
V. OPEN SPACE, NATURAL RESOURCES, & RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Lancaster's natural resources such as its rivers and wetlands, ponds, forests, special wildlife, and natural areas are prized at the state, regional, and local levels. Lancaster has many wonderful publicly and privately protected natural areas, forests, open space, farmlands, and trails that are available for access and enjoyment by the public. Because of the interrelatedness of natural resources, open space, and recreation in Lancaster, these are presented in one combined Chapter of the Lancaster *Master Plan*.

During the May and November 2005 master planning community workshops, protection of natural areas and open space emerged as a major priority for the Town. A citizen group met and worked over a period of months to explore and recommend actions to better protect the important open spaces and natural resources of the Town and to improve access to these areas as an important source of recreation and enjoyment for the Town's citizens and visitors.

Two previous studies addressing open space, natural resources and recreation provide important complements to this *Master Plan* Chapter. Lancaster's 2000 Open Space & Recreation Plan contains important background data and mapping of open space in Lancaster. The 2004 Lancaster Community Development Plan developed under the Executive Order 418 Plan also provides a complementing study and background data. This *Master Plan* Open Space, Natural Resources, & Recreation Chapter provides updates where needed of material in these previous studies.

Open Space Land Use Inventory

As of the most recently-available McConnell land use data inventory of 1999, 10,650 (59 per cent) of Lancaster's 17,910 acres were in forestland, with cropland, urban open land, and open undeveloped land accounting for another 21 per cent. Water bodies and wetlands constitute another 4 per cent, all totaling about 84 per cent of Lancaster's total land area. Following 2-3 decades of substantial regional

development, this amount of open space and natural areas is fairly remarkable.

A major contributor to this sizable amount of open space in Lancaster is the amount of publicly-controlled land in town. The U.S. Government owns 4,376 acres of land in the Devens South Post. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns another 1,421 acres, with the Town of Lancaster following with 1,207 acres. All total, publicly-controlled land comprises about 45 per cent of Lancaster's total land area.¹ Of this amount, 1,288 acres are permanently protected. (Specific descriptions of these lands are included in the Lancaster 2004 E.O. 418 Community Development Plan).

There are 250 additional acres of permanently-protected privately-owned open space, including land owned by the New England Forestry Foundation. And finally, as of 2006, there were 1328 acres of land in "Chapter 61" – privately-owned land with agricultural restrictions, assessed at lower rates, according to the Lancaster Assessor Office. (See Open Space & Recreation Map at the end of this Chapter for public and privately-protected open space locations).

Water Bodies & Water Resources

The North and South branches of the Nashua River are the 'spines' of the Nashua River Watershed area in which Lancaster is located. Connected to these water spines are a network of brooks, including McGovern, Spectacle, Ponakin, Cranberry, Slate Rock, and Wekepeke Brooks. Lancaster's nine ponds include the South Meadow Pond, White Pond, Slate Rock Pond, Fullers Pond, Oak Hill Pond, Cranberry Pond, Big Spectacle Pond, Little Spectacle Pond and Fort Pond. Not surprisingly, Lancaster's system of rivers, streams, and ponds is interspersed with considerable wetlands. These wetlands constitute part of 1,900 acres of a regional wetlands system identified and listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to be among its Priority Wetlands of New England.

Two aquifers underlie land within Lancaster – one underneath the Cook Conservation Area, with another underlying much of the Devens South Post.

¹ MRPC, *Lancaster Community Development Plan*, June, 2004.

The Nashua River Watershed Association has identified South Meadow Pond as a “eutrophic” water body and has made this a priority for attention in its 5 year action plan.² Other ponds whose ecosystems similarly are threatened include Spectacle and Fort Ponds.

The Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Much of the Central Nashua River Valley *Area of Critical Environmental Concern* lies within the Town of Lancaster’s boundaries. It also encompasses area in the neighboring Towns of Bolton, Harvard, and Leominster. Lancaster citizens and officials were instrumental in obtaining state designation of this area to bring attention to, and hopefully to better protect, the important natural resources in this region, most notably its rivers, wetlands, and ponds.

While not triggering any particular regulatory action, an *ACEC* designation has the effect of garnering particular attention on the part of the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) concerning the impacts of proposed federal, state, or local projects upon the resources contained in the *ACEC*. The EOEA is then charged with the responsibility to “take action, administer programs, and revise regulations in order to: (a) acquire useful scientific data on the *ACEC*; (b) preserve, restore, or enhance the resources of the *ACEC*, and (c) ensure that activities in or impacting on the area are carried out so as to minimize adverse effects” upon the natural, historic, and cultural resources identified in the *ACEC*.³

The centerpiece of the *ACEC* is the Nashua River. The north branch of the Nashua River flows from Leominster into Lancaster, where it combines with the south branch flowing north from Clinton. The river then flows north to empty into the Merrimac River.

A twenty-mile corridor along the river contains many diverse forms of wet areas, such as sedge marshes,

² *Eutrophication* is a condition where, due to an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus, plant life in a water body grows excessively, taking up most of the dissolved oxygen, thereby killing other forms of life such as fish.

³ Massachusetts EOEA, 301 CMR 12.00: “Areas Of Critical Environmental Concern”.

swamps, spruce bogs, oxbows⁴, brooks, streams, dry and wet kettle holes, vernal pools, and floodplains. These diverse wet areas contain in turn a wide range of wild life – plants, animals, amphibians, insects and fish – who are particularly adapted for living in these special riparian (water-based) ecosystems.

McGovern, Slate Rock, Ponakin, Big Spectacle Pond, Little Spectacle Pond, and Cranberry Brooks in Lancaster are all part of this interrelated ecosystem. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the 1986 Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, and the Environmental Protection Agency all have designated these wetlands to be of priority for protection in New England due to their critical importance in supporting waterfowl of the Atlantic Flyway. Estimated wetland habitat covers approximately 3,925 acres, or 30 per cent of the *ACEC*, according to the GIS mapping carried out for the *ACEC* nomination. Priority habitat covers approximately 4,375 acres, or 34 per cent of the *ACEC*. Together, with considerable overlapping, wetland and priority habitat cover approximately 4,975 acres, or 39 per cent of the entire Central Nashua River Valley *ACEC*.

- WILDLIFE WITHIN THE *ACEC*

The Natural Heritage Program identifies 19-state listed critical species – four plants, 15 animals – within the *ACEC*. Six of these are “Endangered,” five are “Threatened”, and eight are listed as species of “Special Concern” according to the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Rare bird species that inhabit or pass through the area include the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, Cooper’s Hawk and the Sharp-shinned Hawk, the Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Upland Sandpiper, Vesper Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow.⁵

- SOUTH POST HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

Many rare species inhabit the wide variety of habitat types found in the relatively undisturbed area of Fort Devens’s South Post, such as pitch pine barrens, rare grassland, and wetlands. Two threatened bird species and one endangered bird

⁴ An oxbow is a U-shaped bend in a river, or the land included in the bend.

⁵ A list of the BioMap critical wildlife species are included in the Appendix.

species inhabit its extensive grassland area. Its pitch pine barrens are important habitat for three state-listed species of moths. Its wetlands and adjacent uplands are home to three species of aquatic turtles. According to the Natural Heritage Program, possibly the largest-in-New England population of Blanding's Turtle, a threatened species, lives in the South Post as well as in the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge and the adjoining Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area. Two South Post vernal pools that are habitat for the rare Blue-spotted Salamander have been certified by the Natural Heritage Program.

- FARMLAND AND HISTORIC RESOURCES IN THE ACEC

Critical farmland and historic resources also are part of the ACEC designation. Agricultural lands in South and West Lancaster are part of a greater area of agricultural lands in Bolton Flats, Lunenburg, and Sterling, which have contributed to the region's natural resource and historic landscape. The confluence of the North and South Nashua Rivers and its importance as a fishing area provided the home for the Nipmuck Native Americans. Archeological finds provide evidence that early peoples hunted and fished at the confluence of the rivers, known historically as the "meeting of the waters", as long as several thousand years ago. Both the National Register Historic Districts of Lancaster – Center Village and North Village – are included in the ACEC designation.

- WATER RESOURCES IN THE ACEC

Aquifers within the ACEC include the high and medium yield Wekepeke and Still River aquifers, as well as additional medium-yield aquifers lying in a north to south direction within the area. Public water supplies and wellhead protection areas located within the ACEC include the North Main Street well in Lancaster, presently in the "New Source Approval" process, but not currently in active use. According to the ACEC state designation, the South Post has a non-community public water system that will be registered by the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection in the future. Additionally a portion of a Leominster Zone II wellfield in the Wekepeke aquifer extends into Lancaster beneath the North Nashua River and adjacent wetlands in the vicinity of the Cook Conservation Area.

- SCENIC LANDSCAPES IN THE ACEC

The Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory has designated sections of Route 117 as it crosses the Still River and Nashua River in Lancaster, and between Langen Road and North Main Street in Lancaster as "Distinctive" landscapes. "Distinctive landscapes" are landscapes that are ranked statewide in the top 5 per cent of all scenic areas for landscape quality and value. The State Inventory also has designated additional landscapes adjacent to Lancaster's Distinctive landscapes as "Noteworthy".

Public recreational areas within the ACEC include the Cook Conservation area and the Lancaster State Forest. The Lancaster Land Trust's Ballard Hill and Turner Pond parcels are also available for recreational use.

In December of 1993, the Lancaster Board of Selectmen submitted the Central Nashua River Valley region nomination as an ACEC to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). On January 29, 1996, the Secretary of EOEA officially designated the ACEC, in so doing, recognizing the critical importance of the Central Nashua River Valley region, of which Lancaster is a part, to the state of Massachusetts as a whole.

Core Habitats in Lancaster

Lancaster has three to four special natural areas for wildlife that have been identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program as *core habitats* – areas found to be the most critical sites for biodiversity conservation throughout the state. These areas contain a wide variety of rare or endangered plants, animals, insects, as well as almost all other species that live in Massachusetts.

Why do we need to think about, let alone work to safeguard, the biodiversity of species? The renowned biologist E.O. Wilson has said:

"...the question I am asked most frequently about the diversity of life [is]: if enough species are extinguished, will the ecosystems collapse, and will the extinction of most other species soon follow afterward? The only answer anyone can give is, possibly. By the time we find out, however, it might be too late. One

planet, one experiment.”⁶

Other scientists have pointed out:

“[We] do not really know what we are losing when we lose a species. Some ecologists have likened the loss of biodiversity to an airplane flight during which we continually pull out rivets as the plane cruises along. How many rivets can we pull out before disaster occurs?”⁷

-CORE HABITAT BM494⁸

This core habitat in Lancaster bands a long stretch of the Nashua River that includes wetlands, meadows, floodplain forests, oxbows, and a special eco-system called a Riverside seep that occurs at the base of steep riverbanks. (‘Seep’ refers to groundwater that seeps out of the bottom of the slope). This enriched area brings about a high diversity of species. Three endangered plant grow in this core habitat, including one of only two known populations in the state of Wild Senna. Two other endangered species of plants – the Ovate Spike-Sedge and Small Bur-Reed grow along oxbows. The threatened species Blandings Turtles are found here, as well as Wood Turtles, Spotted Turtles, and the Blue-spotted salamander.

-CORE HABITAT BM567

This area includes Turner Pond with adjacent meadows and wetlands that extend into Lunenburg. Although it is surrounded by development, this core habitat has not been fragmented so far, and is close enough to other core habitats to enable species, for example, the rare Elderberry Longhorned Beetle, to travel to these other areas.

-CORE HABITAT BM590

This core habitat, again including the Nashua River, supports one of the most diverse assemblies of rare animals in the state, most notably the largest known populations of Blandings Turtles in the state and

⁶ E.O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992, p.182.

⁷ Richard Wright & Bernard Nebel, *Environmental Science*, 8th edition, Pearson Education, Prentice-Hall, p.281.

⁸ Core habitat numbers are assigned by the Mass. Natural Heritage Program. See accompanying Natural Resources Map for locations.

perhaps in New England, according to the Natural Heritage Program. The Fort Devens meadows of this core habitat support Grasshopper Sparrows and its heathlands and Pitch-Pine Scrub Oak barrens support a variety of rare species of moths. Several rare plant populations of the Sedge family are found here. Again, Spotted Turtles, Wood Turtles, and Blue-spotted salamanders are found in the vernal pools and forested wetlands of this core habitat. (See Natural Resources Map at the end of this Chapter for locations).

The Natural Heritage Program created the BioMap and Living Waters Programs, including extensive mapping and inventorying of rare and endangered wildlife, to help towns and cities set priorities for their land protection efforts, and to help communities “appreciate the biological treasures in their cities and towns.” It is clear, from studying the BioMap data for Lancaster available to anyone on the Web,⁹ that some of the most critical and important wildlife ecosystems in the state exist in Lancaster.

Town Forest

The 290-acre Lancaster Town Forest consists of 125 acres of undeveloped land that were donated to the Town in 1946 by Arthur Blood, coupled with other Town-owned parcels between Brockelman and Old County Roads and another gift of land on the west side of Brockelman Road. It is a natural area within a greater ecosystem that includes the Lancaster Land Trust’s Ballard Hill property, abutting Conservation Commission land, the Cook Conservation area, Devens South Post, and the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. A trail system links the Town Forest with these other important natural areas. Naturalists, hikers, horseback riders, cross-country skiers, campers, children, and seasonal hunters all use and enjoy the Town Forest for recreation and for just being in nature. An annual Halloween parade and treasure hunts used to be held in the Town Forest.

The Town Forest Committee, chartered by the Board of Selectmen oversees the responsible recreational and educational use of the Forest, and is charged with preserving and enhancing the ecological health of the Forest, including the habitat of its threatened and endangered plants and wildlife.

⁹ Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, <http://www.nhesp.org>

In July 2003, the Town Forest Committee commissioned a study and ten-year forest management plan for the Town Forest. The major types of woodland found in the Forest were: northern red oak, eastern white pine, red pine, softwood, and maple. Major recommendations of the forest management study to maintain and increase woodland and wetland health were to thin inferior trees with defects or insect problems, remove interfering vines, and mark boundaries of particular stands. The study recommended carrying out the thinning in a manner that creates trails for people to enjoy the experience and scenery of the Forest.

The Town Forest Committee is working to improve the camping sites in the Forest in a low-impact, reusable approach, with the help of Lancaster's Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. The Committee is also planning to develop a walking tour of the Town forest to increase local awareness of what it has to offer, and an informational sign at the forest entrance. Goals of the Committee are to carry out sustainable forestry practices to foster diverse wildlife habitat, in accordance with the ten-year forest management plan, and to purchase land or conservation restrictions on land abutting the Town Forest that could connect with other protected parcels, hence providing wildlife corridors.

Other Conservation Areas in Lancaster

Besides the Town Forest, there are many protected open space and nature areas that are available for public enjoyment. The Lancaster State Forest, a Massachusetts state park, and the Cook Conservation area, overseen by the Lancaster Conservation Commission, consist of about 800 acres connected to a six-mile trail that runs along the Nashua River's North Branch. Johnny Appleseed's original homestead was contained in what is now the Cook Conservation Area. The Bartlett Pond Conservation Area (about 20 acres) and the Atherton Bridge River Greenway also are owned by the Lancaster Conservation Commission. The 38-acre Turner Pond Conservation Area and the 34-acre Ballard Hill Conservation Area are owned by the Lancaster Land Trust. The Bolton Flats Management area, about 923 acres, is owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. The 3.5-acre Dexter Drumlin is owned by the non-profit organization The Trustees of Reservations.

Other Recreation Areas

Thayer Field, located behind Town Hall, is the Town's main recreation area for field and ball games. It is overseen by the Recreation Committee. The Recreation Committee also oversees the Town Beach. Lancaster has an active Little League. Many of the Little League games, however, are played on fields in Bolton, Harvard, and Berlin.

Canoe and kayak launching areas are found at: Ponakin Bridge, I-190 Bridge, Route 117 Bridge, Center Railroad Bridge, Fort Pond State Boat Launch, and the Bartlett Pond Conservation area.

Lancaster has a network of trails that is illustrated on the Open Space and Recreation Map at the end of this Chapter. Some of these trails, plus several proposed trails, are components of the Nashua River Greenway Plan – a vision for a green protected area along either side of the Nashua River that would run through Lancaster, Bolton, Devens, and Shirley – that evolved out of Lancaster's 1967 Master Plan. The idea for a Greenway Plan has been strongly supported by the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, and the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Supporting and expanding Lancaster's network of trails emerged as a high priority of the citizen workshops and citizen working groups during the 2005-2006 master planning process.

Land Use Policy & Regulations

While Lancaster has some policies and land use regulations that help to protect open space and natural areas, there is much yet to be done. In June, 2005, a diagnostic workshop of Lancaster's policies and land use regulations involving several Town officials and land use policymakers revealed that Lancaster has not adopted laws as strong as have many towns controlling wetlands alterations, development within floodplains, or protecting aquifers and other water resources.

The Land Use Chapter and Policy Areas Map of this *Plan* identify what are called "Countryside" areas of the Town which contain most of the Town's most critical natural resources and open space. The Land Use Chapter proposes that development be guided away from these critical areas, and toward the other more thickly settled sections of Town. Designing and adopting a system of regulatory and policy controls to accomplish this goal will be a major step forward

toward protecting and preserving the critical natural areas and open space of Lancaster – that contribute so much to Lancaster’s quality of community life, not to mention the ecosystem in which the Town exists.

The Nashua River Watershed Association’s 5-Year Action Plan 2003-2007 similarly has identified a series of recommended land use regulatory steps that can be taken by communities within the region to better protect water quality, natural resources, and open space.

Oversight of Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation in Lancaster

A variety of boards, organizations, and non-profit and private institutions in Lancaster have responsibility for or oversee various types or properties of open space and recreation in Lancaster.

The Lancaster Conservation Commission has responsibility for reviewing development proposals and issuing permits for development occurring within 100 feet of water bodies or wetlands, and is the local authority for administering the state Wetlands Protection Act. The Commission is also charged with overseeing open space in Lancaster, in particular the Cook Conservation and Bartlett Pond areas. The Lancaster Land Trust is empowered to hold conservation easements and restrictions on privately-owned land, and also oversees some conservation lands in Lancaster and Lunenburg. The Trust currently owns the 37-acre Turner Pond Conservation Area, the 33-acre Ballard Hill Conservation Area, and holds a conservation restriction on 28 acres adjacent to the Lancaster Town Forest.

The Town Forest Committee oversees the Town Forest and its use. The Recreation Committee oversees the use of Thayer Field and the Town Beach Landing. Private organizations organize soccer and baseball games. The Community Development & Planning Department and the Planning Director also are involved with open space protection.

Regional organizations promoting open space and natural resource protection include the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, of which the Town of Lancaster is a member, and the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA). Several Lancaster organizations and individuals work closely with these regional organizations.

At the same time, there is no one organization or individual in Lancaster charged with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating all open space, natural resource protection, and conservation efforts in the Town. Nor is there one department, staff person, or organization who oversees all recreation and recreation facilities in the Town. While a remarkable amount of conservation and open space protection has been accomplished in Lancaster – for example, the nomination and successful designation of the *ACEC* - there still remain challenges to ongoing natural resource and open space protection. Many of these challenges would be more easily dealt with through a coordinated approach to open space and natural resource protection, as well as recreation that would enable all those concerned with these areas to communicate easily and effectively, and to work together toward a common agenda of goals and objectives.

The Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) has completed a Five-Year Action Plan (2003-2007) for the communities within its region, of which Lancaster is a part. Several Lancaster citizens participated in the development of this Plan, whose extensive mapping, data, and detailed action items present a significant resource for Lancaster individuals, boards, and officials in continuing to work toward protecting the Town’s significant natural resources and open space. The NRWA Plan recommendations for Lancaster are included in the Appendix of this *Master Plan*.

A study exploring the use of environmental controls to protect both water quantity and quality has just been completed, covering the central and northern portions of the Town, funded as a pilot by the MA Riverways Program, with additional funding by the Town. That study¹⁰ contains an array of proposals for water resource protection, addressing pollutant removal, water temperature control, groundwater recharge, flood control, aquatic habitat protection, and aquifer sustainability. Proposals include reshaping and strengthening the existing Water Resources District, extra controls on large flow septic systems, and strengthened storm-water controls.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

¹⁰ Comprehensive Environmental, Inc. (CEI), *Environmental Overlay District Pilot Project: Final Report, Lancaster, MA*. Milford, MA, 2006.

At the May and November, 2005 master plan community workshops, Lancaster citizens made it clear that protection of open space and natural resources was a goal of high priority. Their detailed review of the Lancaster 2000 Open Space and Recreation Plan by the Master Plan Open Space & Recreation Topic Group revealed that a substantial number of the 40 goals and recommendations in that plan had not been met. A review of the 1967 Lancaster Master Plan revealed the same thing. The Topic Group then focused upon ways that the Town could improve its communication, distribution of information.

One significant finding was that responsibilities and oversight for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation are fragmented among several Town boards, committees, non-profit and private organizations in Town. This in itself could account for much of the inability to move forward on conservation and protection goals that have long been articulated. Accordingly, one major goal of this *Plan* Chapter is to improve coordination and communication among the diverse organizations, boards, and groups that oversee open space, natural resources, and recreation in Lancaster.

Overall, Lancaster's goals for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation are to:

- Improve the fragmented oversight and responsibility for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation in Lancaster.
- Seek and find the appropriate balance between safeguarding important natural areas, wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities for human recreation and enjoyment of Lancaster's rich natural resources. Protect critical habitat for Lancaster's populations of rare, threatened, or endangered species from human activity.
- Move forward on implementing the goals and recommended actions of the 2000 Open Space and Recreation Plan, as well as this Chapter of Lancaster's *Master Plan*.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

-OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

- Work with large landowners to participate in the Agricultural Restriction Program and explore other means of keeping agriculture viable in Lancaster.
- Purchase land or conservation restrictions on land that abuts the Town Forest that would connect it to other protected parcels, thus creating corridors for wildlife to travel from one place to another.
- Develop a preservation strategy and plan for the Pine Hill area.
- Preserve and protect the Hilltop Road parcel that is home to endangered spotted turtles.
- Support the South Meadow Pond and Nature Association in its environmental remediation efforts as well as survey and control invasive plant infestation (spread of noxious aquatics) in South Meadow Ponds, as recommended by the NRWA. Work to restore other ponds with threatened ecosystems such as Fort and Big and Little Spectacle Ponds.
- Work to carry out the recommendations for improved water quality and quantity, open space and resource protection outlined in the NWRA 5-Year Action Plan 2003-2007.¹¹
- Pursue improved water quality and quantity throughout the Town, including but not limited to consideration of the proposals outlined in the CEI *Environmental Overlay District Pilot Report* 2006. Assure that whatever measures are adopted will not impose implementation demands which could damage the viability of the smaller-scale businesses most appropriate to Lancaster, and that their administrative demands can and will be well handled by the Town.

-RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ENJOYMENT

- Improve trails for biking, hiking, walking,

¹¹ Relevant NRWA Plan recommended actions for Lancaster are included in the Appendix.

including:

-Clearing brush, posting signs
-Put in a bike path along Route 70, Old Shirley Road, Route 117, Langer Road, & George Hill Road
- Develop bike paths and extend sidewalks along Route 70 to connect North and South Lancaster

- Expand and enhance the existing trails of the Town Forest in an ecologically sound and interesting way that includes clear marking. Discourage inappropriate use of the Town Forest that can disrupt wildlife or destroy its habitat, for example ATVs.
- Improve and publicize Lancaster's trails system, and develop new trails that connect the Town Forest, State Forest, and the various conservation lands.
- Develop educational and recreational programs that would encourage and foster passive recreation use of the Town Forest by all Lancaster citizens, and give the Forest more visibility.
- Restore and reopen the tennis courts in the Town center.
- Restore and reopen the playground in the Town center.
- Provide signage and public information about the river canoe/kayak access points, and explore alternatives for public parking at these sites.
- Develop a new canoe launch site off Bolton Road on the Nashua River.
- Develop new recreational fields for soccer, baseball, football, and general use.
- Approach the Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association to propose occasional Town recreation use of their fields.
- Allow the Conservation Commission or Recreation Commission first priority for Town-owned lands as they become available before auctioning for private development.

- Improve the Town Beach landing and provide swimming lessons, and access for disabled people. Allow kayakers and canoeists to launch from here. Address the erosion caused by heavy rain.
- Explore locations and resources for a gymnasium and teen center in Town.
- Develop a community garden and a farmers' market.

-LAND USE POLICY & REGULATION

- Work to implement the regulatory, as well as other, recommendations of the Nashua River Watershed Association 5-Year Action Plan, such as adopting development controls that preserve significant amounts of open space.
- Implement the policy and regulatory actions contained in this Plan's Land Use and Housing Chapters that work to concentrate development in or near already settled areas, and away from critical natural areas in Lancaster's proposed "Countryside" designated areas.
- Revise site plan review criteria and create performance standards to include extra "points" for commercial development that creates recreational or open space.

-ORGANIZATIONAL

- Form a coordinating committee with representatives from the range of boards, organizations, and groups concerned with open space, natural resources, and recreation. The mission of this committee would be to advance the goals, objectives, and implementing actions of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and those of the *Master Plan* Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation Chapter.
- Assign this committee with the responsibility, among others, to recommend the most appropriate use – for example natural open space, active or passive recreation use - of Town land as it becomes available.

APPENDIX

Chapter 61 Properties, Lancaster Assessor's Office, February, 2006.

"BioMap: Species and Natural Communities", *BioMap and Living Waters: Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts*, Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, 2004, pp.5-7.

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