



### CLEAN, PLENTIFUL WATER IS A FOREST PRODUCT

*Over 75% of Rhode Islanders get their drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests.*

#### ACCORDING TO A 1999 STUDY PREPARED FOR GROW SMART RHODE ISLAND:

*Between 1961 and 1995, Rhode Island developed far more land (96,000 acres) for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes than in the previous 325 years. During this time period, consumption for land grew 9 times faster than population growth. Between 1988 and 1995, Rhode Island developed about 11,500 acres of farmland and forestland, an area the size of Providence. The report projects that as much as 3,100 acres of farmland and 24,000 acres of forestland will be consumed by 2020 if this current trend continues.*

## A Well-Kept Forest is a Legacy

**N**o other forested region in the nation has as rich an historical heritage as the woodlands of southern New England.

They have undergone continual change, shaped by humans and nature in successive waves of use, abandonment and natural recovery, making it one of the greatest meeting places of people and forest in the world. For hundreds of years, these lands have provided jobs, wood products, recreational opportunities, clean water, and a place for wildlife. Southern New England is a unique region, with both a high population density and a high percentage of forestland. If the rest of the United States were as densely populated as the southern New England states, our nation would have ten times its current population. Likewise, if the rest of the nation had as much forestland as this region, we would have well over a billion acres of forest—2.5 times the current U.S. acreage of 500 million acres.

Whether you own your woodlands to produce income from wood or other forest products such as mushrooms, maple syrup or high quality furniture wood; provide habitat for wildlife; shelter rare native plants; or provide recreational opportunities for hiking, camping, or cross country skiing; your activities can go hand-in-hand with sustaining the environment and protecting valuable water resources.

Forests purify ground and surface waters. In fact, forests serve as a primary way of protecting and managing public drinking water supplies. Forested buffers protect streams and ponds by filtering sediments and some nutrients that can degrade water quality and aquatic habitats. Forests are crucial in sustaining the natural balance of the water cycle and protecting watersheds. Forests serve to protect us from frequent flooding and replenish groundwater resources. This is because the majority of rain and snowmelt soak into the forest canopy and floor rather than quickly draining to the nearest surface water body.

#### In addition to protecting our water resources, healthy forests

- Provide clean air
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Provide privacy & peace
- Provide recreation & natural beauty
- Provide valuable products
- Provide income & employment
- Increase property values
- Keep municipal taxes low
- Conserve energy
- Reduce noise pollution

#### Rhode Island Forests... Past, Present and Future

**At present**, about 60% of Rhode Island is forested. Does this surprise you? About 80% (303,000 acres) of the state's forests are privately owned. What is most significant, however, is the change in ownership trends. There are roughly 32,000 private woodland owners in Rhode Island and of these, approximately 80% (over 26,000 people) own parcels of less than 10 acres.

This trend is not unique to our small, densely populated state. Nationwide, there are 150,000 new forest owners each year acquiring between 1 and 10 acre parcels. These woodland owners are obtaining some of the nations most productive forestland and, cumulatively, they can have a significant impact on the quality and health of these forests. Likewise, Rhode Island woodland owners can have a significant impact on the Rhode Island landscape. Looking at our forest as both inherently valuable and as a source of renewable resources should provoke questions of great interest to any forest owner such as:

- How did the forest come to be?
- How does a forest function ecologically?
- What kinds of human interaction with the forest are most appropriate and beneficial?
- How can we conserve our forests and keep them healthy?

**THE PAST:**

*At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a few thoughtful people began to become concerned about the loss of valuable forest. In 1820, the prominent Rhode Island textile manufacturer, Zachariah Allen, began what is believed to be the first scientific and carefully recorded silvicultural experiments in the US. He demonstrated his theory that "vacant land may profitably be improved by planting to trees," by planting oaks and chestnuts on 40 acres of barren land in Smithfield, RI and maintaining extensive records of his expenses and profits for the next 57 years. The site is now part of Lincoln Woods State Park. (Society of American Foresters.)*

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Ireland, Lloyd. 1999. *The Northeast's Changing Forest*. Harvard University Press. 416p.

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Wessels, T. 1997 *Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England*. The Countryman Press. 200p.

**REFERENCES:**

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. 1960. *Rhode Island Forest Facts: 1959-1960 Edition*.

Society of American Foresters. 1992. "Dedication of the Zachariah Allen Pioneer Silvicultural Plot Information Sign."

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**What about the past?**

Forests are dynamic ecosystems that are formed by natural processes and site conditions. Rhode Island, along with most of the Northeast, would naturally revert to forestland if left untouched by human hands. In fact, the area that is now Rhode Island was probably more than 95 percent forested (RI DEM) upon the arrival of the first European settlers in the early 1600's. Early European settlers then proceeded to clear about two thirds of the state's forests for agriculture and wood products. The first state forest survey, in 1767, recorded about 31% land area in forest. The state has since "reverted" back to about 60% forestland, as is the case with all of southern New England. And in doing so, both humans and natural forces have had a part in shaping the forests you see today.

**The future awaits...**

Despite being about 60% forested, southern New England imports about 90% of its forest products. However, if the state's current acreage of classified timberland were properly managed, Rhode Island could increase both the annual net growth of trees and production of wood products several times over (USDA Forest Service).

All activities taking place in a forest—even local fire management decisions, can affect the trees and wildlife, as well as the water, air, and soil that supports them. The greatest threat to today's forest, however, is from conversion to non-forest uses. Having peaked at 64% in the early 1950's, Rhode Island's forest cover has been slowly decreasing due to development pressures.

**It is crucial that today's Rhode Island woodland owners gain awareness about the values of this prized resource and have the tools and educational materials available to make informed decisions that protect and enhance these lands.**

**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

**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.

**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

**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.

**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.

**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.

*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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