



Rhode Island's Green Amendment

Providing Economic Benefits & Values to the State

The RI Green Amendment does not call for a direct budget expenditure to implement nor money damage payouts when violations are found. Rather it ensures government action proactively considers and protects environmental rights and natural resources as part of the decision-making process - when protections and needed adjustment are most accessible, and rendering determinations before there has been an irretrievable commitment of resources; and if a violation is identified it secures equitable or declaratory remedies that will cure the harm as opposed to money damages, for example:

- a permit, law, or regulation determined to be unconstitutional will be unenforceable until the constitutional infirmity is remedied;
- government may be expected to fully enforce existing legal mandates already in place in order to ensure environmental rights are protected.

The RI Green Amendment can strengthen government actions in the face of legal challenges, helping to preserve governmental resources. For example,

- if government has passed a law or advanced a permit decision that is beneficial for protecting environmental rights and securing natural resource protections, the Green Amendment can help strengthen the government's position should there be a legal challenge;
- the Amendment can help strengthen the government's position when enforcing existing laws or permits against violations should perpetrators seek to challenge an enforcement action.

The RI Green Amendment will support good government action to protect the state budget from unnecessary expenses that could be avoided.

- Hazardous brownfield sites are known to cause health harms and reduced property values, as well as impacting a community's sense of safety. Rhode Island

is home to ~2800 brownfield sites covering 22,000 acres. Cleaning up these sites is a significant burden on the state budget. Rhode Island has already invested \$14 million from the Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund to carry out 62 brownfield remediation projects in 15 municipalities. Rhode Island has also been the recipient of over \$50 million from the federal government to assist with clean-up efforts. But having stronger protections that avoid these costly harms - protections a Green Amendment could help provide - is much more cost beneficial for the state and all involved. <https://ecori.org/southern-new-englands-contaminated-landscape-costs-plenty-to-clean-up/>

- Pennsylvania's Green Amendment has been relied upon to help secure stronger implementation of existing hazardous site clean-up laws and regulations in the state, helping to ensure responsible corporations took financial and on the ground responsibility for clean-up of an otherwise long-ignored toxic site believed to have caused serious health consequences and impacting community sense of safety and security.
- The Green Amendment, if secured years ago, may have provided regulators the tool needed to avoid PFAS contamination in the state, or to address it earlier, while awaiting legislative guidance, and as a result avoided the over \$9.5 million the state has had to invest to address PFAS contamination.

<https://nonsticknightmare.org/nightmare-costs/>

- In 2017, due to PFAS contamination, the Oakland Water District, serving ~175 people, had to hook in to an alternative water supply to secure safe household water for their community. The effort cost ~\$3 million, with homeowners having to contribute. In the interim the state incurred the cost of providing bottled drinking water to these impacted residents. <https://ecori.org/just-the-tip-of-the-iceberg-new-pfas-drinking-water-standards-in-r-i-go-a-long-way-but-target-only-one-part-of-complicated-issue/>

The RI Green Amendment will strengthen healthy economic growth that avoids the costs of environmental harm including illness, cleanup costs, flooding, drought & declining property values by ensuring government actions avoid environmental degradation rather than responding to it after-the-fact.

Protecting the environment benefits property values, which in turn provides tax benefits to host communities.

- A study looking at the impacts of water quality on homes near Narragansett Bay found poor water quality was harmful to property values while improving water quality had a positive impact: "poor coastal water quality, measured in terms of the concentration of chlorophyll, has a negative impact on housing prices that diminishes with distance from the shoreline. Furthermore, our finding suggests that housing prices are most influenced by the extreme environmental conditions, which

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may be accompanied by unpleasant odors, discoloration, and even fish kills. We further predict potential increases in home values associated under water quality improvement scenarios and find an increase in the values of homes in coastal communities along Narragansett Bay of about \$18 million up to \$136 million.” <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318601448> *The impact of water quality in Narragansett Bay on housing prices*

- Research and experience demonstrate that proximity to quality natural open space enhances the value of nearby properties. In one PA study, properties located ¼ to ½ mile near natural open space increased in value by \$11,000 to \$13,000 dollars. <https://uniqueplacestosave.org/news/open-spaces-impact-property-values>
- In Pennsylvania, the Green Amendment protected the authority of municipalities to zone in order to protect the integrity of residential communities, protecting quality of life and property values from inappropriate industrial operations that are better suited for industry and commercial zoned districts in the community.

Protecting Rhode Island’s natural resources is important for protecting the state’s economy:

- Protecting healthy waterways that support healthy fish populations attracts anglers not just from within the state, but also attracts anglers from elsewhere. While fishing, anglers contribute significantly to our state’s economy. In a single year, anglers have spent up to \$370 million while fishing in Rhode Island, resulting in \$552 million in economic activity, contributing \$25 million to state and local tax coffers, and supporting 3000 jobs. <https://asafishing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-ASA-Senate-Handout-Digital-Rhode-Island.pdf>
- Outdoor recreation is an important part of Rhode Island’s economy, contributing ~\$3.3 billion every year to the state’s economy while also supporting 36,000 jobs. This contribution includes \$2.4 billion in consumer spending and the support of 24,000 jobs as a result of outdoor recreation in the state. Ensuring constitutional protection for environmental rights and natural resources will ensure we continue to support this kind of economic vitality. <https://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease/layouts/RIL.PressRelease.ListStructure/Forms/DisplayForm.aspx?List=c8baae31%2D3c10%2D431c%2D8dcd%2D9dbbe21ce3e9&ID=372667&Web=2bab1515%2D0dcc%2D4176%2Da2f8%2D8d4beebdf488>
- According to a report out of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and partners, conserving Rhode Island’s forests brings tremendous economic benefit to the state, including its cities and towns. The Green Amendment will ensure protection of forest resources so these benefits continue for present and future generations. Among the economic values provided by Rhode Island’s forests:
 - more than \$30 million every year in the removal of harmful air pollution, including absorbing hazardous air pollution;

- the forest and wood products sector generated 2,496 jobs and in a single year generated \$408 million in gross sales;
- forest-based recreation contributes ~\$375 million annually in sales, while supporting 1,500 jobs with an annual payroll salary of approximately \$37 million.

<https://dem.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/programs/bnatres/forest/pdf/forest-value.pdf>

The Green Amendments passed in Pennsylvania and Montana – in place for decades – have had no adverse impact on economic growth, industry development or job creation. There is also no indication of adverse impact in New York whose Green Amendment has been in place since 2022. But the amendments are helping to avoid pollution that causes harm and costs money to address in the form of emergency response, clean-up efforts, health care costs, worker lost days at work which is harmful to the workers and business owners.

The Green Amendment will ensure that as industry, business and development continues and grows in our state, it does so in a way that protects our environment and communities, ensuring the economic and job benefits business provides while at the same time ensuring and protecting the economic vitality and jobs that healthy nature provides.

- The RI Green Amendment will not stymie or prevent quality economic development, it will instead ensure that economic development, industry, and businesses do not advance at the expense of the environment and people’s rights to clean water and air, to healthy soils and food, to a climate that is livable, and environments that are protective of their health and safety.
- There are always ways to accomplish our energy, manufacturing, development and business goals that are environmentally protective. The RI Green Amendment will ensure they are pursued, allowing for quality economic development, while avoiding costly harm to Rhode Island’s environment and people.
- As well-explained by the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court when speaking about development proposals in the context of that state’s Green Amendment:

The Environmental Rights Amendment was not intended to “deprive persons of the use of their property or to derail development leading to an increase in the general welfare, convenience, and prosperity of the people.” Robinson Twp. v. Commonwealth, 623 Pa. 564, 83 A.3d 901, 954 (2013). It does, however, require that economic development not take place at the expense of an “unreasonable degradation of the environment.” Id. (emphasis added). Furthermore, with respect to the environment, “the state’s plenary

police power ... must be exercised in a manner that promotes sustainable property use and economic development.”

Feudale v. Aqua Pennsylvania, Inc., 122 A.3d 462 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2015)

When there are critical issues of environmental concern not addressed by existing law, the RI Green Amendment can be utilized to fill these gaps in protection until such time as the law catches up and addresses the areas of concern.

- For example, PFAS contamination has inflicted severe economic, health and safety harms on Rhode Island communities. Had RI had a Green Amendment in place decades ago – it could have provided state regulatory agencies the tools needed to prevent the proliferation and use of PFAS in ways that allowed for all of this devastating harms. This could have provided needed protection in the state until legislators had time to pass necessary protective laws.
 - PFAS causes a wide variety of very serious health harms – that cost people their quality lives and result in significant health care costs. Health harms from pfas include:
 - Kidney and testicular cancer
 - decreased fertility
 - developmental effects in children
 - cancers of the prostate, kidneys, and testes,
 - liver damage,
 - dangerously high cholesterol,
 - weakened immune function
 - Pregnancy-induced hypertension and preeclampsia
 - Decrease in birth weight
- Nearly half the drinking water sources tested in Rhode Island demonstrated PFAS contamination.