



OVER 100 YEARS OF EDUCATION, CONSERVATION, & ADVOCACY

Audubon Society of Rhode Island

April 30, 2009

Professor Steven K. Swallow
University of Rhode Island
Coastal Institute in Kingston
Kingston, RI 02881

Dear Professor Swallow:

I am writing in response to an article that recently appeared in the *Providence Journal* regarding the University of Rhode Island's plan to build on virtually all of the developable land in the 325-acre North Woods parcel. While I understand that the university has to balance many competing needs for limited resources, I am very concerned that the university is making an unwise decision in this regard, especially in light of the fact that there are alternatives.

The specific area proposed for the research and technology park (i.e., the "Century Forest") is the most highly-valued part of the North Woods because of its age and it being undisturbed over the last 100 years. Such forests are rare in southern Rhode Island. Its location on the URI campus makes the Century Forest a truly irreplaceable education resource. The North Woods has been the principal outdoor education resource for biological and environmental science students for decades.

The University of Rhode Island has one of the strongest environmental science programs in the country and enjoys an especially high rate of student placement with state and federal agencies, environmental consulting firms and non-governmental conservation organizations. I know this personally, since I am one such former student, having earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Resource Development from URI in 1981.

Throughout my career, I have had the great fortune to interact with the former URI environmental science students, many of whom now hold key positions in various organizations and agencies which help protect our state's environment, making Rhode Island a wonderful state in which to live, work and raise a family. One of the key reason for our success, and perhaps why so many of us continue to live and work here in Rhode Island, is that the education we received emphasized hands-on, experiential learning in a real-world setting.

The North Woods provides a no-cost alternative to off-campus field trips, maximizes teaching time, and provides an ideal, on-campus research site for students. I urge you to reconsider your current plans to develop this forest and that a significant part of that area, including the Century Forest and adjoining lands, be set aside as a natural outdoor laboratory for teaching, research and outreach.

If there is a way the Audubon Society of Rhode Island may assist in helping to preserve this irreplaceable educational resource so that it will be available for study by biological and environmental science students, and to the university community at large for as long as the university stands, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Lawrence J. F. Taft
Executive Director
(URI Class of 1981)

cc: President Carothers; Vice-President Weygand; Vice President Alfonso

