

# THE FOREST CONSERVATIONIST

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



## ANNUAL ACTIVITY UPDATE 2024

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

### **RIFCO'S 2024 Friend of the Forest Award: Deana Tempest-Thomas**

Deana, of Scituate, was recognized at the 2024 Annual Conservation Awards Dinner for her work advancing the public's awareness of the importance of the world of fungi (funga) in maintaining healthy forest environments.

Deana is the founder and president of the RI Mycological Society and is a Director of the No. RI Conservation District. Her work promoting the understanding of our world of fungi has brought a new perspective on the importance of forest conservation.

More Award Winners on the Back Page



Above, Deana is presented RIFCO's award by Bill and Hilary Fortune at the November 2, 2024 Conservation Awards Dinner in Portsmouth, RI.

At left, Deana presents at RIFCO's Woodland Owner Workshop in February of 2024. The workshop included two presentations on "Ground Level Ecology", with her talk on the importance of fungi in forest ecosystems, and a talk by Mike Cavaliere, biologist and stewardship manager for the Audubon Society of RI, on amphibians and the importance of protecting vernal pools and freshwater wetland habitats.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By William Fortune

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Our Recurring Efforts

By Bill Fortune

Some things in life you generally only do once. Graduating from high school, getting a driver's license and signing up for social security are a few examples. However, most things in life are repeated over and over again requiring constant attention. It would be fantastic if you only had to paint your house or service your vehicle once and be done with it, but we all know that is far from reality.

It would be nice to think what RIFCO does could be done once and accomplished for eternity. Obviously that's also far from reality. The fact is that the vast majority of what RIFCO does is a recurring activity. That's ok because we are in it for the long haul. Many of you reading this may be fully aware of this but the reminder is worth noting. The threat to healthy, productive forests in Rhode Island is multi-dimensional and, yes, a recurring one.

As soon as RIFCO gets involved in addressing one issue it's clear that there are other outstanding issues and yet more new ones to deal with. It seems to me that in the thirty-five years since RIFCO was established the number of issues we deal with has doubled. There are more invasive pests threatening forest health than ever. The pressure to develop forests for housing, solar fields or other infrastructure is greater than ever. Although the conservation of working forests has been enhanced by programs like the Farm, Forest, Open Space Program and the sale of development rights, these are also just a few of the issues that RIFCO is constantly working on.

I've always been impressed with how much RIFCO accomplishes with a relatively small budget. This is in large part because we are a volunteer organization with thrifty-minded people overseeing our finances. Even less obvious on the list of RIFCO's ongoing obliga-

tions are our operating costs. Our recurring and ever-increasing costs for liability insurance, various postal and printing fees, maintaining a website and conducting workshops are a reality. These operating costs are covered by our membership income, and are the primary importance of membership fees.

I think that most would agree that our transition to a monthly e-news from the old quarterly newsletter that was sent via snail mail does a much better job of keeping our members informed on what RIFCO is doing, as well as what is going on in the greater sphere of forest conservation. The recurring value of our monthly e-news' is in the number of people that actually read it, with numbers way beyond our direct membership.

The same goes with the recurring programs RIFCO puts on—the real value is when people actually attend them. Woodlot walks, indoor workshops, and co-sponsorship of training sessions on topics like the new Forestry BMP Manual and wetland guidelines all rely on Member participation, which makes all those recurring efforts worthwhile.

Last but not least, and perhaps impacting the future of RIFCO's ability to maintain that consistent, recurring effort I've been talking about, is the recurring need to enhance our Board of Directors with new faces, voices, and perspectives. We need younger and more diverse people to participate. Please contact us if you're interested ([info@rifco.org](mailto:info@rifco.org)).

With this said, I sincerely thank our members for your participation and support.

I hope to see you in 2025,  
Bill

# RIFCO'S DEMONSTRATION WOODLOTS

## MERRIMAN DEMONSTRATION WOODLOT, HOWARD HILL ROAD, FOSTER

RIFCO Receives NRCS funding for Practices, CSP Contract



The Foster woodlot, consisting of 40 acres of oak woodlands thanks to Alex and Julia Merri-man, 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 in exchange for implementing “enhancements”, which for 2024 included the installation of 5 bird boxes. We installed 4 bluebird boxes, as seen in the picture at left, and one kestrel box.

We also have an EQIP contract for practices, including obstruction removal in the landing, a new section of forest trail, and several acres of Forest Stand Improvement thinning, which have been marked and is ready for cutting.

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## BUGNET DEMONSTRATION WOODLOT, WEST GREENWICH

RIFCO's Management Agreement with the West Greenwich Land Trust (WGLT) allows us to apply on their behalf for a USDA-NRCS EQIP contract for forestry practices. WGLT is a municipal land trust, which are not eligible for EQIP contracts.

RIFCO will be laying out a forest stand improvement thinning (FSI) on about 12 acres of the property, and as part of that project we'll be establishing a shaded fuel break along New London Turnpike and the southern boundary of the property. A forest fire in April 2023 occurred on the Big River Management Area just west of New London Turnpike, and the pine-dominated landscape presents a heightened fire risk for the property's timber value and adjacent residential properties.

Marking and laying out of the practices will be implemented by Marc Tremblay on behalf of RIFCO, with the timber put out to bid to local wood operators. We'll post progress in our e-news.

## RIFCO's 2024 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 2024, we held our **Woodlot Owner's Workshop Series**, with 2 sessions in West Greenwich and one in Scituate. On February 10 in Scituate, we had two presentations on Ground Level Forest Ecology (see Page 1), followed by a program on Forest Conservation Easements through the Forest Health Works Program, featuring Marina Capraro of the No. RI Conservation District, and Forest Carbon Programs with Tig Tillinghast of Forest Metrix. Brendan Buckless, RI Forest Legacy Coordinator, introduced the new "Your Land, Your Legacy" publication.



*Marina Capraro, at left, addresses the Woodlot Owner Workshop on Conservation Easements, while Nick Gorham, at right discusses the Legal Aspects of Property Ownership at the WOW session on Woodlot Business Management topics.*



Our third workshop was dedicated to Woodlot Business Management topics, including presentations by Nick Gorham on Legal Aspects of Property Ownership, and Financial and Tax Implications with Mike Balsamo of Balsamo Associates and Michele Rosa of American National Insurance (Farm Family).

The **2024 RIFCO Spring Program** was held at Bryson's Tree Farm on May 11th in Richmond, where we continued on the Ground Level Forest Ecology theme by having our February WOW speakers, Deana Thomas and Mike Cavaliere, participate in our walk through some of the Bryson property's wetland and habitat features.

A pleasant spring day greeted us at the Bryson's, with Mike Cavaliere, at right, talking vernal.



## RIFCO's 2024 OUTREACH EVENTS

A **Summer Twilight Walk** took place on August 8th at the Hillsdale Preserve in Richmond, RI. Forester Christopher Riely led a tour through the Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change (ASCC) study site in Rhode Island. It is dominated by oak-hickory forest and is experiencing forest health issues exacerbated by climate stress.



On 40 acres, three different types of forest management treatments are being implemented. The results of the three treatments (as well as an unmanaged no-action control) will be compared to determine the effectiveness of each approach.



The project includes the planting of a variety of tree saplings, as pointed out by RI DFE forester Deanna Phan at left, during the tour.

RIFCO members continued to help out with a **RIFCO information booth** at a couple of events this past year, including the Foster Conservation Fair held in April and the RI Fungal Fair in October, which was held at the Borders Farm in Foster. Bill and Hilary Fortune, along with forester Wolf Mueller, were present at these events.

RIFCO also co-sponsored the **RI Tree Farm Program's Fall Tour**, which was held on October 26th at the Angell Tree Farm in Scituate, RI. During that event, the RI Tree Farm Program presented Steve and Donna Chagnon with the 2024 RI Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year Award, and a number of 25 and 50 year Anniversary signs were presented. A nice write-up about Steve and his Foster woodlot made it into The Observer in December.

*Below, Chris Modisette, at right, addresses the attendees of the Fall Tour, while at right, RI Tree Farm Chair Ron Fasano, in the blue jacket, with the Chagnon's and the various 25 and 50 year Anniversary Tree Farmers.*



# POLICY & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

## RI FOREST CONSERVATION COMMISSION

RIFCO serves on the RI Forest Conservation Commission to represent woodland owners. This year's efforts focused on the determination of RI's Most Important Forests, a criteria that the Commission recently provided 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.

## 2024 Legislation

### Old Growth Legislation: H-7293 & S-2299—AGAINST (Did not Pass)

RIFCO submitted written testimony in opposition to this legislation that sought to create an entirely new state agency to oversee state land management and ultimately all land management, with the goal of shutting down any tree cutting (proforestation).

“It is our position that all of our forests are worthy of protection from conversion to non-forest uses, and that active management of our state's forests, with protection from disturbance provided for unique natural heritage sites by the existing state agency responsible for the management of our state's resources, is key in providing a wide range of ecosystem services, including wood products, rural jobs and economies, clean water, clean air, recreational resources, wildlife habitat, and both the sequestration and storage of atmospheric carbon.”

### Forest Parity Act: H-7618—FOR (Did not Pass)

RIFCO submitted written testimony in support of H-7618 that sought “to place our working forests, its owners, and the wood-based businesses that help support our local land-based economy on par with the tax and regulatory environment that agricultural land receives under state laws and regulations. State laws and regulations that foster active management of our state's forests and promotes an economically viable workforce is key in providing a wide range of ecosystem services, including wood products, rural jobs and economies . . . “

### Agriculture Functions of the RI DEM : H-7729 - FOR (Held for Further Study)

Companion to the Forest Parity Act. Expanded definition of agricultural activity to include forestry.

### Fire Plans: H-7728 Comprehensive Fire Safety Act - AGAINST (Did not Pass)

RIFCO opposed the legislation as presented to mandate that owners of more than 500 acres have a forest management plan that included a fire mitigation plan approved by the local FD. That recommendation was amended in the Final Report of the Commission, dated April 1, 2024, that calls for the RI DEM to contact these same owners and advise them on the preparation of these plans, to be approved by the local fire department.

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**RIFCO Executive Committee (2025)**

Officers

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

Directors

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

**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 in-

vited to attend meetings and workshops dealing with the current 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.

**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)**

## OTHER 2024 AWARD WINNERS ARE:

### **Conservator of the Year Award: Richard and Lola Nagle**

Presented at the Annual Conservation Award Dinner, our long-serving Secretary Richard Nagle, along with his wife Lola, were presented with the Conservator of the Year Award. Richard has served for 17 years as our Secretary, and we know that Lola has been behind him 100% with technical support, getting him into our ZOOM meetings and helping with those minutes!



### **RIFCO Youth Forestry Award**

This year's award went to Aimee Grace Robertson of Exeter, pictured at left receiving the award check from RIFCO President Bill Fortune.

Aimee Grace is now a student at UNH in the Forestry Program, and she had worked as a Youth Conservation Corp leader with the Audubon Society of RI.

The Kilmartin Youth Forestry Award seeks to encourage our younger generation to get involved in forestry and all things trees with a scholarship award made possible by the generous contribution of the David and Betsy Kilmartin Foundation.

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