

NATIONAL PRIORITIES SECTION –Update Report

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND 2015

The 2008 Farm Bill, under Title VIII – Forestry, amends the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, to include the requirement that each state develop a long-term, state-wide assessment and strategies for forest resources. These assessments and strategies focused on three national priorities:

- Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses
- Protect Forests from Threats
- Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

These documents were developed with a comprehensive team of stakeholders to address cross-boundary, landscape scale actions that would be the most efficient activities to address issues of concern developed for the assessment phase of the Forest Action plan.

This document provides example of activities, highlights and successes, serving as a record taken by all Rhode Island stakeholders to address strategic actions taken as part of Rhode Island’s Forest Action Plan.

1. Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses

Issue Addressed: Forest Resources Management

Goal 1: To manage State-owned forestland’s in order to provide a safe environment and reduce conflicts between users while maintaining the health, vigor and sustainability of the forest resources.

Objective 2: Map, inventory, analyze, and classify state owned forestlands to insure sustainable uses on state forestlands.

Strategy A: Inventory and document existing conditions, growth, harvest and reforestation levels.

Strategic Action: The State of Rhode Island (RI) in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Town of West Greenwich has had Forest Stewardship Plans developed for the Tillinghast and Wickaboxet Mangement areas. The number of acres inventoried for those two areas are 1769 and 681 respectively.

Issue Addressed: Forest Sustainability

Goal 1: To create, conserve, and maintain sustainable forest resources.

Objective 1: Maintain diverse forests

Strategy A: Maintain and enforce the requirement of active forest management for forestland classified under the FFOS Act.

Strategic Action: The Division of Forest Environment (DFE) along with the associated towns, monitor each property classified as forestland under the Farm, Forest and Open on a 5-year basis. Currently, there are 535 of properties classified as forestland.

Objective 2: Encourage good forest practices on private owned forest.

Strategy A: DEM should provide "on the ground" technical assistance offering advice on forestry, wetlands, fish and wildlife advice to assist landowners to refined their objectives and provide guidance toward sustainable forest resource management

Strategic Action: DEM's Division of Forest Environment along with assistance from Fish & Wildlife and our Office of Water Resources provided 998 on the ground technical assist over the past 5-years.

Strategy B: Encourage landowners to seek assistance from qualified natural resource professionals.

Strategic Action: DEM personnel actively encourage forest landowners to seek assistance from Consulting Forester's, Wildlife and Wetland Biologist and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Approximately 62 forest landowners have been referred to consultants over the past 5-years.

Issue Addressed: Commercial Forest Products

Goal 1: To maintain a viable forest products industry in Rhode Island.

Objective 4: Use the State review process to insure that local comprehensive plans support opportunities for sustainable harvest of forest products in an appropriate manner.

Strategy: Same as objective.

Strategic Action: Rhode Island Statewide Planning and DEM's Forestry division actively review all new an updated local comprehensive plan's, insuring if relevant, compliance with our states FAP. Presently, 8 local comprehensive plans have gone through our review process this past calendar year.

Objective 6: Promote timber harvesting as enhancing forest diversity and creating beneficial wildlife habitat.

Strategy: Same as objective.

Strategic Action: Timber harvesting for biological diversity as well as for wildlife habitat, has always rank high when promoting Rhode Island's Forest Stewardship Program. The Forest Stewardship Program

requires that forestland owners, non-governmental, non-profit organizations and all other program participants address the issues of enhancing biological diversity and wildlife habitat. Program participants Forest Stewardship Plans and activities are monitored on a regular basis. Currently we have 34,573 acres within our Forest Stewardship Program.

Issue Addressed: Fragmentation

Goal 1: To Conserve and restore Rhode Island's forests so as to minimize forest fragmentation.

Objective 3: Promote forest conservation and management in priority areas where significant development pressures exist and land conversion is occurring.

Strategy A: Work with partners to promote and implement land use ordinances that minimize forest cover and fragmentation.

Strategic Action: Working with the Narragansett Bay Research Reserve and local municipalities, model ordinances have been developed to minimize forest cover and fragmentation. Currently, over 17 towns have adopted ordinances that help protect forested acres from fragmentation.

Strategy B: Promote the use of property tax incentive programs that minimize the loss of forestland.

Strategic Action: Rhode Island's current use tax program (FFOS) has been and continues to help prevent the loss of forest fragmentation. As of this year, there are over 35,705 acres under this program and 535 participants. RI's Forest Legacy Program has also been a tremendous success as well; with over 22 active participants and 3,583 acres permanently conserved.

Objective 5: Use innovative land development techniques to conserve forests.

Strategy A: Encourage the adoption of innovative land use ordinances and incentives to protect forests during site planning.

Strategic Action: Working with Rhode Island Statewide Planning and local municipalities, model ordinances have been developed to minimize forest cover and fragmentation, specifically during site planning. Currently, over 17 towns have adopted innovative land development ordinances. Two towns have adopted Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). Many towns are encouraging village development that takes the pressure off forestland. Village development and TDR guidance / ordinances were recently completed by DEM.

Objective 6: Encourage voluntary preservation and stewardship of open space by landowners.

Strategy A: Continue to recognize and promote the FFOS Act as a tool to conserve forestland.

Strategic Action: Rhode Island's current use tax program (FFOS) has been and continues to help prevent the loss of forest fragmentation. As of this year, there are over 35,705 acres under this program and 535

participants. Program is promoted continually through workshops, one on one landowner visits, correspondence with local tax assessors and through the efforts of private consulting foresters.

2. Protect Forests from Threats

Issue Addressed: Forest Resources Management

Goal 1: To manage State-owned forestland's in order to provide a safe environment and reduce conflicts between users while maintaining the health, vigor and sustainability of the forest resources.

Objective 7: Obtain new properties to expand existing management areas.

Strategy A: Use DEM's Land Acquisitions Committee process to purchase land, development rights, or conservation easements to expand natural areas within the State and buffer the existing State-owned management areas from development.

Strategic Action: One of the greatest threats facing Rhode Island's forest is the loss of forestland due to development. Within the past 5-years, working with DEM's office of Planning and development, two (2) new management areas for 3,594 acres have been established and 1,567 acres of forestland surrounding existing management areas have been permanently preserved; either through the purchase of land, development rights or through conservation easements.

Objective 9: Protect sufficient forestland to meet present and future resource needs.

Strategy B: Continue to promote the current tax provisions of the FFOS Act as a tool to conserve forestland and work with municipal tax assessors to reach eligible land owners.

Strategic Action: Working with our local tax assessors, private consulting Forester's and the Rhode Island Conservators Organization, RIFCO (an affiliate of the National Woodland Owner's Association), the FFOS Act message is disseminated on a continuous basis. Presently, we have over 535 landowner's enrolled in this current use tax program.

Strategy D: Use the State Guide Plan process to insure communities address forest resources objectives and strategies within local comprehensive plans.

Strategic Action: A mutual working agreement between DEM's Office of Planning and Development, Forest Environment and RI Statewide Planning, provides us the opportunity to insure communities address our forest resource objectives and strategies, through review of their local comprehensive plans. Within the last five-year, all 39 cities and towns have had their comprehensive plans reviewed and approved.

Issue Addressed: Forest Sustainability

Goal 1: To create, conserve, and maintain sustainable forest resources.

Objective 1: Maintain diverse forests

Strategy A: Maintain and enforce the requirement of active forest management for forestland classified under the FFOS Act.

Strategic Action: The Division of Forest Environment along with the associated towns, monitor each property classified as forestland under the Farm, Forest and Open on a 5-year basis, for compliance with BMP's and good Forest Stewardship. This early and continuous intervention helps limit threats to forestland and encourages a healthy ecosystem. Currently, there are 535 of properties classified as forestland.

Issue Addressed: Forest Health

Goal 1: To protect and improve the health of Rhode Island's forest.

Objective 1: Continue to evaluate aspects of forest health conditions in Rhode Island's forests.

Strategy A: Monitor and report on the aspects of forest health conditions –insects, pathogens, invasive plants, air pollution, weather, manmade, fire, etc.

Strategic Action: The threats of insects and disease outbreaks, air pollution, catastrophic storms, flooding and invasive plants, are continually surveyed for the above threats through aerial observations and data collection from Forest Health Plots.

Objective 8: Continue to aggressively fight forest fires through coordinated efforts with local fire departments.

Strategy A: Strengthen and encourage interagency cooperative agreements.

Strategic Action: Rhode Island's Forestry Division has had a longstanding relationship with the Fire Districts and municipalities throughout the state when it comes to fighting forest fires. Currently, we have over 100 cooperative agreements evaluated and utilized.

Objective 9: Contain the average forest fire to minimal acreage

Strategy A: Maintain records to track individual fire statistics.

Strategic Action: In the past five years, Rhode Island has recorded 287 forest fires and 242 acres of forest burned.

Objective 10: Strengthen communication mechanisms with local fire departments to maintain clear responsibilities for forests fire control and management.

Strategies A and B: Hold regular meetings with the Forest Fire Advisory Committee (FFAC) and use the FFAC to promote the use of prescribed burns for wildlife habitat enhancement through demonstration and training burns.

Strategic Action: Quarterly meetings are held with DFE, Fire Districts, FFAC and cooperating municipalities, with 10 -15 people in attendance.

Objective 11: Continue a process of hazard analysis for the state that will identify critical areas and times of extreme fire conditions.

Strategies A and B: Evaluate forest fuel conditions and weather conditions on an ongoing basis and supply local planning departments with hazard fuel analysis information for community development planning.

Strategic Action: Fire weather / fire danger is evaluated daily and is distributed to departments and other agencies via social media and other methods.

Objective 12: Encourage rural fire departments to install dry hydrants.

Strategy A: Work to install dry hydrants in local fire districts.

Strategic Action: Within the past 5-years in cooperation with US Forest Service, RI Rural Conservation & Development and the Natural Resource Conservation Service; 26 dry hydrant sites were evaluated with 16 dry hydrants being installed.

Objective 13: Continue efforts with various federal, state, and local partners to train and provide funds, personnel and equipment, especially during fire emergencies.

Strategy A: Maintain Forestry hose records on inventory supplied, serviced and loaned to municipal departments.

Strategic Action: Working with the FFAC and local fire departments, DFE loaned and serviced on average, over 56,000 feet of forestry hose on an annual basis.

Strategy B: Hold fire-training exercises with local fire departments and communicate training sessions to local fire departments.

Strategic Action: Working with local fire departments and FFAC, DFE generally holds at least 5 training exercise and trains upwards of 125 people per year.

Strategy C: Use Incident Command System (ICS) for all incidents; train other agencies in its use.

Strategic Action: In cooperation with local fire districts and municipalities, FFAC, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and RI's Emergency Management Agency; 4 agencies have been trained and 47 incidents used ICS for all incidents over the past year.

Objective 15: Use DEM/DFE personnel in non-fire seasons to take a more active role in fire prevention activities and general public educational programs.

Strategy A: Use Smokey Bear Educational program to educate school children about fire safety.

Strategic Action: The last 5-years, DEM's Division of Forest Environment put on over 10 Smokey Bear Educational Programs. Additionally, parades where Smokey Bear was featured, over 5000 people attended annually.

Strategy C: Work with communities to promote awareness of forest fire/fuel reduction measures applicable to their respective communities.

Strategic Action: DFE continues to build a FIREWISE program and has begun outreach in 2015. The division was recently awarded a grant for wildfire risk reduction, community planning, and prevention outreach.

Issue Addressed: Water Resources

Goal 1: To protect and manage the state's forestlands in support of water resource goals and objectives and the needs of Rhode Islanders for plentiful and healthy water supplies.

Objective 4: Encourage stewardship of forest riparian resources.

Strategy A: Educate private forest landowners to protect and manage forested riparian buffers by providing information and technical assistance.

Strategic Action: DEM's Division of Forest Environment along with assistance from RIFCO and our Office of Water Resources, provided 364 number of on the ground technical assist over the past 5-years; primarily through RI's Forest Stewardship Program and related workshops. Topics discussed included practices such as: Selective Cutting; minimizing the disturbance of the forest floor; preventing disruption of natural drainage patterns and interruption of surface flows; and maintaining residual native vegetation in a healthy condition. Proper implementation of the above practices, would among other things, help prevent excessive damaged caused by flooding or catastrophic storms.

Objective 5: Protect water quality during forest harvesting operations.

Strategy A: Continue to require the use of BMPs for all timber-harvesting operations

Strategic Action: The State of Rhode Island requires all Logging operations over 5 acres in size, 5,000 bf. or 25 cords of wood harvested within one year, to file a "Notification of Intent to Saw or Cut" (ITC) to DEM's Division of Forest Environment . All ITC's note whether wetlands are present or absent. On an annual basis, the division inspects approximately 241 logging operations where wetlands are present.

Strategy B: Continue to provide training to foresters and loggers on the use of BMP's.

Strategic Action: On a continuous basis, the Division of Forest Environment, along with RIFCO and DEM's Office of Water Resources, sponsors training to foresters and loggers on RI's BMP's and State Wetlands Rules and Regulations.

3. Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

Issues Addressed: Water Resources

Goal 1: To protect and manage the State's forestlands in support of water resource goals and objectives and the needs of Rhode Islanders for plentiful and healthy water supplies.

Objective 4: Encourage stewardship of forested riparian resources.

Strategy A: Educate private forest landowners to protect and manage forested riparian buffers by providing information and technical assistance.

Strategic Action I: Rhode Island's current use tax program (FFOS) has been and continues to help prevent the loss of forest fragmentation. As of this year, there are over 35,705 acres under this program and 535 participants. Program is promoted continually through workshops, one on one landowner visits, correspondence with local tax assessors and through the efforts of private consulting foresters.

Strategic Action II: DEM's Division of Forest Environment along with assistance from RIFCO and our Office of Water Resources provided 364 number of on the ground technical assist over the past 5-years; primarily through RI's Forest Stewardship Program and related workshops. Topics discussed included practices such as: Selective Cutting; minimizing the disturbance of the forest floor; preventing disruption of natural drainage patterns and interruption of surface flows; and maintaining residual native vegetation in a healthy condition. Proper implementation of the above practices, would among other things, help prevent excessive damaged caused by flooding or catastrophic storms.

Objective 5: Protect water quality during forest harvesting operations.

Strategy A: Continue to require the use of BMPs for all timber-harvesting operations.

Strategic Action: The State of Rhode Island requires all Logging operations over 5 acres in size, 5,000 bf. or 25 cords of wood harvested within one year, to file a "Notification of Intent to Saw or Cut" (ITC) to DEM's Division of Forest Environment . All ITC's note whether wetlands are present or absent. On an annual basis, the division inspects approximately 241 logging operations where wetlands are present.

Issues Addressed: Forest Sustainability

Goal 1: To create, conserve, and maintain sustainable forest resources.

Objective 3: Conserve sufficient forestland in Rhode Island to meet the present and future needs of citizens.

Strategy A: Use all available means to conserve RI's remaining forestland (including purchase of development rights, promotion of the FFOS program, innovative zoning techniques and outright purchase.)

Strategic Action: RI DEM Stewardship Program actively engages forest land owners to enroll in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act to actively manage their forestland. These efforts directly engage Rhode Islanders in improving air quality. Properties are monitored and classified on a 5-year basis. Currently, there are 535 properties classified as forestland.

RI's Forest Legacy Program has also been a tremendous success as well; with over 22 active participants and 3,583 acres permanently conserved.

Objective 2: Encourage good forest practices on private owned forest.

Strategy A: Provide 'on the ground' technical assistance offering advice on forestry, wetlands, fish and wildlife advice to assist land owners to refine their objectives and provide guidance toward sustainable forest resource management..

Strategic Action: RI DEM Stewardship Program actively engages forest land owners to enroll in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act to actively manage their forestland in efforts to protect and enhance water quality and quantity. Properties are monitored and classified on a 5-year basis. Currently, there are 535 properties classified as forestland.

Issues Addressed: Urban and Community Forestry

This section of our National Priority Update, was based entirely on the "Rhode Island Urban and Community Forest Plan", which together along with the "Rhode Island Forest Resource Management Plan", make up RI's 2010 FAP. *Please Note*, this section is not referenced as other sections in Table 4-1 Implementation Matrix.

Goal: Promote trees as community infrastructure

Objective: Insure that municipal budgets produce sufficient resources for proper maintenance and replacement of public tree resources. The National Arbor Day Foundation's recommended minimum investment level in community tree resources is \$2 per capita per year.

Strategy: Promote Tree City USA designation and the myriad benefits of urban tree maintenance.

Strategic Action: The RI DEM Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator continues to engage RI communities in the Tree City USA Program. RI currently has 10 communities enrolled in the Program. The Coordinator continues each year to encourage participation and offers support for all RI communities to become a Tree City USA community and showcase their commitment to environmental stewardship in their community.

Objective: Support efforts by statewide and local tree groups to actively involve citizens in tree planting, care, and advocacy.

Strategy: Promote and support the RI Tree Stewards Program and other local planting programs

Strategic Action: RI DEM has partnered with the National Arbor Day Foundation to provide RI homeowners free trees to conserve home energy costs. In the fall of 2015, 1,000 free trees will be provided, with 3,000 trees planned to be given away in the spring of 2016.

Strategic Action: The RI DEM Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator provides grant funding to the RI Tree Council to run and promote their Tree Steward Course, which graduates approximately 25-30 individuals a year who go on to complete urban forestry volunteer work in their communities and increase awareness about urban forestry needs and help to connect Rhode Island's citizens to the needs and opportunities of their urban forest.

Objective: Promote greater use of the statutory provision allowing public trees to be planted on private land proximate to public ways, as a means to enlist private stewardship of public trees.

Strategy: Increase awareness of successful programs and provide workshops for planners to promote the RI setback planting regulations.

Strategic Action: In 2014, South Kingstown completed a successful setback planting program with funds from the America the Beautiful Grant program and will continue to project with Town funding in 2016. This Grant has been promoted and praised for its strong public/private connection and success.

In Spring, 2015 the RI Tree Council successfully piloted a setback planting program in Cranston, RI with funding provided by the City, and field work completed by the Tree Council to plant 40 trees on private property.

Goal 2: Communicate the value of tree resources to the public

Objective: Develop community tree inventories, identifying the number, locations, types, and conditions of existing public trees, as well as vacant sites where trees could be added. Encourage communities to expand tree inventories to include canopy cover data.

Strategy: Provide education and guidance for communities on the benefits of trees, and relay the pertinent tree resources present in RI communities to all RI communities.

Strategic Action: The RI DEM Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator in 2014 completed a statewide tree canopy assessment that is broken down by each RI community. This assessment will be updated every 5 years to track canopy change. The Coordinator completed an Urban Canopy Analysis in 2015 that will also be updated every 5 years to track changes.

This information is delivered to communities to understand their current tree canopy and work towards increasing or sustaining canopy levels.

Objective: Involve the public and the private sector in efforts to plant and maintain community tree resources including public trees.

Strategy: Encourage neighborhood tree planting and stewardship programs

Strategic Action: In an effort to help communities maintain and work towards enhancing their community forests, the RI DEM Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator provides funding through the annual America the Beautiful: Tree RI grant opportunity for multiple urban forestry-related activities, including planting and tree inventory/plan creation. In 2014 a grant was issued to 2

communities, Cumberland, RI, and Providence, RI to perform tree inventory and analysis projects to better understand their urban forest.

Goal: Seek a higher profile for the protection and management of urban and community forest resources in public and private community planning, development, and infrastructure management decisions.

Objective: Promote enforcement of legal protection for trees under local and state laws.

Strategy: Encourage all RI communities to enact comprehensive shade and street tree ordinances.

Strategic Action: The RI DEM Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator continues to contact each community that has a current ordinance, and has not updated their ordinance in the past 5 years, to remind the community that they should review their ordinance for any changes they wish to enact in efforts to maintain and help communities to enhance the economic benefits and values that the trees and forested land afford their community. There are currently 21 of 39 municipalities within the State of Rhode Island with an active and up-to-date shade tree ordinance.

Issues Addressed: Forest Health

Goal 1: To protect and improve the health of Rhode Island's forests.

Objective 13: Continue efforts with various federal, state, and local partners to train and provide funds, personnel and equipment, especially during fire emergencies.

Strategy A: Maintain Forestry hose records on inventory supplied & serviced and loans to municipal departments

Strategic Action: In the last 5-years, RI DEM has granted approximately \$144,000 to RI volunteer fire companies in efforts to assist in reducing wildfire risks to Rhode Island's forestland.

Issues Addressed: Information & Education

Goal 1: To educate public officials and the general public to gain an understanding and appreciation of the state's forest resources, so they might better utilize, conserve and protect these resources for future generations.

Objective 4: Educate the general public and Legislators regarding the role of forest resource in maintaining water quality.

Strategy A: Build and strengthen partnerships with municipalities, local land trusts and conservation organizations.

Strategic Action: The Division of Forest Environment has worked closely with the RI Woodland Partnership since its inception in 2013. This group "...works to increase the impact of forest conservation efforts in Rhode Island through coordination and information sharing among partners."

This groups' members consist of Rhode Island Forest Conservators Association working to provide sound action items that pertain to The Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014, which seeks to make Rhode Island's economy and communities resilient in the face of climate change.