

Rhode Island's Forest Action Plan
A five year review

It has now been five years since Rhode Island's Forest Action Plan (FAP) "Rhode Island Forest Resources Assessment and Strategies, A Path to Tomorrow's Forest" has undergone a formal review. The following report will primarily focus on areas where further effort will be required, to meet our objectives and strategies over the next five years and set the ground work for a full revision of our FAP by the year 2020.

This report will include comments received by our Forest Action Plan Advisory Committee, following a letter asking for their inputs (encl. 1), as well as an internal audit by our own division. Additionally, two new policy area issues will be added as appendices to our current FAP: Urban and Community Forest and Forest Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change. Both of these will appear in 2020's revision under Part 4: The Vision, Issues, Goals Policies, and Strategies.

What our committee had to say:

The feedback received from our advisory committee was as diverse as the members who make up the committee. With over four pages of comments, an attempt will be made to synthesize their thoughts among common themes.

- *Wildlife:* Sections on wildlife habitat, including plant life, birds, insects and other invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, fish and mammals should also be included besides trees.

The state continues to fail in meeting objectives for habitat creation for wildlife species requiring young forest age classes. Acceleration of programs to create young forest habitat on state lands would be welcome and is something to strive for.

A statement under Fish and Wildlife Resources, stating the values of young and the needs faced by young forest wildlife.

Other guide plans such as RI's Wildlife Action Plan (WAP), should be listed early on and referenced where appropriate throughout our FAP.

- *Forest Health:* Following the policy of FH1 & FH2, the state needs to develop those Objectives and Strategies as outlined in Performance Measures 4 & 5. Specifically in regards to the Emerald Ash Borer as to is responsible for what.
- *Forestland Recreation:* For FRT 2, it was recommended that some of the camp grounds that were once used in Arcadia and other state management areas should be re-

opened; the theory being, the more people get out and spend time in the forest, the more connected they become to supporting preservation and conservation.

- *Forest Sustainability:* Under our sustainability policy, Objective & Strategy 3, revise the law to allow communities the right of first refusal for those properties under the Farm, Forest and Open Space Program, who decide to sell their property.
- *Planning:* Additional maps could be included such as one showing large unfragmented forestlands that have the highest value for habitat.

Objective & Strategy #5 under the Fragmentation Issue, states the use of innovative land development techniques to conserve forest. This could be more specific as to what techniques such as: Transfer of Development Rights, Conservation Development and encourage appropriate small businesses on forestland to help prevent the conversion to house lots.

An assessment should be done that would show the monetary value of primary and secondary forest based businesses, such as what was done by URI for agriculture.

Under the policy issues of Fragmentation and Forest Resources Management, it appears that little has been done as far as mapping, inventory and classification of forestland, on both state and community forest.

- *Other:* The Forest Action Plan Advisory Committee should meet more often to review existing components and determine if any new developments should be addressed, i.e. markets for low grade material, loss of historic economic species or “New” invasive plants and insects.

What our own agency uncovered:

As with any strategic plan over five years old, you would expect a lot would change, especially in the areas of contact information and time dependent data sets; our FAP is no different. Forest Inventory and Analysis data, website addresses, FAP advisory committee members and changes in state statutes are just some of those items in our FAP that will need to be updated. In our assessment of Rhode Island’s Forest Resources, those values spelled out in our 2010 FAP are still relevant and reflect the values that Rhode Island expects from its forest.

Goals, Policies, Objectives and Strategies or what I would refer to as the plans core; our internal review did discover some deficiencies as to where we should have been in five years.

Forest Resource Management

- 1.** Seek increased and sustainable funding for management and improvements to access in state management areas. *Except for income generated by timber sales, no sustainable funding source for management and improvements has been acquired.*
- 2.** Map, inventory, analyze, and classify state owned forestlands to insure sustainable uses on state forestlands. Inventory and document existing conditions, growth, harvest and reforestation levels. Continue to Use DFE personnel to maintain property bounds. Strengthen process to document and report boundary trespass and property damage for litigation. *Due to budgetary constraints imposed on our division over the last several years, especially the replacement of retired personnel; little has been done in this area.*
- 3.** Seek legislation to modify the FFOS Program so municipalities have a right of first refusal when land is converted out of program classification. *Both we and our committee members found this to be of concern. This item would require a public hearing and will be most likely addressed when we update the regulations to the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act.*

Forest Sustainability

- 1.** Maintain diverse forest; actively manage state forestland to provide a wide range of benefits. *Due to budgetary constraints imposed on our division over the last several years, especially the replacement of retired personnel; little has been done in this area.*
- 2.** Research and develop maintenance levels and types of forestlands to be used as carbon sequestration. *Lack of available staff time or funds to contact out work.*
- 3.** Develop statewide landscape level prescriptions for the forested habitats of RI as a goal for management (using UFS inventory as a baseline) to achieve renewable forest and habitats. *This has not been done formally as of yet, but is doable. With Fish and Wildlife's nearly completed 2015 WAP, I expect much collaboration within the next couple of years between themselves and us*

Information and Education

- 1.** Maintain and expand the Division of Forest Environment website to include links to information on educational opportunities available. Expand the Division of Forest Environment website to include web sites for teachers. *As of this year, DEM including*

the Division of Forest Environment is undergoing a major revamp of the entire website; this will allow for the changes and updates needed to reach this objective.

- 2.** Continue to provide pamphlets to the general public with information on current techniques of forest management. Develop, update and distribute information pamphlets on Forestry. *Depending on the individual program, is to how far along we are on this particular Objective & Strategy.*



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June 30, 2014

Dear Forest Action Plan Advisory Committee,

It has been five (5) years since Rhode Island's Forest Resources Assessment and Strategies, now Forest Action Plan (FAP) has been reviewed, amended or updated. As required under the previous Farm Bill, this plan shall be reviewed every 5 years, updated every 10 years and amended as needed.

The guidance from this plan was intended to advance the effectiveness of public and private stewardship of the state's tree and forest resources towards the twin goals of a healthy, sustainable economy and environment. As an element of the State Guide Plan, the FAP sets goals and policies that must, under state law, be reflected in future updates of local comprehensive plans.

As chair of this advisory committee, my question to you is: Are we on the right path; are we as partners meeting the Objectives & Strategies that we set out to do? If not, what changes need to be made?

Being members of the FAP Advisory committee, I ask if you would spend some time going over the 2010 Rhode Island Forest Resource Assessment and Strategies <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/pdf/assestra.pdf> , specifically Table 4-1 Implementation Matrix starting on page 65.

Any feedback you can give me would be both helpful and appreciated. I can meet with you individually or in small groups. If you prefer to send me your recommendations by e-mail, that will work also. I hope to receive all responses back by August 1st, 2014; if I don't here from you by then, I will conclude the plan is still relevant and on track.

Once all changes to the plan have been made, I will schedule a FAP Advisory Committee meeting to go over those recommendations, prior to any amendment of the state's FAP.

Thank you in advance for your help with this.

Sincerely,

Thomas D. Abbott, Supervising Forester
Chair, Forest Action Plan Advisory Committee
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Encl. 1

Appendix G

Forest Mitigation and Adaption to Climate Change

Forest Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change (FMAC)

Over the last several decades, the Northeast has experienced noticeable changes in its climate. Since 1070, the average annual temperature rose by 2⁰ F and the average winter temperature increased by 4⁰ F. Heavy precipitation events increased in magnitude and frequency. For the region as a whole, the majority of winter precipitation now falls as rain, not snow. Climate project scientist project that these trends will continue ¹.

As our climate changes, the projected changes that are most likely to affect woodlands are: increasing temperatures, change in rainfall patterns, longer growing seasons, drier soil in summer and wetter soil in the winter, saltwater intrusion into groundwater, increasing abundance of pest and diseases, increasing invasive species and more frequent extreme weather events. In particular, Shifting species distributions; Sea level rise and coastal flooding; increased temperatures, drought and fire; Invasive species, pest and disease; and storing carbon in woodlands and wetlands are all things Rhode Island's forest can help mitigate, if not adapt to ².

Disturbances such as mentioned above, can reduce forest productivity and change the distribution of tree species. In some cases, forest can recover from a disturbance. In other cases, existing species may shift their range or die out. In these cases, the new species of vegetation that colonize the area create a new type of forest. In addition to a reduction of forest productivity, warmer temperatures could impact winter recreation opportunities such as: Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing and skating ¹.

Rhode Island's forests play a critical role in mitigating the effects of the changing climate on the state's natural environment and communities. Most importantly, healthy forest ecosystems store carbon that could otherwise add to the "heat-trapping blanket" effect caused by high carbon levels in the atmosphere. Trees in urban areas help protect human health by moderating temperatures, especially during summer heat waves, and reducing air pollution that contributes to respiratory problems ³.

Since "A Report to the Forestry Working Group of the Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Process" was completed in May of 2004 (see Appendix D of RI's 2010 FAP), new legislation and an Executive Council on Climate Change was established. Unlike the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which focused on mitigation of CO₂ through a Cap-and-Trade system; the Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 seeks a balanced approach and mandates both adaptation and mitigation efforts, and stipulates that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced to 45% below 1990 levels by 2035.

In summary, climate change will impact Rhode Island's forest in the future and it is up to us mitigate these changes when possible and adapt when these changes are not.

***FMAC Goal:* To make Rhode Island's forest resilient to the effects of a changing climate.**

FMAC Policy: Promote sound forest stewardship options, that enhance the ability of both state and private forestry to adapt to climate change and its effects.

¹Climate Impacts in the Northeast, www.epa.gov/climatechange.

²Helping your woodlot adapt to a changing climate, Maryland Climate Adaptation Guide for Forest Landowners, FINAL 2013 PDF.

³The Importance of Rhode Island's Forest in Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change, Rhode Island Woodland Partnership *Position statement*, January 2015.