

DEM Announces \$3.33 Million in Green Economy Bond Funding to Help Communities, Local Groups Protect Open Space

PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) announced today the award of more than \$3.33 million in grants to help communities and local organizations protect valuable green space throughout the state. Seventeen projects will receive matching grants to protect 904 acres of open space and farmland across Rhode Island. The funding is made possible by the 2016 Green Economy Bond, which was passed overwhelmingly by Rhode Island voters, and invests \$35 million in preserving open space, improving recreational facilities, and cleaning up lands and waters.

"The open space grants we're awarding today – and the Beach, Clean Water, and Green Bond proposed in my budget – will help support the health and vitality of our lands, waters, and communities for generations to come," said Governor Gina M. Raimondo. "Investing in our natural resources benefits communities' quality of life, promotes health and wellness, protects drinking and recreational water, and helps Rhode Island become a more resilient place."

Rhode Island's historic parks, bikeways, and green spaces provide opportunity for public enjoyment – in addition to improving the health of the environment, strengthening the state's climate resilience, and supporting the economy. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in Rhode Island generates \$2.4 billion in consumer spending and supports 24,000 local jobs. Since 1985, over 11,000 acres of land have been protected.

"We're delighted to partner with cities, towns, and organizations to protect an incredible array of properties across Rhode Island," said DEM Director Janet Coit. "From Block Island to Little Compton to North Providence, these special lands delight families, support wildlife, and help support sustainable communities. Preserving Rhode Island's natural assets and increasing the public's access and enjoyment of our open spaces is a win-win for our residents and our quality of life."

Grants up to \$400,000 – which may cover up to half of the project cost – were awarded to help preserve lands that offer significant natural, ecological, or agricultural value and those that connect or expand existing protected lands. DEM's successful open space grant program has provided funding for the preservation of over 11,000 acres of land across the state since its inception in 1985. DEM has worked with partners in every municipality to

complete 184 easement transactions with land trusts and local communities to date, furthering the mission of preserving Rhode Island's precious resources and increasing the public's access and enjoyment of natural lands. Over the years, this grant program has resulted in the protection of places used by residents and tourists alike for outdoor recreation – and has contributed to the economic health of the state. These natural assets play a big role in the state's tourist economy by providing opportunities for the public to camp, fish, hunt, hike, and enjoy the great outdoors, while also bringing revenue to the local economy.

The open space grants being awarded today to protect 904 acres of open space and farmland include:

Aquidneck Land Trust – Johnston Spitalnik: \$200,000 to acquire 7.5 acres bordering existing conservation land protected by the Town of Portsmouth. Just north of the Sakonnet Greenway Trail corridor, consisting of over 1,260 acres of protected land, this property has the potential to connect significant recreational opportunities and will help to conserve an important habitat corridor for resident and migratory species.

Barrington Land Conservation Trust – Adams: \$7,500 to purchase .65 acres abutting the Johannis Farm Wildlife Preserve. The existing salt marshes in this preserve, along the Palmer River, provide important habitat for a wide variety of state species of concern, bald eagles, and osprey. In addition, the open fields and woodlands of the Adams parcel provide a rare opportunity to conserve land for future saltmarsh migration.

Block Island Conservancy – Kastner: \$62,500 grant to acquire a conservation easement over 2.6 acres of regionally-significant coastal shrubland habitat important to migratory songbirds. This acquisition would provide the only corridor link between Win Dodge Preserve (30 acres) to Lewis-Dickens Farm (over 350 acres). The area supports over 30 state threatened and endangered species, including the most viable population of the federally endangered American Burying Beetle, in the world. This property also is adjacent to the site of the Palatine Graves, burial site to passengers from a 1738 shipwreck – the project includes the right to lead guided public walks to this historic gravesite.

Town of Charlestown – Tucker Estates: \$400,000 grant to acquire 66.5 acres of pitch pine forest in a column of nearly contiguous open space that extends from the coast at the Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge to the Carolina Management Area in Richmond. Its streams are tributary to the Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River, and its field, pitch pines, oak forests, vernal pools, and rock outcrops provide habitat for species of state concern. With nearly 1,500 feet of frontage on Rt 91, it provides a rural landscape of field and forest along the scenic road and creates a forested frame for the National Register Carolina Village. Once owned by the town, it will provide public hiking and other passive recreation opportunities.

Town of Coventry – Heritage Homes: \$397,000 to acquire 94.7 acres abutting the Coventry Greenway and within a 900-acre block of forestland. This acquisition will add to the Coventry Greenway, a large swath of conservation land along the Washington Secondary Bikeway that provides walking trails on over 400 acres of land. This parcel provides interior forest habitat for several species of greatest conservation need as well as the opportunity to expand the trail system.

Town of Johnston – Luchka: \$400,000 to acquire 47 acres of combined forest and farmland to be available for public recreation. This project will help protect the water quality of the Cedar Swamp Brook, which flows through this property and will keep intact a 250-acre unfragmented forest core.

Johnston Land Trust – Generali: \$84,000 to acquire 38 acres of upland forest abutting the 160-acre Woodlake Park. The property sits within a large unfragmented forest just west of Route 295. Dry Brook runs through this property on its way from Oak Swamp Reservoir to Almy Reservoir. Both bodies of water provide recreational value. This acquisition will protect the water quality of these water bodies and will conserve a significant forest core uncommon in the metro Providence area.

Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust – Ratcliffe: \$350,000 to acquire 5 acres at the mouth of the Fogland/Donovan Marsh estuary. The Ratcliffe property contains a sandy beach that supports nesting Piping Plovers, mudflats that supply foraging area to a host of shore and wading birds, high and low salt marsh, and coastal thicket. With direct road access, this property will be open for swimming, paddling, fishing, and passive recreation.

City of Newport – Ballard Park acquisition: \$100,000 grant to acquire a 3.67-acre inholding in Ballard Park that includes a walking path along an elevated ridge with views of the park. Ballard Park is part of a contiguous 80-acre corridor of conservation land that includes woodlands, an estuarine cove, wetlands, and a meadow. The Ballard Park acquisition will enhance this conservation corridor.

Town of North Kingstown – Cruickshank: \$211,210 to protect 422 acres of unfragmented native upland and lowland deciduous forest with high ecological value. A large freshwater wetland complex dominates the property and includes vernal pool habitats and surrounding upland – thus providing important breeding habitat for reptiles and amphibians such as wood frogs, salamanders, and northern spring peepers. This acquisition protects the headwaters of the Saugatucket River Watershed and is part of a GAA Groundwater supply that provides drinking water to the surrounding residential neighborhoods that use the Sole Source Aquifer.

North Providence Land Trust – Oceau: \$150,000 to acquire 2.5 acres of land along the Woonasquatucket River. This acquisition will protect valuable river frontage and provide public access for canoes and kayaks. Close to dense residential development, this parcel will

provide an excellent recreational opportunity while maintaining intact river buffers important for habitat and water quality.

Pocasset Wampanoag Land Trust – Chmura, et al. : \$21,050 to acquire 40 acres that was part of the original Pocasset reservation and a key site of the King Philip's War. The property contains a small stream, Sucker Brook, and its surrounding wetlands. The property is immediately adjacent to the new Tiverton Casino and provides an opportunity for public recreation. Once protected, an interpretive signage and trail system will be constructed on the property.

Richmond Rural Land Preservation Trust – F & S Enterprises: \$235,000 to acquire 113 acres across the street from DEM's 1,800-acre Hillsdale Wildlife Management Area. This property connects Hillsdale to an additional 230 acres of conservation land owned by The Nature Conservancy and Audubon Society of RI and is within a 250-acre unfragmented forest core. A planned trail network will provide a nice recreational opportunity to view the property's combination of upland and wetlands and unnamed streams, which drain to the Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River.

South Kingstown Land Trust – Richmond: \$400,000 grant to acquire 18 acres of both conservation easement and fee interests on Yawgoo Pond. Yawgoo Pond is an important coastal plain pond, the shoreline of which is already about 65% protected. The Richmond property abuts 100 acres of permanently protected land around the pond and is across the street from Audubon Society of RI's Eppley Preserve.

Watch Hill Conservancy – Eddy: \$14,000 grant to acquire 1.03 acres on Napatree Point in Westerly within the Napatree Point Conservation Area (86 acres total). Except for six small inholdings, including this acquisition, all Napatree is protected from development. Napatree Point provides important wildlife habitat consisting of dunes, shrubland, salt marshes, and a tidal lagoon that support rare and endangered species including the piping plover and roseate tern. In addition, the point protects 2 acres of mussel bed and the largest contiguous patch of eelgrass (80 acres) in the state.

Westerly Land Trust – Cottrell: \$300,000 grant to acquire 43 acres on the Wild & Scenic Pawcatuck River and abutting 257 of conservation land. This acquisition closes a significant gap of developable land between the River and the Town Forest, further protecting water quality and a significant wildlife corridor. Consisting of a mix of upland forest interspersed with small streams and wetlands, the property protects a diverse array of important habitats.

In addition, DEM announced that a supplemental open space grant round will be offered this spring, with applications available starting March 16 and due on June 5. DEM anticipates making approximately \$1 million available, dependent on demand, to communities and local organizations to protect valuable green space throughout the state. Like the previous

grant round, this supplemental round will feature awards up to \$400,000 - which may cover half the project costs – to help preserve lands that offer significant natural, ecological, or agricultural value by direct purchase or conservation easement.

Governor Raimondo's fiscal year 2021 proposed budget includes a \$64 million Beach, Clean Water, and Green Bond that champions investments in state beaches, campgrounds, parks, outdoor recreation; forests and farmland conservation; clean water and drinking water; and resilience to climate change. A fact sheet on the bond is available at www.dem.ri.gov.

For more information on DEM programs and initiatives, visit www.dem.ri.gov. Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM or on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) for timely updates.

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