

DIVISION OF FOREST ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM PLAN SUMMARY YEARS 2004 AND 2005

Division of Forest Environment's Mission:

Working to ensure healthy sustainable forests for Rhode Island's future

Duties of the Department of Environmental Management's Division of Forest Environment

The Division of Forest Environment manages 45,000 acres of state-owned rural forestland. It coordinates a statewide forest fire protection plan, provides forest fire protection on state lands, assists rural volunteer fire departments and develops forest and wildlife management plans for private landowners who choose to manage their property in ways that will protect these resources on their land. The division promotes public understanding of environment conservation, enforces department rules and regulations on DEM lands and assists the federal government in providing landowner assistance programs.

Moreover, the division mandates include: to monitor and recommend controls for forest insects and diseases, to monitor and manage dispersed recreational activities on state forestlands, to manage timber resources and conduct timber harvests on state forests, to ensure use of "best management practices" during timber harvests, to work with communities promoting urban tree health, to license arborists and to certify forestlands under the State's Farm, Forest and Open Space Act.

WORK PROGRAM FY 2004 AND 2005 HIGHLIGHTS

The following work program is a comprehensive compilation of strategies that will be employed to meet the Department's strategic priorities for FY 2004 and 2005. Performance measures are also compiled and some environmental indicators have been identified where appropriate. Quarterly reporting will be used by the division's staff to track progress towards meeting the objectives as well as the identified strategic bench marks.

Priority focus areas for the division will be strengthening partnerships, working to enhance watersheds, improving our recreational infrastructure at George Washington Campground, and promoting the greening of our urban areas through the promotion of the Urban Forestry Guide Plan, Element #156 that was passed by the State Planning Council.

Key issues that frame our strategies include seeking ways to: mitigate forest fragmentation and parcelization, maintain forest health and promote stewardship on public and private land, protect homes and forests from catastrophic wildland fire, educate citizens on the benefits of conservation, and manage state lands to teach conservation by example.

PARTNERSHIPS

DFE has been a leading force in the creation of partnerships. When appropriate partners did not exist, the division played an active role in creating non-profit organizations to assist with program delivery. Involving citizens in program development and delivery has been a standard set by the division. Prime examples include: The Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc. (SNEFCI), The Rhode Island Tree Council (RITC), the Rhode Island Forest Conservators Organization (RIFCO), and the Rhode Island Rural Lands Coalition (RIRLC). Partnering with existing non-profits, such as, the Nature Conservancy, Audubon, the Rhode Island Fire Chief's Association, and the Rhode Island Environmental Education Association, as well as, partnering with other federal and state agencies has been the practice within the division. In FY 2004 and 2005, DFE will continue to seek ways to enhance the capabilities of our partners by assisting with program delivery, seeking funds to assist with projects and jointly sponsoring a number of significant programs. Some examples of this include, continuation of the RI Tree Stewards Program through the RITC, a photo exhibit project on the forests of southern New England by SNEFCI, an urban forestry annual conference so-sponsored by the RITC, the Neighborwoods Awards Program conducted by SNEFCI, and the development of current use taxation values by a subcommittee of the State Conservation Committee under the leadership of the RIRLC. DFE will partner with groups and citizens to complete a new Comprehensive Forest Resources Management Plan that will set the course for forest policy in Rhode Island for the next 2 decades.

WATERSHEDS

A watershed focus will be applied to DFE program activities in FY2004 and 2005. To assist in delivering the watershed approach, the division's federal program section will assist in coordinating Federal grant resources to assist watershed groups expand environmental opportunities. The division played a major role in securing Federal Grants for Greenways Plans for the Wood-Pawcatuck and Woonasquatucket watersheds. To date, over \$250,000 has been secured to work on specific issues within Rhode Island watersheds. The division will continue to cooperate with the U.S. Forest Service to deliver water quality improvement programs and provide coordination with DEM programs and watershed groups.

The division will assist the RI Water Resource Board (WRB) with continued implementation of the Big River Watershed Management Plan by coordinating cutting plans throughout the watershed. As a pilot, DFE will assist the WRB with developing a comprehensive Forest Management Plan that will address resource issues throughout the watershed.

The Forest Legacy Program will continue and has been built largely on a watershed approach; primary areas include the Scituate Watershed and Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed.

In FY 2004 and 2005 the division will continue to partner with the Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, Inc. to promote our stewardship program for private landowners and the forest legacy program.

FOREST HEALTH

The health of Rhode Island's forest has been an on-going concern and focus of the division. Rhode Island's forests, although they are under pressure from fragmentation, insects and disease, as well as atmospheric stressors, have been growing at a rapid rate. The division has been cooperating with the US Forest Service on a number of critical programs. DFE collects data on forest health and the Forest Service performs the analysis. Ozone has been identified as causing damage in some Rhode Island forests. Recent field data collected for the 10 year inventory has been made available in FY 2001 and DFE reported the results in 2002. Data indicates that

although we have fewer acres in forest cover, Rhode Island has more wood-fiber than at any time during the 20th century. DFE has worked to refine the data after analysis by the Forest Service and made the information available to all agencies and organizations.

The division will work with the Forest Service in FY 2004 and FY 2005 as it develops the Forest Inventory and Monitoring Program which is being built to provide annualized data. Collection of insect and disease information will continue seasonally.

URBAN FORESTS

Improving the livability of our urban areas not only benefits urban residents, but it improves our capacity to protect rural lands. Working with Grow Smart Rhode Island, the Rural Lands Coalition and the Rhode Island Tree Council, the division will continue to provide grants to communities and assist cities and town with their tree related problems. Environmental justice requires us to examine our urban areas and focus tree planting in the areas of highest need. The RI Tree Council (RITC) will assist with this task and provide input to the division on recommended planting areas.

Educating community leaders on the importance of community tree programs has been accomplished by providing information and workshops on the new Urban Forestry Guide Plan, Element #156, but this work needs to continue. This document serves as a useful tool for developing community awareness of the importance of trees for making our environment more livable. With the assistance of the RITC, the state's guide plan will be promoted. Additionally, the division will provide financial assistance to the RITC to enhance urban forestry consulting services to communities. DFE will continue to urge communities to become a "Tree City". In 2002, RI had a record number 9 "Tree Cities" and this number needs to continue to increase in 2004-2005.

FIRE

We have been successful achieving our objectives of losing no homes to wildland fire and maintaining an average fire size of less than two (2) acres. Whenever drought occurs there is cause for concern and our effectiveness will be tested. The division has trained additional DEM staff on basic fire fighter training. Also, the division will continue to work with the Forest Fire Advisory Committee and will send a newsletter to fire chiefs to foster better communications. The Forestry Hose program will remain our priority suppression tactic. In 2004 and 2005, the division will continue promoting the installation of dry hydrants within rural communities utilizing funds acquired through the Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant, as well as seek funding for enhancing personal protective gear and other equipment for our rural volunteer fire departments.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

The division will continue to maintain a Conservation Education Coordinator. In previous years, the Coordinator served as a vital link to the RI Environmental Education Association and will continue to do so. A Fall "Walk in the Woods" program will continue in cooperation with partners, SAF, RIFCO, and the RI Tree Farm Committee. Educational programs will be offered year round as before at appropriate locations.

Educational programs will include activities, such as, an Arbor day Poster Contest (grade 5), conferences, workshops, Neighborhoods Awards Program, Tree Farmer of the Year, and various appearances of Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl.

Division of Forest Environment

Program Plan Summary

Years 2004 and 2005

Division of Forest Environment's Mission:

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In keeping with the Department's strategic objectives, the Division has established the following strategies as integral components for achieving our success. The Department emphasis areas, Clean Air, Clean Water, Healthy Ecosystems, Resource Based Industries, Open Space and Recreation, and Open and Effective Government are all significantly enhanced through DFE goals and objectives. The following strategies will be employed in fiscal years 2004-2005 to work towards the success of each goal:

The Division continues to participate with many outside groups, such as, the Rural Lands Coalition, Southern New England Forest Consortium, and Rhode Island Tree Council to deliver environmental assistance through citizen involvement. The cultivation of partners and strengthening the ability of focused non-profits to direct conservation initiatives will be a primary focus.

Goal 1. The growth and stewardship of Rhode Island's forests (both state and privately owned) results in increased productivity of timber resources, increased biodiversity of forested habitats and the continued protection of our state's water quality and quantity. In the years 2004 and 2005 the Division will:

- A. Continue to provide assistance to landowners with the management of their forest resources by engaging and assisting local non-profit organizations such as the Rhode Island Forest Conservators Organization (RIFCO), the Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc (SNEFCI), the Rural Lands Coalition (RLC), local land trusts and other organizations.
- B. Implement the process of enrolling all DEM forestlands in AF&PA's Sustainable Forestry Initiative and begin a process of preparing state lands for forest certification. Comprehensive planning on state forest management areas will begin.

- C. Promote informational materials developed through Federal Program funds that focus on alternative Forest product opportunities for landowners throughout Rhode Island.
- D. Apply Federal Forest Service grant dollars when appropriate towards improving land protection strategies within Rhode Island watersheds; thereby, engaging communities in pursuing forestry solutions to environmental concerns.
- E. Continue to Partner with the Rhode Island Water Resources Board to promote silvicultural improvements on the 8,500 acre watershed, and assist in the production of a Big River Comprehensive Forest Management Plan.
- F. Focus on timber sale opportunities on state forest lands to improve forest health by removing diseased red pine and hemlock resources and ensuring adequate regeneration of native species.
- G. Promote the Forest Legacy Program, funded through federal dollars, by offering forest landowners the opportunity to sell development rights on critical forested lands. Partner with the Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, Inc., Land trusts, and the Providence Water Supply Board to ensure strong forest legacy acquisition projects.
- H. Continue to monitor the health of Rhode Island's forests through annual survey programs and promote the findings of the Forest Inventory and Analysis report that was issued in the year 2000.
- I. Continue to assist private landowners achieve their forest management goals, connecting landowners with consultants and the forest products industry. Assist landowners by promoting FLEP and EQUIP in cooperative partnership with NRCS and the Conservation Districts.
- J. Assist the forest products industry by reviewing logging sites throughout the state and monitoring the use of prescribed best management practices thereby protecting water quality and eliminating regulatory burdens.
- K. Assist the State Conservation Committee with keeping current the use values for farm, forest, and open space.

Possible Performance Measures for Annual Data Collection

- Number of "Intent to Cut" plans filed
- Volume of timber reported for "Intent to Cut" plans
- Acres acquired through Forest Legacy
- Acres negotiating through Forest Legacy
- Number of acres in new stewardship plans (including Forestland Certification acres)
- Organizations assisted through Stewardship Programs
- State timber sales prepared
- Acres of forest land at risk -- (insects and disease)
- Industry assists on logging sites
- On ground landowner technical assistance and landowner attendance at workshops
- Referrals to forestry consultants
- Grants to organizations and grant requests supported on behalf of private organizations
- Acres enrolled in AF&PA's Sustainable Forestry Initiative

- Acres in completed state land management plans
- Number and Acres of FLEP and EQUIP assists

The passage by the State Planning Council of the Urban Forestry Guide Plan, Element #156 was a major success that needs to be communicated effectively to all Rhode Island cities and towns. Growth of the "Tree City" Program will remain a priority.

Goal 2. The quality of life within all 39 of Rhode Island's cities and towns is improved through coordinated efforts to enhance urban and community forests and community tree resources. In the years 2004 and 2005, the Division will:

- A. Continue to promote the state's *Urban Forestry Guide Plan* element #156 passed by the State Planning Council in 1999 through meetings with communities, community officials, community groups and conducting a workshops for community officials.
- B. Continue to partner with community tree groups, the RI Tree Council, and communities through the promotion of arbor day events, tree planting ceremonies, planning programs, an annual urban forestry conference, urban forestry workshops and field tours.
- C. Transfer information on the value of urban forest resources through partnering efforts with tree groups, providing education opportunities through tree steward workshops, an arbor day poster contest, arborists workshops, and Tree City USA community awards.
- D. Conduct a conservation education program that will provide opportunities for students to learn the value of trees and forests by conducting walk-in-the-woods programs, assisting with the annual RI envirothon and providing educational outreach opportunities at shows and fairs.
- E. Distribute urban forestry grants to communities and non-profit groups for the planning of urban forest resources, tree planting activities and tree maintenance programs.
- F. Conduct a tree seedling sales program affording citizens the opportunity to reforest Rhode Island landscapes.
- G. Actively engage the RI Tree Council that serves as the state's urban forestry advisory council on needs to enhance opportunities for securing non-governmental financial resources for expanding urban forestry efforts.
- H. License arborists and provide training opportunities.

Possible Performance Measures for Annual Data Collection

- Cities and towns assisted through Urban Forestry Partnerships
- Dollars distributed to communities and groups to enhance tree resources
- Community dollars matching urban forestry grants
- Total urban trees planted
- Cities and town with "Project Level", "Formative Level", "Developmental Level", or "Sustained Level" Programs
- Conservation education programs given
- Number of citizens directly benefiting from education programs
- Urban Forestry workshops held
- Tree seedlings sold
- Arborists trained/licensed
- Number of "Tree City" Communities

*Program coordination between DFE and the fire departments will continue through efforts to involve the Forest Fire Advisory Committee and providing a newsletter for departments. DFE will coordinate a dry hydrant installation program to assist rural fire departments throughout the state. **Forestry Hose remains a top priority.***

Goal 3. No homes are lost to wildland fires and the average forest fire is contained to less than 2 acres. In the years 2004 and 2005 the Division will:

- A. Continue to aggressively fight forest fires through coordinated efforts with local fire departments.
- B. Maintain as a top priority the servicing and supply of sta-flow synthetic forestry hose for use by local departments on direct attack of wildland fires.
- C. Continue to monitor fire weather, maintain fire records, and transfer fire weather reports to local departments in each district ensuring fire policy is consistently applied.
- D. Seek training opportunities to enhance on the ground fire fighting capability through the RI Fire Academy and other sources.
- E. Partner with the US Forest Service, through cooperative agreements, to enable local departments to acquire fire fighting equipment utilizing the Government Surplus Administration (GSA).
- F. Strengthen local volunteer fire fighting efforts by managing the use of Federal Excess Personal Property which allows local fire companies to have loaned federal equipment for fire fighting purposes. Presently over \$2 million in equipment is on loan.
- G. Strengthen our communication mechanisms with the fire departments by maintaining the participation of fire chiefs on the Forest Fire Advisory Committee, a committee of the Rhode Island Fire Chief's Association.
- H. Communicate with all departments through a newsletter.

- I. Continue efforts with our federal partners to train and provide personnel resources during fire emergencies through interagency cooperative agreements.
- J. Continue a process of hazard analysis for the state that will identify critical areas during extreme fire conditions.
- K. Continue to support and participate in the Northeastern Forest Fire Protection Commission to ensure Rhode Island's ability to secure resources from other states and Canadian Provinces during fire emergencies.
- L. Provide Federal grant resources to rural fire departments to assist in the installation of dry hydrants, provide personal protective equipment and upgrade appropriate fire equipment.
- M. Conduct prescribed burns as appropriate, weather permitting, to enhance wildlife habitat

Possible Performance Measures for Annual Data Collection

- Homes lost to forest fires
- Average forest fire size
- Number of fires/acres burned
- Percentage of forest fires under 2 acres
- Dollar value of equipment loans to fire departments
- Forestry hose supplied, serviced, and loaned to municipal departments
- Forest fire suppression/community costs
- Meetings with Forest Fire Advisory Committee
- Fire training exercises held
- Dry hydrants installed
- Fire Departments inventoried

A Major effort to improve the George Washington Campground through the Capital Improvement Budget will be ongoing during FY 2004 and 2005. Coordination of recreation activities with the Trail Advisory Committee will remain a primary focus of the Recreation Program.

Goal 4. State forest lands are continually managed to provide a variety of recreational uses while minimizing conflicts between users. In the years 2004 and 2005, the Division will:

- A. Continue the use of management councils (Arcadia and the Northwest Management Council) to coordinate recreational permits and state land improvement projects.
- B. Continue to partner with various user groups through a coordinated department effort to utilize the state Trail Advisory Committee as an advisor for recreational use issues, policy, and recreational grants to communities and groups.

- C. In coordination with the state's capital budget plan, proceed with improvements to George Washington Campground (a top Division priority).
- D. Maintain state forest recreation areas through a program of trail maintenance, road repairs, and infrastructure improvements.
- E. Enforce recreational use policy on state lands through the use of forest rangers to patrol , manage, and protect state land resources.
- F. Monitor environmental conditions within state management areas that are directly affected by recreational use to establish use parameters.
- G. Continue work to improve Management Area literature and mapping to better educate recreational users. Improve the division's web page.

Possible Performance Measures for Annual Data Collection

- Recreational Special Use Permits issued
- Recreational groups assisted
- Dollar value of grants distributed through the Trail Advisory Committee
- Progress towards completing Capital Project, George Washington Campground
- Miles of trails maintained by trail class (vehicle, hiking, horseback, mountain bike, other)
- Number of arrests, written warnings, immediate compliance reports
- Educational materials developed
- Management Area annual visits (estimated)