



February 24, 2026

Chair Marvin Abney
House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Article 6 Question 5 - Green Bond - The RI Land Trust Council SUPPORTS the Green Bond with the addition of \$10 million in funding for conservation programs

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

The Rhode Island Land Trust Council (the Council) is the statewide coalition of over 50 land trusts – community-based organizations formed to conserve land and water resources for the public’s benefit. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve a safe and healthy place to live with access to clean air, clean water, open spaces for recreation, and local food. For over 30 years, land trusts have worked in partnership with the State to conserve parks, community gardens, farms, and forests throughout Rhode Island.

This work strengthens our economy through tourism, outdoor recreation, agriculture, and forestry. Conserved lands provide green infrastructure. Wetlands and forests store and sequester carbon, protect drinking water, reduce flooding, and serve as natural climate solutions.

We are pleased to see funding included in the FY27 Green Bond proposal for the Narragansett Bay Watershed Restoration Program, the Resilient Rhoody Fund, brownfields remediation, marine infrastructure, energy efficiency and much needed facilities improvements for DEM. However, ***we are concerned that traditional land and water conservation programs that municipalities, land trusts, and state agencies rely on were not included in the budget proposal.***

We respectfully ask the General Assembly to amend the Green Bond to include \$10 million for the following conservation programs, consistent with the RI Department of Environmental Management’s FY27 capital budget request in August 2025.

- \$3 million for the State Open Space Program, which enables the State to acquire and conserve lands of statewide significance, including ecologically valuable landscapes that enhance DEM’s management areas, parks, and important forests.
- \$3 million for the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program, a competitive matching grant program that supports municipalities in acquiring, developing, and rehabilitating outdoor recreational lands and facilities.
- \$2 million for Farmland Preservation through the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC). There are dozens of farms approved and awaiting final protection, but insufficient funding to move them forward. Preserving farmland keeps land in production, supports farm families, and strengthens Rhode Island’s local food system.
- \$2 million for the Local Open Space Matching Grant Program which provides up to 50% matching funds for municipalities, land trusts, and nonprofit conservation organizations to protect valuable open spaces in local communities.

The Local Open Space Grant Program is a competitive, merit-based program established in state statute. Applications are evaluated and ranked by the Natural Heritage Preservation Commission [Advisory Committee](#) using objective scoring criteria focused on resource protection and plan implementation.

Final award decisions are made by the Natural Heritage Preservation Commission, which consists of the Director of the Department of Environmental Management (Chair), the Governor's Office of Intergovernmental Relations, a second representative from the Governor's office, and the Chief of the Division of Statewide Planning within the Department of Administration. In other words, final decisions on the projects that are funded through this program are made at the state level.

These are not discretionary acquisitions; they are investments that protect public health and strengthen climate resilience. We recognize that Rhode Island is also working to address a serious housing shortage. Land conservation and housing production need not be at odds. The Local Open Space Grant Program does not target buildable lots or areas carefully planned for growth; it prioritizes ecologically fragile habitat, contiguous protected areas, species of greatest conservation need, floodplains, and other areas often unsuitable for development outlined in the ranking criteria. Protecting these landscapes strengthens the environmental infrastructure that housing and economic growth depend on.

Just a few weeks ago, the Administration announced \$1.23 million in Local Open Space awards protecting 174 acres across Rhode Island. In that announcement, Governor McKee stated:

"These grant awards will help preserve natural spaces that are so important for protecting both our environment and local communities... ensuring that they continue to provide resiliency and recreational benefits for generations of Rhode Islanders to come."

We couldn't agree more. These grants protect wetlands, forests, and farms that reduce long-term public costs associated with environmental degradation. At current land values, \$2 million for the Local Open Space Program will fund a limited number of high-priority projects statewide, all requiring a 50% local match. Each state dollar invested leverages additional federal, municipal, and philanthropic funds.

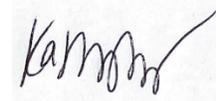
In fact, every \$1 invested in Rhode Island's land conservation programs yields nearly \$2 in additional funding. Without these conservation programs, Rhode Island risks leaving federal dollars on the table.

Conservation projects are complex and take time. Nearly every important park, farm, or forest conserved in the last 30 years has required strong partnerships among municipalities, land trusts, and willing landowners. While the State's capital budget may show prior bond funds as unspent, those dollars are allocated to projects currently moving toward closing and will be exhausted as transactions are completed.

The Council supports the Green Bond. We respectfully ask that the General Assembly include \$10 million to ensure that Rhode Island's longstanding conservation programs are funded alongside the other important environmental investments in Article 6, Question 5.

For your reference, I have attached the current Local Open Space Grant Program scoring criteria, as established pursuant to statute and regulation (250-RICR-110-00-4), which govern the evaluation and ranking of applications.

Sincerely,



Kate Sayles, Director

Attachment: Local Open Space Grant Program Scoring Criteria