

Rhode Island

STRATEGIC PLAN

JANUARY 1, 2024 - JUNE 30, 2027





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FOREWORD



Rhode Island is the Ocean State. Its tidal waters flow from the lands and rivers, forests, islands, cities, and landscapes that surround Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound.

The Nature Conservancy established the Rhode Island chapter in 1989. While best known for protecting great places since the 1960s, it has grown significantly in the last decade to better serve all of Rhode Island’s communities.

TNC is addressing climate change, reconnecting marine and coastal systems, influencing public policy, advancing science, and building partnerships to achieve large-scale conservation and ecological restoration needs for the whole region.

The work of the Rhode Island chapter directly contributes to TNC’s 2030 climate and biodiversity goals for the Northeast and for all North America, including climate mitigation and adaptation; large-scale land conservation; rapid, responsible development and siting of renewable energy; advancing conservation in cities; and improving organizational effectiveness, culture, diversity, and inclusion. We lead in and from our place and collaborate intentionally with other U.S. chapters and TNC business units to achieve these high-level goals.

The next four years are critical for the future of nature in Rhode Island and the region. Precious forests, farmlands, and marshes are threatened by development, pollution, and habitat degradation and fragmentation.

The warming climate causes ever higher high tides that inundate and transform coastal wetlands and flood communities. Increasingly intense and frequent coastal storms accelerate erosion.

Warmer and shorter winters and more extreme weather in summer disrupt the balance of native plant and animal communities and change the distribution and abundance of species.

To meet these challenges, we will build on the foundation of all TNC’s work to date to achieve tangible, lasting results on climate for all of Rhode Island. TNC will adapt and evolve to optimize our effectiveness, leveraging federal and state climate and infrastructure funding to help get more done at a greater scale.

Partnerships are key to everything TNC does. In the next four years, TNC will grow partnerships with municipal, state, and federal agencies, universities, environmental and labor groups, and the private sector to accelerate our impacts. By acting as a fiscal agent and project manager for large and complex restoration and conservation projects, we will take full advantage of new funding streams and help to position Rhode Island as a top leader in these areas.

This plan prioritizes the challenges TNC must meet to reach our full potential for people and nature over the next four years and positions the Rhode Island chapter to maximize our contributions to TNC’s 2030 goals. Thank you to all staff and trustees for helping to create it!

John Torgan
Rhode Island State Director

OVERVIEW

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to protect the lands and waters upon which all life depends. In Rhode Island, our conservation efforts focus on the tidal waters, the lands and forests that surround them, and the rivers that flow into them. We address the effects of climate change by reducing carbon emissions, accelerating the deployment of renewable energy including offshore wind, and helping communities adopt nature-based resilience strategies. To achieve all this, we will strengthen support for the mission by making the organization and its work more diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all people.

Our actions between now and 2027 are critical to the future of biodiversity and climate change across the world and especially in Rhode Island. Thanks to the strength of TNC's staff, our board of trustees, and supporters - and backed by the resources of the worldwide organization - TNC is uniquely positioned to make a difference here in Rhode Island and for all of nature.

Over the next four years, we will advance land protection and management in key areas, sustain our progress in coastal and river restoration, and build on the foundation of our climate and renewable energy work in Rhode Island. Our growth and ultimate success will depend on building and sustaining strategic partnerships with federal, state, and municipal agencies and with our nonprofit and private sector partners.

We will position the Rhode Island chapter to achieve our conservation and climate goals by investing in our professional staff, maintaining a highly effective and diverse board of trustees, and stewarding relationships with existing and new supporters. We will develop a practice of equitable conservation that centers equity and serves nature and all people and communities in Rhode Island. And we will lead both in and from Rhode Island to move the greater organization forward to a more resilient future.



TILLINGHAST POND MANAGEMENT AREA, WEST GREENWICH, RI © AYL A FOX

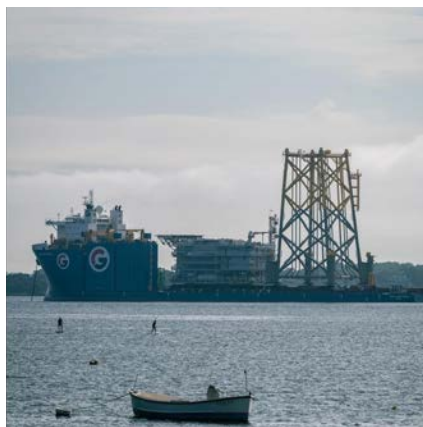
REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS

GOAL

Put Rhode Island on track to meet science-based greenhouse gas reduction mandates for 2030 and 2040, and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, as part of a just transition to a clean energy future.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Advocate for state legislation to promote decarbonization across the entire economy, including the electric, thermal and transportation sectors, as well as the adoption of strong energy efficiency plans.
- ▶ Sponsor and oversee TNC's Atlantic coast offshore wind program. Engage in the permitting process, providing data, science, and policy analysis to advance responsible offshore wind energy development, reduce conflicts with commercial and recreational fishing, and minimize impacts to habitat and coastal communities.
- ▶ Work with state agencies and NGO partners to articulate Rhode Island's strategy to achieve "no net forest loss" in the 2025 Act on Climate Implementation Plan.
- ▶ Drive Rhode Island's implementation of the Act on Climate by engaging in the 2025 Plan, the Energy Efficiency Resource Management Council, the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council Advisory Board, the Distributed Generation Board, the Public Utilities Commission docket on the Future of Gas, and the Climate Justice Advisory Board.
- ▶ Help lead Climate Jobs Rhode Island, coordinating with environmental, justice, and labor stakeholders to accelerate implementation of greenhouse gas reduction and workforce development policies.



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CLIMATE JUSTICE & RESILIENCE

GOAL

Partner with all Rhode Island municipalities to build statewide resilience to natural and climate-related hazards.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Advocate for increased state funding for the Municipal Resilience Program (MRP) and accelerate the completion of local climate resilience projects in partnership with the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).
- ▶ Lead regional collaboration among cities and towns, and between municipalities and private sector partners, and help secure federal funding for green infrastructure and climate resilience.
- ▶ Expand MRP to include new partners, such as the Office of Energy Resources and DEM to integrate energy, forestry, and other resilience-related efforts.

GOAL

Support municipal and state efforts to restore urban water quality and bring nature back to city neighborhoods.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ With the Green Infrastructure Coalition and community stakeholders, promote sustainable municipal funding mechanisms for stormwater management. Develop a model that can be adopted by urban communities throughout the Narragansett Bay watershed.
- ▶ Support municipalities' integration of nature-based solutions for stormwater management and tree equity while making other infrastructure upgrades.
- ▶ Amplify the Stormwater Innovation Center's work to provide professional water quality monitoring for the City of Providence and promote participatory science at the Roger Williams Park ponds and other priority water bodies.



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CLIMATE JUSTICE & RESILIENCE

GOAL

Support state agencies in centering equity and justice in climate action through our government relations work.

STRATEGIES

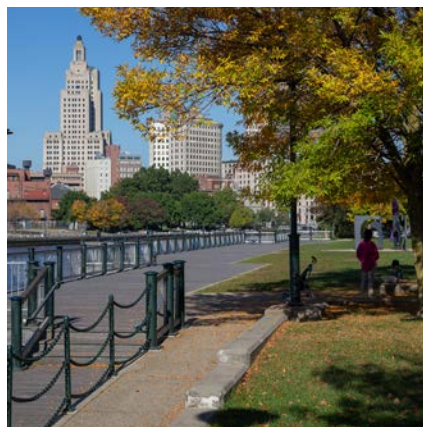
- ▶ Provide support for expansion of DEM's Climate Justice program partnership to create and coordinate a climate justice advisory committee to inform the state climate council's processes and decision-making.
- ▶ Within the annual state budget process, work with state agencies to expand climate justice staff capacity to engage and partner with communities.
- ▶ View state and federal policy priorities through an equity and justice lens.

GOAL

Reduce vulnerability to heat and other climate impacts by implementing community priorities identified in PVD Tree Plan.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Implement the PVD Tree Plan with partners, building the community mechanisms for workforce development, tree care and maintenance, and resident engagement to set the City of Providence on track to achieve equity in tree cover across all neighborhoods by 2030.
- ▶ Build funding and support for the PVD Tree Plan from federal, state, and private sources.



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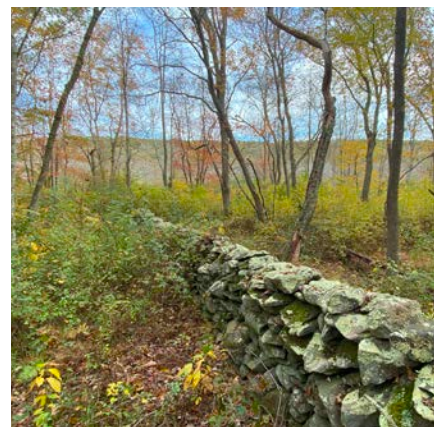
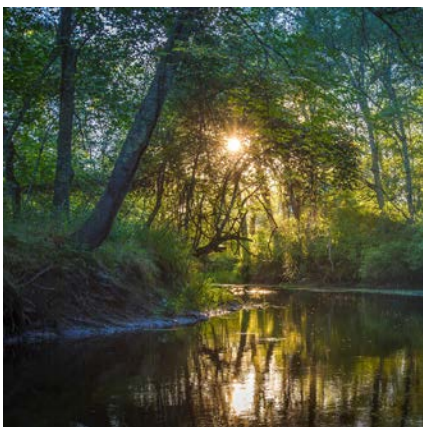
SAVING LANDS FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

GOAL

Protect wildlife habitats that contribute to biodiversity and climate resilience, in Rhode Island and across the region.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Conserve high priority forests, working farms, and coastal shrublands and marshlands, building on Rhode Island's network of resilient and connected natural systems along the Connecticut border, in South County and the Sakonnet, and on Block Island. Close on at least 5 new land projects each year.
- ▶ Expand TNC's land conservation plan to pursue opportunities in the Providence Metro and East Bay areas that may contain less biodiversity but support public access to nature, climate resilience or other important local priorities.
- ▶ Manage TNC's 25 nature preserves for people and nature, adopting and demonstrating best practices in wildlife habitat improvement, including forest management and invasive plants control.



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IMPROVING OCEANS, ESTUARIES & RIVERS

GOAL

Improve nature's resilience to climate impacts and increase access to natural resources through restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Conduct habitat restoration and living shoreline projects in the Providence River estuary, Narrow River estuary and the coastal ponds to improve native fish habitat, improve water quality, and protect the coast from climate impacts like flooding, erosion, and sea level rise.
- ▶ Lead removal or lowering of dams and other derelict structures to reduce flood risks and improve natural resilience in freshwater systems, from large rivers like the Pawcatuck to cold-water streams that flow through Rhode Island's core forests. Where dam removal is not possible, enhance connectivity and coastal ecosystem health by installing, improving, or repairing technical fishways.
- ▶ Partner with renewable energy developers to design offshore wind projects that create net positive impacts for biodiversity and deliver the greatest possible benefits in marine and coastal conservation and restoration.
- ▶ Improve public access to Narragansett Bay and inland lakes and streams to enhance recreational opportunities, including fishing, paddling and the enjoyment of Rhode Island's natural beauty.



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DEEPENING SCIENCE PARTNERSHIPS

GOAL

Collaborate with state and federal conservation agencies to advance strategic studies, surveys, and habitat restoration work to manage and restore Rhode Island's unique natural resources by pooling and leveraging financial capacity and technical expertise.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Continue fisheries and habitat monitoring and surveys in the Providence River estuary and in the Great Salt Pond on Block Island, identifying, over time, changes in species composition and relative abundance, and informing state Division of Marine Fisheries regulations that provide for sustainable management of fish species important to commercial and recreational anglers.
- ▶ Evaluate and improve the performance of technical fishways on Rhode Island's coastal streams and monitor returns of river herring and other anadromous fish, through tagging studies and in-water "fish cameras," in partnership with the USFWS Fish Passage Engineering Group.
- ▶ Continue piping plover and least tern monitoring in the Sakonnet, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Environmental Management.
- ▶ Continue longstanding conservation science commitments such as the Block Island Raptor Research Station, Block Island songbird banding, and the American burying beetle study and connect young scientists with new research opportunities at TNC preserves.



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STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION

GOAL

Incorporate principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) in all aspects of our work and in all the places we serve.

STRATEGIES

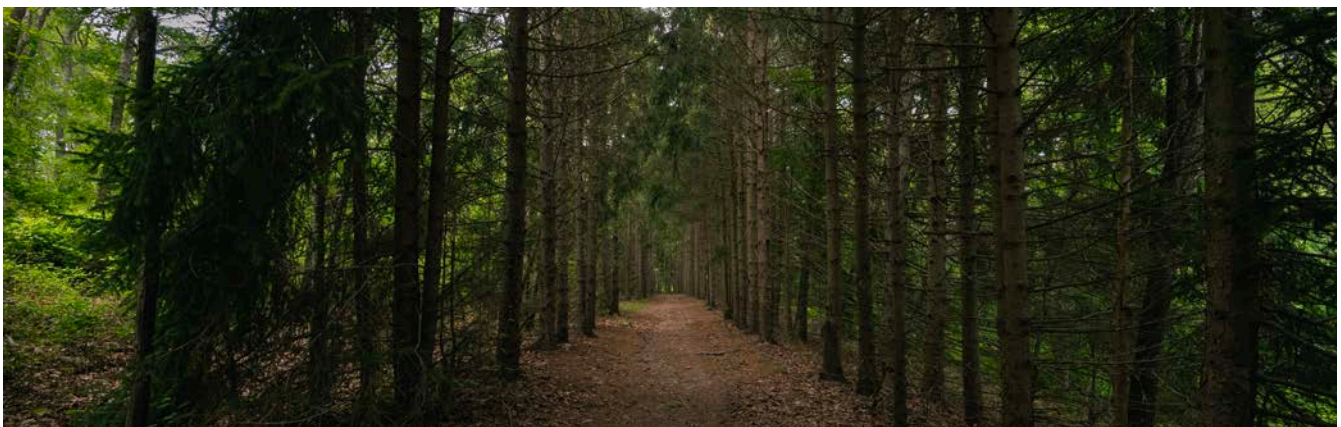
- ▶ Grow our investment in TNC’s regional DEIJ capacity, invest in trainings and learning opportunities, and build partnerships with organizations that can help us grow in this space.
- ▶ Actively pursue recruitment and hiring practices to promote diversity, equity and inclusion among our staff, to integrate a broader range of skills and perspectives.

GOAL

Maintain a healthy and productive work environment that allows each person to thrive and bring their best ideas and whole selves.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Provide professional development opportunities to promote skills building and personal growth, and facilitate career advancement, enabling staff to take on larger responsibilities with or beyond the Rhode Island chapter.
- ▶ Ensure full-time and seasonal positions are aligned with the ambitious goals of this plan.
- ▶ Explore possibility of redirecting some staff responsibilities or adding capacity as necessary, provided sufficient resources are identified to sustain the chapter’s financial health.



KING PRESERVE, NORTH KINGSTOWN, RI © RAFEED HUSSAIN/TNC

PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY

GOAL

Expand opportunities for community engagement and engage volunteers in support of the Rhode Island chapter's strategic plan.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Identify and match volunteer interests (including corporate and youth volunteers) to key chapter priorities, such as trail stewardship, conservation science, habitat restoration, government relations and marketing to support conservation impact and engagement.
- ▶ Identify and support new community partnerships that will connect the Rhode Island chapter to new, diverse groups and enhance our reach and presence, building on TNC's work with Movement Education Outdoors and the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council. Add at least one new partnership each year to expand youth and public engagement.
- ▶ Continue outreach and engagement efforts on Block Island through community science programs and nature-based education.

GOAL

Increase opportunities for people to spend time in nature and manage TNC's preserves as inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces for people of all abilities and experience levels.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Identify barriers to preserve access, develop trail standards, and create a work plan for opportunities to improve trail infrastructure on TNC's preserve system.
- ▶ Enhance psychological safety on TNC's preserves and trail systems through visitor-centric signage and trail maps, making the places we protect more broadly welcoming to inexperienced hikers and marginalized communities.



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PHILANTHROPY AND BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

GOAL

Amplify the chapter's Culture of Philanthropy to achieve our annual revenue goals and the goals of TNC's One Future: Together We Find a Way global campaign.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Support a Culture of Philanthropy in which everyone – chapter staff, board, and divisional and executive leadership – plays a part in fundraising.
- ▶ Raise funds to meet our chapter's annual operating, deferred giving (Legacy Club) and global goals with a focus on incrementally increasing the percentage of unrestricted annual support.
- ▶ Elevate TNC's 2030 campaign objectives to inspire campaign gifts.
- ▶ Engage the board in introducing TNC to their peer networks and assisting with donor solicitations and stewardship.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for the board, donors, and prospects to engage more deeply with staff and our work via on-site field visits and communications that highlight conservation results and demonstrate the impact of their philanthropy.
- ▶ Maintain philanthropy team focus on building the pipeline of qualified prospects through a relationship-based approach to major gift fundraising, incorporating TNC's multiple giving options to maximize gifts.
- ▶ Continue to strengthen the board by implementing the recommendations of our board self-assessment and capacity surveys and by recruiting candidates that bring a diversity of experience and perspectives to the mission.



CARTER PRESERVE, CHARLESTOWN, RI © RAFEED HUSSAIN/TNC

BROADENING SUPPORT FOR NATURE

GOAL

Raise TNC's profile as an environmental leader, expert voice, and innovative, global problem solver, committed to addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

STRATEGIES

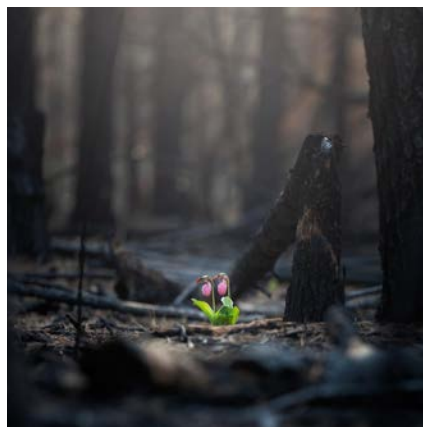
- ▶ Maintain relationships with local print and digital media outlets, reinforcing TNC's reputation as reporters' best resource on climate change, land conservation, and coastal ecosystems.
- ▶ Increase brand awareness and engagement through social media, highlighting Rhode Island's biodiversity and conservation success stories. Invest in social media advertising to reach new, younger and more diverse audiences.
- ▶ Utilize nature.org to elevate stories of the scientists and partnerships that drive TNC's work and promote our nature preserves with high quality imagery and broadly welcoming, visitor-centric language.

GOAL

Support revenue-generating and policy-influencing efforts with strategies that capture attention, deepen understanding and strengthen connections.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Support membership retention and growth through compelling digital and print communications, including the quarterly magazine insert, to engage current members, inspire new audiences and build the managed donor and planned giving pipelines.
- ▶ Support the work of the philanthropy team to engage donor audiences, celebrating successes and demonstrating global impact.
- ▶ Coordinate with government relations staff on messaging to generate the support and momentum needed to move relationships, laws and policies in a direction that will help achieve TNC's conservation goals.



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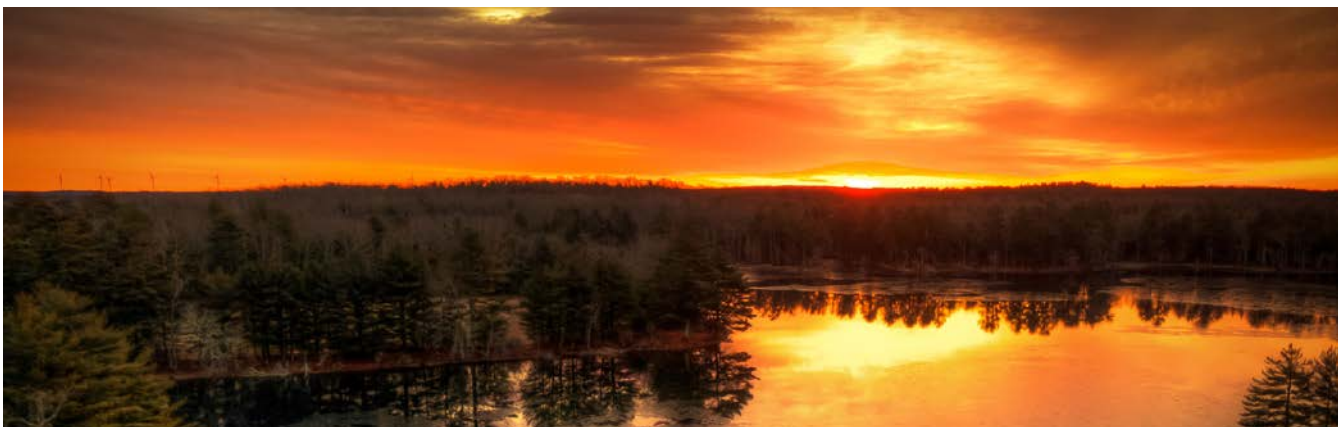
ENSURING FINANCIAL STABILITY

GOAL

Manage the resources of the Rhode Island chapter to ensure long-term financial sustainability, while supporting ambitious conservation outcomes. The chapter is willing to take reasonable and measured risks to achieve our goals.

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Exceed Worldwide Office financial sustainability metrics including: a) unrestricted net assets available to cover 10 percent to 50 percent of budgeted expenses, b) no unapproved year-end negative net-asset balances, and c) an endowment that is greater than two times the annual budget and returns a yearly balance that supports operations and conservation projects.
- ▶ Build and manage a sustainable budget by operating with a sustainable Net Assets balance.
- ▶ Consider all options before incurring debt for capital projects by considering only projects with a sound “take out” strategy and more than 50 percent funding in-hand.
- ▶ Ensure staff and trustee fluency around chapter finances and investments.
- ▶ Finance staff will work collaboratively with conservation and philanthropy teams to ensure donor intent, manage private awards, ensure alignment with chapter direction, produce relevant and informative financial reports, and project funding needs.
- ▶ Leverage the endowment and other internal TNC investment options (Land Protection Fund and Conservation Impact Fund) to earn income from reserves and bequests to advance chapter priorities.



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