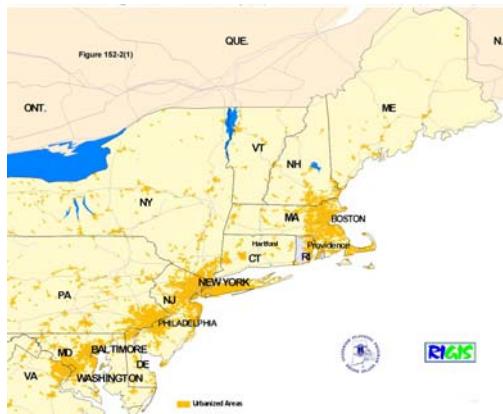


152-2 THE CONTEXT FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION IN RHODE ISLAND

This part of the plan describes the broad context of physical, social and institutional parameters within which outdoor recreation takes place. Chief among these are the physical and social dimensions of Rhode Island – the important characteristics of the land and its people that figure prominently in outdoor recreation matters. The significant resources of Rhode Island’s public recreation system – land, water and facilities devoted to public enjoyment of the outdoors – are also summarized.

2-1 Physical Dimensions

The most striking physical characteristic of Rhode Island's geography is its small size. Covering only 1,214 square miles, the state is the smallest in the nation. Despite its small size, Rhode Island is heavily populated, having the second highest population density of any state (over 900 persons per square mile). As shown in Figure 152-2(1), Rhode Island is located within the heavily urbanized Northeast Corridor. Over 50 million people live within a one-day drive of the state.



2.1

Narragansett Bay is the state's chief geographic feature, extending twenty-eight miles into the interior of Rhode Island from the Atlantic Ocean. The bay and Rhode Island's streams, rivers, and ponds occupy about twenty-five percent of the state's total area.

Rhode Island's location at the interface between land and sea has blessed the state with a great diversity of landforms. The state's varied topography has helped shape land use patterns over nearly four centuries since European settlement. Early maritime settlements (Newport, Providence, Bristol, Warwick) exploited easy access to the bay and the ocean. In the nineteenth century entrepreneurs built water-powered mills and industrial villages that grew into larger manufacturing centers along the rapidly falling inland waterways that empty into Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound.

The spectacular views and healthful air of the 420 miles of shoreline bordering Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean fostered resort communities with public and private parks and other outdoor recreation areas. Farmers tilled the soil and raised livestock among the hills and valleys of northern and western Rhode Island that rise between 500 and 800 feet.

The majority of Rhode Island lies in the Seaboard Lowland physiographic region. The Narragansett Basin, a dominant feature, includes much of the eastern part of the state and a low lying strip bordering the west shore of Narragansett Bay. To the west of the bay and adjoining the Atlantic Ocean are coastal lowlands with relief generally lower than 200 feet above sea level. Moving away from the bay, the land surface rises gradually toward the hilly upland section in the northwestern part of the state, where the state's highest point, Jerimoth Hill (812'), is located.

The modern Rhode Island landscape is a complex mosaic of natural environments, historical remnants, and contemporary development. Moving around the state, a traveler still encounters a surprising number of small villages nestled in stream valleys, farms and old fields, and back roads lined with stone walls and crowned with overhanging trees. Yet, such vestiges of the past, and the sense of ruralness and small - town character they convey, are increasingly juxtaposed with elements of the contemporary landscape – large scale commercial, industrial and residential development, which too often respects neither the natural lay of the land nor the rural semblance of the communities they occupy.

Highway improvements have made daily commutation between all points in the state feasible, facilitating a dispersal of the population into formerly isolated areas. At the same time, improvements in communications and electronics have spurred the decentralization of commercial, institutional, service, and industrial functions once limited to urbanized areas. These centrifugal forces have brought both the benefits and detriments of growth to rural communities, and effected permanent changes to the face of Rhode Island. Yet, the natural face of Rhode Island, while subdued in some places, remains distinct in others; many, many locales remain compellingly beautiful and alluring for outdoor recreation.

2.2

Rhode Island's geographic diversity is echoed in its landscape. Barrier beaches, heavily utilized for summer recreation, separate land from sea along much of the state's southern shoreline. Just inland, a recessional moraine -- a remnant of the state's last glaciation -- meanders across the ocean-fronting communities of Washington (or "South") County, creating a variety of environments and habitats. Beyond the moraine to the north lie extensive wetland systems of the Wood-Pawcatuck River system, the most pristine river system in the state. The river and wetlands offer valuable wildlife habitat and canoeing, fishing and hunting, and other recreational opportunities. While retaining a distinctively rural flavor, the Wood-Pawcatuck basin, and the entire South County area, faces growing development pressures.

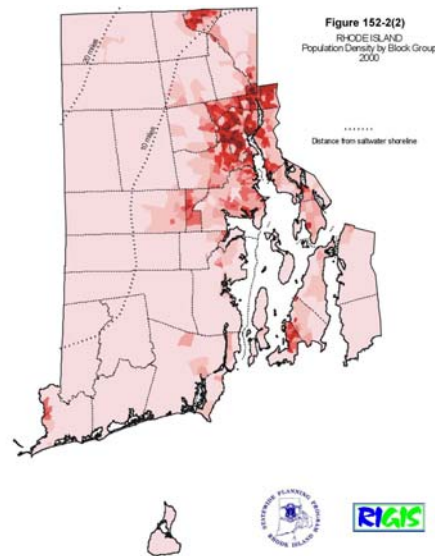
Many visitors to Rhode Island encounter only Block Island, a summer tourist mecca eight miles off the south coast that is also the home of the some of the state's rarest ecosystems and most valuable natural habitats.

Communities along the state's western boundary with Connecticut are distinctively rural in flavor -- dominated by gently rolling forested uplands, broken by stream valleys, small lakes and ponds and wetlands. The State's extensive multi-purpose management areas encompass nearly 25,000 acres in the western corridor, and offer a diversity of recreational opportunities, including trail use, hunting, fishing, camping, swimming, and picnicking. Mill villages and farmscapes remain

discernable, although recent development has made in-roads in some places. Just west of the Providence urban area, the 13,000 acre Scituate Reservoir is the source of drinking water for nearly half the state's one million inhabitants.

Stretching 19 miles northwest from Providence to the Massachusetts border in Woonsocket, the Blackstone River has a proud history as a birthplace of the nation's industrial revolution. The eleven valley communities in Rhode Island have been designated as the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, created by Congress in 1987 in recognition of the region's significance in the nation's industrial and cultural heritage.

Rhode Island's close association with the ocean also has a pervasive influence on its outdoor recreational participation. Rhode Island has approximately 420 miles of salt water coastline along its southern shore, islands, and along Narragansett Bay, an estuary extending 28 miles inland from the open ocean. As shown in Figure 152-2(2), the state's geography and small size allows all Rhode Islanders to live within 25 miles of the coastline. The Bay and ocean and their shoreline are, consequently, Rhode Island's most cherished natural features, and offer opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, wildlife observation and other passive recreational pursuits enjoyed by residents and tourists alike.



Lying at the confluence of three rivers at the head of the Bay, Providence, the state's capital, is home to major commercial, industrial, cultural, medical and educational complexes, as well as racially and ethnically rich residential neighborhoods. Surrounding Providence, urban and suburban communities line the shorelines of upper Narragansett Bay. On the bay's west side, a string of mill villages and small coastal settlements has grown into a densely-settled suburban mosaic of post World War II residential, commercial and industrial developments. The intensity and character of the upper bay's development, water quality problems and lack of public access to the shoreline have limited the recreational usage of the estuary; however, a number of remedial measures are underway to restore these lost values for the many Rhode Islanders who live in the upper bay communities.

Aquidneck, Prudence, Conanicut and several smaller islands dominate the center of Narragansett Bay. Newport, at the mouth of the Bay, grew from a colonial seaport to become a major east coast naval fleet port. Today, this nautical heritage is preserved and celebrated in the shops, restaurants, and boutiques that line the historic wharfs and quays for the thousands of tourists who visit the city each year. The State's Bay Islands Park System and Narragansett Bay Estuarine Sanctuary constitute a 2,000+ acre open space system for visitors seeking recreation, conservation, environmental education and research opportunities. East of the Bay, five communities, originally part of Massachusetts,

retain many historical structures and sites -- remnants of their nautical and colonial heritage.

2-2 *Natural Resources*

Rhode Island's natural endowment of land and water remains as central to the state's destiny in the 21st Century, as it was in past eras. Recreation, the focus of this plan, is but one of the many functions dependent upon the state's natural resources.

Waterbodies and Wetlands: Rhode Island's 420 miles of saltwater coastline provides opportunities for boating, swimming, fishing and shellfishing, waterskiing, windsurfing and more. The long, sandy ocean beaches of the southern shore draw over 1.9 million visitors each year, including many out-of-state visitors. There are hundreds of public access sites to the Rhode Island coast.

Rhode Island's freshwater swamps, marshes, bogs, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and 1,498 miles of rivers and streams attract kayakers, canoeists, swimmers and fishers as well as motor boaters and jet skiers. In addition to providing recreation, open space, and educational and scientific research opportunities, wetlands also perform critical functions including flood and storm water control; erosion and sedimentation control; water quality maintenance; recharge of groundwater supplies; discharge of groundwater; fish and wildlife habitat; nutrient production and cycling.¹

2.4

Forests: In 1998, forests covered 59 percent of Rhode Island's land area or 393,000 acres, a 4.5% decline from the 411,800 acres of forested land reported in 1985. In addition to providing recreational opportunities, forests provide a number of important benefits to Rhode Island including water supply protection, wildlife habitat, timber products, firewood, and non-timber forest products such as witch hazel and floral greenery. Rural and urban residents also appreciate the scenery and open space that forests provide.



The State manages several extensive forested tracts including the 3,200 acre George Washington and 12,000 acre Arcadia Management Areas in western Rhode Island, and continues to acquire significant forestland parcels as resources and opportunities consistent with State land protection plans become available. Municipalities, water suppliers, and non-profit groups such as the Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy, and land trusts also manage significant forested tracts.

¹ RIDEM, 2002 State of the State's Waters Report (305b)

Farmland: Rhode Island's farms, while not a recreational resource, are an important component of Rhode Island's landscape, and are attracting more visitors with farm stands, pick-your-own fields and orchards, farmers' markets, and attractions such as corn mazes and hayrides. According to 1997 USDA statistics, there were over 735 farms in Rhode Island occupying over 55,236 acres (of which 25,611 acres was cropland). Rhode Island agriculture is generally healthy, and is ranked first nationally in net farm income per acre. Through the Agricultural Land Preservation Program, the State has purchased the development rights to nearly 4,000 acres of farmland.



Wildlife: Rhode Island, despite being a heavily urbanized state, hosts a great diversity of wildlife. Some 45 species of mammals, 165 nesting bird species, and 36 species of native freshwater fish are commonly found in the state. Migrating and wintering waterfowl, neo-tropical migrants, butterflies, dragonflies, fish, and rare plants attract residents and eco-tourists to five US Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife refuges, six State Management Areas, and ten Audubon Society of Rhode Island wildlife refuges for wildlife observation opportunities. State Management Areas also provide fishing and hunting opportunities. Wildlife resources also figure in environmental education and interpretation offered by a number of agencies, including the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council in the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, and the Audubon Society's nature center in Warren. Save The Bay, a non-profit environmental group, is planning a Narragansett Bay educational center on the Providence waterfront.

2.5

Coastal Islands: Coastal Islands provide a variety of shorelines including, sand, cobble and boulders, rocky shores, cliffs, and salt ponds. They provide important bird nesting sites and are valued for fishing and sailing. The Bay Islands Park System provides wildlife observation and other extensive recreation. The Learning Center of the Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve on Prudence Island is a joint project of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, DEM and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island.

2-3 Historical/Cultural Resources

Rhode Island has one of the densest concentrations of historical buildings and sites in the nation, offering residents and visitors to the state a means to incorporate appreciation of past events and traditions with contemporary leisure activities. Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns are host to over 1,250 historic structures and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the National Park Service. Major historic/cultural resources include pre-revolution era homes and churches in Newport, Providence, Bristol and Warren, early forts around Narragansett Bay, and important Industrial Revolution mills and homes throughout the state, particularly in the Blackstone, Pawtuxet, Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck valleys. Newport is famous for its "Gilded

Age” mansions. Many elegant 19th century commercial and residential buildings can also be seen throughout the state.

Several Rhode Island state parks are unique in their historical heritage. Fort Adams State Park in Newport contains Fort Adams, the largest coastal fortification in the United States, dating from 1824. Colt State Park, in Bristol, retains the air of the elegant private estate created by Samuel Colt, yet it includes modern-day facilities such as multiple use fields, a fishing pier and boat launch, picnicking areas, and adjoins an historic working farm.

2-4 Population Trends -- A Growing Diversity

Rhode Island's people are as diverse and distinctive as its landforms. Throughout its history the state has welcomed wave after wave of newcomers; each group adding to the richness and breadth of its cultural tapestry. Recent increases in Hispanic and non-white groups continued to broaden the diversity of the state's population. The 2000 Census found that Hispanics make up 8.7 percent of Rhode

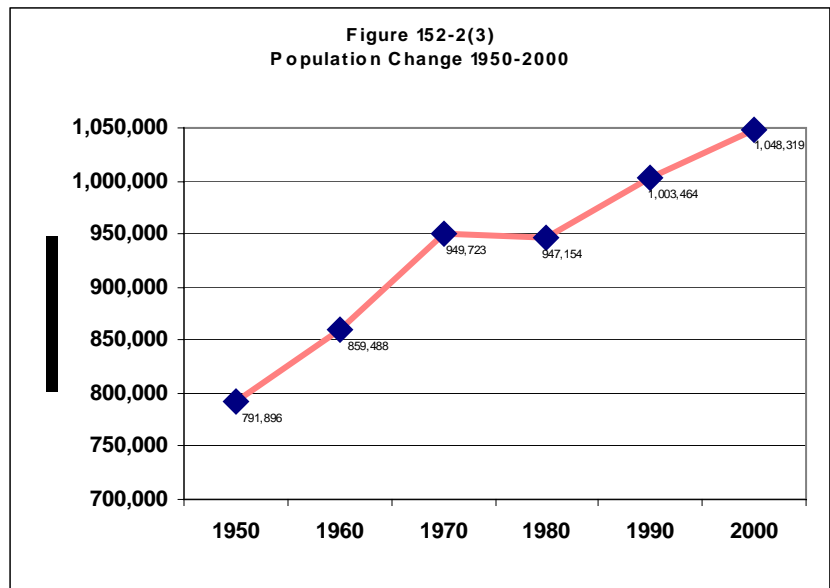
Race/Ethnicity	% of Total Population
White	85.0%
Black/African American	4.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%
Asian	2.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.1%
Other	5.0%
Two or more races	2.7%
Hispanic	8.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Island's population, and were the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the state from 1990 to 2000. This sharp growth contributed to large population gains in central cities such as Providence and Central Falls. Table 152-2(1) shows Rhode Island's population by race/ethnicity in 2000.

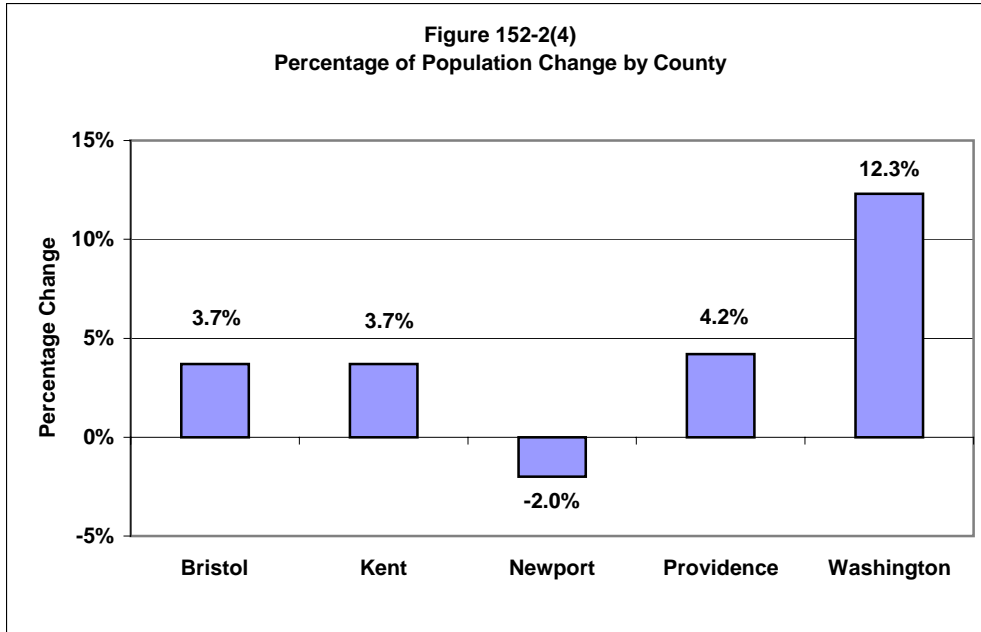
2.6

In aggregate, Rhode Island's population increased 4.5% (from 1,003,464 to 1,048,319 inhabitants) during the 1990s. This growth rate was modest compared to the national growth of 13.1%, and was lower than the 5.9% Rhode Island experienced between 1980 and 1990. Figure 152-2(3) shows Rhode Island's population growth since 1950.



Source: US Census RI Statewide Planning Program

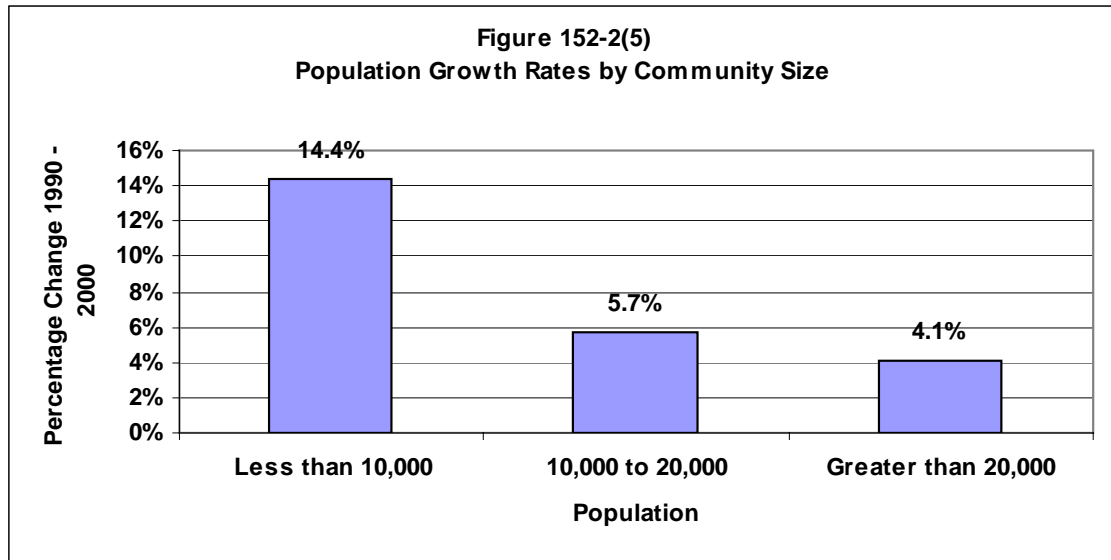
As can be seen in the Figure 152-2(4), the largest relative population increases since 1990 have taken place in Washington County in the southern part of the state, which is host to salt water beaches and the largest state management areas.



The geographic decentralization of population throughout the 1980's and 1990's was a major dynamic affecting the open space and recreation resource base. The population growth rate for rural small towns (those with under 10,000 people as of 1990) rose by more than three times the rate of growth for larger towns (those with populations over 10,000 as of 1990.)

Figure 152-2(5) illustrates the relative rates of population growth for different size communities.

Four of five leading communities in terms of 1990-2000 population growth rates (percentage change) were rural: West Greenwich (45.6%), Richmond (35.0%), Charlestown (21.3%), and New Shoreham (20.8%). The fifth was the suburban town of Lincoln (15.8%). In terms of absolute increase, Providence (12,890), Cranston (3,209), South Kingstown (3,290), Lincoln (2,853), and Cumberland (2,802) were the five fastest growing communities in the '90's.



Figures (4) and (5) Source: U.S. Census
RI Statewide Planning Program

2.8

Rhode Island's median age is slightly higher than the nation's (36.7 years vs. 35.3 years). Fourteen and one-half percent of the population was age 65 and older in 2000, a slight decrease from fifteen percent in 1990. Despite the decrease, the percent of population over 65 ranks third highest in nation. The 2000 Census shows that over half the population is in the 25 to 64 year age group. Table 152-2(2) illustrates population distribution by age class.

**Table 152-2(2)
Population Profile by Age Group – 2000 Census**

Age Group	Population	Percent
Under 18 years	247,822	23.6
18 to 24 years	106,607	10.2
25 to 44 years	310,636	29.6
45 to 64 years	230,852	22.0
65 years and older	152,402	14.5
TOTAL	1,048,319	99.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (SF1, DP1)

Table 152-2(3) presents 1990 and 2000 national and state populations by various age groups. The largest segment of the population continues to be represented by the Baby Boomer generation, predominantly identified in the 45 to 64 age group. While Rhode Island's elderly population (65+) grew at a lower rate (4.5%) than the national average (13.2%), this group represents a larger percentage of the total population in Rhode Island (14.5%) than it does nationally (12.4%). Contrary to a national trend, the 18 to 44 age group in Rhode Island decreased 14.7 percent. Nationally, this age group increased 6.8 percent.

**Table 152-2(3)
Population Change 1990 to 2000 by Age Group**

United States				
Age	1990	2000	Numeric Change	Percentage Change
<18	63,604,432	72,293,812	8,689,380	13.7%
18-24	26,737,766	27,143,454	405,688	1.5%
25-44	80,754,835	85,040,251	4,285,416	5.3%
45-64	46,371,009	61,952,636	15,581,627	33.6%
65+	31,241,831	34,991,753	3,749,922	12.0%
Total	248,709,873	281,421,906	32,712,033	13.2%
Rhode Island				
Age	1990	2000	Numeric Change	Percentage Change
<18	225,690	247,822	22,132	9.8%
18-24	120,358	106,607	-13,751	-11.4%
25-44	321,241	310,636	-10,605	-3.3%
45-64	185,628	230,852	45,224	24.4%
65+	150,547	152,402	1,855	1.2%
Total	1,003,464	1,048,319	44,855	4.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (SF1, DP1)

The median family income in Rhode Island increased 26.9 percent during the decade from 1990 to 2000, from \$41,600 to \$52,781. The percentage of families with incomes less than \$50,000 decreased during the ten year period. Conversely, the percentage of families with incomes over \$50,000 increased substantially, with the largest increase reported for families with incomes between \$75,000 and \$100,000. The percentage of families with incomes over \$100,000 remained relatively constant.

The 2000 decennial census reported that 32.6 percent of the Rhode Island population 25 years old and older possessed a college degree. This represents a significant increase over the 27.6 percent recorded in 1990. There was a corresponding decrease in the percentage of the state's population that had less than a high school education, from 28 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2000.



The changes to population composition and distribution in Rhode Island present both challenges and opportunities in the development and management of recreational resources. Population growth may lead to increased demand for new facilities in rural towns experiencing growth as well as in urban communities, such as Providence, which grew as a result of in-migration between 1990 and 2000. More urban neighborhood facilities, and linkages or transportation services to facilities outside the city, may be required.

The changing age distribution correlates with the strong demand seen for paved walking and biking trails. Needs for beaches, picnic areas, and natural areas and similar passive recreation opportunities may also increase along with the aging of the population. Attention to the layout and design of new development, as well as efforts to improve the walkability of existing neighborhoods is needed to enhance the opportunities for all residents to be physically active as part of their daily routines.

At the same time, facilities such as basketball and volleyball courts, playgrounds, and various types of playing fields will be needed to provide more activities for youth. Changes in ethnic diversity require modification in how we operate facilities (e.g. increase bi-lingual signage and staff) as well how we allocate resources in the recreation grant selection project (e.g. encourage projects that directly benefit minority communities).

2-5 Rhode Island's Outdoor Recreation System

2.10

Sector Roles and Responsibilities

Rhode Island's network of natural places and developed recreational facilities offers a diverse array of outdoor recreational opportunities to its residents and visitors. Given a system that ranges from primitive hiking trails through large undeveloped tracks of land, to exquisitely maintained golf courses, to local ball fields and playgrounds, it is not surprising that a partnership of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private for-profit and non-profit entities are needed in order to maintain the state's outdoor recreation system. Resource conservation and provision of high quality opportunities for the public's understanding and enjoyment of the state's outdoors are the common themes that help unify the disparate missions and singular purposes of the multiple jurisdictions, agencies, and personnel involved in the management of outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space areas in Rhode Island. Only with the proper understanding and integration of the roles and responsibilities of these partners can the state's outdoor recreation system work effectively and efficiently in providing an adequate system of conservation areas, parks, developed facilities, and other recreation opportunities while avoiding both duplication of effort and gaps in the spectrum of recreational facilities and areas.

2-5-1 The Federal Role

Federal agencies have both an operational and supporting role in Rhode Island's outdoor recreation system. The major operational aspect of the federal role consists of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's management of five conservation and wildlife refuges totaling 2,109 acres along the Rhode Island coast. They are the:

- Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge in Middletown
- Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge in South Kingstown
- Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge in Charlestown
- John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge at Pettaquamscutt Cove in Narragansett
- Block Island National Wildlife Refuge in New Shoreham

Additionally, the National Park Service (NPS) operates the 4.5 acre Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence and is the major federal partner in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (BVNHC). Encompassing portions of both Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the BVNHC was created by Congress in 1986 as an "affiliated area" of the National Park System for the purpose of preserving and interpreting the significant contributions to our national heritage of the lands, waterways, and structures. The NPS offers expertise in park management, historic and natural resource preservation, and interpretation and education.

Perhaps even more important than the direct operation of the above mentioned facilities is the critical supporting role that federal agencies provide to Rhode Island's recreation system through substantial funding. Federal agencies involved in outdoor recreation include the National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Federal Highway Administration, and the US Department of Agriculture. Federal funding is made available to both state and local agencies. Additionally, many federal agencies offer technical assistance programs. Table 152-2(4) lists major federal funding programs; funding amounts vary from year to year.

Table 152-2(4) Major Federal Funding Programs Supporting Land Acquisition and Outdoor Recreation Development in RI	
Agency/Program	Purposes
<i>Federal Highway Administration:</i>	
Surface Transportation Program & National Highway System Program	Design and construction of bike paths and trails.
Transportation Enhancements Program	Development and improvement of transportation-related scenic and historic resources.
Recreational Trails Program	Development and improvement of new and existing multi-user trails.
Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program	Bicycle and pedestrian facilities to improve air quality/reduce congestion
<i>US Department of the Interior:</i>	
Land & Water Conservation Fund	Acquisition and development of outdoor recreation lands and facilities.
North American Wetlands Conservation Program	Acquisition of easements or fee title to protect waterfowl habitat.
Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program	Rehabilitation of existing indoor and outdoor recreational facilities in urban areas.
<i>US Fish & Wildlife Service:</i>	
Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration	Enhance, protect, and manage fish and their habitats; restore and improve wildlife habitat.
North American Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants	Conservation of lands, water, and water quality.
<i>US Department of Agriculture:</i>	
Forest Legacy Program	Acquisition of easements or fee title to protect forest resources.
Farmland Protection Program	Acquisition of development rights to agricultural land.

Source: RIDEM 2003

2-5-2 The State Role

The State's overarching responsibility in outdoor recreation is to assure that an adequate system of conservation areas, parks, developed facilities, and other recreation opportunities are available to residents and visitors. This is accomplished through planning, direct operation of facilities, and financial and technical assistance to municipalities.

The State sets overall goals and policies for outdoor recreation, conservation and open space directly through the State Guide Plan and indirectly through the approval of Community Comprehensive Plans. This Plan and the Greenspace and Greenways Plan (both elements of the State Guide Plan) are the primary recreational planning documents for the State but other State Guide Plan elements such as Land Use, Transportation, Rivers Plan, etc. contain policies related to recreation. Additionally, State agencies, notably the Department of Environmental Management produce agency specific plans directly pertaining to outdoor recreation.

The State is a major provider of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The primary operational role for the State is to provide facilities that offer statewide or regional benefits available to all Rhode Island residents or visitors, such as major parks, bikeways, beaches, and management areas. Several State agencies are involved in the development and operation of recreational facilities.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management is the primary State provider and manager of state-owned recreational resources. DEM also provides financial and technical assistance to municipalities and other governmental agencies.

The Department controls twenty-three management areas that encompass approximately 45,000 acres that are predominately forest but include water bodies and open fields. Management areas are multi-purpose, providing fish and wildlife habitat. Additionally, DEM manages approximately 15,000 acres of State parks and beaches, trails, and bike paths. Table 152-2(5) identifies beaches, parks and other major facilities managed by DEM. These facilities attract more than six million visitors each year, including many out-of-state visitors who support Rhode Island's tourism sector – which contributes \$1.7 billion dollars annually to Rhode Island's economy.



**Table 152-2(5)
Major State Facilities Managed by DEM**

Beaches	
Charlestown Breachway – Camp Area	Salty Brine State Beach
East Beach – Camp Area – Barrier Beach Permit	Scarborough North & South Beaches
East Matunuck State Beach	Roger C. Wheeler State Beach
Misquamicut State Beach	
Parks and Other Major Recreational Facilities	
Arcadia Management Area	Fort Wetherill State Park
Beach Pond	George Washington Management Area
Beavertail State Park	Goddard Memorial State Park
Black Hut Management Area	Great Swamp Management Area
Blackstone River Bikeway	Haines Memorial State Park
Brenton Point State Park	Killingly Pond
Buck Hill Management Area	Lincoln Woods State Park
Burlingame State Park	Nicholas Farm
Burlingame State Campground	Pulaski State Park
Carolina Management Area	Sapowet Management Area
Colt State Park	Simmons Pond
Durfee Hill Management Area	Snake Den State Park
East Bay Bike Path	Wickaboxet Management Area
Fisherman’s Memorial State Park & Campground	Woody Hill Management Area
Fort Adam’s State Park	World War II Memorial State Park

Source: RIDEM

2.14

DEM’s Parks and Recreation Division is exclusively devoted to operating and maintaining public recreational facilities. The principal roles of the Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and Forest Environment are as stewards of natural resources, but both also have significant involvement in operating recreational facilities or supporting public recreational activities. The Planning and Development section of DEM operates the land acquisition program that works with various partners to acquire land, development rights to land, and conservation easements. The Division also provides planning, design, and oversight of consultants in the development of recreational facilities. The Strategic Planning and Policy section provides planning and policy documents such as the 2001 Asset Management Plans for forest management areas, parks, and beaches and was DEM’s lead unit in updating this plan.

DEM and Rhode Island Department of Transportation (DOT) have formed a major partnership to advance construction of bikeways. What began in the 1980's as several unconnected bike paths, is now beginning to coalesce into an integrated, statewide system of connecting natural greenways, bike paths and trails, as recommended in the (1994) State Greenspace and Greenways Plan. Today the vision of a statewide greenway network is well underway with more than 37 miles of bikeways and greenways open to the public, and another 31 miles moving towards construction. Table 152-2(6) lists major bike paths and greenways completed or under development in Rhode Island.

DEM, the Department of Transportation, and municipalities share responsibility for state bikeways. DEM and DOT jointly design bike trails; DOT constructs them with FHWA funding. DEM or host municipalities are responsible for operating and maintaining the bikeways.



Table 152-2(6)
Rhode Island's Major Bike Paths & Greenways²

Name	Mileage	Status
East Bay Bike Path	14.5	Open
Blackstone River Bikeway	6.3 11.7	Open Under design
Cranston Bike Path	5.5	Open
Woonasquatucket River Bikeway/Northwest Bike Trail	1,800 ft 3.93	Open Under design
Ten Mile River Bikeway	1.5 2	Open Under design
Warwick/West Warwick Greenway	4	Open
South County Bicycle Path	3.5 2 2	Open Construction underway Under design
Coventry Greenway	2	Three bridges to be redecked and 2 miles to be paved
Trestle Trail	10	Under design
Jamestown Verazzano Bridge Bicycle/Pedestrian Access		Design alternatives complete; working with host towns to select preferred alternative

2.16

In addition to the previously mentioned parks and management areas, the Rhode Island Water Resources Board owns and maintains the 8,600 acre Big River Management Area in the towns of West Greenwich, East Greenwich, Coventry, and Exeter. Largely undeveloped, the land was condemned for water supply purposes, and the Water Resources Board is conducting groundwater investigations and development activities in the area. In 1993, the Rhode Island General Assembly also designated the area as “open space” for use by the residents of Rhode Island until necessary for water supply purposes thus allowing limited recreational usage (hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing, horseback riding) that does not compromise water supply objectives.

While not their primary responsibility, other State agencies have programs that provide or support outdoor recreation. Examples include:

- The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides transportation to many recreational venues, including summer beach bus routes as well as a Rack N' Ride program for cyclists. Most RIPTA buses are equipped with bike racks.

² Information from Department of Transportation website, Bike RI webpages

- The Agricultural Land Preservation Commission purchases the development rights to agricultural land. Preservation of open space, habitat, historic features, and scenic views are all part of the Commission's evaluation criteria.
- The Rhode Island Department of Health promotes the Rhode Island Prevention Coalition's Path to Health program that works with local communities and residents to designate fitness and walking routes
- The State's university and college system has extensive recreational facilities that are available for limited public usage.

Finally, the State has a major role in providing financial assistance to municipalities for the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities. Tables 152-2(7) and 152-2(8) display the amount and sources of State-supported local recreation and open space projects since 1992.



Table 152-2(7)
State Investment in Local Recreation Facilities & Land Acquisition 1992-2002

City/Town	Recreational Facility Grants	Land Protection		Total
		Grants	Loans	
Barrington	\$362,628	\$300,000		\$662,628
Bristol	575,000	935,000		1,510,000
Burrillville	577,628	15,375		593,003
Central Falls	438,743			438,743
Charlestown		530,000		530,000
Coventry	268,019	217,750		485,769
Cranston	315,000	19,125		334,125
Cumberland	432,000	687,764		1,119,764
East Greenwich	150,000	300,000	100,000	550,000
East Providence	567,613	400,000	200,000	1,167,613
Exeter	25,000	126,900		151,900
Glocester	440,213	484,084		924,297
Hopkinton	51,668			51,668
Jamestown	30,000	157,219	173,383	360,602
Johnston	450,000			450,000
Lincoln	76,175	1,056,374		1,132,549
Little Compton		800,000	101,000	901,000
Middletown	198,975	700,000		898,975
Narragansett	60,600	250,000		310,600
New Shoreham	274,000	400,000	150,000	824,000
Newport	500,000	400,000		900,000
North Kingstown	339,006	300,000		639,006
North Providence	439,350			439,350
North Smithfield	384,528			384,528
Pawtucket	1,007,386			1,007,386
Portsmouth	200,000	200,000		400,000
Providence	1,148,925			1,148,925
Richmond			88,500	88,500
Scituate	135,000			135,000
Smithfield	300,000	164,150	96,000	560,150
South Kingstown	870,373	1,577,169	308,000	2,755,542
Tiverton	22,599	865,000		887,599
Warwick	815,100	81,500		896,600
Warren	47,140			47,140
West Greenwich		213,992		213,992
West Warwick	165,000	151,875		316,875
Westerly	1,125,000	615,872		1,740,872
Woonsocket	525,000			525,000
Totals	\$13,317,668	\$11,949,149	\$1,216,883	\$26,483,700

Source: RIDEM 2003

Table 152-2(8) Major State Funding Programs Supporting Land Acquisition and Development of Recreation Facilities	
Program	Purpose
DEM Land Acquisition Program	State open space preservation Local open space preservation
Agricultural Land Preservation Program	Agricultural land protection through purchase of development rights
Greenways Development Program	Regional and local linear open space acquisition and development
Distressed Communities Grants	Park land acquisition and development in urban areas
DEM Fish and Wildlife	Land acquisition and capital improvements, fishing and hunting access, and match for federal Fish and Wildlife funds
Natural Heritage /Open Space	No-interest loans for land acquisition
Rhode Island Water Resources Board - Surcharge for Watershed Protection	Acquisition of land or interests in land that protect surface and ground water.

Source: RIDEM 2003

2-5-3 The Municipal Role

Local governments are responsible for planning and providing facilities and programming that primarily benefit the residents of the sponsoring municipality. Rhode Island law authorizes municipal governments to establish public recreation systems and requires each community to develop a Community Comprehensive Plan (CCP) that includes an open space and recreation element and a natural resources element that are consistent with State plans. Neighborhood parks, playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts, and fields for team sports (e.g. baseball, soccer, football) are typically emphasized at the local level. Many facilities are associated with schools. Several municipalities do possess special facilities of regional or statewide significance; the most notable example of these being Roger Williams Park and Zoo, operated by the City of Providence.

Municipalities manage over 13,000 acres of recreational facilities with nearly 2,000 parks and beaches. They have also joined with local partners to protect more than 30,000 acres of open space, ranging from extensive water supply watersheds to small neighborhood conservation areas. Local recreation facilities include mostly multi-purpose parks, playgrounds, community centers, and sports fields and courts. Municipalities also offer a wide variety of recreational programming from team sports, individual sports, summer recreation programs and camps for youth, instructional classes, concerts and cultural events, and special programs for seniors or people with disabilities.

While the major sources of funding for constructing municipal outdoor facilities come from state and local bonds and the National Park Service’s Land and Water Conservation Fund, local taxes provide the funds to operate and maintain local facilities.

2-5-4 Private For-Profit Role

Although the 2003 SCORP does not include data on private facilities, it is important to note the private sector plays a significant role in outdoor recreation in Rhode Island, providing facilities such as golf courses, marinas, beaches, campgrounds, and many types of tourist attractions. The distinction between private and public facilities can never be clear-cut; both the public and private sectors offer many of the same types of facilities. There is an important distinction nonetheless. The private sector can offer recreational facilities that are more specialized, are of more limited interest, or offer additional amenities than can be justified by the public sector. The private sector can simply be more flexible in providing recreational facilities since it is not limited in imposing fees or restricting membership.

Table 152-2(9) Percent of Municipally-Owned Facilities Operated by Schools	
Type of Facility	% Operated by Schools
Football Fields	68%
Running Tracks	58%
Multi-Use Fields	52%
Tennis Courts	45%
Outdoor Basketball Courts	37%
Soccer Fields	35%
Baseball Fields	34%
Playgrounds	34%
Softball Fields	23%
Schools often work with municipal recreation departments to provide recreational programs. In many cases, a school will provide the facility, and the parks and recreation department provides the staffing and administration of a program or vice versa.	
Source: RIDEM 2001	

2.20

To the extent that private and public facilities do overlap, there are still benefits to both. Private providers have the opportunity to make a profit. Without this additional supply, the public sector, both State and municipal, would face the potential of either overcrowding or finding additional supplies.

The private sector also provides services and/or facilities at State parks on a short-term or seasonal basis. This includes operation of concession stands, providing sailboat lessons and rentals, and offering special events such as the Jazz Festival at Fort Adams State Park.

2-5-5 Non-Profit Organizations Role

Rhode Island has a vibrant non-profit sector that includes environmental organizations, land trusts, youth organizations, and historical societies, and philanthropic foundations that provide programs, facilities, and/or resources connected to outdoor recreation. The role of each organization is guided by their individual missions but, collectively, the non-profit sector provides significant additional land, facilities, resources, and programs that serve to supplement the public sector’s commitment to outdoor recreation and conservation. Non-profit organizations frequently have the expertise to advise government decision-makers and promote public participation and support.

Private non-profit organizations and local land trusts are playing an increasingly important role as partners in recreation and land protection. Rhode Island's land trusts have blossomed in the last ten years from fifteen to forty-three. Notable partners include The Nature Conservancy Rhode Island Field Office (TNC), which has provided support to local land trusts and works closely with DEM on land preservation, and The Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI), which owns or protects over 9,000 acres of property in and around the state. Many Nature Conservancy and Audubon properties are open to the public for hiking and observing nature. Through refuge acquisition and maintenance, ASRI and TNC play an important role in the preservation of diverse habitats. Non-profit organizations have also played a pivotal role in open space and recreation by advocating for state bond funding, laws, and regulations.