

Time to invest in hayfield 'market'

Jamestown residents are being asked this month to "invest" in hayfields on the island in the second year of a unique test by University of Rhode Island economists who are trying to establish investment markets for ecological services.

The investment will compensate farmers who agree to refrain from mowing the hayfields and limit cattle grazing during the nesting season of the bobolink, a grassland-nesting bird whose population is declining in New England.

"We'd like to double or even triple the participation rate this year, and we're confident we can do that," said Stephen Swallow, URI professor of natural resource economics. "We received a great deal of feedback from residents during last year's project, much of which indicated that we needed to be clearer in our literature about how the program works."

"But we can't yet do everything the residents want us to do, like reveal which field they are investing in or hold money from one year to the next," he added. "The project is still a new concept, and if we're going to learn from it and make it work in other communities in the future, we have to stick to our plan without introducing new factors that may make our results difficult to interpret for future improvements. So we hope residents will work with us in this early going."

About 350 Jamestown residents participated in the market experiment in 2007, and nearly 200 of them invested from \$5 to \$200, raising enough money to delay the harvest in three hay fields.

Residents received mailings in early March outlining the program and their investment options. Posters have been placed around the town, and advertisements are running in the Jamestown Press.

"The investment market runs until April 30, which means people who want to participate must do so



by that date," said Emi Uchida, URI research assistant professor. "We hope that those who choose not to invest will indicate that on the reply form and return it to us. Replying 'no' is still considered a form of participation in the market."

In the project, Jamestown residents have been randomly assigned to one of four hayfields, each with a different pricing approach designed to ensure that the project collects only as much money as is needed to protect the bobolink habitat. In every case, investors will receive their money back if not enough money is raised to implement the project on a given field. Investors will also receive partial refunds if more money is raised than is necessary.

"This way, either investors get a return on their investment from the improved protection of grassland birds that will remain as part

of Jamestown's landscape, or they will get their money back," Swallow said.

The researchers said that participation in the program last year may have been hampered by confusion with a farmland preservation referendum being debated then in Jamestown. "Our project can work hand in hand with the town's efforts to preserve farmland," said Swallow. "This market can help to ensure that the protected farms can continue to be working farms by helping to create an additional revenue stream for farmers."

"This market approach is brand new," Uchida said. "The Jamestown residents and farmers are experiencing one of the first experiments in the world to use a market approach of this type to enhance ecosystem services."

The project is funded by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and matching funds from URI and EcoAsset Markets, Inc. For additional details, visit www.jamestownbobolinkproject.com.

Wind

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ment of wind power generation on the island. The state office offers a re-payable, renewable energy fund grant to help support sustainable energy technology development in local communities. "We just need to get the grant application in to him," Wineberg said, adding that material expenses may be incurred, such as public education and advertising for public hearings.

Wineberg mentioned a legislative session he and Bryer attended that included Rep. Bruce Long and Sen. Teresa Paiva-Weed. They discussed Jamestown's interest in legislative packets currently being considered. Senate bill 2607 and House bill 7616 would require certain providers of electric service to purchase electricity from eligible electric generators, according to a legislative status report.

In the conversation about possible regulation of renewable energy pricing, Wineberg explained the feed-in tariff bill would require a set minimum premium at which renewable energy would be bought. "There wasn't a lot of enthusiasm for the bill as it is currently written," he added.

The discussion moved on to the net-metering bill, which would allow municipalities a retail credit for a portion of energy created by the town. Bryer noted problems consumers experienced in switching from traditional to sustainable energy resources. "Now we're

paying more for green energy," she said. Wineberg agreed, adding, "We want to reward the green power, if more people are advantaged by it."

In response to a question about using Dutch Island as a possible connection to National Grid, the state's electricity distributor, Wineberg admitted that a number of concerns need to be addressed. "It's a very expensive component to the system," he said.

Wineberg encouraged those present to learn about wind energy exploration at the state level, and referred to "some tension" between the governor's office, the University of Rhode Island, and Coastal Resources Management Council. "It sort of mirrors our discussions here," he said.

All present at the town hall discussion last week agreed that wind turbines could create a boost in tourism as a by-product. Wineberg noted that Denmark has had a rise in tourism since installations of wind energy generators, and Audubon stops in Germany do better financially where turbines are located. "They are beautiful, people like to look at them," he added.

Committee members Robert Bowen, William "Bucky" Brennan, and Michael Larkin were absent.

As of last Friday, April 11, Applied Technology and Management received a work contract signed by the town to begin the feasibility study. An introductory presentation for the feasibility study was rescheduled for May 13.

Help available for coyote issues

The Potter League for Animals, in collaboration with The Conservation Agency's Narragansett Bay Coyote Study, this week announced the opening of the Coyote Info Line, which is 924-HOWL (4695.)

A knowledgeable wildlife expert will man the phone. Individuals concerned about immediate safety issues will be directed to call their local police department.

The Coyote Info Line is supported by a grant from the Prince Charitable Trust made to the Potter League for Animals.

To inquire about education programs on coyotes, contact Lynne Maloney at lynnem@potterleague.org. To learn more about the Narragansett Bay Coyote Study, go to www.theconservationagency.org.

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