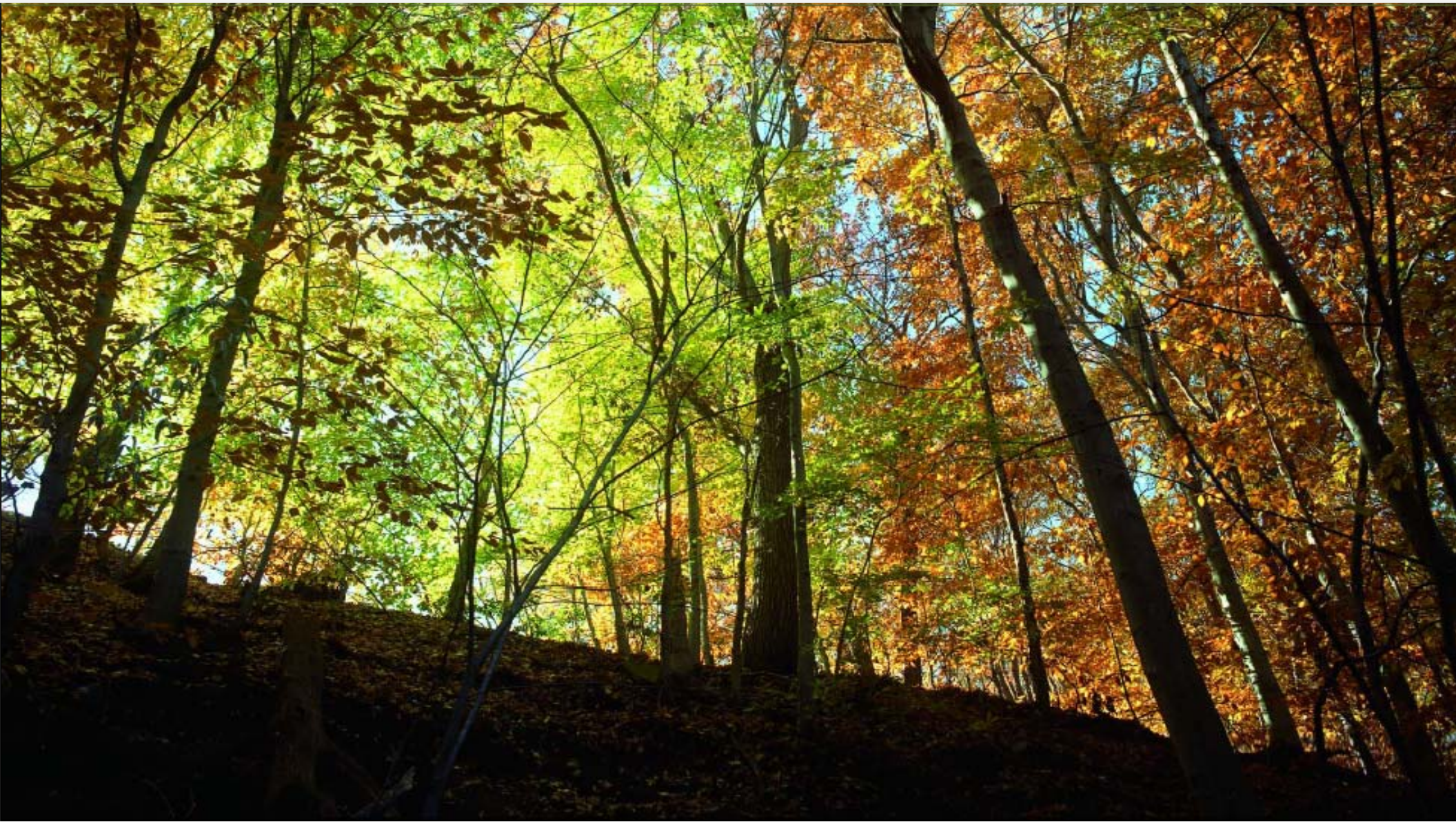




# Rhode Island Tree Farm Program Strategic Plan, 2010-2015 *Executive Summary*





# *Tree Farm Committee Message*

Dear Fellow Rhode Islander:

The Rhode Island Tree Farm System is part of the American Tree Farm System®- a program of the American Forest Foundation which is committed to sustaining forests, watershed and healthy habitats through the power of private stewardship. Our mission is *“To promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of all benefits of productive forestry”*.

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) was established in 1941 in response to concerns that America's private forests were being cut at unsustainable rates without reforestation. In 1941, the first Tree Farm was designated in Washington State. Since 1941, the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) has educated and recognized the commitment of private forest owners in the United States. Currently, ATFS has 24 million acres of privately owned forestland and 90,000 family forest owners who are committed to excellence in forest stewardship, in 46 states.

Rhode Island's Tree Farm program started later, in 1949, and by 2010 has grown to include 182 Tree Farms covering 35,919 acres of the state. Our Tree farms range from the smallest (10 acres) to the largest, some 11,900 acres of forest land owned by the Providence Water Supply Board which protect the Scituate Reservoir system. ***A Tree Farm sign hangs on one out of every ten forested acres in Rhode Island!***

We are pleased to let you know that Rhode Island's Tree Farmers share a unique commitment to help conserve our state's private forests and the environmental benefits that these forests provide to our citizens. In addition, our private forests can also help create thousands of new green jobs in rural America, increase the nation's energy security by promoting greater use of renewable energy, and address the most pressing environmental challenge our nation faces—climate change. These individuals hold the key to the kinds of forests, forest activities and forest resources future generations of Rhode Islanders will enjoy.

Rhode Island's network of family forest owners, our conservation partners, and environmental educators, strive to create a future where Rhode Island's forests are sustained by a public which understands and values the social, economic, and environmental benefits they provide to our communities, our state, our nation, and the world.

For more information on this document and the American Tree Farm System, please visit our website at <http://ritreefarm.org>.

Rhode Island's forests are one of our state's greatest natural resources. Please join us and the other Rhode Islanders Tree Farmers in conserving this “Green Hope” for future generations.

Sincerely,

The Rhode Island Tree Farm Committee

**RI TREE FARM PROGRAM**



# Mission, Vision, Goals

## Mission

To promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of all benefits of forest conservation and sustainable forestry.

## Vision

To create a future where Rhode Island's forests are sustained by the public which understands the values the social, economic, and environmental benefits that they provide to our communities, our state, and our nation.

### Did you know?

- Fifty-five percent of the 393,000 acres of forestland in Rhode Island is privately owned.
- Privately owned forests supply nearly 75% of our state's drinking water.
- Forestlands serve as natural filters and reservoirs.
- For every ton of wood a forest produces, about 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide is removed from the air and replaced with about 1.1 tons of oxygen.
- Approximately 90 percent of endangered species depend on forests for their habitat

## Goals

- Assuring through periodic on-site re-inspection by forestry professionals that Tree Farms continue to be managed in accordance with AFF 2010-2015 Standards of Sustainability for Forest Certification.
- Cooperate with a wide array of state and local partners to educate Rhode Islanders on the public benefit of conserving and protecting Rhode Island's forests for the benefit of present and future generations through educational materials, workshops, field days, fairs, urban seminars, magazines, and public service announcements.
- Provide a voice for family forest owners in national and state affairs by setting priorities and organizing education and lobbying efforts in support of policies that advance sustainable forestry on family-owned forests.
- Increase public awareness of the role and activities of the Rhode Island Tree Farm program

# Conservation Solutions

## WHAT WE DO TO CONSERVE FORESTS

The term "tree farming" was first used in the 1940's to introduce the public to sustainable forestry terminology they could easily understand. Farming implies continual stewardship and production of goods year after year. By linking the term "farming" with trees, foresters could communicate the concept of sustainable production of forest products over time. Tree Farming implies commitment to the land and was the philosophical opposite of the "cut-out and get-out" philosophy of the early 20th century.

Tree Farms are more than pine plantations or Christmas tree farms. Tree Farms are varied in nature and contain many different habitats and stages of forest regeneration, from seedlings to mature timber. Biodiversity is a critical component of a certified Tree Farm. Tree Farmers must maintain natural forest buffers and other aspects of conservation techniques.

## THE AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM (NATIONAL)

The American Tree Farm System® (ATFS), a program of the American Forest Foundation's Center for Family Forests, is committed to sustaining forests, watershed and healthy habitats through the power of private stewardship.



70 YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

1941-2011

Since 1941, ATFS has educated and recognized the commitment of private family forest landowners in the United States. Currently, ATFS has certified 24 million acres of privately owned forestland and over 90,000 family forest owners who are committed to excellence in forest stewardship, in 46 states. Supported by 46 state Tree Farm Committees, and 4,400 volunteer foresters from the public and private sectors, ATFS comprises 87,000 family forest owners who, together, manage more than 23 million acres under the widely recognized green and white Tree Farm sign.

Tree Farmers share a unique commitment to protect wildlife habitat and watersheds, to conserve soil and to provide recreation for their communities while producing wood for America. These individuals hold the key to the kinds of forests, forest activities and forest resources future generations of

Americans will enjoy. ATFS has established standards and guidelines for property owners to meet to become a Certified Tree Farm. Under these standards and guidelines, private forest owners must develop a management plan based on strict environmental standards and pass an inspection by an ATFS volunteer forester every five years.

## RI TREE FARM PROGRAM

# Tree Farming in Rhode Island

## RI Tree Farm History

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) was established in 1941 in response to concerns that America's private forests were being cut at unsustainable rates without reforestation. In 1941, the first Tree Farm was designated in Washington State. The Tree Farm's purpose was to demonstrate sound forest management practices to area landowners.

Rhode Island's Tree Farm program started later, in 1949. The first six (6) Tree Farms in the state were recognized in a ceremony on Friday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1949 at the property of Rhode Island's first Tree Farmer, Walter Kenyon of Hopkinton, Rhode Island. Governor John O. Pastore presented each of the six Tree Farmers with their certificates. Since 1949, the Rhode Island Tree Farm Program has educated and recognized the commitment of private forest owners in our state.



Henry Arnold of the Greene Company  
(Courtesy of The Greene Company)



Scituate High School, 2010



Providence Water's Scituate Reservoir watershed forest

Rhode Island's oldest continuously active Tree Farm is owned by The Greene Company (Tree Farm #15) and was certified on May 1, 1951.

Today, the RITFS has grown to include 182 Tree Farms covering 35,919 acres of the state. Our Tree Farms range from the smallest (10 acres) to the largest, some 11,900 acres of forest land owned by the Providence Water Supply Board to protect the Scituate Reservoir system.

Rhode Island's Tree Farmers share a unique commitment to protect wildlife habitat and watersheds, to conserve soil and to provide recreation for their communities while producing wood for America. These individuals hold the key to the kinds of forests, forest activities and forest resources, future generations of Rhode Islanders will enjoy.

**Water. Wildlife. Recreation. Wood.** The four sides of the Tree Farm sign tell the story of sustainable forestry ... a thriving forestland that has clean water, a healthy wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Our green and white diamond shaped Tree Farm signs are widely recognized across the country.

**Today, a Tree Farm Sign, the Sign of Good Forestry, hangs on one of every ten acres of woodland in Rhode Island!**

# *A Leader in Forest Sustainability*

ATFS has established standards and guidelines for property owners to meet to become a certified Tree Farm. Under these standards and guidelines, private forest owners must develop a management plan based on strict environmental standards and pass an inspection by an ATFS volunteer forester every five years.

In 2010, the American Forest Foundation (AFF), the nation's oldest and largest network of woodland owners adopted new, revised standards for the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), its woodland certification program. Bob Simpson, AFF Senior Vice President for Forestry Programs, said "The changes do two important things: they go further in protecting woodlands of high conservation value, and they streamline the process for woodland owners participating in USDA conservation incentive programs."

The new standards were developed by an independent panel of experts, representing academia, conservation organizations, Federal and State governments, landowners, and foresters. Designed especially for small woodland owners, who provide nearly two-thirds of the wood fiber used for paper products in the U.S. Periodic on-site re-inspection by forestry professionals assures that properties continue to be managed in accordance with Tree Farm Standards.



The American Tree Farm System has certified over 90,000 woodland owners as managing their land sustainably, in a way that will ensure that the wood, wildlife, water, and recreation benefits will continue for future generations. Together, ATFS members are conserving 24 million acres. Wood products derived from ATFS certified land is distributed throughout North America and the world under the consumer labels SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and PEFC (Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes).

## **International Acceptance of America's Family Forests**

Ours is the oldest forest certification system in the world, with thousands of properties now under the ownership of second, even third-generation owners. After 67 years of dedication to America's private forest landowners, the American Tree Farm System® (ATFS ) was internationally endorsed on the merits of its sustainable forest standards by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC ). PEFC is the world's largest forest certification program that provides an assurance mechanism to purchasers of wood and paper products that they are promoting the sustainable management of forests. Tree Farm standards have been updated to conform to latest benchmarks for sustainability, by an independent standards review panel.





# Family Forests

## Tree Farm in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Do you know who owns those beautiful woods that you drive or walk by every day? Many people are surprised to learn that private individuals own most of the forestland in Rhode Island – roughly 34,000 individuals and families who together own 302 thousand acres of forests. This chunk of forestland amounts to nearly 75 percent all forested land in Rhode Island.

Put another way, most of the forests, watersheds, most of the headwaters, most of the lake shore, stream-sides and ponds – is in large measure owned by ordinary citizens. Their stewardship behavior ... what they do in the woods or don't do ... will have profound impact on our ability to sustain these landscapes over time. Shaping stewardship behavior among such a broad and diverse population will demand aggressive and creative outreach strategies.



## Conservation Benefits of Family Forests

- **Drinking Water Supply** — Forests protect watersheds, aquifers, and groundwater supplies that provide the bulk of our clean drinking water. 75% of Rhode Islanders get their drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests.
- **Healthy Rural Economies** — Working forests provide jobs, forest products, recreation, tourism, hunting and fishing income to forest owners and the communities in which they live.
- **Forests and Climate Change** — Family forests and forest products provide an immediate and cost-effective method to reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Healthy forests remove emissions from the air and store them every day. For every ton of wood a forest grows, about 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide are removed from the air, stored in forests and replaced with 1.1 tons of oxygen.
- **Energy** - Forests have the tremendous potential to provide renewable energy solutions to rural America
- **Recreation** — Forests provide countless recreation opportunities and income in the form of camping, fishing, and hiking much of which takes place on private lands, most of which is forested.
- **Biodiversity & Endangered species** — Almost 90% of the endangered species depend on forest for the habitat they provide.
- **Wildlife** — Rhode Island's forests provide habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife including: 48 species of mammals, 130 species of birds, 48 species of freshwater fish, 19 amphibians and 20 species of reptiles.

## Family Forests and Climate Change

Family forests and forest products provide an immediate and cost-effective method to reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Healthy forests remove emissions from the air and store them every day. Ten percent of *all* U.S. carbon emissions each year are absorbed and stored by America's forests and forest products. The following types of projects can be undertaken to sequester and store greater levels of carbon in our private forests:

1. **Afforestation** – planting trees in areas that have been without trees for an extended period (e.g., pasture or marginal farmland).
2. **Reforestation** – planting trees that were recently lost due to natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina.
3. **Forest Management** – using forestry practices (e.g., thinning, extending the length of time between timber harvests, reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire) to enhance the amount of carbon stored in a forest.
4. **Harvested Wood Products** – carbon storage in wood products varies depending on species (hardwood, softwood) and product type (homebuilding, furniture, etc.).
5. **Avoided Deforestation** – contracts, conservation easements, or other legal instruments that assure that a site will remain forested.



## Challenges to Conserving Rhode Island's Family Forests

Family forests face the following challenges to their long-term sustainability and affordability.

1. **Protecting Forestland from Development** — Since 1985, RI has lost 41,000 acres of forest land to developed land uses.
2. **Shrinking Size of Forest Tracts** — As forest tracts become smaller, their ability to provide goods and services, such as clean water, forest products, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, diminishes.
3. **Property & Estate Taxes** — Taxes often make it unaffordable for families to continue forest ownership.
4. **Aging Forest Owners** — The average age of family forest owners is 60+ years. Consequently, a significant portion of family forest may soon change hands, often resulting in splitting forest into smaller pieces.
5. **Inadequately Funded State Forestry Agencies** — Dramatically reduced funding for state forestry agencies (RIDEM & URI) reduce important sources of technical and financial assistance for private landowners.
6. **Invasive Plants** — Invasive plants are spreading throughout North America with the help of humans, animals, and natural vectors such as wind and water. These species are threatening forests by displacing native flora, altering nutrient composition, and changing aesthetics. In addition, these plants have economic implications, nationally costing billions of dollars annually through reduced timber yield and the costs of inspection and eradication.
7. **Insects & Disease** — A variety of insect pests and tree diseases are causing damage in the New England States. Exotic invasive species continue to create the most concern for forest health in both urban and rural areas. The effects from these pests have been costly and it is expected that they will cause more significant damage in the next decade.



# Environmental Learning

Conserving our natural world and educating our youth on environmental issues are fundamental to our success and well-being as a nation and as a people. Our forest conservation and environmental education work are connected by our vision and our mission: *To strive to ensure the sustainability of America's family forests for present and future generations.* An environmental literacy gap is growing in the United States, with two-thirds of the public failing a basic environmental quiz.

A reported 45 million Americans think the ocean is a source of fresh water and 130 million think hydropower supplies most of the energy in the United States. Lack of environmental awareness or understanding has been cited as one of the leading causes for lower student performance on standardized science tests, compared to other countries. Only three states, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, require some type of teacher certification for environmental education. We need environmental education to provide the tools our youth will need to compete in a 21st Century work force. AFF is educating the next generation of forest owners so our nation's private forests will continue to thrive.



## Project Learning Tree

PLT began in 1976 when natural resource managers and educators from the American Forest Institute (now the American Forest Foundation) and Western Regional Environmental Education Council (now the Council of Environmental Education) formed a partnership to develop an unbiased, educationally sound program for elementary and secondary students and their teachers. The partners

designed PLT to be shared through trained facilitators (educators, resource managers, or other interested people) who, in turn, train others in how to most effectively and efficiently use the curriculum and materials.

Project Learning Tree started in Rhode Island in 1978. The program uses the forest as a “window” into the relationship between the natural and built environments, helping people gain an awareness and knowledge of the world around them, as well as their place within it. PLT initially was facilitated by teachers. One of the first facilitators, Janet Gould remarked on how, through PLT, educators finally had a program that helped teachers reach out to students about environmental education. As the program matured, the State of Rhode Island was one of the first states to have a forester dedicated to working with the educators. The current PLT Coordinator, Paul C. Dolan, started working with the program in 1983, and has been the coordinator for over 25 years. Since its beginning says Mr. Dolan, “We have held well over a hundred of workshop and informational sessions reaching thousands of teachers, and informal educators.”



**RI TREE FARM PROGRAM**

## Education through Partnerships

To succeed in today's world, Tree Farm's education programs are adapting to major societal trends. The "greening" of our society is now a given, but in many ways our educational system and our ways of reaching forest landowners have not yet caught up. Additionally, there are now more forest landowners than ever before. The US Forest service estimates that there are 38,400 forest landowners in RI, an increase from 24,000 in 1995. To reach this ever-expanding group of new landowners, RI Tree Farm has embarked on an "Education through Partnerships" approach to outreach and education. By partnering with a variety of different groups, each can reach a broader of landowners and interests. Some of these partnerships include:

- RI Department of Environmental Management
- Providence Water Supply Board
- RI Forest Conservators Organization
- RI Chapter Society of American Foresters
- RI Resource Conservation & Development Council
- RI Association of Conservation Districts
- RI Envirothon
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service





## Acknowledgements

A project of the Rhode Island Tree Farm Committee.

Prepared with the assistance of Christopher F. Modisette, USDA NRCS, Paul Boisvert, President, Rhode Island Forest Conservators Organization, Hans T. Bergey, Consulting Forester, Marc J. Tremblay, Consulting Forester, Paul C. Dolan, Deputy Chief, RIDEM-Division of Forest Environment, and Thomas Armstrong, Retired Forester, RIDEM-Division of Forest Environment.

Printing provided through a Capacity Building Grant from the American Forest Foundation.

Technical Assistance provided by: Julie Crow, Operations Coordinator, American Tree Farm System.

American Tree Farm System information provided by the American Forest Foundation.

Photographs: Cover - Fall Foliage courtesy of Salvatore Mancini. Others provided by the RI RC&D Council, the Edward Vock Family, The Greene Company, Providence Water, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (RI), Chris Modisette and Paul Dolan.

Specials thanks to the following individuals who provided input into this document: John Macera, Ron Fasano, Rob MacMillan, Thomas Abbott, Thomas Dupree, Peter Lockwood, and Dawn Lockwood.

“Green Hope for the future” courtesy of RIDEM – Division of Forest Environment, Rhode Island Forest Resource Plan, Report 108, March 2005.

## The RI Tree Farm Program is Sponsored By:





70 YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

*1941-2011*