

Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Project Synopsis

Project Title: Rhode Island Natural Heritage Data Management Renewal

Goal: The preservation and enhancement of rare species, rare natural community types, and resources that support them (collectively referred to here as “natural heritage resources”) is one of the earliest and still one of the most important goals of the land conservation movement. In order best to utilize the resources being devoted to this goal, nothing is more important than accurate, timely information on the location and viability of natural heritage resources. Stewardship of conservation land in absence of this information, or with poor information, is not only inefficient, it presents the possibility of making flawed decisions that would jeopardize the widespread public support of conservation in general. Data on natural heritage resources in Rhode Island has been systematically collected since at least the mid-1970’s when the state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) instituted the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program (RINHP). In 2002, RINHS became directly involved in supporting RINHP’s data management activities and from 2004 to 2008 supported a data manager for the purpose with support from TNC and the Rhode Island Foundation. From 2008 on, due to lack of funds, there has been little direct support for natural heritage data management from RINHS, resulting in a data backlog and technical and accessibility problems with the existing facility. From the late 1990’s to the present DEM has collected important data on various natural heritage resources that have not been incorporated in databases managed by either RINHP or RINHS. In 2009, RINHS, DEM, TNC, and URI agreed to work together to combine divergent and under-supported data management efforts, clarify the roles of each organization, and build a coherent and effective data management capability going forward. The purpose of the present request is to support this nascent initiative with funds sufficient to continue early development of a comprehensive technical and institutional solution.

Brief Description: Funding is requested to pay for a database technician to work with RINHS, DEM, URI, TNC and other involved parties to identify and describe in technical terms the existing data sources proposed for integration, assist the parties in formatting and otherwise organizing existing data sources for test integrations during development, and for providing technical assistance to the parties who will be keyboarding backlogged data (for instance by finding or creating a suitable data entry screen and training volunteers or interns to use it). Funding is also requested to pay students, preferably work study students, a modest rate for data entry and other clerical tasks. Funding is requested for personnel time and miscellaneous costs to convene meetings of the parties in spring 2010 for planning.

Deliverables: The deliverable for this project are:

1. A plan, with timetable and budget, for implementation of a single, statewide natural heritage data management program, including plans for collection, validation, and entry of new data, and for access by various user groups.
2. Entry of all backlogged data at RINHS and assist DEM with entry of backlogged data.

3. A “demonstration” product that combines at least samples of all existing major data types and formats and includes a procedure for fulfilling routine data access requests.

Timetable and Benchmarks:

Support is requested for calendar 2010.

July 1 -- a draft plan for further implementation of natural heritage data management renewal, including an outline for a demonstration project and a list of obstacles that require research

December 1 -- a plan, with timeline and budget, for further implementation of natural heritage data management renewal

Budget:

Amount	Purpose
\$1,800	45 hours database technician time
\$2,000	student assistance (preferably work study), approx. 200 hours.
\$2,500	personnel time to convene players and develop a structure for future heritage program operations
\$6,300	TOTAL

Payment will be made to The Rhode Island Natural History Survey:

Attn: Dr. David Gregg
Rhode Island Natural History Survey
P.O. Box 1858
Kingston, RI 02881

Project oversight will be done by David Gregg, Rhode Island Natural History Survey