

## DEM ROLES IN DROUGHT RESPONSE

### Introduction

The Water Resource Board (WRB) [Rhode Island Drought Management Plan](#) establishes coordinated procedures for the State of Rhode Island's response to severe drought episodes. It outlines the responsibilities of state, federal and local entities involved in water resources management, and it defines the roles these key entities are to play in the state's response to a long-term drought. Duties related to data gathering, anticipation of drought conditions, and mitigation of the effects of drought are described. Policies and recommendations are established to anticipate drought conditions, respond early and coordinate resources to effectively manage the state's water resources during a drought. (See also the WRB homepage at <http://www.wrb.ri.gov/>.)

The Department of Environmental Management includes several units having specific responsibilities and/or resources related to the state's drought response:

### Division of Agriculture

The responsibilities of the division include a broad range of agriculture-related functions, organized within five primary program areas: animal health, mosquito abatement, pesticides, farmland ecology, and plant industry sales. The staff of the Farmland Ecology Unit works with, and regulates, farmers to ensure that agricultural activities do not negatively impact the state's valuable wetland and groundwater resources. The division is responsible for coordinating with the Governor to declare a disaster or take other steps necessary based on either actual or predicted drought impacts to agricultural products. This declaration is often made in anticipation of crop failures so that the state will be eligible to receive federal disaster assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture. Federal funding sources for drought assistance to agricultural interests are included in [Rhode Island Drought Management Plan](#), Appendix D, "Federal Funding Assistance." The Division of Agriculture will also seek state financial assistance as necessary. The division has developed an agency response plan to reduce drought impacts on the agricultural community/industry. (See "[Drought Response Plan for DEM Division of Agriculture](#)" in this ERP and/or [Rhode Island Drought Management Plan](#), Appendix E). The DEM Division of Agriculture plan is considered part of the RI Drought Management Plan in its entirety and part of the state response to drought management.

### Office of Water Resources

The Office of Water Resources implements a variety of programs aimed protecting and restoring the state's surface waters, groundwater and wetlands. Office of Water Resources' programs play a pivotal role in controlling wastewater discharges, promoting non-point source abatement, preventing groundwater pollution and averting alterations to freshwater wetlands. The office is also responsible regulating individual septic systems, underground injection control, groundwater certification, private well installation, water quality certification, the Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System and wastewater facility treatment permitting. The private well installation program regulates the location, design and installation private drinking water wells. It also provides for registering of well drillers and pump installers and maintains a current list of companies and/or individuals who are properly registered. Rules stipulate the design and construction requirements for drilling wells or improving old wells. Permits are not necessary but drillers are required adhere to the standards. Records of well installations including size, location, geology, depth and yield are maintained. The office

estimates that there are approximately hundred to one thousand private drinking water wells installed annually in Rhode Island.

### **Division of Forest Environment**

The Forest Environment Division manages 40,000 acres of state-owned forestland. It coordinates a statewide forest fire protection plan, provides forest protection on state lands, assists rural volunteer fire departments, and develops forest and wildlife management plans for private landowners. The division promotes public understanding of environmental conservation, enforces Department rules regulations on DEM lands, and assists the federal government in providing landowner assistance programs. Risk of fires in wild land, rural areas, state forests and parks linked to dry conditions. Assessment of fire risk and management of fire control resources is an on-going activity of the Division of Forest Environment. The division responsible for managing state fire suppression resources and coordinating with other local, state, federal agencies and other states to obtain the appropriate resources.

### **Division of Fish and Wildlife**

The Division of Fish and Wildlife protects, restores, and manages the fish and wildlife resources of the state. The division is responsible for operating and managing twenty-four wildlife management areas totaling over 46,000 acres and also operates more than one hundred boat launching ramps and shore fishing areas located through the state. The division is responsible for setting seasons, size limits, methods of taking, and daily limits for the harvest of all wildlife as well as all recreational and commercial fisheries in the state. It is divided into three separate sections: Marine Fisheries, Freshwater Fisheries, and Wildlife Management. Each section is responsible for specific program activities. These activities include fisheries and wildlife research and management, freshwater fish hatcheries and fish stocking programs, habitat restoration, public access, land acquisition, education and information, public angling and hunting programs, and commercial fisheries management. Dry conditions can lead to a range of impacts to fisheries and wildlife, from reducing food sources to fish kills or displacement of certain populations of animals. Department responsibilities include responding to incidents of wildlife entering residential or urban areas. They also include identifying impacts to specific fisheries and wildlife populations and recommending measures to reduce the impacts to these resources.

Source: Water Resources Board (WRB), Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, Department of Administration, State Guide Plan Element #724, [Rhode Island Drought Management Plan](#) (June 2002), 04-03-03.