

Hampden Conservation Areas Plan

Hampden Conservation Commission, Oct 2007

The goal of the Conservation Areas Plan is to maintain Hampden's rural character and to ensure the health of its natural communities and wildlife resources while providing opportunities for economic growth and development. The Plan prioritizes areas based on their relative conservation value and has 3 landscape components:

1. Large Blocks of Natural Habitat
2. Riparian Habitat
3. Connections Between Habitat Blocks
4. Protected Unique Plant/Animal Habitats

1. Large Blocks of Natural Habitat are critical to preserving Hampden's rural character, maintaining its ecological integrity, and protecting its water quality. More species of wildlife are likely to occur in larger (1,000+ acre contiguous habitat blocks) versus smaller habitat areas and the interiors of these relatively undisturbed areas provide havens for nesting and denning wildlife and quiet, natural areas for recreation. These habitat blocks may incorporate transition zones to guide appropriate activities:

0 - 500 feet from road: outer ring where moderate levels of traditional development are appropriate

500 - 1,000 feet from road: transition ring where practices that limit disturbance and preserve open space (Conservation Developments, for example) are preferred

>1,000 feet from road: undeveloped block interior; some uses still are appropriate, such as a managed forest that sequesters carbon and produces oxygen, hiking/skiing trails, etc.

Prioritizing areas as blocks of natural habitat should be based on:

- o Size
- o Shape (affects amount of interior)
- o Habitat Quality
- o Location of existing easements and open space
- o Connectivity (see below)
- o Existence of trails and ease of access

2. Riparian Habitat is also critical to preserving Hampden's rural character, maintaining its ecological integrity, and protecting its water quality. Riparian habitat is the river, streams, ponds and wetlands that create a massive wildlife habitat and corridor throughout the town. These areas are also critical to water quality and stormwater management. They also provide scenic and

recreational areas for the town. Much but not all of these areas are regulated under shoreland zoning and local zoning. Lower order streams and wetlands are also important conservation areas and some of these should be included as well.

3. Connections Between Blocks of Natural Habitat preserve the movement of ecological resources among them and provide opportunities for recreation. Isolated blocks will contain fewer wildlife species that depend on the ability to safely move across the landscape and may be much more limited in recreational opportunities. Ideally, there should be a central area that acts as a connection “hub” - a place where multiple streams, trails, etc. intersect to tie all the blocks together. Large blocks of natural habitat can be connected by:
 - o Enforcing existing Resource Protection zones around streams and wetlands and, in some cases, expanding Resource Protection to additional riparian areas that either provide key connections and/or have other values such as protecting salmon habitat, nesting bald eagles, and rare mussels, plants, and wood turtles.
 - o Preserving existing pipeline corridors, snowmobile trails, and hiking trails and building trails to make key connections

4. Protected Areas of Unique Plant & Animal Habitats that fall outside the habitat blocks and connectors. This will ensure their conservation for future generations of Hampden residents and, in some cases, are supported by existing state regulations.
 - o Open, grassy areas are becoming increasingly rare throughout the state of Maine. These provide critical habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife and were identified by many Hampden residents as a key part of the Town’s rural character. These may be both active and inactive farms and need to be managed appropriately.
 - o Locations of rare plants
 - o Habitats for Endangered & Threatened species of wildlife
 - o Stands of old trees
 - o Significant vernal pools