

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (RIDEM)

# **RIDEM's Role in the Big River Watershed Management Area**

An overview of DEM's efforts to ensure Big River continues to meet its statutory purpose







**DEM**  
RHODE ISLAND

## Our mission:

To protect, restore, manage and promote Rhode Island's environment and natural resources to preserve and improve our quality of life. The **strategic plan** is designed to outline a clear direction for us to achieve our mission as we continue to grow, innovate, and improve as a department.



1. Take actions to **counter climate change** and its effects, both locally and regionally.
2. Protect and restore our environment to create **greener, healthier communities**.
3. Protect and improve **water quality**
4. Conserve, promote, and **steward our natural resources**
5. Promote and increase **outdoor recreation** in Rhode Island
6. Promote and expand **local food** and agricultural industries
7. Demonstrate statewide leadership in **customer service** and continuous improvement



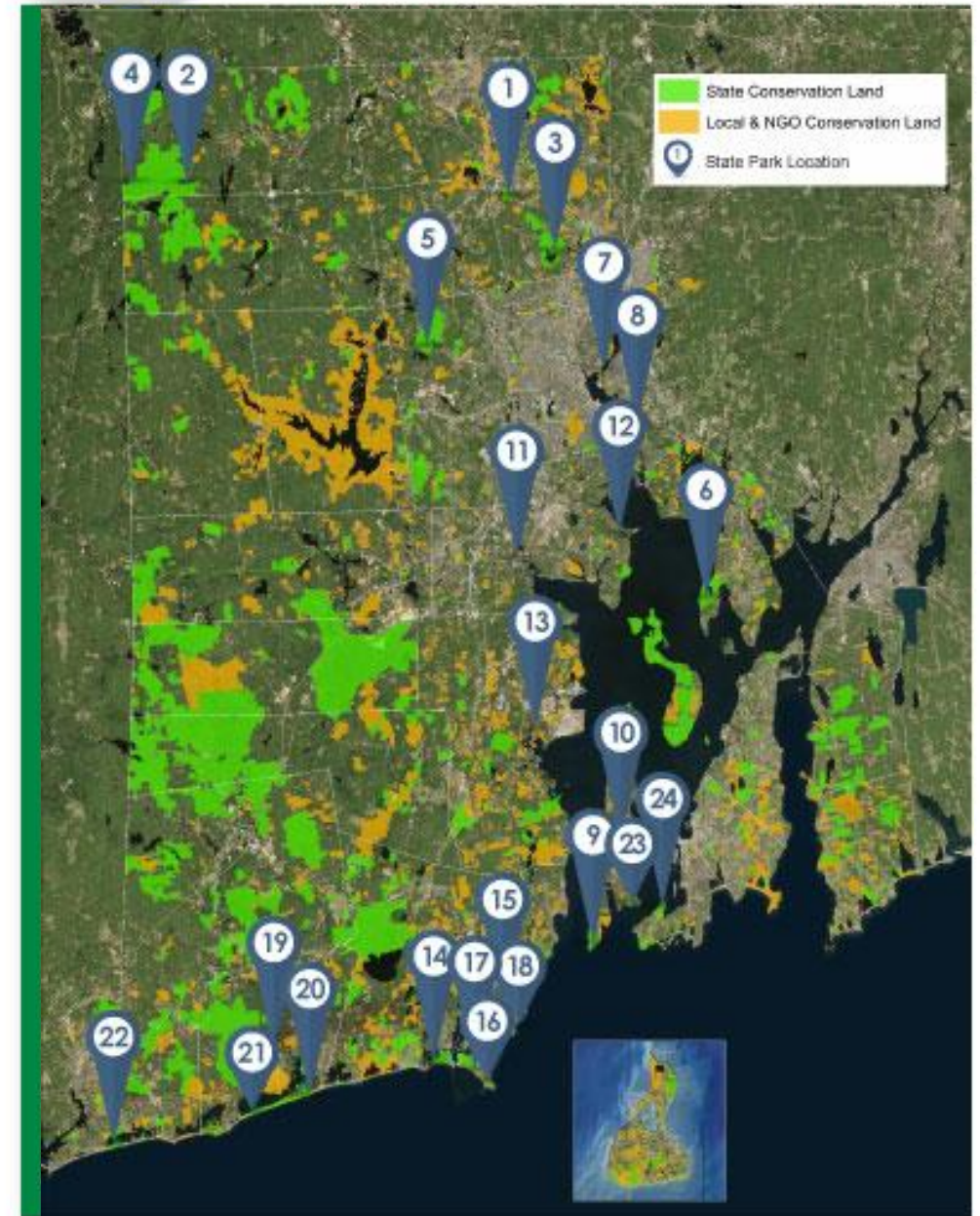
**9+**  
**MILLION**  
ANNUAL VISITORS  
(major parks only)

**8,500+**  
**ACRES** OF PARK LAND  
ACROSS **69 AREAS**

**1,000+**  
**CAMPSITES**

**200+**  
**FISHING AREAS**  
INCLUDING BOAT RAMPS

**400+**  
**MILES OF TRAILS**  
FOR BIKING, HIKING & WALKING

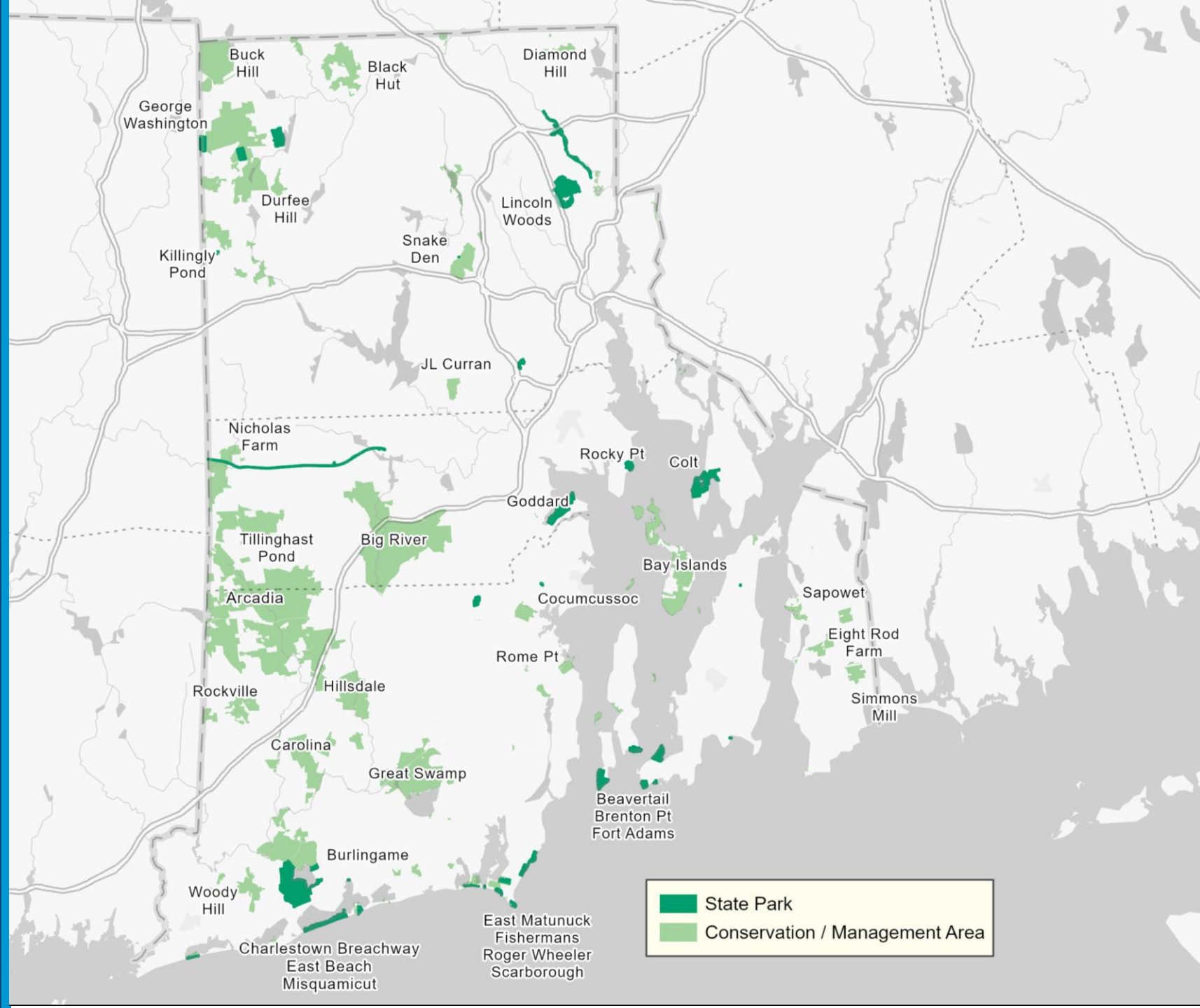




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## Public lands

DEM manages more than 65,000 acres of state land, including 25 state management areas.







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## Big River

DEM does not own Big River, it is owned by the RI Water Resources Board. Per statute and agreement, DEM “manages” the site, so responds to dumping events, maintains trails, has enforcement responsibilities, and manages events in the area.



- **Supported activities:**

- Fishing, hunting, hiking, horseback riding on trails
- Mountain, fat tire, and motorized biking (with permit)
- Military Training (with permit)
- Environmental Studies (with permit)

- **Prohibited activities**

- Swimming, washing or bathing in streams or ponds
- ATVs and dirt biking; Paintball games and target shooting
- Removing trees, shrubs, vegetation, stone walls
- Dumping solid waste and littering



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## Big River

Big river is an active place in all seasons with numerous users in addition to the hunters, hikers, and bikers that frequent the area.



- **Groups/events using the area in 2022**

- Photoshoots
- RI National Guard Training
- RI NEMBA events
- Botanical field trip
- Rhody Rovers events
- Birding events (URI)
- RIDEM Div of Fish and Wildlife Outreach events
- West Greenwich Conservation Commission clean up events
- Boy Scout/Cub Scout events
- Research (most local universities and DEM)





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## Big River

Aside from the many users of the area, the natural resources are critical to the state including being home to many rare plants and animals, it is one of the states largest contiguous natural spaces, and has pristine water quality, thus the main purpose of Big River, as a potential backup drinking water supply for the state.





An aerial photograph of a river system, likely the Big River, showing a winding path through a landscape with green fields and some urban areas. The river is a prominent blue feature. The text of the presentation is overlaid on a white rectangular box in the upper left portion of the image.

## • Summary

- DEM does not own but has a role in managing Big River
- The purpose of the original acquisition of the property was to protect it as a backup drinking water source for the state and this is still the main focus of the area
- Given that RI is the second most densely populated state in the country, the limited open space areas like Big River get actively used by outdoor enthusiasts
- Aside from the water quality attributes of the area, it is also home to rare plants and animals, and contains numerous important habitats
- Subsequent presentations today will fill in some of the remaining gaps about Big River, but I am happy to entertain **any questions** that you may have