

R H O D E I S L A N D



NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY

Strategic Plan 2025–2030

ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE THROUGH BIODIVERSITY





P.O. Box 1858, Kingston, RI 02881

A growing majority of Americans experience nature as a top source of meaning and fulfillment in their lives.

The natural world, however, is increasingly threatened by numerous external forces. Climate change, air and water pollution, plant and animal extinctions, habitat loss, invasive species, and deforestation dramatically modify the landscape and compromise quality of life and many health, economic, and climate mitigation benefits derived from stable and resilient ecosystems.

To be the best environmental stewards possible, we must work together, combining knowledge, interests, experiences, and resources, to better understand and sustain the natural systems that we value and depend upon.

The Rhode Island Natural History Survey is a non-profit organization dedicated to documenting and sharing information on the state's species, geology, and ecosystems, and partnering to promote the conservation of Rhode Island's natural resources.

—Board of Directors, September 10, 2024



Mission

To promote ecosystem resilience, the Rhode Island Natural History Survey collects, organizes, and disseminates information on Rhode Island's biodiversity and ecosystems. We engage curious observers of all ages—professionals and amateurs, scientists and artists—in field-based experiences that build connections to science, conservation, and the natural world.

Vision

To prompt a sense of wonder that inspires people to value and protect biodiversity through a deeper understanding of the world around us.

Values

A nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering “Ecosystem Resilience Through Biodiversity,” we value:

- *Sound science* to inform decision-making and environmental policy
- *Strong partnerships* built on trust, transparency, and mutual benefits
- The unique *sense of place* in natural areas and rural, suburban, and urban ecosystems
- *Biodiversity* that instills resilience in both natural and human communities
- *Responsible stewardship* of Rhode Island's ecosystems and our supporters
- The *accomplishments of dedicated individuals* who have shaped our understanding of Rhode Island natural history
- *Field-based approaches* and direct connections to the natural world
- Knowledge, enthusiasm, and a *sense of wonder* in every curious observer



GOAL 1

Explore and Understand Rhode Island's Biodiversity

The Survey will serve as the information hub for Rhode Island's biodiversity inventory, habitat restoration monitoring, invasive species, rare species, natural communities and other natural heritage program activities.

Strategy 1

Expand, steward, and disseminate the state's natural heritage database and serve as the statewide repository of biodiversity data and information.

Strategy 2

Leverage BioBlitz as the premier statewide biodiversity event to build community, gather data, celebrate our sense of place, and show the importance of biodiversity throughout Rhode Island.

Strategy 3

Secure funding for climate change-related community science projects that document impacts on biodiversity and engage communities across Rhode Island.



GOAL 2

Build and Nurture Partnerships

The Survey will strategically expand partnerships and efforts aimed at documenting and sharing information, understanding Rhode Island's biodiversity and ecosystems, and building a coordinated community of naturalists and earth scientists.



Strategy 1

Expand academic collaborations that leverage the Survey's strengths and offer potential for external funding.

Strategy 2

Explore strategic partnerships to expand natural history and earth science expertise, coordinate applied research, and co-sponsor major events.



GOAL 3

Expand Visibility, Impact, and Support

The Survey will leverage its strengths and statewide reputation and growing environmental interests in society to expand visibility, impact, and philanthropic support, and secure consistent base funding for the Survey.

Strategy 1

Make a strategic and impactful investment in communications and branding.

Strategy 2

Create a culture of philanthropy among members, friends, and partners leading to increased donations.

Strategy 3

Develop a cross-generational membership growth plan that engages diverse communities to sustain relevance, impact, and donor support.

GOAL 4

Organization Sustainability and Inclusivity

The Survey will enhance its organizational sustainability and inclusivity through succession planning and establishing a natural history presence in the urban core as well as rural areas of Rhode Island.

Strategy 1

Establish a staff succession and financial plan that defines position needs to ensure continuous expertise, support, and functioning of the Survey in the future.

Strategy 2

Define the roles and responsibilities of the Board and establish a strategic Board succession plan.

Strategy 3

Develop a growth plan that engages all ages, diverse communities, and future constituents to sustain relevance, impact, and donor support.



HISTORY

In the early 1990s, information about Rhode Island's biodiversity was incomplete and hard to access. A committee of researchers and naturalists looked into the problem and recommended a new organization to encourage study of the state's ecology and to coordinate people and information. Thus, in 1994, the Rhode Island Natural History Survey was born.

At first, we organized conferences and lectures and published a book series; we began a newsletter and inaugurated awards to recognize distinguished naturalists.

The Survey grew rapidly after 2000, the year of our first Rhode Island BioBlitz. In 2002, we began helping land trusts with their inventory and stewardship responsibilities, and in 2003 we became the manager of the state's rare species database.

Diverse projects sustained us through the 2010's: tackling invasives, propagating native plants, evaluating wetlands, coyote ecology, and collaborative conservation partnerships.

Now, to give people new ways to explore nature and contribute to conservation, the Survey also hosts exhibits of art inspired by nature, produces videos, and sponsors the annual Rhode Island Nature Video Festival.

The Survey is an independent nonprofit, with a board of volunteer directors. Since our founding, the University of Rhode Island has provided office space, first at the Outreach Center, later at the Coastal Institute and Ranger Hall, and, since 2015, at East Farm.



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