

Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative
Management Plan Protocol, Version 1



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Project Goal:

To develop a standard protocol for management plan development on protected land in Rhode Island.

Project Description:

There is currently no uniform protocol for preparing management plans on conservation land in Rhode Island. The purpose of this project, undertaken by the Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative, was to:

- Build upon the RICSC's successful development of a Baseline Documentation Protocol by developing guidance for creating Management Plans;
- Provide a basic understanding of the importance of developing Management Plans on conserved lands and a clear explanation of how they differ from Baseline Documentation Reports;
- Develop a protocol outlining the information that should be included in a Management Plan for it to be comprehensive and effective;
- Share model documents for representative properties in the state.

Each property, and each conservation group, is unique. This protocol seeks to provide information as simply and accessibly as possible, while still maintaining standards that provide a sound foundation for future stewardship to ensure that our conservation efforts today truly can be maintained and enforced in perpetuity.

This document is provided as guidance for conservation groups in Rhode Island. It conveys no regulatory authority. While we have made an effort to provide recommendations that reflect best management practices, land trusts seeking national accreditation should refer to guidelines provided by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission (<http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/>).

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Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. Ensuring appropriate stewardship for conservation lands is critical if properties are to truly be protected in perpetuity. A Management Plan is a tool that land trusts can use to establish management priorities/goals, guide and track their stewardship for a particular property over time.

Management Plans (MPs) and Baseline Documentation Reports (BDRs) are not the same, but are related, or may in some cases be merged into a single document. For the purposes of this guidance document, we recommend that your stewardship efforts begin with the creation of a BDR for each and every property (Trocki & Ruhren 2014). A BDR documents all of the conservation values and facts inherent to each piece of conservation property (including why it was acquired/protected) and is a static document that doesn't change over time (even though the property may).

Management Plans are useful when a land trust or conservation organization has an interest in the specific, regular management and use of the property and/or primary responsibility for its stewardship. This is most likely to be true for properties owned in fee. However, some Conservation Easements may also reference a mutually agreed upon MP (often as an exhibit) that outlines management activities, and is adhered to by the landowner and enforced by the conservation easement holder.

While the purpose of a BDR is to document conservation values, a Management Plan's purpose is to provide guidance for all of the stewardship activities that help maintain and protect those conservation values. MPs identify threats to the integrity of the existing conservation values (as documented in the BDR) and describe specific management goals to address these threats. In addition, the MP is a place for a conservation organization to identify its goals and intentions for the future use of a specific property, and even catalog potential future opportunities that are more aspirational in nature.

Conservation land management planning is an on-going process! Unlike a BDR, which does not change, a MP may very well change over time. Where a BDR is mostly a statement of facts, drafting a MP requires your Board (or other responsible party) to focus on developing organizational policy and on technical decision-making to implement your specific goals for each property. A MP is a dynamic document that reflects your organizational priorities and values, and therefore requires periodic review to stay current and relevant.

Before beginning the Management Planning process, it is critical that your organization identify the key decision makers that need to be involved. It could be your Board, specific Staff members, or a Stewardship Committee that makes critical decisions. Information needed to inform your decision-making (as described in detail below) may be gathered by qualified volunteers, trained staff, or with the support of a consulting conservation biologist. These individuals can provide insight and professional recommendations about relevant legal restrictions, ecological threats, and best management practices, but ultimately it is the responsibility of the organization's key decision makers to decide on the best use of the

property and the appropriate allocation of the land trust's limited resources (time and funds) for stewardship activities.

In addition to identifying/documenting the potential threats, reasonable responses, and establishing desired goals for each property, a Management Plan is a place for cataloging future opportunities. While your land trust may not currently have the resources to pursue one or more of the desired goals, a MP can serve as a place to store these ideas as potential opportunities for the future when the land trust's capacity – the right combination of resources and individuals - aligns.

The language used in crafting a Management Plan can be key to determining its usefulness and applicability. Consider the differing tone of words such as 'should,' 'will,' 'may,' or 'may in the future, if resources become available.' Your MP does not need to be limited or restrictive in nature. The use of aspirational language can inspire future readers to dig in to a project they otherwise might not have considered. However, it is important that the document clearly differentiate between those activities you might like to pursue, and those to which you are clearly committing.

For example, you might see the following language all used within one MP.

The organization **will** conduct annual monitoring visits to the property.

Efforts **should** be made to prevent further spread of invasive species into the wetland area by removing Multiflora Rose along the stream corridor, wherever possible.

Any activities planned on the property, including invasive species management, **will** adhere to the requirements of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Rules and Regulations Governing the Administration and Enforcement of the Freshwater Wetlands Act.

Study of the natural and ecological features of the property **should** be encouraged. A more complete inventory of breeding and migrating birds, mammals, amphibians, and stream quality **may** be desirable in the future.

The organization **may wish to consider** clearing vegetation and debris from the historic stone wall along the property's northern boundary.

Supplementing your MP with a bulleted Action Plan, a Timeline, and a Budget can help you translate those items to which you are committing into a reasonable schedule with the appropriate allocation of necessary resources for your organization.

The following outline reflects issues that should be considered in your Management Plan. Parts 1 and 2 describe the property being managed, while parts 3-8 represent various management topics that may be appropriate for consideration, depending on the particular characteristics, conservation values, and management goals for that property. The list of management issues is, by design, long and inclusive, and should be considered as a menu of issues to review. Not every topic will apply to every property.

Examples of management plans for two properties have been developed following these guidelines. They can be found in the Resource Library on the Land & Water Partnership web site www.landandwaterpartnership.org.

- 1. Site Overview** (Some pieces may already be covered in the associated BDR, if not they should be included within your MP)
 - Orienting - ownership, location, plat/lot, acreage, access and parking information
 - Existing Deed or Conservation Restrictions
 - Inventory of Conservation Values (see BDR protocol, Trocki & Ruhren 2014)
 - Boundary documentation (including boundary photography)
 - Management Responsibility - who?
 - Management Plan Review – who and when?
 - Monitoring and Management History – what has happened so far?
 - Plans for annual monitoring

- 2. Restrictions, Terms, Permissible Uses** - Identify overarching limitations on Management Planning
 - Existing property-specific deed or conservation restrictions
 - Federal or State Regulations – Freshwater or Coastal Wetlands?
 - Do wetlands potentially limit the use of the property for public access, recreational, or agricultural use?
 - Local Ordinances – Zoning restrictions, local wetland requirements
 - Is there any local recognition of the resources on the property (historic cemeteries, stone walls, sensitive habitats) that should be considered in management planning? Are there local wetlands restrictions that potentially limit the use of the property for public access, recreational, or agricultural use?
 - Restrictions tied to funding

- 3. Ecological Conservation and Habitat Management**
 - Rare Species and Species of Conservation Concern
 - Harvested Game Species
 - Invasive Species
 - Management of Overabundant Wildlife – deer, urban geese
 - Tick / Mosquito Management

- Habitat Management to maintain natural community type and/or for Species of Interest

4. Agricultural & Forest Resource Management

- Farming and/or Mowing Practices – permitted uses?
- Agricultural Infrastructure
- Forest Management / Harvest?
- Herbicide & Pesticide Use

5. Water Resource Management

- Freshwater & Coastal Wetlands
- Water Quality
- Watershed Protection
- Drinking Water Supply
- Stormwater Runoff, Erosion, Sedimentation
- River/Stream Restoration (e.g., dam removal)
- River/Stream/Shoreline and Buffer Management or Restoration

6. Scenic, Cultural, and Educational Resources Management

- Scenic Quality and Viewsheds
- Cultural Restoration / Maintenance
- Management or Protection of Historic Sites
- Opportunities for Education? (informal or structured)

7. Public Access & Recreation – Permissible Uses: Active? Passive? User Conflicts? Safety Considerations?

- Hiking/x-country skiing – trail development and maintenance
- Hunting – size, feasibility, permission, safety, tracking use and harvest
- Fishing – water access?
- Horses – seasonal or spatial restrictions?
- Dogs – leash requirements?
- Mountain Bikes / ATVs – access appropriate? Erosion or habitat degradation concerns? Seasonal or spatial restrictions?
- Infrastructure – parking, signage, structures / kiosks

8. Existing Infrastructure Maintenance

- Boundary Marking
- Dams and Bridges
- Roadways and Parking Lots
- Trails and Signage Structures – buildings, kiosks, blazing protocol

Once threats, goals, and appropriate management actions have been thoroughly described, it may be helpful to summarize next steps with an **Action Plan**, a **Timeline**, priorities established and a realistic **Budget** specific to your organization. Associated **Maps** and **Representative Photos** describing habitat types or specific management areas may be particularly helpful in making your MP clear and useable.

Useful Online Resources for Additional Information

Examples of Management Plans for Land Trust Properties:

Pelloni Diamond Hill Property, Hopkinton

http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/documents/Pelloni_BDR_Final.pdf

Noyes Neck Farm, Westerly

http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/documents/Noyes_Neck_BDR-MP_Final.pdf

General Resources

Rhode Island Land and Water Partnership – Online Library, Land Stewardship Resources

<http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/library.php>

Rhode Island Digital Atlas

<http://www.edc.uri.edu/atlas>

RIDEM Environmental Resources Maps

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/maps/>

Rhode Island Conservation Stewardship Collaborative: Maps to Support the Work of RI Land Trusts

<http://bit.ly/1m8pEdW>

Vision Appraisal

<http://www.vgsi.com/vision/Applications/ParcelData/RI/Home.aspx>

RIGIS Historic Aerial Photos

<http://www.edc.uri.edu/rigis/data/imageryBaseMapsEarthCover.html>

Refer to town websites for town specific information such as zoning, wetland ordinances, and plat maps. Some towns have interactive mapping.

Wetlands Restrictions, Special Area Management Plans, State Regulations

Coastal Resources Management Council

<http://www.crmc.state.ri.us>

RIDEM Freshwater Wetlands

<http://www.dem.state.ri.us/programs/benviron/water/permits/fresh/index.htm>

Ecological Conservation & Habitat Management

Federally Threatened and Endangered Species

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>

Rare Native Animals of Rhode Island

http://www.rinhs.org/wp-content/uploads/ri_rare_animals_2006.pdf

Rare Native Plants of Rhode Island

http://www.rinhs.org/wp-content/uploads/ri_rare_plants_2007.pdf

Rhode Island Natural Communities Classification

<http://www.rinhs.org/wp-content/uploads/ricommclass.pdf>

Photo Atlas for the RI Natural Communities Classification

<http://www.edc.uri.edu/rieccatlas/>

Rhode Island Wildlife Conservation Strategy – Species of Greatest Conservation Need

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/swgindex.htm>

USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern

<https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/CurrentBirdIssues/Management/BCC.html>

Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

<http://www.eddmaps.org/ipane/>

The Nature Conservancy Invasive Species Plant Summaries

<http://www.imapinvasives.org/GIST/ESA/index.html>

Rhode Island Natural History Survey Invasive Species Information

<http://rinhs.org/invasive-species-portal/invasive-species-lists/>

Impacts of White-tailed Deer Overabundance in Forest Ecosystems

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/special_interests/white_tailed_deer.pdf

RIDEM Wildlife Management and Hunter Education

<http://www.dem.state.ri.us/topics/wltopics.htm>

Tick Identification and Life Cycle Information

http://www.tickcounter.org/tick_identification

Agricultural Resource Management

Rhode Island Land Trust Council Farm Conservation Resources

<http://www.rilandtrusts.org/agriculture.htm>

RIDEM Division of Agriculture

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/index.htm>

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rhode Island
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/ri/home>

Northern Rhode Island Conservation District
<http://www.nricd.org/>

Southern Rhode Island Conservation District
<http://sricd.org/>

Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District
<http://www.easternriconservation.org/>

Water Resource Management

RIDEM Office of Water Resources
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/>

RIDOH Office of Drinking Water Quality
<http://www.health.ri.gov/programs/drinkingwaterquality/>

RIDEM Groundwater Protection Program
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/quality/prot/index.htm>

RIDEM Integrated Water Quality Monitoring & Assessment Report
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/305b/index.htm>

RIDEM Freshwater Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/quality/surfwq/lakeindx.htm>

URI Watershed Watch
<http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq/ww/index.htm>

RIDEM Surface Water Quality
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/quality/surfwq/index.htm>

Scenic, Cultural and Educational Resource Management

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
<http://www.preservation.ri.gov/>

Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
<http://rieaa.org/>

Public Access and Recreation

See RI Land and Water Partnership Resource Library for information on trails, signage, etc.

<http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/library.php>

Public Rights-of-Way and Public Access to the Coast

<http://www.crmc.ri.gov/publicaccess.html>

Infrastructure Maintenance

Dam Safety

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/compinsp/dams.htm>

Stormwater Management

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/permits/ripdes/stwater/>

Signage

http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org/documents/RI_Signage_guide.pdf