

Bureau of Natural Resources

Malcolm Grant, Associate Director

Work Plan for Fiscal Year 2000

**RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
FY2000 WORK PLAN - BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES, OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR**

I. Office Name and Description:

The Office of the Associate Director for Natural Resources Management oversees and directs the operations of the Bureau of Natural Resources, which consists of :

- ◆ The Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing
- ◆ The Division of Coastal Resources
- ◆ The Division of Law Enforcement
- ◆ The Division of Fish and Wildlife
- ◆ The Division of Forest Environment
- ◆ The Division of Parks and Recreation
- ◆ Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve

II. Mission:

The mission of the Bureau of Natural Resources and its component Divisions is to work in an effective and coordinated manner to support the Department's mission of:

1. Enhancing the high quality of life for this and future generations by protecting, managing, and restoring the natural resources of the state, enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities, protecting public health, and preventing environmental degradation.
2. Guiding utilization of the state's natural resources to provide for sustainable economic opportunity while sustaining our natural environment.
3. Motivating the citizens of the state to practice an environmental ethic based on an understanding of their environment, their own dependence on it, and the ways in which their actions affect it. (Strategic Assessment, 1996)

III. Office Highlights:

1. **Conditions, Trends, Opportunities and Challenges:**

1. **Agriculture**- The State's agricultural base continues to erode due to land use pressures (urban sprawl), narrow to non-existent profit margins and competition from large-scale agri-business elsewhere. Problems are frequently exacerbated by cumbersome and/or unresponsive regulatory requirements. Rhode Island's agricultural community is currently weathering the impacts of a severe drought which has highlighted weaknesses in the state's support network for farmers and regulatory impediments to responding to their pressing need for access to reliable water sources. The Division of Agriculture and the Department generally appear to be responding to drought related challenges adequately, but the challenge remains to develop a long-range response strategy.
2. **Marine Fisheries**- Replenishment of species depleted to below sustainable levels by excessive fishing effort and other environmental factors (pollution, habitat destruction, and natural predation) remains a highly contentious, complex and difficult task. Numerous jurisdictions and levels of government are involved and frequently conflicting interests between fishermen, scientists and states continue to bedevil managers such as the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council. Effective enforcement of fisheries laws remains a daunting challenge given the economic incentives to ignore restrictions, the size of the jurisdiction being regulated, and the limited staff resources available for patrol. Purchase of a new offshore patrol vessel should, however, result in major improvements in our effectiveness.
3. **Freshwater Fisheries**- Rhode Island's recreational freshwater fishery is predominately put and take (hatchery reared). Fish quality and hatchery output is among the best in the country. Continued investment in hatchery infrastructure is critical to maintaining this result. Access opportunities are excellent, although opportunities to acquire additional sites must be pursued aggressively. Water quality impairment remains a limiting factor in urban watersheds.
4. **Wildlife** - Stocks of huntable species continue to grow, in some cases to nuisance levels, due to a number of factors including favorable environmental conditions, restrictions on hunting by municipalities and private land owners, and reduced numbers of new recruits into the hunting community. We appear to be entering a cyclical upward swing in the number of infected animals within populations of rabies target species. This pattern seems likely to persist.
5. **Forests and Open Space** - Urban sprawl, ineffective land use controls and economic incentives to develop remaining large blocks of privately held forest land are placing ever increasing pressure on the state's rural environment. While state, local and private non-profit efforts to preserve forest and open space resources

through purchase are expanding, it is increasingly clear that acquisition by itself cannot reverse the conversion process. More effective partnering among those committed to preservation is clearly required, as are more progressive and farsighted approaches to land use control at all levels of government. Ironically, some of our greatest recent successes in preserving and restoring forest resources have been in our most urbanized areas through a highly effective Urban Tree Council.

6. **Outdoor Recreation** - Due to recent Delaware Fund investments in renovation and reconstruction, the infrastructure of the state beach and park system is in good to excellent condition. Planned investments in FY 2000-2002 in the forest park system should yield similar results. The system's greatest challenge is to adequately maintain these facilities while providing a safe and enjoyable recreational experience with reduced manpower, reduced operating budget and a chronically deteriorated vehicle and heavy equipment inventory. These challenges will be exacerbated by the continued expansion of the Blackstone Bikeway and the operational obligations associated with it. Opportunities exist in developing increased "off season" access to and recreational use of park facilities, greater handicapped access to both users and new hires, in more systematically pursuing opportunities for sharing of equipment and manpower between operating units, and in reconfiguring custodial responsibilities to maximize efficiencies.
7. **Port Operations** - Considerable progress has been made over the last several years in improving the severely deteriorated infrastructure of the Port of Galilee and at Pier 9 in Newport. The Department's five year capital plan contemplates continued major investments in both facilities. Additionally, efforts over the last year to improve the appearance of these facilities and revitalize them generally have borne fruit, as testified to by the high level of community and tenant support for DEM's continued management. A comprehensive master plan for the Port of Galilee has been completed by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and most of its elements have received broad community support. It should provide a useful road map for revitalizing Galilee as a vibrant, sustainable, and multi-faceted commercial fishing port, intermodal transportation hub, and tourist asset. Both challenges and opportunities exist in addressing chronic berthing shortages at both facilities, in solving Galilee's debilitating seasonal parking problems, in revitalizing fish processing and related support industries in Galilee through such measures as developing small-business incubators, and in developing an effective working arrangement between the Department, EDC, the Town of Narragansett and port tenants.

2. **Strategic Priorities and Targets:**

1. **Pollution Prevention:**

- ◆ **The Division's Integrated Pest Management Program within the Division of Agriculture has been directed to initiate a comprehensive review of its grant procedures and requirements to ensure that grant funds are expended on projects that maximize the development of practical measures to develop alternatives to or otherwise reduce the use of chemical pesticides. (target - December 31, 1999)**
- ◆ **The IPM Program will provide technical support to the Division of Parks and Recreation to ensure that chemical applications to the Goddard Park Golf course and other landscaping throughout the Park system is minimized and non-chemical strategies are maximized. (target - April, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Division of Parks and Recreation will explore alternatives to the use of potable water for landscape and golf course maintenance where feasible. Particular attention will be paid to opportunities to use treated effluent. (target - April 2000)**

2. **Public Health Risk Prevention:**

- ◆ **The Bureau's EEE response protocols and resources will be integrated into the Department's overall Emergency Response Program under the direction of the Administrator for Environmental Response. The Associate Director will act as the Administrator's single point of contact for all Bureau functions and resources (target-immediately.)**

3. **Smart Growth:**

- ◆ **The Bureau will make available, on an as needed basis, technical assistance to municipalities, watershed groups and land trusts in the various natural resources and scientific disciplines in which we have programmatic expertise. These include agriculture, fish and wildlife management, habitat protection and restoration, aquaculture and marine fisheries management, forestry and silvaculture, environmental assessment, public recreation. Existing informal relationships and opportunities will be formalized and advertised. (target - immediate)**

4. **Fair and Effective Regulation and Enforcement/ Regulatory Streamling:**

- ◆ **The Bureau of Natural Resources will work with the Bureau of Environmental Protection and the Director towards developing a protocol for regulatory interactions with the farming community. It is proposed that this protocol employ the Division of Agriculture as a "single point of contact" to the maximum extent feasible. It is also proposed that opportunities to "normalize" emergency drought related regulatory relief to farmers be explored where environmental obstacles do not preclude doing so. (target- March, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will develop interim guidelines for regulatory inspections under its jurisdiction pending completion of a Department-wide protocol. (target- October 1, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will undertake a full review of the pilot Parks enforcement effort initiated during mid-season, 1999 to determine whether the dedicated assignment of Environmental Police Officers to trouble spots during high risk periods and the delegation of limited enforcement powers to seasonal park rangers accomplished the goal of keeping order and did so at a reasonable cost. (target- Fall, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau has initiated a full review of the Department's programs to provide relief to farmers plagued by nuisance animal activity (deer, geese). Where these programs are found to be unduly and/or unnecessarily restrictive or cumbersome or are otherwise ineffective, appropriate revisions will be made (target- December, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will undertake a similar review of its wildlife rehabilitator certification program to ensure that it is not unduly and/or unnecessarily restrictive or cumbersome or is otherwise defective. Appropriate revisions will be made, if necessary (target- April, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau has initiated a comprehensive review of successful measures implemented in other jurisdictions to curtail the nuisance operation of personal watercraft (jet skis). The objective of this exercise is to develop regulations or, as necessary, proposed legislation to prohibit the operation of these craft in confined waterbodies; e.g., other than the open ocean. (target - December, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Associate Director and the Assistant Director will continue to work towards a rational and fair regional system of marine fisheries management through the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council, the various regional management Councils and the Department of Commerce. The Associate Director chairs the Marine Fisheries Council as the Director's designee. This effort will be coordinated closely with the Office of Legal Services and the Director's Office (target-ongoing)**

5. **Ecosystem and Watershed Management:**

- ◆ **The Associate Director will participate in the South County and Woonasquatucket Watershed pilot projects and has assumed a support role in the South County project in cooperation with Scott Millar of the Office of Strategic Planning and Policy. The Bureau will ensure that its Divisions participate fully and contribute generously to the work of the pilot projects. (target - ongoing)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will develop a watershed educational program within the context of the watershed pilot projects and employing its facilities and personnel towards this end. Such a program could include any or all of the following:**
 - **Implementation with and through the Parks Ranger Naturalist Program**
 - **Display of maps and other visual aids at high volume public facilities**
 - **Display of "you are here" watershed maps and information at fishing access areas, boat ramps and other appropriate locations**
 - **Integration of watershed education into the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Aquatic Education Program**
 - **Distribution of educational material by Environmental Police Officers during routine patrols to members of the fishing and hunting communities**
 - **Providing technical assistance to watershed groups. (target - May, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will make available to watershed groups, municipalities and land trusts technical assistance as described under (3), above. (target - immediate)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will ensure that the Department is positioned, staffed and effectively organized to implement the Governor's \$50 million open space bond initiative upon its passage. In particular, organizational integration of the Division of Planning and Development's land acquisition and grants management program into the Bureau's activities will be explored as a means of accelerating the acquisition process. Necessary linkages with other Bureau Divisions and programs with land preservation and acquisition expertise will be strengthened and formalized. Grant award criteria will also be reviewed and revised to ensure that ecosystem and watershed principles are promoted and that to the maximum extent possible, local governments and land trusts are encouraged and empowered to become active partners in the Governor's land preservation initiatives. (target-ongoing; complete by June 30, 2000)**

6. **Promote Partnerships:**

- ◆ **The Department can do much to support the development and success of local land trusts by conveying to them parcels of DEM controlled property that could as well or better be managed by a non-state entity while nonetheless preserving the environmental and recreational amenities they provide. Such an initiative will require careful attention to deed restrictions and federal grant requirements in order not to run afoul of one or the other, but even if practical on a limited basis would still convey a powerful message of DEM investment. A conveyance of DEM wetland property across from Misquamicut State Beach to the Westerly Land Trust for preservation and accommodation of a town drainage easement has already been agreed to in principle between the three parties. (target - ongoing)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will explore opportunities for public/private partnerships in facility operation and/or maintenance. (target – June 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will seek to strengthen cooperation between the Division of Agriculture, State Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, URI's Extension Service and the Farm Bureau for purposes of better utilizing limited resources and developing long term farm and watershed protection strategies (target – June 2000)**

7. Setting an Example:

- ◆ **The Bureau proposes that RIDEM set for itself the goal of becoming a national example of open access to hiring and access to facilities for the physically challenged (handicapped). Such a program should have the following elements. As noted, progress is already underway in a number of these.**
 - **Develop a hiring program for seasonal employees with physical disabilities. Shake-a-Leg, a nationally recognized center for spinal cord injury rehabilitation has been approached and is extremely enthusiastic about cooperating with the Department. The Governor's Commission on the Handicapped should also be approached. (target - April, 2000)**
 - **Incorporate handicapped accessible docks in all future launch ramp renovations and/or new construction. (target - ongoing)**
 - **Build a two mile handicapped accessible physical fitness and scenic access trail connecting Scarborough State Beach with Black Point to the north and extending along Black Point's scenic bluffs and cliffs. This proposal has already been favorably received by a potential private funding source, the Town of Narragansett and DEM staff. An initial internal scoping session took place in mid-August. (target - late 2000, early 2001)**

8. Exploring Operational Efficiencies:

- ◆ **The Bureau proposes to examine the need for and opportunities to implement a more formal arrangement between its Divisions for the sharing of heavy equipment and construction crews to maximize efficiencies and eliminate duplication. Numerous informal cooperative arrangements between Divisions are in place and appear to work well. The purpose of this exercise would be to build on these arrangements and formalize them only if and to the extent necessary to facilitate increased efficiencies. (target- March, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau proposes to cross train field crews in the Divisions of Parks and Recreation and Fish and Wildlife in basic wildfire suppression. Training will be performed by the Division of Forest Environment in mid-September over a two-day period. Cross training will allow Division crews to support each other and volunteer departments during severe fire conditions.**
- ◆ **The Bureau will, with the cooperation of the Bureau of Planning and Administrative Services, explore closer organizational integration of the Division of Planning and Development with the Bureau's other programs. The objective is to facilitate improved coordination between the Division of Planning and Development and its principal clients in the Bureau of Natural Resources. (target-November 1, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will examine the pros and cons of consolidating management of the Division of Forest Environment's park, camping and beach facilities in the Division of Parks and Recreation. This will be done in close consultation with affected Division Chiefs and personnel, and with careful attention to issues of benefit/cost efficiencies, operational requirements, employee rights and morale. Similarly, the Bureau will examine the pros and cons of consolidating management of the Ports of Galilee and Pier 9 and the functions of the Marine Fisheries section of the Division of Fish and Wildlife. (target- March, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will, in cooperation with the Bureau of Environmental Protection, explore the pros and cons of effecting a closer operational relationship between or consolidating into a single unit the following cross-Bureau functions:**
 - **The Division of Agriculture's Water Resources Protection Program and the Office of Water Resources**
 - **The Narragansett Estuarine Research Reserve and the Narragansett Bay Project (target- June, 2000)**

- ◆ **The Bureau proposes to develop a thoroughly researched and documented proposal to implement a rational heavy equipment and construction vehicle replacement program for the Divisions of Parks and Recreation and Forest Environment. The basic research and support documents have already been completed and require only updating. The inescapable conclusion is that the most fiscally responsible and affordable strategy is a lease-to-purchase agreement, which spreads costs over a four-year period at a low interest penalty. The challenge will be to make an effective case for state investment in such a proposal or, failing that, obtaining private foundation assistance or corporate sponsorship. (target- late September, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will resubmit a proposal to increase the seasonal salary structure overall to improve recruitment and retention, both of which are major impediments to the operation of safe and clean recreational facilities. (target-mid-September)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will explore with the Department of Employment and Training opportunities for integrating welfare reform and back-to-work programs into its seasonal hiring effort. (target- December, 1999)**
- ◆ **The Bureau will explore opportunities to better coordinate and focus the educational and public outreach functions of its Divisions and of the Estuarine Research Reserve. Much is being done, but no systematic examination of opportunities for increased coordination has been undertaken. (target-June, 2000)**
- ◆ **The Bureau must negotiate an operating protocol for the intermodal facility under construction at Fort Adams in Newport. Negotiations will include the City of Newport, RIDOT, RIPTA and our tenant, Sail Newport. (target-March, 2000)**

9. **Other Priorities:**

- ◆ **The Associate Director anticipates investing considerable time and effort in forging an effective and constructive relationship with the Town of Narragansett, EDC and Port tenants towards revitalizing the Port of Galilee in a manner acceptable to the many conflicting interests involved in the Port. Particularly important challenges will be:**
 - **To develop a fiscally sustainable fisheries small-business incubator at the Stonington Seafood site (or elsewhere);**

- **To develop, gain consensus behind and identify a means of financing either an off-site parking site or on-site parking garage to address the major choke-hold on Port development, the chronic seasonal shortage of parking. (target- ongoing)**
- ◆ **Similar efforts will be pursued with the City of Newport and tenant fishermen to expand and improve one of commercial fishing's last toe holds in Newport Harbor at State Pier #9 while respecting the City's overall harbor and waterfront development priorities and plans. (target-June, 2000 and beyond)**