

# **PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION LANDS**



**Adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission  
as Appendix C of the  
2013 Plan of Conservation and Development  
December 12, 2013**

# Acknowledgements

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# 1. Introduction and Overview

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The Plan for Conservation and Recreation Lands (PCRL) was initiated by the Planning and Zoning Commission's Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee in 2001. Completion of the initial PCRL was mandated in the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), with the task assigned to the newly formed Conservation Commission. Accordingly, the Conservation Commission began inventorying, indexing, and researching land use and natural and cultural resources. Over the years, the town has developed a considerable library of land use and resource studies, findings, and recommendations that have relevance today.

In 2008, The PCRL was adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission and included in the slightly revised 2009 POCD as Appendix B. In 2011, the town began its task of formally updating the 2003 POCD and 2009 revised POCD. The Conservation Commission was tasked with updating the PCRL with any current information or new goals to provide a foundation for the conservation and recreation related goals, strategies and actions specifically



Donald R. Henne Memorial Tract of North Stonington's Shunock River Preserve

addressed in the POCD. The recommendations contained in this plan and the POCD need to be implemented by various town boards and commissions and the town's legislative body.

## 1.1 Findings

- The needs and desires expressed by the community to retain and protect rural living and natural resources have remained largely unchanged through the years. Development pressures increase the necessity to plan carefully and act with renewed vigor to assure the continuance of the quality of life in town and to protect natural resources of significant local and regional importance, while working to mitigate the tax burden.
- Areas of the town most prone to increased development and density are generally located where valuable surface and underground water resources occur as well as in areas of prime farmland. The need to protect these waters and rich farmland soils substantially heightens the need for sound planning and enforcement and renewed effort to increase awareness about the value of greenways and wildlife corridors.
- High quality economic development can be achieved in harmony with the conservation and recreation goals of the community - through careful planning, regulation, and enforcement.



## 2. Existing Conservation and Recreation Lands

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In order to recommend logical areas for future conservation, recreation, and greenways, the Conservation Commission has expanded upon the existing “Focus Areas” Map to better illustrate the importance of the valuable resources located throughout town. The new map highlights significant concentrations of natural, recreational, and/or historic resources and features deemed important to the town while emphasizing the Green Falls River and Shunock River watersheds as the dominating features of the eastern and western sides of town respectively. Identifying these resources required extensive research and community outreach.

General features, such as Clarks Falls with its farmland, and the Shunock River and Valley with its water resources, are identified on the map with additional layers of specific features such as farmland soils, historic buildings, wildlife habitats, wetland soils, recreation areas, and protected open space. As new features are identified they can be added to this map to keep a current inventory of our existing conservation and recreation lands.

The town of North Stonington has two major river basins, the Shunock River Corridor in the west section of town and the Green Falls River Corridor in the east. Each of these important rivers runs through parts of the largest aquifer in the state of Connecticut before joining the Pawcatuck River and emptying into Long Island Sound. The protection of these water sources and their tributaries is of paramount importance to the health of our town, our state and our regions coast line. The efforts of The Wood-Pawcatuck River Association to attain federal recognition as a Wild and Scenic River is well underway. Once designated, the Shunock and Green Falls Rivers as major tributaries will be included in that protection.

A large portion of Pachaug Forest separates the two basins through the center of North Stonington. Town regulations specify a 100' buffer along all water courses. This regulation, combined with current conservation easements, open space parcels, and land protected by private conservation organizations establish the foundation for eastern and western greenway/wildlife corridors. Properties identified on the *Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map* on page 17 will add to these corridors for



Parke Pond Dam



Rock Wall within Crevice, Camp Wightman

wildlife and resource protection on into the future. Currently, approximately 8% of the total land in North Stonington is considered to be protected open space (i.e., conservation easements, owed by a land trust, development rights sold), with another 45% temporarily protected (including PA 490 farm and forest land and Pachaug State Forest). The goal is to increase the amount of *protected* open space especially within above mentioned eastern and western greenway/wildlife corridors, through public or private acquisition of available parcels or by encouraging conservation easements, restrictions, or sale of development rights.

## 2.1 Western Resources and Shunock River Greenway Corridor

The Shunock River flows north-west to south-east and is the outflow of Billings and Blue Lakes, Hetchel Swamp, Miller Brook, Yawbux Stream and several other smaller tributaries. It crosses over our sole source aquifer within the Hewitt Farm town owned property, through the historic district in town center, and parallels the Route 2 before merging with the Pawcatuck River. Portions of the upper western streams flow westward into Lake of Isles, Lantern Hill Pond and on to the Mystic River basin. Spotted along the river basin lie working farms and multiple bio-diversity sites. The following is a summary of focus areas and their defining characteristics, resources, and other features.

### Shunock River and Valley

**Defining Features:** Central river corridor: aquifer, wetlands; biodiversity sites; potential high-yield water resources important to the region; aquatic communities; beaver meadows, bogs, dams and lodges; and state designated and managed cold water stream.

**Recreation:** Canoeing; kayaking; nature study; hiking and horseback riding; and conservation lands open to public for passive recreation.

**Other Features of Note:** Many mill seats; dams; reservoir ponds and canals; Richardson Mill site; historic and geologic features; glacial esker; and Level A aquifer.



Beaver Lodge – Assekunk Wildlife Management Area

### North Stonington Village

**Defining Features:** Historic Village -18th, 19th Century structures; mill ponds; reservoirs; canals; dams; mill seats; artifacts; Old Plains Cemetery; and historic register district.

**Recreation:** Village Green; town recreation and picnic area; Hewitt Farm, Bicentennial Trail; community gardens; and fishing and other passive recreation opportunities.

**Other Features of Note:** Public water supply well head; Park Pond and cold springs; wetlands; biodiversity; and underlying aquifer. Historic Green Gables Cottage and 1750 Homestead on Hewitt Farm.





## Assekonk

**Defining Feature:** Biodiversity: Assekonk Wildlife Management Area; white cedar groves; and Assekonk Pond, Swamp, and Brook.

**Recreation:** Hunting; canoeing; and nature study.

**Other Features of Note:** Assekonk dam and reservoir pond; town recreation area; and Assekonk Borderlands trail through and around historic parade grounds.

## Southwest Agricultural

**Defining Feature:** Wychwood Farm with large poultry production and fields in cultivation.

## Central Lakes

**Defining Features:** Lakes and wildlife: Wyassup, Billings, and Blue Lake; and the numerous Natural Resource Diversity Areas where species of concern and endangered species are found.

**Recreation:** Water sports; fishing; Camp Wightman (Church Camp); State boat launches; Pachaug State Forest with numerous hiking trails; Stillman Preserve open space; and town owned & State shared Billings Lake hiking, biking & equestrian trail.

**Other Features of Note:** Bears Den (possible prospect hole for magnetic iron); and Potholes on Ricktown Mountain, Ashwillet.

## Lake of Isles

**Defining Features:** Lakes and Hills: Swantown Hill; Barnes Hill; and Lake of Isles.

**Recreation:** Golf courses and boat launch.

**Other Features of Note:** Gold Mine; Bentley Place well and milk cellar; and false lime kiln.

## Lantern Hill

**Defining Features:** Hills: Lantern Hill; Long Hill; and Wintechog Hill.

**Recreation:** Lantern Hill hiking trail; boat launches; and rock climbing.

**Other Features of Note:** Biodiversity areas; geology; high cliffs; silica mine; mill seats; Lantern Hill Pond; Long Pond; Bush Pond; Silex Pond; Lantern Hill railroad bed; silica transfer station; Old Stone Church ruins; Native American burial grounds; State Pawcatuck Eastern Pequot Reservation; and the Brown, Miner, and Denison farms.

## Northwest Corner

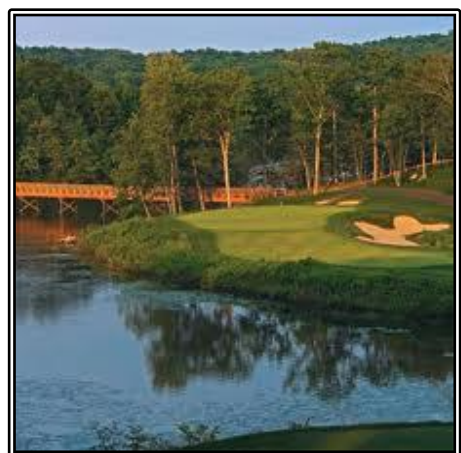
**Defining Features:** Farms (High Acres, Flood Reed, Banker, Bison Brook and others)

**Recreation:** Westbrook Fishing Club.

**Other Features of Note:** Prentice Mountain; Barnes Hill; Limestone mine; lime kiln; stucco cellar; and grave of North Stonington gravestone carver.



Billings Lake



Lake of Isles Golf Course



High Acres Farm Bed & Breakfast



## 2.2 Eastern Resources and Green Falls River Greenway Corridor

The Green Falls River flows north to south throughout the eastern corridor of town from the heavily forested northern section including a portion of Pachaug Forest to southern farm lands. The Clarks Falls mill site, Bell-Cedar Swamp, and foundry add to the significant bio-diversity sites along the river protected from development. The following is a summary of focus areas and their defining characteristics, resources, and other features.

### **Green Falls River Corridor & Clarks Falls Area**

**Defining Feature:** Green Falls River and Farm Village of Clarks Falls.

**Other Features of Note:** large expanses of prime farm soils with working farms including Palmer, Renahan, Learned, and Bill farms; historic villages; grist mill; mill ponds; mill seats of Laurel Glen and Clarks Falls; and important drinking water aquifers.

**Recreation:** Avalonia's Yannatos Preserve; and Green Falls River.

### **Pendleton Hill**

**Defining Features:** Scenic areas: Palmer Farm; First Baptist Church; Pendleton Hill; and Ledgen Wood Road.

**Recreation:** Groton Sportsmen's Club; and hiking and equestrian trails.

**Other Features of Note:** Pawkhungernock Rock; site of first Baptist church; ancient stone bridges; and colonial milestones.

### **Chester Main**

**Defining Feature:** Working farms: Stewart Hill; Miner; Jonathan Edwards's winery and vineyards; Cool Breeze; and Pickwick.

**Recreation:** Hangman Hill Preserve hiking trail.

**Other Features of Note:** Horse Gravestone; and mill seats.

### **Spaulding Pond and Bell Cedar Swamp**

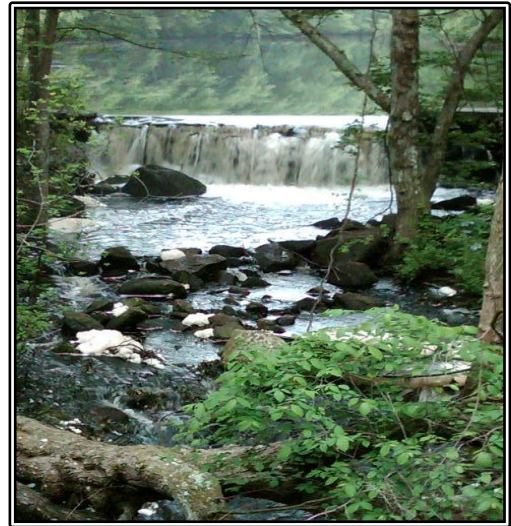
**Defining Features:** Amazingly rich site of concentrated biodiversity and rare white cedar swamps. Bell Cedar Swamp (Avalonia Land Conservancy 2013)

**Other Features of Note:** Reservoir ponds and dams; iron works site; bog iron ore in red brook; standing historic grist mill; Break Neck ledges; aquifer; and large farmland fields.

### **Southeast Agricultural**

**Defining Features:** Large expanses of prime farm soils and with working farms including Beriah Lewis farm.

**Other Features of Note:** Pawcatuck River and Green Falls River; sole-source stratified drift aquifer; potential high yield drinking water well head sites; and Level B aquifers.



Spaulding Pond Dam



Cool Breeze Farm, Hangman Hill Road

## 2.3 Conservation Lands

Conservation areas provide intangible amenities to residents, such as peace and quiet, dark night skies, and privacy. Historic sites and resources contribute greatly to the rural character of the town and are attractive to high quality economic development. Historic sites are generally in close proximity to streams, lakes, and ponds. Many ponds and lakes themselves were reservoirs for the mills and other works that helped cultivate North Stonington's cultural heritage and weave the historic fabric of the community its residents now enjoy.

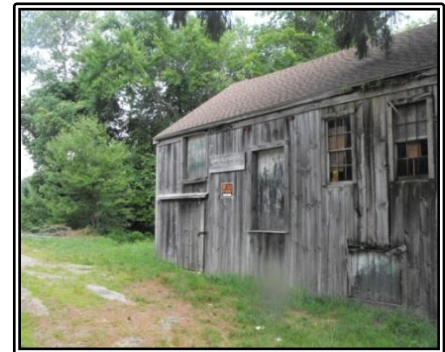
The town's topography and low human population promotes wildlife habitat. Both aquatic and surface vegetation in identified sensitive areas, as well sensitive fauna, should be adequately protected. Many land areas have several conservation and recreation attributes such as forest cover combined with biodiversity sites, significant water and cultural features, and significant habitat for fish and wildlife.

Open space and conservation land is protected in various ways. If ownership is held by the town, state or by a land trust, the land is dedicated in perpetuity to conservation and/or recreational uses by deeds and agreements filed in the land records of the town. The degree of protection provided by conservation agreements and ownership of development rights is considered high, though changes can occur that lessen this protection through extensive legislative action or judicial re-interpretation of terms. Town or land trust ownership offers one of the best ways to conserve large tracts of open space over the long term while still providing substantial passive recreational opportunities. Requiring the designation of a certain percentage of land as open space in subdivisions as a tool for acquiring open space may not provide useful land in every instance. The option for developers to pay a fee-in-lieu-of open space provides the town with funds to acquire land it considers to be of value for conservation and recreational uses.

The outright purchase of development rights (PDR) is an effective tool used to prevent the loss of prime agricultural lands and can help prevent the fragmentation of open space. PDR programs are voluntary, public-private partnerships that help achieve the permanent protection of lands that in many ways define the community. Under the *Connecticut Farmland Protection Program*, five of North Stonington's farms have sold their development rights to the state, resulting in the preservation of 465 acres of farmland. Although not available to the public, these parcels are managed privately by the owners.



Bell Cedar Swamp



Former Grist Mill, Clarks Falls



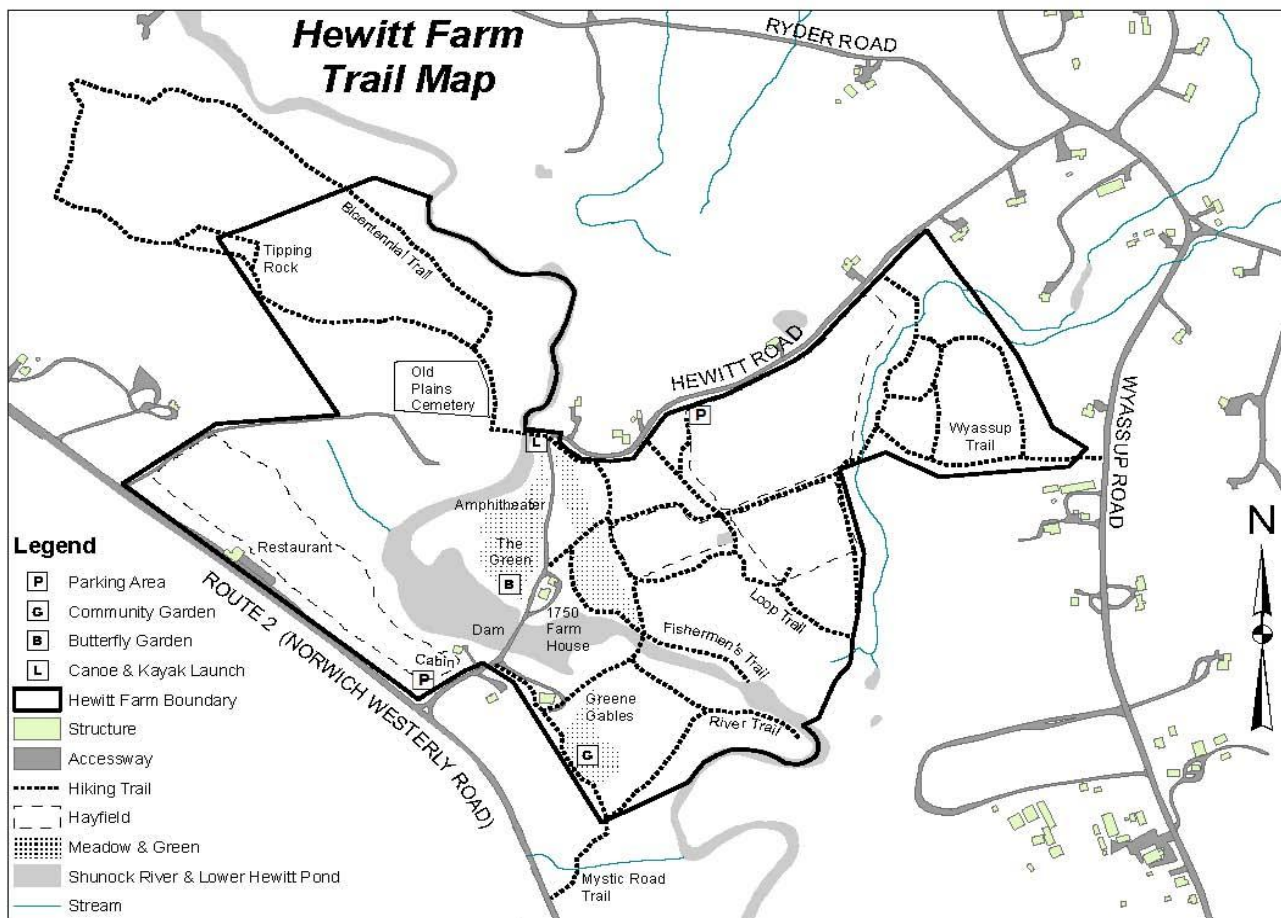
Rattlesnake Plantain, Babcock Ridge



The land area known as the **Hewitt Farm** was acquired by the town in 2008. A committee was formed to consider ways of using the property with serious priority given to protecting the Shunock River water quality and quantity, as well as protecting the public water supply wellheads that supply Kingswood/Meadow Wood, the schools, and parts of the village. Recreation uses include hiking, boating, horseback riding activities, a farmer's market, community gardens and possibly a teaching farm.



Hewitt Farm



1750 Hewitt Farm Homestead



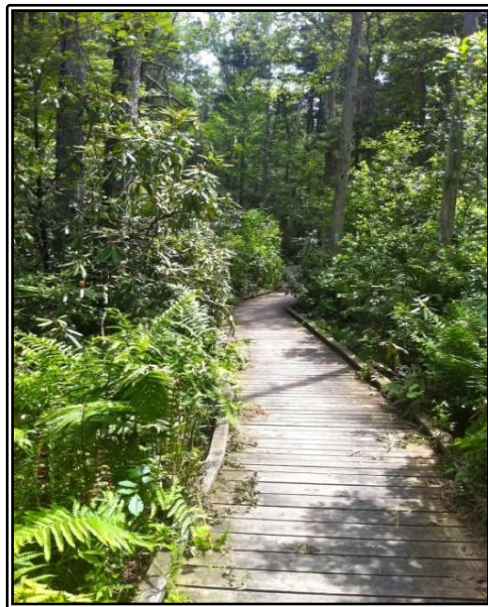
Meadow on Hewitt Farm

## 2.4 Recreation Lands

Passive recreational activities are non-motorized and do not significantly alter the natural aspects of the landscape. Passive recreation opportunities on public or private lands are abundant, contribute to the high quality of life for residents, and could become an important economic resource for the town. Conservation lands are generally used for passive recreation, unless sensitive resources preclude any public use. The extensive trail system in Pachaug State Forest and other nature preserves in town are in constant use by the public.

Active recreation opportunities involve a more intense use of the land that may somewhat alter the landscape but should not destroy its value. Conflicts frequently arise when an inappropriate location is chosen for active recreation. The need for additional public active recreational lands is recognized.

**The Pachaug State Forest** (approximately 3,082 acres) and the **Assekong Wildlife Management Area** (634 acres) are existing areas managed by the State of Connecticut



**Pachaug State Forest**

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Various clubs and organizations also manage large tracts of land generally serving as open space and used for passive recreation, hunting, fishing, camping, or sporting activities, and generally open to the public by membership, fee, or permission. As custodians of these land areas, the owners generally manage the flora, fauna, and water resources.

**The Old Parade Grounds** owned by the town at the edge of Meadow Wood, has been renamed Assekong Borderlands Preserve and holds a trail system for community enjoyment (outside of school hours), extending from Rocky Hollow Recreation Area, through the “borderlands” and with a short roadway walk, connects to the Hewitt Farm Trail system across Route 2.

## 2.5 Summary

It is vital to continue to create and implement programs and procedures for ongoing monitoring of protected and potential conservation lands. Residents and town officials must be sensitized as to the need to preserve historic resources, to protect archeological sites, and to the benefits of resource conservation and access to recreational lands. All plans, policies, and land use decisions must reflect the town’s commitment to preservation and clearly demonstrate how desired parcels, new regulations, and/or approved developments fit into and/or support the broader plan for natural resource and rural character preservation. Effective management of the town’s resources is largely dependent on the ability and willingness of the townspeople and elected officials to understand the value in what they have and to work diligently to realize their stated goals in this and other plans. **Conservation requires a strong management commitment.** If citizens, elected officials and other stake holders lack a clear vision, it will be costly in the long term with respect to preserving the kind of environment we desire, our quality of life, and the economic viability of North Stonington.





Existing Conservation  
and  
Recreation Lands

Parcel Lines To  
10/1/2012

Legend

- Parcel Lines
- Cemetery Locations
- Public Town Trails
- Boat Launches
- Active and Passive Recreational Areas

Natural Features

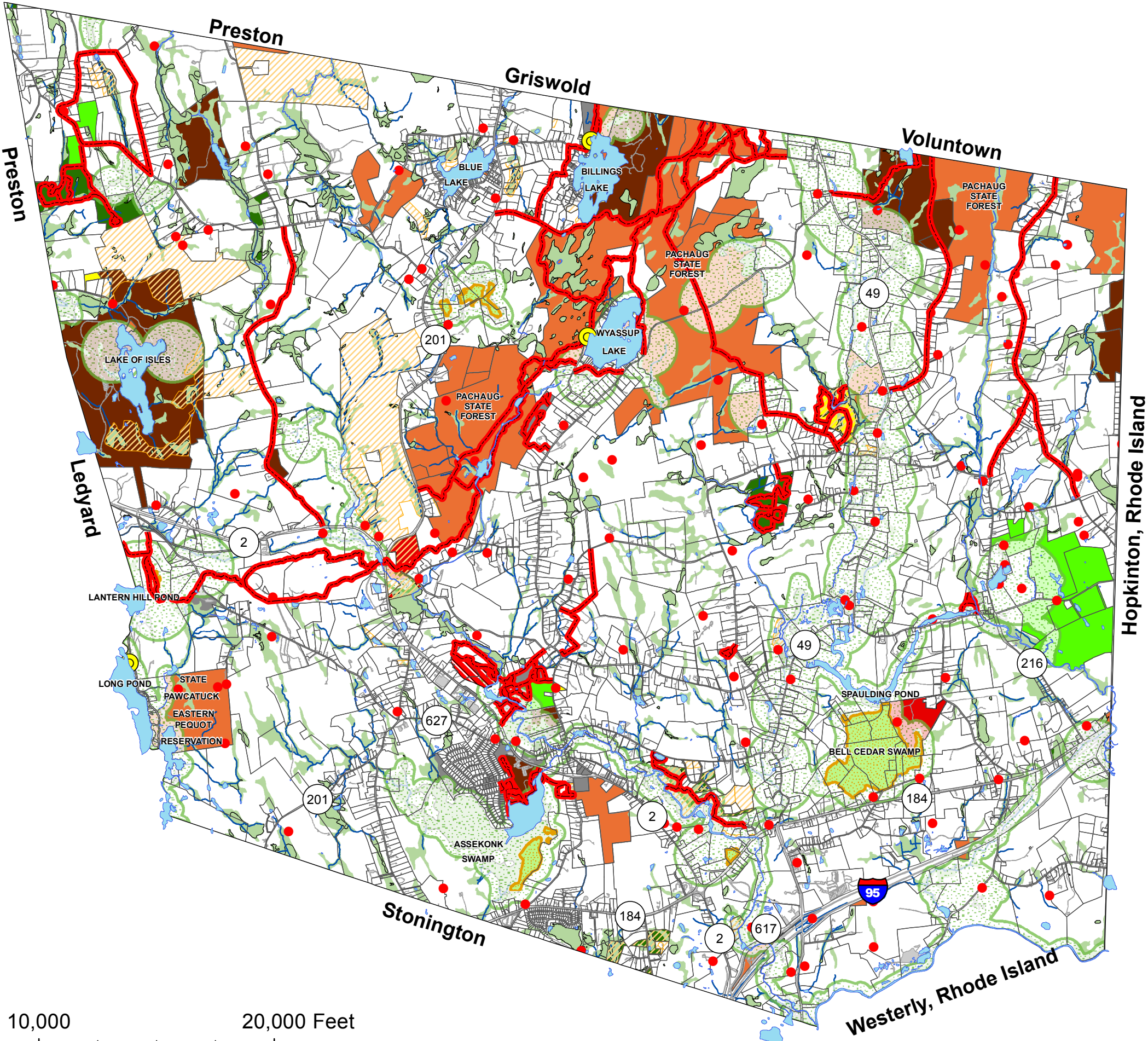
- Lakes and Ponds
- Level A Aquifer Protection Area
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Natural Diversity DEEP
- Critical Habitat DEEP

Protected Open Space

- Avalonia Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy of CT
- North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance
- Development Rights Sold
- Private Conservation Easements

Select Owners

- State of Connecticut
- Town of North Stonington



Notes

THIS MAP IS PREPARED FOR THE TOWN OF NORTH STONINGTON, CONNECTICUT, BY THE TOWN ENGINEER. IT IS BASED ON THE RECORD MAPS AND RECORD PLATS ON FILE IN THE TOWN ENGINEER'S OFFICE. THE TOWN ENGINEER HAS CONDUCTED A VISUAL INSPECTION OF THE MAP AND HAS FOUND IT TO BE CORRECT. THE TOWN ENGINEER DOES NOT WARRANT THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION SHOWN ON THIS MAP. THE TOWN ENGINEER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS ON THIS MAP. THE TOWN ENGINEER'S OFFICE IS NOT A PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING FIRM.





### 3. Future Conservation and Recreation Lands

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This plan identifies five broad goals for preserving and planning for the future conservation and recreation needs of the town. These goals aim to: maintain the rural character; protect the existing natural and historic resources; permanently protect water quality and quantity; provide appropriate areas for active and passive recreation; and improve regulatory procedures and prioritize land acquisition and uses.

In addition to the abundant natural resources and farmland, historic features and scenic vistas also define and shape North Stonington's rural character and are worthy of continued protection and enhancement. As part of its long-range planning, the town should continue to encourage farming and promote agriculturally related economic development as well as encourage high quality development thereby ensuring minimum adverse impact on these valuable resources, and our rural character .

The recommendations and mapping in this document are for the purpose of focusing the town's limited resources on the preservation of land *most appropriate* to town goals, and to also encourage private land conservation efforts. Recommendations are made in two contexts: general long-range goals for the town; and recommendations to acquire specific parcels *as opportunities present themselves*. That said, however, no mathematical rating and ranking system can replace the accumulated wisdom and vision of the citizens of North Stonington.

#### 3.1 Water Management Lands

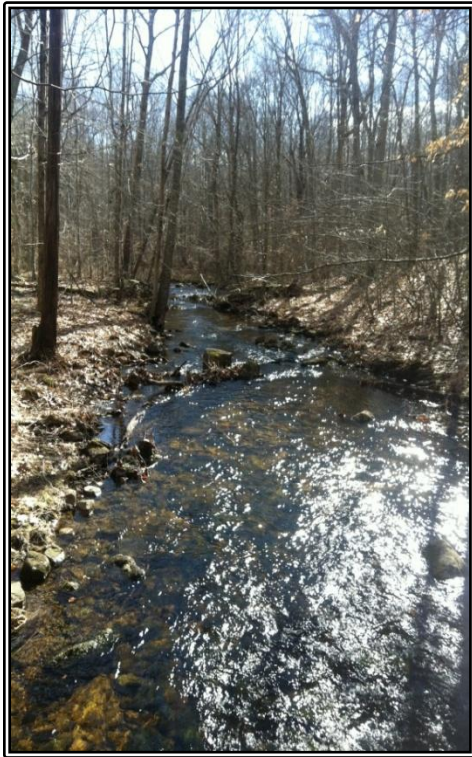
North Stonington has abundant water bodies including small lakes, and an extensive network of ponds, streams, and wetlands. These water bodies provide a significant quantity of quality wildlife habitat. The town's primary drinking water source is a major stratified drift aquifer. The health and ecological functions of the town's water bodies are a most critical aspect of the town's physical, economic, and cultural wellbeing. By keeping a low density of development within the upper and middle reaches of the Shunock, Wyassup, and Green Fall watersheds and establishing a program to monitor surface and stratified drift aquifer water quantity and quality, the town can take corrective action *before* any potential large-scale damage occurs.

Protecting the streams, wetlands, and headwater ponds and lakes that overlie and recharge aquifers is essential to safeguard the quantity and long-term quality of the town's drinking water. To protect the



Fishing on Wyassup Lake

potential drinking water resources in the Shunock, Green Falls, Wyassup, and Pawcatuck Rivers, a 100 foot buffer must be maintained to restrict development within the area.



Fowler Grindstone Preserve (NSCLA)

The town should acquire fee title to those sites where public water supply wellheads could be developed or maintained. The state has given the town exclusive rights to distribute drinking water into new areas that would include important opportunities for commercial and industrial development. The availability of drinking water in the aquifer is large but limited. The town should not only acquire the recommended sites, it should also apply to the state for diversion permits to withdraw the drinking water from the aquifer that will serve the planned future needs of the town.

For over 20 years, The North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance (NSCLA), in partnership with University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch Program, has collected data from its volunteers who collect and test water samples from our town's lakes, brooks, and small rivers. NSCLA's Fowler Grindstone preserve is home to a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) flow station, whose solar-powered gauge equipment has monitored the thousands of gallons of water that course down Pendleton Hill and Hetchel Swamp Brooks since 1958. As an exciting new addition, the station is presently being outfitted with both rainfall and temperature gauges as well.

### **3.2 Greenway/Wildlife Corridors**

Greenways are corridors that provide connectivity for wildlife and human benefit. They are often critical to species survival. They protect water resources and watersheds, thus ensuring good water quality and quantity now and in the future. Greenways can be defined by their functions and the areas they link. They may be natural - used only by wildlife, or have trails and roads for public access and recreational enjoyment of natural and historic resources. Historic trails and ancient pathways are a non-intrusive way of linking different areas. A primary goal of the Conservation Commission is to better identify existing and potential corridors and to educate the public as to their importance with respect to the larger conservation goals of the town.

The *Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map* highlights the primary greenway/wildlife corridors in town which include the Shunock River Corridor (*Western Border Greenway/Wildlife Corridor*) and the Green Falls River Corridor (*Eastern Border Greenway/Wildlife Corridor*). A more defined Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor also exists extending from the Pachaug State Forest in the north/central portion of town to the Assekunk Swamp to the far south. The following section identifies 26 parcels selected for future preservation within these three corridors *should the opportunity arise*. The parcels have been selected based on the existence of a particular natural resource, their proximity to



other preserved parcels, the presence of protected species, trails, and/or other special features deemed important to preserve. The parcels are highlighted in pink on the *Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map* so that residents can see how they fit into existing networks of State-owned forests and wildlife management areas, town or privately owned and managed open space lands, and/or other land recognized for its valuable resources.

### **3.3 Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation**

The following parcels/areas are recommended for future acquisition and/or protection and are identified on the *Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map* on page 17.

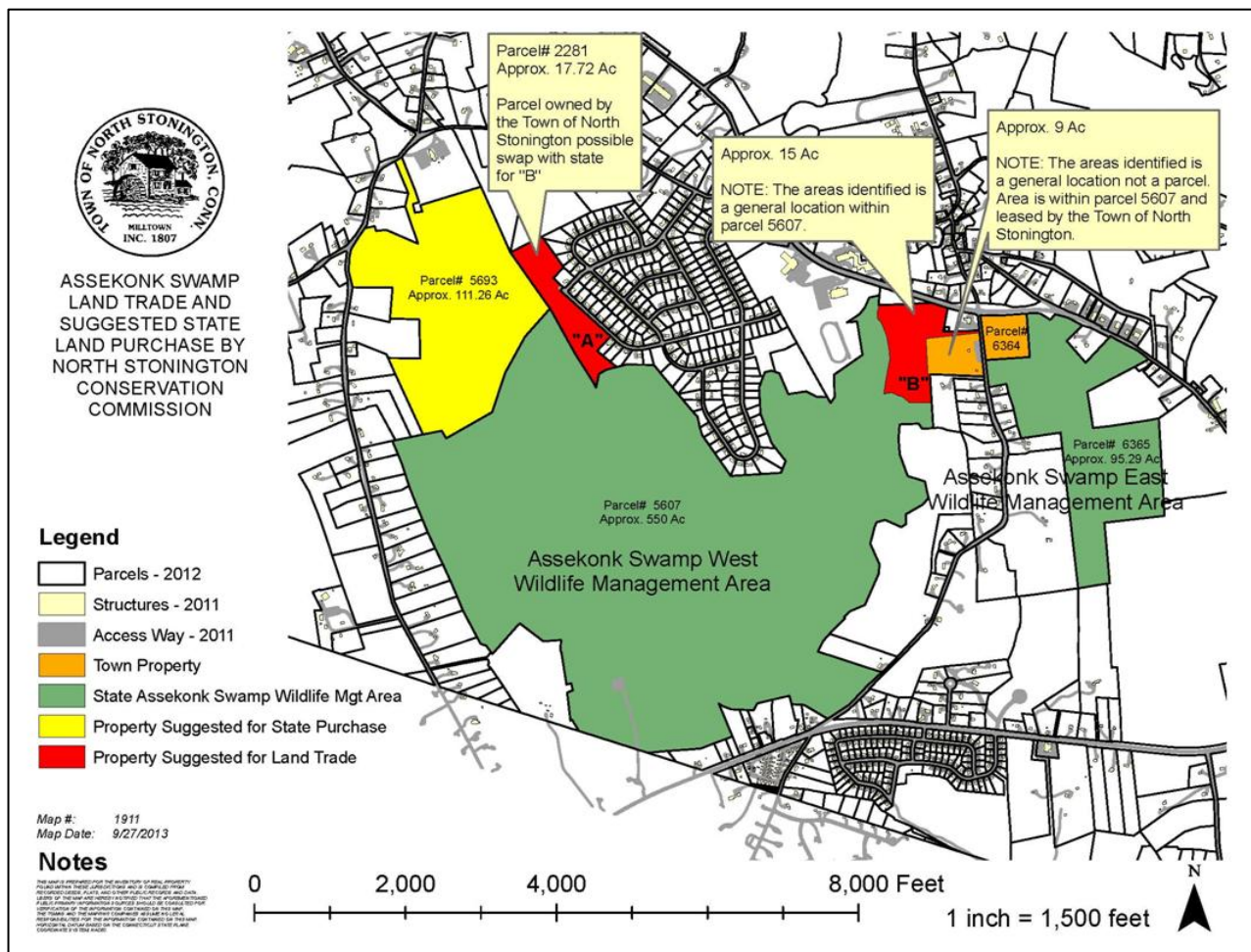
<b>MAP ID</b>	<b>PARCEL#</b>	<b>RATIONALE/ATTRIBUTES</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>6122</b>	Both 1&2 are parcels located within corridor of existing preserved properties and, if combined with the open space to the north in Griswold, would add to the <i>Northwest Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>2</b>	<b>2096</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>3527</b>	202.57 acre parcel is within state designated biodiversity area; crisscrossed by state and town trail system; and abuts state forest. Parcel would add to the <i>Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>4</b>	<b>2674</b>	85.21 acre parcel has 1,000 +/- undisturbed feet along N-E side of Wyassup Lake. Parcel is surrounded by Pachaug State Forest and contains beautiful rock ledges; fern & lady slipper gardens; vernal pools; Hetchel Swamp outlet; and is within state designated biodiversity area. Parcel would add to the <i>Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>5</b>	<b>7047</b>	53 acre residentially developed parcel that borders the Green Falls River. Parcel contains some wetlands and a portion is within the <i>Aquifer Protection Overlay Area</i> (APOA). This parcel would provide connectivity to the <i>Eastern Boundary Wildlife Greenway/Corridor</i> .
<b>6</b>	<b>5583</b>	89 acre vacant parcel that borders the Green Falls River. Parcel contains some wetlands, forested land, and is entirely within the APOA. This parcel would provide connectivity to the <i>Eastern Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>7</b>	<b>4141</b>	71 acre parcel – of which approximately 68 acres are in farm and forest. Property borders the Green Falls River. Parcel contains some wetlands and is entirely within the APOA. This parcel would provide connectivity to the <i>Eastern Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>8</b>	<b>9308</b>	79.28 acres of park-like setting maintained by owners who wish to preserve the property. There are trails throughout and the parcel fits into the <i>Eastern Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>9</b>	<b>2396</b>	Borders #5. 1.84 acre parcel contains extensive wetlands and would form a direct link to preserved farmland to the south making it an extension of the <i>Eastern Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
<b>10</b>	<b>7418</b>	77.3 acres of fertile farmland bordering Spaulding Pond to the south. 2/3 of the parcel is within a biodiversity area.

11	0419	Land locked 80.12 acre parcel within biodiversity area bounded on west by Wyassup Brook and on southwest by town-owned conservation easement. Parcel characterized by hilly terrain with extensive wetlands.
12	4320 & 5387	Both parcels were originally deeded to the town as part of a subdivision approval. Parcel 4320 contains 29.22 acres and has extremely steep ledge with wetlands along Rte. 184. Parcel 5387 has 2.52 acres and is mostly wetlands. Would link Bell Cedar Swamp Preserve with other preserved acreage.
13	5251	5.5 acres parcel is presently in litigation to be turned over to town as open space. Parcel is within state biodiversity area and borders the Shunock River.
14	0547	For #11 - # 17: Nearly 1/3 of all parcels contains biodiversity areas; border the Shunock River; and are within the <i>Aquifer Protection Overlay Area</i> .
15	5545	
16	7908	
17	9669	
18	3159	
19	8994 & 0341	
20	4967	
21	6365	Assekong Swamp East: Long sought 95.29 acre area for future town facilities: recreation, town buildings, and school site. Parcel abuts 8 acres of town-owned land where the new emergency complex is proposed.
22	5607	Rocky Hollow Extension: A natural extension of the Rocky Hollow Recreation area within the <i>Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> . Possible construction of ball fields and trails and could be used for nature study. The parcel contains 550 acres of Assekong Swamp owned by the state. The town should explore the possibility of trading 15 acres of this land for the town-owned Parcel #2281 (17.72ac.) along Ravenswood Road.
23	5693	Headlands of Assekong Swamp. 111.26 acre parcel could be used as an extension of existing hunting area and is listed as a high priority on the state purchase list. Site contains a biodiversity site; is within the <i>Aquifer Protection Overlay Area</i> and <i>Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> ; and is considered a quality wildlife habitat.
24	6410	9.36 acres of open space set-aside as part of subdivision approval and is deeded to all 11 surrounding property owners. No taxes have been paid on the area and it could therefore be secured by foreclosure. There are extensive wetlands.
25	7981	A major portion of the 35.75 acre parcel is used for growing corn. The western portion of the parcel has extensive wetlands which would protect the wildlife habitat adjacent to the Hewitt Farm and add to the <i>Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
26	9534	The northern portion of this 243 acre parcel contains Lantern Hill. It is currently owned by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. The area contains rare geological features, an existing trail system, possible archeological sites, and biodiversity areas. The area was once recommended as a State Park and has a pond situated on property.

### 3.4 Desired Future Recreation Land

The present town Rocky Hollow Recreation Area provides a nucleus for centralizing playing fields and expanding active recreation lands and facilities. An approximate 15-acre area (within Parcel #5607) for expanding facilities is adjacent to the approximately 9-acre area (also within parcel #5607) of state-owned land that is presently leased by the town for recreation. The site connects with the school recreational fields and facilities by way of a footbridge across Assekunk Pond. Town acquisition of the state owned 15-acre site is considered high priority. In exchange for the potentially beneficial 15 acre area ("B" on Map below), the town could offer its 17.72 acre parcel (#2281) ("A" on Map below) at the edge of Assekunk Swamp that is of little use to the town but of value to the state.

The town supports the state's initiative to acquire the 111.26 acre open parcel (# 5693) at the head of **Assekunk Swamp**. The acquisition would expand the State's wildlife management area by approximately 20% and add to the important protected Assekunk wetlands. The state would then be in a more favorable position to sell or swap the 95.29 acre parcel (#6365) - **Assekunk Swamp East** - with the town for its long term municipal facilities expansion. This is considered a high priority acquisition and exchange opportunity because the parcel at the head of Assekunk Swamp could be lost to housing development at any time, and the town needs to develop a plan for its long-range municipal and recreational needs.





**Pachaug State Forest and Assekong Wildlife Management Area** provide extensive opportunities for passive recreation. The state has a goal of expanding its ownership of open lands state wide. This provides North Stonington with the opportunity to add state-owned open space that is available to the public for state allowed active and passive recreational purposes. The town can recommend to the state land areas for state acquisition that would contribute to the town's plans.

**Lantern Hill** owned by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation provides a wonderful opportunity for hiking, geologic and nature study, and spectacular views.

A cluster of undeveloped lots owned by the town near the high ground in the Kingswood subdivision could provide the residents in that area with a beautiful, well-shaded picnic ground and community gathering place. Input from the homeowners in Kingswood/Meadow Wood would indicate desired use. If there is no interest for this purpose, the lots could be sold to a land trust to add to the town's open space fund, or to the state where they border the *Assekong Wildlife Management Area*.

Passive recreation lands can be expanded through state, town, or land trust purchase of tracts rather than through the acquisition of conservation easements on private land that would be closed to the public. Ecologically sensitive areas and species can be best protected under trust management. These tracts can provide connective corridors and trails for enhancing town-wide conservation and recreational opportunities.



Lantern Hill Pond



Bridge at Gallup Pond



Bridge over Assekong Swamp Spillway





## Desired Areas for future Recreation or Preservation

Parcel Lines To  
10/1/2012

### Legend

- Parcel Lines
- Cemetery Locations
- Public Town Trails
- Boat Launches
- Active and Passive Recreational Areas

### Natural Features

- Lakes and Ponds
- Level A Aquifer Protection Area
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Natural Diversity DEEP
- Critical Habitat DEEP
- Protected Open Space

### Select Owners

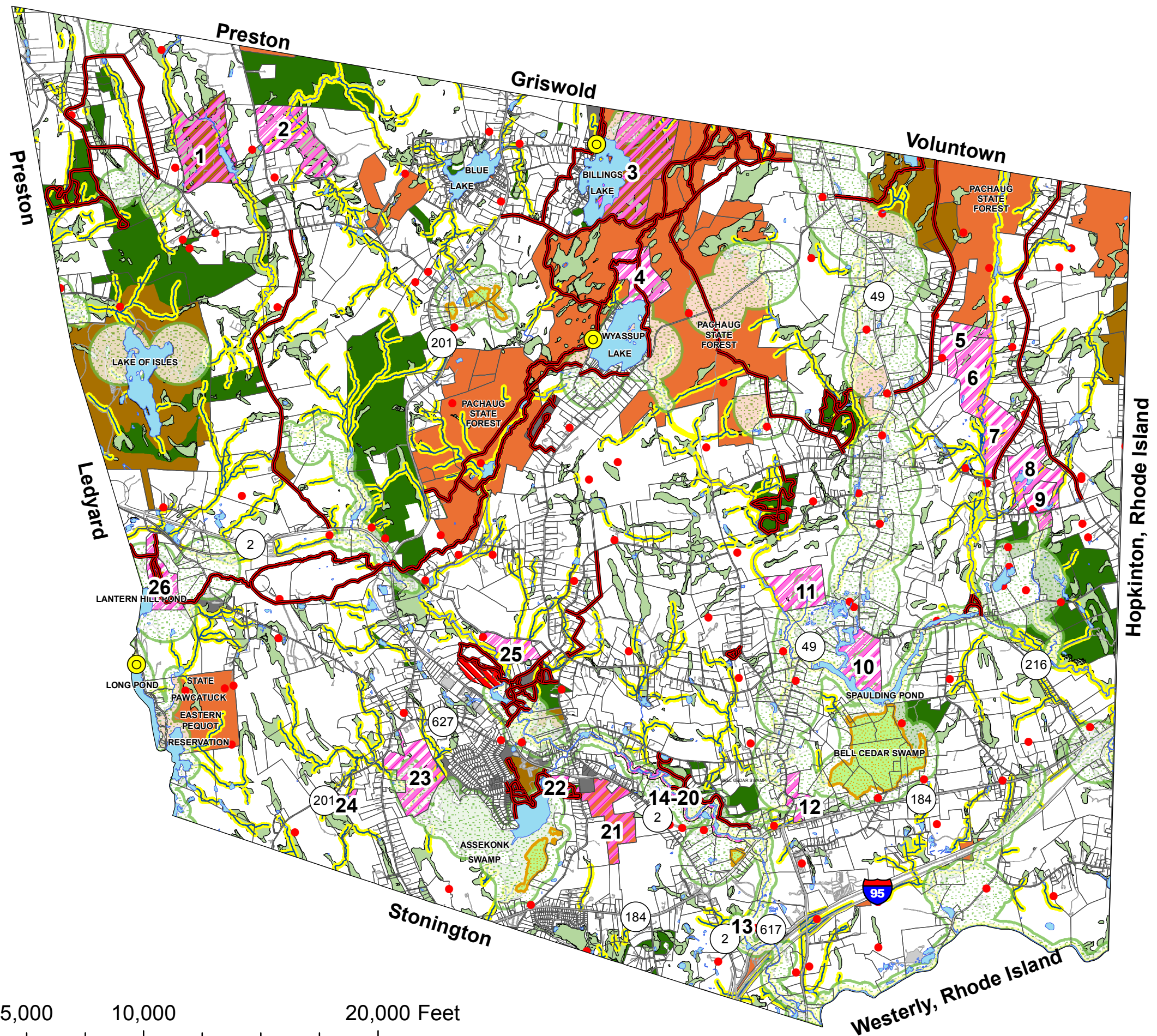
- State of Connecticut
- Town of North Stonington

### Future Conservation and Recreation Land

- Desired Areas For Future Preservation
- 100' Water Buffer

NOTE: Desired Areas For Future  
Preservation Numbers relate to  
the chart on Page 13 of the  
Plan of Conservation and  
Development revised 2013

0 5,000 10,000 20,000 Feet



Notes

THIS MAP IS PREPARED FOR THE INVENTORY OF REAL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY AND SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS THE PROPERTY OF THE TOWN OF NORTH STONINGTON, CONNECTICUT, AND IS NOT TO BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL, INCLUDING PHOTOCOPYING, RECORDING, OR BY ANY INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL SYSTEM, WITHOUT THE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE TOWN OF NORTH STONINGTON, CONNECTICUT.







# 4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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## I. MAINTAIN RURAL CHARACTER

1. Encourage the preservation of rich farmland soils by supporting both traditional and specialty farming (whether large or small scale), raising of crops, and animal husbandry. Consider establishing an Agricultural Commission to assist the town in proactively helping to obtain available grants, subsidies, tax relief, sale of development rights, and other helpful programs to maintain these activities. The town needs to invest in its rural future if it is to remain rural.
2. Keep traffic and other detrimental effects of development away from working farms by establishing clear buffer zones between farms and new developments, and limit the areas for possible traffic-generating development through zoning regulation revisions.
3. Continue to allow active farms to sell their crops retail, engage in ag-tivities and agro-tourism and to have low profile signage along roads as needed. Support the potential added provision of farm worker housing.
4. Encourage the (re)establishment of small farms and the leasing of small farm acreage by larger farms. (A state program could be created that mirrors the state forest program: instead of harvesting trees, the state could lease small farmland holdings for active farming. Towns wishing to participate could designate eligible lands. This program could help the state to achieve its open space goals while helping the town to provide economic development from farming and maintain its rural character).
5. Support the Grange and Fair whenever possible. The North Stonington Agricultural Fair and the Grange support agricultural activities that are positive economic and recreational contributions to the town.
6. Expand tax abatement opportunities. Adopt an open space ordinance under the provision of PA 490 that extends tax relief to specifically designated lands important to the town's conservation and agricultural goals not already covered by PA 490 or the former 10 Mill Law of 1913 (and revised in 1963).



Farm on Ryder Rd.



NS Agricultural Fair



Pinewoods Road

7. Support rural-sensitive safety improvements to the existing Route 2. Oppose conversion to a four-lane highway.
8. Encourage rural road design. Prohibit excessive width, excessive impervious coverage, and excessive excavation.
9. Encourage expansion of the Village Protection Overlay Area and the North Stonington Village National Register of Historic Places district to include and buffer historic features associated with the village.



**Historic Homes within Village Preservation Overlay Area**

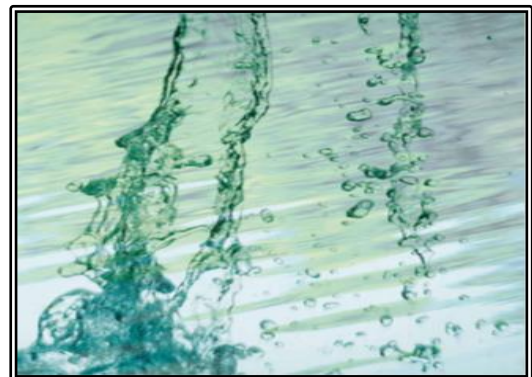
10. Protect historic resources and minimize encroachment and impacts of development or road improvement projects on historic structures or districts, cemeteries and other ancient burial places, and archeological sites through appropriate site development regulations and other land use policy.
11. Promote good site design and businesses that contribute to the rural character of the town such as farm related businesses, green energy technology, and small-scale retail.

## **II. PERMANENTLY PROTECT WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY**

1. Support limited increase in the size of the existing commercial and industrial zones.
2. Seek funding to develop and implement a program for monitoring pollution to surface and underground waters, and for maintaining an adequate quantity of water needed to protect species' habitat, conservation areas, and recreation resources of the town.
3. Remap the aquifer protection area to better describe its actual boundaries and to include the Green Falls Aquifer.
4. Continue to avoid sewers in all residential zones, but consider sewers in commercial and industrial areas that are situated over the aquifer.



**Rattlesnake Plantain, Babcock Ridge**





### III. PROTECT THE TOWN'S NATURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

1. Provide concept plans and necessary infrastructure to entice development away from areas of rich farmland or other valuable natural and historic resources and facilitate locating any potential high-density and/or intensive uses elsewhere.
2. Protect the habitat of threatened and important species. Species such as the Cardinal Flower, Canadian Warbler, and River Otter are indicative of a large biodiversity, however all these species require extensive habitats through a combination of land conservation, environmentally sensitive development, and good land management practices from private citizens.
3. Protect and preserve dark night skies as one of the town's many natural, scenic, scientific and cultural resources. Zoning regulations should continue to ensure the preservation of North Stonington's dark night skies through the reduction of light pollution for public and natural benefit, with thoughtful regard for security and visibility.
4. Designate the Shunock and Green Falls River and Valley, and the Wyassup Brook, corridor and their tributaries as areas of prime interest to the community as pure water resources and wildlife corridors.
5. Designate the North Stonington Village Area as a central amenity to the entire community. This will help to focus town, state, and federal protection and conservation efforts.
6. Maintain appropriate regulations to ensure that the preservation of sites and/or renovation and reuse of historically significant structures is encouraged; and that archeological assessments are provided routinely where appropriate.
7. Work with the Historical Society to expand education efforts in order to raise awareness and to foster a cooperative community-wide approach to preserving the town's historic resources.
8. Recognize the Green Falls River basin as an important resource from Voluntown to the Pawcatuck River for both the protection of pure water and as an important unspoiled wildlife corridor.



Yannatos Preserve, Clarks Falls – Avalonia Land Conservancy



Town Hall Complex - Village Center

9. Recognize and maintain the 100-foot buffer zone to water resources (lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands) along the Green Falls, Shunock and Wyassup water ways and their tributaries as identified in Inland Wetlands and Watercourses regulations. The inland wetlands and watercourses of the State of Connecticut are an indispensable, irreplaceable and fragile natural resource.

10. Encourage properly managed lands in private ownership that are in harmony with the conservation and development goals of the town. Consider zoning incentives for large lot subdivision with significant acreage in preservation. Such incentives may include: allowing building on slopes to save good farm land; allowing more than one (1) cut for land owners willing to give 15% to the Town's Land Acquisition Fund; and relaxing the frontage requirement for lots 10 acres or greater. Non-zoning incentives may include possible tax incentives. Provide opportunities for private conservation such as sale or transfer of development rights.



Green Falls Pond



Babcock Ridge

11. Consider incentives such as tax relief or relaxation of buildable land and access requirements for private conservation and environmentally sensitive site design.
12. Work to establish a state park or wildlife preserve at Lantern Hill and Lantern Hill Pond. This is a unique geologic feature and conservation opportunity that the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, town, and state should work on together.
13. Support energy conservation plans consistent with the rural character of the town.
14. Support the current Federal Efforts to designate the Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers and their tributaries as wild river status.
15. Consider a ten-acre rural single-family villa overlay zone near Lake of Isles Golf Course. This may encourage high end single family development on large lots taking advantage of tribal resort development, resources and infrastructure.



#### **IV. PROVIDE APPROPRIATE AREAS FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATION**

1. Encourage multiple-use of conservation and recreation lands where additional uses do not interfere with the primary conservation or recreation purpose such as passive recreation and farming. Active recreation and school uses are also compatible. The use of school facilities, subject to suitable policies and procedures, would be beneficial to residents.
2. Encourage that all tracts of land recommended for recreation be open to the public rather than encumbered by restrictions with the exception of reasonably appropriate protective restrictions.
3. Work toward the immediate enlargement of the Rocky Hollow Recreation Facility by acquiring additional land from the state for an expanded and centralized town recreation facility. Town-owned open space bordering the Assekunk Swamp West along Pinecrest Road with little or no conservation or recreational value could be offered to the state in trade.
4. Continue to develop a network of trails and pathways that will provide the public with safe active and passive recreational opportunities, and provide connectivity to conservation and recreation lands. The town has an abundance of trails, pathways, pentways, ancient roads, unimproved roads, and rights of way that are being mapped to show public ownership, permitted public use, and public use by right. Trails and pathways for bicycle, hiking, horseback riding, cross country skiing, and alternative sport use should be developed as a major endeavor of the town. Trails can provide many recreational opportunities. When considering land for open space, trails should not automatically be passed over in favor of large tracts of land.
5. Develop parks and other public recreational facilities (including a possible public swimming pool or area) in areas identified as having exceptional opportunity for one or more uses for public recreation, preservation of natural, cultural, and historic features, and education. These may be town or state owned and managed in a way that will actively contribute to the quality of life in the town.
6. Seek input from residents and stakeholders via regular neighborhood meetings to ensure parks and recreation areas serve the needs of the surrounding residents. Ensure that areas will be used and that activities planned are in harmony with the existing neighborhood.
7. Consider the town-owned parcel on Putker Road as an east side recreation area.



**Arial View of Rocky Hollow Recreation Area and Assekunk Pond**



**Banker Farm, Northwest Corner Road**



## **V. IMPROVE REGULATORY PROCEDURES AND PRIORITIZE LAND ACQUISITION AND USES**

1. Assure that the duties and authority of the various boards and commissions dealing with conservation and recreation are clear and that they are given adequate financial and legal power to carry out their respective missions.
2. Encourage the town to provide a professional grant writer to secure funding necessary to implement the recommendations of this and other town plans.
3. Focus resources and conservation efforts on parcels that have been specifically recommended (and identified on the Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map) for conservation, recreation, protection of natural and cultural resources and features, protection and development of water resources and water supply management, open space, and/or farming and farm land conservation.
4. Keep open space and land use maps up to date. In order to intelligently plan for conservation and recreation, maps should be continually updated in conjunction with the town's Geographic Information System (GIS) Coordinator. GIS maps can be cropped, enlarged, combined, and layered providing an invaluable tool for detail research, planning and presentation purposes.
5. Carefully consider conservation easements (CEs) held by the town, especially scattered small parcels where the public is excluded from use. These types of CEs are potentially difficult and costly to enforce and maintain. While CEs can be a useful conservation tool between private citizens and willing land trusts, they are a tool the town should use with discretion. Land trusts are set up to manage property as the town has limited resources for this purpose.
6. Recognize that acquisition and management can sometimes be best achieved through partnerships with other governmental or private agencies. The town should be prepared to enter into such partnerships when appropriate.
7. With respect to new subdivisions, continue to seek fee-in-lieu of open space rather than accepting isolated parcels of little use to the town that are costly to monitor and maintain.
8. Support the restoration of \$20,000 for Open Space Acquisition as a line item in the budget.



Ma & Pa Goose at the Bog on Denison Hill Rd.



Parke Pond Cardinal Flowers

## 5. Summary

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This 10 year Plan for Conservation and Recreation Lands (PCRL) is intended to provide a framework for the protection of our rural character, our water quality and quantity, and our natural and historic resources. These recommendations must address the future active and passive recreational opportunities through the protection and acquisition of identified land parcels throughout town. Our legislators and boards and commissions must be supportive, through active recognition and regulatory



Button Road

initiatives, if our character as a town is to be preserved.

It is not the intention to remove land from the tax rolls, but to protect more land through facilitating private acquisition and/or the sale of development rights; encouraging state incentives to farms; and by providing appropriate tax relief if we are to satisfy the needs and desires expressed by the community to protect rural living.



Fog at Wyassup Lake

If we are to stabilize our tax structure and provide the education and emergency services desired by our public as well as maintain the roads and bridges, the town must facilitate high quality economic development by providing the infrastructure necessary to encourage commercial investment (business opportunities), while continuing to protect the aquifer and physical environment. Sound planning and enforcement is not only essential for steady desirable growth, but needed as well to maintain our rich rural heritage. Plans must be created to entice development away from any environmentally sensitive areas such as aquifers, rivers and their tributaries, and the lakes and ponds, or at least provide for a protection zone for any development to help

maintain the ecological health of the water and maintain the wildlife habitat which enriches our town. Archeological assessments as well as existing maps identifying endangered species, rich farm lands, aquifer protection areas, historic sites, and natural resources should be utilized when planning for new residential and economic growth and prior to site construction.

In addition to the larger conservation and development goals of the town, a need exists for active and passive recreational opportunities throughout town. The utilization of school grounds and Rocky Hollow Recreation Area for playing fields and organized sports programs, and the use of conservation protection areas for appropriate hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, camping and equestrian activities



Swantown Road



Mike Minor's Longmeadow Farm

will have minimal environmental impact on the land and will satisfy this need. Open tracts of land recommended for recreation should be easily available for public use with only reasonable protective restrictions.

In order to add meaningful or useful conservation and recreation lands, regulatory procedures must include fee-in-lieu of open space rather than practice of accepting small checkerboard parcels of often undesired land which is difficult and costly to monitor and maintain as public open space. These procedures and fees, accompanied by the restoration of a recommended \$20,000 yearly line item in the budget will restore a fund to acquire quality open space for our future recreation and conservation needs.

The protection of our environment is the most critical aspect of this report. Without the vigilant attention by us all to our open spaces, its beauty, its wildlife, and its majesty, the rural atmosphere and indeed our heritage is lost.



## 6. Glossary and Definitions

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**Conservation Restriction:** a limitation, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land described therein, including, but not limited to, the state or any political subdivision of the state, or in any order of taking such land whose purpose is to retain land or water areas predominately in their natural, scenic or open condition or in agricultural, farming, forest or open space use, in perpetuity.

**Farm Land:** any tract or tracts of land, including woodland and wasteland, constituting a farm unit. Ref: Sec. 12-107b (1) Connecticut General Statutes (CGS).

**Forest Land:** any tract or tracts of land aggregating twenty-five acres or more in area bearing tree growth that conforms to the forest stocking, distribution, and condition standards established by the State Forester. Ref. Sec. 12-107b (2) CGS.

**Focus Area:** an area with a concentration of significant natural, recreational, and or historic resources and features that are important to the town where conservation and or recreation goals can be unified for planning and implementation purposes.

**Greenway:** a conservation and or recreation corridor connecting open space parcels for people and wildlife.

**PA 490:** Since 1963, Public Act 490 provides for assessment of farm, forest, and open space land on the basis of its current use rather than market value. “Use value” is based on what the land is actually used for and not what it might potentially be worth on the market. Use value taxation is justified because the land requires little, if any, support from local government revenues (Source: NEMO Open Space Fact Sheet T6).

**Open Space:** any area of land, including forest land, land designated as wetland under section 22a-30 of the Connecticut General Statutes and not excluding farm land, the preservation or restriction of the use of which would (A) maintain and enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources, (B) protect natural streams or water supply, (C) promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes, (D) enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open spaces, (E) enhance public recreation opportunities, (F) preserve historic sites, or (G) promote orderly urban or suburban development. Ref: Sec. 12-107b (3). CGS *[Please recognize that the definition for Open Space in a plan such as the PCRL - which identifies potential areas for consideration, must necessarily differ from the town’s Zoning Regulations where Open Space is narrowly defined as protected land. Each is correct within its different context.]*

**Overlay Area:** designated area or district, delineated by an overlay on the Zoning Map which is of such historical or environmental importance that it commands extraordinary measures for its protection from any activity or plan deemed detrimental to the underlying basis of its character (Reference: P&Z Regulations, definitions 1/09).

**Parcel (Lot):** an area or parcel of land, in the same ownership, designated and recorded in the land records of the town by its owner as a separate lot (Reference: P&Z Regulations, definitions 1/09).

**Passive recreation:** Non-motorized recreational activities that leave the land essentially in its natural state.

**Purchase of Development Rights (PDR):** Voluntary, legal agreements that allow owners of land meeting certain criteria to sell the right to develop their property to a town or state government, or to a nonprofit organization. A conservation easement is then placed on the land and the agreement is recorded on the title to limit the future use of the land to agriculture or other open space uses (Source: EPA Smart Growth Policies Glossary).

**Streambelts:** The natural area along rivers, streams, wetland drainage creeks, and intermittent brooks.

**Wetlands:** land, including submerged land, as defined in Sect 2.1 (Conservation Commission) of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Regulations of the Town of North Stonington, that are regulated pursuant to Section 22a-28 through 22a-35 inclusive of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended; which consist of any of the soil types designated as poorly drained, very poorly drained, alluvial and flood plain by the National Cooperative Soils Survey, as it may be amended from time to time, of the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Such areas may include filled, graded or excavated sites, which possess an aquatic (saturated) soil moisture regime as defined by the USDA Cooperative Soil Survey. Ref: P&Z reg. definitions.

**Wildlife corridors:** Natural pathways for wildlife movement within and between important habitats.

#### **Abbreviations Used:**

**APOA** – Aquifer Protection Overlay Area

**CE** – Conservation Easement

**GIS** – Geographical Information System

**NSCLA** – North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance

**PCRL** – Plan of Conservation and Recreation Lands

**PDR** – Purchase of Development Rights

**POCD** – Plan of Conservation and Development

**USGS** – U.S. Geological Survey