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RHODE ISLAND

Although Rhode Island has little old growth remaining, several good sites of known old growth have been documented.

Great Swamp Management Area, within a few miles of the Atlantic Ocean (Washington County)

Approximately 3000 acres of old growth owned by Rhode Island's Division of Fish and Wildlife. The Management Area has had some cutting as people would enter during the winter when the swamp was frozen; but "probably" portions were left intact, according to the Area's James Myers (1993). Rick Enser of the Natural Heritage Program says that in Rhode Island cedar was heavily cut, but it is likely that the Management Area has areas that were never logged, because skidders could not reach them (1933, 2001). Most of the area is covered by swamp forest over "shallow muck soils." Red Maple, Atlantic White-cedar, Black Gum, Black Alder, rhododendron, Sweet Pepperbush, and blueberry are common. The area has "excellent stands of American holly" (Goodwin and Niering 1975, Goodwin 1993).

Crandall Swamp (Washington County)

A wetland complex of up to 1500 acres, with a 700 to 1000-acre stand of mature Atlantic White-cedar. (The entire complex has acquired the name that first belonged only to the Atlantic White-cedar stand.) Probably portions of this swamp were not cut due to their inaccessibility. Also present are a couple of sizeable shrub bog mats: quaking bog habitat with shrubs and 30 acres of open bog mat. Leatherleaf is common; Red Maple occasional. The family that owned Crandall Swamp proper recently donated it to the Narraganset Indians on condition that the land remain as it is. The state and private parties own other areas of the wetland (Goodwin and Niering 1975, Enser 1993).

Pawcatuck River Floodplain Forest* (Washington County)

An old-growth Red Maple floodplain forest of about 250 acres. Most of this forest is more inaccessible than the nearby Great Swamp Management Area; and, if it was logged, the logging was done previous to any logging at Great Swamp. The attention of the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program was drawn to the Pawcatuck Forest, because the first confirmed nesting of the Prothonotary Warbler, a bird associated with old growth, occurred there. The land is mostly in private hands (Enser 2001).

Oakland Farms,* in the town of Portsmouth (Newport County)

**A recently discovered twenty-acre mixed forest, with American Beech, White Oak, Red Maple, and Scarlet Oak showing old-growth forms that would seem to indicate ages between 150 and 300 years. The beech have been measured to slightly more than 10 feet in circumference. Many have circumferences of 6.5 to 8.5 feet. They are up to 85 feet tall and are of varying ages. White Oaks mixed with the beech are in the 6 to 9 foot

circumference range and between 70 and 80 feet tall, high for coastal forests. Regeneration is taking place. Portions of the site show no visible sign of post-settlement human disturbance; the balance shows only limited signs of such disturbance. In 1999, after Matthew Largess had discovered the likely significance of the forest, Dr. Charles Canham of the Institute of Ecosystem Studies, and old-growth sleuth Robert Leverett examined the site and concluded that, despite its location in the midst of a subdivision, it is functionally an old-growth forest, not just a collection of old trees (Leverett 1999, Leverett 2002, Largess Forestry 2002).

Also in 1999 Ed Cook, Paul Krusic, and Neil Pederson cored twenty-two White Oaks at the site. The trees were found to vary in age between 152 and 222 years, younger than the researchers had expected from their appearance. In other words, none of the twenty-two go back farther than the 1770s. Like Canham and Leverett, Cook et al. observed little evidence of logging, but because of the ages of the White Oaks, Pederson thinks that the forest may have been altered by European settlers at some time in the past. Nevertheless, he points out, it is important. Old forests near the ocean, where human development usually overwhelms the landscape, are rare (Pederson 2006).

Oakland Forest was originally part of the Cornelius Vanderbilt estate, most of which was sold to a developer piece by piece. Matthew Largess and Eleanor Kinney spearheaded a campaign to save the forest, which led to the purchase and preservation of the site by the Aquidneck Island Land Trust (Leverett 1999, Leverett 2002, Largess Forestry 2002).*[Updated 1/10/06]*

Ell Pond (Washington County)

Rhode Island's only National Natural Landmark, with a ten to fifteen-acre rocky ravine sheltering large Eastern Hemlock and a bog pond, around which is a floating mat with pitcher plants and other bog species. The hemlock stand is locally known as the Cathedral. However, The oolly adelgid has killed a large number of the hemlock, which are now standing dead trees. Atlantic White-cedar around the pond are less mature than those at Crandall. The site is protected, since it is owned by the state, Rhode Island Audubon, and The Nature Conservancy (Goodwin and Niering 1975, Enser 1993, 2001).

Factory Pond (Washington County)

A bog pond with some ten acres of stunted Atlantic White-cedar on a bog mat. The area may never have been cut. The town of South Kingston owns the pond and most of the adjacent wetland, which it has agreed to preserve (Enser 1993).

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