



Environment Council of Rhode Island 2011 Legislative Agenda

The Environment Council of Rhode Island is a coalition of over 60 Rhode Island organizations as well as individuals whose mission is to serve as an effective voice for developing and advocating policies and laws that protect and enhance the environment.

Join us for Earth Day at the State House Wednesday, April 27th 2:00pm

Featuring Watershed Counts – A Report on the Narragansett Bay Watershed
Followed by the Presentation of ECRI's Legislative Agenda with Governor Chafee,
Senator Sue Sosnowski, and Representative Art Handy

Transportation:

1. **Transportation Investment and Debt Reduction Act. Sponsors-DiPalma(S148), O'Grady(H5789)** Establishes a dedicated trust fund to provide for investments in road and bridge repair and transit services while simultaneously reducing the amount of state borrowing needs. Scheduled for hearing in the senate 4/7.
2. Complete Streets. Sponsors- Martin(H5886), Paiva Weed. Requires that the Director of DOT incorporate complete streets planning into all state road construction projects. Hearing held in house 3/31.
3. Complete Streets Council. Sponsors- Pichardo(S551), Hearn(H5821) Establishes an eleven member council to coordinate the implementation of complete streets policy among state agencies and between the state and local governments. Committee hearing for H5821 held on 3/31, S551 hearing scheduled on 4/14.

Water:

1. Onsite Wastewater Treatment Improvements. Sponsor- Walsh(H5801) Under this bill, substandard septic systems would be brought up to state standards or tied into local sewer systems within one year of the sale of a property. Scheduled for hearing on 4/7.
2. Dam inspection legislation. Sponsor- Ferri(H 5582). Unneeded dams pose a potential threat to public safety and their removal can also restore habitat. This bill is aimed at insuring that owners and the state are aware of the condition of their dams and the option of removal. The bill requires three things: 1) regular inspections by owners of high and significant hazard dams starting in 2014, 2) inspection reports which include the option of removal in the case of unsafe dams, and 3) recording of any outstanding orders or notice from DEM regarding unsafe dams in local land records of the city or town in which the dam is located.
3. Clean Water Finance Agency (CWFA) Funding for Dam Removal. Sponsors- Walsh(H5583), Sosnowski(S447). This bill would allow a municipality to work with the Clean Water Finance Agency to access lower cost loans for financing a dam removal project as well as a maintenance project. Heard on 3/24.

Waste:

1. **Producer Responsibility Bill. Sponsors- Walsh(H5888), Ruggerio(S459).** Establishes a framework for manufacturers to be responsible for collecting and recycling their products providing an incentive to design products that are less toxic, more durable, and easier to recycle

to be pre-populated with requirements for mattress and paint manufacturers. H5888 heard on 3/22.

2. **Oppose (H5315) Sponsor- Brien. Bill overturning incineration ban and allowing incinerator in Woonsocket. Heard 3/24.**
3. Promotion of paper bag usage. Sponsor- Miller(S354). Incentivizes the use of reusable bags with a five cent rebate in all retail establishments. Scheduled for hearing on 4/13.
4. School Siting Bill. Sponsors- Pichardo(S525), Slater(H5630) Prohibits the construction of schools on contaminated sites where there is ongoing potential for vapor intrusion. Requires a written report, public meeting, and comment period for schools proposed for any other contaminated site. Heard on 3/30.
5. Oppose (S454) Sponsor- Lombardo. Bill to add other states' Construction and Demolition (C and D) Material to the RI Landfill as daily cover. Heard on 3/30.

Energy: (note that many of the energy bills may be drafted into a single large omnibus bill)

1. **Energy Independence and Climate Solutions Act. Sponsors- Handy(H5887), Walaska(S724). This bill establishes limits of greenhouse gas pollution in Rhode Island, reducing levels 20 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050, and will increase jobs and investment in the clean energy economy. H5887 scheduled for hearing on 4/7, S724 on 4/13.**
2. Green Jobs Green Rhode Island Act. Sponsor- Bates(S451). This bill establishes the Green Jobs-Green Rhode Island Program, helping homeowners, small business and non-profit managers make energy efficiency upgrades to their properties at no initial cost. It also supports green jobs training programs and the unemployed with employment and training services. Scheduled for hearing 4/13.
3. Creation of a renewable energy board. Sponsors- Paiva Weed(S722), Ruggiero(H5938). Scheduled for hearing 4/7.
4. Extension of the renewable energy fund. Sponsors- Miller(S187), Ruggiero(H5281). The Renewable Energy Fund (REF) is set to expire on January 1, 2013. The House and Senate bill would retroactively extend the REF from January 1, 2008 until January 1, 2018. The REF is a critical program for towns, businesses, and low income housing organizations to gain funding through grants and loans to help finance renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind. The extension of the program would provide stability for renewable energy installers, as having a source to help finance different projects. Hearing 3/17.
5. Distributed Generation Standard Contract. Sponsors-Miller (S723), Ruggiero (legislation will come out of legislative task force). The purpose of the Distributed Generation Standard Contracts program is to better enable local businesses to finance and construct distributed renewable energy generation projects (DG) in Rhode Island. The key element of the program is that projects of any size are able to quickly and easily enter into contracts to sell the Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) produced by the project, at a fixed price for 20 years. Hearing scheduled for 4/13.
6. Renewable Energy Property Tax Exemption for Non-Profit Housing. The bill would allow renewable energy systems that are installed on non-profit housing sites to be property tax exempt from cities and towns.
7. Preliminary Interconnection Application for Renewable Energy Systems. Sponsor- Walaska(S721) The Interconnection bill would allow developers and businesses to get costs for electrical materials for a potential project. Right now National Grid won't give that information, unless we do a full blown interconnection study (multiple thousands of dollars). That study can be very costly, especially when you don't know whether the project will be feasible or not after the report is complete by National Grid. This type of application/program would help renewable energy developers that would like to do solar, wind, hydropower, and other projects in the future. Hearing scheduled for 4/13.

Conservation and Outdoor Recreation:

1. Protecting Conservation Easements. Sponsors- Sosnowski(S234), Lally(H5663). Protects conservation easements by ensuring that any proposed changes made to an existing easement maintain or improve protection of natural resource values. Requires a court review for proposed changes that reduce an easement's environmental protection. This creates an important system of checks and balances for conservation easements and ensures that they will continue to protect the

natural resources. The IRS requires conservation easements to be permanent when landowners donating easements are seeking tax benefits.

2. **Protecting Conservation Easements.** Sosnowski(S239), Walsh(H5309) Protects Conservation Easements when a property is involved in a tax sale or if the easement and property are both owned by the same organization. H5309 heard on 3/1.
3. **Oppose** (H5554) Sponsors- San Bento, Williams, Gallison. Would Require Municipalities to Permit Use of Open Space in a Development for Stormwater Facilities and Limit a Town's Authority to Manage Development to Protect Wetlands & Steep Slopes. Hearing scheduled for 4/7.
4. **Oppose** (S367) Sponsor- McCaffrey. Removes Liability Protection for Outdoor Recreation on Municipal & State Land — would remove towns and the state from the provision of the state code that limits liability for public use of lands for recreation. This bill will increase the state and municipal exposure to liability when people who are using town and state parks etc. for recreation get injured. If this liability protection is lost, towns and the state will either pay high costs for insurance or close many parks, trails and other outdoor areas for recreational uses.

Fair Governance:

1. **Fair Elections Commission.** Resolution requests the creation of a joint legislative commission which makes a comprehensive study of all aspects of the public financing of elections in Rhode Island. The commission shall meet at the call of the Speaker of the House and report its findings and recommendations no later than February 1, 2012.

List of Bill #s for searching legislative database:

148, 5789, 5886, 5821, 551, 5801, 5888, 459, 5315, 5630, 525, 354, 453, 457, 187, 5281, 234, 5663, 239, 5309, 367, 5887, 451, 5796, 5583, 5583, 447, 5798, 722, 5801, 5554, 5582, 5938, 721, 723, 454