

Planning For the Preservation of Rhode Island's Forests

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Thesis

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## Abstract

Rhode Island's forest is a major state resource which currently faces the threat of expanding human development. Interest in protecting forestland from this threat is well justified, given the role of forests in preventing air and water pollution, mitigating carbon dioxide increases, contributing to biodiversity, providing wood products, and maintaining aesthetic quality and rural character, as well as their role in the history of changing land uses in the New England region. Present and future disorderly development threatens to reduce and fragment the existing forest, damaging both its integrity as a living ecosystem and its ability to maximally benefit the public. The current forest policies of the state and its municipalities do not provide adequate protection for large tracts of unfragmented forest. Rhode Island policy makers have a number of forest protection tools available to them, each of which is useful for protecting different sizes of forest patches, and thus different benefits of forestland. This thesis documents the current threats to the Rhode Island forest, the various tools of forest protection and their uses, and the ways current policies actually use those tools. The analysis focuses on the factors that shape state and local governments' attitudes about the need for forest protection. The analysis also considers factors that cause governments to prefer some protection methods and under-utilize others.