

Environmental Roundtable Meeting Notes
October 9, 2003

Attendees:

S. Dormody, P. Beaudette, K. Canada, L. Urso, J. Hubbard, B. Schiller, M. Kerr, J. Sherman, C. McGreavy, D. Riley, J. Garceau, E. Marks, B. Mendoza, C. Obert, G. Lefebvre, T. Hamblett, J. Dubis, G. DiCenso

DEM

J. Reitsma, S. Majkut, S. Millar, J. Keller, E. Stone, B. Migliore, G. McAvoy, T. Gray, A. Good, F. Vincent, T. Getz

Director began the meeting by the welcoming the group and everyone introduced themselves.

I. Old Business

A. Legislative Discussion

Charles Obert provided the five top legislative priorities for the Environmental Council of Rhode Island (ECRI) for the next legislative session and included the following:

- Establishment of an environmental caucus in both the House and Senate. ECRI would like to have a lobbying day where the legislators could be available to discuss environmental concerns.
- Solid Waste- The landfill's capacity will soon be reached. There is need to revise the solid waste plan and this may require legislative input.
- DEM Budget – Concerns that training funding for the Integrated Pesticide Management (IPM) program was cut. ECRI expressed interest in IPM training in the schools. They also indicated an interest in being appointed to appropriate boards and commissions.
- Renewable Energy – Kate Canada mentioned that ECRI is pushing legislation that would require the state to provide 20% of its energy from renewable sources by the year 2020. She also would like to see the California efficiency standards adopted in Rhode Island.
- Separation of Powers

The director mentioned that he was pleased to see that the solid waste issue was an ECRI priority.

Joan Garceau inquired if funding was available for setting TMDL's. Bob Mendoza indicated EPA has not funded this program but is looking at other ways to achieve its goals. He mentioned watershed analysis often require the use of TMDL's to set pollution reduction priorities.

Geoff DiCenso, the recycling coordinator for Smithfield, N. Smithfield, Burrillville and Cumberland thought that increased solid waste enforcement would help the recycling rate. Businesses like bars should be required to recycle, since they throw out a large quantity of beverage containers. Eugenia Marks mentioned that apartments with more than six units should recycle. If required, some towns would help in the enforcement of this requirement.

The director said additional discussion of solid waste issues needs to occur at the legislative level especially on the responsibilities of DEM and the RI Resource Recovery Corporation. A clear statement of who is responsible for enforcement would help to increase recycling rates. He also

thought more work was needed with commercial recycling and recycling in schools. Pay as you throw is effective in reducing the amount of material disposed. However, this program will not grow unless there are incentives to help with its implementation.

The group then discussed budget issues. The following points were made:

- DEM's budget initially included some funding for IPM training. All funding was removed during the legislative process. The director mentioned the budget process is a zero sum game and funding can only be restored if funding is reduced in another area. Fred Vincent mentioned that DEM is investigating if money in Division of Agriculture restricted receipt accounts could be used to fund this program.
- Guy Lefebvre mentioned that funding is needed for stream gauging. At this point, the state through DEM, the Water Resource Board and the Army Corps of Engineers is paying for these stations. This funding has been decreased and stream flow information will be available in the future. This information is needed for work in the watersheds, but DEM will not be able to support the existing monitoring network.
- The director questioned if ECRI was supporting Feebate legislation. Sierra Club and RIPIRG indicated they might be involved with the legislation. Audubon is prepared to support the bill but not to introduce it.

The DEM legislative priorities included:

- Increased civil and criminal penalties for wetlands, air and waste violations.
- Anti-idling legislation for diesel powered school busses.
- Initiation of a Park and Forest Trust fund that will allow funding to be directed to the maintenance of these facilities.
- Jet Ski legislation that will reflect changes to ordinance passed by Coventry, Westerly and Charlestown.
- Cesspool Phase out could be a legislative initiative if it can not be accomplished by regulation change.

Joan Garceau asked about setting up wastewater districts that would require inspection to take place at the point of sale or if the ISDS systems were leaking. The director mentioned that DEM does not have a position on how this would be enforced.

B. Ozone Alert

Steve Majkut mentioned that DEM is meeting with RIPTA tomorrow to discuss this issue. He did not have anything new to report at this time. He also said that the state experienced two violations of the standard.

III. New Business

A. Watershed Discussion

Lori Urso from the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association led the discussion on this issue. She was concerned that DEM does not get involved with town zoning decisions, and only reacts to their decisions by requiring the implementation of our regulations after the fact. She mentioned that people

at the local level do not always have environmental expertise and may not see the full ramification of large building projects. She mentioned that a development in Westerly affects 500 acres and five miles of riverfront area. The zoning change from rural residential to light industry will change the recharge characteristics and could influence the aquifer. She is aware that DEM storm water regulations will require some evaluation of the impact of specific projects, but she is not sure the piecemeal approach will address the issue.

Ms. Urso wants DEM to be proactive in the local zoning process, especially when DEM's input is requested. She mentioned that our silence is often construed as passive approval of these projects. The Director indicated that DEM needs additional resources to be active in this area. DEM keeps away from local zoning issues by design. Towns need to look at planning from a sustainable watershed and greenspace perspective. Communities should develop comprehensive plans that include environmental principles. The director said that DEM could provide comments or attend a local meeting, if requested by a town official. If DEM is contacted with sufficient lead-time, we will try to attend meetings using appropriate groundwater staff or watershed coordinators.

The director also mentioned that conservation commissions are active in some areas. Some members of these commissions, if properly trained, could be used to provide environmental expertise needed at the local level. Ms Urso indicated that membership to conservation commissions is often transient and DEM is a more reliable resource for environmental expertise. Eugenia Marks indicated that she is pleased to see the Conservation Commissions are being represented by an organization.

Fred Vincent mentioned that different municipalities have different models as far as who has the authority over planning issues. In some cases it is the town planners and other instances it is the town councils.

B. Land Protection Report

Fred Vincent discussed the fiscal year 2002 DEM report on Land Conservation in Rhode Island. Fred mentioned that a total of 6,537 acres were preserved through the efforts of DEM, local land trusts, non-profit organizations, federal agencies and agricultural land preservation programs.

Fred Vincent mentioned that the total amount of land preserved is twice the amount usually preserved in a year. The money for this year has been allocated and the bond will need to be replenished if we are to meet our seven-year goal. Prices are going up and it is getting harder to find property that should be preserved.

A question was asked if the state could sell property after it was purchased for conservation purposes. The Director indicated that it is possible, but might require legislative approval. He said this is one reason partners are used in purchasing property. It is more difficult to sell property later and has a side benefit of leveraging state funding to be able to purchase additional property.

Charles Obert requested time to discuss a proposal to rent DEM property adjacent to the Pawtuxet River. This building could be renovated and used to conduct environmental education concerning the Pawtuxet watershed. In addition the building could be used to conduct fishery research and breeding. The director mentioned that it is premature to hold this discussion. The DEM facility was proposed

being moved to the Snake Den area once it was developed. The development plans for this park are not clear due to budget concerns.

C. Announcements

Terry Gray mentioned that DEM would begin discussions on revision to the comprehensive Solid Waste Plan. The first meeting will be held on November 6, in 235 Promenade Street, Providence.

Charles Obert indicated he is setting up an event on the Pawtuxet River to have political candidates canoe down the river to inform them of this valuable resource.

David Riley representing Friends of India Point mentioned that there are existing transmission lines running along India Point Park. He thought the park would be better served if the lines were placed underground.

D. Future Meeting Agenda Topics

Testing of private homeowner wells.

Impact of runway expansion in Warwick on wetlands and anadromous fish.

E. Next meeting

February 12, 2003, Room 300, 3:30 –5:00