

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**  
**WETLANDS PROGRAM CORE ELEMENTS PLAN**  
**2017 – 2019**



Prepared by the  
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

For the  
Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1

December 2016

For more information about this Plan contact:

Sue Kiernan, Deputy Chief  
Office of Water Resources  
Department of Environmental Management

Phone: 401-222-4700, ext. 7600

Email: [sue.kiernan@dem.ri.gov](mailto:sue.kiernan@dem.ri.gov)



Cover photographs by Shawna Smith (RIDEM) and Dr. Frank Golet (Former URI CELS)

This page by Kate McPherson (RI DEM)

### 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.

| <b>Action 1: Develop and implement regulations to strengthen protection of freshwater wetlands, buffers and floodplains.</b>  |             |             |             |  |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |  |
| A. Develop draft regulations to implement statewide standards for freshwater wetland buffers and setbacks in accordance with revised state law.   | X           |             |             |  |
| B. Conduct a scientific literature review related to wetland buffers.   | X           |             |             |  |
| C. Coordinate stakeholder input process and public review of draft freshwater wetland regulations.  | X           |             |             |  |
| D. Promulgate revisions to freshwater wetland regulations. Phase in implementation in accordance with the rules.  | X           | X           | X           |  |
| E. Support implementation of new rules by developing and distributing guidance and public outreach materials. Update website content. Develop and conduct training for target audiences including municipalities and consultants. | X           | X           | X           |  |
| F. Coordinate with the New England District Army Corps of Engineers regarding reissuance of the RI General Permit.  | X           |             |             |  |

| <b>Action 2: Protect wetlands through improved management of stormwater</b>  |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>  | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| 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. Update and refine policies to support implementation of the Stormwater Manual related to wetland permitting; including evaluation of new information about BMPs and BMP performance.                  | X           | X           | X           |
| C. Update the Manual and promulgate stormwater related regulations in order to comply with the creation of a standardized code of Rhode Island regulations.  | X           | X           |             |
| D. Provide training on updated Erosion and Sedimentation Control Handbook for RI   |             | X           | X           |
| E. Coordinate with RIDOT on prioritization, design and implementation of stormwater projects including retrofitting that will better protect wetlands. .   | X           | X           | X           |
| F. Implement process and customer service improvements identified via LEAN and other reviews of wetland permitting process.  | X           | X           | X           |

| <b>Action 3: Improve Wetland Data Management</b>  |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Improve capacity to share detailed information on wetland permits with local governments   |             | X           | X           |
| B. Complete planning for migration of wetland permitting data system to new database/platform   | X           | X           |             |
| C. Develop new wetland permitting data system and complete data migration to new platform. (Full implementation may require additional time.)                                   |             | X           | X           |
| D. Design and implement data management system improvements to integrate wetland information with water resource information and expand access to information to targeted users |             | X           | X           |
| <b>Action 4: Modify regulations to facilitate wetland restoration</b>   |             |             |             |
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| 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 previously completed.

| <b>Action 1: Update the Rhode Island Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan (NEIWPCC &amp; DEM 2006)</b>  |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Finalize an update of the <i>Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</i> .   | 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. Investigate sustainable funding mechanisms to support wetland monitoring.  |             |             | X           |
| D. Coordinate efforts on wetland monitoring and assessment with the Rhode Island Environmental Monitoring Collaborative   | X           | X           | X           |
| E. Continue to participate in the New England Biological Assessment of Wetlands Workgroup (NEBAWWG)   | X           | X           | X           |
| <b>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</b>                     |             |             |             |
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Continue to develop and promote the consistent use of wetland indicators in collaboration with partners; e.g. RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative, Initiative and Narragansett Bay Estuary Program | X           |             | X           |
| B. Develop appropriate datasets on wetland reference conditions and associated metrics  |             |             | X           |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>that support analysis and application of wetland monitoring data.</p>   |   |   |   |
| <p>C. Develop and implement field monitoring and assessment projects for freshwater wetlands, complete data entry, analyses and reports. Current targets: high ecological value wetlands, wetlands in proximity to saltmarshes identified as vulnerable to sea level rise by SLAMM</p> | X | X | X |
| <p>D. Refine tools to support application of RIRAM and FQA across freshwater wetland types; e.g. develop reference gradients.</p>  |   |   | X |
| <p>E. Refine, validate and implement saltmarsh monitoring protocols on an expanded number of saltmarshes to build a baseline data and support tracking of changes over time.</p>   | X | X | X |
| <p>F. Use LiDAR and new aerial imagery to identify potential vernal pools. Develop and apply approach in regions where mapping has not yet been completed.</p>   |   | X | X |
| <p>G. Prepare Status and Trends report</p>   |   | X | X |
|  |   |   |   |

## CORE ELEMENT: Restoration and Protection

Goal: Restore the quantity and quality of wetlands and their functions and values. Develop and implement freshwater wetland and saltmarsh restoration strategies to prioritize and facilitate voluntary restoration actions. Collaborate with partners to build capacity for wetland restoration activities.

Goal: Prevent degradation of wetland functions and values. Ensure non-regulatory wetland protection strategies are integrated into state and local (watershed) plans. Coordinate on outreach and technical assistance provided to communities to promote wetland protection.

| <b>Action 1: Integrate wetland protection and restoration into watershed-based planning</b>  |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>  | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Develop statewide wetland restoration strategies to provide frameworks for prioritizing restoration actions (freshwater and coastal)  | X           | X           |             |
| B. Integrate wetland protection strategies and actions into watershed based plans being developed by OWR surface water programs. Current target watersheds: Narrow River, Wood –Pawcatuck, Aquidneck Island reservoirs, Nonquit Pond | X           | X           | X           |
| C. Share pertinent wetland information with local communities; e.g. vernal pool data, monitoring data, etc.  | X           | X           | X           |



| <b>Action 2: Enhance Wetland Data Systems Capabilities to Report Key Metrics</b>   |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>  | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Track and report data on completed wetland restoration projects and activities (in collaboration with NBEP)   | X           | X           | X           |
| B. Develop and implement an improved means to automate the reporting of wetland habitat restoration outcomes   |             | X           | X           |
| C. Develop and implement an improved means to report on acreage of wetlands and adjacent buffers that are permanently conserved through acquisition.                               |             | X           | X           |
| <b>Action 3: Promote adoption of local strategies and voluntary actions to protect wetlands</b>  |             |             |             |
| <b>Activities</b>  | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| 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 acquisition planning that protects wetland habitats of high ecological value (includes vernal pools).              |             | 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.)                 |             |             | X           |

| <b>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 and facilitate implementation.</b> |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>2017</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> |
| A. Research various records and programs to identify key restoration opportunities.   |             | X           | X           |
| B. Collaborate with restoration initiatives through the RI Habitat Restoration Team.  | X           | X           | X           |
| C. Conduct watershed-based projects to identify and assess freshwater wetland restoration opportunities including evaluation of riparian buffers.   | X           |             | X           |
| D. Design adaptation strategies to support resilience of coastal saltmarshes to climate change.   |             | X           | X           |
| E. Award and administer state grants to projects that prevent and mitigate flooding through ecological restoration actions.   | X           | X           | X           |
| F. Coordinate and implement the Water Quality/Wetland Restoration Team to provide technical pre-application assistance to water quality and restoration project applicants.   | X           | X           | X           |
| RI WPCEP #4 12/29/2016  |             |             |             |

(\*) Specific protection actions are also reflected in the RI State Wildlife Action Plan (2015).