

# CHAPTER 7

## ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

The Deerfield River Watershed contains vast forests, clean streams and rivers, viable populations of wildlife, fisheries, water supplies, small rural communities, and a lot of active farms. Looking to the future, watershed towns, state conservation agencies, recreation groups, and non-profit organizations have identified the most important regionally significant water supply resources, wildlife habitats, scenic and cultural landscapes, recreational, and conservation and forests for protection.

The collective understanding of these resources is in the beginning stages. There is much to learn about the lands and waters of this watershed and how people, and nature can interact in mutually beneficial ways.

In many ways, the Deerfield River Watershed Open Space and Recreation Plan represents a starting point for multiple stakeholders of varying interests to collaborate on projects that begin to answer important questions. Through the meetings of the Watershed Open Space Planning Committee, the most important regionally significant resources have been identified:

Question: What are the most important regional water supply resources?

Answer:

- The high yield aquifers in West Charlemont, Colrain, Shelburne, Deerfield, and Greenfield; and,
- The largest blocks of unprotected, contiguous forest in Charlemont, Heath, Shelburne, Leyden, and Colrain that provide recharge to important ground and surface waters.

Question: What are the most critical and regionally significant wildlife habitats in the watershed?

Answer:

- The BioMap Core Habitats most at risk from development in Colrain, Charlemont, Leyden, Conway, and Buckland;
- Vernal pools and wetlands watershed-wide; and,
- Large blocks of contiguous forest of various age classes.

Question: What are the most critical and regionally significant conservation areas and forests for future acquisition? Since this question has already been answered above, another question could be, what is the most important and regionally significant natural resource (other than water, wildlife, and forests) that also happens to be at risk from development?

Answer:

- Farmland and prime farmland soils.

Question: What are the most critical and regionally significant scenic and cultural landscapes and resources?

Answer:

- The Deerfield River Valley and major tributaries
- Agricultural landscapes
- Scenic views from the Mohawk Trail
- Historic village centers
- Natural-cultural features like Mt. Massamet, which are recognized over time and space.

Question: What are the most important regionally significant recreational resources?

Answer:

- The Deerfield River
- State Forests
- Private snowmobile trail system

The following section represents a summary of issues commonly identified in the watershed towns' Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs) as well as key findings of the three inventory chapters of this watershed plan and input of the Watershed Open Space Planning Committee. The issues addressed in municipal OSRPs can be summarized as a need for information, technical assistance, and funding to conserve what matters most to the residents of the basin. The questions listed on the following pages could be used by watershed stakeholders as a source of research needs and project ideas that when completed would aid the watershed communities' in their work to sustain and enhance the quality of the environment and of the lives of residents.

Specific, open space and recreation needs of the watershed are expressed below as questions, reflecting the idea that conserving important resources through social and political actions needs to start with an understanding of the problem and, that there may be alternative ways of solving each issue. The answers to the questions could be recommendations. Choosing which one to implement is the purpose of the Ten-Year Action Plan. However, even then, the Action Plan represents only one set of potential solutions. Hopefully, as people seek to implement solutions to conserve and enhance resources and values of the watershed, more will be learned about the issues and needs, the efficacy of a particular recommendation, and the process by which it was pursued.

## **A. Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs**

Towns in the watershed are attuned to conserving natural resources: water, forests, farms, habitat, scenic areas, and recreational access to open space lands. The most pressing questions regarding the conservation of these natural resources include:

1. How can we protect surface and ground waters from non-point source pollution?
2. How do we reduce the potential negative impacts of unplanned development on the ecological, agricultural, recreation, and scenic and cultural resources of our region?
3. How can we conserve more farmland and encourage farm and forest-based businesses?
4. What are the most effective ways to conserve large blocks of forest of varying age classes and compositions?
5. What can we do to protect critical habitats like vernal pools and the most threatened of the watershed's core habitat areas while also creating regional wildlife corridors?
6. How can we provide public access to the most important rivers in the basin like the Deerfield, Green, and North Rivers?
7. How can we preserve the most distinctive of our scenic agricultural and historic landscapes, defined by "openness, low population density, high relative relief, historical structures and features, and lack of contemporary development?"
8. How can we impact how state forests in our region are maintained to improve trail conditions, lessen illegal use of park roads, and curtail illegal dumping?
9. How can we coordinate with neighboring communities to develop regional recreational trails?

## **B. Summary of the Communities' Needs**

Over the next ten years, many of the watershed communities will be working to answer the following questions. Residents of the watershed might consider these questions as opportunities for collaboration with neighboring towns and among constituencies within the region. As is described in Management Needs, communication and collaboration may need to be a significant part of any solution, especially when involving more than

one town. The most pressing questions regarding the needs of the watershed residents include:

1. How can we provide for additional recreational programming, including libraries, for all ages given current state funding levels?
2. How can we develop safe pedestrian and bicycle paths between village centers and areas of interest?
3. How can we maintain and develop new recreational facilities?
4. How can we develop more community events?
5. Where are the areas most appropriate for providing public use of our major rivers and how do we secure that access?
6. How can we restore or renovate important public spaces as a means of building community spirit in our watershed?
7. How can we protect scenic views along the Mohawk Trail from poorly planned development?
8. How should we begin to identify, manage, and promote the use of existing trails that are open to the public?
9. Is there a means by which we can develop trails that could connect our state forests with our population centers?
10. How can we strengthen our regional economy in a manner that supports our open space and recreation goals?
11. How can we amend our local zoning bylaws to reflect the development patterns desired by our residents?
12. How can we ensure that there will be affordable housing in the watershed for people who work the land and for young families?
13. What can we do to promote renewable energy and renewable resource management including timber and other forest-based resources, biomass energy, hydropower and the consumptive use of the wildlife resource?

## C. Management Needs

As in a single town, the challenges to implementing any action item listed in Chapter 9 will likely require collaboration and effective communication at different scales. Within a town, different boards and committees often need to coordinate their efforts before new policies, plans, and regulations can be adopted or implemented. On a watershed scale or even at the sub-region, it may be even more important for initiative proponents to seek out diverse interests and build collaborations so that actions taken are successful and reflect consensus on the goal and the recommendation chosen. The most pressing questions regarding the successful implementation of the Ten-Year Action Plan include:

1. How can we build upon the consensus represented in our own town plans as well as in our watershed-wide planning?
2. How can we build effective collaborations that involve combinations of all or some of the following to identify and implement workable solutions to our needs:
  - Water supply district and town officials to protect drinking water supplies;
  - Environmental Police Officers, the land conservation community, large landowners and recreation clubs to curb destructive trail uses;
  - State forest officials and friends or advisory groups for better public lands oversight for recreation, forest, and wildlife management;
  - Regional farmland conservation and farm promotion agencies and organizations;
  - Regional and statewide agencies and organizations for land conservation and trail development;
  - Historical commissions of different towns to celebrate and protect resources of common historic roots; and,
  - Watershed organizations, Boards of Health, and Planning Boards to reduce non-point sources of pollution.
3. How can we inspire more of the watershed's residents to get involved in the stewardship of their communities?
4. How can we collaborate to support forest and farmland conservation goals through economic development and marketing strategies that seek to support forest and farm-based businesses like loggers, foresters, sawmills, native wood-using manufacturers, woodworkers, and farmers?
5. How can we encourage town residents to implement recommendations with Town Meeting support and or approval?
6. How can we encourage towns to work together to reduce non-point source pollution within shared sub-watersheds?

7. How can we collaborate to develop a funding pool for the conservation of these resources within the watershed?
8. As a town often chooses to create an Open Space Committee to oversee the implementation of a town plan, what body is needed to oversee the implementation of the Watershed's Open Space and Recreation Plan?
9. How can we strengthen our capacity to implement recommendations that satisfy our open space and recreation goals and objectives?