

# THE FOREST CONSERVATIONIST

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



## ANNUAL ACTIVITY UPDATE 2025

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

### **RIFCO'S 2025 Friend of the Forest Award: Paul Dolan**



RIFCO recently presented its “Friend of the Forest” Award to Paul Dolan of Scituate for dedicating his career as a forester to increase the public’s awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy forest environments.

Above, fellow forester Chris Modisette, at left, provides some background on Paul’s career, since 1977, with the state and now with the RI RC&D Council, running educational programs such as the Coverts, Envirothon, Forestry for RI Birds, and countless presentations to Rhode Island woodland owners and the public.

His work has not gone unnoticed by a number of organizations both here at home, throughout New England, and even nationally.

### **Conservators of the Year Award: Ron & Mary Fasano**

The RIFCO Dinner and Tree Farm Banquet was held at the beautiful Cranston Country Club, situated on an old dairy farm at the intersection of Phenix Ave and Burlingame Road in western Cranston.

Presented at the Dinner, our long-serving Board member Ron Fasano, along with his wife Mary, were presented with the Conservator of the Year Award. Ron has been active with both RIFCO and RI Tree Farm activities, in a variety of roles, with Mary behind him 100% with technical support, getting him into our ZOOM meetings and attending many of our programs.

Ron is currently serving as the RIFCO Stewardship Committee Chair. Below, RIFCO President Bill Fortune presents the Fasano’s with the Award.



# **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

By William Fortune

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

### **The Joy of Learning**

By Bill Fortune

What is the first thing you think of when prompted with the question of what is a forest? A fairly expansive somewhat densely packed grouping of trees would be a reasonable response for many of us. Obviously the most simplistic definition of forest wouldn't be met without some trees being included. Would your definition include the wildlife that lives in a forest? How many of us would answer the question by answering that a forest is a specific complex ecosystem generally dominated by trees. The truth is that the more you learn about forests the more likely you would find the second response an insufficient definition. We haven't even included any mention of how a forest is dynamic. The question is similar in scope to asking someone to give a definition of what is life itself. It's complex indeed.

Ever since I was a child I have derived great joy in the ongoing quest of learning something new about the natural world. That satisfaction is amplified when I can combine pieces of knowledge and understand the dynamics between multiple aspects. This is what enlightenment is in a nutshell. I'd be lying if I told you that I figured this out by walking around the woods all alone and stopping periodically to meditate until I had some sort of Eureka moment.

The truth is that I have been fortunate enough to be able to expose myself to literature, people and organizations that are extremely knowledgeable in the wide range of forest science.

The science is complex enough but we haven't even touched on the economic and regulatory issues that influence what is going on in our forests. I could write a whole book on the pressure that a constantly expanding population is putting on our forests. As I mentioned earlier, this subject of forests is complicated.

Complicated to me means one needs to put some effort into understanding and appreciating how something works. RIFCO has and continues to help spread this understanding. At a minimum we put on two or three educational events each year. We bring in knowledgeable speakers on a wide range of topics. We try to look at new topics so we are not treading over the same old ground, and we have also continued to get news out to our members and beyond with our monthly newsletter.

This upcoming year will be no different in that aspect, starting with our Woodland Owner Workshop series that is coming up in February.

I hope that you will continue to participate and learn with us at RIFCO in the upcoming year.

Best Wishes for the New Year,

Bill

**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**

## POLICY & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

### RI FOREST CONSERVATION COMMISSION

RIFCO serves on the RI Forest Conservation Commission to represent woodland owners. This past year's efforts focused on the coordination of public outreach about the Commission and its member organizations. The RI DEM has created a page on its website for the commission, and there is a listserv that anyone can sign up for.

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.

The RI Woodland Partnership, of which RIFCO is a member, typically has ZOOM meetings, but its June meeting was held in the field at the Bryson's Tree Farm property in Richmond on June 26th.

Expert birder Paul Miller of the Ocean State Bird Club helped lead the walk through the property. Of note, his observations of the wide diversity of bird species that were present can be attributed to the work of the Bryson's along with impacts from Spongy moth defoliations. A big shout out to the Bryson's for hosting!

*At left, the participants of the meeting held its roundtable discussion of programs and relevant topics following the walk through the Bryson's property.*

### 2025 Legislation

#### Old Growth Legislation: H-5294—AGAINST (Did not Pass)

RIFCO submitted written testimony in opposition to this legislation that sought to create an entirely new function within the Administration's Division of Statewide Planning to direct the land management activities of the existing RI DEM and all town-owned lands, with the goal of shutting down any tree cutting (pro-forestation).

“These powers would go beyond the stated intent of protecting “Old-growth Forests” and is intended to shut down any legitimate and scientifically-sound forestry and wildlife habitat management practices of the state. Although we forest landowners share in the common goal of conserving Rhode Island’s forested lands, we are concerned by what the overall goal of its advocates are, namely, to shut down the active management of our state’s forests.”

#### H-5098 Forest Parity Act - FOR (Partial Passage)

RIFCO submitted written testimony in support of H-5098 that again 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.

A portion of the Act did pass, which provides for a special “Forestry Plate”, similar to a Farm Plate, although no sales tax exemption was provided to go along with that plate.

## RIFCO'S DEMONSTRATION WOODLOTS

### MERRIMAN DEMONSTRATION WOODLOT, HOWARD HILL ROAD, FOSTER

RIFCO Receives NRCS funding for Practices, CSP Contract



At left, Bill Fortune with the second kestrel box he's built and installed as structural habitat. This box was installed at the edge of the 3-acre clearing, with the remnant of the slash wall visible.

The Foster woodlot, consisting of 40 acres of oak woodlands donated by Alex and Julia Merriman, is where several thinning and habitat projects have taken place over the past 25 years, and additional work is being carried out in co-operation with the USDA-NRCS and their programs.

At left, a brush pile for structural habitat was recently constructed out of a couple of broken oak leaders adjacent to the shelter at the Merriman Demonstration Woodlot in Foster. Builders include Tom Bryson, Ron Fasano, and Jeff Gardener.

The project to provide habitat enhancements under the Conservation Security Program (CSP) contract in place with the USDA-NRCS includes ten structures, with nest boxes and piles over a 2-year period.

In addition to these habitat enhancements, we also implemented an oak release thinning in the 2-acre clearing that was established in 2000. These enhancements qualify us for the annual payment for the CSP.

### 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. This project has been delayed during 2025 due to the lack of capacity of the RI office of USDA-NRCS to provide an archeological review of the site, which is now required prior to ground-disturbing activities.

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 2025 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.

**RIFCO's Winter Workshop** was held on March 13, 2025 at the Camp E-Hun-Tee educational facility, located off of Frosty Hollow Road in the Arcadia Management Area, Exeter, RI to introduce the newly-revised forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) manual.



Forest Stewardship Program forester Fern Graves, seen at left, presented the changes to the regulations that must be followed by Wood Operators and woodland owners as they operate in areas that have streams and forested wetlands, including vernal pools.

Following Fern's indoor presentation, we visited a site within the Arcadia Management Area that will soon be part of a harvest operation for on-site examples of jurisdictional areas (JA's), wetland and stream crossing requirements, minimum stocking levels retained within forested wetlands, and other aspects of proper implementation of forestry operations to protect water quality.

The **2025 RIFCO Spring Program** was held at the Merriman Demonstration Woodlot in Foster on May 17, where we viewed a variety of forestry and habitat projects implemented over the past 20 years, ever since we did the first 2-acre habitat clearing in 2005. They included the 5-year results of the slash wall, our thinning projects both past and future, updates on White ash survival, Beech Leaf Disease conditions, and the RI Forestry for the Birds program. We had Micheal Gow of the Ocean State Bird Club present to conduct some bird ID during the height of bird nesting season.

Bill and Hilary Fortune, seen below at the right, brought some mushroom logs to demonstrate the process of inoculation with plugs to grow your own mushrooms.

*Below left: Spring Program attendees within the 20-year old 2-acre clearcut, now populated with oak and mixed hardwood stems that are ready for a release cut. The crop trees have been flagged for future release. They are in the 2 - 6 inch diameter sizes, and are 15 - 25 feet tall.*



## RIFCO's 2025 OUTREACH EVENTS

The **Summer Twilight Walk** was held on Thursday, August 7th, from 6 - 8 pm at the RI DFE's Blitzkrieg Trail Shaded Fuel Break project near Arcadia Road in Exeter, within the Arcadia Management Area and in the Wood River Watershed.

How does protection of our forests from fire also protect water quality? We were joined by Wood River Watershed Association and Scenic River Council members Denise Poyer and Antonia Bryson that helped make the link between Healthy Forests and Healthy Watersheds.

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**. This year's Tree Farm Tour was held at Jeff and Maryanne Gardener's property, 488 Weaver Hill Road in Coventry, RI.

Jeff has recently implemented a forest thinning project that included a two-acre habitat clearing, improved access trails, and harvest of timber for his portable sawmill and construction of a barn on site. He's been planting Tulip poplars to replace dying White ash.

Jeff was also selected as the 2025 Outstanding RI Tree Farm of the Year. See story on back page.



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Email: [info@rifco.org](mailto:info@rifco.org)  
**RIFCO Executive Committee (2026)**

Officers

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

Directors

Jeffrey Gardener  
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.

You will receive our monthly digital e-news and our Annual Report. And you will be invited 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. (Phone, email, and/or an on-site visit).

## RIFCO MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

To support RIFCO's efforts and receive member benefits, please complete the form below and send it with your appropriate dues payment to:

RIFCO  
PO Box 53  
No. Scituate, RI 02857

### DUES SCHEDULE:

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	45.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	100.00+
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit	20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Membership	= \$500+

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_  
EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Any amount over \$25.00 is tax deductible**

Additional Donation Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

## RI TREE FARM PROGRAM



2025 RI Outstanding Tree Farm of the Year Award was presented to Jeff Gardener of Coventry, RI, on the right, along with his wife Maryanne, by RI Tree Farm chair Ron Fasano.

Tree Farm #378, first Forest Management Plan in 2002 for home woodlot of about 13

acres, expanded his Tree Farm by purchasing Carleton Maine's woodlot in 2020, adding 40 acres. Jeff recently purchased a portable sawmill and has been milling timbers for the construction of a barn/garage on the property, which is a great example of local forest products being generated, while also providing wildlife habitat.

Jeff hosted the 2025 Fall Tour, and was recently elected to the RIFCO Board of Directors. Congrats to the Gardeners!



A tree was planted in memory of Milt Schumacher, past chair of the RI Tree Farm Committee and past president of RIFCO. From left, Chris Modisette, Tom Angell, Ron Fasano, and Paul Dolan, along with Phyllis Schumacher. *Photo by Marc Tremblay.*

No. Scituate, RI 02857

PO Box 53

RI Forest Conservator's Organization

