

Protecting Andover's Rural Qualities

# Andover Conservation Plan & Natural Resources Inventory

By Lorraine Cline  
Andover Conservation Commission

The Andover Conservation Commission (ACC) has the important role of ensuring that our Master Plan includes provisions and guidelines for conserving and protecting our land, water, and other natural resources in both a town-wide aspect and regional context. If Andover is to retain its rural character – deemed very important in the 1992 Master Plan, as well as in the May 2007 Overview of Master Plan Survey Findings – we all need to protect our natural, historic, scenic, and agricultural resources. The goal of the ACC is to ensure the future ecological and sustainable health of Andover, as well as its rural character.

With this in mind, the ACC embarked on a project to develop a comprehensive conservation plan and natural resource inventory. The conservation plan is based upon specific natural resources inventory data made available to Andover from a variety of sources, including the US Department of Agriculture, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Fish & Game, New Hampshire Geographically Referenced Analysis and Information Transfer System (GRANIT), National Agricultural Imagery Program, and several reliable, local sources. With these source materials and the assistance of Laura Alexander, a community and environmental studies consultant and assistant professor at Colby-Sawyer College, the ACC developed criteria and set priorities to facilitate the compilation of data layers in defining areas of potential conservation. The recommendations for preservation are based upon the greatest co-occurrence using geographic information system (GIS) mapping of the following sets of criteria:

- drinking water resources
- ecologically important lands, including wildlife habitats
- working agricultural lands, including lands with soils of statewide importance
- working forests
- scenic resources as identified by Andover residents

Coincidentally, many of these criteria match those set forth by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests' (SPNHF) New Hampshire Everlasting plan, as well as criteria used by the Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust (ASLPT), whose mission is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Mount Kearsarge/Lake Sunapee region for public benefit.

Once the criteria were defined, the areas representing each specific criterion were overlaid onto a map of Andover in what is referred to as "co-occurrence

mapping" utilizing GIS mapping software. The map produced from this procedure illustrates each unique layer as well as the areas representing multiple criteria (darker areas). Using GIS mapping allows the ACC to easily update the information as new data becomes available. In fact, the ACC is currently updating the working forests data to include Current Use land with forest management plans.

Once areas were identified using the co-occurrence mapping, the ACC established a mechanism to prioritize projects by asking the following questions:

- Can the identified property produce income for the Town?
- What is the development pressure on the property?
- Is there likely to be public support for the project?
- Does the land contribute to the rural character of the community?
- Does the land connect or expand existing conserved lands?
- What is the cost of acquiring an easement? Is the landowner willing to donate an easement?

Andover citizens should note that these land areas identified as areas of higher co-occurrence are not meant to specifically target any landowner. The ACC believes that the Conservation Plan and Natural Resource Inventory should be used as a vehicle to encourage voluntary donation of conservation easements by private individuals, and that the findings be considered in our planning and zoning regulations in local land use controls – the regulatory component set forth as a guide in the Master Plan.

The ACC presented the Conservation Plan to the Selectmen at their August 6 meeting and to the Andover Master Plan Update Committee on August 27. Individual data layers and the co-occurrence map are on display at Town Hall. Copies of the Conservation Plan, GIS data layers, and co-occurrence maps are available by request.

The ACC encourages everyone interested in preserving Andover's rural character and maintaining open space for the benefit of our citizens to review the maps and supporting materials. This information is extremely important in helping to determine where future development of Andover can best occur. If you have questions concerning the Andover Conservation Plan and Natural Resources Inventory, please feel free to contact a member of the Andover Conservation Commission: Mary Anne Broshek, Chair, 648-2539; Lorraine Cline, 648-6477; Tina Cotton, 735-5724; Sandra Graves, 735-5697; Jerry Hersey, 735-5593; Nan Kaplan, 735-5352; Bob Ward, 735-5061.

## What Is GIS Mapping? How Does It Benefit Andover?

Geographic information system (GIS) mapping is a system for capturing, storing, analyzing, and managing data which are spatially referenced to the earth. GIS is a tool that enabled the Andover Conservation Commission (ACC) to integrate, store, edit, analyze, share, and display geographic information in individual data layers as well as combinations of layers, also known as co-occurrence maps.

Fortunately, the ACC did not need to start from square one in developing GIS data layers for Andover. The New Hampshire Geographically Referenced Analysis and Information Transfer System (New Hampshire GRANIT) creates, maintains, and makes available a statewide geographic database. A collaborative effort between the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, the core GRANIT System is housed at the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space in Durham. In addition, the US Department of Agriculture, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, and several other agencies use GIS mapping and make it available for local, regional, and statewide use.

The GRANIT approach to a statewide GIS depends upon the cooperative efforts of a host of agencies. The collaboration occurs formally through the New Hampshire GIS Advisory Committee, and informally through daily interactions between the growing body of GIS users in the state and the region.

In developing the Conservation Plan and Natural Resources Inventory, the ACC was fortunate to be able to utilize GIS mapping technology. Using this scientific approach allows the ACC to reference reliable, existing data as well as add, update, and maintain spatially-correct information important to Andover's future land use planning.

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