

April 14, 2026

Representative Marvin L. Abney  
Chair, House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence RI 02908

**Re: The Nature Conservancy testimony in Support of H8144 and HR8299**

The Nature Conservancy is grateful for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 8144 and House Resolution 8299.

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 2026 Green Bond proposed in the FY27 budget omits critical funding streams for protecting land and water. As the state's largest land trust, we are committed to land conservation and management and recognize that these items cannot be sufficiently completed without funding from bonds as historically has been done. TNC is in strong support of House Bill 8144 introduced by Representative Cotter to add funding for open space conservation, farmland preservation, and outdoor recreation and access projects 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.

In November 2025, The Nature Conservancy worked with a pollster to conduct polling of likely Rhode Island voters and their views of environmental issues, and likelihood of supporting a Green Bond. The polling results showed what we know to be true, that Rhode Islanders care about our natural resources, and think these are worth investments for the state to make. A few highlights are below, as well as a memo with polling results included with this testimony.

- 88% of respondents said **protecting working farms** is extremely or very important
- 83% of respondents said **protecting water quality in Narragansett Bay** is extremely or very important
- 75% of respondents said **protecting forests** is extremely or very important
- 69% of respondents said **conserving natural open space and open areas** is extremely or very important
- 65% of respondents said **enhancing public access to outdoor recreation** is extremely or very important

Furthermore, we understand there has been a discussion about local conservation efforts conflicting with housing initiatives in the state. We disagree with this narrative, as well as an overwhelming majority of

Rhode Islanders. **85% of poll respondents said that with the right planning, we can protect Rhode Island's forests and open space and build more affordable housing without having to choose.**

The Nature Conservancy also strongly supports House Resolution 8299, introduced by Representative Cortvriend to include \$20M to the bond for decarbonization infrastructure and projects. Rhode Island has strong and necessary climate mandates to achieve, and this is a great next step. We know that these investments not only benefit our environment, but provide good, family-sustaining jobs for the Rhode Island workforce.

We understand there are a lot of asks on the table for bond funding this year, and each is important to a healthy, vibrant Rhode Island. The polling we conducted tested different levels of bond funding to gauge a difference in likelihood of passage.

- 67% of respondents said they would vote for a \$98 million Green Bond
- 68% of respondents said they would vote for a \$74 million Green Bond
- 68% of respondents said they would vote for a \$65 million Green Bond
- 68% of respondents said they would vote for a \$50 million Green Bond

**Rhode Islanders overwhelmingly support these types of investments, regardless of the dollar figure.**

We urge the Finance Committee to support a “greener” Green Bond to continue your critical leadership in protecting our irreplaceable natural assets which are essential to Rhode Islander’s quality of life and the state’s economic vitality.

Sincerely,



Angela Tuoni  
RI Director of Climate & Government Relations  
The Nature Conservancy  
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**TO** Interested Parties

**FROM** Miranda Everitt and Denny Han  
FM3 Research

**RE:** Rhode Island Voter Views of a Conservation Bond Measure

**DATE** December 3, 2025

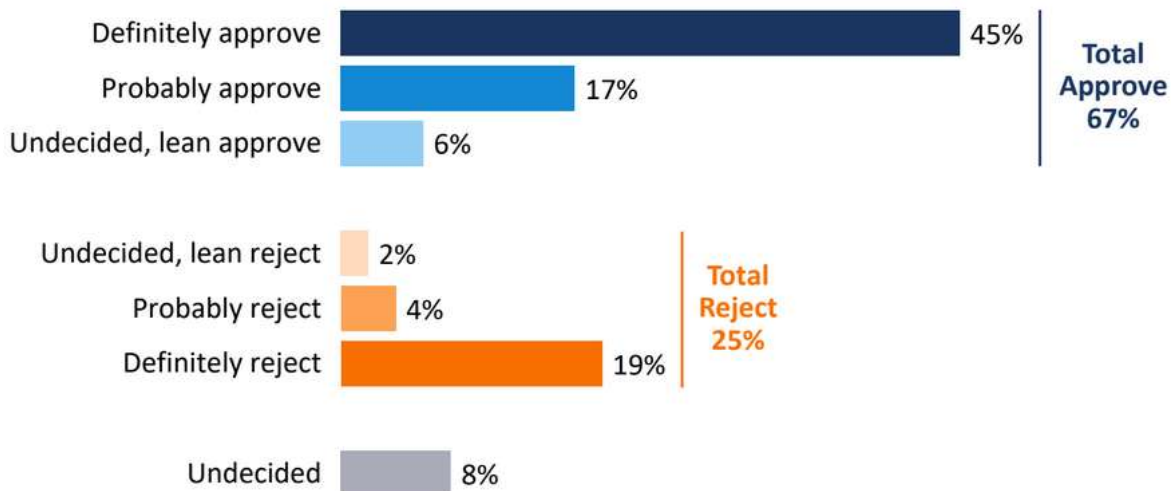
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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of 426 Rhode Island voters to assess views of a potential conservation bond measure. **The study found strong support for a bond of \$98 million to invest in environmental and recreational purposes** – with no broader backing at lower overall bond amounts. Rhode Islanders especially prioritize clean water, farms and forests as uses of funding for the measure.

Key findings include:

- **Two-thirds approve of a \$98 million environmental bond measure.** When presented only with a draft ballot question (shown on the next page, and based on prior “Green Economy Bonds” in the state), two in three Rhode Island voters (67%) say they would approve the measure – with nearly half (45%) saying they would vote to “definitely approve” it.

**Figure 1: Support for a \$98 Million Bond Measure**



*This Green Economy Bonds Measure would issue \$98 million in general obligation bonds for environmental and recreational purposes including:*

- *Matching grants for restoring and improving resiliency of infrastructure, vulnerable coastal habitats, and restoring rivers and stream floodplains; and for brownfield remediation and local public recreational facilities;*
- *Grants for small businesses to remove impediments to clean energy project implementation;*
- *Restoring and protecting the water quality and enhancing the economic viability and environmental sustainability of Narragansett Bay and the state’s watersheds;*
- *Maintaining forest and wildlife habitat; and*
- *Acquiring open space, farmland, watershed, urban parklands, and recreation lands.*

This support cuts across nearly all key major demographic and geographic lines within the Rhode Island electorate, including:

- ✓ 86% of Democrats and 65% of independents;
  - ✓ 74% of women and 61% of men;
  - ✓ 71% of voters under 50, 60% of voters ages 50-64, and 69% of voters ages 65 and older;
  - ✓ 68% of voters of color and 66% of white voters; and
  - ✓ 62% or more in each county.
- **Support is no broader at lower overall bond amounts.** In a follow-up question, voters were asked whether they would support a measure at \$74 million, \$65 million, and \$50 million. In each case, 68% of voters said they would vote to approve – within the margin of error of the 67% result for the highest level tested, \$98 million. The results show that reducing the amount of the bond is not likely increase support.
  - **Voters’ top priorities for funding include drinking water and supporting farms.** Figure 3 on the next page shows the shares of Rhode Island voters who rate each of a variety of potential spending categories as either “extremely” or “very important” priorities. The items that three-quarters or more rank in the top tier include protections for drinking water sources and water quality in Narragansett Bay, as well as upgrading stormwater infrastructure, protecting working farms, and protecting forests.

**Figure 3: Top Funding Priorities**

*I am going to read you some types of projects that might be funded by this measure. Recognizing that there may not be enough funding for all such projects, please tell me how important it would be to you that each project be funded: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not at all important:*

Priority	% Extremely or Very Important
Protecting sources of drinking water	93%
Protecting working farms	88%
Improving infrastructure to improve drinking water quality	84%
Supporting local farms	83%
Protecting water quality in Narragansett Bay	83%
Supporting local agriculture	83%
Investments to protect and improve the state’s drinking water supplies	81%
Protecting water quality in rivers, streams, and the Bay	80%
Protecting water quality in rivers, lakes, and streams	78%
Preventing polluted stormwater runoff from entering streams, rivers, and the Bay	78%
Protecting forests	75%
Upgrading aging infrastructure and deteriorating stormwater infrastructure	75%
Supporting local forestry	72%

In sum, as they have in prior election cycles, **Rhode Island voters strongly support a state bond measure to invest in conserving land, water and wildlife in the state.** Broad shares support a bond of \$98 million, and especially value investments in farms, forests, and water quality.

<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From Nov. 16-20, 2025, FM3 completed 426 online and telephone (landline and wireless) interviews with likely November 2026 Rhode Island voters. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-4.9% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.



PHOTO CREDIT | RUSSELL LAMAN

# RHODE ISLAND

In Rhode Island, a healthy environment and a strong economy go hand in hand. The state's lands and waters are the cornerstones of quality of life, community health and safety, and economic development. With strategic stewardship, nature can provide even bigger economic benefits in the future.

## ACCESS TO NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE REDUCES HEALTHCARE COSTS.

Parks and natural areas support healthy lives.<sup>1</sup> A significant body of scientific research has drawn a connection between access to nature and improved physical and mental health, including reducing the costs of diabetes, asthma, depression, and other chronic illnesses.<sup>2</sup> Studies have shown that healthcare providers prescribing nature-based physical activity can help patients improve their health.<sup>3</sup>

## INVESTING IN NATURE SUPPORTS OUTDOOR RECREATION, BOOSTING THE ECONOMY, AND ATTRACTING BUSINESSES AND TOURISTS.

Rhode Island's natural treasures attract visitors who support local businesses and the hospitality industry. In Rhode Island:

- Over 476,000 people (46.1% of residents) participate in outdoor recreation,<sup>4</sup> a sector that adds \$1.9 billion to the economy each year and supports 18,000 jobs with \$900 million in wages.<sup>5</sup>
- A total of 97,000 anglers generate \$370 million in spending and support 3,000 jobs,<sup>6</sup> while 8,100 hunters generate \$113 million in spending and support 1,000 jobs.<sup>7</sup>

- In 2024, 29.4 million visitors spent \$6.0 billion. This spending sustained 88,509 jobs and generated \$992 million in state and local tax revenues.<sup>8</sup>

## FORESTS PROVIDE CLEAN DRINKING WATER.

In Rhode Island, forests are essential to maintaining drinking water supplies. For example, 60 percent of Rhode Island's drinking water comes from the Providence Water Supply Board, which owns over 17,000 acres of forestland.<sup>9</sup> The state's water utilities recognize that it costs less to keep drinking water supplies clean than to treat polluted water.<sup>10</sup> A study of 27 water suppliers showed that for every additional 10% of forest cover (up to 60%), water treatment costs decreased 20%.<sup>11</sup> Protecting forests is critical to water quality, because treating drinking water from an unprotected watershed can cost up to ten times more than from a protected one.<sup>12</sup> This is also true for the 26% of the state's population that relies on public and private wells.<sup>13</sup>

## NATURE IS A DRAW FOR NEW BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS.

Studies show that businesses and residents are drawn by scenery, clean water and air, and access to recreation.<sup>14</sup> A recent survey found that for 63% of Americans, parks and recreation are important in choosing where to live.<sup>15</sup> In fact, three-quarters of corporate executives report that quality-of-life amenities are important in choosing where to locate.<sup>16</sup>

## NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROVIDES PROTECTION FROM FLOODING AND EXTREME WEATHER.

Over the past 80 years, Rhode Island has seen a significant increase in flood frequency and severity.<sup>17</sup> Wetlands protect communities from coastal flooding, providing \$2,930 of annual coastal protection value per acre in Rhode Island.<sup>18</sup> Green infrastructure protects urban communities by absorbing potential floodwaters and reducing water pollution. Heavy rains in 2010 caused flooding, evacuations, property damage, and business closures across Rhode Island. Groups like The Nature Conservancy are working to promote vegetation along waterways to absorb the impact of future storms.

## INVESTING IN WORKING LANDS PROTECTS FARMERS AND THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

Rhode Island's food and agriculture sector generates \$25.2 billion in annual economic output and employs nearly 138,000 people with \$7.9 billion in wages.<sup>19</sup> Rural areas support small-scale farming.<sup>20</sup> These industries are all dependent on healthy lands and access to clean water.



For the full report  
*Nature's Dividends: The Economic, Health,  
and Safety Benefits of Investing in Nature.*



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