

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

WETLAND PROGRAM CORE ELEMENTS PLAN

2014 – 2016



Prepared by the
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

For the
Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1

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Cover photographs by Deb Pelton Hall (former NEIWPCC)
At Ethel Newman Wildlife Sanctuary, Audubon Society of Rhode Island

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CORE ELEMENT: Regulation

Goal: Avoid and minimize alterations and losses of wetlands for protection of the important functions and values they provide and facilitate effective restoration. Conduct periodic reviews of wetland regulatory processes to identify opportunities for improving efficiency and effectiveness, including through data system improvements.

Action 1: Develop methods and guidance to improve wetland protection and regulatory processes				
Activities	2014	2015	2016	
A. Implement the <i>Rhode Island Stormwater Design and Installation Manual</i> and Low Impact Development (LID) w/ Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) including integrating permitting reviews	X	X	X	
B. Develop and refine policies to support implementation of the Stormwater Manual related to wetland permitting; including standardized engineering reviews.	X	X	X	
C. Organize and implement the Stormwater Manual stakeholder group to facilitate on-going input on application of the manual	X	X	X	
D. Provide training on updated Erosion and Sedimentation Control Handbook for RI		X	X	
E. Coordinate and implement the Wetland / Water Quality Restoration team to provide technical assistance to water quality and restoration project applicants.	X	X	X	
F. Implement process and customer service improvements identified via LEAN and other reviews of wetland permitting process	X	X	X	

G. Develop field guide content or other tools to promote compliance by RIDOT contractors with wetland permit requirements.		X	X
H. Update and refine outreach and guidance materials, including DEM website content, to inform stakeholders and the public on the wetland regulatory process	X	X	X
I. Compile and evaluate science on the effectiveness of wetland buffers and evaluate approaches or models for establishing buffers via regulation.	X	X	X
J. Coordinate with the New England District Corps of Engineers regarding reissuance of the State of RI General Permit			X
Action 2: Improve Data Management			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Improve capacity to share detailed information on wetland permits with local governments	X	X	X
B. Complete planning for migration of wetland permitting data system to new platform		X	X
C. Initiate development of wetland permitting data system to new platform. (Full implementation will require additional time.)			X
D. Design and implement data management system improvements to integrate wetland information with water resource information and		X	X

expand access to information to targeted users			
Action 3: Modify regulations to facilitate wetland restoration			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Convene working group and identify proposed regulatory changes. Prioritize changes and draft and promulgate revisions through rulemaking.			X

CORE ELEMENT: Monitoring and Assessment

Goal: Assess the condition of the State's wetlands to understand the cumulative impacts of human activities on wetlands and to improve their protection and management. Continue to refine and apply wetland monitoring and assessment methodologies during the next three years building on projects completed with the Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS), NEIWPCC, and technical advisors during the past six years.

Action 1: Update the Rhode Island Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan (NEIWPCC & DEM 2006)			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Update the <i>Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</i> , and finalize <i>Plan</i> following stakeholder review.	X	X	
B. In the <i>Plan</i> update, consider climate change and the impacts to freshwater wetlands that may occur due to sea level rise, changes in precipitation patterns, storm events, etc.	X	X	
C. Integrate & cross-reference the updated <i>Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</i> with the updated <i>Rhode Island Surface</i>		X	

<i>Water Monitoring Strategy (pending)</i>			
D. Investigate sustainable financing for wetland monitoring, including conferring w/ the University of North Carolina, Environmental Finance Center			X
E. Document monitoring strategies for coastal saltmarshes.	X	X	
F. Refine saltmarsh monitoring strategies through further demonstration, field testing and methods evaluation.		X	X
G. Coordinate efforts on wetland monitoring and assessment with the Rhode Island Environmental Monitoring Collaborative	X	X	X
H. Continue to participate in the New England Biological Assessment of Wetlands Workgroup (NEBAWWG)	X	X	X
Action 2: Continue to develop and implement wetland monitoring and assessment tools and projects consistent with the updated Rhode Island Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Continue to explore development of wetland indicators in collaboration with partners; e.g. Watershed Counts Environmental Indicator Initiative and Narragansett Bay Estuary Program	X	X	X
B. Evaluate the use of new imagery and Lidar in order to identify potential vernal pools. As		X	X

feasible, collaborate with partners to apply in regions of the State where mapping to date has not been completed.			
C. Develop and implement field monitoring and assessment projects for freshwater wetlands, complete data entry, analyses and reports. Current targets: high ecological value wetlands.	X	X	X
D. Use existing tools to assess condition of selected freshwater wetlands identified as vulnerable to sea level rise by SLAMM.			X
E. Implement saltmarsh monitoring to track changes in condition.			X
F. Incorporate monitoring and assessment findings into wetland watershed profiles and distribute via DEM web.	X	X	X
G. Prepare Status and Trends report		X	X

CORE ELEMENT: Restoration and Protection

Goal: Restore the quantity and quality of wetlands and their functions and values. Develop and implement a freshwater wetland restoration strategy with the assistance of advisors and in collaboration with other voluntary restoration initiatives. Collaborate with partners to prioritize restoration opportunities and build capacity for wetland restoration, with emphasis on riparian buffers, stream continuity and restoration of buffers around wetlands of high biodiversity.

Goal: Prevent degradation of wetland functions and values. Integrate non-regulatory wetland protection strategies into state and local (watershed) plans. Work across DEM programs and with other stakeholders involved in watershed-based planning to produce such plans for RI's designated watershed planning areas. Coordinate on outreach and technical assistance provided to communities to promote wetland protection.

Action 1: Integrate wetland protection and restoration into watershed-based planning			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Develop statewide wetland restoration strategy, w/ advisors (freshwater & coastal)		X	X
B. Inventory and report data on completed wetland restoration projects and activities	X	X	X
C. Integrate wetland protection into watershed based plans being developed by OWR surface water programs. Current target watersheds: Narrow River, Wood – Pawcatuck, Scituate, Aquidneck Island.	X	X	X
D. Disseminate information on vernal pool mapping in the W-P watershed		X	X
E. Provide input to reflect sound science in updated RI State Wildlife Action Plan (currently in draft).	X	X	
Action 2: Enhance Data Systems			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Continue to build the data system and tools to track and report on restoration outcomes		X	X

B. Develop an improved means to report on acreage of wetlands and adjacent buffers that are permanently conserved through acquisition.			X
Action 3. Promote adoption of local strategies and voluntary actions to protect wetlands.			
A. Coordinate with DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife on outreach and technical assistance to communities on topics involving protection of aquatic habitats, including wetlands		X	X
B. Provide access to data and information to support open space planning that protects wetlands of high ecological value		X	X
C. Devise and implement adaptation strategies for freshwater wetlands in the coastal region identified as vulnerable to climate change via SLAMM (sea level rise)			
Action 4: Identify potential wetland and buffer restoration opportunities that support important Statewide goals of retaining fish and wildlife habitat, improving water quality, and protecting people from flooding.			
Activities	2014	2015	2016
A. Research various records and programs to identify key restoration opportunities.	X	X	X
B. Collaborate with restoration initiatives through the RI Habitat Restoration Team	X	X	X
C. Conduct watershed-based projects to		X	X

identify and assess freshwater wetland restoration opportunities including evaluation of riparian buffers.		
D. Design adaption strategies to support resilience of coastal saltmarshes to climate change	X	X
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- Specific protection actions are also reflected in the RI State Wildlife Action Plan (in draft 2015).