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Tapping the environment for jobs

A recent panel discussion sponsored by Grow Smart Rhode Island and the Environmental Business Council of New England resulted in a rather simple, but important conclusion.

That is, not only can and should economic development occur without harming the environment, but Rhode Island's environmental advantages should be tapped as a major part of any real job-producing agenda.

The panel discussion featured Jan Reitsma, director of the state Department of Environmental Management; Michael McMahon, director of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation; and Grover Fugate, director of the Coastal Resources Management Council.

According to McMahon, it is imperative that the state maintains its "quality of place." That's a key factor in attracting and retaining top talent. It is important to remember that employees do choose Rhode Island because of its coastline and recreational opportunities.

We are pleased to see a public recognition that economic and environmental interests can co-exist.

And we encourage continued efforts on the part of the state to clean up federal brownfields sites and make them available for development. These efforts are transforming old mills and tired downtowns.

McMahon correctly points out that the state needs to be in the business of promoting environmentally friendly industries and that doing so has economic advantages.

He's right. And by working closely with DEM and the coastal resources council, those efforts can only be enhanced.