jersey, and EPA Regions I and II, is "*Shop for a Better Environment.*" This year's theme encourages the general public to purchase products that cause minimal harm to the environment. Examples would include:

- Buying locally grown and/or produced products, which can have a significant impact on reducing the air quality impacts of long distance shipping;
- Buying available alternatives for products that contain toxic metals, such as low or no mercury fever thermometers;
- Buying alternative, low impact cleaning products, paints, and other commonly sold items;
- Buying products such as paper, plastic, and metal products, that have a recycled content;
- Reading product labels to understand the content of the purchases made and taking environmental impacts into consideration when making purchasing decisions.

**OTCA** is currently planning activities to help highlight the message of this year's P2 Week. These activities include hosting the Governor's Awards for Pollution Prevention to honor businesses that have put P2 into practice in their everyday business operations, and holding a workshop to emphasize successful P2 activities undertaken in conjunction with URI's Center for Pollution Prevention and DEM's program.

For more information on DEM's Pollution Prevention Program, call [Rich Enander](#) at the DEM's Office of Technical and Customer Assistance at 401-222-6822, or visit the [Pollution Prevention Program web site](#) for additional information.

## Stormwater Phase II

Polluted storm water runoff can enter municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) and ultimately be discharged into local rivers and streams without treatment. DEM has published a draft 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 draft regulations affect all of the 39 cities and towns. Thirty-one municipalities have storm sewers in urban areas and will be required to obtain permits for their storm water discharge by March 10, 2003. To obtain a permit, the municipality must develop a local storm water management program. Seven of the 31 are eligible for a waiver from this requirement if the municipality can demonstrate that storm water discharges do not impair the receiving waters. The remaining eight municipalities with storm sewers in rural areas must initiate measures that address storm water discharges and prevent impairments to sensitive water bodies to avoid future permit requirements.

The draft regulations allow municipalities flexibility to develop cost-effective local programs for their municipal storm sewer systems that take a "best management practices" approach and address local water quality issues. The programs must include public education and outreach, public

involvement and participation, illicit discharge detection and elimination, construction site storm water runoff control, post-construction storm water management, and pollution prevention or "good housekeeping" for municipal operations.

**DEM** must develop and apply criteria for the ten remaining municipalities by December 8, 2002. Also included under the Phase II Rules are federal, state, and quasi-state facilities including those owned by the Rhode Island Dept. of Transportation.

To date, the RIPDES Program has mailed outreach material to more than 300 interested parties (municipal officials, environmental organizations, watershed groups, and other 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. The workgroup met on September 5, 2000, September 12, 2000 and April 4<sup>th</sup> 2001.

The public workshop will be held on Wednesday, July 25 at 6 PM, in Room 390, at DEM's Headquarters, 235 Promenade Street, Providence. The public hearing will be held on Tuesday, August 14 at 6 PM, at the same location.

The target effective date for the Regulations is the first week in September 2001

Visit DEM's website for additional information regarding the [RIPDES Phase II Program](#).

## Nonpoint Source Grant Proposals

Up to \$500,000 is available for grants to communities, state and regional government agencies, and non-profit groups to support water quality restoration. The grants, which are financed primarily through federal Clean Water Act funds, must be used for water quality restoration projects or implementation of on-site wastewater management programs that prevent, control, or abate water pollution caused by nonpoint sources.

Nonpoint source pollution is a significant cause of water quality impairment in Rhode

Island. Diffuse in nature, it comes from a number of sources such as failed septic systems, runoff from lawns, farms, and paved surfaces, unconfined stormwater, and erosion from unprotected construction sites.

**DEM** is accepting final proposals until August 3, with projects to be selected in late fall. Eligible activities for water quality restoration actions primarily include the design and construction of best management practices that address water quality impairments or restore habitats for waters that have been degraded by nonpoint source pollution. Water quality restoration actions may include, but are not limited to, projects that address stormwater, wastewater management, wetland loss, and degradation of aquatic species habitat. Grants may range from \$10,000 to \$200,000, depending on the project. Visit DEM's website for a [Request for Proposal Fact Sheet and detailed guidance](#) on the grant process. For additional information about the workshops or the grant process, contact [Jim Riordan](#), nonpoint source program coordinator at 222-4700 extension 4421.

### **West Nile /EEE Status Update**

This year to date, no mosquitoes have tested positive for West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Two birds have previously tested positive for West Nile Virus. DEM expects that birds infected with West Nile Virus will be found throughout the mosquito season. While infected birds appear to be poor indicators of disease risk to humans, their sensitivity to West Nile Virus may be useful in tracking the spread of the disease in the environment. Wildlife rehabilitators, veterinarians, animal control officers and others are being asked to report suspect target species, i.e. crows, bluejays and hawks, to DEM's bird hotline at 788-3698. Target species that are sick with neurological symptoms such as staggering or tilted head, or those that have been dead less than 48 hours and have no obvious signs of injury will be considered for testing.

Throughout the mosquito season, residents are encouraged to increase personal protection, such as eliminating mosquito breeding grounds and avoiding mosquito bites. Personal protection is the first line of defense against mosquitoes that can carry diseases such as West Nile Virus and EEE

and is by far the most effective way of avoiding infection.

This year's mosquito response protocol is based on lessons learned last year and new findings issued by the Centers for Disease Control. Based on a growing recognition that infected birds appear to be poor indicators of disease risk to humans, spraying this year will be recommended only when a team of mosquito-control experts determines that the public is at substantial risk of being bitten by infected mosquitoes.

For information on protection measures, call DEM's recorded Mosquito Information Line at 222-2793 or the Department of Health's Family Health Information Line at 1-800-942-7474. Visit the DEM website for additional information concerning [mosquitoes, EEE or West Nile Virus](#).

### **Permit Streamlining Task Force Updates**

The DEM ISDS and Waste Site Remediation Task Forces are starting to wind down. It is expected that final reports on task force activities will be completed in the fall.

### **Waste Site Remediation Task Force**

The Waste Site Remediation Task Force has been meeting monthly on the fourth Thursday of the month since February. The major issues that this group has identified for evaluation included the arsenic policy, the Brownfields program and development of a streamlined process to evaluate sites that pose a marginal risk to human health and the environment.

### **Marginal Risk Policy**

The working group has developed a draft policy that streamlines the review process for site remediation projects that pose marginal risk to human health and the environment. Resources that are currently used to review these "marginal risk sites" can be freed up to review projects that have a significant environmental impact. In addition, DEM staff often spends considerable time and effort reviewing incomplete submissions that do not provide the information needed by DEM to make

decisions. Implementation of this policy will reduce the review time, improve the quality of applications, and clarify the requirements for “marginal risk sites.”

**DEM** is establishing review time guidelines for “marginal risk sites.” The proposed policy applies to sites located in a GB and in some limited cases, GA/GAA groundwater aquifers. It encourages the removal of waste material and sets information requirements for the Site Investigation Report and presumptive remedies that could be used at the site. Applications that adequately address these requirements will be reviewed by DEM within 42 calendar days. However, this guideline for DEM review factors in a public notice requirement. If there is substantial public comment on the proposal, DEM may not be able to meet this review time guideline.

Review guidelines are predicated on DEM receiving complete submissions that are of sufficient quality to review. If these submissions do not address all the elements of the policy, DEM will reject the submission as a “marginal risk site” and evaluate it in the normal process where there are no firm time review guidelines or presumptive remedies.

For more information concerning this draft policy, contact [Gary Waldeck](mailto:gary.waldeck@state.ri.us) at 222-2797, ext. 7107.

## **Arsenic Policy**

The Waste Site Remediation Permit Streamlining Task Force met on May 24, and the Department provided feedback on the implementation of an Interim Arsenic Policy. During that six-month interim period, the Department, under the policy, reviewed 12 sites. All 12 sites had site specific background concentrations between 3 and 7 PPM and were approved.

**DEM** is proposing to change the industrial/ commercial direct exposure criteria to 7 PPM. The current interim policy for residential properties, i.e. 1.7 PPM, would remain the same. In addition, industrial/ commercial properties that are cleaned up to the 1.7 PPM level would not require an Environmental Land Usage Restriction on the property limiting the use of the property to industrial/ commercial.

**DEM** is modifying the current Interim Arsenic Policy and will be forwarding it to interested members of the Site Remediation Waste Task Force. Based on the comments received, DEM may convene a special meeting to discuss this issue. The Department welcomes any feedback on this approach.

Contact [Gary Waldeck](mailto:gary.waldeck@state.ri.us) at 222-2797, extension 7107 with any questions or comments concerning this policy.

For further information concerning the [Waste Site Remediation Task Force](#), visit the [DEM Website](#).

## **ISDS Task Force**

The ISDS Regulatory Working Group has been meeting on an average of twice a week, for the last nine months, reviewing the existing ISDS program and its regulations.

This effort has resulted in a series of recommendations that will increase the effectiveness of the regulations by providing a new method of sizing a system based on the ability of the soil to treat wastewater. This method replaces the percolation test that has been used for years. Other major changes include denitrification requirements, development of a cesspool replacement policy, increased coordination between the Wetlands and ISDS programs on permitting issues, and numerous technical changes that relate to leachfield and tank design standards. Contact [Ernie Panciera](mailto:ernie.pancier@state.ri.us) at 222-2234 ext. 7603 for additional information, or check out the [DEM website](#).

The Outreach and Training Working Group recommended that DEM develop an outreach plan that focuses on the development and distribution of information on proper inspection and maintenance procedures for conventional and more innovative systems. It was recommended that partnerships be formed with water districts, conservation commissions and municipalities to assist in this public outreach effort. For additional questions about this topic contact [Jim Riordan](mailto:jim.riordan@state.ri.us) at 222-3961 extension 4421. For additional information concerning this ISDS Task Force, visit the [DEM website](#).

## RI Forests Continue To Grow!

The U.S. Forest Service, in cooperation with DEM's Division of Forest Environment, conducts periodic evaluations of the condition of the state's forestland. A study just released examines the forest for the period 1985 through 1998. Remarkably, forests cover 59 percent, or 393,000 acres, of the state's land surface.

This forest is extremely important for protecting the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders as well as protecting the quality of Narragansett Bay. As development continues to encroach into the forest, the remaining forest becomes vital to protecting habitats, stabilizing soil, and providing recreational opportunity and forest products into the next century. Although forestland decreased by 4.6% during the study period, Rhode Island still remains the 9<sup>th</sup> most heavily forested state.

This study period also marks the first time since the earliest settlers that the amount of standing timber has exceeded 1 billion board feet. Tree volumes have increased from less than 200 million board feet at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to over 1.3 billion board feet today. The state's forests have grown a remarkable 400 million board feet since the last inventory in 1985. What this means is that Rhode Island's forest is growing older and trees are growing faster than they are being removed.

The study found that we are growing 2.4 times more wood than is being removed. While Rhode Island's primary timber industry remains small, the availability of resources has grown significantly. The challenge remains to protect as much of the existing forest as possible, balancing the need to utilize timber resources while protecting forest habitats. A worthy goal for the future is to continue to grow our resource base and maintain a standing volume of trees that exceed 1.5 billion board feet. For more information contact Tom Dupree at 647-3367.

## Land Conservation, Development and Property Taxes in Rhode Island

A recent study published by the Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc. examines the relationships between

permanent land conservation, land development and property taxes in Rhode Island, both in the short and long term. The report does not find that development causes high taxes nor that conservation results in lower taxes; however, it does find that development over time has not resulted in lower taxes, as has often been assumed.

**Key findings** in the study demonstrate that development is not necessarily the key to lower taxes. If that were true, it would follow that the towns with the most development would have the lowest taxes. This is not the case. The study found that:

- On average, the tax rate was lower in the Rhode Island towns with the fewest year-round residents and higher in the towns with the most residents.
- On average, tax rates are higher in the towns that have the most commercial and industrial property and lower in the towns that have the least.
- On average, the tax rate is higher in the towns that have the most jobs and lower in the towns that have the least.
- On average, the tax rate is lower in the towns that have the most open land and higher in the towns that have the least.

In the most recent decades, Rhode Island's traditional centers of population and economic activity have been declining while more rural areas have experienced much higher rates of growth. Economic wealth has been moving from urban to rural and suburban areas. Although the tax rates in the rural and suburban areas are still lower than tax rates in urban areas, taxes in the areas where the rate of population growth is the greatest are increasing more rapidly than they are in other parts of the state.

For more information or a copy of this publication contact: Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc., PO Box 760, Chepachet, RI 02814, or telephone 1-401-568-1610.