

SECTION 7

ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

The Whately Open Space and Recreation Plan incorporates an inventory of land-based natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources in town (Section 4), identifies the areas that contain these resources (Section 5), and based on the community's general goals (Section 6), makes comparisons between the supply of resources and the demand (Section 7). In the following subsection, *Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs*, the most important environmental issues are highlighted. In *Summary of Community's Needs*, the most important needs of the residents are discussed. Finally, in *Management Needs*, the obstacles to the effective resolution of these needs are addressed.

A. Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs

The previous sections of this Open Space and Recreation Plan examined the variety of natural and cultural resources that give Whately its distinctive rural and agricultural character. In particular, Section 4 Environmental Inventory and Analysis, has a discussion of environmental challenges in Whately, including: farm and forestland fragmentation, and water quality and pollution. Public input, in the form of survey results and comments from Whately Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee members, provided a basis for discussion as to what resources are of priority concern to residents. The following section outlines key natural resource protection needs. Each resource need is followed by a recommended strategy. The strategies are reflected in the Goals and Objectives and the Action Plan.

A. 1 Areas of Conservation Interest

Whately residents place a high value on their town's natural resources and historic, rural character. According to the results of the 2006 Open Space and Recreation Planning Survey, more than 90 percent of survey respondents felt it was important to preserve clean air; drinking water supplies; the Connecticut River; forests; lakes, ponds and streams; pasture; the rural character of the town; scenic views; farms and farmland; and wildlife habitat. Between 80 – 89 percent of survey respondents felt it was important to preserve wetlands; walking and hiking trails; undesignated scenic roads; recreational opportunities; open space; the Mill River; historic markers/monuments; historic landscapes; historic buildings, including farmhouses and barns; floodplains; endangered species habitat; and connected blocks of wildlife habitat. These attributes can be linked to a specific place or multiple areas of town. Section 5, Environmental Inventory and Analysis includes a list of areas of conservation interest in town and additional significant

areas are shown on the *Scenic Resources and Unique Environments Map* at the end of Section 4.

Recommendation 1: Before land protection strategies can be developed and implemented, the Open Space Committee (in collaboration with other individuals and non-governmental groups) must perform a careful review of the areas of conservation and recreation interest in town, determine which areas provide the most benefit in terms of recreational and/or natural resource values, and then develop a Priority List of parcels which can then be distributed to the Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Whately Land Preservation, and the Franklin Land Trust. It is important that private landholders, local residents, and local officials be involved in this process.

A.2 Farm and Forestland Fragmentation

Farmland and forests give Whately its rural, small town feel. Active farming and forestry support the town's and the region's economy. Wildlife abounds in Whately because large areas of contiguous forest and undeveloped agricultural areas exist.

Farmland and forests provide multiple public benefits to Whately residents. The support of local farms affords residents access to fresh vegetables, fruits, and dairy products, as well as the opportunity to buy forest products grown by neighbors. Farms also provide passive recreational value as roadside views and scenic vistas. Forests cover sub-watershed slopes and help replenish streams and wetlands over time. Forests provide habitat for wildlife and can provide public and private landowners periodic income.

In Whately, there are many forested parcels and parcels with prime farmland soils that are or soon will be threatened by development. This fact is not lost on residents. Over 90 percent of survey respondents believe it is important to preserve farms, farmland, pasture and forests in Whately. Approximately 70 percent of survey respondents supported zoning changes for open space protection. Over 80 percent of survey respondents supported the town acceptance of donated land; education on land protection and estate planning; cooperative efforts among the town, state, and land trusts to protect land; and education about the costs and tax revenues of homes, forestland, and industry. When asked if the town's current efforts to protect/conservate Whately's natural resources were adequate, almost 60 percent of survey respondents said no – the town needs to do more.

Recommendation 2: The Town should continue to work with Whately Land Preservation, the Franklin Land Trust, and other non-profit land protection organizations to encourage private conservation efforts. Outreach efforts could include informational meetings and distribution of publications summarizing conservation options and potential tax benefits to landowners and the costs and tax revenues of homes, forested land, farmland, and commercial and industrial uses.

Recommendation 3: Coinciding with outreach, the Town should make an effort to address landowners' immediate concerns about their land. These concerns could relate to the physical upkeep of the land, which may be impacted by erosion or flooding or other natural or man-made factors and/or the costs of keeping the land in agriculture. In addition, local landowners may benefit from increased promotion of locally grown products. Ultimately the financial success of these lands will have a significant influence on conservation decisions as well as their contribution to the welfare of the community as a whole.

Recommendation 4: When financially possible, Whately should set aside funds each year to provide local matches for Agricultural Preservation Restrictions as well as to assist in paying for a share of other types of land protection transactions in town.

Recommendation 5: The Town should consider whether revisions to its zoning bylaws could be made to encourage the conservation of forest and farmland and other natural and historical resources.

A.3 Water Resources, Wetlands and Floodplains

Whately residents value the role that ground and surface waters play in the quality of their lives. Every person who completed a 2006 survey, 100 percent of the survey respondents, considered it important to protect drinking water supplies in Whately. Over 90 percent of survey respondents said it was important to protect the Connecticut River and other lakes, streams, and ponds in town. A serious problem that affects two important tributaries of the Mill River, the West Brook and the Roaring Brook, is lack of adequate flow, especially during the summer months. The natural flow regime in West Brook is impacted by the operation of the upstream drinking water reservoirs owned by the City of Northampton. Similarly, Roaring Brook is impacted by the operation of the Town of Deerfield's drinking water reservoir.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of survey respondents believed it was important to preserve wetlands in town. Wetlands provide important pollutant filtering, flood control, and ground and surface water recharge functions. Many wildlife species rely on wetlands for their habitat (see next section). Eighty-five percent (85%) of survey respondents indicated that floodplains were important to preserve. Like wetlands, floodplain areas provide important floodwater storage and filtering functions and help to recharge ground and surface waters. Floodplains help to stabilize stream channels, reduce erosion along the stream channel, and provide sediment storage during flood events. Floodplains also provide important habitat for wildlife.

Recommendation 6: The Town should continue to work closely with the Whately Water Department and the Whately Water District to secure access to clean and sustainable supplies of drinking water through water supply protection measures, conservation, and other forms of demand management. Recently, the town passed an Aquifer Protection Overlay District bylaw.

Recommendation 7: The Town should consider adopting and enforcing a local Wetlands Protection Bylaw that would be more stringent than state laws but which would also provide for exemptions for agriculture and forestry operations. This recommendation also addresses concerns raised in the following section, *Wildlife and Habitat Preservation*.

Recommendation 8: The Town should consider adopting and enforcing more stringent requirements for development or considering prohibiting new development within the 100-year floodplain. The new regulations would provide for exemptions for agriculture and forestry operations. This recommendation also addresses concerns raised in the following section, *Wildlife and Habitat Preservation*.

Recommendation 9: The Town should obtain copies of the permits of the two water supply reservoirs to see if there are requirements for maintaining flows in West Brook and Roaring Brook. The state Water Resources Commission is currently in the process of setting streamflow standards and useful information may come from this work¹. The Town should initiate and maintain an ongoing dialogue with the state Department of Environmental Protection, which issues permits for drinking water supplies², the City of Northampton, and the Town of Deerfield to ensure that Whately's concerns about adequate streamflow are considered during permitting and operation of the water supply reservoirs.

A.4 Wildlife and Habitat Preservation

As outlined in the Environmental Inventory, Whately possesses a rich array of plant and animal species. These species are valued for their ecological significance as well as the wildlife viewing opportunities they offer to local residents and visitors to the Town. At this time, there are several areas in Town which provide wildlife habitat as well as opportunities for passive recreational uses such as hiking and birding. These areas are: Graves Sanctuary, which is owned by Massachusetts Audubon, and approximately 822 acres owned by the state. Of these 822 acres, 42 are owned by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. The remaining acreage is owned by the state Department of Fish and Game and includes the Whately Wildlife Management Area and land within Great Swamp. While this is an important start, there are other areas which contain important species habitat and are not yet protected.

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program provides protection for vernal pools that have been certified according to specific guidelines. Currently, there are eight (8) certified vernal pools in Whately³. However, as shown on the *Scenic Resources and Unique Environments Map* at the end of Section 4, there are

¹ www.mass.gov/envir/mwrc/default.htm See Streamflow Standards and Stress Redesignation power point presentation. www.mass.gov/envir/mwrc/ppt/streamflow_standards_stress_redesignation.ppt

² www.mass.gov/dep/water/approvals/wmgforms.htm

³ www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/nhcvptal.htm

many more that have not yet been certified. Certifying vernal pools is important for wildlife habitat protection, particularly for rare and endangered species, and for groundwater quality. As these pools are seasonal in occurrence, there are limited times during the year when they can be located and identified.

Recommendation 8: Certification of vernal pools is necessary to ensure their protection (see Appendix C for more information and a copy of the certification documents). A good approach to implementing a certification project would be to have the Conservation Commission involve Whately's elementary students and/or Boy and Girl Scout groups. Children can gain important knowledge of wooded wetlands while providing an important service to the community at the same time. The involvement of the Town's youth in a project like this can be a fun and educational way to include them in the town's open space and recreation planning process.

Recommendation 9: The Town should undertake a comprehensive biological inventory of wildlife species and habitats. Such an inventory would be helpful for prioritizing areas of conservation interest. In addition, a biological inventory can be used to gauge the environmental impact of land use changes.

A.5 Scenic Corridors and Views

Anyone who visits Whately will immediately notice the abundance of scenic views and corridors, including: broad expanses of flat farm land, hilltop vistas, waterways, abundant forests, and historic homes and farm buildings in town. Residents of Whately highly value their scenic views and roads. Over 90 percent of survey respondents believe it is important to preserve scenic views. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents felt it is important to preserve undesignated scenic roads. The scenic areas in Whately provide opportunities to observe wildlife, explore the Town's geologic and cultural history, or to simply enjoy the scenery for its own sake. Many of these scenic sites will disappear if open space is not protected. Another threat to these scenic sites is the litter thrown from vehicles and the trash and other improperly disposed of debris. Through the Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey and the Public Forum, the town has begun to identify significant scenic corridors along roadways, waterways, or other known trails and overlook points.

Recommendation 10: Continue the process of identifying significant scenic corridors or viewsheds and then develop a process for prioritizing these areas for protection. For example, parcels that provide linkages between various protected parcels around the Town might receive higher priority for protection than others.

Recommendation 11: The Town should consider adopting a Ridge Protection Overlay District to help protect the scenic viewsheds of the West Whately hills.

Recommendation 12: Neighborhood and community-oriented volunteer groups and Girl Scout and Boy Scout groups can be encouraged by the Town to assist officials in the clean-up of litter along roadways. A “Roadside Cleanup” day could be sponsored by the Town or other civic group with a barbeque or other gathering held at the conclusion of the clean-up to celebrate success and community spirit.

A.6 Balancing Development and Conservation: Planned vs. Unplanned Development

Almost 50 percent of survey respondents believe that the quality of many of Whately’s important natural, recreational, and historic resources has remained the same since they have lived in town. These percentages indicate that most of what residents love and value about their town is still fairly intact. The exceptions that survey respondents noted have changed for the worse are: farms and farmland (41%); local open space (30%); scenic views (38%) and Whately’s rural character (34%). Residents are in a relatively unique and enviable position of being able to plan for and manage future growth in order to protect what they value about their town.

However, this planning “window of opportunity” will not remain open for long. New home construction, primarily Approval-Not-Required (ANR) development, along Whately’s major roads could diminish the quality of significant historic landscapes and the future use of prime farmland soils. The value of prime agricultural soils is negated once the land is developed. Many of Whately’s most scenic vistas are dependent on the maintenance of open fields and the retention of contiguous forests along the slopes of the hills in town. The scenic value of these landscapes would be severely diminished by unplanned development. Large blocks of contiguous forest, wetlands, and stream corridors create a diversity of habitats across the landscape of the town and provide recharge to the aquifers that supply drinking water to residents.

Although most Whately residents would probably agree that poorly planned development can detract from their town’s rural character and erode the quality of the environment over time, some types of residential, commercial, and industrial development can be very beneficial to a community, especially if it is consistent with a town plan that balances growth with natural resource protection. Well-planned economic development, for example, could help provide jobs and small-scale commercial enterprises that serve the community. Ideally, through zoning and non-zoning techniques, the town could provide incentives to developers so that all development in Whately would contribute as much as possible to the residents’ shared vision for their town. For example, by using existing buildings or unused farm structures for new commercial or residential development, forest or farmland would remain undeveloped. Another way the town could promote and preserve active farmland, help stabilize local residential property tax bills, and create jobs, is by seeking to increase the market value of local agricultural and forest-based goods and services. Increasing revenue to farms and forest landowners via direct sales might create a small number of local jobs. A town with a greater number of its residents working locally feels different than a bedroom community.

One of the most pressing needs is for a continuing discussion on how residents want their town to develop over time, and which areas should be protected from development so that recreational opportunities, water resources, forests, wildlife habitat, and farmland can be conserved for this generation, and the next.

B. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY NEEDS

Over the next five years, town boards and commissions should work collaboratively to address several key community needs: 1) improving recreational access to rivers, trails, and natural areas and improving access to existing recreational facilities for the disabled community; and 2) protecting the visual rural and agricultural character of Whately.

B. 1 Recreational Needs

According to the survey respondents, the five most needed recreational resources in Whately were, in order of need: public access to natural areas; public access to waterbodies; hiking trails; an ice skating rink (outdoor); and cross-country skiing trails.

Massachusetts Outdoors 2000, the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) is a five-year plan developed by the state to be eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants. The SCORP is the state's Open Space and Recreation Plan, and provides regional data for the entire state. Overall, the greatest statewide recreational need is for trail-based activities including walking (ranked #2), road biking (#3), hiking (#7), and mountain biking (#8). Together, these four activities accounted for 40.5 percent of the most desired recreational facilities. Clearly, Whately residents are right in line with those figures—trail activities are very popular in town.

Recommendation 13: Request that the Open Space Committee appoint a Trails Working Group to facilitate the establishment, maintenance, and mapping of trail systems and access points for seasonal non-motorized uses.

Recommendation 14: Cooperation between the Open Space Committee and the Whately Recreation Committee is necessary to determine the best method for addressing these recreational needs. This effort should include an evaluation of the existing municipal properties and ways to maximize their recreational and conservation potential for all visitors, including the disabled community. An ADA Self-Evaluation was completed for four facilities in Whately, including the Tri-Town Beach, Herlihy Park, Tot Land at the Center School Offices, and the Whately Elementary School Playground. An Accessibility Working Group should be formed to prioritize the needed retrofits for these facilities to make them accessible to the disabled community. The Accessibility Working Group, the Recreation Committee, and the Open Space Committee could work together to evaluate the potential for an access point to the Connecticut River via Herlihy Park. In addition, the Open Space Committee should consider including the publication of a guide on recreational

resources including a list of local trails, access rights, use restrictions, and private facilities available for public use.

Recommendation 15: The Town should collaborate with other entities that provide recreational facilities used by local residents. These include Massachusetts Audubon, private sporting clubs, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Good communication will help to ensure that these properties are managed in a way that suits the needs of all parties involved.

B.2 Whately's Rural, Agricultural Character

Survey respondents are concerned about the impact of rising property taxes (76%), environmental pollution (78%), loss of farmland (83%), loss of open space (82%) and residential development (86%) on Whately's sense of community and rural character.

Recommendation 16: The Whately Planning Board may want to consider assessing its current zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to determine whether any revisions should be proposed to increase the town's capacity to mitigate the impact of ANR development and maintain its rural and agricultural character.

Recommendation 17: The Whately Board of Selectmen may want to consider holding all-board meetings several times a year to improve communication among municipal officials and interested residents. Information-sharing and brainstorming potential strategies for addressing community concerns can be an effective and empowering experience for those who participate.

C. Summary of Management Needs

This section addresses opportunities for improvement in the way that open space and recreation areas are managed and maintained in the Town of Whately.

C.1 Town-wide Cooperation

The key to the successful implementation of the Whately Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) will be the continued participation of both the town's elected and appointed officials and residents. Like any new endeavor, ongoing land conservation, natural resource protection and recreation projects may need the input and effort of many individuals.

The implementation of the Whately Open Space and Recreation Plan may be best overseen by a standing Open Space Committee. The current Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee could propose to the Board of Selectmen that an Open Space Committee be formed from interested citizens and representatives of existing boards and committees. The towns of Colrain, Leyden, Shelburne, Wendell, Northfield, and Warwick recently completed their OSRPs and all have established standing Open Space Committees

(OSC). Each of these OSCs is involved in implementing their action plans and in promoting conservation in their community. Three of these towns have already protected land with funding from the Self-Help Program, administered through the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services.

Recommendation 18: Establish a standing Open Space Committee that would be comprised of concerned citizens and officials intent on implementing the Whately Open Space and Recreation Plan.

C.2 A Dialogue with Motorized Recreational Vehicle Users

The town Open Space Committee or Whately Land Preservation might consider working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to hold a meeting to discuss all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and snowmobile use in Whately. ATV use has been blamed for the degradation of rare species and natural communities especially where they occur near trails and wetlands. This is a common issue for communities, land conservation trusts, and state conservation agencies. Rogue snowmobile users have been blamed for crossing lands very near homes. Whately could take a leadership role in seeking to create a forum where trail users come together to try and craft a shared solution to the problem.

Recommendation 19: Hold an informal meeting at the Town Hall between recreational trail users and landowners to discuss common issues, identify the problems, and establish consensus on solutions.

C.3 Stewardship of Whately's Natural, Recreational, and Cultural Resources

Engaging residents as volunteers in the stewardship of the town's natural, recreational, and cultural resources will be a key undertaking as the Open Space and Recreation Plan is implemented. Typically, once a person participates in a cooperative effort to preserve something that they themselves value, they will want to come back for similar experiences time and time again. The main ingredient needed to initiate this level of community organizing and involvement is leadership. The leader that produces an engaging, meaningful, and satisfying stewardship project will help to foster feelings of responsibility and ownership among the project participants. Leadership is the most important ingredient to successful implementation of a community's vision.

Recommendation 20: The Town should encourage diverse opportunities for the involvement of residents in community projects, including those associated with this OSRP. Stress that all volunteers and the projects they work on play a critical role in supporting the whole community.