

# CHAPTER 2

## INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) sponsored-Deerfield River Basin Team secured funding for a watershed-wide open space and recreation planning effort that included the development of several municipal open space and recreation plans (OSRP) and a Deerfield River Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan. EOEA staff met with Colrain, Leyden and Charlemont town officials to determine residents' interest in working towards the completion of their own plans and all three communities took on and completed the challenge between 2002 and 2004. The grant to assist the three towns in the development of their own OSRPs as well as to bring together watershed stakeholders in the development of a watershed-wide open space planning effort was awarded to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) Planning Department.

Earlier in 2003, Dodson Associates, a landscape architecture and planning firm from Ashfield, had completed a five-town open space planning effort that resulted in GIS maps for the towns of Conway, Hawley, Ashfield, Buckland, and Shelburne. Dodson Associates used a strategy of breaking down assessments into three categories: Natural Resources, Cultural and Scenic Resources, and Recreational Resources. FRCOG staff agreed to continue with the same strategy in its assessment of similar resources in the watershed.

### **A. Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this plan is to provide an accurate and thorough basis for decision-making involving the current and future open space and recreation needs of the residents of the Deerfield River Watershed in Massachusetts. The Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan represents consensus on key issues involved with, and strategies for protecting, watershed-wide natural, cultural, and recreational resources through collaborative project planning and implementation.

The Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was created using existing data from eleven municipal OSRPs and the oversight of the Deerfield River Watershed Open Space Planning Committee. The Watershed Open Space Planning Committee developed consensus on the most important regionally significant natural, cultural, and recreational resources, on goals and objectives, on key threats, and on the strategies and actions that would be implemented over the next ten years by members of their own agencies and towns.

This OSRP represents years of consensus building on an individual town by town basis and about seven months of concentrated effort by the Regional Open Space Planning Committee. The Ten-Year Action plan, when carried out by watershed stakeholders with support from the Regional Open Space Committee, will successfully implement the goals and objectives.

## **B. Planning Process and Public Participation**

FRCOG regional planners worked closely with the Board of Directors of the Deerfield River Watershed Association (DRWA), with the Deerfield Basin Team, and with consultants from Gomez and Sullivan who developed a Natural Resources Assessment and a Watershed Action Plan.

Beginning in August 2003, FRCOG staff and DRWA board members drafted a letter requesting towns, state agencies, and non-profit conservation organizations in the watershed to provide a representative to serve on a Deerfield River Watershed Open Space Planning Committee (OSPC). The letter was sent in October, in advance of the first meeting scheduled for November 20, 2003.

FRCOG staff organized a small meeting of the DRWA President, Gisela Walker, and the Chair of the Colrain Open Space Planning Committee, Ellen Weeks, to discuss and reach agreement on a strategy for assessing the vast amount of mapping and other information on a watershed-scale by all of the stakeholders in a manner that people would find interesting. We agreed that the OSPC should be divided into Natural Resources, Cultural and Scenic Resources, and Recreational Resources sub-groups to identify critical resources, threats and strategies for some part of each meeting.

Prior to the first meetings in November (*see below*), FRCOG staff developed draft Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps including the Open Space Map which included updated Chapter 61 parcels for most communities in the watershed. In addition, FRCOG staff communicated with towns in the watershed to collect from them copies of their recent open space and recreation plans. FRCOG began development of a set of Goals and Objectives that summarized municipal plans in early November.

On November 4, FRCOG staff held a meeting for land conservation professionals from state agencies, non-profit organizations, and land trusts. The Franklin Land Trust, Valley Land Fund, Trustees of Reservations/ Highland Communities Initiative, Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Department of Agricultural Resources were represented. The meeting was held to provide the land protection community a pressure-free forum within which to share land protection priorities and their opinions on effective conservation strategies (*see Appendix*).

The Deerfield River Watershed Open Space Planning Committee had their first meeting on November 20, 2003 in East Charlemont. Between that first meeting and June 2004,

the Deerfield River Watershed OSPC had six public meetings and one public forum. A Deerfield River Watershed Conference was held on April 24, 2004 where concerned citizens reviewed both the Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan as well as the Watershed Assessment and Action Plan (prepared by Gomez and Sullivan) and learned how different aspects of the plans would be implemented. All public comments were recorded and considered for incorporation into the plan.

Drafts of each chapter of the Plan were E-mailed to approximately seventy-four people representing key town boards, state agencies non-profits, business owners and residents of diverse interests in advance of the meetings. The Historic Resources sub-section in Chapter 3-Community Setting, was developed by Marcia Starkey, a member of the Greenfield Historical Commission. Overall, the Deerfield River Watershed OSPC was comprised of approximately thirty persons, though a core group of fifteen persons came to most meetings. In all, the participants represented the following constituencies:

- Leyden Open Space Planning Committee
- Charlemont Open Space Planning Committee and Conservation Commission
- Colrain Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee
- Buckland Open Space Planning Committee
- Heath Select Board and Conservation Commission
- Shelburne Community Development Planning Committee
- Greenfield Historical Commission
- Greenfield Planning Department
- Hawley Select Board
- Town of Ashfield
- Conway Community Preservation Committee
- USDA / Natural Resource Conservation Service
- U.S. Gen New England
- Deerfield River Watershed Association
- Water Resources Research Center
- A forestry/wildlife management consultant
- Town of Florida
- American Whitewater
- New England F.L.O.W.
- Crabapple Whitewater Outfitter
- North East Association of 4 Wheel Drive Clubs
- Beef farmer
- Sawmill owners
- Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Massachusetts Riverways Program
- Connecticut River Watershed Council
- Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
- The Trustees of Reservations, Highland Communities Initiative
- Colrain Sno-Drifters Snowmobile Club

- Greater Whately Snowmobile Club
- Conway Snowmobile Club

Any ideas, comments, and corrections pertaining to different sections of the plan and the action steps have been included in the final version of the Deerfield River Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan.