



## Where Do I Begin?

### *A Forest is More Than a Bunch of Trees*

**T**rees take a long time to grow, so your decisions today will have long-term impacts on the forest and water resources in the future.

This guide will help you make plans for your woodland acreage and provide steps you can take to get there. Many things including your family situation, income needs, and philosophy about land ownership and the environment will influence your decisions. You also have to consider your resources, skills, time and applicable regulations in your location. Then you can begin to create a flexible plan to reach your property goals while protecting water resources and the environment.

Having clear, realistic goals and objectives are critical for your woodland plans and activities to be rewarding and achievable. You must first identify your goals and objectives—your wishes and plans, along with your resources—your property characteristics and your available time, labor capabilities, and finan-

cial situation. Through informed decision-making, you can then develop a record of plans and activities. Ideally, this record includes a proposed timeline with a list of steps that you plan to take. As you complete the steps, or make changes, your plan should reflect this.

You may develop your plans with the assistance of a consulting forester or other natural resource professional, or you may do this yourself. Regardless of who prepares your woodland plans, several key points apply:

- No plan is set in stone and can be modified at any time. The plan you develop is an operating plan that is based on current conditions and facts, which will help you in meeting your objectives.
- Plans are unique to each woodland owner.
- Plans should be reviewed and updated at least every 10 years, or as conditions change, or as your objectives change.



#### Determine your starting point

Here is a list of questions to help you begin to identify your woodland goals and develop an activity plan.

1. Are you concerned about the overall health of your woodlands and the surrounding environment—how your woodlands are affected by storms, insects & disease, invasive species, how their natural characteristics can be used to conserve energy, and how your woodlands can contribute to clean water and air?
2. Do you wish to create a suitable habitat for wildlife?
3. Will you or others use the woodlands for recreation?
4. Is the beauty of your woodlands important to you—certain types and placement of tree & plant species?
5. Do you want to produce wood products or alternative forest products to generate extra income or to heat your home?
6. Are you interested in working on group projects with your neighbors that incorporate larger scale, landscape-wide environmental and cost-effective benefits?

Based on your answers to the questions above, take some time to rank, in the next column, your preferences in order of importance. A couple of these items may be of equal importance to you, but otherwise, rate them using 1 as most important and 9 as least important.

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| _____ | <i>Water Resource Protection</i>                                       |
| _____ | <i>Forest Resources &amp; Health</i>                                   |
| _____ | <i>Protection from invasive species &amp; the loss of biodiversity</i> |
| _____ | <i>Wildlife Habitat</i>  |
| _____ | <i>Recreation</i>  |
| _____ | <i>Aesthetics</i>  |
| _____ | <i>Wood &amp; other Forest Products</i>                                |
| _____ | <i>Group projects--reconnecting forest fragments</i>                   |
| _____ | <i>Other _____</i>   |

You can use this ranking to help make choices that balance your desires for your woodlands and that will help you set goals and develop a project action plan. For example, wanting income through wood production need not be in conflict with environmental concerns. By developing a flexible plan, it is possible to compatibly link choices such as wildlife habitat and recreational use with the production of wood products. The following series of factsheets will help you develop goals for your woodlands and an action plan to help you reach those goals.

## Getting to know your woods

A forest is more than a bunch of trees, and it is important to become familiar with your woods to:

- Identify where your property boundaries are located.
- Begin understanding the land features and characteristics.
- Identify which trees and plants exist.
- Identify what soil and water resources exist.
- Understand how your land and woodlands fit in to the overall lay of the larger landscape.

Depending on your time, resources, and what you would like to accomplish, getting to know your woods may be a gradual, rewarding process for you and your family and friends. Others may wish to get busy developing and implementing woodland plans and projects. Some may wish to enlist the help of a consulting forester, licensed wood operator, and other natural resource professionals. You can also broaden your current frame of reference or knowledge by visiting other tree farms and neighbors, joining a group such as the Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization or the Rhode Island Tree Council, and attending workshops and other programs.

It is always helpful and suggested that you view your property using maps such as aerial photomaps (or orthophotos) and USGS Topographical maps to obtain a broader sense of how your land fits into the larger landscape. Where is your property located in relation to significant ground and surface water resources, managed forestlands, agricultural lands, cultural resources, public lands, preservation or wildlife refuge lands, etc? The Rhode Island Critical Resources Atlas Map and Rhode Island Orthophotos are available on-line at [www.edc.uri.edu](http://www.edc.uri.edu). You can also contact the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI DEM) Division of Forest Environment at (401) 647-3367 for assistance with using these maps. A factsheet on site assessment, which includes discussion on the use of various maps, is also available through the RI DEM Sustainable Watersheds Office – Alternative Forest Businesses Opportunities Project, (401) 222-3434.

## Now that you have some priorities and preferences in mind, take a walk through your woods

As you begin to consider future plans for your woodlands, we recommend you begin the process by simply walking through your woods. Consider the benefits the woods provide you and how important these benefits are to you. Keep in mind your preference ranking as you walk. **And remember, it is very important that you identify your property boundaries.**

Use the *Woodland Area Inventory Sheet* included in this package to help you take notes and summarize what you find. There is also a record sheet to list goals and start developing project action plans.

Consider the following questions. If you are walking with a family member, you may want to discuss these.

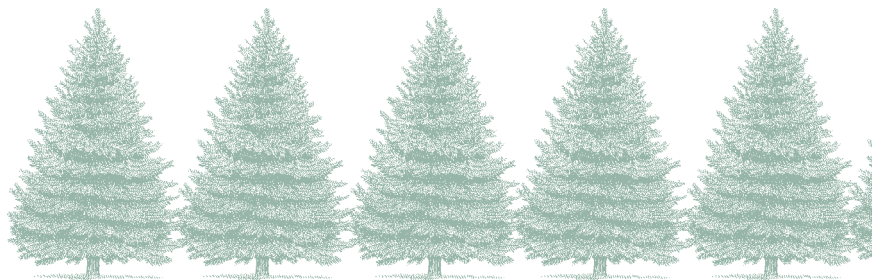
- Is there a stream, spring, pond, or wetland?
- Are there trees or other vegetation along the edges of the surface water?
- Where do you hear wildlife?
- Where do you see wildlife?
- Where does sun shine through the canopy? What causes these gaps in the canopy? Is it tree dieback or blow downs?
- Where are there shady areas? What types of trees are here?
- Are the trees big or small? Where are big trees located? Where are small trees located?
- Are trees far apart or close together?
- Are there historical resources on the site, such as stone walls, cemeteries, or cellar holes?

## TELL ME MORE ABOUT

*Most landowners with property under 10 acres will not hire a consulting forester for the development of a forest management plan. Forested properties under 10 acres also do not qualify for certain programs such as the Rhode Island Tree Farm Program and the upcoming Forestland Enhancement Program, a USDA incentive program.*

*A small acreage landowner may, however, be able to hire a consulting forester, arborist, or landscape professional on an hourly basis to do a short "walk through" of the property to provide advice and ideas towards reaching desired goals. It is always best to have a list of objectives and questions ready for this visit.*

*The first point of contact for a landowner should be a Public Service Forester, an employee of Rhode Island's state forestry agency, who can provide basic tips and information for no fee. A public service forester can provide information about forestry programs and laws and a list of consulting foresters and licensed wood operators. For more information contact RI DEM Division of Forest Environment at (401) 647-3367.*





## WHOM I CAN CALL

*When selecting a consulting forester, it is recommended that you consider the following: can they provide you with references (other satisfied landowners); what are their credentials (experience, education, professional associations); and do they work independently (or in a small privately owned consulting firm) or for a sawmill or other wood-using industry? As is recommended with many service providers such as automobile mechanics or building contractors, it is always a good idea to interview at least three consultants before making a final selection.*

## Additional activities

The following are additional things you can do to learn more about your woodlands and the important role that Rhode Island forests serve towards protecting and sustaining our environment.

- Visit a Certified Tree Farm or attend a Tree Farm tour (American Tree Farm System).
- Participate in the RI Tree Council Tree Stewards Training Program.
- Join an organization such as the Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, The Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc., The Audubon Society of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy, or other environmental or conservation organization.
- Learn about and participate in community decision-making by serving as a board member to a local land trust or conservation commission.
- Review on-line learning programs such as Lincoln Educational Online **Introduction to New England Forests**; [www.lincolneducationonline.org/index.cfm](http://www.lincolneducationonline.org/index.cfm) or USDA Forest Service downloadable software including **The Forest Stewardship Planning Guide**; [www.fs.fed.us/ne/burlington/ned/product.htm#FSPG](http://www.fs.fed.us/ne/burlington/ned/product.htm#FSPG)

## Where Do I Turn for More Information and Help?

### RI DEM Division of Forest Environment

- (401) 647-3367 • [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov)
- Talk with a state service forester.
- Obtain a list of consulting foresters and licensed wood operators; *Best Management Practices for Rhode Island: Water Quality Protection and Forest Management Guidelines*.
- Information on Rhode Island's Forest Legacy Program; forest conservation, management & stewardship.

### RI DEM Sustainable Watersheds Office

- (401) 222-3434 • [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov)
- Factsheets on Site Assessment and Alternative Forest Products.

## Rhode Island Forest Conservators

### Organization (RIFCO)

- (401) 568-3421 • [www.rifco.org](http://www.rifco.org)
- Educational programs and events, newsletter, Rhode Island Tree Farm Program, links to numerous publications and local, state, and federal forestry agencies and organizations.

## Rhode Island Tree Council

- (401) 647-9922
- *Tree Stewards Training Program*—education series on tree planting and care; urban and community forestry

## USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

- (401) 828-1300 • [www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov)
- Obtain the *Soil Survey Map of Rhode Island* and assistance with the identification of and information about the soils on your property; technical assistance with conservation planning and practices; and local conservation district contacts.

## URI College of Environment and Life Sciences, Department of Natural Resources Science

- Rhode Island Critical Resources Atlas Map and Rhode Island Orthophotos, available on-line at [www.edc.uri.edu](http://www.edc.uri.edu)

## Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc. (SNEFCI)

- (401) 568-1610
- [www.snefci.org](http://www.snefci.org)
- Information and publications on forest resource potential and stewardship, sustainable forestry, forest legacy, tax and estate planning, forest fragmentation.

## The Audubon Society of Rhode Island

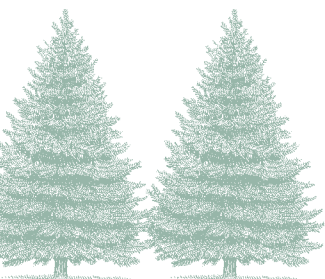
- (401) 949-5454 • [www.asri.org](http://www.asri.org)
- Information, publications and programs about birds and other wildlife, environmental conservation, education and advocacy.

## The Nature Conservancy, Rhode Island Chapter

- (401) 331-7110
- <http://nature.org>
- <http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/rhodeisland>
- Information and programs on the preservation and protection of land & wildlife.

## Your local Land Trust; Your local Town/City Officials

- For information on local tax and land protection programs.



## FORESTS HAVE A STORY TO TELL.

*Did you know that a walk through the woods could reveal signs of Rhode Island's turbulent forest-land past? The American Chestnut, once one of the state's fastest growing and most utilized trees, was completely wiped out by blight in the years from 1910 to 1930. Dutch elm disease, which began around the same time, eliminated all but a few of the state's elm trees. In 1930, 1942 and, again in 1951, major forest fires swept through western RI, burning tens of thousands of acres of timber. The hurricanes of 1938 and 1954 caused large timber blow downs. Every few years, major ice storms have damaged timber throughout the state. Periodic infestations of gypsy moth caterpillars have caused epidemics of defoliation. (RI Office of State Planning and Division of Forest Environment.) Since the mid 1980's, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid has been killing off large areas of hemlock trees.*

### USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry

[www.na.fs.fed.us](http://www.na.fs.fed.us)

Links to Durham, NH Field Office

(603) 868-7600

[www.fs.fed.us/na/durham](http://www.fs.fed.us/na/durham)

- Information, factsheets and publications on: forest health and monitoring, stewardship, fire management, conservation education and sustainability, urban and community forestry, watershed program, on-line library.

### Cornell Cooperative Extension, Department of Natural Resources

(607) 255-2115

[www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/ext/index.htm](http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/ext/index.htm)

publications:

[www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/ext/publications.htm](http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/ext/publications.htm)

### Lincoln Education On-line

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

(617) 661-3016

[www.lincolneducationonline.org](http://www.lincolneducationonline.org)

*Introduction to New England Forests* explores the fundamentals of forest processes and active, private stewardship. It is designed for owners of small woodland properties such as land trusts, local governments, and private landowners.

### NED

[www.fs.fed.us/ne/burlington/ned](http://www.fs.fed.us/ne/burlington/ned)

NED is a collection of software products being developed by the USDA Forest Service. The NED software is intended to aid resource managers, develop goals, assess current and future conditions, and produce sustainable management plans for forest properties. *Forest Stewardship Planning Guide* downloadable software available

### A Forest Landowner's Guide to Internet

Resources: States of the Northeast

[www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ir/index.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ir/index.htm)

- Publications and factsheets for: Recreation; Wildlife/Hunting; Income Tax and Estate Planning; Economics of Forest Investments; Tree Identification/Species Info; Forest Health and Protection; Tree Planting/Regeneration; Forest Management Planning; Sustainability and Certification; Silviculture; Forest Sampling and Inventory; Forest Harvesting Operations; Timber Sales; and Special Forest Products.

### References:

Rhode Island Office of State Planning and the Division of Forest Environment. April 1984. Rhode Island Forest Resources Management Plan. State Guide Plan Element 161. Report Number 45.



*Programs and activities are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or national origin.*

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# American Chestnut