

2012 Local Farm, Open Space & Recreation Bond

Article 5, Question #4

Invest \$25 million in Rhode Island's economy and our future by:

- ✓ protecting working farms & our communities' special places;
- ✓ improving state and municipal parks and beaches – unlocking their potential to grow our tourism and outdoor recreation industries; and
- ✓ restoring Narragansett Bay Watershed – for clean water and healthy fisheries.

Key assets – working farms, clean water, world class beaches and parks – **support important sectors of the state's economy.** They **increase the state's appeal for innovative start-up and knowledge-based businesses** that locate where they can attract and retain the brightest and most creative people. They also enhance the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders.

State bond funds are a catalyst. They **attract millions of dollars of additional funding** from federal agencies, foundations, individuals and corporations. Grant programs prompt community leaders and non-profit organizations to volunteer hundreds of hours improving our communities. Without State bond funds, most projects that they support would not be done.

Voters - in every community – have demonstrated strong support for these programs!

Land Conservation

- ◆ **Farmland Protection Program** **\$ 4.5 million**
Purchases development rights to protect working farms that are essential for retaining and **increasing our agriculture and local food economies.**
- ◆ **Local Open Space Protection Grants** **\$2.5 million**
Support community-based efforts to **protect our special places** and sound planning.
- ◆ **RIDEM's Land Acquisition Program** **\$2.5 million**
Enables the state to: **fill gaps in state parks and management areas; protect iconic properties** that have statewide significance for state parks, beaches, and waterfront access points as opportunities surface.

Outdoor Recreation Facilities

- ◆ **Local Recreation Development Grants** **\$6.5 million**
Empower development of municipal parks and outdoor recreation facilities - **a critical tool for revitalizing main streets and urban areas** and for **unlocking outdoor recreation and tourism potential.**
 - Urban Community Grants (\$2 million) - improve local recreation opportunities in the state's dense urban communities;
 - Cultural & Historic Park Grants (\$1 million) - preserve and develop culturally and historically significant parks...these are **especially important for heritage tourism;**
 - Local Recreation Development Grants (\$3.5 million) - help municipalities fund active recreation facilities such as ball fields and playgrounds.
- ◆ **State Recreation Facility Development** **\$5.0 million**
Fund major capital improvements and renovations for State Parks & beach facilities.

Narragansett Bay and Watershed **\$4.0 million**

- ◆ Provide financial assistance to municipalities, state agencies and watershed organizations to **protect and restore Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island watersheds.**
 - Priority stormwater and non-point source pollution abatement projects (\$2.8 million);
 - Habitat restoration projects (\$1.2 million) – such as Blackstone River fish passage.

How does the Local Farm, Open Space & Recreation Bond help Rhode Island's economy?

- ◆ By protecting working farms for local fruits and vegetables, parks and open space for exercise, health and renewal. **Land conservation is the foundation for our tourism and outdoor recreation economy** and is essential to maintain the character of our communities.
- ◆ **By attracting millions of visitors to Rhode Island's parks, beaches, Narragansett Bay** and outdoor recreation areas. Tourism is the state's 2nd largest economic engine that supports over 70,000 jobs and annually generates \$2.26 billion for the state's economy, \$5 billion in spending and 9% of all Rhode Island government revenue.
- ◆ **By sustaining agriculture and the "local foods" economy – two growth sectors with increasing jobs and sales.** Agriculture, alone, contributes over \$100 million/year to the state's economy and enhances the quality of life for all Rhode Island residents.

The state has lost over 80% of our farmland since 1940 and during the past 25 years we lost a greater percentage of farmland than any other state. Today, less than 7% of Rhode Island - only ~ 40,000 acres remains as farmland in production. **3/4 of the state's remaining farmland is not protected** and more than 1/4 of our farmers are over 65 years old. The State's farmland protection program gives aging farmers an option for getting equity out of their farms and protecting them instead of selling their farms for development.

25 farms are already approved by the state's farmland program and waiting for funding. Many others are in jeopardy because farmers don't even apply for the protection of their farms due to the lack of funding.
- ◆ By inspiring sportsmen (hunting and fishing), birdwatchers and other wildlife observers, **Rhode Island's fish and wildlife populations generate \$332 million** each year.

Bottom line: parks and outdoor recreation "infrastructure" unlocks economic development potential by attracting people and businesses to our communities and state.

Why the Farm, Open Space & Recreation Bond is a prudent use of state funds!

- ◆ RI could lose up to \$5 million/year in federal farm protection funding if we lack the required 50 % match. **Other federal funding** available for park and recreation development will also be lost or missed without state bond funds.
- ◆ Bond funded programs leverage state dollars and **attract much more funding from other sources** such as grants and private donations as a match. In recent years, **every \$1 in state bond funding is matched by an additional:**
 - \$3.28 for farmland protection program;
 - \$2.06 for local open space protection grants; and
 - \$3.86 for DEM's land acquisition program.
- ◆ Money invested to protect working farms and special places in our communities is one of the few state capital expenditures that actually **appreciates in value over time** and is a permanent contribution to the state and local economy.
- ◆ Bond funds enable DEM to **protect floodplains & reduce costly damage from future flooding.**
- ◆ Protecting **farmland and open space reduces the cost for municipal services** that would be required if these places are developed and thereby **helps to keep communities' taxes lower.**
- ◆ **State grants motivate community volunteers** who donate 100's of hours to protect special places. Without grants we lose this volunteer capacity and momentum.