

CSC Project Report – 2020

Date Report submitted: November 20, 2020

Project Title: URI Land Conservation Seminar Course on Baseline Documents
Project oversight: Rhode Island Land Trust Council

Goal: Replicate the very successful class at URI that was taught in Spring 2016 and repeated in Fall 2018 Semester. This class:

- Complements the RI Land Trust Council's circuit rider program to help land trusts prepare baseline documents.
- Engages URI Natural Resource students in a concrete land conservation stewardship project that uses the skills and knowledge they have gained through classwork. This project exposes the students to real world contributions they can make to address land stewardship needs and connects them with Rhode Island's land conservation community.
- Engages and coach students in the production of a Baseline Documentation Report (BDR) for a local conservation group to help address the existing 'BDR backlog' in Rhode Island by creating baseline documents for 10-15 properties.
- Provide students with a tangible portfolio project that demonstrates their technical skills in an applied fashion.

Brief Description: Upper level undergraduate students in the Natural Resources Science Department at the University of Rhode Island have all of the content and technical skills required to create baseline documentation for local land conservation groups. They are well trained in flora, fauna, and environmental resource identification, have experience with GIS mapping, are technologically adept, and are passionate about contributing to the protection and restoration of natural systems. However, in most cases students lack exposure to the basic framework of land conservation transactions, are unaware of the stewardship needs facing the land conservation community, and are not currently engaged in local land conservation efforts.

This project conducts a seminar class for these students with instruction, coaching and oversight by an expert working in the field that enables them to prepare a baseline document report for a protected property. The students will finish the class with the knowledge and experience of preparing baseline documents. Students are each partnered with a land trust or other conservation organization to prepare a baseline document. This has resulted in students continuing to work with land trusts after the class.

CSC funding was used to pay for the consultant who teaches the seminar, supervises the student's work and ensures quality control for the baseline documents being prepared. This project has a strong track record helping land trusts reduce the backlog of baseline documents needed for protected properties. It has a great cost efficiency for preparing baseline documents and increases the number of people in Rhode Island with expertise and experience preparing these important stewardship records.

Accomplishments: The accomplishments of this project are:

- This class was held in Spring 2020 semester. The class was altered because of COVID and the URI suspending class and then continuing with instruction on line.
 - 14 students were enrolled in the class
 - 12 Baseline Document Reports (BDRs) were completed for land trusts
 - 8 land trusts were involved in this project as partners. 6 received completed BDRs.
 - ◇ Barrington
 - ◇ Glocester
 - ◇ Narrow River
 - ◇ Hopkinton
 - ◇ South Kingstown
 - ◇ Warren Land Trust
 - ◇ Weekapaug

Budget: CSC Awarded a grant of \$8,400 for this project which were fully expended for a contract with the course instructor.

University of Rhode Island contributed in-kind class space and ARC-GIS licenses for the students.

Recommendations: This is a very successful project with a strong track record of:
- connecting students with land conservation and stewardship work;
- engaging students with land trusts - in past classes several students from this semiar have continued to be involved with land conservation as board members of land trusts, volunteers, interns and staff;
- training students to prepare baseline document reports; and
- cost effective preparation of Baseline Document Reports for conservation lands which helps land trusts reduce their backlog of baseline document reports.

We found that there are not enough students interested in taking this class to hold it every year. We recommend offering it every other year. We also have learned that it is important for URI instructors to promote the class with students taking wildlife and other classes.