

OCEAN STATE OUTDOORS

RHODE ISLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

STATE GUIDE PLAN ELEMENT 152

August 29, 2019

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- Prepare State Guide Plan Elements
- Coordinate activities of the public and private sectors within the framework of the State Guide Plan
- Assist municipal governments with planning
- Advise the Governor and others on physical, social, and economic planning related topics.

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List of Acronyms Used

ATV means “All-Terrain Vehicle”

BMX means “Bicycle Motor Cross”

CRMC means “Coastal Resources Management Council”

DEM means “Department of Environmental Management”

DMO means “Destination Marketing Organization”

DOH means “Department of Health”

DSP means “Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning”

RIPRA means “Rhode Island Parks and Recreation Association”

RIHPHC means “Rhode Island Historical Preservations and Heritage Commission”

RRRC means “Recreation Resources Review Committee”

Ocean State Outdoors means “State Conservation Outdoor Recreation Plan” (SCORP)

SGP means “State Guide Plan”

AMC means “Appalachian Mountain Club”

TNC means “The Nature Conservancy”

USFWS means “US Fish and Wildlife Service”

RILTC means “Rhode Island Land Trust Council”

RIBA means “Rhode Island Blueways Alliance”

WPWSSC means “Wood Pawcatuck River Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council”

ABSTRACT

TITLE: *Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*
State Guide Plan Element 152, Report No. 122

SUBJECT: Outdoor recreation and resource planning and management

DATE: August 29, 2019

AGENCIES: Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning and
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

SOURCE OF COPIES: www.planning.ri.gov

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ABSTRACT: This document represents the tenth edition of the SCORP. The Plan establishes long-term state goals and policies for outdoor recreation and includes a five-year “Plan for Action.” The Plan was approved by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan and by the National Park Service, as the State of Rhode Island’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for the 2019-2024 period.



Burlingame State Park

OCEAN STATE OUTDOORS

RHODE ISLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Rhode Island, we are poised to improve our outdoor recreation network to build wealth, renew infrastructure, reduce chronic illness, support job growth, all while giving our state economy a well-deserved shot in the arm. We can join with waiting partners and entrepreneurs to support outdoor recreation with targeted improvements, strategic promotions, and modern delivery of information. We live in gorgeous state with inexpensive and easily accessible outdoor recreation resources. *Ocean State Outdoors* aims to open the door and let opportunity walk in. *Ocean State Outdoors* makes the following key findings related to outdoor recreation in Rhode Island;

“Our state’s world-class beach facilities, parks, and green spaces are beloved by residents and tourists alike and generate millions of dollars for the local and state economy every year.”

- DEM Director Janet Coit, 2018

Rhode Islanders Love to Spend Time Outdoors

Most Rhode Islanders do some form of outdoor recreation on a nearly daily basis. We tend to engage in outdoor recreation more than the typical American; everything from football and baseball, walking and hiking, beachgoing and rock climbing. Enjoying Rhode Island’s outdoor resources is important for our culture and our health.

Ocean State Outdoors is the State of Rhode Island’s plan for outdoor recreation. As a Rhode Island State Guide Plan Element, *Ocean State Outdoors* serves several key purposes:

- It requires the consistency of community comprehensive plans and all publicly supported activities, both planning and project implementation.
- It meets the National Park Service’s planning eligibility requirements for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program.
- It meets the requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation—Federal Highway Administration’s National Recreational Trails Program which provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities.
- It meets the federal Emergency Wetlands Conservation Act.

2016 Green Economy Bond (Question 6)



passes with
67%
voter approval!



Governor Raimondo announces \$4 million in community recreation grants during the Yes on 6 Kick-Off Rally in September of 2016. Another \$2.16 million was conditionally awarded, pending bond approval.

Rhode Islanders Walk, Cycle and Go to the Beach

Recent demand surveys conducted for this plan found that the top four activities in RI are walking, using bike paths, visiting coastal areas and beaches and attending outdoor festivals and special events. *Ocean State Outdoors* recommends that RI continues to add to and maintain as many of these recreation opportunities as we can.

Rhode Islanders Continually Demand More Recreational Resources and Facilities

Despite ongoing purchase of land and investment in recreational facilities, the public continues to show a need for more, while recreation providers continue to report user conflicts and constrained resources. *Ocean State Outdoors* seeks to build on our existing outdoor recreational resources to meet the growing demand.

Rhode Islanders Call for Better Staffing and Maintenance of Recreation Facilities

The full-time staff in Rhode Island State Parks and Beaches has declined by 67%, from 123 in 1989 to 42 in 2018, but public use of these resources is growing quickly. Participants in our focus groups and surveys echoed the need for attention to maintenance and staffing. *Ocean State Outdoors* recommends increasing staffing to meet management needs and strategically improving existing management practices to be more effective.

Rhode Islanders Call for Better Information about Outdoor Recreation Facilities

A key finding, repeated by people in focus groups and respondents to surveys, is that information around Rhode Island outdoor recreation facilities lacks consistency, clarity, and accessibility. *Ocean State Outdoors* proposes action to provide better, more accessible information about Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system so that more people can truly enjoy outdoor resources.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE IMPACT OF STATE PARKS ON THE RHODE ISLAND ECONOMY



9.4

MILLION VISITS



\$38.8

MILLION TAX REVENUE

\$311.9

MILLION CONSUMER SPENDING



3,709

JOBS SUPPORTED/CREATED ANNUALLY

Adapted from University of Rhode Island Economic Impact of Rhode Island State Parks, no publication date.



Providing for the public’s enjoyment of Rhode Island’s outdoor environment is an important responsibility of state government. This document is the tenth Rhode Island state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan produced since 1965. In those intervening decades, the interest and commitment of Rhode Islanders for outdoor recreation, conservation and open space protection has continually deepened. *Ocean State Outdoors* articulates state goals and policies, guiding municipal governments and not-for-profit groups, and maps out a five-year action agenda for partners across the State.

THE GOALS:

Goal 1:

Invest in new and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation to meet the public’s needs, promote wellness and create economic benefits.

Goal 2:

Strengthen, expand and promote the statewide recreation network while protecting natural and cultural resources as well as adapting to a changing environment.

Goal 3:

Ensure sustainable operation, maintenance and management of the statewide outdoor recreation network.

Goal 4:

Improve access by removing barriers and enhancing information and communication systems.



Goddard Boat Ramp & Farmer’s Market, July 2017



Lincoln Woods, September 2018



Lincoln Woods, September 2018

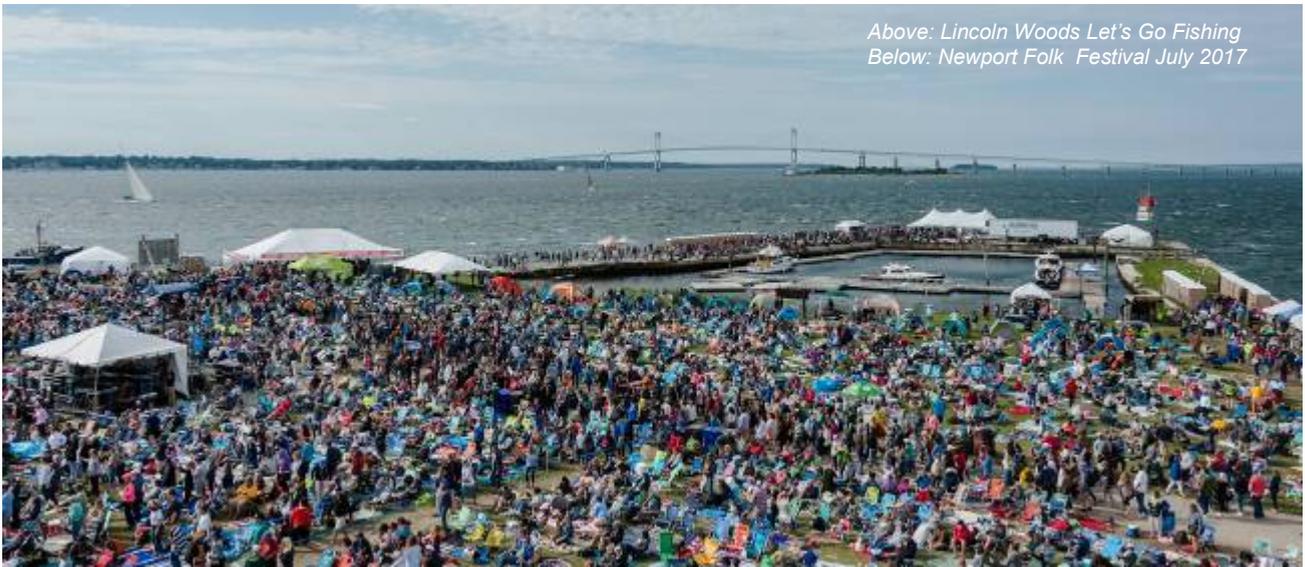
PART ONE

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND THE PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

Welcome! *Ocean State Outdoors* presents long-term goals and a five-year plan of action for strategically managing outdoor recreational resources of the State, impending threats and unfulfilled needs. The Plan looks to leverage our strengths, partnerships and emerging opportunities offered in the context of a 20-year planning horizon.



*Above: Lincoln Woods Let's Go Fishing
Below: Newport Folk Festival July 2017*



BACKGROUND

Rhode Island offers an impressive range of outdoor resources including mature hardwood forests, city parks, bike paths, streams, ponds, shorelines, and, of course, our famous Narragansett Bay, opening to the majestic Atlantic Ocean. Living, playing and thriving outdoors nourishes our collective spirit and forms a cornerstone of our economy.

DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Analysis of Rhode Island census data indicates that the demographics of the State are rapidly changing. Rhode Island experienced relatively little population growth— only 0.4% between 2010 and 2018 (from 1,053,000 to 1,057,000), but the population growth that is occurring is largely due to the growth of the Latino population, 44% since 2000 (DSP, 2014).

The population of the State is also getting older. In 2010, the median age of Rhode Islanders was 39.4, an increase of 2.7 years from 2000. The largest population growth occurred in those aged 60 to 69 (37% increase to a total of 102,760 people), followed by those 50 to 59 (30% increase to a total of 151,684 people). At the same time, significant population decrease has occurred in those

30 to 39 (22% decrease to a total of 124,893 people) as well as those 18 and under (8% decrease to a total of 261,758 people) (DSP, 2014).

Income

In 2017, 11.6% of Rhode Islanders lived in households with income below the federal poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2017). Two-wage-earner families reported a 2012 median income of nearly \$92,000, compared to families with a single-wage earner, who earned less than \$49,000, and households headed by someone in the prime earning years (45-64) made nearly twice what those in the traditional retirement years (65+) earned. Married-couple families with children enjoyed a median income in 2012 of more than \$93,000, while the median income for single mothers with children was just over \$30,000. When considering how to deliver outdoor recreation services, we should also consider the needs of those who are most like to rely on them. Given that people with limited incomes are most likely to live in the urban core, we need to consider how limited means affects people's ability to access outdoor recreation in those areas.



Rocky Point RISA Fish Camp



Colt Bike Path, August 2018

PURPOSE

Ocean State Outdoors is the Recreation Element of the State Guide Plan (SGP) and is Rhode Island's plan for maintaining and improving its outdoor recreation system. It articulates state long-term recreation goals and policies and maps out a five-year plan of action for the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) as well as other state agencies, municipalities and nonprofit organizations. It establishes the State goals and policies for outdoor recreation with which community comprehensive plans must be consistent. Its purpose, in the broadest sense, is to report on progress the State has made, assess the current situation, and set future directions for outdoor recreation. Its primary audience is state and local officials who are responsible for Rhode Island's recreation and programs, but also the diverse array of public and private organizations which play roles in outdoor recreation and supported by a broad cross-section of Rhode Islanders if its initiatives are to be realized.



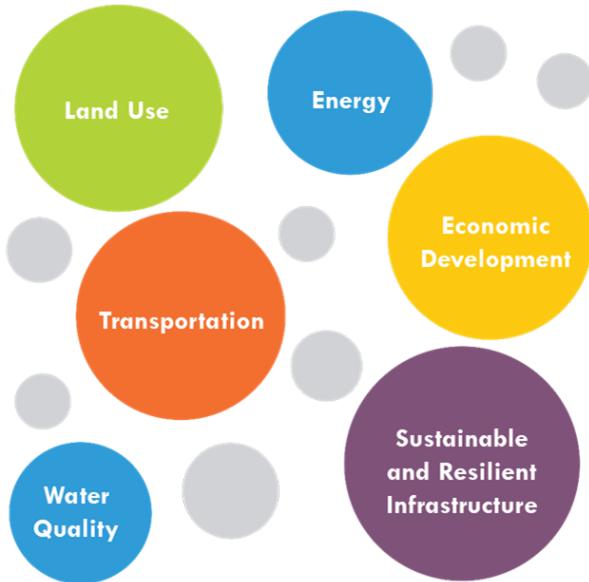
Lincoln Woods, September 2018

Integrated planning purposes

Ocean State Outdoors serves several closely related state and federal purposes, which are listed and discussed briefly below. They are presented in a single plan in order to ensure their alignment.

State Guide Plan

Through its adoption by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan (SGP), this Plan has legislated stature that requires the comprehensive plans prepared by the municipalities be consistent with its goals and policies. Publicly supported projects of state agencies are also required to be consistent with the SGP. Transit is an integral part of providing access to outdoor recreation facilities and in many cases (e.g., bicycling), transit and recreation overlap. Inclusion of recreation goals and policies in the SGP also helps ensure that these concerns are properly coordinated with other elements covering land use, open space, transportation, and economic development. Other elements of the SGP that support *Ocean State Outdoors* are SGP 611, *Transportation 2037*, SGP 155, *A Greener Path*, and SGP 121, *Land Use 2025*.



State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Ocean State Outdoors is also submitted by Rhode Island as the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to meet the planning eligibility requirements of the National Park Service outlined in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program outlined in the LWCF Act of 1965. Which is a valuable source of support for protecting resources and providing facilities for public recreational use. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has the authority to represent and act for the State in dealing with the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for the purposes of the LWCF Act.

Conversion of Recreation Resources

One role of this plan is to ensure that existing open space and recreational resources are protected from conversion to other uses. Requests for conversions should be resisted and should face the highest burden of proof of net public recreational benefit. Where conversion of recreation system land is considered, approval should be predicated on full administrative review and public scrutiny. If the resource was acquired or improved with federal funding through the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund, Rhode Island bond funds, or other public funds approval of any conversion is required to be conditioned upon a full one for one replacement of the acreage or resource value. This standard should also be used for portions of the recreation and open space system that do not have such official protection.

In addition, throughout Rhode Island, there are parcels of unused government land that provide unofficial recreational and open space values. Particularly in urban areas, the open space functions of such lands may have unrecognized but real importance. For example, although unsanctioned for such use, the site may serve as a "de facto" play lot for children having no other opportunities close at hand. Government decisions to part with such parcels should accord public input and serious public significance to these intangible benefits in their calculations of management efficiency or added revenues.

State Recreational Trails Plan

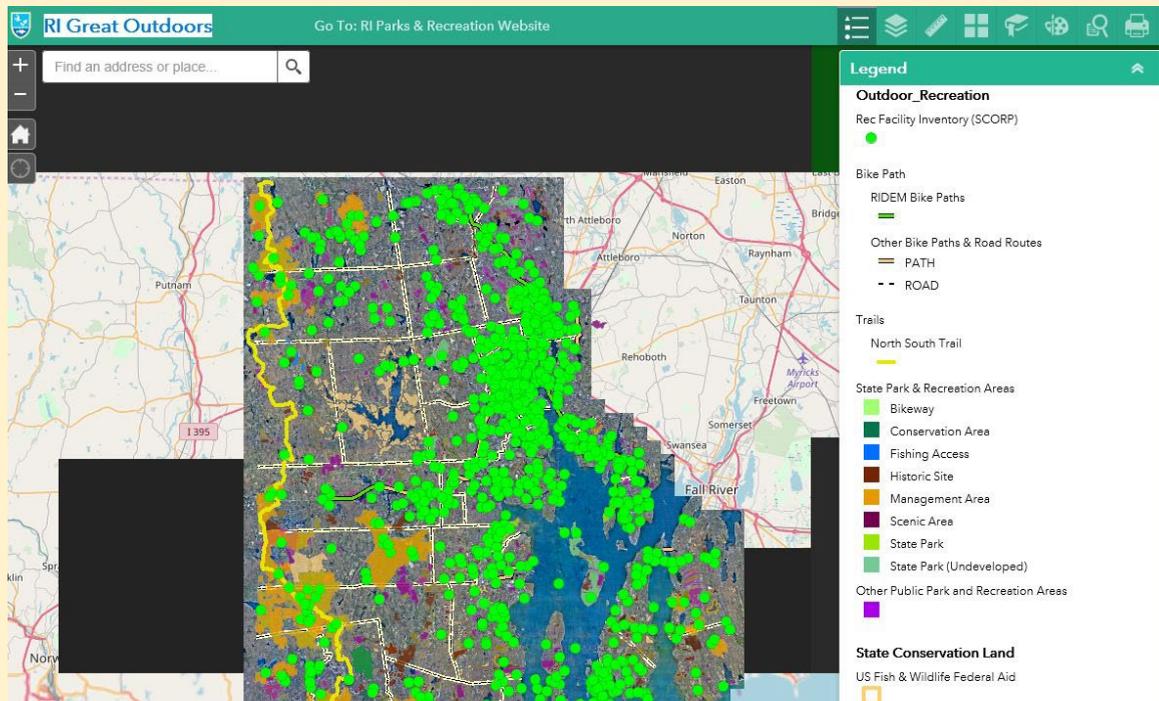
Ocean State Outdoors is also incorporated as the State Recreational Trails Plan, addressing the requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation—Federal Highway Administration’s National Recreational Trails Program that provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Recreational trails make up an important element of the outdoor recreation system and are heavily used by the public in Rhode Island.

Wetlands Priority Plan

This Plan provides an update to the wetland priority plan required under the federal Emergency Wetlands Conservation Act. Updates to the plan are submitted to the National Park Service periodically as part of updates to *Ocean State Outdoors* as the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for Rhode Island.

Statewide Distribution of Publicly Owned Recreation Facilities

A map of state owned, or affiliated outdoor recreation land and facilities can be accessed by going through the DEM Map Room at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/maps/> and clicking on the RI’s Great Outdoors box. This map-based application can be used to find locations for favorite actives and hundreds of state and local parks. Instructions on how to use the map appear when you click on the box.



SECTOR ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

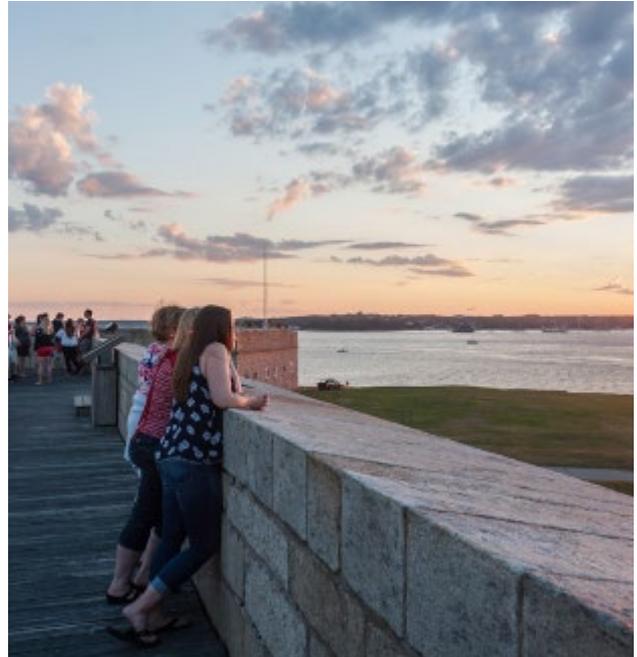
Only with the proper understanding and integration of the roles and responsibilities of partners can the outdoor recreation system of the State work effectively and efficiently in providing an adequate system of conservation areas, parks, developed facilities, and other recreation opportunities while avoiding both duplication of effort and gaps in the spectrum of recreational facilities and areas.

Federal Role

Federal agencies have both an operational and supporting role in Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system. The major operational aspect of the federal role consists of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's management of five conservation and wildlife refuges totaling over 2,460 acres along the Rhode Island coast. They are the:

- Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge in Middletown
- Trustum Pond National Wildlife Refuge in South Kingstown
- Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge in Charlestown
- John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge at Pettaquamscutt Cove in Narragansett
- Block Island National Wildlife Refuge in New Shoreham

Additionally, the National Park Service operates the 4.5-acre Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence, as well as the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (BRVNHP). Created by Congress in 2014, the BRVNHP is a collection of sites located within the much larger Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, although no property is owned by the federal agency. The "nodes" of the National Historical Park include the Blackstone River including major tributaries and the canal, the DEM owned and operated Blackstone River State Park, and several local historic districts in Rhode Island (as well as Massachusetts).



Fort Adams, July 4, 2012

Lastly, the Wood-Pawcatuck River System in southwestern RI was recently designated by Congress as "Wild and Scenic" and includes seven rivers – the Beaver, Chipuxet, Green Fall - Ashaway, Pawcatuck, Queen - Usquepaugh, Shunock, and Wood Rivers. These rivers offer exceptional recreational opportunities for paddlers, birders, fisherman, and anyone who enjoys scenic waterways. This designation, with oversight from the National Park Service, brings with it some opportunities for federal technical and financial assistance for both protection and public access projects on the river system.



Also, quite important is the supporting role that federal agencies provide to Rhode Island's recreation system through funding. Federal agencies involved in outdoor recreation include the National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the US Department of Agriculture. Federal funding is made available to both state and local agencies. Additionally, many federal agencies offer technical assistance programs.

State Role

The overarching responsibility of the State in outdoor recreation is to assure that an adequate system of conservation areas, parks, developed facilities, and other recreation opportunities are available to residents and visitors. This is accomplished through planning, direct operation of facilities, and financial and technical assistance to municipalities and non-profits. The State sets overall goals and policies for outdoor recreation, conservation and open space directly through the State Guide Plan and indirectly through the approval of Community Comprehensive Plans. As an Element of the State Guide Plan, this Plan is the primary recreational planning document for the State.

The primary operational role for the State is to provide facilities that offer statewide or regional benefits available to all Rhode Island residents or visitors, such as major parks, bikeways, beaches, and management areas. Several State agencies are involved in the development and operation of recreational facilities. DEM is the primary State provider and manager of state-owned recreational resources.

The Parks and Recreation Division of DEM is exclusively devoted to operating and maintaining public recreational facilities. The principal roles of the Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and Forest Environment are as stewards of natural resources, but both also have significant involvement in operating recreational facilities or supporting public recreational activities. The Planning and Development section of DEM operates the land acquisition program that works with various partners to acquire land, development rights to land, and conservation easements.

DEM and the Department of Transportation (DOT) have formed a major partnership to advance construction an integrated, statewide system of connecting natural greenways, bike paths and trails, as recommended in SGP Element 155, *A Greener Path, Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*. Today the vision of a statewide greenway network is well underway with more than 50 miles of bikeways and greenways open to the public, and another 43 miles in design and planning. DEM, DOT, and municipalities share responsibility for state bikeways. DEM and DOT jointly design bike trails; when using FHWA funds, the Division of Statewide Planning (DSP) plans for their funding in the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). DOT then constructs them with FHWA funding. DEM or host municipalities are responsible for operating and maintaining the bikeways. While not their primary responsibility, other State agencies have programs that provide or support outdoor recreation. Examples include:

- The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides transportation to many recreational venues, including summer beach bus routes as well as a Rack N' Ride program for cyclists. Most RIPTA buses are equipped with bike racks.
- The Agricultural Land Preservation Commission purchases the development rights to agricultural land. Preservation of open space, habitat, historic features, and scenic views are all part of the Commission's evaluation criteria.
- The Department of Health provides technical assistance to local communities to maintain the Path to Health program. The Path to Health program has mapped walking routes in 9 RI communities. The routes are marked with signage that includes maps of the trail and mileage markers. The Department's Initiative for a Healthy Weight provides mini-grants to communities to improve access to low-cost recreation through park improvements, trail maintenance, community programming and gardening programs.
- The university and college system of the State has extensive recreational facilities that are available for limited public usage.

Finally, the State has a major role in providing financial assistance to municipalities, land trusts, and other organizations outdoor recreation support and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities, land conservation, and trail development.

Municipal Role

Local governments are responsible for planning and providing facilities and programming that primarily benefit the residents of the sponsoring municipality. Rhode Island law authorizes municipal governments to establish public recreation systems and requires each community to develop a community comprehensive plan that includes an open space and recreation and natural resources elements that are consistent with the SGP. Neighborhood parks, playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts, and fields for team sports (e.g. baseball, soccer, football) are typically emphasized at the local level. Many facilities are associated with schools. Several municipalities do possess special facilities of regional or statewide significance such as Roger Williams Park and Zoo, operated by the City of Providence.

Municipalities manage over 13,000 acres of recreational facilities with nearly 2,000 parks and beaches. They have also joined with local partners to protect more than 30,000 acres of open space, ranging from extensive water supply watersheds to small neighborhood conservation areas. Local recreation facilities include mostly multi-purpose parks, playgrounds, community centers, and sports fields and courts. Municipalities also offer a wide variety of recreational programming from team sports, individual sports, summer recreation programs / camps, instructional classes, concerts and cultural events, and programs for seniors, and people with disabilities. While the major sources of funding for constructing municipal outdoor facilities come from state revenues and bonds, local taxes provide the funds to operate and maintain the facilities.

Role of Nonprofit and Conservation Organizations

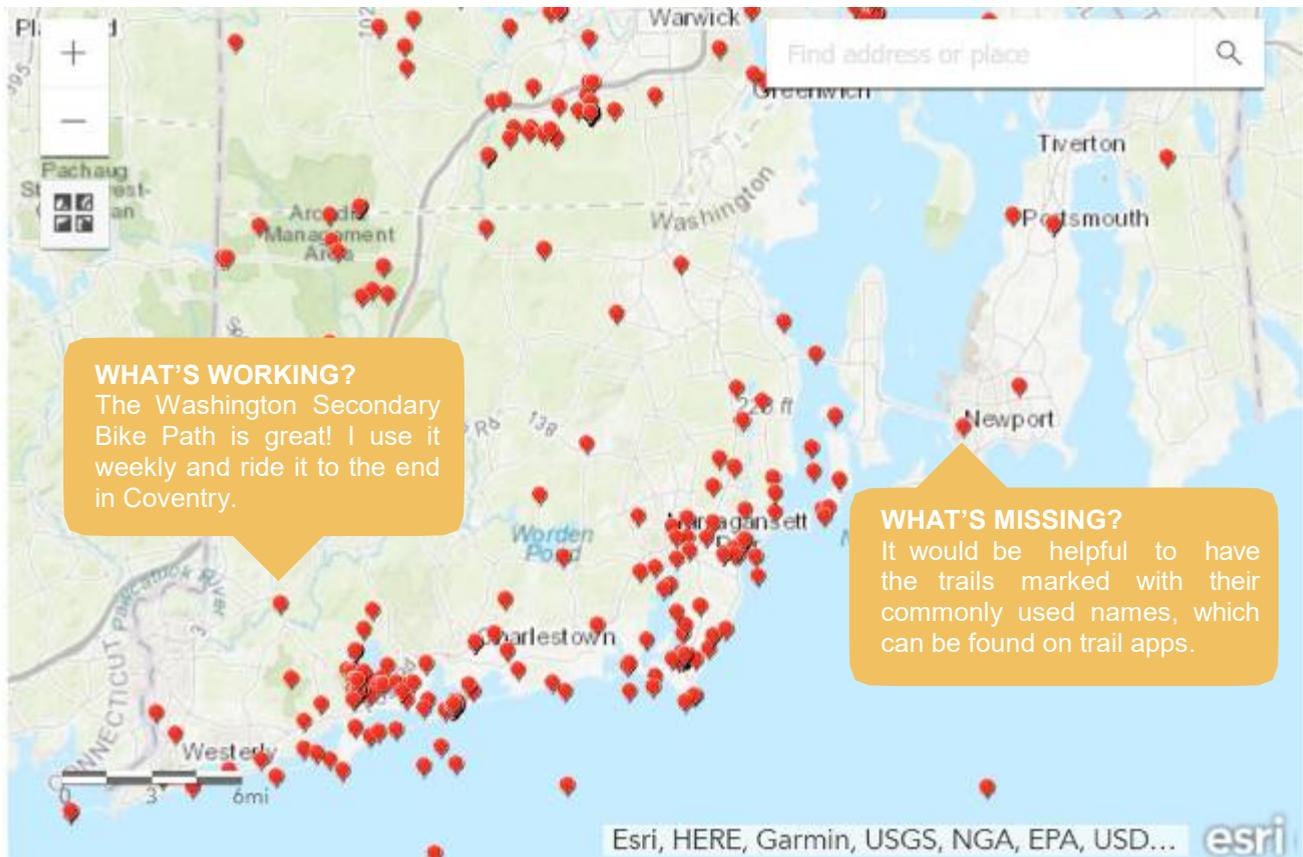
Rhode Island has a vibrant nonprofit sector that includes environmental organizations, land trusts, youth organizations, historical societies, and philanthropic foundations that provide programs, facilities, and/ or resources connected to outdoor recreation. The role of each organization is guided by their individual missions but, collectively, the nonprofit sector provides significant additional land, facilities, resources, and programs that serve to supplement the public sector's commitment to outdoor recreation and conservation. Nonprofit organizations frequently have the expertise to advise government decision-makers and promote public participation and support.

Private nonprofit organizations and local land trusts play an important role as partners in recreation and land protection. Notable partners include The Nature Conservancy (TNC) protects land itself, provides support to local land trusts, and works closely with DEM on land preservation. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island owns or protects over 9,000 acres of property in and around the State. Many land trusts, TNC and Audubon properties are open to the public and have extensive trail networks. Non-profit organizations have also played a pivotal role in open space and recreation by advocating for state bond funding, laws, and regulations.

Role of the Commercial Sector

The private for-profit sector plays a significant role in outdoor recreation in RI. Private businesses offer many of the same facilities found in the public sector. Marinas, campgrounds, beaches, golf courses, tourist attractions, horseback riding, and recreation outfitters are just some of the offerings found around the State. The public and private sector often collaborate in promoting outdoor recreation. In addition, the private sector provides many valuable services within public sector facilities, including food concessions, rental opportunities, recreational activity lessons, special events, and more.

Interactive Map Used in the Outdoor Recreation “Map Survey”



The public was offered the opportunity to share comments about outdoor recreation through a web-based mapping application (Survey123®), which generated 850 responses (see “Map Survey” on page 15 for more details).

THE PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

This update of *Ocean State Outdoors* was informed by a comprehensive public outreach program including public meetings, stakeholder interviews, a survey, and focus group meetings. The purpose of this multifaceted approach was to meaningfully engage the full range of the diverse population of the State, including traditionally underrepresented populations and non-English speaking groups.

Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey

DEM conducted a general outdoor recreation demand survey using Survey Monkey®. The public was invited to share their thoughts about outdoor

recreation preferences and needs including questions about frequency of use, willingness to pay, and reasons for participating in outdoor recreation activities. 575 individuals participated in the survey.

The survey was publicized and promoted through press releases, DSP helped with partner organizations, social media, and at focus group meetings. A summary of the outreach strategy and responses is the Appendix. Respondents tended to prefer activities that involve spending time in nature such as hiking, biking, and horseback riding (58%). Respondents also indicated a preference for recreation at the water such as beach days (49%).

Many respondents indicated that they like outdoor cultural events (47%). When asked why they participate in outdoor recreation, most respondents indicated to have fun (96%), enjoy scenic beauty (93%), or relax (92%). Many also noted an interest in health and fitness (87%).

Sixty percent of respondents said that they would like to participate in more outdoor recreation but feel they are constrained by availability of recreational resources. When asked “what keeps you from using outdoor recreation facilities more often?” respondents tended to note crowding (31%), difficulty locating facilities (30%) and distance (28%).

Map Survey

The public was also offered the opportunity to share comments about public outdoor recreation facilities through a web-based mapping application (as shown on page 14). Respondents could “drop a pin” on a map to identify a point of interest and then make a comment about it.



Brainstorming during Advisory Group meetings



Brainstorming during Advisory Group meetings

There were 850 individual pins submitted. General results echo the findings of other recent outdoor recreation studies in Rhode Island and provide new insights from residents as well as out of state tourists.

- Respondents say that camping, trails, beaches and access to the shore are elements of outdoor recreation that all work well.
- Respondents also say that maintenance, communication, signage and coordination with user groups are all elements of providing outdoor recreation that could all be improved.
- Respondents identified missing elements such as dedicated ATV sites, opportunities to work with DEM on trail maintenance, integration of historic context at recreation sites, outfitters to provide gear, better opportunities for residents when compared to tourists, general information about the “rules of the road,” and swimming lessons.

Respondents referred most frequently to:

- camping (271 responses)
- trails (90 responses)
- biking (50 responses), and
- boating (61 responses)

Respondents expressed appreciation for the facilities provided but often noted maintenance issues, lack of signage, and conflicts between user groups. Responses generally echoed the input we received from focus groups.

State Recreation Facility Customer Satisfaction Survey

In the summer of 2018, DEM staff surveyed 457 users of state parks and beaches as well as 671 users of state campgrounds on satisfaction levels with the quality and service at these facilities. Major findings indicated that current users of our facilities have a high satisfaction level with our parks, beaches, and bike paths with only 5% or less expressing dissatisfaction with one or more areas of service. Of park and beach visitors, over half (54%) were residents, while approximately one-third (38%) of campers are residents.

What Would Improve Your Visit?



This word cloud represents the most frequently found words when the 457 outdoor recreation facility users were asked “what would have improved your visit today?”

Source: Survey of Outdoor Recreation Facility Users (DEM, 2018)

Recreational Directors Survey

In 2018, DEM conducted a survey of municipal recreation directors around the State. These surveys are conducted periodically to help the State better understand local needs. Twenty-nine responses were received. The results of the survey generally indicate:

- Increasing use of municipal facilities with unmet demand.
- General underfunding of recreational departments with decreasing or flat-line budgets.

These findings are consistent with the previous survey done in 2015.

Focus Groups

Eleven focus group meetings were conducted at locations throughout the State in 2018 and 2019. Most focus groups addressed a specific outdoor recreation topic such as fishing, hunting, biking, parks/ playgrounds and others. The purpose of the Focus Groups was to gather specific information regarding “What is Working,” “What Could be Improved,” and “What is Missing” in relation to the statewide system and a range of outdoor recreation activities.

Over 100 persons participated in the focus groups. Focus group participants openly shared their ideas about outdoor recreation in the Ocean State. Some key findings are summarized below.

- Development in some areas is threatening sensitive resources.
- Provide better information about connectivity between recreation facilities.
- Improve signage and information at outdoor recreation facilities.
- Health and wellbeing should receive more consideration as part of outdoor recreation planning.
- Provide better communication about potential conflicts between usage (e.g., hunting and hiking uses can conflict with each other).
- Improve programming to unlock the potential of recreational resources (e.g., provide swimming lessons).
- Provide more outdoor recreation opportunities and open space in urban centers.



Targeted Interviews

Several experts were interviewed on specific aspects of outdoor recreation including the areas of youth and low-income population outreach, senior populations, climate change, urban recreation and access, placemaking, historic preservation, access to paddling, and connectivity. These issues were raised during the public outreach and needed to be more completely addressed. Questions covered gaps in providing outdoor recreation and how to address those gaps. Interviewees responded with the following recommendations:

- Focus on urban needs such as enhanced programming, youth recreational opportunities, opportunities for aging populations, and placemaking.
- Provide for connectivity and access using means of transit other than the traditional privately-owned automobile.
- Provide better access to information especially to non-English speakers.
- Provide more camping and portage access along paddling routes.
- Ensure that our approaches to providing outdoor recreation are keeping up with changing needs and user demands.
- Consider that climate change is both changing the way we should design facilities and interfering with the operation of our existing facilities.



Charlestown Breachway Campground



Burlingame, August 2018

Public Meetings

Two general public meetings were held in May of 2019 to receive comments on the preliminary draft of *Ocean State Outdoors*.

State Guide Plan Approval Process

This 2019 edition of *Ocean State Outdoors* replaces the 2009 edition of the SCORP as an Element of the SGP. The SGP approval process consists of several informational presentation to both the State Planning Council and the Technical Committee of the Council. The Council authorized a formal public hearing on the Preliminary Draft on June 13, 2019 and the DSP conducted a formal the hearing for the Council to solicit final public comments on and the adoption the Plan. Details and comments heard at the public hearing are contained in the Appendix.



Fort Wetherill, July 2017

PART TWO

OUTDOOR RECREATION YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW



East Beach, August 2018

KEY FINDINGS

The following are findings and general conclusions on facility and land needs for outdoor recreation based on a variety of input provided through surveys of the general public, focus groups on specific outdoor recreation topics, surveys of municipal recreation directors, and the *Ocean State Outdoors* Advisory Committee. Key findings were also informed by several previous state studies conducted by the University of Rhode Island, DSP and DEM.

Rhode Islanders Love to Spend Time Outdoors

The public survey data, collected as part of this Plan update, indicates that the typical Rhode Islander engages in some type of outdoor recreational activity almost daily and uses outdoor facilities more intensively than the national average. Data from the same survey shows that Rhode Islanders participate in a wide range of outdoor activities including team sports like football and baseball, walking and more novel passions such as rock climbing. It's clear, Rhode Islanders have integrated use and enjoyment of the outdoors deeply into their individual lifestyles, a finding having profound social, economic and public policy implications.

Rhode Islanders Walk, Cycle and Enjoy Nature

Perhaps unsurprisingly, recent surveys have found the top three activities in Rhode Island in terms of total demand to be walking, visiting coastal areas / beaches and attending outdoor festivals and special events. When it comes to recreation, most people engage in outdoor physical activities that are readily available to them.

Rhode Islanders Continually Demand More Recreational Resources and Facilities

Despite ongoing purchase of land and investment in recreational facilities, the public continues to show a need for more, while recreation providers continue to report user conflicts and constrained resources. Survey data continues to point to a high demand for "providing public beaches," "protection of water resources," "providing natural habitats," and "preserving historic sites and scenic vistas." Yet real estate market of the State continues to consume land for private uses.

A need for additional recreation facilities was also indicated by local system managers in the survey. Municipal recreation directors reported organized sports to be highly popular among younger Rhode Islanders. The top three sports were soccer, baseball/ softball and basketball.

Rhode Islanders Call for Better Staffing and Maintenance of Recreation Facilities

Focus group and survey participants repeatedly called for better staffing and increased programming at recreation facilities. Over approximately the last three decades, the number of full-time staff managing Rhode Island State Parks has declined by about two-thirds, but number of facilities and the intensity of their use keeps growing. Outdoor recreation facilities suffer as a result.

Rhode Islanders Call for Better Information about Outdoor Recreation Facilities

A key finding, repeated by people in focus groups, respondents to surveys, and in the Rhode Island Parks Organization Manager and Operations Study (DEM, 2019), is that information around Rhode Island outdoor recreation facilities lacks consistency, clarity, and accessibility. Actions are included in Part Three to address the following critical issues:

Wayfinding

Wayfinding refers a system of maps and directional signage that helps users get around safely and effectively so they can truly enjoy their outdoor experience. Actions are included in Part Three to update wayfinding for Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system. The idea is to allow users to readily access trail, bike, blue way other mapping to find connections between facilities and to get around within facilities. This information should be consistent across physical and digital platforms.

Rules and Usage

If outdoor recreation facility users are expected to use facilities appropriately, clear rules and guidance that can be followed with relative ease need to be present. Use rules should be displayed where visitors can readily find them and should be echoed by easily accessible information online. Rules and guidance should address the potential for conflict between uses (e.g., hunting and trail walking).

Trail Information

Rhode Islanders love to walk outdoor trails but not all trails are mapped, easy to find, or readily accessible to potential users. Rhode Islanders need a better on-the-ground information at trail heads as well as a comprehensive, searchable and up-to-date online map that covers both state and local trails.

Explore RI <https://exploreri.org/>

ExploreRI is great resource for maps of land trust-owned trails in RI. Created as a collaboration between the Blueways Alliance and the RI Land Trust Council, the site also includes information about paddling trails and access sites. Many land trusts have their trails maps on this site, and plans are in the works to add municipal trails, and eventually state trails as well. An expansion of ExploreRI may be the best way to make comprehensive trail and paddling information accessible to users.



Ladies Fly Fishing, July 2017

A MORE DETAILED LOOK AT THE OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM

The table below summarizes the statewide inventory of publicly owned recreation facilities based on surveys conducted in 2001 and 2019.

Inventory of Public Outdoor Recreation Facilities As of 2019¹

Types of Sites	Federal	State	Local	Total
Bike Paths	0	35	29	64
Trails	2	313	87	402
Boat Ramps	1	66	58	125
Fishing Access Sites	1	115	135	251
Baseball fields	0	18	507	525
Soccer fields	0	8	257	265
Football field	0	0	42	42
Multi-use field	0	13	300	313
Ice Rinks	0	0	4	4
Camping Sites	0	1,073	0	1,073
Public Pools	0	0	10	10
Tracks	0	0	33	33
Skate Parks	0	0	17	17
Basketball court	0	2	256	258
Tennis Courts	0	4	406	410
Volleyball Courts	0	0	7	7
Beaches	0	10	40	50
Playgrounds	0	4	353	357
Totals	4	1,378	2,489	4,206

Notes:

1. The data in the table is based on a 2001 survey of publicly owned recreation facilities in the State and was updated in 2019 using GIS analysis combined with detailed information from the DEM divisions that operate park and recreation facilities. These sites can be located using an online mapping tool at the DEM RI Great Outdoors Map.
2. Local trail number reflects only those mapped online at ExploreRI.org
3. Trails and bike paths are reported as number-of, but in past years were reported as miles-of.

Rising Demand for Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Declining Resources



1:67

EXISTING STAFFING LEVELS EQUATE TO 1 FULL TIME EMPLOYEE FOR EVERY 67 MAINTAINED ACRES **BEST PRACTICE IS 1:30**



37.2%

INCREASE IN BEACH VISITATION ALONE FROM 2010 TO 2017, 9.4 MILLION VISITORS ANNUALLY TO THE PARK SYSTEM



\$50 MILLION

INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS IDENTIFIED DUE TO AGING FACILITIES AND DEFERRED MAINTENANCE



123 to 42

FULL TIME STAFFING HAS DECREASED BY 67% SINCE 1989
Source: DEM, 2018

Public demand for outdoor recreation continues to rise but resources to maintain outdoor facilities continue to fall off. The result is understaffing of facilities and rapidly aging infrastructure with approximately \$50 million in deferred maintenance.



Fort Adams, 4th of July

A MORE DETAILED LOOK AT NEEDS

Staffing Needs

According to The Rhode Island Parks Organization Management and Operations Study (DEM, 2019), the number of full-time staff members in Rhode Island State Parks has declined by 67%, from 123 employees in 1989 to 42 employees in 2018. At the same time, the number of visitors to the system, the number of facilities managed by DEM, and the length of the outdoor recreation season have all increased. The study called for specific strategies to address existing facility operation and maintenance needs. This Plan echoes the call to:

- Increase the number of maintenance technicians to meet the industry standard of one full-time staff person for every 30 maintained acres.
- Add appropriately skilled full-time employees to reduce outsourcing of maintenance.
- Provide administrative support for managers and staff so that these technical experts can focus on management and operational needs.

- Create two to three positions dedicated to business development to raise facility income and improve the bottom line.
- Geographically realign the Division of Parks and Recreation to improve efficiency.
- Establish best practice maintenance standards to better reflect existing facility use.

On the local level, more than half of municipal recreation directors report that their maintenance and staffing needs are underfunded. This issue also arises in recreation surveys of the general public.

Funding Needs

Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system needs a better, more responsive, and more consistent funding system if it is to meet the needs of Rhode Island citizens. Our outdoor recreation system has aging infrastructure representing \$50 million in deferred maintenance and significant growth in use. Rhode Island's State

outdoor recreation system is currently ranked 47th for expenditure per visit. That means, despite the outstanding outdoor recreation system we offer, there are only three states that expend less for the level of use sustained. We cannot continue this way. This is echoed at the local level, where 46% of municipal recreation directors report that since 2015, their budgets have remained flat, and 8% report a decrease in funding.

If we allow our outdoor recreation system to decline, we risk lost revenue and miss out on an important economic development opportunity. The outdoor recreation industry is thriving. According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis it continues to outpace the larger economy and represents over 2% of the gross domestic product. Visitors to our Rhode Island outdoor recreation facilities spent over \$300 million in 2016, which generated over 3,700 jobs. These numbers are not sustainable if we do not take better care and properly finance of our outdoor recreation facilities.

Following the guidelines in the Rhode Island Parks Organization Management and Operations Study, this Plan recommends:

- Establishing a business development office with two to three full-time staff who concentrate on revenue generating strategies including cost accounting, sponsorship and donor development, grant opportunities, fees, concessions, leases, and fiscal entrepreneurship.
- Establishing new pricing and fee setting policies for special events, site rentals, special uses, etc. based on the market value, cost of service, and the classification of the service depending on essential, important, or value-added criteria.
- Working with the General Assembly and the Office of Management and Budget to develop a new budget process that includes incentives to increase revenue by allowing earned revenue to be re-invested in state parks with a consistent minimum annual capital funding level that DEM can count on for facility and infrastructure needs.
- Evaluating expansion of recreation and business opportunities within each park with a strategic program and business plan to increase revenue generation and visitor experiences. This should include an assessment of which type of entity is best suited to develop and manage operations (e.g., state parks, nonprofit, and/or private sector).

DEM Outdoor Recreation Grant Program Requests and Awards in 2016



Demand for outdoor recreation grants far exceeds supply. Many of our outdoor recreation facilities are underfunded and lower-income communities face unique challenges supporting maintenance and upgrades.

Source: DEM, 2016. "A Final Report of the Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Council"



Lincoln Woods State Park

DEM Grant Opportunities

DEM runs several successful grant programs that enable municipalities to maintain, improve and make additions to their recreational infrastructure. Since 2014, the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program has awarded \$14 million to municipalities for acquisition, development and renovation of outdoor recreational facilities.

The Rhode Island Recreational Trails Grant Program, funded by the Federal Highway Administration, has awarded over \$2.2 million since 2009 to local Land trusts and municipalities for Trail Acquisition and Construction projects statewide.

**A MORE DETAILED
LOOK AT DEMAND**

To capture the picture of demand and preferences for outdoor recreation in Rhode Island, feedback was sought from both the general public, via a series of surveys, and municipal recreation directors.

Public Demand for Outdoor Recreation

In the fall of 2018, the Municipal Recreation Departments were surveyed for information about recreation facility usage and demands, along with recreation trends. There was a variety of responses, reflecting the state's diverse communities.

The majority (approximately half) of recreation directors reported that their recreation facilities and staff either do not meet demand or only somewhat meet demand from the public. Furthermore, most recreation directors report an increase in use of their facilities and unmet demand for those facilities—with at least three-quarters of respondents reporting unmet demand for facilities. For example, many directors reported a large increase in demand for field time, both designated fields and multipurpose. In addition, many towns found that private leagues heavily relied on public fields.

On the State level, 60% of respondents to the Outdoor Recreation Survey said that they would like to participate in more outdoor recreation but feel they are constrained by availability of recreational resources. When asked “what keeps you from using outdoor recreation facilities more often?” respondents tended to note crowding

(31%), difficulty locating facilities (30%) and distance (28%).

What's Most Important to Rhode Islanders

In the 2018 Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Survey, Rhode Islanders expressed a preference for a wide range of outdoor recreation resources. When asked to indicate how important it is to provide various types of park and recreation facilities, Rhode Islanders showed the greatest preference for:

- wilderness (64% indicating very important) environmental and outdoor education (58% indicating very important)
- recreation at lakes and ponds (51% indicating very important)
- trails for nonmotorized activities (50% indicating very important), and
- boat launches (45% indicating very important).

Respondents tended to prefer:

- activities that involve spending time in nature such as hiking, biking, and horseback riding (58%)
- a preference for recreation at the water such as going to the beach (49%), and
- outdoor cultural events (47%).

When asked why they participate in outdoor recreation, most respondents indicated to have fun (96%), enjoy scenic beauty (93%), or relax (92%). Many also noted an interest in health and fitness (87%). According to the State Recreation Facility Customer Satisfaction Survey, many users of state parks and beaches are heavy users, with 64% of respondents visiting state recreational facilities five or more times.

Pheasant and Duck Hunting, October 2017



2017 State Parks and Beaches Attendance by Month

Month	Attendance
January	299,074
February	327,864
March	344,830
April	563,004
May	628,839
June	895,660
July	1,023,439
August	1,238,233
September	780,540
October	542,684
November	348,820
December	271,216

Notes:

These figures do not include bike paths. They also do not capture beach attendance before Memorial Day or after Labor Day or after 4 p.m. between Memorial Day and Labor Day. *Source: DEM, 2018*

each year. Campgrounds are also used heavily with over 30% of respondents indicating that they visit campgrounds at least monthly.

Participation in high school sports is at an all-time high in Rhode Island, reflecting national trends. Rhode Island participation numbers in 2014 - 2015 were 16,565 boys and 11,921 girls, for a total of 28,486. (National

Federation of State High School Associations). In addition, club and private leagues are an increasingly popular option for youth sports. For example, Soccer Rhode Island was founded in 2000 and now serves over 22,000 youth players across 33 Town Associations and eight Premier Clubs throughout Rhode Island.

Recreation Facility Usage

People make over 6 million visits to state-managed recreational facilities (beaches, campgrounds, state parks) annually. Improved counting technology will be coming online soon and is estimated to increase these numbers dramatically.

Included in the 6 million number are visits to DEM-managed campgrounds. DEM Parks manages five campgrounds throughout the State with a total of 1,048 sites. On a peak summer night, the campgrounds are often at capacity with approximately 3,150 campers. George Washington Campground recently added 25 campsites to handle the demand. Last year, the total number of visitors to our state campgrounds was nearly 80,000 (DEM, 2018)

Including both fresh and saltwater beaches in Rhode Island on the local and state level, visitation numbers top 20 million annually. Beach visits are defined as one person visiting a beach for any part of a day. Clearly our beaches are a highly regarded and significant outdoor recreation asset.

In addition, the USFWS estimates that 424,000 people visit their five National Wildlife Refuges annually for hiking, hunting, and more.



Burlingame, August 2018

The high volume of visitors that our recreational facilities receive are testament to the importance of outdoor recreation to Rhode Islanders and visitors to our state. But this high volume of use can also cause significant wear and tear on our facilities and demonstrate the need to adequately fund upkeep and restoration.

Needed Facility Improvements/Upgrades

The State of Rhode Island made a comprehensive analysis of all state-owned capital assets, including recreational infrastructure owned by DEM. The analysis included data on necessary maintenance, repair and replacement projects including deferred maintenance items, and major capital improvements that needed attention in the next 10 years. This analysis provided DEM with vital information that enabled planning and budgeting for facility repairs and upgrades.

In addition, DEM has an active capital development program, systematically improving and modernizing the facilities at its state beaches and parks. All facility upgrades include green design and alternative energy generation along with resilient infrastructure to handle impacts associated with climate change, where appropriate. Recently, DEM completed several large recreation development projects, including:

- Lincoln Woods' new beach pavilion and concession area (\$5.3 million project).
- Fisherman's Campground improvements (\$3 million), including electric, water, some sewer work, and the phased construction of three new bath houses and restroom facilities, which will make the site more attractive on the shoulder season.
- George Washington Campground restroom and shower facility, new lighting and adding 25 campsites.
- Development of a new State Park at Rocky Point Park in Warwick.
- World War II Park rebuild including a water park and major landscaping project.

These improvements reflect basic and critical facility upgrades. Many other infrastructural needs and deferred maintenance issues remain unfunded.



Charlestown Breachway Campground



Newport Folk Festival at Fort Adams State Park, July 2017



East Bay Bicycle Path

PART THREE

THE PLAN FOR ACTION

This plan for action is the essence of the *Ocean State Outdoors*. It proposes strategies through which the public's recreational needs and desires can be actualized. Actions proposed encompass planning and coordination activities, legislative initiatives, programmatic modifications, regulatory needs, and capital investment measures (land acquisition and facility development).

VISION & GOALS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

THE VISION:

Rhode Island seeks to welcome and inspire residents and visitors to enjoy our iconic and connected outdoor recreation network with diverse opportunities across a variety of geographies. The recreation network ensures inclusive opportunities that inspire a culture of stewardship, wellbeing and shared resources.

THE GOALS:

Goal 1: Invest in new and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation to meet the public's needs.

Goal 2: Strengthen, expand and promote the statewide recreation network while protecting natural and cultural resources as well as adapting to a changing environment.

Goal 3: Ensure sustainable operation, maintenance and management of the statewide outdoor recreation network.

Goal 4: Improve access by removing barriers and enhancing information and communication systems.

CRITICAL NEEDS & ISSUES

Through the development of the *Ocean State Outdoors*, seven critical needs and issues emerged, which informed the development of the *Ocean State Outdoors* vision, goals, policies and actions.

Health and Wellness

Park Rx: Connecting Health Outcomes to Outdoor Recreation

RI's pilot Park Rx program encourages Rhode Islanders to spend time walking outdoors to improve their health. Health care providers give their patients a "prescription" to take outdoor walks and several local land trusts organize walks to "fill prescriptions" Pioneered by the South County Health Equity Zone, Westerly and South Kingstown Land Trusts, and RI Land Trust Council, the program is ready to be scaled up. A statewide program could encourage more healthful behavior for both Rhode Island adults and children.

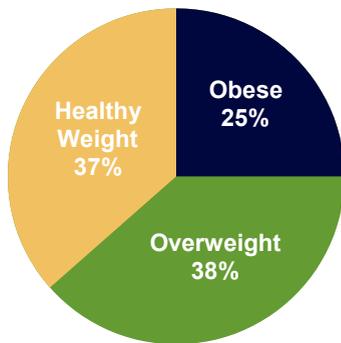
Modern life tends toward sedentary lifestyles and increasing stress that manifests as chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. Exercise and recreation—especially outdoors in beautiful natural surroundings—helps to rejuvenate us and prevent disease. Unfortunately, many people are unable to access and take advantage of outdoor recreation opportunities. Consider these DOH statistics from 2013 and 2014:

- 50% of Rhode Island adults do not meet physical activity recommendations, while one in four reported doing no physical activity or exercise other than their regular job (DOH, 2014).
- In 2014, DOH reported that nearly 63% of Rhode Islanders are overweight and that Rhode Islanders spend \$539 million annually on obesity-related healthcare costs.

- The 2013 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 17% of RI students play on the computer more than 5 hours a day and are not active. Twenty-three percent of students don't attend Physical Education class and 45% don't play on any sports team.

Promotion of outdoor recreation perpetuates use of outdoor facilities which in turn results in improved health and wellness, reduced health costs, improved individual productivity that will serve Rhode Islanders for generations to come. Outdoor Foundation's Outdoor Participation Reports found introducing outdoor recreation and physical activities early in life has a lasting effect. Among adults who are current outdoor participants, 75% had physical education and 42% enjoyed outdoor activities in elementary school.

Percent of Rhode Island Adults in Healthy and Unhealthy Weight Categories



In a 2014 study, Rhode Island DOH found only 37% of Rhode Island adults to be of a healthy weight (DOH, 2014).

Urban Needs

Many urban outdoor recreational needs currently go unmet. We interviewed several experts in providing specific aspects of outdoor recreation and found providing services to urban populations to be one of the most frequently cited unmet needs. Interviewee comments included the need for:

- Youth opportunities for outdoor recreation, especially less traditional opportunities and facilities like street workouts, skateboarding, bicycle motor-cross (BMX) and parkour courses.
- Playing fields, especially for soccer and lacrosse, which are both rising rapidly in popularity.
- Dog parks.
- Age friendly programming, including gardening, drawing, photography, and painting groups, which support people with physical limitations.
- Connectivity, signage, and wayfinding for walkers, hikers, cyclists, and paddlers. Signage and wayfinding should be designed to address the needs of non-English speakers.
- Focusing on nonautomotive transit options, such as may be provided through bike share programs and complete streets, to enhance access and connectivity.
- Enhanced placemaking and stewardship through adopt-a-spot programs.

What's Parkour?

Parkour is a training discipline using movement that developed from military obstacle course training. Practitioners aim to get from one point to another in a complex environment, without assistive equipment and in the fastest and most efficient way possible.

Source: Wikipedia

Goddard Brown Invitational



Climate Change

Recent weather records indicate highly accelerated climate and a clear need for a new way of thinking about building and improving our recreational infrastructure. For example, our fishing piers, boat ramps, beach pavilions, and wetlands, are all vulnerable to climate change impacts, a fact showcased during Superstorm Sandy, which resulted in \$77.4 million in federal assistance and \$102 million in private insurance claims.

For these very reasons, our future recreational infrastructure plans must incorporate climate change resiliency into all improvements, reconstruction and new facilities. This is a necessity to protect our assets going forward and to reduce public expenditures. Similarly, green infrastructure design should be incorporated into any improvements, reconstructions, or new facilities. Keeping the carbon footprint of our recreation infrastructure as low as possible ensures that our recreational facilities are not exacerbating climate change impacts locally. Additionally, it helps protect our natural resources and reduces the heating, cooling and water demands of the facility.

Habitat and Conservation

More than just a pleasure to behold, Rhode Island's environs offer many unique opportunities for wildlife. For example, wetlands provide incredibly valuable habitat as well as recreational resource function throughout the State. Twenty freshwater wetland habitats, excluding rivers and lakes, along with estuarine salt marshes and brackish marshes have been identified as key habitats for Rhode Island's Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the 2015 Rhode Island State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

Ocean State Outdoors recommends actions aimed to provide opportunities to recreate in the outdoors while ensuring preservation of environmental resources. Park and recreation facility managers should and need to operate and grow outdoor recreation resources in way that is sensitive to environmental resources. Users have the responsibility to be aware and responsible of the impacts their use can have on our natural resources.

Project Wild

Is an international supplementary wildlife education curriculum for K-12 that encourages conservation, awareness, and appreciation of nature, culture, and social interaction with wildlife.

What Recreation Opportunities do Wetlands Offer and Support?

Some recreation opportunities include—waterfowl hunting, birding, fishing, hiking, boating or canoeing, and general nature observation. Kids love to see and play with tadpoles, salamanders, turtles and toads.

Tourism

Tourism is one of Rhode Island's largest industries. The Ocean State's unique natural features and recreation opportunities provide for a wealth of tourism opportunities throughout the State. State beaches along the southern coast derive a significant portion of their parking revenue from out-of-state visitors. Much of the State's tourism is linked to activities such as recreational boating and fishing in Narragansett Bay and offshore. As shown by web use of ExPloreRI, (fifty % of out of state users) visitors are drawn to various areas that offer hunting, golfing, skiing, biking, hiking, and bird watching, among other activities. Birding groups of between 20 and 200 visit regularly to observe the fall migration. The tourist industry depends on the same features that are important to Rhode Island residents: a clean, healthy, and accessible bay and beaches, our natural, cultural, scenic, and historic resources, and attractive, safe and accessible parks, management areas, and other open spaces.

It is crucial to maintain the balance between high-quality recreational experiences, meeting local recreational demands, and tapping the tourist market to ensure that tourists' use of recreation and open space facilities does not overtax them and displace resident users. Increased coordination and mutual understanding between recreation managers and the tourism industry can help protect Rhode Island's natural resource base while continuing to generate tourism revenue.

[ExPloreRI](#)

ExploreRI is a website site to find information on places to go kayaking, canoeing, and walking. The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance and the Rhode Island Land Trust Council work together to maintain and update the website. The Blueways Alliance focuses on paddling information and the Land Trust Council focuses on trail information.

Collaboration

Ocean State Outdoors represents a proposal for collaboration between all proponents of outdoor recreation. Providing for our outdoor recreational needs requires a team effort involving management professionals, experienced staff, local volunteers, trainers and educators, local officials and many others. Partnerships with non-profit organizations, particularly the Appalachian Mountain Club, The Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society and the dozens of local land trusts, have played a pivotal role in protecting open space and recreational resources around the state. Private businesses have also contributed to support recreation facilities and programs. Some local sports leagues help maintain ball fields. Businesses, individual volunteers, and environmental groups help organize and provide workers for cleanups and special events.

Equity

Communities need good outdoor recreation facilities. Outdoor recreation increases the likelihood that people will be active. Access to parks is a matter of equity and justice as well as health. While Rhode Island has great physical access to parks and greenspace, simple distance to a park is not a sufficient measure. The quality of the park needs to be included in the assessment. Some parks, particularly in low-income areas can be unattractive, unwelcoming, or unsafe havens for illegal activity. Because of this, these parks can be rendered essentially inaccessible, particularly for children. As public recreation budgets shrink or flatline, urban parks in low-income areas disproportionately suffer. While wealthy neighborhoods may have the resources to advocate for their parks and create non-profits to maintain and sustain their parks, low-income neighborhoods often do not.

A key part of ensuring equitable access to outdoor recreation resources is to acknowledge that some communities are traditionally underrepresented as users of outdoor recreation resources. One potential source of this disparity is that some groups may not feel welcome in places where they don't see people that look like them - they may not feel that the space is "for them". One way to address this is to formally welcome traditionally under-represented groups via cultural programming and signage. For example, in Rhode Island, the Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Markers Project (RI MPCMP) promotes the

recognition of the State's history as a major actor in the transatlantic human trade, as the home of multiple ports receiving enslaved people who survived the Middle Passage, as well as the vital role that Africans and their descendants played in the development of both Rhode Island and the Americas. Physical markers are displayed at historic locations throughout the State. Incorporating as many of these markers and events as possible in state parks and other recreational areas can make these resources more accessible.

Access

Outdoor recreation can positively impact Rhode Islander's health and quality of life, ensuring that everyone can access quality outdoor recreational opportunities is paramount. Accessibility improvements can be made by all sectors of the recreational community; therefore, *Ocean State Outdoors* calls for action to:

- Improve access to safe and inviting outdoor recreation opportunities through targeted upgrades to recreational infrastructure where there are known gaps.
- Increase attendance and participation in outdoor recreation by activating existing parks through increased programming sourced from outside the public sector.
- Making stronger connections between our recreational resources to allow for by foot, bike, or public transit whenever feasible.
- Improving wayfinding and informational signage at our recreation sites. Signage and wayfinding should be designed to address the needs of non-English speakers.
- Enhancing our digital presence with the most comprehensive and up-to-date information about outdoor recreation facilities.

Rhode Island Shoreline Access

Shoreline access is a Rhode Island tradition going back to the very founding of the State. As set out in the Rhode Island State Constitution, "the people shall continue to enjoy and freely exercise all rights of fishery, and privileges of the shore" (Article I, Section 17). The [Coastal Resources Management Council](#) maintains the inventory and maps of rights-of-way to the shore for the State.

ACTIONS & POLICIES FOR ACHIEVING GOALS

This section summarizes policies and actions for achieving the goals and vision of *Ocean State Outdoors*. The goals, policies and actions in this Plan form a hierarchy, where actions have been placed under the policies they are intended to implement; and in turn policies have been placed under their associated goal. Actions are organized in chronological groups—ongoing, short term, medium term, and long term:

- Ongoing actions are in process and are expected to continue.
- Short-term actions are anticipated to begin within the first year after approval.
- Medium-term actions are anticipated to begin between Year 1 and Year 3 after approval, and
- Long-term actions are planned to initiate after Year 3 and before Year 5 after approval.

List of Acronyms Used

ATV means "All-Terrain Vehicle"

BMX means "Bicycle Motor Cross"

CRMC means "Coastal Resources Management Council"

DEM means "Department of Environmental Management"

DMO means "Destination Marketing Organization"

DOH means "Department of Health"

DSP means "Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning"

RIPRA means "Rhode Island Parks and Recreation Association"

RIHPHC means "Rhode Island Historical Preservations and Heritage Commission"

RRRC means "Recreation Resources Review Committee"

Ocean State Outdoors means "State Conservation Outdoor Recreation Plan" (SCORP)

SGP means "State Guide Plan"

AMC means "Appalachian Mountain Club"

TNC means "The Nature Conservancy"

USFWS means "US Fish and Wildlife Service"

DOT means "Department of Transportation"

RILTC means "Rhode Island Land Trust Council"

RIBA means "Rhode Island Blueways Alliance"

WPWSSC means "Wood Pawcatuck River Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council"

RIEMA means "Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency"

Goal 1: Invest in new and improved opportunities for outdoor recreation to meet the public’s needs.

Outdoor recreation provides us both direct and indirect benefits. This goal recognizes the public’s needs broadly related to outdoor recreation. Setting this goal helps us to address key findings related to Rhode Islanders love of the outdoors, demand for more services, and call for better staffing and maintenance. It also addresses the critical issues of urban needs, equity and access.

Policy 1.1 Strengthen connections between health and outdoor recreation.

In our culture, we are amid a health crisis of our own making, which results from chronic inactivity. One of the best available cures is outdoor recreation but sadly many people either do not or cannot take advantage of outdoor facilities. Strengthening the connection between health and outdoor recreation, raises awareness of this issue and improves the likelihood of good healthful behaviors.

Action Items	Lead (s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Coordinate with Health Equity Zones to highlight the importance of outdoor recreation	DOH	DOH, Municipalities, DSP	Medium term
B. Expand the Park RX program	RILTC	Land Trusts, DOH, Health Care Providers	Medium term
C. Assess equipment and trails in parks and provide upgrades and creative designs that support use and access by people of all fitness and ability levels	DEM	Municipalities, Land Trusts	Ongoing
D. Ensure outdoor recreation facility users have access to shade and sunscreen	DEM, Municipalities	DOH, Private Vendors	Ongoing

Programming can be used to engage people who have not traditionally used facilities and make them feel more at home. In this way, programming can be used as part of a strategy to improve the equity of use.



Policy 1.2 Activate parks through programming and education.

Although many of our outdoor recreational resources are overtaxed with use, Rhode Island also has many parks that are presently underutilized, and some are essentially unused. Parks that are not used are both lost opportunities and targets for vandalize and other forms of misuse. Programming activates parks for their highest and best purposes. A park that is used regularly is much less likely to sustain abuse.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Develop and support family targeted tool kits and programs to encourage outdoor recreation, such as the Great Outdoors Pursuit and Land Trust Days	DEM, RILTC	Land Trusts, Watershed Councils	Medium term
B. Work with RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission to fund, install, and maintain interpretive displays that highlight cultural and historic sites	DEM	RIHPHC , Preserve Rhode Island, Providence Preservation, DMOs	Ongoing
C. Encourage private sector operators to provide in-park services, including sailing, canoe and boat rentals, refreshments, concerts, and horseback riding	DEM, Municipalities	Private partners	Ongoing

Policy 1.3 Incorporate targeted additions to our recreational infrastructure – build where there are demographic and geographic gaps and ensure equal access to high quality opportunities.

Overall, Rhode Island outdoor recreation system brings a wide range of excellent opportunity. Targeted additions are needed to fill the gaps and address access limitations.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Identify top priority trail gaps and work to close them within 5 years	DEM	AMC, Land Trusts, Municipalities	Ongoing
B. Identify and prioritize needed boating and fishing access site additions and improvements and fund their completion	DEM	Municipalities , Land Trusts, AMC, RIBA	Ongoing
C. Create an option for legal ATV use	DEM	Municipalities	Ongoing
D. Assess portage and paddle only camp sites and parking options/opportunities and work to ensure they meet needs	DEM	RIBA ,TNC, Municipalities	Ongoing
E. Identify opportunities for new canoe and kayak rental operations in proximity to put-ins with adequate parking	DEM	RIBA ,CRMC, Municipalities, Private partners	Ongoing

F. Identify top priority gaps for freshwater swimming opportunities and work to close them	DEM	Municipalities	Ongoing
G. Implement the Bicycle Mobility Plan developed within the SGP Long-range Transportation Element	DSP, DEM	DOT, RI Bike Coalition	Ongoing
H. Expand and enhance shoreline access by acquiring and developing key access points in coordination with improvement and expansion of facilities	CRMC, DEM	Municipalities, Land Trusts	Medium term

Goal 2: Strengthen, expand and promote the statewide recreation network while protecting natural and cultural resources as well as adapting to a changing environment.

Outdoor recreation has both the potential to compliment and conflict with natural and cultural resources. Ensuring that outdoor recreational opportunities do not negatively impact important habitats, animal and plant species, and historic resources is of paramount importance. Adapting to rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, and other climate change impacts will also become increasingly critical. Setting this goal helps us to directly address key findings related to Rhode Islanders love of the outdoors, demand for more services, and call for better staffing and maintenance. This goal directly addresses the critical issues of habitat and conservation and climate change. Furthermore, it calls for collaboration to enhance tourism and to ensure protection and recognition of natural and cultural resources.

Policy 2.1 Ensure that outdoor recreation facilities are built and operated in a manner that provides for the protection of natural and cultural resources.

Much of our outdoor recreation system depends on high quality natural surroundings and cultural resources. Build and operate outdoor recreational facilities in a manner protects natural and cultural resources.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Promote preventative maintenance, sustainable designs, and other practices that will reduce maintenance costs while conserving natural resources	DEM	Municipalities, DOT, RIPRA	Ongoing
B. Work with environmental agencies and organizations to ensure new or expanded recreation facilities, trails, and other uses protect wildlife habitat	DEM	WPWSSC, Watershed Councils	Ongoing
C. Ensure that cultural heritage sites are recognized and protected when expanding outdoor recreation opportunities	DEM, Municipalities	Preserve Rhode Island, Narragansett Indian Tribe, RIHPHC	Ongoing
D. Invest in resilient infrastructure to mitigate and adapt to flooding and heat that may result from climate change	DEM, Municipalities	CRMC, DOT	Medium term

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
E. Include resiliency in outdoor recreation design through strategies such as floodable parks	DEM	CRMC, Municipalities	Short term
F. Enforce the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission run-of-the river policy to protect recreational and aquatic resources	DEM, DSP	WPWSSC, Watershed Councils	Ongoing
G. Prohibit the loss of recreation and open space system land through conversion to alternative uses	DEM, DSP	Municipalities, Attorney General	Ongoing
H. Prohibit the conversion of land that has been dedicated to recreation and open space to alternative uses	DEM, DSP	Municipalities, Attorney General	Ongoing
I. Establish priorities and procedures for the purchase of storm damaged properties, particularly barrier beaches and other flood prone areas to use for recreational areas as part of natural hazard mitigation and resiliency planning	DEM, CRMC	RIEMA, Municipalities, DSP	Ongoing

Policy 2.2 Work together to promote outdoor recreation opportunities.

Promoting outdoor recreation requires cooperation between agencies and organizations.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Establish a liaison at the State Tourism office to coordinate with recreation advocates	DEM, Commerce RI	Chambers of Commerce, DMO	Ongoing
B. Regularly communicate the economic and community benefits of outdoor recreation to legislators and the general public	DEM	Municipalities, RIPRA, RILTC	Ongoing
C. Work with environmental educators to promote successful environmental curriculums that encourage stewardship of outdoor resources such as "Project Wild"	DEM	School districts, Education providers, Watershed Councils, RI Environmental Education Association	Medium term
D. Expand successful engagement initiatives such as ongoing hunting and wildlife education programs to cultivate support for the protection of wildlife and fish habitat	DEM	Land Trusts, Education providers, WPWSSC	Ongoing

Goal 3: Ensure sustainable operation, maintenance and management of the statewide outdoor recreation network.

By their nature, facilities and systems require operation, maintenance, and management. The ideal is to make operation, maintenance, management as simple and cost effective as possible to maximize delivery. This goal focuses on sustainable and effective delivery of service. Setting this goal helps us to address key findings related to Rhode Islanders call for better staffing and maintenance. This goal addresses all key issues, but directly addresses collaboration to ensure the sustainability of outdoor recreation facilities.

Policy 3.1 Build partnerships for the sustainable stewardship of outdoor recreation facilities.

A key finding of *Ocean State Outdoors* is that state and municipal resources for managing outdoor recreation facilities are stretched beyond capacity and causing deterioration of facilities. Partnering with allied organizations to share work could relieve some of the current stress.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Encourage the creation of and collaboration with organizations to support stewardship of specific facilities and parks	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts, RIPRA Watershed Councils	Ongoing
B. Develop an umbrella nonprofit/affinity organization for outdoor recreation that can help maintain recreation facilities	RIPRA	Municipalities, Land Trusts,	Short term
C. Empower user groups to undertake activities such as trail clearing and maintenance and upkeep of athletic fields	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts, AMC, Watershed Councils	Ongoing
D. Provide clear and meaningful opportunities for outdoor recreation stewardship for the private sector	DEM, Municipalities	Private partners	Medium term
E. Request nominations from local recreation agencies for the Top 10 Endangered Parks list	DEM	Municipalities, Land Trusts, RIPRA	Short term

Policy 3.2 Dedicate funding to outdoor recreation in a manner that reflects its value and the evolving needs of the public.

Current budgeting offers little tethering to evolving needs or the return on investments that outdoor recreation offers. Clearer connection between user fees, the cost of providing service and the value realized links funding to management and will help to ensure the viability of outdoor recreation facilities.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Increase capital investment for outdoor recreation facilities and improve funding at the state and municipal levels	General Assembly	DEM, Town / City councils	Ongoing

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
B. Develop support for adjusting user fees to be commensurate with other New England states and apply proceeds to capital investments	DEM	General Assembly	Short term
C. Provide for dedicated and restricted funding for recreational resources in a manner that incentivizes proper operation and maintenance	DEM	General Assembly	Medium term
D. Work to secure funding to continue state and local land protection programs and propose an open space state bond referendum for consideration for the 2020 and 2022 elections.	DEM	General Assembly	Medium term
E. Study establishment of a self-perpetuating trust fund for acquisition of storm or flood damaged properties in coastal areas and along rivers.	DEM, CRMC	DSP, General Assembly	Long term

Policy 3.3 Provide and support training opportunities for staff of outdoor recreation facilities.

Providing and supporting training opportunities is paramount to ensuring the effective maintenance of our outdoor recreation facilities. In the face of staffing and budget cuts across the State, targeted training can expand capacity.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Establish an information clearinghouse and hold workshops on park system management for recreation staff	RIPRA	DEM	Ongoing
B. Create a recreation technical assistance program to connect recreation agencies with experts on recreation management	DEM	Municipalities, RIPRA	Medium term
C. Consider establishing a “Gold Medal Award” for local park and recreation agencies	DEM	RIPRA, RRRC	Long term

Goal 4: Improve access to the outdoor recreation network by removing barriers and enhancing information and communication systems.

Complete access is an ideal requiring an ethic of continual improvement to remove barriers to the use of our outdoor recreation system. An important part of this work is collaborating with partners to improve information available about outdoor recreation. This goal addresses key findings related to the need for better information about outdoor recreation facilities as well as improving opportunities to walk, cycle, paddle, boat, and enjoy nature since it provides for connectivity between uses. This goal also addresses the critical issues of health and wellness, urban needs, equity, and access.

Policy 4.1 Create better information about outdoor recreation online.

The general public has asked for easily accessible and comprehensible information about outdoor recreation resources. Rhode Island's numerous providers across all sectors need to cooperate to ensure proper implementation.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Provide a unified outdoor recreation web portal and mobile app that provides information about local, state, private, and federal resources	DEM	Commerce RI, Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, DMO, RIPRA, RIBA, RILTC	Short term
B. Implement a unified communications and social media strategy across agencies and organizations	DEM	Commerce RI, Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, DMO, RIPRA, RIBA, RILTC	Short term
C. Provide improved general information and communications for non-English speaking audiences	DEM	Commerce RI, Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, DMO, RIPRA, RIBA, RILTC	Short term

Policy 4.2 Provide for adequate capacity and safe connections to, from and between outdoor recreation facilities.

A well-connected outdoor recreation system that enables residents to travel to and between recreation opportunities safely via bus, bike, sidewalks, or boat can enhance recreation opportunities for the whole community. In addition, connecting existing recreational opportunities to each other can make those opportunities more readily useable.

Action Items	Lead(S)	Support	Timeframe
A. Improve public transportation networks and bike paths leading to recreation spaces and make grants available for this work	DEM, DSP	RIPTA Municipalities, DOT	Ongoing
B. Improve safety on bike paths with a focus on high-risk areas such as entrances-exits and integration and crossing with other modes of transit such as walking and automotive	DEM, DOT	Municipalities	Short term
C. Enhance and integrate special interest recreation access, such as mountain biking, horseback riding and urban BMX courses.	DEM	Municipalities	Medium
D. Improve connectivity within the recreation network, including bikeways, walking paths, paddling routes as well as connections to recreation destinations	Municipalities, RIPTA	Land Trusts, DSP, DEM	Long term

Policy 4.3 Seek to resolve and avoid creating user conflicts at outdoor recreation facilities.

In our dense and populous state, conflicts between user groups create inconvenience and, sometimes, safety issues. Resolving these conflicts removes barriers to use and allows for more effective promotion of outdoor recreation facilities.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Better designate and define trail networks with consideration for user conflicts	DEM	Municipalities, Land Trusts	Ongoing
B. Rejuvenate the DEM Management Area Councils and special use permit system	DEM	Municipalities	Ongoing
C. Better designate trails and public access areas to protect natural resources by diverting uses to appropriate terrain.	DEM	Land Trusts, Municipalities	Ongoing
D. Work with user groups on public education to protect natural resources and minimize conflicts among hikers, equestrian, bikers, hunters and other user groups	DEM	Land Trusts, Municipalities	Medium term

Policy 4.4 Use signage displays and related information technology to improve communication about proper use of outdoor recreation.

Lack of easily available information about how to properly use outdoor recreation facilities can result in user conflicts and major inconveniences. Easy-to-read displays on site with references to readily accessible online information will facilitate the use of our outdoor recreation system.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Improve signage and wayfinding at recreational facilities with up to date information, readily available, standardized, and friendly to non-English speaking populations	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts	Short term
B. Erect educational signage to encourage responsible behavior in outdoor resources	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts	Short term
C. Implement standardized symbology for signage to simplify and clarify information	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts	Ongoing
D. Better designate public shoreline access sites through signage and information online for the rules of use	CRMC	DEM, Municipalities, Land Trusts	Medium term
E. Consider using educational, hands-on displays that use QR codes or other interactive features	DEM, Municipalities	Land Trusts	Medium term

Policy 4.5 Provide for an outdoor recreation network that is fully accessible to potential users.

Fairness and equity are critical tenets in the delivery of outdoor recreation opportunities. A universally accessible outdoor recreation network is the desired goal.

Action Items	Lead(s)	Support	Timeframe
A. Address public shoreline access in municipal comprehensive plans with ideas to improve physical access to public rights of way	Municipalities, DSP	DEM, CRMC	Medium term
B. Provide new/enhanced recreational opportunities for people with limited mobility that go beyond adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act.	DEM, Municipalities	Land trusts, RIPRA	Long term

Lincoln Woods State Park



APPENDIX A

Rhode Island Wetland Priority Plan



Lincoln Woods, September 2018

APPENDIX A

RHODE ISLAND WETLAND PRIORITY PROTECTION PLAN

Background

In RI, it is estimated that 53% of previously existing salt marsh acreage in RI has been lost. Similarly, it has been estimated that 37% or more of freshwater wetlands have been historically lost to physical alteration. Significant physical alteration of the upland buffers to both coastal and freshwater wetlands has occurred as well. Some 30% of Narragansett Bay's marshes have inadequate or non-existent buffer zones. The various physical disturbances in salt marshes and freshwater wetlands can lead to changes which leave areas vulnerable to invasive species, Phragmites which outcompetes native salt marsh vegetation, and reduces local biodiversity. Some 1200 of the existing 3700 acres of salt marsh in Narragansett Bay are impacted by Phragmites and other invasive plant species. According to *Water Quality 2035*, today an estimated 88,052 acres or approximately 12.8% of Rhode Island's land area is composed of freshwater wetlands including but not limited to swamps, marshes, bogs and fens. In addition, we have about 3,800 acres of salt marsh located along RI's coastal shorelines.

In Rhode Island both coastal and freshwater wetlands attract various recreational uses including hiking, birdwatching, boating, and other naturalist activities. In addition, as prominent features along many of RI's bike paths and hiking trails, wetland resources enhance the recreational experience for the user by providing scenic views and nature observation opportunities. They are an integral part of the outdoor recreational experience in RI. Coastal and freshwater wetlands perform other critical functions including purifying and maintaining groundwater supplies, flood and stormwater control, erosion and sedimentation control, fish and wildlife habitat, nutrient production and cycling, open space, and education and scientific research opportunities.

Wetland protection is a top priority for the State. Protection measures utilized in Rhode Island include federal and state regulation of alterations to wetlands, acquisition of land and interests in land, programs to restore degraded wetlands, and efforts to educate and involve the public in the protection of wetlands. The federal Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 authorizes federal funds, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund, for wetlands acquisition. The statute also directs the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and each state to prepare a Wetlands Priority Plan to guide and direct protection efforts. State plans are to be included as part of their SCORP and are to identify wetland types or areas that are priority for protection through acquisition programs.

State Regulation

State wetlands protection regulations administered by the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) play the most important regulatory role in protecting Rhode Island's freshwater and coastal wetlands. Rhode Island state laws protect both freshwater and coastal wetlands and require that impacts to wetlands be avoided and minimized. Rhode Island's Freshwater Wetlands Act, Chapter 2-1 of the General Laws, is one of the oldest and strongest state wetlands protection measures in the nation. The DEM Office of Water Resources operates the freshwater wetlands regulatory program, which seeks to protect and restore wetlands to provide wildlife habitat, reduce floods, improve water quality, and provide recreational opportunities. The technical and public review of development proposals provided for under this regulatory program have been largely responsible for Rhode Island's avoidance of the substantial wetlands losses which other states have experienced in recent years. A change to state law in 2015 broadened the State's jurisdiction regarding freshwater wetland protection and directed stronger protection of the lands adjacent to wetlands via the establishment of buffer standards, which require buffers to be kept or restored to their natural condition.

Saltwater wetlands in Rhode Island are regulated by the Coastal Resources Management Council. Established by Chapter 46-23 of the Rhode Island General Laws, the CRMC has a broad legislative mandate for coastal resource planning, management, and regulation with jurisdiction over all construction, filling, removal, and grading within 200 feet of the coast and of coastal features, as well as over moorings, docks, dredging, and other activities through its permitting program. Under the Coastal Resources Management Program, the Council's regulatory document, uses of shoreline areas are regulated according to the characteristics of the resource involved and the intensity use designation of the adjacent coastal waters.

Since about 90 percent of the State's salt marshes are adjacent to waters having the two lowest intensity usage categories or have been designated as areas for preservation and restoration, only minor alterations to most of the State's saltwater wetlands are permissible. Only about 37 acres of saltmarsh statewide are located adjacent to higher intensity water classes where significant alterations could be allowed. CRMC has adopted a saltwater wetland mitigation policy.

Protection Programs

Conservation of important wetland habitat through land acquisition has been and will continue to be an important strategy for the long-term protection of high-quality wetlands. DEM will continue to identify protection of wetlands as a priority, consistent with Section 303 of the Federal Emergency Wetlands Resources Act. State and local governments and private sector organizations all play important roles in protecting wetlands. The following components play an integral part in preserving and protecting the State's wetlands and natural resources:

- State Land Acquisition Program, DEM Planning and Development Section
- Municipal, local and non-profit land conservation organizations

In 2002, pursuant to Rhode Island General Law 46-23.1, RI established the Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund which is administered by CRMC. The program allocates about \$225,000 per year, to support a range of projects to plan, design, implement and monitor habitat restoration actions for saltmarshes, submerged aquatic vegetation, fish passage and shellfish beds. Projects are selected through a competitive process with input from a Technical Advisory Committee.

Wetlands Conservation Priorities

Several existing state planning efforts further inform and refine wetlands conservation priorities.

Rhode Island State Wildlife Action Plan (RIWAP) - Developed by the DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife Division. It identifies twenty freshwater wetland habitats, excluding rivers and lakes, along with estuarine salt marshes and brackish marshes as key habitats for RI's Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The RIWAP identifies threats to wetland habitats:

- Changes to the natural system- including climate change and hydromodifications (dams) (33)
- Invasive Species (33)
- Residential and Commercial Development (20)
- Pollution – from various sources (19)
- Agriculture and Forestry activities (11)

For rivers, lakes and wetlands, the impacts associated with development in areas adjacent to shorelines is a priority concerns for habitat. Conversion of land for development near water resources results in fragmentation and loss of habitat that is important to wildlife that utilize aquatic habitats. While certain lands adjacent to rivers, lakes and wetlands have been protected by laws which restrict development in these "buffer" areas, many properties had been previously altered or developed before regulatory protection came into place. Most of these wetland habitats were included in the planning analysis that identified priority conservation opportunity areas (COAs) for RI in the RIWAP. The COAs will help direct collaborative efforts to acquire or strengthen protection of these prioritized, intact habitat areas.

- <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/fish-wildlife/wildlifehuntered/swap15.php>

Water Quality 2035, State Guide Plan Element 731 – Developed by the Division of Statewide Planning and The DEM Office of Water Resources, this State Water Quality Plan is part of the State Guide Plan. It offers a long-range plan for effective management of RI's water resources. It contains policies and action items for aquatic habitat and freshwater and coastal wetlands:

- 1) protect wetland functions and values by avoiding and minimizing alterations and wetland loss, and
- 2) facilitate restoration of the quality and quantity of wetlands and adjacent buffers.

- (http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/LU/water/2016/SGP_WQMP_Approved%2010.13.16.pdf)

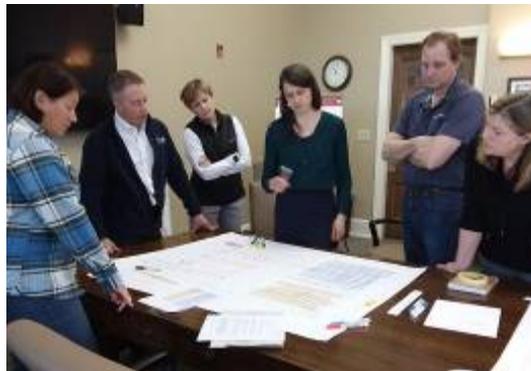
Rhode Island Coastal Wetland Restoration Strategy – Developed by the CRMC, the RI Natural History Survey, and the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, this strategy outlines a vision, goals and objectives for identifying and prioritizing restoration of the ecosystem functions and services provided by coastal wetlands on a statewide, rather than a strictly site-specific scale. It describes the State's coastal and estuarine habitats, restoration goals, inventory of restoration projects, projected comprehensive budget and timeline to complete the goals, funding sources, an outreach element, and contains provisions for updating the plan and project inventory

- <http://www.crmc.ri.gov/habitatrestoration/RICWRestorationStrategy.pdf>

Together, the *Rhode Island State Wildlife Action Plan*, the wetland sections of SGP 731, *Water Quality 2035*, and the *Rhode Island Coastal Wetland Restoration Strategy* fulfill the requirement to produce a wetlands priority plan for Rhode Island consistent with the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan.

APPENDIX B

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



2019 SCORP Advisory Committee

STAFF & SCORP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

STAFF - The Plan was developed by the Division of Statewide Planning and Office of Planning and Development of the Department of Environmental Management. A staff working group guided and coordinated the development of the content of the Plan by the Advisory Committee, the DEM, and the State Planning Council and its Technical Committee. The preliminary draft was written by consultants Weston & Sampson and finalized by the staff of both agencies after a public hearing authorized by the State Planning Council. The staff members were:

Department of Administration - Division of Statewide Planning

- Meredith Brady, Associate Director
- Nancy Hess, Supervising Planner
- Paul Gonsalves, Principal Planner

Department of Environmental Management

Office of Planning & Development

- Lisa Primiano, Chief (formerly)
- Megan DiPrete, Chief
- Michelle Sheehan, Program Services Officer
- Lisa McGreavy, Senior Environmental Planner

Bureau of Natural Resources

- Terri Bisson, Chief Program Development

ADVISORY COMMITTEE - The overall development of this Plan is the product of many hard-working and dedicated individuals who helped to define major issues, and set goals, policies and actions on a broad range of outdoor recreation topics. This task required time, deliberation, and a strong interest on a personal and a professional level to assist. It could not have been accomplished without the following individuals who generously contributed their time and technical advice as members of an advisory committee.

- Raena Blumenthal, Coventry Recreation Department
- Joshua Giraldo, Central Falls Parks & Recreation
- Andrea Hall, Burrillville Parks & Rec Director
- Philip Hervey, Barrington Town Planner
- Chuck Hobert, RI Rivers Council & RI Canoe & Kayak Association
- Meg Kerr, RI Audubon Society
- Anna Lockmer, REI
- Tim Mooney, The Nature Conservancy
- Theresa Murphy, South Kingstown Recreation Director
- Steven O'Donnell, YMCA Greater Providence
- Mia Patriarca, Department of Health
- Tiffany Rhodes, Johnson & Wales

Photos and images were provided by the Department of Environmental Management.

STATE PLANNING COUNCIL

- Michael DiBiase, Chair, Department of Administration,
- Rosemary Powers , Vice Chair, Governor's Office
- Meredith Brady, Secretary, Division of Statewide Planning
- Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Department of Health
- Peter Alviti, Department of Transportation
- Scott Avedisian, RI Public Transit Authority
- Robert Azar, City of Providence - Department of Planning and Development
- Jeanne Boyle, Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, President's Designee
- Lisa Bryer, Rhode Island League of Cities & Towns, Local Government Representative
- Janet Coit, Department of Environmental Management
- Jeanne Cola, Representative of Nonprofit Housing
- Roy Coulombe, Public member
- Brian Daniels, Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns
- Grover Fugate, Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council
- Carol Grant, Department of Administration, Office of Energy Resources
- Carlos Machado, Federal Highway Administration (Ex-Officio)
- Marcus Mitchell, Small Business Representative
- Thomas Mullaney, Department of Administration, Budget Office
- Anne M. Nolan, RI Housing Resources Commission
- Sandy O'Connor, Governor's Designee (Resigned)
- Amy Rainone, Rhode Island Housing
- M. James Riordan, Public Member (Recused)
- Mike Walker, Commerce RI
- Jeff Willis, Coastal Resources Management Council
- Girard R. Visconti, Esq., Large Business Representative (resigned)
- Scott Wolf, Public Member - Environmental Advocate

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

- Michael DeLuca, Vice Chair, Narragansett - Community Development
- Roberta Groch, Secretary, Division of Statewide Planning
- Caitlin Chaffee, Coastal Resources Management Council
- John Chambers, Fuss and O'Neill
- Jeffrey Davis, RI Chapter of American Planning Association
- Michael Gannon, Department of Transportation
- Carrie Gill, Office of Energy Resources
- Nicole LaFontaine, North Kingstown - Planning Department
- Mark Motte, Ph.D., Rhode Island College
- Randy Warden , Federal Highway Administration(Ex-Officio)
- Paul Jordan, Department of Environmental Management
- Mia Patriarca, Department of Health
- Ashley Sweet, Exeter - Town Planner
- Michael Walker, Commerce RI
- Jane Weidman, Charlestown - Town Planner
- Diane Williamson, Bristol - Planning Director

APPENDIX C

OUTREACH



Lincoln Woods, September 2018



SCORP Timeline

OUTREACH PLAN

Website

Map application

Focus Groups

Surveys

- Recreation Directors
- General Public

Interviews

Public Meetings

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY: Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The following plan details recommended communications strategies and tactics to support the feedback strategy to inform the Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). This plan will continue to evolve as work of the SCORP Project Team and its various partners moves forward.

Primary Objective: Engage partners, stakeholders, and public to provide feedback on Rhode Island's outdoor recreation network to inform the Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to identify areas of success and prioritize funding for improvements over the next 5 years.

Secondary Objectives:

- Continue momentum and build upon work previously outlined in the 2016 Outdoor Recreation Council that informs people about the State's recreational assets and encourage residents to enjoy these spaces.
- Build excitement among Rhode Islanders; engage them as the "experts" in what makes Rhode Island special.
- Support efforts of the Project Team and its partners to promote and expand outdoor recreation in Rhode Island.
- Promote healthy habits and physical activity.
- Increase access to and use of Rhode Island's recreational areas by diverse populations.
- Promote the economic and cultural importance of Rhode Island's network of natural and recreational assets.
- Highlight the proximity, accessibility, and diversity of recreational offerings in Rhode Island. Promote ecotourism and support partner efforts to attract/increase local recreation, staycations and nearcations. Reinforce the Administration's commitment to conserving the state's natural resources and growing the green economy.

Topline Message: We want to hear from you! Enhancing outdoor recreation in Rhode Island benefits our environment, families, and economy. Let us know which recreational resources are working for you, where improvements are needed, and where there are opportunities to add resources.

Rhode Island is widely regarded as having one the nation's most distinct environments. Narragansett Bay and the State's iconic landscapes and green spaces are often cited as "must visits" by prominent journals from *National Geographic* to *The New York Times*. They are also powerful economic drivers, attracting national and international events such as the Volvo Ocean Race which made its second appearance in Rhode Island this past spring; in 2015 the race drew 130,000 fans to Fort Adams State Park in Newport and contributed \$47 million to the local economy. And the State's wide array of historic parks, beaches, bikeways and other recreational facilities are frequented by millions of people each year.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in Rhode Island generates \$2.4 billion in consumer spending and supports 24,000 jobs. A recent study conducted by the University of Rhode Island found that State-managed parks and bikeways alone contribute \$311 million to the economy annually and support over 3,700 jobs and nine million visits.

These assets are part of our identity as a state and what makes Rhode Island such a special place to live, visit, and raise a family; continuing to invest in providing safe, accessible places for people to recreate is vital to the health of our economy, culture and families. These spaces play an important role in promoting public health and providing opportunities for physical activity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, inadequate physical activity is associated with higher rates of obesity. In Rhode Island, slightly over half of residents do not get the recommended amount of daily physical activity; minorities and those with lower incomes, education is particularly at risk.

audiences: Primary audiences for the feedback campaign include two distinct Rhode Island population segments: 1) the influencer group most likely to seek out leisure activities that are family oriented and/or nature-based. This includes organized stakeholder groups; and 2) a group at higher risk of inadequate

levels of physical activity.

The 'engaged local influencer' is not only critical to promoting outdoor recreation among in-state groups but also tourists. According to the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, in 2017 Rhode Island hosted 24.8 million visitors in 2017, including 7.8 million overnight visitors. Secondary audience segments include urban youth, millennial outdoor enthusiasts, and near-vacationers.

Campaign Activities: The following major activities will be used to increase engagement with focus groups and surveys to gather public feedback on the status of outdoor recreation opportunities in Rhode Island. This list will continue to be updated and guided by the work and initiatives of the Project Group. Efforts will also be made to support relevant initiatives of partner organizations.

Earned Media - Earned media efforts will focus on placing positive, compelling news stories in local, regional, and national outlets. Specific opportunities include announcements of surveys and focus groups. Other tie-ins are TBD.

Social Media - All posts will include the hashtag #goRI - with a secondary tag #Explore RI, as appropriate at e. The focus with social messaging will be to invite participation in formal feedback mechanism, like the interactive map. A secondary focus will be to inspire meaningful conversations and story sharing among Rhode Islanders and visitors to the State on all the special features and places in Rhode Island they love to explore. The campaign will also leverage social influencer handles within state government and other prominent handles in the news, tourism, health & fitness, and recreation spaces.

Website - The campaign site, hosted on the DEM website at www.dem.ri.gov/scorp, will provide a robust map of recreational facilities around the State - as well as many interactive features that invite users to provide their feedback through online surveys and an interactive map. It also provides information on upcoming focus groups and materials from the Project Team. The site is optimized for mobile and can integrate social media networks.

Email - Email campaigns will be developed to raise awareness and engage people to participate in feedback opportunities including focus groups and online surveys.

Events

Focus Groups: The Project Group is developing a schedule of 11 focus groups to occur across Rhode Island throughout the fall of 2018. These public meetings will offer participants an opportunity to discuss general comments on outdoor recreation in Rhode Island and each occurrence will offer a guided discussion on a specific outdoor recreation activity such as fishing, hunting, biking, facilities, and others. The full schedule is under development. Stakeholder and partner groups will be hosting the meetings - the first of which is targeted to take place at Thundermist and feature discussions on public health. More information to come.

Online Feedback Strategies

Public Survey(s)- The Project Group is developing a public survey to gauge current and future demand for recreational resources around the State. There will also be a shortened survey provided to focus group participants. The survey will be open until spring 2019.

Interactive Map: Accessible on the SCORP webpage or at www.dem.ri.gov/scorpmap, this interactive map invites users to provide their feedback on which recreational resources are working for them, where improvements are needed, and where there are opportunities to add resources. The map captures whether the commenter is local or a visitor to Rhode Island, narrows down what type of outdoor recreation they are commenting on, and asks them to place a marker for the location in which they are providing feedback. The interactive map will be open until spring 2018.

Feedback Form- Accessible on the SCORP webpage, this simplified form asks for a commenter's name, email, and feedback. This form is designed as a quick and easy way for users to provide their feedback to the Project Group. The form will be open until spring 2019.

Feedback Incentive - Participants who provide their contact information in the online public survey and interactive map will be entered to win a '019 Rhode Island State Beach Season Pass. Both opportunities

will be open until early spring 2019. A limited number of winners will be selected. Incentive details are currently being formalized.

Paid Media & Collateral Development - As budget permits and where applicable, additional paid advertisements and promotional items will be purchased to complement other campaign activities. As budget permits and where applicable, special promotions may be offered to incentivize social media engagement, use of recreational facilities, website engagement, etc.

SCORP Website

<http://test.dem.ri.gov/programs/planning/scorp/index.php>

SHARE YOUR IDEAS
at
www.dem.ri.gov/scorp

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) website. The header features the DEM Rhode Island logo, a search bar, and social media icons. The main navigation menu includes Home, About Us, Offices & Divisions, Online Services, Events, In the News, and Contact Us. The main content area is titled "Ocean State Outdoors" and "Rhode Island's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)". It features a large image of a park with a playground and a building. A "Share Your Ideas!" section is visible on the right side of the page, with a call to action: "We want your input to learn what outdoor recreation challenges need to be addressed statewide. Share your observations with us!"



RI's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Take Our Outdoor Map Survey:
<https://arcg.is/1vrLza>



We want to hear from you! Tell us your thoughts about outdoor recreation opportunities in Rhode Island

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning are seeking public input on outdoor recreation across our state to help to inform the Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Your feedback will help us create better outdoor opportunities for all Rhode Islanders and visitors and will be used to help prioritize funding for future projects.

Please join us at an upcoming roundtable discussion to tell us your experiences on 'What is Working', 'What Could be Improved', and 'What is Missing' in Rhode Island's outdoor recreation network.

Tuesday, October 30 • 6:00-8:00 PM

Kettle Pond Visitor Center
50 Bend Road, Charlestown
Focus Topics: Trails/Mountain Biking

Thursday, November 8 • 6:00-8:00 PM

Health Equity Zone HUB
1229 Main Street, West Warwick
Focus Topics: Health

Monday, November 19 • 6:00-8:00 PM

AARP, 10 Orms Street Suite 200
Please pull a parking ticket when arriving and bring inside for validation
Focus Topic: Universal Access to Recreation

Wednesday, November 28 • 6:00-8:00 PM

Exeter Public Library
773 Ten Rod Road, Exeter
Focus Topics: Hunting/Fishing

Thursday, November 1 • 7:00-9:00 PM

Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket
One Moeller Place, Pawtucket
Focus Topics: Parks, Playgrounds

Tuesday, November 13 • 6:00-8:00 PM

Cold Spring Community Center
36 Beach Street, North Kingstown
Focus Topics: General Recreation

Tuesday, November 27 • 6:00-8:00 PM

Quinta Gamelin Community Center
101 Asylum Road, Bristol
Focus Topics: Biking

Thursday, December 13 • 6:15-7:45 PM

Jesse M. Smith Memorial Library
100 Tinkham Lane, Harrisville
Focus Topics: Camping, Winter Recreation

Each discussion will focus on a specific outdoor recreation topic such as fishing, hunting, biking, trails, parks/playgrounds, or others, but will also reserve time to cover additional issues and concerns outside of the designated topic area.

Can't make it? Be on the lookout for additional dates and locations or provide your feedback through our outdoor map survey. It only takes a few minutes to fill out and you can enter to win a 2019 Season Pass for Rhode Island State Beaches! Start the survey at www.dem.ri.gov/outdoorsurvey

The SCORP update process is led by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) in partnership with the Rhode Island Division of Planning (DOP). The document will be updated in collaboration with a Working Group (DEM and DOP staff) and an Advisory Committee, which includes a broad representation of stakeholders such as state and municipal officials, environmental organizations, and private-sector stakeholders. Visit www.dem.ri.gov/scorp to learn more.



dem.ri.gov/outdoorrec



RhodeIslandDEM



#RIoutdoorrec



Focus Groups

- 11 meetings around the state with stakeholder groups
- Current rec issues, demands, local conditions, future need
- Strategy – start small, then evaluate process and outcome



Topics

- Hunting/Fishing
- Trails/ATV/Mountain Biking/Winter Recreation (Ice-Skating, Cross-Country Skiing, Skiing, Snowboarding, Snowmobiling, etc.)
- Boating/Paddding/Freshwater or Shoreline Access, Beach or Pool Access, Swimming
- Passive Recreation (Birding, Scenic Views, Photography)
- Camping
- Biking (Dedicated Bike Paths/Lanes, Signed-Shared Roadways)
- Parks/Playgrounds (Skate Parks, Splash/Spray Parks)
- Access to Outdoor Recreation (ADA/Universal Access, Evening/Night-time Access)
- Athletic Fields/Facilities (Basketball, Baseball, Softball, Soccer, Football, Lacrosse, Tennis, Multi-Use/Multi-Purpose Fields)
- General Recreation (Golf, Walking/Jogging Trails/Paths, Bocce, Pick-Up Sports: Frisbee/Frisbee Golf)
- Other

RECREATION DIRECTORS' SURVEY

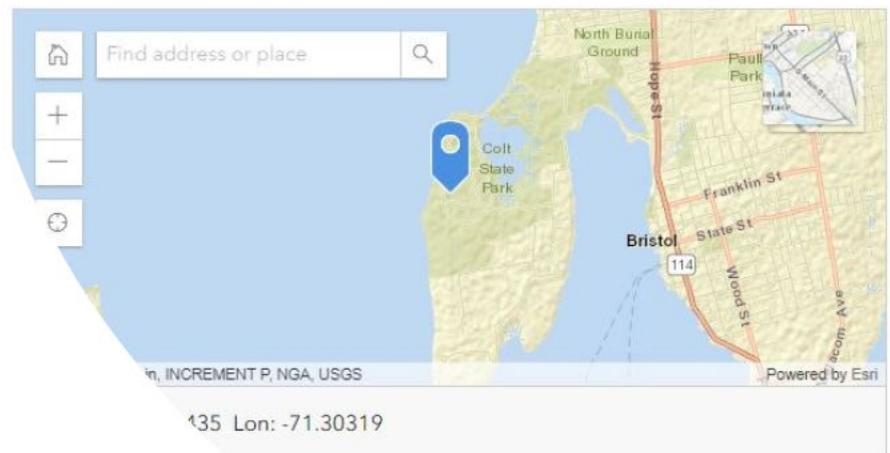
- **Via Survey Monkey**
- **Any feedback on the questions?**
- **Any information that would be useful for you to know?**
- **Look for the survey via email next week**

OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN MAP

- What is working
- What could be improved
- What's missing
- Go to www.dem.ri.gov/scorp
- <https://arcg.is/0u1PSX>
[\[arcg.is\]](https://arcg.is)

Where is the activity/facility you are commenting on?*

Next, pan the map to navigate the pin to the desired location. You can also type in the name of the site/facility, the address, or the street it is located on to scale the map to the general location. This map is for planning purposes only - we will not be following up on individual comments.





We want to hear from you! Tell us your thoughts about outdoor recreation opportunities in Rhode Island

Tell us about your outdoor recreation preferences – do you fish, camp, bike, hike, walk, skateboard?

What kinds of outdoor activities would you like to do more often?

Why do you like to be active outside?

What would get you outside more often?

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning are seeking public input on outdoor recreation across our state to help to inform the Rhode Island Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Feedback will help us create better outdoor opportunities for all Rhode Islanders and visitors, and will be used to help prioritize funding for future outdoor recreation projects.

Please fill out the Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Survey to make your voice heard!

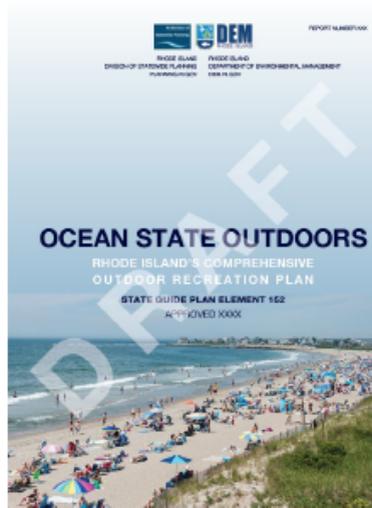
Go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DWBN8MS> to get started.

Updating Ocean State Outdoors 2019

The Division and the Department of Environmental Management is updating the State Guide Plan Element, *Ocean State Outdoors*, Statewide Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for 2019 – 2024. The Update will outline the existing status, current needs, and future vision for outdoor recreation and open space protection. It will be informed by public input from our growing and changing population and will set concrete goals and strategies for improvements and additions to our infrastructure, programming, and resources. The SCORP is being updated in collaboration with an Advisory Committee, which includes a broad representation of stakeholders such as state and municipal officials, environmental organizations, and private sector stakeholders.

2019 Advisory Committee

Frank Floor, Chief, DEM Division of Parks and Recreation
Mia Patriarca, RI Department of Health, Ctr. For Health Promotion RIDOH
Joshua Giraldo, Chief of Staff, Central Falls
Veronica Berounsky (or Designee), Chair, Rivers Council
Chuck Horbert, Rivers Council/RI Canoe & Kayak Association
John Torgan (or Designee), State Director, The Nature Conservancy
Meg Kerr, Senior Director of Policy, RI Audubon
Sarah Mitchell (or Designee), RI Bicycle Coalition
Theresa Murphy, Parks & Recreation Director, South Kingstown
Raena Blumenthal, Recreation Director, Coventry
Anna Lockmer, REI, Outdoor Rec. Retailer
Steven O'Donnell, CEO, YMCA Greater Providence
Phil Hervey, Municipal Planner, Barrington
Tiffany Rhodes, Johnson and Wales University



Two Public Meetings will be held on a Preliminary Draft

Tuesday, May 21

URI Coastal Institute, Hazard Room, South Ferry Road, Narragansett
5:30 PM

Wednesday, May 22

DEM Headquarters, Room 300, 235 Promenade Street, Providence
3:00 PM

For more information see <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/planning/scorp/about.php>

Public input

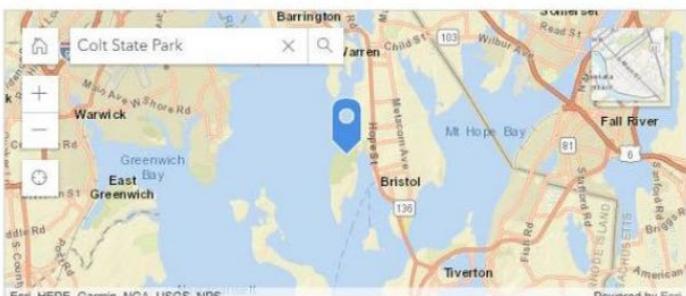
Surveys

- **General Public Survey**
 - 573 responses
 - To gauge demand and preferences
- **Recreation Directors' Survey**
 - 28 of 39 responses
 - To gauge infrastructure and programming needs, local demand
- **State Recreation Facility Customer Satisfaction Survey**
 - surveyed 457 users of state parks and beaches, 671 users of state campgrounds
 - satisfaction levels with the quality and service at these facilities.

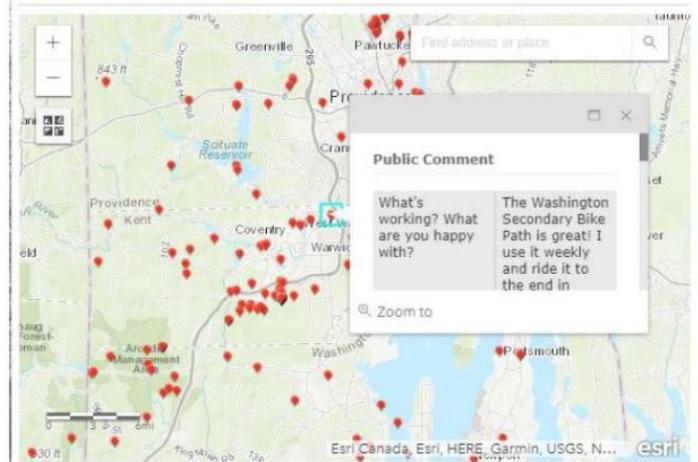


Online Survey Map

- 749 responses - 517 residents, 232 visitor/tourist
- What is working, what could be improved, what's missing



RI SCORP Submissions



Key Findings

- What's Working
 - camping, trails, beaches, access to the shore, great recreational assets around the state
 - high satisfaction level with our parks, beaches, and bike paths
- What could be improved
 - Need for more effective communication about assets/amenities
 - Need for more information/signage and maps at sites
 - Better coordination between user groups and DEM
 - Munis are underfunded for maintenance and staffing
 - Need for better enforcement of rules
 - Maintenance issues
 - Coastal access rules - confusion



Key Findings (continued)

- What's missing
 - Dedicated ATV sites
 - User groups want to work more closely with DEM on trail maintenance
 - Canoe/kayak rentals
 - educating the public around regulations/enforcement
 - Swim lessons as a gap across the state
 - Need for more programming for elderly, adults



Key Findings (continued)

- Big demand and insufficient supply:
 - Day hiking on unpaved trails
 - beach activities
 - fishing, bike paths
- Increase in demand for playing fields and trails/bike paths
- What prevents more use?
 - Overcrowded
 - Don't know where resources are
 - Too far from residence
- More interest from adults, aging population



Common themes

-
- Health and wellness
 - Urban needs
 - Habitat and conservation
 - Climate change
 - Tourism
 - Collaboration
 - Equity
 - Access



APPENDIX D

RRRC RECREATION GRANT SELECTION PROCESS



Lincoln Woods, September 2018

Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Recreation Grant Selection Process

I. Introduction

This part of the Rhode Island State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) describes the Recreation Grant Selection Process (RGSP) and procedures governing the RI Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC). The State of Rhode Island utilizes the RGSP to solicit, evaluate, and select outdoor recreational land acquisition and facility development projects eligible for grant assistance under the State Outdoor Recreation Development and Acquisition Grant Program funded through State bonds. In addition, the RGSP serves as the state's Open Project Selection Process (OPSP), as required by the National Park Service in its allocation of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The National Park Service requires that the procedures be designed to ensure that projects are selected for funding in a rational and systematic manner open to public scrutiny, that all sectors of the general public can participate in the benefits of the Fund, and that projects selected meet priority recreational needs.

The Governor has designated the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) as Rhode Island's state liaison agency for administering the federal LWCF monies. DEM also administers the State bonds supporting the State Outdoor Recreation Development and Acquisition Grant Program, which are allocated to municipalities and Native American tribes. DEM establishes the Recreation Resources Review Committee to assist in the review of grant applications and advising the DEM Director in funding project applications.

The RGSP considers the allocation of funds, funding categories, criteria for applicant eligibility, the level of public participation required in project formulation, and criteria for scoring project proposals. Scoring criteria is based on how well the application meets the goals, objectives, and action items identified in the SCORP and other applicable State plans. Scoring criteria also considers the accessibility of proposed projects to all segments of the population including minority populations, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, other underserved populations, and other LWCF requirements (found in Chapter 2, Section B of the LWCF Grants Manual).

II. The Recreation Resources Review Committee

The Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC) is established for the purposes of evaluating and establishing the relative priority of recreation grant projects and submitting funding recommendations to the DEM Director. In order to effectively carry out these responsibilities and to guarantee a representative and balanced evaluation, the membership of the RRRC is structured to provide both the professional expertise and the diversity of interests needed to accurately and fairly evaluate and rank the variety of project proposals.

The RRRC consists of at least six but not more than twelve experts in outdoor recreation, natural resource management, and conservation of open space, selected with the objective of providing balanced representation of state, municipal, public, and private constituencies. Permanently represented on the RRRC are the Governor's Office, the Department of Environmental Management (which serves as the State Liaison Office to the National Park Service), and the RI Department of Administration's Division of Statewide Planning. The DEM Director shall appoint additional committee members for staggered terms of up to three years and shall make every effort to include minority representation and representation from: urban, suburban and rural communities; the full spectrum of outdoor recreational interests; municipal interests; environmental and land conservation interests; planning interests; and local parks and recreation interests. The DEM Director shall solicit at a minimum the RI League of Cities and Towns, the RI Parks and Recreation Association and the RI Chapter of the American Planning Association to ascertain their interest in participating on the RRRC. Existing members may be reappointed. Vacancies are filled in the same manner as regular appointments.

The RRRC shall elect a chair and a vice-chair. If a member misses three consecutive meetings, the RRRC will report the absence to the DEM Director and may make a recommendation to remove the individual from the Committee.

III. Allocation of Federal and State Funds

Allocation of Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds

Under the LWCF, states are given the prerogative of determining the most equitable allocation of available funds among the various categories of applicants (generally state and municipal). The State may use up to 10 percent of the total LWCF apportionment for planning projects and for maintaining an updated SCORP. The remaining funds (not less than 90 percent) shall be allocated in support of DEM projects to implement the SCORP.

Allocation of State Acquisition and Development Bonds, Appropriations, and other Sources of Funds

State funds are allocated as provided in the authorizing legislation, or regulations issued pursuant thereto, of the specific funding program. The Department of Environmental Management establishes the amount of State funding to be made available within a grant round, consistent with applicable laws and regulations governing the source of the State funding.

IV. The Recreation Grant Selection Process

Funding Cycle

Funding cycles are determined by the availability of funds, coordination with other State funding processes and shall occur not less than every two years pending availability of funds. Following the proposal submission closing date, DEM staff and the RRRC undergo evaluation and ranking of the proposals. Funding cycles conclude with notification to all applicants and the transmittal of funding commitment letters to those applicants selected for funding.

Setting Funding Categories and Limits

DEM staff is responsible for informing the RRRC of LWCF and State funds available and any restrictions on those funds. The RRRC shall establish funding categories and scoring criteria that promote equity and efficiency. At a minimum, funding categories shall include:

- 1) Recreational Development projects which include
 - a. Renovation of Existing Recreational Facilities
 - b. Construction of New Outdoor Recreational Facilities
- 2) Acquisition of Land for Outdoor Recreation

The RRRC may also set a minimum required rating score for each proposal to promote selection of the highest quality projects. If a proposal does not attain the minimum score, it will not be recommended for funding.

Accordingly, at the outset of each grant round, the RRRC may:

- Set a maximum per project funding limit for each category.
- Establish a maximum number of submissions per municipality for project proposals.
- Establish additional funding categories and allocations for each category.
- Set a financial match requirement for grant recipients.

Note: If a surplus occurs because: 1) total funding requests are less than the available monies for a category, or, 2) state or local projects do not score high enough to qualify for funding, the RRRC may recommend to the DEM Director that such funds be reallocated to another category or reserved for a future grant round.

Financial match requirement

Grant recipients will generally be required to match a percentage of the total project cost to be determined by the RRRC. However, the RRRC may raise or lower the match requirement for any grant round or category, as circumstances require.

Applicant Eligibility

DEM, Rhode Island municipalities, and federally recognized Native American tribes may apply for funding under these RGSP procedures. DEM projects applying for LWCF monies will be ranked by the RRRRC according to the Priority Rating System on page 6. Municipal and tribal projects will compete for funding under the guidelines that follow. Non-municipal and non-tribal entities must partner in grant proposals with a municipality or tribe, which must be the applicant.

Solicitation of Proposals

DEM initiates the solicitation of grant proposals. DEM is responsible for sending a notice to the Chief Elected Official and the manager/administrator of all cities, towns, and tribes. The notice shall include the procedures to be followed for submitting a grant application, project eligibility, match requirements, the deadline for submission of project proposals, and other materials deemed appropriate. DEM shall also advertise and post information on the DEM website regarding application procedures for the grant round.

Public Participation Requirements

The RGSP requires public involvement to ensure that the projects selected have widespread public acceptance and support, best reflect current needs and desires of State residents and are, to the maximum extent possible, free from potential problems. The required minimum public participation for a grant application to qualify for review is as follows:

- All projects shall require the consent of the local governing body.
- All projects shall require public notice and at least one public hearing or meeting held not more than 6 months prior to the grant submission.

The RRRRC encourages all project sponsors to exceed these minimum public participation requirements (particularly for larger-scale projects) by means of public informational meetings, a project advisory committee, neighborhood surveys, or similar measures.

Preliminary Evaluation of Applications

Upon receipt of applications and the close of the application period, DEM staff will conduct a preliminary evaluation to determine the completeness of applications. Completeness is determined by:

- Determination that the submission is made by an eligible applicant
- Documentation demonstrating the public participation requirements have been met
- Determination that the application has been completed in accordance with directions and contains sufficient information to allow the proposal to be rated
- Determination that the proposed project is in accordance with the Guidance Document available on the DEM website.

DEM staff will also be reviewing applicant's compliance with program requirements including conversion issues. As part of the preliminary evaluation, DEM staff will prepare a brief report for each application to be reviewed by RRRRC members.

Final Evaluation of Applications

Following the preliminary evaluation period, the RRRRC will hold priority-rating sessions at which all complete applications will be evaluated and RRRRC members will assign points to each application under the criteria contained in the priority rating system established in this Appendix. These sessions are conducted as open public meetings.

Project Selection and Funding Commitment

When RRRRC evaluation and scoring of all eligible projects within the grant round has been completed, the RRRRC will hold a meeting to review the list(s) of proposals ranked by final score. Proposals will be recommended for funding in rank order of final score within the limit of available funding within each category, with the following exceptions:

- If the RRRC has established a minimum point score threshold, funding will not be recommended for projects whose final score is below the threshold score regardless of their ranking within a grant category.
- If the RRRC has established a limit to the number of grants awarded to a single applicant in one grant round, funding will not be recommended for lower ranking projects exceeding the limit.

The RRRC will, by vote, adopt a recommendation for proposals to be funded based upon the ranked list(s) of projects and funding available within each category and will forward this recommendation to the Director of DEM. The Director of DEM shall review the RRRC grant award recommendations and have authority to adjust such grant awards, including consideration as to whether one community may be receiving a disproportionate amount of the funds available and so that a reasonable geographic distribution of funds is achieved. DEM will notify all applicants in writing of the Director's decision and the grant amount offered for those applications selected for funding.

The grant amount offered is contingent on the proposed scope of work as presented in the application. Therefore, if any element of the proposed project scope of work changes before the grant contract is signed, applicants are required to notify DEM and obtain approval for the proposed changes. DEM is in no way obligated to support a project outside of the approved project description and scope of work.

V. Priority Rating System Overview

The RRRC uses a rating system to identify which project proposals will best serve communities and Rhode Islanders. The Priority-Rating System form used by the RRRC for scoring all applications follows this section.

**RI Recreation Resources Review Committee Priority Rating System
Recreation Grant Selection Process
Acquisition of Recreational Land Only**

	Criteria Name	Criteria Description	Maximum Points	Points Awarded
1	Relationship to Need	Points will be awarded based on the need and/or demand for parks or other recreational land in the area.	10	
2	Acres to be Acquired	One point per acre acquired, up to a maximum of 20	20	
3	State Planning Consistency	The project satisfies priority needs documented in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and any other State Guide Plan elements identified as applicable by the RRRC. Points will be awarded based on the number and/or importance of recommended actions supported by the proposal.	10	
4	Relationship to Community Planning	The project advances elements of a larger community planning process.	5	
5	Applicant Priority	The applicant's highest priority application will receive 5 points, 2 nd highest will receive 3 points, and 3 rd highest will receive 1 point. All other applications will receive 0 points.	5	
6	Historic & Cultural Preservation	Acquisition of the site will preserve significant historical, cultural, or scenic resources.	10	
7	Habitat Preservation	Acquisition of the site will preserve areas of wildlife habitat.	10	
8	Brownfield Redevelopment	Acquisition of the site will provide for the redevelopment of a brownfield as defined by DEM Remediation Regulations.	5	
9	Connectivity	Acquisition of the site will provide for a connection between two existing recreational resources or from a population center to a recreational resource.	5	
10	Equity, Service, and Accessibility	The project will expand the recreational opportunities available to disadvantaged segments of the population. A) The project is located within or provides enhanced service to neighborhoods in which low income and/or minority residents are over-represented B) The project is located in a densely populated neighborhood or a neighborhood identified for revitalization by State or community programs. C) The project is served by public transportation (within ¼ mile of a bus stop) or is proximate to a bikeway.	15 total possible points A. 5 B. 5 C. 5	____ ____ ____
11	Climate Change Resiliency	Acquisition of the site will enhance an area's resiliency to climate change through elements such as a coastal buffer, flood storage, future marsh migration, etc.	5	
TOTAL POINTS			100	

**RI Recreation Resources Review Committee Priority Rating System
Recreation Grant Selection Process
Recreation Development Projects**

	<i>Criteria Name</i>	<i>Criteria Description</i>	<i>Maximum Points</i>	<i>Points Awarded</i>
1	Relationship to Need	Points will be awarded based on the need and/or demand for the proposed recreational activity in the area.	10	
2	State Planning Consistency	The project satisfies priority needs documented in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and any other State Guide Plan elements identified as applicable by the RRRC. Points will be awarded based on the number and/or importance of recommended actions supported by the proposal.	10	
3	Relationship to Community Planning	The project advances elements of a larger community planning process.	5	
4	Applicant Priority	The applicant's highest priority application will receive 5 points, 2 nd highest will receive 3 points, and 3 rd highest will receive 1 point. All other applications will receive 0 points.	5	
5	Multi-community or Regional Needs	The project demonstrates how it will address multi-community or regional needs.	3	
6	Economic Revitalization	The project will improve the economy of an area. Examples include projects that spur local business activity, tourism, job creation, town center redevelopment, etc.	5	
7	Historic & Cultural Preservation	Projects that protect and restore historic and cultural resources, educate the public about the importance of these resources via interpretive signage, etc.	5	
8	Habitat Creation & Restoration	Projects that create and/or substantially restore areas of wildlife habitat.	5	
9	Brownfield Redevelopment	The project involves the redevelopment of a brownfield as defined by DEM Remediation Regulations.	3	
10	Connectivity	The project creates a connection between two existing recreational resources or from a population center to a recreational resource.	3	

11	Equity, Service, and Accessibility	<p>The project will expand the recreational opportunities available to disadvantaged segments of the population.</p> <p>A) The project is located within or provides enhanced service to neighborhoods in which low income and/or minority residents are over-represented.</p> <p>B) The project is located in a densely populated neighborhood or a neighborhood identified for revitalization by State or community programs.</p> <p>C) The project is served by public transportation (within ¼ mile of a bus stop) or is proximate to a bikeway.</p>	<p>15 total possible points</p> <p>A. 5</p> <p>B. 5</p> <p>C. 5</p>	<p>—</p> <p>—</p> <p>—</p>
12	Maintenance	The applicant has documented that the facility proposed for renovation has been maintained consistent with industry standards.	0 to -5	
13	Expanded Usage	The project adds to the number of recreational amenities or hours of usage (e.g. additional fields are added to a facility or lights are added so it can be used at night).	7	
14	Multiple Uses	The project appropriately integrates a variety of recreational opportunities providing activities for a mix of age groups and degrees of physical abilities.	5	
15	Improved User Comfort or Safety	The project provides for the addition of bathrooms , fencing to separate recreational activities, benches, shade trees, shelters over picnic tables, etc.	5	
16	Opportunities for physically or mentally challenged individuals	The project provides activity or amenity features that expand the recreational opportunities for physically or mentally challenged individuals (such features to be in excess of normally mandated barrier-free accessibility standards).	5	
17	Green Building and Site Design	The project incorporates green building design/LEED/SITES features (water or energy conservation, recycled materials, renewable energy, etc.)	3	
18	Climate Change and Resiliency	The project incorporates innovative ways to account for impacts associated with climate change such as site/landscape construction to provide adaptations for sea level rise, shade, storm buffers, stormwater infiltration, etc.	3	
19	Exceptional Features	The project has special features not noted elsewhere in the application. For example, promotes arts, supports healthy aging, special programming, includes acquisition of land, etc.	3	
TOTAL POINTS			100	