



Environmental Roundtable

October 4, 2000 Update

Environmental Bonds

Two important environmental bonds, one for open space and the other for water pollution control issues will be voted on in the November elections.

Voters will decide on a \$34 million Open Space proposal, (Question 1 on the ballot) aimed at protecting 35,000 acres of high value and priority open space. The bond will provide \$10.8 million for the state acquisition program, \$11.4 million for matching grants for local acquisition of parks and conservation land, and \$10.5 million for community recreational development. These funds will be leveraged with other funding sources that will result in a total of \$100 million for open space protection over the next five years.

Question 2, if approved, will provide funding to further progress on Clean Water. The \$60 million bond will subsidize zero percent loans to approved sewage treatment and drinking water facilities.

Anyone interested in information on open space issues should contact either of the co-chairs of the effort, Trudy Coxé at 847-1000 or Bob Gilbane at 456-5800. For questions on the water issues, contact David Preston at 453-3100 or Kurt Spalding at 272-3540.

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 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 Department of Transportation owned MS4s).

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. The workgroup has met on September 5, 2000 as well as September 12, 2000.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 3, 2000 from 10:00-12:00 in Room 300 at DEM and is open to the public. DEM will present to the workgroup portions of the draft Regulations for discussion. DEM anticipates that it will formally notify the public through a Press Release and present the complete draft Regulations in November 2000. The target effective date for the Regulations is December 8, 2000. For additional information regarding the RIPDES Phase II Program, visit the website at www.state.ri.us/dem/storm2/storm2.htm.

Summer 2000 Ozone Season

Ground-level ozone concentrations are generally highest during hot summer days when winds are from the southwest or west. During the beginning of the 2000 ozone season, weather conditions were conducive to ozone formation. Temperatures in May averaged about 2 degrees above normal. The May 7th to 9th period was particularly hot, and the 8-hour ozone standard was exceeded at the Narragansett monitoring site on the 8th and at the other two sites, W. Greenwich and E. Providence, on the 9th. During June, temperatures remained slightly above normal, and ozone readings above the 8-hour ozone standard were recorded on the 2nd, 9th, 10th and 27th. Readings were particularly high on June 10th; on that day the 8-hour average concentration was in the "very unhealthy" range, and the 1-hour average standard was also exceeded.

Exceedances of the 8-hour standard were again recorded on July 2nd and 3rd, but, after the 3rd, the weather pattern dramatically changed. Temperatures in July averaged almost 3 degrees below normal, and rainfall occurred on nineteen days that month. In August, average temperatures averaged 2 degrees below normal and precipitation occurred on at least 15 days. This weather pattern was largely due to an abnormal position of the jet stream, which caused a persistent easterly airflow off the ocean. Temperatures exceeded 90 degrees on two days in June, but did not reach 90 degrees during July and August. No elevated ozone levels were observed after July 3rd.

Although summer 2000 ozone data have not yet been validated, it is clear that the State continues to be in violation of the 8-hour ozone standard. Rhode Island has been classified as a "clean air" area for the 1-hour standard. However, if the one-hour standard is exceeded at the Narragansett site even once next year, the State will lose its "clean air" status, and will be considered to be fully in nonattainment of both the 1-hour and 8-hour ozone standards.

303(d) (Impaired Waters) Update

DEM is in the process of updating the list of impaired waters as defined by Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. This list also includes a priority ranking and schedule for development of water quality restoration plans. DEM noticed the availability of the draft 2000 303(d) List on August 7, 2000 and accepted public comments through September 6, 2000. A workshop was held on August 16, 2000 to discuss the draft List. DEM is in the process of responding to public comments. It is expected that the list will be finalized by September 30, 2000.

RIPDES Permit Issuance Improvements

EPA's July 2000 national report on the NPDES major permit backlog recognizes Rhode Island as the most improved of the 56 states and territories. The report notes that DEM has reduced the backlog from 56% to 36% and improved Rhode Island's ranking from 48th to 35th. Since the date of that report, two additional permits have been issued improving the current backlog to 32%.

The DEM has submitted a four-year major permit backlog reduction plan to EPA that has a goal of a 20% backlog by 12/31/00 and 0% by 12/31/01. EPA has established a national goal of a 10% backlog for all major permits by 12/31/01.

The RIPDES Program is currently developing a similar backlog reduction plan for minor discharge permits. The RIPDES Program's minor Permit backlog reduction plan will require that the DEM issue greater than 100 minor permits from 1/1/00 to 12/31/04. If you have any questions about the RIPDES program please contact Eric Beck at 222-3961 X7202.

Auto Body Certification Program

An Auto Body Certification Program is being designed by DEM to provide a simpler and more useful way to regulate auto body repair shops. This initiative is a first-ever regulatory and assistance partnership involving state environmental and health departments, a state university and a vocational training institution that results in an environmentally measurable protection program.

The program will cover training requirements, hazardous waste management, air quality concerns, occupational health and safety, and pollution prevention techniques in a question and answer format that will allow any auto body shop to determine its compliance status. A certification form, along with a guidance manual, that includes all of this information will be mailed to all auto body shops in the state. The Department will then use this data from the returned forms to measure compliance rates and to determine where best to focus its assistance and compliance efforts.

Air Toxics Study

The Department of Environmental Management has received a \$500,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency to measure air toxics in the Providence metropolitan area. The state has been monitoring the traditional air pollutants for many years and this effort will increase the state's understanding of the distribution of air toxics in the urban environment where people work and live. Under the new program, DEM's Office of Air Resources, in conjunction with the Department of Health's Air Pollution Laboratory, will operate air toxics monitors at five sites in the Providence metropolitan area for a year. The monitors will measure toxic metals as well as toxic gaseous pollutants, including formaldehyde, benzene, and chlorinated solvents.

EPA determined in awarding the grant that the state had the ability to design and operate an effective monitoring effort. DEM already collects an extensive annual inventory of air pollutants that will be used to identify

monitoring locations, and the Department of Health Air Pollution Laboratory has extensive experience and expertise in the analytical procedures required for this project.

Monitoring will begin at the end of this year. As results become available, they will be distributed to interested members of the community, and will be used to determine whether additional air pollution control measures are necessary. DEM is interested in community input to this project. Those interested should contact Barbara Morin in DEM's Office of Air Resources at 222-2808, extension 7012.

Greenhouse Gas Action Plan

DEM is working with a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Action Plan. For the most part, DEM's plan will use existing programs to reduce greenhouse gasses. One new effort, however, will be to incorporate energy conservation measures as a means to reduce these emissions.

This plan will focus on cost-effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These benefits can stimulate the state's economy by creating greater profits for business and reducing costs for residences. Decreasing greenhouse gas emissions has the benefit of reducing air pollution, minimizing the associated health risks and protecting coastal development in the event of sea level rise.

The stakeholder groups will identify and prioritize strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for incorporation into a Greenhouse Gas Action Plan. The first stakeholder meeting was held on September 27 at DEM headquarters in Providence. For more information, please call or email Josh Uebelherr at 222-3434, extension 7134 or juebelhe@dem.state.ri.us.

Fort Wetherill

Within the next month, construction will begin on a \$4,000,000.00 building and site rehabilitation project at Fort Wetherill State Park. Three abandoned military buildings on State Park land will be rehabilitated and turned into a Fish and Wildlife Aquatic Resource Center for DEM. Approximately fifteen F&W Marine Biologists and support personnel will be relocated to the new facility which will contain office and marine laboratory space. These employees are presently housed at four separate locations throughout the State. This will be the first time in the Division's history that the Marine personnel will be located in the same place and in professional office and laboratory space.

Three separate laboratories will be located at the center. The test tanks design and access to high quality seawater will allow for improved research and data collection. The protected wharf and harbor at Fort Wetherill will allow for docking of the Division's research vessel fleet. A small marine engine mechanics facility will also be included in the rehabilitated buildings.

The Project will also provide public restrooms and improved State Park facilities for fishing and other Park recreational activity and will be fully handicap accessible. The design allows for allow these improvements without altering the historical architecture and military significance of the site. Construction is expected to take eighteen months to complete.