

# THE FOREST CONSERVATIONIST

*A Publication of the Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, Inc.*



## ANNUAL ACTIVITY UPDATE 2023

**RIFCO is an affiliate of the National Woodland Owner's Association  
& co-sponsor of the RI Tree Farm Program**

### **Friend of the Forest: Christopher F. Modisette**

Chris started his forestry career at Providence Water in 1979, and has since been actively involved in all manners of the forestry community here in RI, especially with the Southern New England Forest Consortium, the RI Tree Farm Program and the Society of American Foresters.

Chris recently retired from the USDA-NRCS, where he led the resource team there, and provided professional guidance to the NRCS RI office in the expansion of technical and cost-share assistance to RI woodland owners through its EQIP programs. He has mentored several of the foresters that now work with RI woodland owners.



### **RI Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year**

#### **Thomas Angell of Scituate, RI**

At left, Ron Fasano presents the annual OTFY award to Tom & Ruth Angell, who are joined by Tom's sister Jean, also a woodlot owner from Scituate, at the RI Tree Farm Program's Annual dinner.

A Tree Farmer since 1987, Tom manages the family's property on Chopmist Hill in Scituate, and has worked to conserve his forest land that is situated in the Scituate Reservoir watershed. He has been active with RIFCO since its inception, and has been the Chair of the Scituate Land Trust and Conservation Commission.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By William Fortune

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### Being Engaged

By Bill Fortune

There is no shortage of issues that pertain to local forest conservation. Forest conservation issues are multidimensional and have wide reaching implications. No one person can solve all these issues alone. It clearly requires a group effort on the part of a committed organization to even start to make a difference regarding these issues.

An issue that I feel that is often overlooked is that of engagement on a personal level. It is wonderful that people feel passionate about forest conservation. Unfortunately, feeling good about forest conservation and staying at home with those noble thoughts kept to yourself doesn't really do much good. Engagement is the start and foundation of making a difference. I realize that not everyone has the time, energy, or expertise to go on a forest conservation crusade potentially giving every ounce of one's energy to the cause. Just the fact that you are reading this is a sign that you are concerned with forest conservation issues and are willing to put some energy into this. That wasn't so hard now, was it?

Something that is almost as easy as reading this message is to open and read through RIFCO's monthly E-news. I'm guessing that many of you are already doing this. The E-news typically contains listings and descriptions of RIFCO events such as tours and educational workshops as well as the events of other related local groups. The E-news also presents technical and policy articles and links to other related topics. The E-news is a great and almost effortless way of keeping in touch

with what we are doing along with other relevant forest conservation news. The E-news is free to anyone, RIFCO member or not, and it is something you can pass along to others that you feel may be interested.

As mentioned, RIFCO hosts several workshops and outdoor educational walks. Many of you have attended at least some of them and probably feel that there is always something new to learn at each event and they are great opportunities to network with other RIFCO members and like-minded individuals. The next higher level of engagement is to write an article for submission to our E-news, be a presenter at one of our workshops or host an outdoor tour if you have access to a property that has an educational value. Many of you have also done this. The next level of commitment is to become active as a RIFCO Board member. We are always looking for additional fresh faces who feel that they have the time and something to offer RIFCO as an organization.

What makes RIFCO work so well is that we have a dedicated and engaged base and our members participate at a healthy level. Our efforts are for our members and for the greater good of forest conservation.

I would like to sincerely thank all of you who do participate, and encourage others to jump in. Without your participation none of what we do would really matter.

# POLICY & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

## RI FOREST CONSERVATION COMMISSION

RIFCO is represented on the newly-appointed FCC to represent woodland owners. This year's efforts focused on the determination of RI's Most Important Forests, a criteria that the Commission will provide to the RI DEM and the state legislature for inclusion in future policy and legislation that impacts land use, solar-siting, and forest conservation efforts.

See more on its website: [dem.ri.gov/about-us/dem-offices/commissions/rhode-island-forest-conservation-commission](http://dem.ri.gov/about-us/dem-offices/commissions/rhode-island-forest-conservation-commission)

## RI WOODLAND PARTNERSHIP

As a partner organization, RIFCO has participated in the Partnership's meetings to help advance the collaboration of like-minded organizations in the conservation of RI's woodland resources.

For more about the Woodland Partnership and the collaborative projects we've been working on, go to: [rhodeislandwoods.uri.edu](http://rhodeislandwoods.uri.edu) and click on Links to see the RI Woodland Partnership site.

The current hot-button topic that we've been involved with:

RI's Most Important Forests (final draft, complete text at RIFCC website):

The Commission has determined that forests meeting any of the following seven criteria are "the most important forest land" under the Act:

### **Core Forests:**

Unfragmented forest blocks of single or multiple parcels totaling two hundred and fifty (250) acres or greater unbroken by development and at least twenty-five (25) yards from mapped roads.

### **Old Growth Forests:**

The term "Old Growth Forests" shall be defined as a tract of forest land at least 5 contiguous acres in size, with no evidence of previous forest conversion such as logging, cellar holes, stone walls, roads, or other post European settlement disturbance, and exhibiting at least three of the features commonly called "old growth forest characteristics" as defined below;

### **Old Growth Forest Characteristics**

The term "Old Growth Forest Characteristics" shall be defined as characteristics commonly used to identify "Old Growth Forests".

These characteristics include:

- An abundance of late successional tree species, with at least a majority of canopy trees that exceed half their maximum biological age, including numerous large diameter trees;
- A complex structural diversity of old, young, and middle-aged trees at different canopy levels; large standing dead trees called 'snags', live trees with cavities, dead, broken, or decaying parts; canopy gaps; coarse woody debris along the forest floor consisting of abundant dead wood in various sizes and stages of decay;
- An abundance of lichen or moss on trees, decaying logs, and on the ground;
- Has the capacity for self-perpetuation.

### **Most Productive Forest Soils:**

The best and most productive soils for growing trees consisting of 50% or more forest cover.

### **Forest to protect drinking water supplies:**

Forests whose protection would most benefit drinking water supplies, being within 200 feet of tributary streams of surface water supply reservoirs, within 200 feet of class A waters, and all forests within well head protection areas and/or groundwater classified as GAA.

### **RI Natural Heritage Rare Forest Types:**

Those forest types recognized by the RI Natural Heritage Program as being most at risk of extinction within Rhode Island. Currently those types are:

- Pitch pine/scrub oak,
- Mixed oak/ American holly,
- Floodplain forest: includes Silver Maple/Sycamore and Red Maple/Pin Oak floodplain forests
- Atlantic white cedar swamp,
- Red maple/ash swamp,
- Southern New England mesic forest: includes beech, sugar maple, red oak.

### **Urban Forests**

All trees located within a US Census Urban Area including but not limited to trees in public rights-of-way, parks, private property, and residential yards.

# RIFCO'S BIOCHAR INITIATIVE

[www.biochar-ri.org](http://www.biochar-ri.org)

## FOREST CARBON & BIOCHAR PRODUCTION WORKSHOP VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT THE RI BIOCHAR INITIATIVE WEBSITE: [WWW.BIOCHAR-RI.ORG](http://WWW.BIOCHAR-RI.ORG)

USDA-NRCS has recently updated a couple of its practices under the Conservation Stewardship Program and EQIP to include soil enhancements with biochar from woody residue.

Check out our website for the biochar initiative, where we've loaded up some information on biochar and its many uses, producers in the region, and the videos from the 2022 biochar workshop, courtesy of Zane Lewis.

### The 2023 Exeter Fire



On April 14 & 15, after several weeks of dry weather and during a couple of exceptionally warm spring days, the state experienced several wildfires, with the largest being the Exeter Fire.

Above, a recently thinned pine stand where a crown fire swept through, killing all White pines. At right, across the Queen River where the fire started, an un-thinned pine stand also experienced a crown fire, killing all pines.

Deer browse on sprouting hardwood stumps was the next eco-disaster in these areas!



In response to the fires in April, 2023, the state legislature created the Fire Commission to come up with recommendations on improving capacity to respond to these events, and funding was added to the state's budget to hire 2 new fire and forest management positions at the RI DEM, Div. of Agriculture & Forestry.



## RIFCO's 2023 OUTREACH EVENTS

Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, we've got them all! RIFCO sponsors winter workshops, a Spring Program, a Summer Walk, and we co-sponsor the RI Tree Farm Fall Tour every year.

In 2023, we held our Spring Program walk in the woods at Wild Harmony Farm in Exeter, where Ben Coerper has established some silvopasture areas as part of his agro-forestry program, raising beef cows in lightly-wooded pastures.

A Summer Twilight Walk took place at the site of the April Queen River Fire in Exeter. Our host, Ray Pezza, provided access to his property to view the area where a crown fire destroyed a pine stand, and we walked over the bridge onto the TNC's Queen River Preserve, where the fire originated and where an un-thinned pine stand had also burned. We should revisit those sites in a couple of years to see how they've responded!



And we co-sponsored the RI Tree Farm Program's Fall Tour, which was held at the Rotondo Tree Farm in Foster, where the folks from the RI Health Works Project provided information on the availability of funds to purchase Forest Conservation Easements.

At right, JoAnn Riccitelli (on the left) and Kate Bousquet present information about the RI Forest Health Works Project at the RI Tree Farm Program's Annual Fall Tour, held at Bob Rotondo's Tree Farm in Foster. Great thing we had Bob's pole barn to shelter in out of the rain that morning!

RIFCO then held an indoor Workshop on Forest Conservation Easements and the RI Forest Health Works Project at the West Greenwich Community Center in November of 2023. Our speakers included Kate Sayles and Marina Capraro, along with a panel of woodland owners that have had experience selling their development rights.



# RIFCO'S DEMONSTRATION WOODLOTS

## MERRIMAN DEMONSTRATION WOODLOT, HOWARD HILL ROAD, FOSTER

RIFCO Receives NRCS funding for Practices, CSP Contract



2005 habitat clearing with slash (left) and without (right)

2015 Inventory:

# TREES/ACRE: Clearcut 1: (With Slash): 1150  
Clearcut 2: (Without Slash) 650

Is it time to re-cut our 2-acre habitat clearing (est. 2005)  
Or should we just release the oak sprouts that came in?

The Foster woodlot, consisting of 40 acres of oak woodlands thanks to Alex and Julia Merriman, is also the northern RI demonstration woodlot for the Forestry for RI Birds project. Several thinning and habitat projects have taken place here, and additional work is being carried out in cooperation with the USDA-NRCS and their programs.

RIFCO has been awarded a CSP contract with the USDA-NRCS, beginning in 2023. That 5-year contract

includes annual stewardship payments and payment for practices, including obstruction removal in the landing, a new section of forest trail, and several acres of Forest Stand Improvement thinning.

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## BUGNET DEMONSTRATION WOODLOT, WEST GREENWICH



RIFCO's pine-dominated demonstration woodlot, owned by the West Greenwich Land Trust with a cooperative management agreement with RIFCO, was dedicated to Ernest & Marie Bugnet in 2021.

The property is adjacent to the Big River Management Area along New London Turnpike.

An update to its Forest Stewardship Plan is planned for 2024, as well as a selective harvest and fire break to help reduce fire hazards.

Rhode Island Forest Conservator's Organization, Inc. (RIFCO),  
PO Box 53, North Scituate, RI 02857 www.rifco.org  
Email: info@rifco.org  
**RIFCO Executive Committee (2024)**

Officers

President William Fortune  
Vice- President Richard Went  
Secretary Richard Nagle  
Treasurer Marc Tremblay  
& Outreach Coordinator

Directors

Norm Hammond  
Tom Bryson  
Hilary Fortune  
Bob Verrier  
Bob Maguire  
Mike Cavaliere  
Thomas Angell

**The RIFCO Board would like to thank all of our members and partners for their support, both financially and through their participation in our programs and activities.**

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

There are numerous benefits of a RIFCO Membership

### **Involvement**

As a member, you will have the opportunity to join together with other landowners, natural resource professionals, land trusts, and industry representatives to exchange ideas, receive technical advice, and help promote action on vital conservation issues.

### **Publications & Workshops**

You will receive our monthly digital e-news and our printed Annual Report. And you will be invited to attend meetings and workshops dealing with the cur-

rent issues in woodlot, shade tree, and wildlife management.

### **Technical Assistance**

The RIFCO Outreach Coordinator is available for telephone and on-site assistance with woodlot management advice. Often the issues can be addressed over the phone or by email, or with referrals to other resources. There are times when your questions or your situation is best addressed in person, with a visit to your woodlot to provide an assessment.

## WHY JOIN RIFCO?

- Education and technical assistance on woodlot management
- Networking with people in similar situations
- Advocacy voice on issues such as taxes and regulations
- Support forestry and agriculture in Rhode Island
- Support wise use of RI's woodland resources
- Fellowship
- Voice concerns on issues through a common medium
- Participation by landowners in the policy-making process
- Staying on top of issues and current events through receipt of monthly e-news

Are these reason enough for you to become a member of RIFCO, and to continue your support if you already are a member? Our voice on forestry issues is only as strong as our membership. Visit our website (www.rifco.org) for our membership form, and join us at our meetings.



## OUR 2023 AWARD WINNERS ARE:



### YOUTH FORESTRY AWARD

Billie Desjalais of Coventry was awarded the first of RIFCO's enhanced David & Betsy Kilmartin Youth Forestry Award at the RIFCO Annual Dinner Meeting in November of 2023. Billie led the Coventry Envirothon Team for the past couple of years and is looking forward to enrolling in a forestry and/or arboricultural program at UMass in 2024.

RI Forest Conservator's Organization  
PO Box 53  
No. Scituate, RI 02857

