

CASE STUDY:

BUILDING / ENHANCING SHOOTING RANGES WITH PR EXCISE TAX FUNDS



Rhode Island: Great Swamp Shooting Range (GSSR)

State Agency: Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish & Wildlife.

Project/Range Name: Great Swamp Shooting Range (GSSR).

Location: 277 Great Neck Road, West Kingston, RI 02892
(within ~3,500-acre Great Swamp WMA, adjacent to DFW Field Office).

Contact information: Branton Elleman, Range Supervisor, DFW Hunter Education Office.
Branton.Elleman.ctr@dem.ri.gov. Office Phone: 401-575-6331.

Range Website: <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/fish-wildlife/outreach-education/hunter-education/great-swamp-shooting-range>

Range Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mwJH1CaC4g>

Project Type: This project was an expansion of an existing range.

Project Cost Breakdown: PR \$1,745,000. DNR Match \$2,327,000.

Annual Cost to Operate the Range: \$300,000.

Project Timeline: This project initiated ~ August 2016 and completed in August of 2018.

Range Usage: The Great Swamp Shooting Range is designed to accommodate rifle, handgun, shotgun and archery.

Number of Shooting Lanes/Fields: The GSSR features a total of 18 shooting lanes. Eight 100-yard lanes which are primarily used for long guns. Eight 50-yard lanes which are used by both long guns and handguns. Specifically for shotgun shooters, the GSSR offers two trap stations that features 2 clay target throwers next to shooting stations. For archery shooters, the GSSR offers two 40-yard lanes with target stands. All 18 lanes are allowed to be used for shotgun patterning as well.

Intended Users: The GSSR's is designed to support hunters, target shooters and to facilitate hunter education classes.

How is the Range Staffed: The Great Swamp Shooting Range is staffed by both full and part-time RI DNR agency personnel.

Funding Services: The GSSR is funded through both state agency and PR funding.

Actual Time to Completion: From design to completion, the upgrade of the GSSR range took 16 months. The project did take 24 months from the initial bid with solicitations to final approval.

Biggest Obstacles: The biggest obstacle to this project was political opposition upon the publication of the reopening/expansion timeframe of the GSSR.

How Were Those Obstacles Overcome? The Great Swamp Shooting Range overcame this objection by citing that the funding came from federal PR monies and renegeing on the plan was not an option. GSSR also provided assurances that the range was preexisting, and expansion was well constructed, safe, and fully staffed. A “quite” reopening got the ranges past this objection point, and the GSSR has kept a low profile to this day given the State’s political leanings.

What Portion of the Project Took More Time Than Expected? The largest delays consisted of the typical internal state processes: permitting and purchasing (for both engineering and construction). Construction completion hit a delay and reopening ended up being later than scheduled due to these complications.

What Range Development Resources Were Most Helpful? The team in charge of the expansion/renovation referenced the [NRA Range Source Book](#), but the team found the smaller conference presentations by colleagues in other states have been the most helpful. Specifically, the “don’t do this!” stories shared at places like the IHEA conference (rubber mulch target berm fire from unnoticed incendiary ammo use!).

What Information/Knowledge Do You Know Now That You Wish Knew Earlier? Most importantly the staff at the GSSR would have given more thought to the logistics of final berm maintenance and employee comfort in relation to seasonal weather

Also, the range’s sand/silt berms erode and wash downhill badly during rain from bullet impacts loosening the substrate, requiring tedious contractor manpower to re-grade. Further the employee office heat was never prioritized and installed, leading to band-aid fixes to keep staff warm in colder months and to keep the office from collecting moisture.

And lastly, portable toilets and no running water were considered acceptable then, but in hindsight we now wish we had permanent facilities as the public—especially new shooters—clearly want them.

What Additional Resources Would Have Made the Task Easier/Cheaper/Quicker? The staff at the Great Swamp Shooting Range wished they had a central document outlining the process, timelines, and pitfalls encountered in the last project. As Rhode Island only has one state range, the other states could have multiple project plans to refer back to.

Due to staff turnover, the team at GSSR have incomplete knowledge of the issues that directly impacted this range expansion. While design/construction file directories are available, they are in a disorganized condition. What would be ideal is a comprehensive, but simple non-technical document that laid out the entire process amongst a couple division perspectives would be very useful.

For additional information on Rhode Island shooting ranges, visit: <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/fish-wildlife/outreach-education/hunter-education/shooting-ranges/private>

