

# 1.0 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.

The PCRL was updated in 2008 and 2013 with current information and new goals to provide a foundation for the conservation and recreation related goals, strategies, and actions. Several goals and actions have been implemented in the past ten years and the Conservation Commission has focused heavily on bringing awareness to the importance of natural resources, farmland and open space and their relation to the town's history and role in the quality-of-life residents enjoy. The Conservation Commission has partnered with several Conservation organizations to develop new ways for public to access and enjoy the forests, rivers and conservation lands such as the development of brochures, trail maps, and hosting educational outings.

There was a dramatic upsurge in the use of town trails during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. Townspeople were getting out of their houses and enjoying the woods and trails around them without fear of contagion. The outdoors played a crucial role in providing a sense of normalcy, promoting physical and mental well-being, supporting economic activities, and fostering

community connections during the COVID-19 pandemic. This unexpected consequence of a global pandemic has helped highlight not only the importance of having available open space and outdoor recreational space during such a crisis, but hopefully reinforced the important role the natural world plays in our lives.

## Findings

Public input related to Conservation and Recreation was collected in the 2023 Survey, Open Space Focus group and during the neighborhood meetings. The Findings from the 2013 PCRL are still relevant and reflect the public input received.

- The needs and desires expressed by the community to retain and protect rural living and natural resources remain strong. Development pressures necessitate careful planning renewed commitment to policies and actions that lead to the continuance of the quality of life in town, protection of natural resources of local and regional significance, and support for the preservation of farms and the town's agricultural history.
- 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.
- High quality economic development necessary to mitigate the tax burden can be achieved in harmony with the conservation and recreation goals of the community - through careful planning, regulation, and enforcement.
- The Conservation Commission has researched the fact that the tax base is enhanced by the addition of Open Space.

## 2.0 Existing Conservation and Recreation Lands

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In order to recommend logical areas for future conservation, recreation, and greenways, the Conservation Commission created a map that identifies “Focus Areas” and greenway/wildlife corridors chosen for their relationship to valuable resources located throughout town (See map pg. 10). The 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. 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 16 will add to these corridors for 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, owned by a land trust, development rights sold), with another 54% 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. Since 2013, the development rights were sold on a 49.1-acre parcel on Ryder Road bringing the total acreage to 430.25 acres. Avalonia has preserved 707.05 additional acres; North Stonington Citizens



Small inlet to Shunock River (Photo courtesy of North Stonington Citizens land Alliance)



Rock Wall within Crevice, Camp Wightman

land Alliance 31 acres and the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife an additional 79.28 acres.

In 1968 Congress enacted the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as a way to protect and preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values for the enjoyment of present and future generations. In March 2019, after thousands of hours of community effort over a ten-year period, Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut residents celebrated the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed receiving a National Wild and Scenic River designation. The Watershed's 300 square mile area includes twelve towns, seven major rivers and countless lakes, wetlands, and smaller streams. The entire Watershed is now considered a Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers System under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

North Stonington is home to two of the Watershed's Wild and Scenic rivers (Green Fall River, Shunock River) and three feeder streams (Assekunk Brook, Pendleton Hill Brook, Wyassup Brook). The Green Fall Rift Valley is one of the most notable geologic features in the entire Watershed with its ancient rock formations and six-mile-long fault. Hundreds of acres of rich flood plain soils at the Green Fall River's southern end continue to support agriculture today. The Bell Cedar Swamp is a significant Atlantic White Cedar swamp that drains into the Wyassup Brook and Green Fall River. The swamp contains imperiled natural habitats, like the Atlantic White Cedar stands, and supports endangered, rare and uncommon plants like green adder's mouth orchid, nettled chain fern, and the Hessel's Hairstreak butterfly.

North Stonington's two rivers were important to both Native Americans and colonial settlers. There are three state documented tribal camping/fishing/settlements of the Pequot and Eastern Pequot Tribes along the Shunock River. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, settlers constructed dams on both the Shunock River and Green Fall River to power mills. During that time the Village of North Stonington had the largest concentration of river-dependent industry in the region. The villages of Clarks Falls and Shady Glen grew up around the Green Fall River dams. The

villages had churches, schools, retail stores, and large fulling mills and woolen mills powered by the river.

North Stonington residents in the central and eastern portion of the town rely on the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed's underground reservoirs to supply clean drinking water. Zoning regulations and land use controls need to be in place and adhered to in order to protect both our drinking water supply and the natural state of our rivers and tributaries. Chapter 6 (Action Strategies for the Future) contained in the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Plan provides guidance for towns to help preserve and protect the watershed.

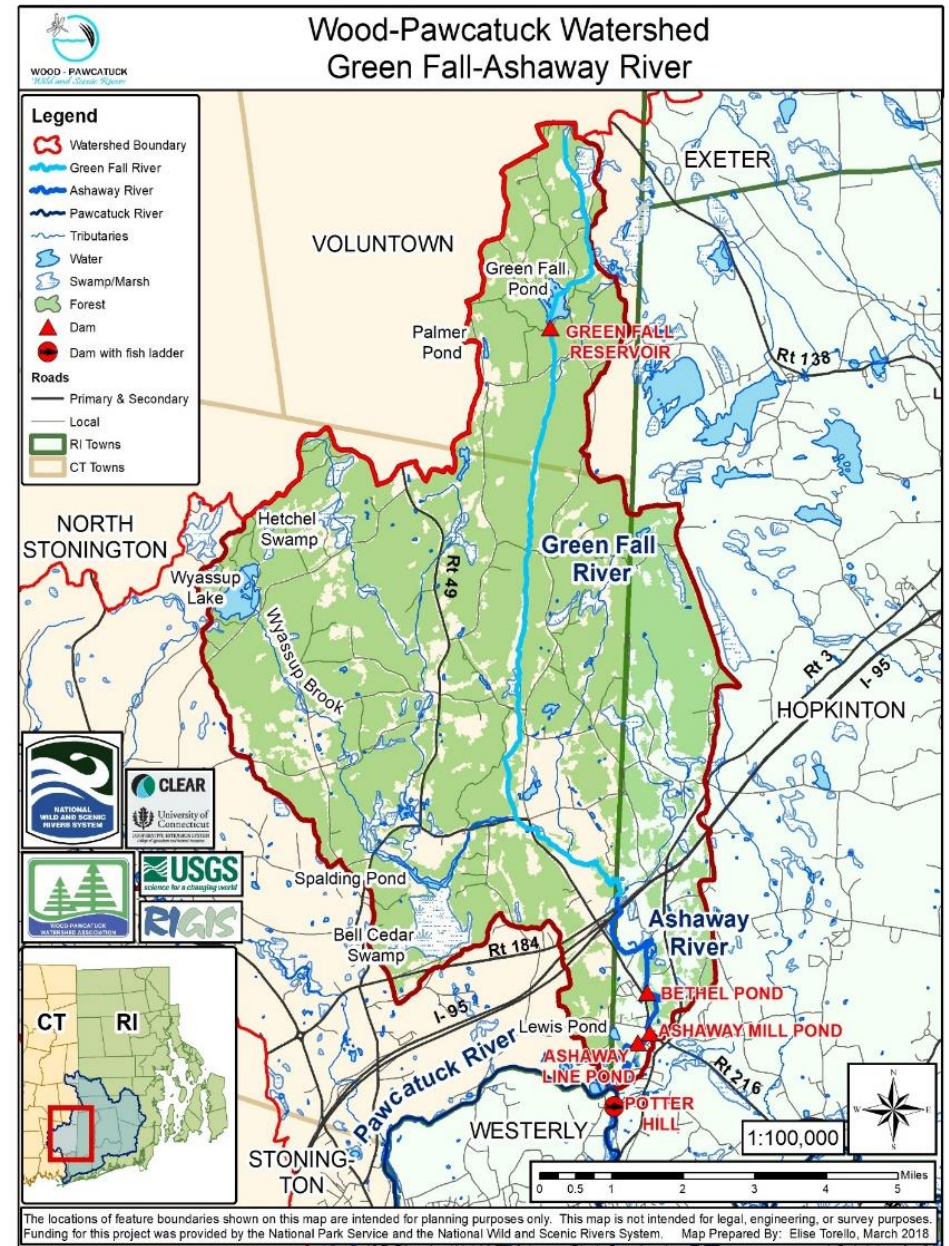
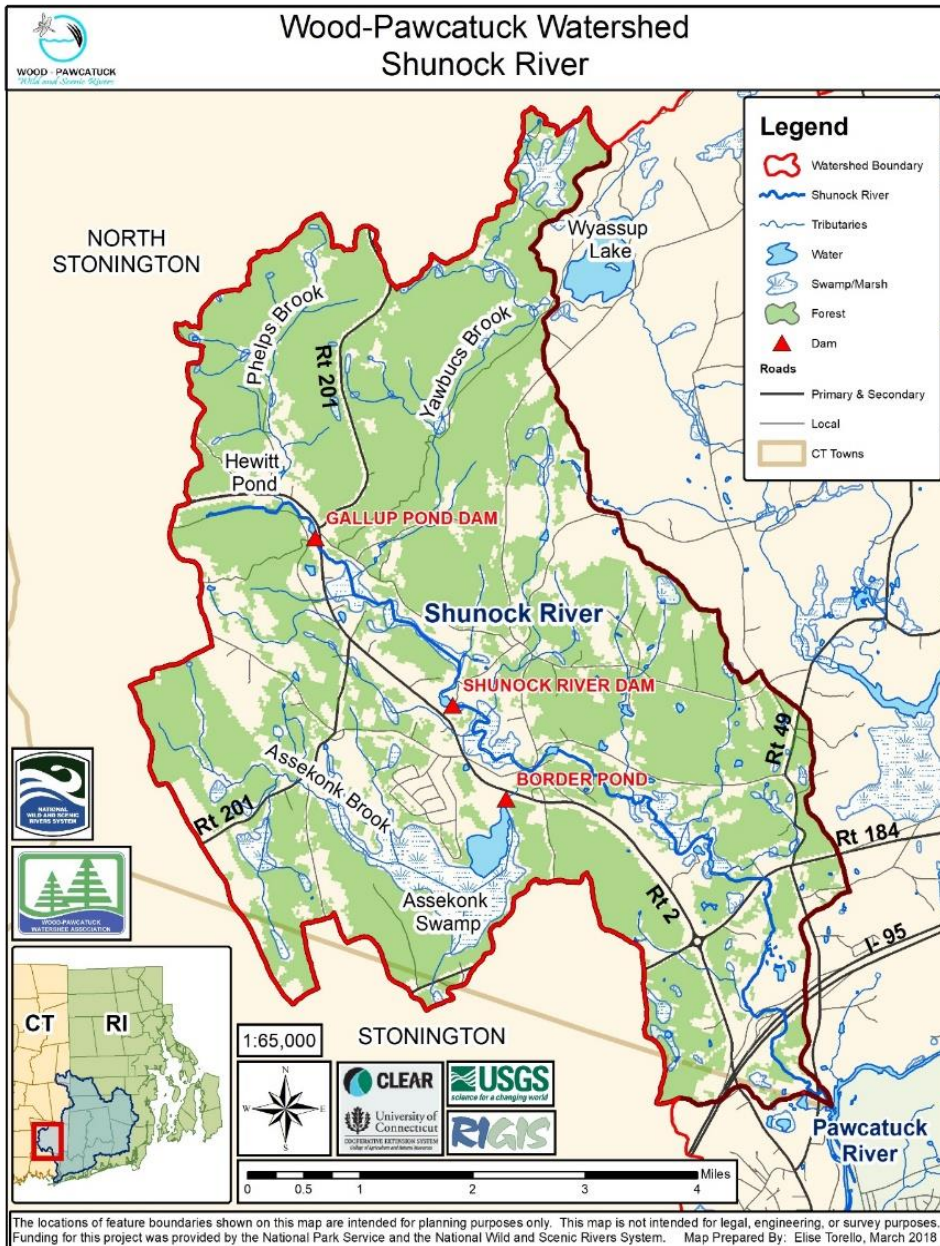
<https://wpwildrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WandSStewardshipPlan-CH-6.pdf>

Designation of the Watershed as Wild and Scenic provides an opportunity for North Stonington residents to recognize the unique attributes of the rivers and tributaries within the town and plan for protection of these attributes so that future generations will enjoy this special area.



Spalding Pond near the confluence with Green Fall River (Photo courtesy North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance)







## 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 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 – Assekonk Wildlife Management Area



Shunock River in the village of North Stonington, CT

### North Stonington Village

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

**Recreation:** Village Green, town recreation and picnic area, Hewitt Farm, Bicentennial Trail, new Historic Hiking trail, community gardens, 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, 1750 Homestead on Hewitt Farm, and the following farms: Terra Firma farm, Hoppy's Christmas Tree Farm and the Zichichi Family 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:** Former Wychwood Farm and large tracts of open space bordering Stonington.

### 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, and Potholes on Ricktown Mountain, Ashwillet.

#### Lake of Isles

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

**Recreation:** Golfing, fishing, 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: Banker Farm, Bison Brook and Firefly Farms, Greystone Winery.

**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, Firefly Farms, and Wyassup lake



## 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 farmlands. 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, Learned, Bill and Trillium farms, historic villages, grist mill, mill ponds, mill seats of Laurel Glen and Clarks Falls, and important drinking water aquifers, and one of the original 15, one-room schoolhouses.

**Recreation:** Avalonia's Yannatos Preserve, Cody Preserve, Clarks Falls Pond and Green Falls River.

### Pendleton Hill

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

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



Cool Breeze Farm, Grist Mill, Clarks Falls, Stonyledge Farm, and Yannatos Preserve, First Baptist Church

**Other Features of Note:** Pawkhungernock Rock; site of first Baptist church; ancient stone bridges; colonial milestones and one of the original 15, one-room schoolhouses.

### Chester Main

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

**Recreation:** Hangman Hill Preserve hiking trail, and Teftweld Preserve

**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, working farms including Beriah Lewis farm, and Kingdom of the Hawk Winery and Vineyard.

**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.

## 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 near 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, large areas of open space and forest, and low human population promotes wildlife habitat. Both aquatic and surface vegetation in identified sensitive areas, as well as 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



Community Gardens



Construction of Hewitt Farm Pavilion



1750 Hewitt Farm Homestead

tracts of open space over the long term while still providing substantial passive recreational opportunities. The final way to protect open space is to require a certain percentage of land to be designated open space in all proposed subdivisions, however this tool does not always guarantee that the town will gain 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 430.25 acres of farmland. Although not available to the public, these parcels are managed privately by the owners.

The land area known as the **Hewitt Farm** was acquired by the town in 2008, and when determining how it would be used, priority was 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. Permitted uses include hiking, boating, horseback riding, small events in the pavilion built in 2019, a farmer's market (started in 2022), and a community garden. The Gallup House is used as a residence, and Buon Appetito leases a portion of the property.



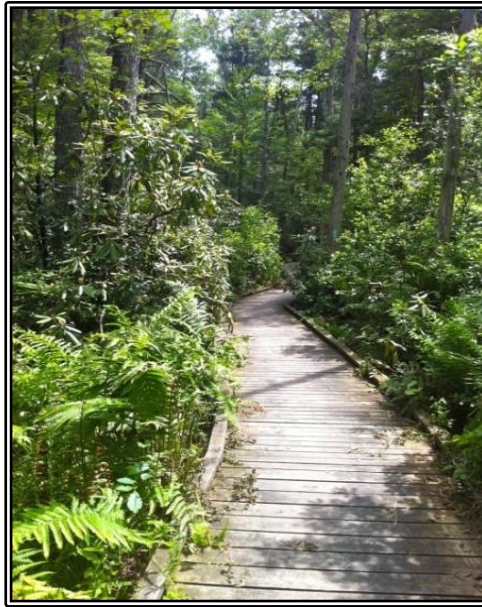
## 2.4 Recreation Lands

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 **Assekunk Wildlife Management Area** (634 acres) are existing areas managed by the State of Connecticut 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 Assekunk 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



Pachaug State Forest

roadway walk, connects to the Hewitt Farm Trail system across Route 2. An attempt to secure a grant in 2023 to convert a portion of the Borderlands Trail to become ADA Accessible was unsuccessful.

### 1.5 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 aware of the need to preserve historic resources, to protect archeological sites, and the benefits of resource conservation and access to recreational lands. In addition to providing recreational opportunities such as hiking, boating and fishing, preserved open spaces provide habitats for various plant and animal species, play a role in protecting water quality, create buffer areas between development, help mitigate the impact of natural disasters, and often include scenic landscapes, traditional farms, heritage sites and unique geological features

all of which preserve the visual aesthetics of the rural environment residents value.

All plans, policies, and land use decisions must reflect the town's commitment to this 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.** Citizens, elected officials and other stakeholders must have a clear vision to ensure our quality of life, and the economic viability of North Stonington.

**INSERT EXISTING CONSERVATION LAND MAP**



## 3.0 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 characteristics, 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 bodies of water including small lakes, and an extensive network of ponds, streams, and wetlands. These bodies of water 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. The Town needs to continue to financially support the Lake Association's efforts to mitigate invasive, destructive water plants.

Protecting the streams, wetlands, 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 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.



Fishing on Wyassup Lake

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.



Fowler Grindstone Preserve (NSCLA)

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.

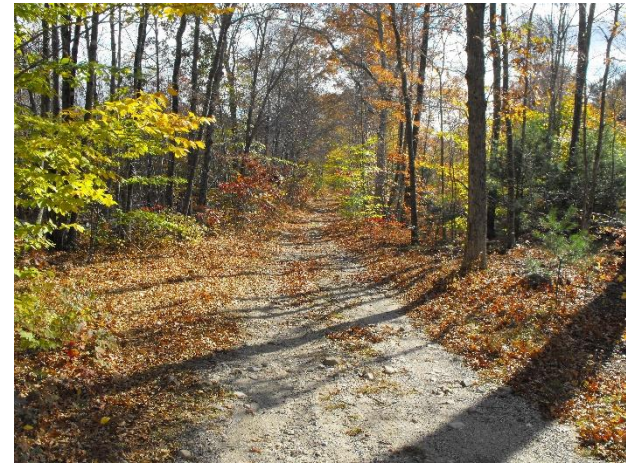
### 3.2 Greenway/Wildlife Corridors

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 Assekong Swamp to the far south. The following section identifies 19 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 16.



MAP ID	PARCEL#	RATIONALE/ATTRIBUTES
1	2096	135.17-acre parcel lies within the corridor of existing preserved properties. 35-acres of the property hold a conservation easement to the town. The remainder of the parcel is forest, pasture, and some wetlands. Miller Brook, a tributary to the Assekunk River, bisects the parcel north to south.
2	3527	202.57-acre parcel is within the state designated biodiversity area and is crisscrossed by state forest and town trail system. Holds dozens of precolonial stonework. Would add to the Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
3	2674	85.21-acre parcel has 1000+/- undisturbed feet along state owned Wyassup Lake and surrounded by Pachaug Forest on the other three sides. Contains rare Lady slipper gardens, a significant number of fern species, vernal pools, rock ledges and the outlet of Hetchel Swamp. It is within the state biodiversity area and would add significantly to the Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
4	8095	81.53- acre parcel along the east bank of Green Falls River. Pachaug Forest abuts this parcel to the north and across the river to the west. Open farmland and abuts state forest that would add protection to the Green Falls River water quality. Totally within the DEEP designated biodiversity area, with Pachaug Forest adjacent to it. Would

		add significantly to the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
5	7047	53-acre residentially developed parcel that borders the Green Falls River holding with a portion within the Aquifer Protection Overlay Area (APOA). The parcel would provide connectivity to the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
6	5583	89-acre vacant parcel that borders the Green Falls River totally within WSPOA. This parcel would provide connectivity to the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
7	4141	71 acre parcel – of which 68 acres are designated farm and forest. Property borders the Green Falls River, contains some wetlands and is entirely within the WSPOA. This parcel would provide connectivity to the <i>Eastern Boundary Greenway/Wildlife Corridor</i> .
8	3710	27.58-acre parcel bordering Green Falls River that contains some wetlands and is within designated biodiversity area. This parcel and the two that abut the north and south boundaries would add connectivity to the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
9	7267	71.1-acre parcel is bisected by the Green Falls River throughout its length with two additional rivulets (or small streams) draining extensive wetlands throughout the parcel. With surrounding parcels, would add significantly to the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.

<b>10</b>	<b>2396</b>	27.16-acre parcel immediately south of United States Fish & Wildlife property providing continuity of the Eastern Wildlife Corridor.
<b>11</b>	<b>9823</b>	25.97 -acres bordering the east side of Green Falls River providing protection to the river and adding to the Eastern Wildlife Corridor.
<b>12</b>	<b>9110</b>	40.37-acre parcel bordering the lower Green Falls River now alternately called the Ashaway River. Parcel would add protection to the river and add to southern terminus of the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
<b>13</b>	<b>5536</b>	23.78-acre parcel bordering the Green Falls/Ashaway River which would add protection to the river and add to the terminus of the Eastern Greenway/Wildlife Corridor.
<b>14</b>	<b>8238</b>	31.13-acre forested parcel along Rte. 184 with historic stone walls & wetlands recently (temporarily) protected from a solar farm development.
<b>15</b>	<b>4320 5387</b>	Both parcels were originally deeded to the town as part of a subdivision approval. Parcel 4320 contains 29.22 acres and has extremely steep ledges and wetlands along Rte. 184. Parcel 5387 2.52 acres and is primarily wetlands. These parcels would link Bell Cedar Swamp Preserve with other preserved acreage. Town litigation would be necessary.

<b>16</b>	<b>5146</b>	131.76-acre parcel adjacent to two significant permanently protected wildlife areas. The parcel includes an onsite pond with two brook drainages, pasture and woodlands. Combining the three properties would add 268.24 acres for wildlife habitat.
<b>17</b>	<b>5251</b>	This 5.5-acre parcel has been in litigation for several years, through several owners. It was to be turned over the town as open space. Parcel is within the state biodiversity area and positioned atop the sole source aquifer and borders the Shunock River. Town litigation would be necessary.
<b>18</b>	<b>5693</b>	111.26-acre parcel lies at the headlands of Assekong Swamp and could be used as an extension of the state hunting area. This parcel is also a high priority on the state purchase list. It is within the biodiversity area; is within the <i>Water Supply Protection Overlay Area</i> and Central Greenway/Wildlife Corridor. It is considered a quality wildlife habitat.
<b>19</b>	<b>6410</b>	9.36-acre parcel was set aside as part of a subdivision approval and was deeded to 11 surrounding property owners by the Stonington Land Company. The company no longer exists, and the principals are deceased. No taxes have been on the property and could therefore be secured by foreclosure. The parcel has extensive wetlands.



### 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 for expanding facilities is adjacent to the approximately 9-acre area 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 Assekong Pond. Town acquisition of the state owned 15-acre site is considered high priority.

**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



Lantern Hill Pond



Bridge at Gallup Pond



Bridge over Assekong Swamp Spillway

beautiful, well-shaded picnic ground and community gathering place. 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* or added to the Assekong Borderlands Trail.

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.

**Insert**

**Desired Areas for Future Recreation or Preservation Map**

## 4.0 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### 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 or provide sufficient town staff 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 support farming if it is to maintain lower density and 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, 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.
5. Support the Grange and Fair whenever possible. Consider a membership drive to attract younger residents. 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).

7. Encourage scenic road design.
8. Hold joint meetings between PZC, IWWC and CC to ensure everyone is on the same page.
9. 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.
10. Promote good site design and businesses that contribute to the present 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 water supply protection area to better describe its actual boundaries and to include the Green Falls Aquifer.
4. Encourage the development of sewers in commercial and industrial areas that are situated over the Water Supply Protection Area.
5. Require homes around the lakes to have wastewater disposal systems that comply with the state and local health code.
6. Continue to treat mill foil and other invasive plants.
7. Consider a 25 foot "No Build Area" around lakes, rivers and wetlands.

## 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 educational efforts in order to raise awareness and to foster a cooperative community-wide approach to preserving the town's historic resources.
8. Continue hosting events that raise awareness of the town's valuable resources and the importance of preserving them.



9. Lobby the state to and local government to enact laws/ordinances to better protect natural resources
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. Consider incentives such as tax relief or relaxation of buildable land and access requirements for private conservation and environmentally sensitive site design.
14. 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.
15. Support energy conservation plans consistent with the current character of the town.

#### 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 open space property recommended for recreation be open to the public rather than encumbered by restrictions except for reasonably appropriate protective restrictions.
3. 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. 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.



4. Create more elderly/ADA accessible trails.
5. Develop parks and other public recreational facilities (including a possible public swimming pool or pickleball court) 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 or future fire department satellite station.
8. Encourage cluster developments in appropriate locations (i.e. Wintechog Hill, NW or SE Corner of rotary) with associated trails system.
9. Create more places like Hewitt Farm for people to enjoy - consider developing a cultural park where the former middle school was located.

### **III. 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. 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 farmland conservation.

3. Keep open space and land use maps up to date. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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 such partnerships when appropriate.
6. 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.
7. Support an increase to the historically underfunded Open Space Land Acquisition fund as a line item in the budget.



## 5.0 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 characteristics, our water quality and quantity, and our natural and historic resources. These recommendations must address 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 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.

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 farmlands, 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 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.

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.



## 6.0 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.

**Farmland:** 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:**

**WSPOA** – Water Supply 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