

April 2, 2026

Representative Terri Cortvriend  
Chair, House Finance Subcommittee on Environment & Transportation  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence RI 02908

**Re: The Nature Conservancy testimony in Support of DEM FY 2027 Budget**

The Nature Conservancy is grateful for the opportunity to testify in strong support of the Department of Environmental Management's FY 2027 budget.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Here in Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy protects more than 15,000 acres of land and has partnered on the permanent conservation of more than 35,000 acres of land. We do much of our work to protect and restore our natural environment in partnership – including with State agencies such as the Department of Environmental Management.

The Nature Conservancy recognizes that DEM is tasked with the tremendous responsibility of protecting Rhode Island's natural assets, including lands, waterways, beaches, ports, farms, and more. This work is essential to maintaining the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the state. We are strongly supportive of a budget that provides DEM with the funding they need to fully manage these resources.

As the agency that chairs the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council, DEM also plays a vital role in the State's effective implementation of Act on Climate. The agency creates the state's Climate Action Strategies and does inventories of greenhouse gas emissions to ensure that emissions reductions mandates are met.

TNC strongly supports Article 3, Sections 6 & 7 of the FY27 budget to transfer ownership of Big River Management Area to RIDEM. Big River Management Area is a significant Rhode Island conservation area, serving as critical habitat and part of a larger connected network of resilient lands. RIDEM has been managing this land since the 1960s and is the most qualified agency to make decisions and most effectively manage this land, including a forest management plan that is being created in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy. This transfer represents the designation of a definite purpose of this land as conservation land for public benefit in perpetuity.

The 2026 Green Bond proposed in the FY27 budget, however, omits critical funding streams for RIDEM to continue operations to protect land and water. As the state's largest land trust, we are committed to land preservation and management and recognize that these items cannot be sufficiently done without funding from bonds as historically has been done. TNC is in strong support of House Bill 8144 by Representative Cotter to add funding for open space conservation, farmland preservation, and outdoor recreation to the Green Bond. Much of this funding was originally requested by RIDEM and we strongly encourage the General Assembly to meet the needs of this agency and protect these programs.

We applaud the general assembly for passing environmental regulations in the past few years and acknowledge that DEM requires funding and staff to implement those laws. In past years, the budget has provided additional capacity to RIDEM, allowing the agency to make significant progress on the state's forestry, climate, water and air quality, and coastal management goals. We are grateful that the FY2027 budget preserves that progress and provides resources for RIDEM to continue the critical work that is being done. A strong, fully-funded DEM is essential to protect the natural resources of our state – as well as ensure that our economy runs smoothly and in line with our environmental laws and regulations.

We urge the Finance Committee to support the DEM Budget to continue your critical leadership in protecting our irreplaceable natural assets which contribute to Rhode Islander's quality of life and the state's economic vitality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angela Tuoni". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Angela Tuoni  
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The Nature Conservancy  
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