



# Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan

## Chapter 7

# Outreach and Coordination with Partners, Stakeholders and the Public

**Chapter 7: Table of Contents**

**Introduction ..... 1**

**RI WAP Organizational Infrastructure..... 5**

**Coordination Partners ..... 11**

**Collaboration with State Partners ..... 13**

**Collaboration with Local Partners..... 16**

**Collaboration with Federal Partners ..... 18**

**Collaboration with Tribal Partners ..... 27**

**Collaboration with Academic Partners ..... 27**

**Collaboration with Non-governmental Organization Partners ..... 29**

**Chapter 7: List of Tables**

Table 7-1. Rhode Island’s WAP Coordinating Committees/Teams and Structure ..... 7

Table 7-2. RI WAP Committees/Teams, Members and Affiliations ..... 8

Table 7-3. Existing Land Conservation by RI DEM and its Partners through  
Land Acquisition, Conservation Easements and Other Agreements..... 12

Table 7-4. Natural resource conservation programs available through the federal  
U.S. Department of Agriculture to Rhode Island and their allocations  
for FY2013 (or last year available). ..... 22

### Introduction

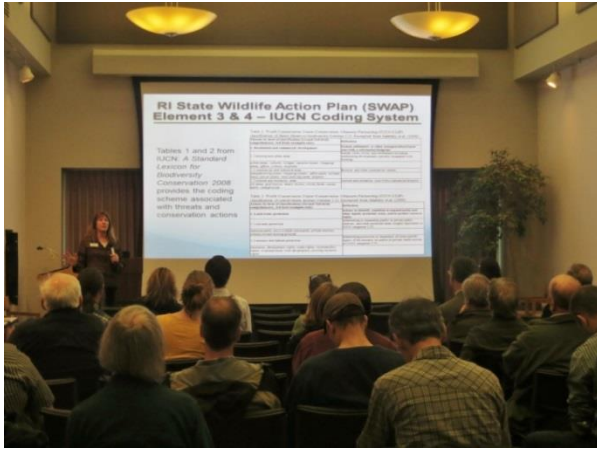
This chapter describes how RI DEM DFW coordinated with partners in the development of this RI WAP and how it will continue to work with and through its partners in the implementation of this wildlife conservation strategy (Element 7). Opportunities to use existing partnerships and create new ones to implement the RI WAP are also described in this chapter.

The public were also informed and involved, and this chapter describes their participation in WAP development through implementation (Element 8). Building on the initial 2005 CWCS outreach plan, throughout the development of the 2015 WAP the Core Steering Team and Consultant engaged the public at multiple levels and at each stage of the process. These same efforts will be carried forward throughout the WAP's 10-year implementation period. Increased public awareness will result in greater public involvement, buy-in, and participation, leading to improved coordination opportunities as well as new mechanisms to incorporate in the 2025 RI WAP revision. Throughout the next decade, regularly scheduled public events and meetings will occur annually, to provide coordination and outreach opportunities, exchange information, and deliver updates on the progress of WAP targets and implementation through RI DEM, The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island, the University of Rhode Island (URI), Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS) and other key partners.

Appendix 7c provides a list of the stakeholders involved throughout the planning process, and Appendix 7d describes the Public Input Plan (PIP) developed to guide outreach to these publics. This PIP was used as an example in the Northeast Lexicon (Crisfield and NEFWDTC 2013) to help guide the 13 northeastern states in developing consistent, coordinated approaches for public involvement.

### RI WAP Outreach Overview

Outreach for the 2015 RI WAP took many forms, including formal and informal meetings, workshops, surveys, mailings, articles, outreach materials (e.g., presentations, fact sheets, poster, newsletter), websites and social media, as well as personal contacts and correspondence. A [dedicated RI WAP website](#) and an e-mail address were established to disseminate information to a wider-audience and receive public input throughout the process. RI WAP materials, progress updates, and events were posted on the site throughout the WAP development to maximize public awareness and participation. Stakeholder workshop agendas and other meeting materials, as well as WAP elements and chapters, were also posted to allow stakeholders time and opportunity to review relevant materials during each stage of WAP development (e.g., identifying SGCN, key habitats, threats, and conservation actions). Additionally, press releases and media interviews were timed to allow for stakeholder reaction and attendance at meetings. Research was conducted into other related stakeholder events or meetings taking place throughout the state, and representatives were sent to discuss the 2015 RI WAP and distribute outreach materials. These activities demonstrate considerable efforts to solicit public input during key phases of WAP development (Appendix 7d).



WAP meeting among stakeholders

TCI

A series of introductory and follow up meetings were held to solicit feedback from key staff, partners, and stakeholders on Elements 1-4 of the WAP at different stages of plan development. During that time, additional input was also solicited via email invitations and links that reached hundreds of local and state level target stakeholder organizations (Appendix 7d), inviting them to get involved and send comments on the development of SGCN and key habitats lists. A survey was posted on the website for stakeholders to provide their contact information and request for input. As a result, the SGCN and

Key Habitats list were updated taking stakeholder responses into consideration, and re-posted on the website. This is an example of the iterative process and goals of the RI WAP Outreach Plan – to engage, inform, and respond to the public.

In response to one of the highest priority conservation actions identified in the 2005 CWCS, a Community Liaison was contracted in 2013 to promote participation by municipalities and other local level organizations in the development and implementation of the 2015 RI WAP. This position was sponsored through a collaborative effort of the non-profit corporation RINHS and RI DEM.

## Outreach Plan Development

The 2015 RI WAP Core Steering Team built upon the 2005 CWCS Outreach Plan foundation to develop an updated, revised strategy (see Appendix 7e). First, the information on public and private conservation stakeholder programs compiled in 2004 was updated using input and knowledge gathered from meetings, correspondence, literature reviews, and internet research. The resulting inventory of local, state, and regional/national programs and stakeholders was used as the foundation for the 2015 RI WAP Outreach Plan. Next, the Steering Team again employed the Bleiker Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO) process to identify and target the Potentially Affected Interests (PAIs), the specific messages and objectives to be communicated, and the most effective techniques to reach these targeted publics (Bleiker and Bleiker 2000). For the purposes of this WAP effort, the "public" was categorized into three tiers of PAIs. These included 1) federal, state, local, tribal, public and private partners as well as internal partners within RI DEM, 2) interested individuals and groups, and 3) the general public. Each of these three tiers is described below, along with its level of coordination and involvement.

### Tier 1: Partners/collaborators with significant role and/or program

This tier included leaders and other individuals with scientific/technical knowledge specific to the taxa and habitats of RI whose input will benefit the development of the RI WAP, such as:

- Federal, state, local, tribal public and private partners;
- Leaders, staff and programs that contribute significant data or scientific knowledge base to be incorporated directly into the WAP; and
- Leaders, staff and programs that collaborate on development, review/revision, implementation, monitoring and assessment or re-evaluation of the WAP.

**Partners/Collaborators** include:

- **RI DEM Internal Partners:** DFW Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Fisheries, Wildlife, Planning and Development, Natural Heritage Program, Forestry, Wetlands, etc.
- **RI DEM External Partners:** RIGIS, RI DA, CRMC, RI DOT, municipalities, USFWS, USGS, USDA, NRCS, USFS, EPA, NOAA, NPS, DOD, USACOE, Narragansett Tribe, URI, Brown University, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of RI, RINHS, Land Trusts, TWS, AFS, NWF, DOW (refer to each section below and acronym list for full names of organizations).

**Coordination and involvement during development, review and revision, and implementation included:**

- Informal introduction and planning meetings;
- Follow-up informal briefings and coordination meetings;
- Invitation to stakeholder workshop series - first to identify SGCN and key habitats; second to identify threats and conservation actions, and then multiple workshops and meetings to prioritize threats and actions;
- Invitations to serve on teams and/or to develop WAP including draft write-ups, maps, lists of species and habitats, monitoring framework, etc.;
- Request for plans / programs to cite and incorporate in WAP and revisions, and request for partners to incorporate WAP material in their plans;
- Brochure and update materials sent and request for inclusion in organization newsletter/website; and
- Request to review and comment on website updates of plan materials and share links.
- Presentation of poster for use at annual conference and meetings.

Tier 1 individuals and groups were contacted for input throughout the WAP development process. Regular correspondence and sharing of technical information was critical to assist in the development of the WAP. Input and feedback from collaborative partners was solicited through personal, informal meetings with organization representatives and staff. Per the input plan and CPO techniques, input was solicited at each stage of the project. Partner expertise on teams at working meetings and additional follow-up provided peer review and refinement during each of the processes of identifying SGCN and key habitats, determining the most critical problems and threats to species and their habitats, and then prioritizing conservation actions. The use of various programs' existing target species/habitats and recommended conservation strategies was important in focusing existing RI DEM DFW and partner programs to benefit from and complement potential collaborative efforts.

**Tier 2: Interested groups and individuals with limited role/program**

Tier 2 consists of other individuals and entities that have an interest in and potential use of the content (data and recommendations) of the WAP, but may not have the technical or scientific expertise to fall under Tier 1. These entities are expected to derive direct benefit from the WAP such as decision making and practical applications and hold environmental interests. The PAIs included both public and private organizations with little or no technical data, such as small private preserves, civic organizations, advocacy groups, and agencies or institutions with limited interest in and influence on wildlife or land use. Their staff/members may have limited scientific knowledge or data applicable to the WAP, but have

a potential role in outreach or general input into the development and future implementation of the WAP. Some PAIs have the potential to assist in the development and implementation of the WAP.

**Coordination and involvement during development, review and revision, and implementation included:**

- Invitation to stakeholder workshop series - first to identify SGCN and key habitats, second to identify threats and conservation actions, and then to prioritize actions;
- Request for plans / programs to cite and incorporate in the WAP and revisions, and request for PAIs to incorporate WAP material in theirs (information exchange);
- Fact sheets, survey, and updated materials sent and request for inclusion in organization newsletter;
- Request to review and comment on website updates; and
- Presentations at meetings.

**Tier 3: General, uninvolved or unaware public**

Tier 3 included citizens or organizations able to benefit from the development and implementation of the WAP as related to economic, recreational and quality of life benefits from effective statewide wildlife conservation. Tier 3 participants were not directly involved in a Tier 1 or 2 group.

**Coordination and involvement during development, review and revision, and implementation included:**

- Fact sheets, survey, and updated materials sent and request for inclusion in organization newsletter;
- Request to review and comment on website/ updates for each stage of the WAP over the 2 year input period with multiple website updates and press releases; and
- Presentations at scheduled public, community, and organization meetings, primarily conducted by the Community Liaison.

Tier 2 and 3 individuals and groups were informed about the WAP process and goals. They were kept informed of ongoing progress through information posted on the web, RI DEM letters and updates, and by utilizing their scheduled meetings and newsletters to provide presentations and updates through their existing internal communication mechanisms. The Community Liaison was also available to do presentations upon request thus supplying more detailed information to interested parties. Input was then solicited from Tier 2 individuals and groups both during and after RI DEM DFW staff had sufficiently developed the document to a draft product stage, ready for external public review on the website, and they were notified of each update.

**Opportunities for WAP Implementation Outreach**

One important objective identified through the Bleiker CPO was to maintain stakeholder and public involvement through the implementation stage. The original CWCS and CPO processes were designed to include continued input from stakeholders both short and long-term and to keep these stakeholders informed of SWG projects and results through annual reports, magazine articles, meetings, organization newsletters and web site progress reports. In addition to the development of species and habitat profiles, stakeholders and the public will be kept informed and involved throughout the next 10-year implementation stage through the Community Companion Guide to the WAP and the WAP document products and the continued coordination and updates.

The general public (Tier 3) and PAIs will be kept informed and aware of the WAP, its projects and results through a variety of existing public outreach mechanisms. RI DEM, TNC RI Chapter, URI, NRCS, RINHS, USFWS, and other key ongoing partnerships will coordinate on monitoring and review through their existing scheduled meetings, program and plan updates to incorporate the RI WAP revision information. These programs' existing communication mechanisms will provide further outreach to a wider audience to inform more people about WAP information and priorities.

Environmental and education centers have been and will be utilized to provide presentations and RI WAP updates. The many existing events, programs and resources within the partners of the Rhode Island conservation network, such as URI, Audubon Rhode Island, and other federal, state, and local partners' educational facilities, can be used to host and include public outreach events and exhibits on the WAP, SGCN and habitats, and how RI DEM and its partners are implementing conservation actions to improve Rhode Island's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. Utilizing existing partnerships to educate the public also involves these partner PAIs. Education and dissemination of information on SGCN and their key habitats were identified as important statewide, overarching needs in Chapter 4.

Existing partner and stakeholder facilities and programs, both private and public, can serve as valuable tools to disseminate conservation education and public outreach materials into classrooms throughout the state throughout the implementation phase. In addition, universities, laboratories, and other conservation centers, undergraduate and graduate programs can integrate WAP priorities and activities into ongoing and new research and education efforts.

Specific techniques to be used during WAP implementation and review are similar to those identified as most effective during the WAP development stages. PAIs will be informed and involved through active committee and working meetings, website updates and interaction, and by making use of existing stakeholder organization meetings and newsletters. Examples include annual conferences and coordination meetings such as the URI Coastal Institute, RINHS, and other stakeholder events and gatherings. Informal meetings with key partners and Tier 1 and 2 stakeholders will be an ongoing part of the annual program updates and evaluation. Solicitation of input and technical information from expert taxa committees as peer review and evaluation will occur on a biennial basis to provide updates to the RI DEM DFW SGCN dataset and SGCN status review. Their expert advice will be consulted regularly during the process of SWG proposal solicitation and selection review. Finally, Tier 1 and 2 stakeholders will be intimately involved in the next 10-year revision of this document, as they will continue to play a major role in identifying SGCN and key habitats, as well as updating and identifying new threats and actions for the next decade of WAP implementation. Stakeholders and the public will be kept informed of any updates, and participatory events can be used to solicit additional information. This includes magazine and newsletter articles, and exhibits and presentations at public events (e.g., fairs, festivals, public meetings, etc.) for increased exposure. This level of outreach will ensure that Rhode Island has considerable support for the RI WAP in the future.

### **RI WAP Organizational Infrastructure for Outreach and Coordination**

In order to coordinate with its partners, RI DEM DFW first had to establish an effective internal WAP administrative framework (see Table 7.1). RI DEM DFW officially launched the RI WAP revision in early 2012 when a core steering committee within RI DEM DFW was established and the original

consultant from the 2005 CWCS was contracted to assist in the WAP update. A general scope of work was developed to guide the effort, identifying key tasks to be accomplished. Specific guidance provided by the AFWA Best Practices (AFWA 2012), and later the Northeast Lexicon and Synthesis (Crisfield and NEFWDTC 2013, Terwilliger and NEFWDTC 2013), informed the approach throughout the planning process. With this guidance in mind, and with the input of a broadening circle of stakeholders and the conservation community, Rhode Island developed its 2015 RI WAP partnership approach, providing for general and technical input throughout the process.

A RI WAP Core Steering Team was formed with key RI DEM DFW staff (Table 7-2) and a liaison was designated to coordinate the development and implementation of the WAP. This team and liaison met with the consultant to compile existing resources and develop the initial timeline and framework. A series of organizational and input solicitation meetings were held to involve first key staff and then all RI DEM DFW staff. The effort to obtain input was then expanded through a series of meetings with other DEM divisions including Forest Environment, Planning and Development, Parks and Recreation, and Water Resources. A Technical Committee, consisting of key RI DEM DFW staff and the consultant, was established to deal with the substantial technical scientific data, issues, and correspondence with experts and stakeholders.

All levels of RI DEM DFW staff were engaged through initial internal SWG/RI WAP informational presentations with question/answer sessions and meetings. Additional input was sought individually at informal meetings and through follow-up correspondence. RI DEM DFW input was then solicited at the program level, where priority setting and conservation needs were discussed. Meetings with program staff were held to inform and update internal staff and partners on SGCN, key habitats, threats and conservation actions. Habitat GIS and Species teams were then established to address the need for external expert input on habitat and ecological communities and issues for the RI WAP. Key partners were asked to participate on a team or through consultation throughout the process. Specifically, a strong and unique partnership was created between the RI DEM and the Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy to guide the RI WAP development by leveraging financial resources and staff expertise. This effort was further enhanced by URI which also provided project and technical assistance as a key member of the core team. To support this collaboration, an organizational structure was created consisting of:

- 2015 RI WAP Core Steering Team;
- 2015 RI WAP Technical Committee;
- 2015 RI WAP Scientific Review Team;
- 2015 RI WAP Outreach Team; and
- 2015 RI WAP Community Liaison.



**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

**Table 7-1. Rhode Island’s WAP Coordinating Committees/Teams and Structure**

<b>Committee/Team</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Meeting</b>
RI WAP Core Steering Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RI DEM (DEM Acting Director, DFW Section Chief and staff member, Planning staff)</li> <li>TNC Senior Staff</li> <li>URI</li> <li>Consultant</li> </ul> 8 total members	Initiate and develop process and product, oversee and direct process	Every other month meetings, monthly updates
RI WAP Technical Committee (Species Teams)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 species teams (birds, amphibians &amp; reptiles, fish, invertebrates, mammals)</li> <li>45 total members</li> <li>Comprised of external and internal species experts (e.g., universities, partner agencies, NGOs, and other key stakeholder)</li> </ul>	Provide input and feedback on process and species/ habitat ID (technical QC). Coordination and progress evaluation (administrative and technical QC). Provide sound biological information & rankings for Elements 1-5.	Monthly during process and priority development, then weekly, or as input required
RI WAP Technical Committee (Habitat/GIS Team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 habitat/GIS team</li> <li>12 members</li> <li>Comprised external and internal habitat and mapping experts (e.g., universities, partner agencies, NGOs, and other key stakeholder)</li> </ul>	Technical input, scientific evaluation and peer review (technical QC) involved in Elements 2-5 and ranking	Initial planning then follow up Quarterly briefings and correspondence
RI WAP Scientific Review Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>125 members</li> <li>External and internal experts (universities, partner agencies, NGOs, and other key stakeholders)</li> </ul>	Technical input, scientific evaluation and peer review (technical QC) Engaged in elements 1-5 input and ranking	Monthly or more frequent correspondence, Meetings - quarterly or as needed
RI WAP Outreach Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 members</li> <li>External and internal members (DEM Acting Director, web developer, public relations, TNC staff, community outreach and engagement experts, consultant)</li> </ul>	Provide planning and feedback on the best approach for engaging and informing stakeholders in the revision process.	Every other month or as needed

**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

**Table 7-2. RI WAP Committees/Teams, Members and Affiliations**

<b>RI WAP Core Steering Committee</b>	
Scott Comings	The Nature Conservancy
John O'Brien	The Nature Conservancy
Jay Osenkowski	RI DEM (Team Liaison)
Chris Raithel	RI DEM
Sue Kiernan	RI DEM
Catherine Sparks	RI DEM
Peter Paton	University of Rhode Island (URI)
Karen Terwilliger	Terwilliger Consulting, Inc. (TCI)
Amanda Freitas	RI Natural History Survey (RINHS; Community Liaison)
<b>RI WAP Outreach Team</b>	
Tom Epstein	RI DEM
Gail Mastrati	RI DEM
Catherine Sparks	RI DEM
Jen West	Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
Scott Comings	The Nature Conservancy
Amanda Freitas	RI Natural History Survey (RINHS; Community Liaison)
Karen Terwilliger	TCI
<b>RI WAP Technical Team/Species Teams</b>	
<b>Birds</b>	
Scott Williams	URI
Shai Mitra	The City University of New York
Jay Osenkowski	RI DEM DFW
Peter Paton	URI
Chris Raithel	RI DEM DFW
Scott Comings	The Nature Conservancy
<b>Fish</b>	
Alan Libby	RI DEM
Chris Littlefield	The Nature Conservancy
Jason McNamee	RI DEM
John O'Brien	The Nature Conservancy
Chris Powell	Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership Committee
John Torgan	The Nature Conservancy
<b>Reptile and Amphibians</b>	
Nancy Karraker	URI
Peter Paton	URI
Chris Raithel	RI DEM
Julie Victoria	TCI
<b>Invertebrates</b>	
Charlie Brown	RI DEM DFW
Steven Brown	The Nature Conservancy
Ginger Brown	Consultant
Katie DeGoosh	RI DEM
Dennis Erkan	RI DEM DFW
David Gregg	RINHS
Anne Kuhn	EPA
Marc J. Mello	Lloyd Center for Environmental Studies
Chris Raithel	RI DEM
Richard Satchwill	RI DEM
Marty Wencek	RI DEM-Water Resources
<b>Mammals</b>	
Charlie Brown	RI DEM
Tom Husband	URI
Robert Kenney	URI
Suzanne Paton	USFWS Coastal Program
Brian Tefft	RI DEM

**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

<b>RI WAP Technical Team/Habitat Mapping/GIS Team</b>	
Peter August	URI
Gary Casabona	Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
Paul Jordan	RI DEM
Hope Leeson	RINHS
Andrew Maclachlan	USFWS Coastal Program
Chris Modisette	NRCS
Carol Murphy	RI DEM-Water Resources
Jay Osenkowski	RI DEM
Kevin Ruddock	The Nature Conservancy
Scott Ruhren	Audubon Society
Bruce Payton	RI DEM
<b>RI WAP Scientific Review Team</b>	
John Berg	The Nature Conservancy
David Borkman	URI
Jessica Cressman	Napatree Conservancy
Hank Ellis	RI DEM
William Fortune	RI Forest Conservators Organization
Rupert Friday	The Rhode Island Land Trust Council
Howie Ginsberg	USGS
Heather Hamilton	Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association
Scott Hobson	Caputo and Wick, LTD
Penny Howell	American Fisheries Society
Keith Killinbeck	URI
Erin King	RI National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex
Anne Kuhn	EPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Tom Kutcher	Save the Bay
Jim Less	Narragansett Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Christopher Mason	Mason and Associates
Cami McCandless	NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
Rick McKinney	EPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Leland Mello	Natural Resources Conservation Services
Mark J. Mello	Lloyd Center for Environmental Studies
Lou Perotti	Roger Williams Park Zoo
Susan Adamowicz, PhD	USFWS
Sheldon Pratt	URI
Evan Preisser	URI
Dave Reis	Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC)
Malia Schwartz	URI
Shawna Smith	RI DEM
Charlotte Sornberger	Audubon Society of Rhode Island
Caleb Spiegel	USFWS
Linda Steere	Applied Bio-Systems, Inc.
Terry Sullivan	The Nature Conservancy
Jim Tappero	RI Ducks Unlimited
Stephen Tyrrell	RI DEM
Niels Viggo Hobbs	URI
Bruce Ahern	RI DEM
Steven Alm	URI
Amanda Babson	National Park Service (NPS)
Robert Ballou	Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council
Chaplin Barnes	Napatree Conservancy
Richard Bellavance	Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council
Mark Bertness	Brown University, Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Richard Blodgett	Providence Water
Frank Blount	NE Fishery Management Council
Dori Boardman	RI Association of Wetland Scientists
Kenneth Booth	Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC)
Mike Bradley	URI Environmental Data Center
William E. Brumback	New England Plant Conservation Program

**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

Richard Casagrande	URI
Jeremy Collie	URI
Kevin Cute	Coastal Resources Management Council
Chris Deacutis	Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
Marisa Desautel	RI DEM
Paul C. Dolan	RI Resource Conservation & Development Area Council
Curtis Fisher	National Wildlife Federation (NWF)
Kim Gaffett	Block Island Bird Banding Station
Mark Gibson	RI DEM
Art Gold	URI Coastal Institute
Jeff Grant	RIMFC
Nick Grasso	Pheasants Forever
Eric Hall	Rhode Island College
Ray Hartenshire	Rhode Island College
Mitch Hartley	USFWS
Richard Hittinger	RIMFC
Johanna M. Hunter	American Heritage Rivers
Donald Jackson	Brown University
Donald Kaczmarczyk	Johnson and Wales University
Mike Kieron	Roger Williams Park Museum of Natural History
Jason Kolbe	URI
Dan Kowal	RI DEM
James Lazell	The Conservation Agency
Dale Leavitt	Roger Williams University
Roger LeBrun	URI
Stacey Leicht Young	URI
William Mackintosh III	RIMFC
David McCurdy	Atlantic States-Rural Waters Association; Rose Island Lighthouse Foundation
Numi Mitchell	The Conservation Agency
David Monti	RIMFC
Lisa Natanson	NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
Ronald Poltak	New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
Harold Pomeroy	Roger Williams University
Denise Poyer	Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association
Dave Preble	NE Fishery Management Council
Ken Raposa	NBNERR
Charles Roman	NPS
Janice Sassi	Napatree Conservancy
Milt Schumacher	RI Tree Farm
Tim Scott	Roger Williams University
Grant Simmons	Napatree Conservancy
Rhonda Smith	RI NWR Complex
Dinalyn Spears	Narragansett Indian Tribe
Bob Stankelis	NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve System
Sara Stevens	NPS
Judith Swift	URI Coastal Institute
Larry Taft	Audubon Society of Rhode Island
Dave Taylor	Roger Williams University
Carol Thornber	URI
Elise Torello	Salt Ponds Coalition
Marc Tremblay	Land Management Services
David Wagner	University of Connecticut (UConn)
Paul Webb	Roger Williams University
Robin Webber	Narragansett Bay Research Reserve
Paul Pezio-brook	Brook Trout Forever
Shane White	Rhode Island Geographic Information System
Cheryl Wiitala	The Nature Conservancy

## **Coordination with Partners**

Once an internal framework was established, the coordination effort expanded to local, state, federal, and tribal partners. RI DEM DFW employed the methods of the Bleiker Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) and Citizen Participation by Objective (CPO; Bleiker and Bleiker 2000) and developed a process to inform, involve, and engage partners and stakeholders throughout the development of the RI WAP. These methods helped to identify Potentially Affected Interests (PAI) or stakeholders, the objectives of the RI WAP process, and the most effective ways to inform stakeholders. Stakeholders were invited to participate in the process and to contribute to the conservation of Rhode Island's wildlife resources through incorporating their many programs and plans (Appendices 1a and 5).

### **Partner Outreach**

Partners were included in all teams and in each major phase of the RI WAP development and participated in the development of the SGCN and key habitat lists. They also provided and exchanged other valuable information and input throughout the document's development. A workshop was held asking partners to lead or participate in Species and Habitat teams and discussions towards the development of the SGCN and key habitat lists. Initial contact was made with each partner followed by informal meetings and a continuous information exchange. Small, informal focused meetings were held with key local, state, federal and tribal partners around the state to encourage more detailed and meaningful input during each step (per Bleiker CPO). Introductory meetings were held to inform them of the project and solicit input on the RI WAP process and recommendations for SGCN and key habitats.

Informal planning and follow up meetings and correspondence occurred on a quarterly basis from 2013 to 2015. Key partners exchanged technical information, coordinated activities, and provided updates to keep everyone informed and involved, then participated in additional meetings with other partners and the Narragansett Tribe in order to present a coordinated approach to wildlife diversity conservation in Rhode Island. Examples include meetings with URI, RI GIS, The Nature Conservancy, RINHS, USFWS, NRCS, Land Trust Council, Audubon, and EPA to coordinate conservation, planning, mapping and monitoring efforts. CPO objectives were aimed at sharing and integrating program information so that the RI WAP could be used by partners to help implement their programs, and vice versa. Coordination with neighboring states, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York, was also conducted, particularly in regards to addressing shared marine resources and similar habitats. The Core Steering Team was represented by the consultant at monthly meetings for the Northeast Lexicon and Synthesis projects. This ensured the RI WAP is compatible and consistent with the other thirteen states and districts within the region.

A key objective agreed upon by these partners was to coordinate with and integrate the results of this RI WAP into their plans developed over the next 10 years. This step was taken to insure that there would be maximum RI WAP coordination, implementation and buy-in by partners for the next decade.

State and federal partners, including USFWS Ecological Services, Private Lands Program and National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) staff, NRCS, USACOE, RI Cooperative Extension, RI DEM Division of Forest Environment, Division of Planning and Development, and Office of Water Resources, Freshwater Wetlands Program were also asked to incorporate the SGCN and key habitat conservation targets identified in the RI WAP into their programs and plans. Similarly, other key federal partners including

Narragansett Bay NERRS and EPA were all consulted early in the RI WAP process and asked how to best incorporate RI WAP targets into their programs and plans, and how the RI WAP could best incorporate their programs and plans. Especially relevant and promising was the synergy and opportunities revealed between RI WAP targets and the NRCS Farm Bill and RIEMC programs as they impact SGCN and key habitats. Key partner land protection efforts were also researched and land ownership documented (Table 7-3).

**Table 7-3. Existing Land Conservation by RI DEM and its Partners through Land Acquisition, Conservation Easements and Other Agreements**

<b>Agency or Organization</b>	<b>Lands Protected (acres)</b>
RI DEM, Division of Fish and Wildlife	46,000 +
RI DEM, Division of Forest Environment	40,000 +
RI DEM, Division of Parks and Recreation	15,000
Municipalities	13,000 +
Audubon Society of RI	9,500 +
NOAA (Narragansett Bay NERR)	4,800
The Nature Conservancy	12,000 +
RI DEM, Division of Agriculture	4,000
USFWS	2,125

The RI WAP Core Steering Committee coordinated the WAP development with key federal partners, each of whom were solicited for input via written and electronic correspondence, invited to meetings and workshops, and requested to review draft versions of the document via the RI DEM DFW RI WAP website. These agencies included the USFWS (Ecological Services, NWRs, Private Lands Program, Coastal Program, Fisheries, and Federal Aid), NRCS, EPA, USDA, USFS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), USGS, NOAA, National Park Service (NPS), and DOD. The comments and recommendations of these federal partners were considered and incorporated by RI DEM DFW as appropriate during the document’s preparation.

Similarly, RI DEM DFW coordinated the RI WAP development with all affected state agency and local partners. Follow-up exchange of information and updates established a new level of coordination between these agencies and partners. Each partner was informed of the RI WAP targets, process, and schedule and was asked to incorporate the RI WAP information into their appropriate programs and plans (refer to Appendix 7).

Coordination with the federally recognized Narragansett Tribe (the Tribe) consisted of a meeting with the Natural Resource staff at the 2013 National Fish and Wildlife Conference as well as multiple calls, emails, and letters from RI DEM and the consultant to invite their participation and input. Follow up correspondence provided information and updates on the SWG state and tribal programs and funding and continued to request their participation and input. Specific calls were conducted to coordinate development of the Elements 1-4 and to assist the tribes in wildlife conservation both short and long term to benefit to SGCN and habitats. Coordination with the USFWS Tribal Liaison was initiated to provide an additional avenue to engage the Tribe by providing both RI WAP and the Regional WAP effort information. The Tribe was given the opportunity to review and comment on each piece of the draft RI WAP and to participate in each meeting throughout the two year process, however no response or input was received. As partnership opportunities with state-recognized tribes arise during the implementation stage, RI DEM DFW will continue to coordinate with these tribes.

Coordination with all federal, state, local, and tribal partners will be carried forward on a regular, multi-level basis throughout the RI WAP implementation and future revisions. RI DEM DFW staff will inform and update partners and stakeholders at partners' regularly scheduled meetings. SGCN and key habitat information will be presented and these partners will be asked to incorporate them into their plans and programs as they are revised. In this manner, there will be an ongoing dialogue and information feedback loop in which partners' plans reflect the RI WAP targets and the RI WAP incorporates partners' revisions and updated plans and information. This provides an effective mechanism for partner and stakeholder input into RI WAP review and implementation as well as participation at the staff, program and organization level.

Information regarding RI WAP collaboration with specific partners is detailed below.

### **Collaboration with State Partners**

The RI DEM DFW regularly coordinates with state partners (both in Rhode Island and adjacent states) in natural resource conservation and these existing partnerships were utilized to develop this RI WAP. These state agency and institutional partners will be involved annually to implement many of the RI WAP conservation actions. New partnerships will be formed as a result of this process and are critical to implementing new conservation actions that were identified by RI DEM DFW and its partners. The existing partnerships represent institutional opportunities to involve numerous stakeholders in the implementation of the RI WAP, addressing the needs of SGCN and key habitats throughout the state. For instance, RI DEM and its partners already own and/or manage over 138,000 acres of land within the state – lands which are already protecting key habitats and available for adaptive management practices to enhance habitat values (Table 7-3). Opportunities for future collaboration include the annual coordination and other joint partnership meetings scheduled throughout the year. Updates to RI WAP target species, habitat and conservation actions can be discussed allowing partners to incorporate updates into their plans and programs and annual budget for synchronized implementation.

### **Rhode Island Geographic Information System**

The Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) is a consortium of private and government organizations that manage a collective database of GIS information, including biological and other natural resource data (<http://www.edc.uri.edu/rigis/>). Many of these organizations were involved in the RI WAP development and will incorporate the new data and maps from the RI WAP. Specifically, the COA map will be used by many of these partners.

RIGIS monitors and coordinates the use of GIS technology in Rhode Island, provides the technical data to the public, and assists partner organizations to use the data. The consortium produced the Rhode Island Critical Resources Atlas, which assessed the state's natural resources such as rare species habitat, wetlands, water quality, and land use patterns (URI 2004). They are continually improving data, for example, the updated airports and RI E-911 datasets and the impervious surfaces datasets (URI 2013) that were used in this RI WAP revision development. RIGIS is based at the URI's Environmental Data Center.

### **Department of Administration - Statewide Planning Program**

The Rhode Island Division of Planning within the Department of Administration (DA) provides centralized state planning through the RI *State Guide Plan*. The State Guide Plan is a collection of Elements that address various planning issues. In particular Element 121- *Land Use 2025* contains many goals, policies and actions for the protection of natural resources, including beaches and wetlands, farmland and forests, greenways and greenspace. The overarching vision of *Land Use 2025* is that “Rhode Island will be a constellation of community centers connected by infrastructure corridors and framed by greenspace.” In contrast, the plan points out that the current development trend, if unabated, “would produce a highly diffuse or sprawling urbanized region having a relatively small residual of unfragmented open areas.” Just as importantly, it recognizes that this type of development has only occurred for the last few decades and is “a decided departure from the long-term trend”, whereas “the traditional development pattern that Rhode Island followed for over three centuries is one of a more compact pattern of cities and town and village centers, surrounded by open countryside.” The shared goal of *Land Use 2025* and the Rhode Island WAP is to return to a land use vision that promotes an urban-rural distinction and in so doing leaves wild and other undeveloped places for future generations of Rhode Islanders and wildlife. As Rhode Island’s primary plan for conservation and development in the 21st century, *Land Use 2025* “articulates the State’s over-arching goals, objectives, and strategies to guide and coordinate the land use plans and regulations of municipalities and State agencies and to direct good, strategic projects at both the State and municipal level.” It is mandatory that the goals and policies of *Land Use 2025* and all Elements of the State Guide Plan be reflected in the municipal comprehensive plans.

Additional Elements of the *State Guide Plan* include an *Urban and Community Forest Plan* (Element 156), *Forest Resources Management Plan* (Element 161), *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* (Element 162), *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Narragansett Bay* (Element 715), *Ocean State Outdoors: Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (Element 152), *A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island’s Future* (Element 155), and *Energy Plan* (Element 781).

In addition to the RI *State Guide Plan*, further guidance and support is provided by the Division’s Statewide Planning Program staff that specialize in areas such as land use, comprehensive planning, GIS, and transportation. The Division of Planning has links to many collaborative plans that influence the fate of wildlife and the natural resources upon which they rely on the *Land Use and Natural Resources* section of their website. Each of these conservation and management plans provides an opportunity for integration with this RI WAP, highlighting mutual needs and conservation actions. These are all anticipated opportunities for coordination and incorporation of RI WAP information and targets over the next decade.

### **Rhode Map RI**

A recent initiative of Statewide Planning that has a specific wildlife component is *Rhode Map RI*. It is a statewide, collaborative effort to seek input from all Rhode Island residents to devise ways to improve Rhode Island’s economy and livability with transportation, land use, and environmental protection strategies that creatively mobilize state and local assets.

As its name suggests, maps are one of the primary products of *Rhode Map RI*. Specifically, these maps identify important assets from both the built and natural environment (i.e., “Green Assets”). Seeing the



great value in a partnership approach to identifying and protecting these assets, Statewide Planning incorporated extensive feedback from a team of resource professionals throughout RI DEM, The Nature Conservancy, and URI that resulted in the addition of a habitat component to the State's Green Assets mapping. As discussed in Chapter 2, the work of this "Green Assets" team and its Core Natural Areas, Sites, and Corridors informed the final Conservation Opportunity Areas mapping that forms the foundation of RI WAP's conservation strategy.

### **Rhode Island Rivers Council**

The Statewide Planning Program also supports state partner organizations such as the Rhode Island Rivers Council which is responsible for designating and supporting individual Watershed Councils and the management of the state's rivers and streams (<http://www.ririvers.org/>). The Rivers Council has developed a Rivers Policy and Classification Plan that classifies the state's watersheds, assesses their health, and identifies threats ([http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/guide\\_plan/rivers.pdf](http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/guide_plan/rivers.pdf) RI DA 2004). Some of these priorities have been identified as threats to key habitats and SGCN in this RI WAP analysis, and the RI DEM DFW's existing partnership with the Rivers Council affords an opportunity to implement conservation actions that address these priorities together with these partners. The Watershed Councils are existing partners as well, and collaboration on specific riparian and aquatic conservation projects will continue to implement several RI WAP conservation actions.

### **Coastal Resources Management Council**

The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) was established in 1971 as a separate state agency to be the regulatory authority along the Rhode Island coast (<http://www.crmc.state.ri.us/>). The RI CRMC governs development projects in all state waters (up to three miles offshore) and for 200 feet inland from any coastal features such as beaches, dunes, coastal wetlands, bluffs, cliffs, rocky shores, and manmade shorelines. In addition to its regulatory authority, CRMC develops coastal management plans and policies, oversees other state agencies and local governments that deal with coastal zone management issues, and sponsors coastal zone research on emerging issues. The RI DEM partners with the CRMC on coastal zone projects such as salt marsh restoration, eelgrass restoration and water quality issues in Narragansett Bay. Protection of coastal and marine SGCN and key habitats will continue to be integrated into RI DEM's partnership with the CRMC.

In 2012 CRMC was awarded a NOAA research grant for studying the impacts of climate change and sea level rise on Rhode Island's fragile coastal wetlands and tidal marshes. Sea Level Affecting Marsh Model (SLAMM) is a tool for decision makers and resources managers to use in planning how to protect and use marshes in the future when flooding and change becomes an issue. In conjunction with other modeling, SLAMM will lead to revisions to RI coastal program policies and standards, new climate change adaptation strategies, and new standards for coastal buffer zones and coastal wetland restoration projects. These areas are key habitats for many of Rhode Island's SGCN.

([http://www.crmc.ri.gov/news/2012\\_1011\\_noaa.html](http://www.crmc.ri.gov/news/2012_1011_noaa.html)).

### **Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council**

The Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (RIMFC) is an advisory council that holds monthly meetings to advise the RI DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife on the management of the state's marine and estuarine fish and shellfish resources. The Council has advisory panels devoted to shellfish, the fishery industry, and individually managed species as needed. The RIMFC aids in the protection of the state's

fishery resources through the issuance of aquaculture leases, development of annual fishery management plans, and coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Refer to sections below for more information on the NEFMC and ASMFC. In addition, the Council addresses emerging threats or problems such as gear conflict, the density of fish pots in nearshore areas, dockside sales, and compliance with floating fish trap regulations.

### **Department of Transportation**

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RI DOT) is responsible for the construction and maintenance of the state's roadways (<http://www.dot.ri.gov/>). RI DOT operates a Scenic Roadways program, various bicycle pathways, and the state ferry system. RI DEM and RI DOT partnered together over the past twenty years on the creation of Blackstone River Bikeway State Park (11.6 miles) and the East Bay Bike State Park (14.5 miles), both of which afforded RI DEM the opportunity to protect riparian corridor habitats. RI DOT also coordinates with RI DEM on the construction of new roadways and other transportation projects, allowing the opportunity to protect SGCN and key habitats on a site-by-site basis and mitigate the threats of habitat loss and fragmentation.

### **Collaboration with Local Partners**

Rhode Island's municipalities are key partners with RI DEM in the conservation of the state's natural resources. Managing almost 2,000 parks and beaches totaling over 13,000 acres (RI DEM 2003), municipalities are an important stakeholder in the implementation of this RI WAP. These municipalities frequently partner with local organizations to conserve natural resources and have protected over 13,000 acres (Paul Jordan 2014 email communication). For this reason, the 2005 CWCS identified the need for a WAP Community Liaison, and hired one in 2013 through a collaboration with the RINHS. This position solicited community input in the development of this revision and focused on municipalities and land trusts for specific input.

The Comprehensive Community Plan that each municipality is required to develop and maintain (on a five-year update schedule) guide local land use planning and provide an opportunity to implement RI WAP conservation actions on a local level. RI DEM has existing partnerships with several municipal organizations and governments, some of which are highlighted below. The liaison was hired through RI DEM DFW and RINHS to coordinate with these local partners to encourage incorporation of the WAP into their local documents and planning processes. This provided an effective mechanism for coordination throughout the RI WAP revision. Partnerships with local municipal entities will also assist in key implementation efforts over the next decade.

### **The Providence Plan**

The city of Providence is the largest urban area in Rhode Island and represents a significant opportunity for RI DEM to implement habitat restoration projects in a developed setting. The Providence Plan (<http://www.provplan.org/#>) is a nonprofit partnership amongst city and state agencies, the academic community, private entities, and the residents of Providence to address poverty and urban decline through economic and community development and renewal projects. The Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project also seeks to promote environmental education and awareness of river conservation and ecology

within the city. The municipal organization has partnered with RI DEM, EPA, NPS, U.S. DOT and others to implement the riparian restoration project, using it as a pilot watershed project.

### Conservation Commissions

Conservation Commissions are another asset that most (34 out of 39) Rhode Island municipalities have available to them as a valuable conservation resource. R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 45-35-1 through 45-35-4 enable city or town councils to create three to seven-member conservation commissions, “the purpose of which is to promote and develop the natural resources, protect the watershed resources, and preserve natural esthetic areas within municipalities.” The statute also asserts that the commissions research local land and seek to coordinate with like-minded non-governmental groups and that they “may recommend to municipal councils, boards, or agencies, a program for the better promotion, development, utilization, or preservation of open areas, streams, shores, wooded areas, roadsides, swamps, marshlands, and natural esthetic areas.” Commissions can also receive gifts of funds or property in the city or town’s name or acquire interests in such properties (such as easements or development rights) by gift, purchase, or otherwise, and shall manage these in accordance with their mission. [The Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions](#) (RIACC) is a non-profit, grassroots network for Rhode Island municipal conservation commissions and their regional counterparts aimed at enhancing education, problem-solving, cooperation, and coordination for better conservation outcomes. The Community Liaison will be coordinating with these important local partners to incorporate the WAP revision information into their efforts and decisions.

### Local Comprehensive Plans

Rhode Island has what can be referred to as a reciprocal land use planning system. Whereas the *State Guide Plan* establishes overarching long-range goals and policies, municipalities must set their individual long-range priorities via community comprehensive plans. These plans must be reviewed and approved by the State to ensure consistency with the [Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act](#) and *State Guide Plan*. Conversely, once municipal comprehensive plans are approved, State agencies must ensure that their programs and projects are consistent with them. The Community Liaison will be coordinating with localities to incorporate the WAP revision information into these important planning documents and planning processes.

Comprehensive plans are influential documents in terms of conservation and development in Rhode Island. They essentially provide a blueprint for each community by laying out its long-range goals, formulating an implementation plan to achieve those goals, and serving as the foundation for municipal zoning. While municipalities have the authority to enact conservation, however, many are short on time, finances, and/or the expertise necessary to follow through. In fact, only thirteen of Rhode Island’s 39 cities and towns presently have a fully approved comprehensive plan. Under these circumstances, partnerships become particularly vital. RI WAP aims to provide guidance to make conservation work more efficient, and thus more cost-effective, for Rhode Island’s cities and towns.

### Resource Conservation and Development Program

Another example of conservation at the local or district level is the Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) in Rhode Island. The following map (Figure 7-1) shows the RC&D areas and conservation program enrollment in the diversity of conservation incentive funding programs in

Rhode Island. This conservation partnership represents the participation of numerous federal, state, local, and private entities to deliver natural resource conservation locally.

### **Land Trusts**

The northeastern region has the highest number of land trust organizations in the country. These non-profit organizations have protected 8.47 million acres of land across the region (Land Trust Alliance 2014). Rhode Island has more than 47 local and regional land trusts that have protected approximately 30,000 acres of land in the state through ownership, easement or other means of conservation (Land Trust Alliance 2010). The Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy created the Rhode Island Land Trust Council in 1999 to provide technical assistance to these land trusts, allowing them to coordinate and collaborate on their activities; the Council has since become an independent organization. The Rhode Island Land Trust Council, Rhode Island Rivers Council and the Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions have also partnered together to sponsor an annual Land and Water Conservation Summit, which includes a variety of workshops to facilitate and strengthen conservation partnerships, as well as to educate land trusts on threats and needs to Rhode Island's natural resources, funding opportunities and advocacy methods. The land trusts of Rhode Island represent an important partner in the protection of SGCN and key habitats and offer the opportunity for increased RI DEM outreach to incorporate RI WAP needs and goals into local land protection efforts. RI WAP species and habitat targets will be provided to these groups to assist their selection of land prioritization and protection efforts as they are improved and updated throughout the WAP implementation. The Community Liaison will be coordinating with these important partners to incorporate the WAP revision information into their efforts.

### **Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative**

The Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (RICSC) (<http://www.ricsc.org/index.php>) is a collaborative of conservation partners including RI DEM and other conservation organizations such as RINHS, URI Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI), and USFWS. Its primary mission is to advance long-term protection and stewardship of terrestrial, aquatic, coastal, estuarine, and marine areas in Rhode Island that have been conserved by fee, easement, or other means. Projects that have been implemented since the 2005 CWCS include: the development of the Stewardship Resource Library, a website that provides links to existing information and RICSC developed information on land stewardship practices and protocols; the development of the ecological communities database protocol and classification system to assist in mapping for projects such as the state forest plan and the RI WAP; the development and renewal of the Natural Heritage Database and Rhode Island Communities Mapping; preparation of the RIECC and On-line Atlas; updating of the Protected Lands Database; support for the Youth Conservation League in 2011; and the development of trail signage guidelines.

### **Collaboration with Federal Partners**

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

The USFWS maintains several fish and wildlife conservation efforts in Rhode Island. The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) has established a complex of National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) protecting valuable fish and wildlife habitat. The Rhode Island NWR Complex includes the Block Island NWR, the John H. Chafee NWR at Pettaquamscutt Cove, Ninigret NWR, Sachuest Point

NWR, and the Trustom Pond NWR. These refuges have conserved approximately 2,125 acres of coastal habitat in the state (USFWS 2014). Each refuge has developed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that summarizes fish and wildlife resources and habitats, assesses the refuge's resource and management needs, and outlines a conservation plan for meeting those needs (USFWS 2014). Although the CCP was completed in 2002, the Habitat Management Plans (HMPs) for each refuge within the Rhode Island NWR Complex have been developed and are revised to adapt to changing conditions and management priorities. Several SGCN are found on the USFWS refuges, representing a prime opportunity to incorporate SGCN and habitat information into their management plans in order to further implement the RI WAP through this important federal partner. Annual coordination meetings are anticipated to provide opportunities for information exchange and updates on RI WAP targets and implementation progress. Continued cooperative work on Piping Plover, colonial waterbirds, and rare beetles are examples of such opportunities over the next decade.

In addition to preserving land for the conservation of valuable fish and wildlife resources within Rhode Island, the USFWS has provided several million dollars in grants for conservation projects in the state in recent years. The USFWS and NRCS has a new partnership called Working Lands for Wildlife that uses agency technical assistance and financial assistance from the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) to combat the decline of federally listed and other species of concern on private lands. This program allows for an additional opportunity for USFWS to work with RI DEM DFW to implement management strategies of SGCN within the state of Rhode Island. The management of federally listed species within Rhode Island is coordinated by the New England Ecological Services Field Office in Concord, New Hampshire. The Southern New England-New York Bight Coastal Ecosystems Program in Charlestown, Rhode Island, collaborates with states and partners adjacent to Narragansett Bay on habitat restoration projects, land conservation, and the identification of priority coastal habitats and threats to coastal and marine habitats ([http://www.fws.gov/r5nep/area/Narragansett\\_Bay.html](http://www.fws.gov/r5nep/area/Narragansett_Bay.html)). The USFWS's Fisheries Program works to protect fish and wildlife habitats in Rhode Island, focusing on the restoration of migratory fish to the Pawcatuck River basin. The USFWS also maintains a Law Enforcement Special Agent in Narragansett to enforce existing federal fish and wildlife conservation laws and occasionally assist state law enforcement efforts. The RI DEM DFW regularly collaborates with each of these USFWS offices and the refuges, and the grant programs represent a funding mechanism for implementing this RI WAP. Coordination meetings with each of these programs will occur throughout the next decade on important conservation issues (e.g., recovery planning, HMP revisions, landowner assistance, refuge planning, migratory bird planning) and provide opportunities to implement RI WAP target SGCN and key habitat conservation actions, and exchange and update information on these important targets. Revisions of each HMP and other program plans will allow USFWS to incorporate RI WAP targets and become an active implementation partner of the RI WAP.

### **U.S. Geological Survey**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has several on-going natural resource programs and projects within Rhode Island and its marine waters that contribute to the conservation of fish and wildlife resources. The Water Resources Division (WRD) of the USGS has on-going projects to study water quality and quantity in Rhode Island, particularly groundwater resources in the Pawcatuck River basin and on Block Island (<http://ri.water.usgs.gov/>). The Biological Resources Division (BRD) of the USGS also has scientific programs to aid in the understanding and conservation of fish and wildlife resources within Rhode Island, with staff located in a cooperative studies unit at URI. RI DEM DFW coordinates with USGS scientists to

monitor, research, and protect the state's fish and wildlife resources, and this ongoing partnership will allow for efficient implementation of several of the research and monitoring needs identified in this RI WAP.

### **National Park Service**

The National Park Service (NPS) maintains the Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence and the Touro Synagogue National Historic Site in Newport. The NPS is the lead federal partner in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, which encompasses areas within both Massachusetts and Rhode Island (<http://www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm>). At almost 400,000 acres, the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor is New England's largest national park (Gibbs et al. 1995). The NPS is collaborating with the RI DEM and others to develop an updated Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River corridor. This plan includes a natural resources inventory and assessment, with which the RI WAP can be integrated. The existing partnership between the NPS and the RI DEM provides an excellent opportunity to implement RI WAP conservation actions in the Blackstone River corridor.

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers several key programs for private landowners, states, communities, tribes and nonprofit organizations to conserve and protect fish and wildlife resources (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>, Table 7-4). These programs typically are administered with the assistance of the USFWS and in Rhode Island, the RI DEM DFW. The grant programs offer a means for the state to collaborate with private landowners to achieve fish and wildlife conservation goals in a cooperative manner. The NRCS develops State Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) plans to prioritize habitat needs and areas within each state. Funding from the WHIP and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) have restored hundreds of acres of these priority habitats, and provide an ongoing partnership for implementing RI WAP conservation actions related to these key habitats and the SGCN they support. This is a key partnership opportunity for implementing conservation for SGCN and key habitats, as NRCS incorporates the information from the RI WAP into their plan revisions and programs.

The Map Coast Partnership between NRCS, RI DEM, CRMC, NBEP, URI, the Coastal Institute, RINHS, and many others has undertaken a project to develop a subaqueous soils classification system that will facilitate the mapping of aquatic coastal ecosystems (<http://www.ci.uri.edu/Projects/MapCoast/default.html>).

NRCS participates in a regional New England Cottontail Initiative with USFWS and state departments such as Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) to develop local conservation plans on private lands to sustain critical NEC habitat. The New England Cottontail Initiative is a comprehensive strategy to accelerate restoration of critical habitats that support the New England Cottontail recovery efforts ([http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1082032.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1082032.pdf)).

The primary objective is to support the recovery of the New England Cottontail in its historic range. The status of the New England Cottontail is considered to be a species at-risk and listed as a candidate species by USFWS. NRCS oversees the Working Lands for Wildlife partnership to preserve working lands and conserve habitat for wildlife species including the New England Cottontail. NRCS and USFWS reached

an historic agreement to extend wildlife conservation efforts on working agricultural lands that will provide long-term regulatory predictability for up to 30 years to RI farmers and forest landowners participating in the Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative. Participants voluntarily implement proven conservation practices designed to protect wildlife habitat such as the New England Cottontail on private lands.

NRCS also addresses the need for pollinators to enhance biodiversity through a number of methods including the Farm Bill of 2008 and the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/help/>). The Farm Bill authorizes a range of incentive-based conservation programs on agricultural lands that can be used to create or improve pollinator habitat. Farmers who participate in these programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) receive special consideration for financial incentives. Other programs under the Farm Bill allow opportunities for landowners to conserve and create habitats for pollinators through the use of certain plants for cover crops and riparian buffers and through the handling of pest management practices and prescribed burning. NRCS is also a partner in the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign that is an alliance of over 150 state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and corporations that coordinate pollinator research, conservation, education, and policy in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

### **U.S. Forest Service**

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) offers technical and financial assistance to states, operates national programs on invasive species, forest and rangeland management (including fire) and biological diversity, and tracks the status, distribution and health of forestland throughout the country (<http://www.fs.fed.us/>). While there are no national forests in Rhode Island, the RI DEM partners with the USFS to inventory and monitor the state's forest resources, the trends of which are discussed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. The USFS was a partner with RI DEM and the Rural Lands Coalition in the South County Greenspace Project. This existing partnership provides a foundation to implement RI WAP survey, monitoring and conservation actions related to key forest habitats.

### **Northeast Climate Science Center**

The Northeast Climate Science Center (NECSC) is part of a federal network of eight Climate Science Centers created to provide scientific information, tools, and techniques that managers and other parties interested in land, water, wildlife and cultural resources can use to anticipate, monitor, and adapt to climate change.

Recognizing the critical threats and unique climate challenges and the expansive and diverse nature of the NE region, no one institution can provide the region-wide expertise on all critical levels. Thus, the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass), College of Menominee Nation (CMN), Columbia University (CU), Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL), University of Minnesota (UMN), University of Missouri Columbia (UMO), and University of Wisconsin-Madison (UWI) have formed the Northeast Climate Consortium (NECC) to host the DOI NECSC, working with USGS and partners to provide deep and diverse resources for successfully meeting the regional needs for climate impact science assessment, education and stakeholder outreach throughout the NE region. In addition to the host institutions, the NECSC will include several resource management partners, including Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) that exist, in part or whole, within the NECSC bounds. <http://necsc.umass.edu/> <http://www.doi.gov//csc/northeast/index.cfm>

**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

**Table 7-4. Natural resource conservation programs available through the federal U.S. Department of Agriculture to Rhode Island and their allocations for FY2013 (or last year available).**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	<b>Technical Assistance</b>	<b>Updated Figures Pending</b>
Farm Service Agency (FSA), U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA)	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Voluntary program for farmers and ranchers to assist in compliance with environmental laws and regulations, establish vegetative cover on highly erodible cropland, improve water quality, establish wildlife habitat, and enhance wetlands and forests.	Yes	Yes	\$ 2,000 (FY2004)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA	Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)	Voluntary program that provides cost-share assistance to farms for watershed management or irrigation structures, tree planting for windbreaks or water quality improvement, soil erosion control measures, integrated pest management or conversion to organic farming.	Yes		\$ 133,587
	Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI)	Voluntary program that provides grants to states, communities, tribes, and NGOs for planning conservation projects in terrestrial and aquatic habitat, coastal resources, livestock nutrient management, and/or minor/specialty crop pest management.	Yes	Yes	National grant fund
	Conservation Security Program (CSP)	Voluntary conservation program that rewards farmers and ranchers in high priority watersheds (including the Scituate Reservoir and Pocasset watersheds) that maintain and enhance the highest standards of environmental stewardship on their lands.	Yes	Yes	
	Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)	Voluntary program that provides cost sharing for agricultural improvements that will help meet water quality and other environmental objectives.	Yes	Yes	\$ 5,461,693



**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	<b>Technical Assistance</b>	<b>Updated Figures Pending</b>
	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	Voluntary program that provides matching funds to state, tribal or local governments, and non-governmental organizations to purchase development rights to maintain existing farms and/or ranches.	Yes		\$ 3,258,459
	Farmland Protection Program	Voluntary program that provides matching funds to states, communities, tribes and nonprofit organizations for the purchase of conservation easements to protect productive farmland.	Yes		\$ 1,328,600 (FY2002)
	Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	Voluntary program that allows landowners to protect, enhance or restore grasslands, pastures, shrublands, and ranges on their properties.	Yes	Yes	\$ 1,747,881
	Resource Conservation and Development (RCandD) Program	Localized program that assists state, tribal and local governments and NGOs in rural areas in conservation planning and management, sustainable development and quality of life improvements.	Yes	Yes	
	Soil and Water Conservation Assistance (SWCA)	Voluntary program to provide cost-share incentives to farms and ranches for soil and water conservation measures, related natural resource conservation, and compliance with environmental laws and regulations.	Yes		\$ 38,600 (FY2001)
	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program	Voluntary program that assists landowners and local organizations to develop and implement watershed plans, conduct river basin studies, flood hazard analyses, floodplain management practices, and water and land conservation measures.	Yes	Yes	\$ 0 (\$ 0 in FY2004)

**CHAPTER 7: OUTREACH AND COORDINATION**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	<b>Technical Assistance</b>	<b>Updated Figures Pending</b>
	Watershed Surveys and Planning	Voluntary program that assists states, communities, tribes and others to survey and plan watershed protection, sediment and erosion control, water quality, flood prevention, fish and wildlife enhancement, wetland restoration and creation, and other water needs projects.	Yes	Yes	\$ 0 (\$ 535,500 in FY2004)
	Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	Voluntary conservation program that protects, enhances and restores wetlands and their wildlife resources on private lands.	Yes	Yes	\$ 546,800
	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	Voluntary program that assists landowners to create high quality aquatic, riparian, wetland and upland habitat areas that support wildlife populations of local, state, national or tribal significance.	Yes	Yes	\$ 1,120,558
U.S. Forest Service, USDA	Forest Inventory and Analysis Program	Tracks the status, distribution and health of forestland throughout the country.		Yes	
	National Resources Inventory (NRI) Program	Monitors the status and trends of non-federal land use throughout the country.		Yes	
	Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP)	Voluntary program that encourages private forest landowners to maintain productive and healthy forests.	Yes	Yes	
	State and Private Forestry Programs	Assists private landowners, businesses, states, tribes and communities to sustain and manage forestlands, control invasive species, restore urban trees and greenspace, and manage the impacts of wildland fires on communities and the environment.	Yes	Yes	

### **Environmental Protection Agency**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the federal agency responsible for enforcing the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and other environmental regulations that protect Rhode Island's fish and wildlife resources. The agency has a specific presence in Rhode Island through its partnerships with the Rivers Council, URI, RI DEM and others on several conservation projects and scientific studies from its office at the URI Bay Campus in Narragansett. It developed the Rhode Island Resource Protection Project (RIRPP), which is part of a New England-wide effort to identify the region's most ecologically healthy areas and created a Resource Protection Area map (<http://www.edc.uri.edu/rirpp/>). Maps resulting from this joint federal/state effort are displayed in Chapters 2 and 3 to depict relative distribution of general habitat resources in the state.

### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) administers several natural resource programs that effect Rhode Island's fish and wildlife resources (<http://www.noaa.gov>). NOAA is the key federal agency charged with protecting the nation's marine resources, including federally-listed marine species such as sea turtles (when they are in the water; the USFWS has jurisdiction over nesting sea turtles) and Shortnose Sturgeon. Federal fishery management plans (FMPs) and the implementation of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) regulations are also NOAA functions. As a result of these interests, NOAA maintains a research and regulatory presence in the state's marine waters.

The Rhode Island Sea Grant Program falls under NOAA as well (<http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/>). NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management oversees state coastal zone management agencies (the Coastal Resources Management Council-CRMC), authorizing and funding their management programs (<http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/>). In addition, NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration produces oil spill ecological risk maps and responds to the clean-up and restoration of damaged ecosystems following oil and fuel spills (<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov>). NOAA is the leading federal agency promoting the research and restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and has collaborated with (and funded) eelgrass restoration projects in Narragansett Bay. (<http://www.csc.noaa.gov/benthic/mapping/analyzing/narragan.htm>).

NOAA also manages a network of National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR), including the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR) (<http://www.nbnerr.org/>). NBNERR was established in 1980 and expanded in 1993. It currently owns and manages 2,542 acres on Prudence, Patience and Hope Islands plus an additional 2,300 acres of open water habitat (to a water depth of 18 ft) in Narragansett Bay.

### **New England Fishery Management Council**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) (<http://www.nefmc.org>) is a regional council that manages the fishery stocks of numerous marine and estuarine species, several of which have been identified as SGCN for Rhode Island (e.g., Atlantic Salmon, Monkfish, skates). Rhode Island is a member of the NEFMC, and RI DEM regularly collaborates with the Council on the protection and management of these species as well as marine habitats (Appendix 7a). The Council also works with NMFS and others in the protection of key habitats through the designation of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and Marine Protected Areas, the management of EFH, and collaborative fisheries management research through NMFS's Cooperative Research Partners Program.

### **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission**

Rhode Island is a member of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), which assists in the management of mobile fishery species within state waters through regional and national coordination (<http://www.asmfc.org>). As listed in Chapter 1, the ASMFC has formulated interstate fishery management plans for several SGCN, including American Eel, Atlantic Sturgeon, Atlantic Menhaden, lobster, Horseshoe Crab, Weakfish, and Winter Flounder. The Commission's Research and Statistics Program coordinates stock assessments, tagging, habitat mapping, economic and social science studies and many other research efforts related to fisheries resources and management. Thus the ASMFC is a vital partner and mechanism for protecting Rhode Island's fishery resources.

### **Department of Defense**

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) operates several military facilities within Rhode Island. Newport is known as the "birthplace of the Navy" and is the location of the Naval War College and a naval port (Gibbs et al. 1995). Many of the coastal islands in Narragansett Bay historically were military installations, including Sachuest Point NWR, Prudence Island, Gould Island, and Dutch Island. Southern Prudence Island was utilized as a naval installation and storage depot during World War II, and Gould Island supported a naval torpedo station during World War II (Gibbs et al. 1995). While small military facilities remain on the northern tip of Gould Island, most of the island is now owned by the RI DEM DFW. RI DEM DFW has coordinated with the DOD on the transfer of many historic military facilities and lands to state ownership, managing them primarily for conservation today. The two agencies have also worked together on the restoration of other military lands, remediating contaminated sites and abandoned munitions.

### **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is the federal agency that oversees the protection of wetlands and waters of the U.S. through the Section 404 of the Clean Water Act permit program and the Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act permit program. These permit programs protect the wetlands and waters of Rhode Island by avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts to these important habitats. The New England District of the ACOE is located in Concord, Massachusetts (<http://www.nae.usace.army.mil>). RI DEM closely coordinates with the ACOE on its regulatory functions to protect the state's wetlands and waters, and the SGCN and key habitats identified in the RI WAP can be integrated into those regulatory permit reviews. ACOE also designs, constructs and maintains water resources development projects like dredging, dredge disposal, and shoreline stabilization. The Water Management Section owns and maintains numerous dams, reservoirs and floodways, but none of these are located in Rhode Island. The technical and financial assistance programs of the ACOE, including their Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program, will provide an additional mechanism to implement RI WAP conservation actions.

In 2006, a \$2.6 million restoration of the former Lonsdale Drive-I Theater along the Blackstone River in Lincoln, Rhode Island was completed. About 23 acres of asphalt and debris was removed and the site restored to riparian, emergent marsh, and upland grassland habitat. The ACOE New England Division provided 65% of the cost for this project, with the remaining 35% coming from a consortium of groups and programs including the Rhode Island Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, RI CRMC, USFWS, and RI DEM.

## **Collaboration with Tribal Partners**

### **Narragansett Tribe**

The Narragansett Indian Tribe received federal recognition in 1983 and owns a reservation in the Pawcatuck River watershed that has 800 feet of frontage on the Pawcatuck River. The Tribal Natural Resources Department is responsible for the protection and management of natural resources on tribal land. Major natural resource and environmental issues include water quality, non-point source pollution, illegal dumping, air quality, indoor air quality, and safe drinking water.

Tribal activities and programs in forestry management, road maintenance, road construction, water resources, wildlife, parks and recreation, and transportation planning are funded through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Activities and programs on safe drinking water, water quality, environmental enforcement, environmental education, radon, air quality, wetlands protection, and GIS mapping are funded through the EPA. More information on the Narragansett Indian Tribe can be found at [www.narragansett-tribe.org](http://www.narragansett-tribe.org).

In 2008, the Tribe received \$199,931 in Tribal Wildlife Grants (TWG) for their project titled *Indian Cedar Swamp Brook Riparian and Wetland Restoration Project*, when they restored 7 acres of high quality riparian habitat to improve water quality and reestablish culturally and biologically important species on tribal lands. In 2011, the Tribe received \$160,497 for their *Tribal Participation in a Range-wide Conservation Effort for the New England Cottontail*. The purpose was to determine the status of the New England Cottontail on tribal lands and identify areas that would benefit from habitat management. Their intention was to implement habitat protections and management measures on 25 acres of tribal lands to promote the persistence of New England Cottontail populations in southern Rhode Island (press release USFWS, May 2011, <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/news/2011/052611.html>).

## **Collaboration with Academic Partners**

### **University of Rhode Island**

URI is an important partner with the Rhode Island conservation community, collaborating with the RI DEM and the other partners to research, monitor, and implement a variety of conservation projects throughout the state. The URI Department of Natural Resources Science has partnered with RI DEM DFW to develop a database and GIS coverage of amphibians in Rhode Island, using 25 years of RI DEM DFW field records. The URI Environmental Data Center serves as a statewide repository and clearinghouse for physical and biological data (<http://www.edc.uri.edu/edc/>). URI's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management operates a Watershed Watch program and other water quality monitoring and analysis programs. URI also houses several interdisciplinary programs and partnerships, including the Coastal Institute, a Cooperative Ecosystems Study Unit for the North Atlantic Coast, a Field Technical Support Center for the NPS, a Cooperative Studies Unit with the USGS, a Cooperative Extension Service with the USDA, and a Coastal Resources Center that has a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

### **The Coastal Institute**

The Coastal Institute (the Institute) is a regular partner with the RI DEM on a variety of programs and projects, from the monitoring assessments discussed in Chapter 5 to an assessment of the marine fisheries

commercial licensing program (<http://www.ci.uri.edu/>). The Institute has collaborated with RI DEM and others through the Map Coast Partnership (<http://www.ci.uri.edu/Projects/MapCoast/default.html>), the Partnership for Narragansett Bay (<http://www.ci.uri.edu/Projects/PNB/default.html>), and in the development of this RI WAP. The mission of the Institute is to facilitate solutions to environmental problems in coastal ecosystems, including their marine and contributing freshwater components. As a result, the Institute is a vital partner with RI DEM DFW in accomplishing the goals of the RI WAP.

### **The Cooperative Ecosystems Study Unit**

The Cooperative Ecosystems Study Unit (CESU) program is a collaborative research partnership amongst 13 federal agencies, 130 academic institutions, and 35 non-governmental organizations. The North Atlantic Coast CESU is one of 16 regional programs and is housed at URI (<http://www.ci.uri.edu/nacesu/>). The goal of the program is to provide quality science-based information for resource managers in the coastal zone. The NPS Field Technical Support Center at URI provides GIS support for all national parks in the Northeast United States (<http://www.edc.uri.edu/ftsc/>). Both the North Atlantic Coast CESU and the NPS Field Technical Support Center provide technical and scientific resources with which the RI DEM DFW can address the research and monitoring needs identified in the RI WAP.

### **Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Service**

The Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Service is housed at URI as well. The Cooperative Extension Service has programs on aquaculture, fish and domesticated animal health, and water quality (<http://www.uri.edu/ce/index1.html>). The URI-based Coastal Resources Center aims to provide coastal zone management assistance to local, state, federal and international governments (<http://www.crc.uri.edu/>). URI was a key partner in the development of this RI WAP and will remain an important partner in its implementation in many aspects.

### **Brown University**

Brown University is an important academic partner with the Rhode Island conservation community, collaborating with the RI DEM and others to research, monitor, and implement a variety of conservation projects throughout the state (<http://www.brown.edu>). Researchers at the university have partnered with RI DEM and others in the Narragansett Bay Window monitoring program, which conducts monthly surveys of the bay through trawls and fixed arrays of water quality and productivity instruments (<http://www.narrbay.org>). The university also monitors the Barrington and Palmer Rivers and the status of salt marshes in Narragansett Bay (Table 5.1, Appendix 5). The Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology has partnered with the Marine Biological Laboratory at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts to offer research programs in climate change, ecosystems studies, environmental change and other topics relevant to Rhode Island's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and threats facing both. Brown also houses the Environmental Change Initiative, an interdisciplinary program created to research and address environmental problems such as changes in land use and land cover. The Department of Geological Sciences also collaborates with the Marine Biological Laboratory, Environmental Change Initiative, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and others to research the region's physical and ecological environment.

### **Roger Williams University**

Another academic partner, Roger Williams University, also partners with the Rhode Island conservation community (<http://www.rwu.edu>). Roger Williams University is a partner with RI DEM and others in the

Narragansett Bay Window monitoring program that conducts monthly surveys of the bay through trawls and fixed arrays of water quality and productivity instruments (<http://www.narrbay.org>). University researchers have also historically partnered with RI DEM in its Rapid Bioassessment Protocol Monitoring program of stream water quality and macroinvertebrates (Table 5-1, Appendix 5). Faculty in the Department of Biology and Marine Biology research marine mammals, zooplankton, marine bioinvasions, biodiversity of seaweeds, early life stages of marine and estuarine fishes, food web dynamics, aquaculture, anthropogenic impacts on aquatic ecosystems, animal behavior and nutrition, invertebrate ecology and physiology, and other topics that can provide valuable assistance in addressing the inventory, research and monitoring needs identified for Rhode Island's SGCN and habitats.

### **Collaboration with Non-governmental Organization Partners**

The RI DEM DFW also collaborates with several non-governmental organizations (NGO) to conserve and protect fish and wildlife resources and their habitats. These stakeholders are vital to successfully implementing this RI WAP, and their contributions to this RI WAP and natural resource conservation in Rhode Island are discussed in this chapter. Existing programs with some of these NGOs provide an important opportunity to implement the RI WAP with non-governmental partners. The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, and RINHS, however, were key partners in the development of the RI WAP and are highlighted here for their roles. Participation in these organizations' annual meetings and providing presentations and posters on RI WAP updates are examples of coordination opportunities throughout the next decade.

#### **The Nature Conservancy-Rhode Island Chapter**

Through a cooperative agreement with RI DEM, the Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has led all facets of the revision of this RI WAP. In addition to this guide, RI DEM frequently collaborates with The Nature Conservancy on conservation planning, restoration, land acquisition and stewardship at many levels (e.g., site and species-specific, local, watershed, and statewide). This strong partnership between RI DEM and The Nature Conservancy has led to the implementation of many conservation actions identified in the 2005 CWCS on both The Nature Conservancy and RI DEM lands and in the water. The Nature Conservancy expects this to continue and increase during the 10-year implementation of the 2015 RI WAP.

In Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy has 22 nature preserves throughout the state comprising almost 10,000 acres. The most visited preserves include Lime Rock Preserve in Lincoln, Quicksand Pond/Goosewing Beach Preserve in Little Compton, Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve in Charlestown, Tillinghast Pond Management Area in West Greenwich and the trail system on Block Island. The Nature Conservancy is also leading the state in innovative restoration efforts including living shoreline, stream connectivity, *Phragmites* eradication, oyster reef construction, artificial reef construction, and grassland restoration. The Nature Conservancy has a robust state-wide public access, volunteer and outreach program connecting people from all backgrounds with their preserves and the outdoors. For more information about their work visit: [www.nature.org/rhodeisland](http://www.nature.org/rhodeisland).

### **Audubon Society of Rhode Island**

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI, not affiliated with the National Audubon Society) maintains nearly 9,500 acres of natural habitat in 93 refuges, 16 that are open to the public, found throughout the state of Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. ASRI manages and maintains its conserved land through staff and volunteer efforts that guard against invasive species and inappropriate human use. They regularly form partnerships with government agencies and other not-for-profit organizations to ensure the success of conservation efforts. Audubon's conservation strategies are comprehensive to safeguard Rhode Island's diverse and vibrant ecology. ASRI is engaged in many venues of environmental policy, including water policy, wildlife conservation, and habitat preservation. As such, the ASRI participated in multiple RI WAP meetings and provided data and expert information throughout the development process. ASRI is also a member of the Environmental Council of Rhode Island (ECRI) and works in collaboration with many other partners including RI DEM DFW. The conservation efforts and refuges of the ASRI provide a continuing opportunity for RI DEM DFW to collaboratively implement conservation actions and conserve SGCN and key habitats. ASRI staff participated in the RI WAP workshops and will continue to be included in future meetings, workshops and other efforts to review and assess SGCN status and implementation of RI WAP actions.

### **Rhode Island Natural History Survey**

RINHS is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1994 to gather and disseminate information on Rhode Island's animals and plants, geology, and ecosystems. RINHS facilitates communication among the diverse people, agencies, and organizations interested in the ecology of Rhode Island and supports naturalists and the study of Rhode Island's natural history (<http://www.rinhs.org>). RINHS key recent contribution to this effort has been to collaboratively contract the Community Liaison for the RI WAP through the development and implementation of the WAP.

To pursue its broad mission, the RINHS uses a variety of outlets and programs to develop and support the community of naturalists and the dissemination of their skills and knowledge. RINHS maintains the Biota of Rhode Island Information System (BORIIS) which a custom Microsoft Access application and linked ArcGIS project. Species lists developed during the publication of the Biota of Rhode Island volumes are the backbone of the database. Substantial efforts have been made over the years to incorporate records of species in museum collections, publications, and unpublished reports. In addition, as of December 2013, RINHS is part of the four-member consortium that manages the Natural Heritage Database of data on rare and endangered species and natural communities in Rhode Island. Other partners are RI DEM, the Rhode Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and the URI Environmental Data Center (URI-EDC).

RINHS also supports the Rhode Island Invasive Species Council (RIISC), an informal group that meets periodically to improve communication and coordination among the many people and organizations interested in invasive species in Rhode Island. RIISC is an outreach program of the RINHS, The Rhode Island Agricultural Experiment Station, and URI Cooperative Extension. RINHS maintains the Invasive Species Portal which is intended to organize the diversity of information and connections concerning invasive species with links to a variety of web-based resources within and outside of RINHS.

RINHS also supports the Rhody Native initiative in collaboration with other organizations, including the URI Outreach Center (URIOC) and the Rhode Island Wild Plant Society (RIWPS). By working directly



with local nurseries and garden centers, Rhody Native aims to build the state's capacity to produce genetically diverse and local native plants for landscape design and restoration.

Also, as part of its mission as a convener and facilitator, RINHS has acted as an administrative partner for others wishing to undertake projects related to Rhode Island's biota, ecosystems, or environmental stewardship or education. Typically this benefit is extended to groups without their own 501c3 status, for ad hoc coalitions that come together around a single project or event, or for small groups that do not have their own administrative and bookkeeping capabilities. RINHS meets a range of administrative needs including grant writing and project budgeting, grant submittal and accounting, hiring and administering project personnel, bookkeeping, and funds disbursement. A key contribution has been to collaboratively contract the Community Liaison for the RI WAP through the development and implementation of the WAP.

RINHS sponsors annual conferences and a lecture series to share and disseminate the latest ecological data and research in Rhode Island, publishes a variety of scientific and environmental education publications (e.g., the Biota of Rhode Island series), and hosts an annual BioBlitz to survey the biota at a particular location. RINHS staff was instrumental in the preparation of this RI WAP by providing scientific data from their database as well as their taxonomic expertise. Continued collaboration with RINHS provides a ready mechanism to implement inventory, research and monitoring actions, public outreach and environmental education efforts. RINHS staff participated in the RI WAP workshops and will continue to be included in future meetings, workshops and other efforts to review and assess SGCN status and implementation of RI WAP actions.

### **The National Wildlife Federation, The Wildlife Society, American Fisheries Society**

These national groups have been very supportive of the RI WAP and for SWAPs at the national and regional levels since the Teaming with Wildlife (TWW) and the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) legislation was conceived. National and regional staff has been involved and has provided significant information, coordination, and support at the state level through input and communication with the consultant and the RI DEM DFW staff. Various members of these organizations have served on the RI WAP Technical and Scientific Review Committees and provided valuable input throughout the RI WAP process.

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