

Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts

***DRAFT* Open Space & Recreation Plan**

May 5, 2021

Acknowledgements

West Stockbridge Steering Committee

Dana Bixby - Planning Board, Chairperson

Ryan Beattie - Planning Board

Eric Shimelonis - Select Board

Randy Thunfors - Zoning Board of Appeals

Curt Wilton - Public Works Director

West Stockbridge OSRP Working Group

Caitlin Graham – Parks and Recreation Commission

John Masiero – Conservation Commission

Joe Roy, Jr. – Parks and Recreation Commission

Eric Shimelonis - Select Board

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Philip V. Arnold - Community Planner

Lauren Gaherty - Senior Planner

Seth Jenkins – Community Planner

Mark Maloy - GIS, Data, & IT Manager

Funding for the *Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Open Space and Recreation Plan* was provided by the Massachusetts Community Compact Grant Program.

The cover photos...

Table of Contents

1.	Plan Summary	1
2.	Introduction	4
2.1	Statement of Purpose	4
2.2	Planning Process and Public Participation	5
3.	Community Setting	8
3.1	Regional Context	8
3.2	History of West Stockbridge	10
3.3	Population Characteristics and Demographics	11
3.4	Growth and Development Patterns	17
4.	Environmental Inventory and Analysis	31
4.1	Geology, Soils, and Topography	31
4.2	Landscape Character	36
4.3	Water Resources	36
4.4	Vegetation	41
4.5	Fisheries and Wildlife	46
4.6	Scenic Resources and Unique Environments	53
4.7	Environmental Challenges	58
5.	Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest	65
5.1	Private Parcels	68

5.2	Public and Nonprofit Parcels.....	72
6.	Community Vision	82
6.1	Description of Process.....	82
6.2	Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals	82
7.	Analysis of Needs	84
7.1	Summary of Resources Protection Needs.....	84
7.2	Summary of West Stockbridge’s Needs	86
7.3	Management Needs, Potential Change of Use	88
8.	Goals & Actions	96
9.	Seven-Year Action Plan	102
10.	Public Comments	105
11.	References	106
12.	Appendices	107

1. Plan Summary

The 2022 West Stockbridge Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was developed to comprehensively examine the Town's open space conservation and outdoor recreation needs and to identify needed actions to meet these needs for current residents and generations to come. Overall, this Open Space and Recreation Plan helps to answer three questions related to open space and recreation within the Town:

- What resources do we currently have?
- What more do we want?
- How do we get there?

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

Section 3: Community Setting

West Stockbridge is a primarily residential community located within a valley between the Taconic Mountains and the Yokun Ridge in the central Berkshire region of Massachusetts. The Town's population is projected to decline by 35% by the year 2040.¹ Moreover, the population of West Stockbridge is growing older. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, West Stockbridge's median age was 53.8 years old which is an 21% increase since 2000 (44.3 years old).

Section 4: Environmental Inventory and Analysis

West Stockbridge has an abundance of natural resources including extensive forest lands, open water and wetland resources, and open fields that are remnants of the Town's agricultural past. West Stockbridge's location within the Western New England Marble Valleys Ecoregion has produced some unique environments due to its calcium rich bedrock and soils. These unique environments include the Town's priority plant communities which, when combined with other natural resources, host a wide variety of rare and endangered species. The information found in

¹ uMass Donahue Institute – population projections <http://www.pep.donahue-institute.org/>

this section draws upon scientific data provided by state agencies as well as on-the-ground knowledge provided by local naturalists. Beyond the Town's natural resources, there are scenic and cultural resources that create our rural New England landscape.

Section 5: Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

The vast majority of land in West Stockbridge is privately owned, including the majority of the predominantly forested landscape. However, there are large tracts of undeveloped land that are permanently protected in their natural condition, including state-owned Wildlife Management Areas, land owned by a regional land trust, land under conservation restrictions, and Town-owned land. All these lands cover approximately 20% of the total acreage in the Town. Additionally, a few landowners have chosen to enroll in Chapter 61 tax program, a state program that reduces property taxes in exchange for land conservation through forestry, agriculture, or recreation.

WHAT DO WE WANT?

Section 6: Community Vision

This section details the components of the public process that were used to draft the OSRP and states the Town's vision for Open Space and Recreation. Section six also broadly defines the three overarching goals of the plan as derived from the public process:

1. West Stockbridge's rural and natural landscape is protected and maintained; careful development does not impair this landscape.
2. West Stockbridge's water resources are protected and of high quality.
3. Residents of all abilities have access to outdoor recreational opportunities, while respecting and maintaining the natural landscape in which these are set.

Section 7: Analysis of Needs

Section 7 provides an analysis of the Town's natural resource, recreation, and management needs. The analysis considers the findings from Sections 3 through 5 and compares this against the community's desires as voiced by local officials and through the public participation process. In general, there is a need to create more walking and hiking trails, as there are no public trail systems within West Stockbridge. There is also a need to create walking / hiking routes on gentle terrain that people of all abilities can access.

Section 8: Goals and Objectives

This section reiterates the goals defined in Section 6 and provides a list of actions that should be undertaken to accomplish the goals. These have been vetted by local officials and through the public participation process.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Section 9: Seven-Year Action Plan

This section outlines and prioritizes in some detail the how each action will be implemented, including suggested leadership roles that the Town or other local groups can take to help complete the action. Although it is envisioned that most of the actions can be undertaken within a seven-year timeline, many actions will require ongoing efforts that may take years beyond this timeline.

2. Introduction

2.1 Statement of Purpose

West Stockbridge's vision for the protection of open space and accessible outdoor recreation includes protecting its treasured natural resources and maintaining the scenic beauty of the Town. This *Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)* notes existing resources and describes key trends and issues regarding open space and outdoor recreation. It also establishes the Town's work plan for goals, objectives, and actions to achieve its vision. This document is a critical step in helping the Town to prioritize open space preservation during the next seven years. West Stockbridge can use this document to guide growth in a manner consistent with open space preservation tenets.

During 2020-2021 the Town of West Stockbridge embarked upon a planning process to concurrently update its 1959 Master Plan and develop its first OSRP. This document expands upon a previous effort to develop an OSRP in 2004, in which the basis for an OSRP was drafted as a component of the Town's *Community Development Plan*. A complete OSRP did not emerge from the efforts of 2004.

Grant Eligibility and Financial Purposes of this Plan

This OSRP, once fully adopted by the town and approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, will make the Town of West Stockbridge eligible to compete in three state grant programs: the LAND (Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity), the PARC (Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant programs. The LAND grant program provides communities with up to \$400,000 a year in matching grant funds for the acquisition of land for the purposes of passive recreation. The PARC grant program provides up to \$50,000 a year in matching grant funds for land acquisition or recreation improvements for towns with populations below 35,000 and is designed mostly for projects related to parks and other active recreation areas.

Additionally, completion of this OSRP will make the town eligible to compete for funds through the Massachusetts Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant program, which can provide

funds for land acquisition, as well as the establishment and rehabilitation of existing recreation areas. These three grant programs could help with the implementation of the many of the recommended items found in the 7-year action plan. These three grant programs should be distinguished from other possible conservation and recreation funding mechanisms, such as the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which the Town of West Stockbridge enacted in June 2020. As of February 2021, the Town's CPA account has \$110,781 available for projects, with \$77,017 collected locally and \$33,764 available from the state's CPA Trust.

2.2 Planning Process and Public Participation

This OSRP was developed concurrently with an effort to update West Stockbridge's Master Plan. The Town of West Stockbridge undertook the development of both plans during the same time period so that each plan would be informed by the other and would provide consistency in their overarching goals and objectives. The Town hired the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) to provide technical assistance and facilitate the planning processes for both plans. BRPC Senior Planners Phil Arnold and Seth Jenkins provided project management and oversight for both the OSRP and Master Planning processes, while Senior Planner Lauren Gaherty provided support for the development of the OSRP.

Public Survey

One of the first steps in the public participation process was to issue a public survey to gauge residents' needs and desires for open space conservation and outdoor recreational opportunities. The questionnaire was offered online through the website SurveyMonkey and in paper form. The online survey was live for approximately three months, with the paper versions offered at the Town Hall and at a few local businesses located in downtown West Stockbridge. The availability of the survey was advertised on the Town's website and through its social media accounts. Flyers promoting the survey were also posted at Town Hall and downtown storefronts. The survey resulted in 146 households responding, with 75% of respondents being full-time residents. The full results of the survey are found in Appendix ____.

Public Meetings

At the beginning of this process, both efforts were guided by the Master Plan Steering Committee, which began to meet in May 2020. In the summer of 2021, in an effort to more efficiently and comprehensively develop the two concurrent plans, the Steering Committee made the decision to create a subcommittee to shepherd the development of the OSRP. The OSRP Working Group was established in December of 2021, with members derived from the Steering Committee, Parks and Recreation Committee and Conservation Commission. To provide consistency with the Master Plan effort, BRPC staffer Seth Jenkins participated on the Working Group. All meetings held by the Steering Committee and Working Group were publicly posted and open to the public in accordance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. Occasional updates on the planning process were given to the West Stockbridge Select Board at their regularly posted meetings throughout the 2021 and 2022.

Table – OSRP Working Group

OSRP Working Group	Affiliation
Caitlin Graham	Parks and Recreation Committee
John Masiero	Conservation Commission
Joe Roy, Jr.	Parks and Recreation Committee
Eric Shimelonis	Select Board, Master Plan Steering Committee
Seth Jenkins	Consultant for Master Plan Steering Committee

Stakeholder Interviews

While the Working Group provided invaluable insight, interviews with local residents, Town officials, former Town officials and long-time residents were conducted to gather additional information and historical perspective. Interviews were also held with major landowners and managers, including staff from the Berkshire Natural Resources Council and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) Western District.

Public Outreach

In addition to the public survey and stakeholder interviews, the Town of West Stockbridge conducted a public outreach campaign to raise awareness of the planning process, to gather

additional input and ideas, and to vet the plan and its findings. Articles were featured in the *Local Yokel*, the Town's local monthly newsletter to raise awareness of the project and to provide occasional updates or announcements.

A major milestone in the planning process was the hosting of a public forum on April 13, 2022. During this public forum the Working Group was able to provide West Stockbridge residents and businesses with a summary of the major findings that have emerged from the planning process, a summary of the results expressed during the public survey, and a chance to view the draft Goals and Actions being proposed within the Draft OSRP. The forum was held predominantly as an interactive, in-person meeting, but was also offered via Zoom technology. Approximately 25 people attended the forum in person and five people attended via Zoom.

A powerpoint presentation provided background information and summarized the major findings of the project. Both in-person and Zoom attendees were offered the chance to ask questions and/or provide comments. In-person attendees were asked to view and comment on the Draft Goals and Actions, which were displayed on large posters. They were each given five dots to place on the Actions they most favored and were also given colored markers to make additional comments. They were also encouraged to review and write comments on large poster-sized maps taken from the Draft OSRP, including the Draft Action Map. Zoom attendees were given the opportunity to vote and comment on the Draft Actions via an online survey. The results of this input is discussed in more detail Section 7, Need Analysis, of this OSRP.

RESULTS OF THE VOTING AND COMMENTS HERE

The public forum was advertised on the Town of West Stockbridge website and through its social media accounts. It was promoted at Select Board and Parks and Recreation Committee meetings and through flyers posted at Town Hall (which also serves as the Senior Center) and in the windows of local businesses. Additionally, the 68 residents who provided their email on their public survey responses were directly sent an email invitation to attend the forum. An article promoting the forum was featured in the April edition of the *Local Yokel*.

OSRP Comment and Review Period

FINISH THIS - Advertised how?

3. Community Setting

3.1 Regional Context

The Town of West Stockbridge is located in Berkshire County in westernmost Massachusetts. West Stockbridge has a total area of 19.1 square miles (12,216.7 acres), of which, less than 2% is water.² West Stockbridge is bordered by Richmond to its north, Stockbridge to its east, Great Barrington and Alford to its south, and shares a state border with New York to its west.

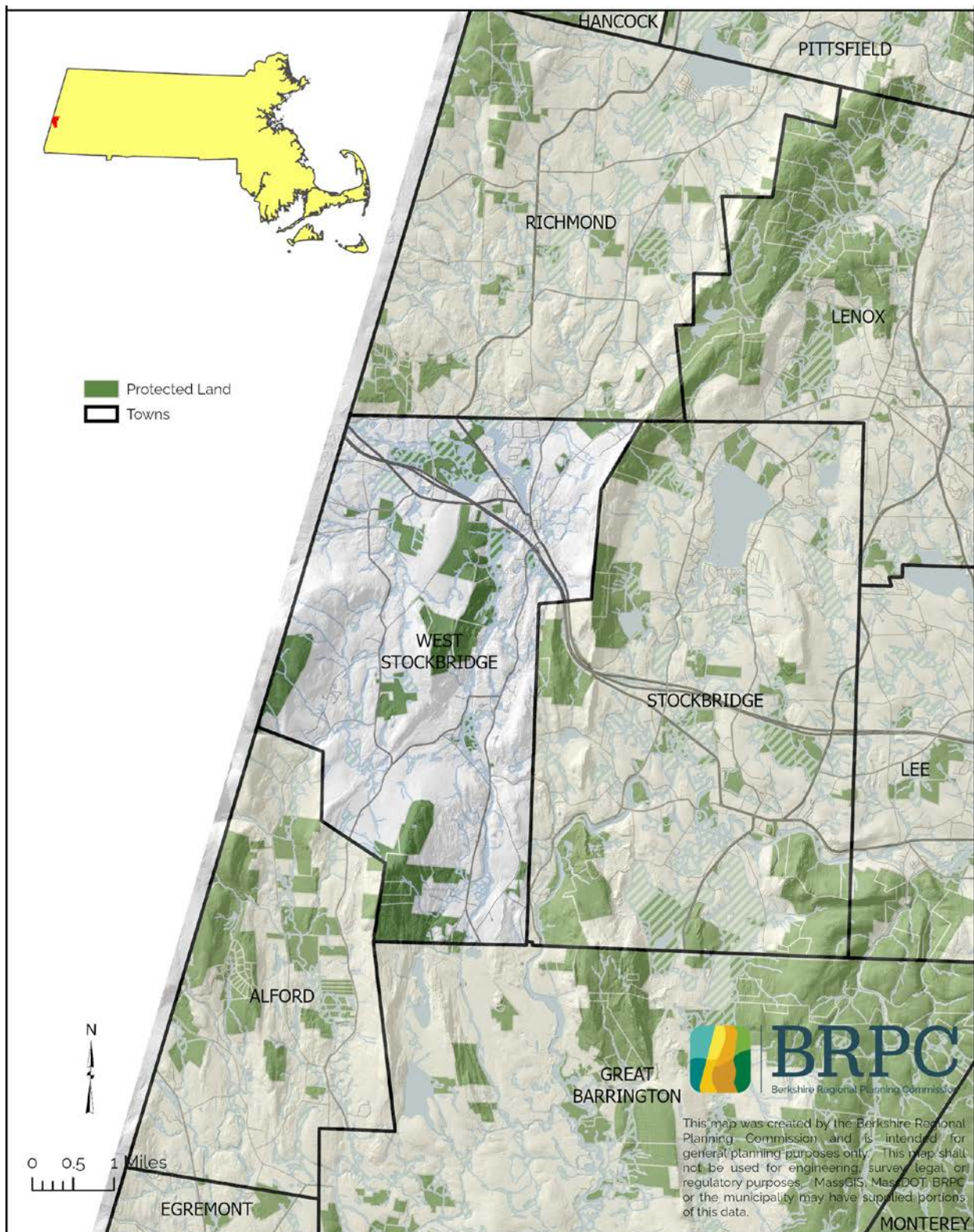
West Stockbridge is a hilly town with peaks ranging from 1,768 to 2,057 feet above sea level with many ponds, streams, wetlands, and open fields that make it a very desirable place to live. There are four major peaks in town: Tom Ball Mountain, Harvey Mountain, Center Mountain (Maple Hill), and West Stockbridge Mountain.

The Williams River is the main water body that flows through the Town providing residents and tourists with excellent opportunities for angling, canoeing, and swimming. West Stockbridge watersheds extend outward into Richmond, Lenox, and Stockbridge in Massachusetts, and Austerlitz and Canaan in New York. Permanently protected lands also extend beyond town boundaries, including lands to Austerlitz and Alford.

The 2018 American Community Survey administered by the Census Bureau estimated that West Stockbridge had a population of 1,133, ranking it 22nd out of the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County.

² MassGIS: Land Use 2016

Fig. 3.1. Regional Context Map



3.2 History of West Stockbridge

Located at the western gateway to the Berkshires, by the 1670s the area was inhabited by the Mohican/Stockbridge band fleeing the aftermath of King Phillip's War. It was a transient fishing and hunting area for Mohican tribes and Dutch traders from the west. Dutch traders from New York, and later farmers from Connecticut and eastern Massachusetts, moved in and acquired land from the Mohicans. Through the early colonial period, the community became more established - with a local church and tavern in the West Center area. By the mid 1770's they petitioned the General Court to allow it to separate from the larger, more powerful Stockbridge Township. By March of 1774, the General Court granted West Stockbridge its charter and it became independent from the Stockbridge Township.

The evolution of West Stockbridge is typical of many small New England communities. During the Colonial Period, farming was the main industry. Settlements along watercourses provided power for sawmills, wool carding, and grain mills. The Williams River was the main source of power with some 13 dams along its banks in Town. The population grew around the mills. West Center was the original farming settlement. Williamsville was an early industrial mill area, State Line a mining and rail center, and Freedleyville/Rockdale an important quarrying center

The local discovery of three key minerals would set the course for the Town over the next 150 years. Iron, limestone, and marble drove the Town's growth and changed it from a small farming community to an industrial mining town. To support the mining industry, all the surrounding hills were deforested to produce charcoal to feed lime the lime kilns.

The mineral industry also spurred the waves of French-Canadians, Irish and Italians that immigrated here and defined the Town's character. The marble in New York City's City Hall was mined in West Stockbridge. Today the John S. Lane is the last remaining working quarry in the Town, one of several quarries operated in the Northeast by Peckham Industries, Inc.

By the 1880's, the Town's population peaked around 1,900, with the West Center farms, booming quarries and lime industries, and two rail lines meeting the needs of businesses. There were twelve, single-room schoolhouses around the hamlets, and a large multi-story school in the downtown area. During the mid-19th century, many of the iconic Greek revival buildings in

the Village Center and Williamsville were constructed. Life in the State Line area of Town revolved around the mines and the two railroads lines that converged there, with the hamlet hosting a schoolhouse, general store, the Town's original post office, and businesses that catered to these industries.

The economic power of the mines began to fade in the early 20th century. By this time West Stockbridge had a mix of long-time local families, new-comers, second homeowners, and visitors. West Stockbridge was becoming part of the Berkshire's "summer culture", although in a lesser way than the more affluent and well-known neighbors like Lenox and Stockbridge. It was a vacation destination with visitors from New York City and Boston arriving by train. Two summer camps for children from the cities opened in the 1920's.

By the mid-20th Century the Town had largely become a bedroom community, with local residents commuting to Pittsfield, Lee and other nearby towns with a larger employment base. Many musicians, actors, and artists that are involved with Berkshire cultural venues have seasonal homes or rent homes in West Stockbridge.

Since 2005, the Town has gone through a resurgence. Concerts, theatre, art shows, lectures, and author talks sponsored by the Historical Society at the restored Old Town Hall bring in over 2,500 visitors every year. The Town also has several active arts venues, such as Turn Park Art Space, which attracts visitors from all over. West Stockbridge has become a quiet destination of cultural and scenic beauty.³ Due to safety concerns about COVID 19 and the expanded opportunity to work remotely from home, many former second homeowners have become year-round residents, at least in the short term. Whether all the second homers become full-time residents over the long term is yet to be borne out.

3.3 Population Characteristics and Demographics

During the 1880's, the Town's population peaked at around 1,900 people. Since that time, with the decline of the mills and mines, the population has declined. In 1960 the population was 1,244 and the latest peak was 1990, when the population of 1,481. As of the 2020 American

³ West Stockbridge Village Association: <https://www.visitweststockbridge.com/history>

Community Survey, the population of West Stockbridge was 1,343 people. From the time of the recent peak population (1990) until present, West Stockbridge has experienced a 23% decline in population. Population decline is not a trend specific to West Stockbridge and is seen in many individual municipalities throughout Berkshire County as well as the County as a whole.

Households in West Stockbridge average 2.5 persons. Like all Berkshire County municipalities, the Town is predominantly white. The three most common racial cohorts in West Stockbridge are white (87.2%), black or African American (5.1%), and some other race (2.7%). Berkshire County as a whole is 90.2% white.

Table 3.1. - Population Change (1960 - 2020)

Municipality	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
West Stockbridge	1,244	1,354	1,280	1,481	1,426	1,306	1,343
Alford	256	302	394	413	399	494	486
Great Barrington	6,624	7,537	7,405	7,841	7,515	7,104	7,172
Richmond	890	1,461	1,659	1,677	1,604	1,475	1,407
Stockbridge	2,161	2,312	2,328	2,402	2,272	1,947	2,018
Berkshire County	142,135	149,402	145,110	139,352	134,953	131,219	129,026

Source: United States Decennial Census; 2018 American Community Survey Table DP05

Aside from the overall decline in population, it is important to examine the changes of age groups (cohorts). The total population is divided into five-year age cohorts. The age cohort that is currently the largest percentage is ages 65+, comprising of 27% of the Town's total population, with ages 55-64 being the second largest percentage at 21%. As seen in the following table, this a trend experienced in neighboring municipalities as well and is not specific to West Stockbridge. Overall, the median age increased from 44.3 years old in 2000 to 53.8 years old in 2018. These

Table 3.2. - Population Distribution by Age (2018)

Age cohorts	0-19 yrs. old		20-34 yrs. old		35-54 yrs. old		55-64 yrs. old		65+ yrs. old	
West Stockbridge	196	17%	157	14%	229	20%	241	21%	310	27%
Alford	58	14%	35	8%	66	16%	73	17%	189	45%

Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Open Space & Recreation Plan

Great Barrington	1,715	25%	1,033	15%	1,399	20%	1,169	17%	1,578	23%
Richmond	237	15%	156	10%	327	21%	387	24%	483	30%
Stockbridge	247	13%	237	12%	405	21%	410	21%	661	34%
Berkshire County	25,961	20%	21,757	17%	30,952	24%	20,594	16%	28,064	22%

Source: 2018 American Community Survey Table DP05

The population of West Stockbridge is projected to decline further between 2018 and 2040. Population projections from the UMass Donahue Institute anticipate declines among every age cohort except the group age 65 and older. This group is projected to experience growth of 45% by the year 2040. However, if more people are able to work remotely and travel long distances to work only occasionally, may enable new workers and second homeowners to take up full-time residency in rural communities like West Stockbridge and reverse this projected trend.

Table 3.3. - Population Projections (2018 - 2040)

Age Cohorts	2018 ACS	2040 Population Projections	Percent of Total Population (2040)	Percent Change
0-19 years old	196	112	13%	-43%
20-34 years old	157	51	6%	-68%
35-54 years old	229	143	17%	-38%
55-64 years old	241	84	10%	-65%
65+ years old	310	448	53%	45%
Total Population	1,133	838	100%	-26%

Source: 2018 American Community Survey Table DP05; UMASS Donahue Institute Population Projections

West Stockbridge household median income is comparable to its neighboring communities in Berkshire County. Sixty-two percent of households in the Town have a median income greater than 80% of the area median income (AMI). However, there are more than 60 households (14%) with incomes less than 30% of AMI and almost 50 more (10%) with incomes between 30-50% of AMI. Within West Stockbridge 6% of the population lives below the poverty level, which is lower than the countywide rate of 11%. Although the Town does not have good data on where

in West Stockbridge low-income residents live, affordable housing can be found in Gennari's Mill Pond Trailer Park, where approximately 70 residents live.

In 2018 76% of all jobs in West Stockbridge were service-providing and 24% were goods-producing. At that time the working population of was employed in several industry sectors. The Educational Services, Health Care & Social Assistance sector employed 32% of the Town's working population, while the Retail Trade sector employed 14% of jobs.

In October 2019, West Stockbridge's unemployment rate was 1.3%. This was lower than the rate for Berkshire County (2.6%), Massachusetts (2.4%), and slightly lower than the average for neighboring municipalities (1.9%). Due to COVID-19, unemployment rates significantly increased in 2020, with West Stockbridge experiencing its highest unemployment rates during the months of April, May, and June of 2020 where the unemployment rate was 12.7%. By October 2020, the unemployment rate had declined to 5.2%.

Environmental Justice and Equity

Environmental justice is "based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental pollution, and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment "(Mass. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, 2015). Conceptually, environmental justice recognizes that some of the most highly polluted and undesirable areas to live have tended to contain populations of low-income, minority, foreign-born, and non-English speaking residents. Additionally, these populations have tended to have reduced or limited access to open space. In Massachusetts, these populations have been mapped in each municipality based on Census information. Because these populations have historically been underserved in terms of open space and recreation access and opportunities, they should be a crucial factor in future decision-making regarding these issues.

In Massachusetts, a neighborhood is defined as an environmental justice population if any of the following are true:

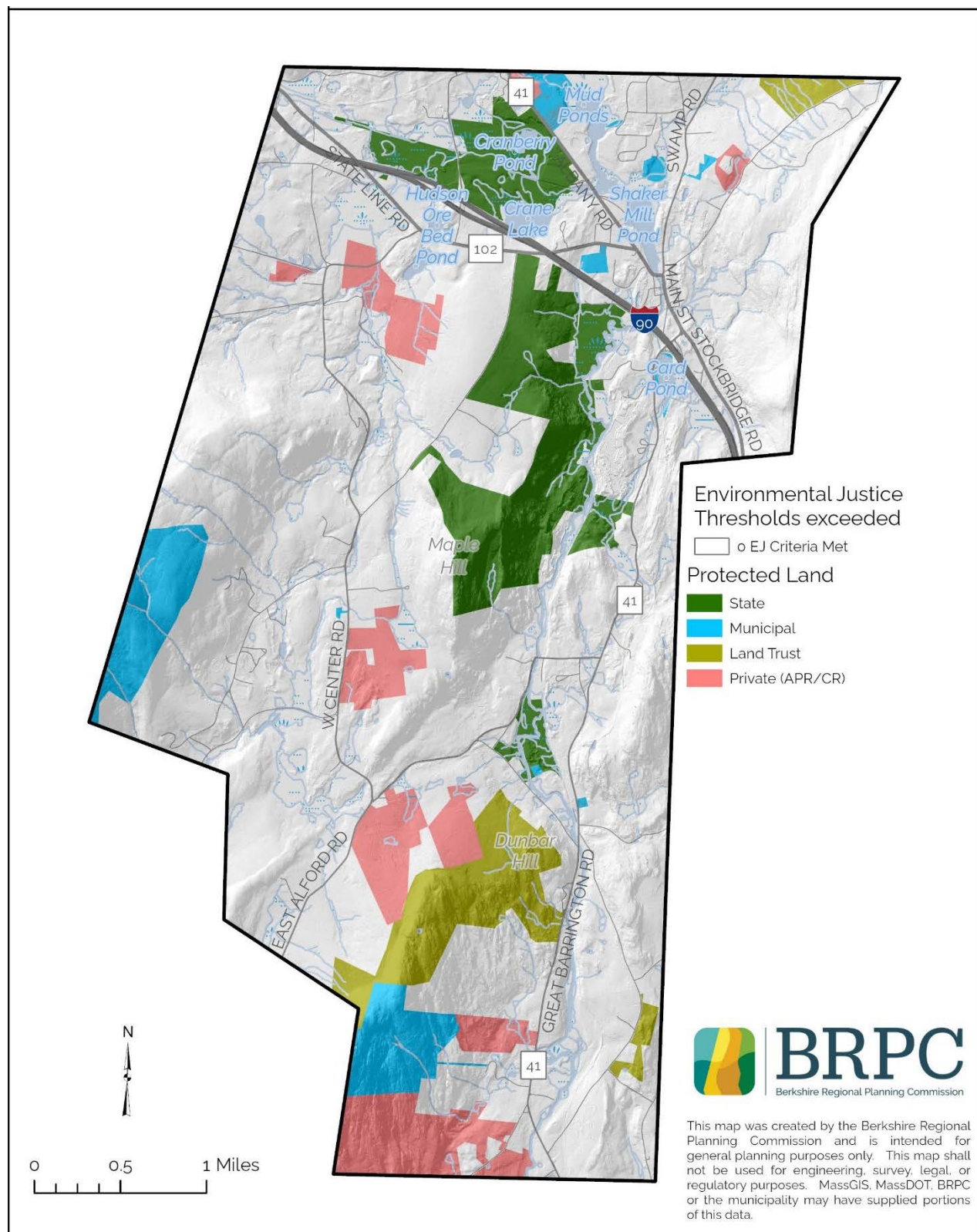
- the annual median household income is not more than 65 per cent of the statewide annual median household income;
- minorities comprise 40 per cent or more of the population;

- 25 per cent or more of households lack English language proficiency; or
- minorities comprise 25 per cent or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 per cent of the statewide annual median household income.

According to 2010 U.S. Census and 2019 American Community Survey data there are no environmental justice populations located within the Town of West Stockbridge based on the state's criteria.

DRAFT

Fig. 3.2. Environmental Justice Communities



3.4 Growth and Development Patterns

Patterns and Trends

West Stockbridge is a rural, residential community without much commercial or manufacturing development, yet has a well-defined village center with retail and restaurants. As can be seen in Table 3.4., the Town is largely forested, with deciduous and evergreen species covering 73% of West Stockbridge. Large open fields (approximately 8% of total acreage) still exist within the Town, with large open patches along Maple Hill, West Center and East Alford Roads. This reflects the Town's agricultural past.

Lakes, ponds and wetlands comprised another 8% of total land coverage. Residential, commercial and industrial development covers approximately 1% of the total land in the Town. It should be noted that this calculation generally covers the footprint of structures, such as homes and businesses. The lawn areas that surround these footprints, including the Town park and athletic fields and lawn at Crane Lake Camp, is not included in this calculation, and this land use covers another 6% of total land in the Town. So, if we were to consider the total footprint of development, it would be more accurate to say that it covers 7% of the total area of the Town. This calculation does not include the impervious surface areas like roads and highways.

The most concentrated area of development is located in the downtown area where Albany Road, State Line Road, Swamp Road, Lenox Road, Main Street, Great Barrington Road and Stockbridge Road all converge. Housing development extends out from the center along the main roads and on several shorter local roads. The Town's commercial area is located in the middle of this residential area, although a few small businesses are scattered along the town's roadways. The John S. Lane quarry, located just south of the downtown area, is still an active business.

There are a few hamlet neighborhoods that have clusters of older homes, reflecting homes that sprung up around past mills, business centers, railroad hubs and mining operations. These include State Line, West Center, High Street and Williamsville, and are represented in green dot clusters on the Development Trends map.

Table 3.4. Land Use 2016

Land Use	Acres	Percent
Bare Land (includes quarries/gravel mines)	124.3	1%
Commercial	13.8	0%
Cultivated	37.2	0%
Deciduous Forest	5,402.8	44%
Developed Open Space	680.5	6%
Evergreen Forest	3,530.5	29%
Grassland	307.4	3%
Industrial	5.1	0%
Mixed use, other	2.8	0%
Mixed use, primarily residential	4.9	0%
Wetland	893.2	7%
Pasture/Hay	703.0	6%
Residential - multi-family	12.1	0%
Residential - single family	96.2	1%
Right-of-way	180.1	1%
Scrub/Shrub	71.5	1%
Water	151.4	1%
Total	12,216.7	100%

Source: MassGIS Land Use 2016

Development outside of the core downtown area is mostly spread out along major roads. Although the number of residents has remained fairly constant since the 1960s, the number of housing units has steadily continued to increase. As can be seen in the Development Trends map, the number of homes constructed after 1975 is substantial (red dots), even though the population has decreased in those convening years. New home construction is largely driving by seasonal homeowners, who increasingly prefer large homes on large lots.

Residential development is also concentrated in the Iron Ore Road subdivision off of Swamp Road. Residential subdivisions featuring large homes, again focusing on the seasonal housing

market, have been built on the former Camp Kinsgmont property, in the area of West Center Road and Maple Hill Road, and West Alford Road.

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, of the Town's 862 total housing units, 787 (91%) are single-family homes. The second most common type of housing seen in West Stockbridge was mobile homes, with 40 mobile homes comprising 5% of the total housing stock. Aside from the downtown area, most of the residential development in the town is single-family houses on large lots along existing roadways. For current land use, see Land Use Map.

The Development Trends map illustrates the historical development trends across West Stockbridge. Approximately 35% of housing units were constructed 1939 or earlier. Relatively small numbers of homes were constructed between the 1940s and 1960s, which is unusual given that the Berkshire economy was booming during these periods, particularly within manufacturing sector. Another 34% of the housing units were constructed during the building boom years 1970-1989. In 1990 there were an estimated 722 housing units in West Stockbridge⁴ and in 2018 there were an estimated 872 housing units, of which 29% are second homes⁵.

Construction of new homes has been light since the recessions years that began in 2008, but the demand for houses and property in southern Berkshire County has exploded during the pandemic, exacerbating conditions where it was already difficult to find affordable housing in the region. In 2020, 29% of West Stockbridge homeowner households were cost burdened, compared with a rate of 24% for the county as a whole. This reflects the overall market demands for housing in southern Berkshire County.

The continuing trend in southern Berkshire County towards the construction of large, residential homes along rural roads and forested hillsides could dramatically alter the rural character of the West Stockbridge if not undertaken carefully. Large areas of unprotected pastureland scattered throughout the town are prime areas for large-scale residential development.

There are various mechanisms that the Town could promote to encourage landowners to protect open space from development, including forest and wildlife habitat land management grants,

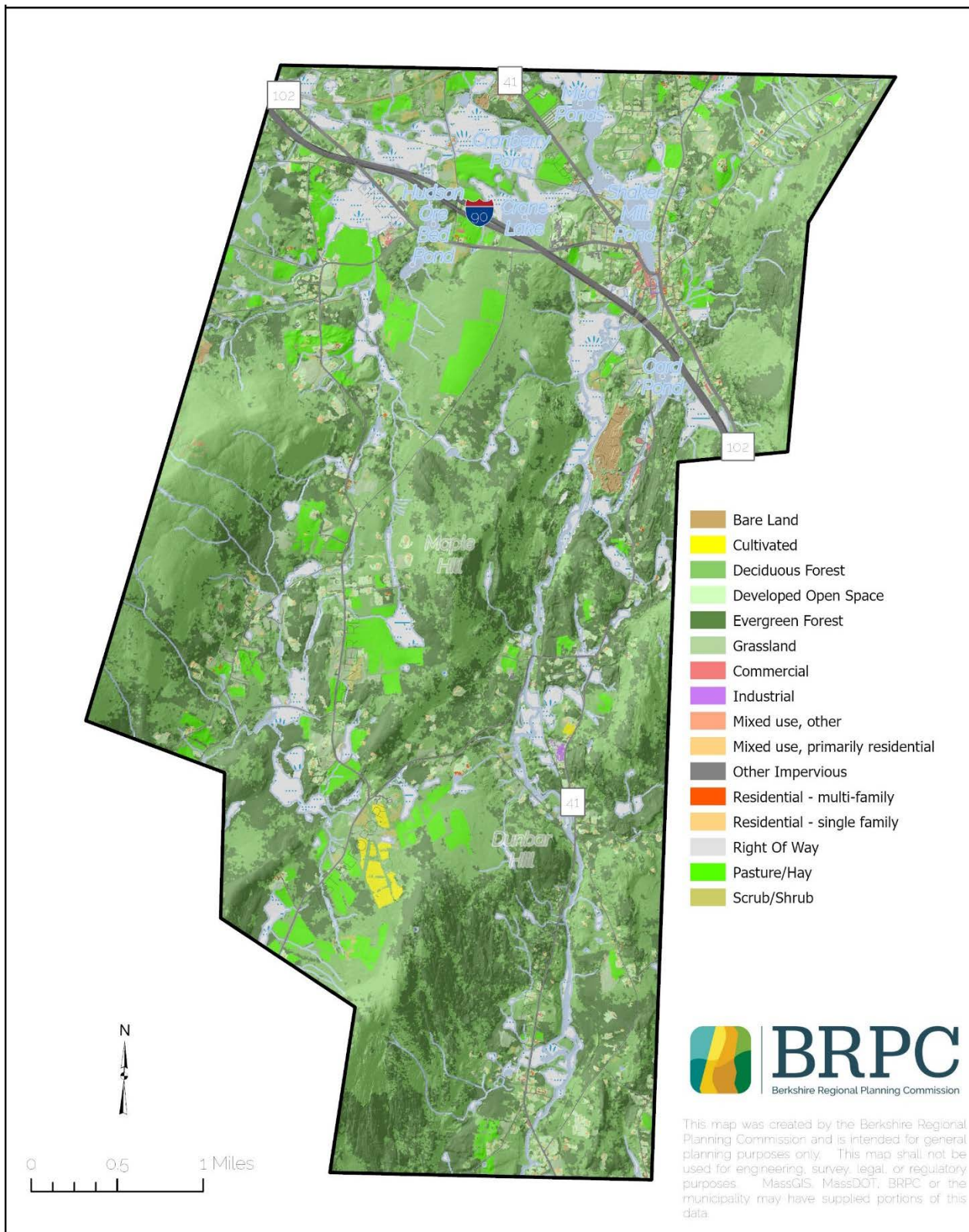
⁴ BRPC, 2004.

⁵ ACS, 2018.

conservation deed restrictions, and protection of farmland through state and federal Agricultural Preservation Programs. State tax abatement programs help to lower the tax burden for maintaining land in undeveloped condition.

DRAFT

Fig. 3.3. Land Use (2016)



Infrastructure

There are approximately 44 miles of roads within West Stockbridge. The West Stockbridge Highway Department is responsible for managing 22.5 miles of paved roads and 12.5 miles of gravel roads. The Commonwealth is responsible for managing the Massachusetts Turnpike, which bisects the norther portion of the Town. There are six private ways involving approximately five miles of road that are not maintained by the Town. Aside from the turnpike, the roads most traveled in town are Albany/Great Barrington Roads (aka Route 41), which is the major north-south route that crosses into Richmond and Great Barrington, and Stateline/Stockbridge Roads, (aka Route 102), which is the major east-west route that crosses into Stockbridge and Canaan, New York. Route 102, Main Street and Route 41 north of downtown are classified as Rural Minor Arterial roads, carrying the highest volumes of traffic through town. Route 41 south of downtown and Swamp Road are classified as Rural Major Collector roads, also carrying high volumes of traffic. Traffic counts in the summer on Main Street reaches approximately 6,000 vehicles a day.

Sidewalks are present in the downtown area and expand outward to two community destinations. The first is the Town Hall/Playground site, which also houses a gymnasium and outdoor sports facilities, and the second is Card Pond. Highly visible crosswalks are located in the downtown core. A sidewalk also extends up to the Gennari's Mill Pond Trailer Park, which has houses approximately 70 residents.

There are no dedicated bicycle lanes or shoulders in West Stockbridge, and bicycle travel is of various safety levels. Albany / Great Barrington Road (Rt. 41), the major north-south route that carries the majority of commercial, commuter and tourist traffic has not shoulder. Local bicycle enthusiasts and safety officials all agree that Route 41 is dangerous for bike travel. A 2004 Bike/Ped Road Compatibility Study, done as part of the Town's Community Development Plan, noted that much of this road ranked as the highest priority for improvement. State Line / Stockbridge Road (Rt. 102), the main east-west route, does have shoulders but these have not been established to serve as bicycle travel lanes. Both Routes 41 and 102 converge on Main Street through the core downtown area, which on the west side has angle-in parking. Enhancements to improve safe bicycling include construction of uniform shoulders and installation of Share the Road Signs.

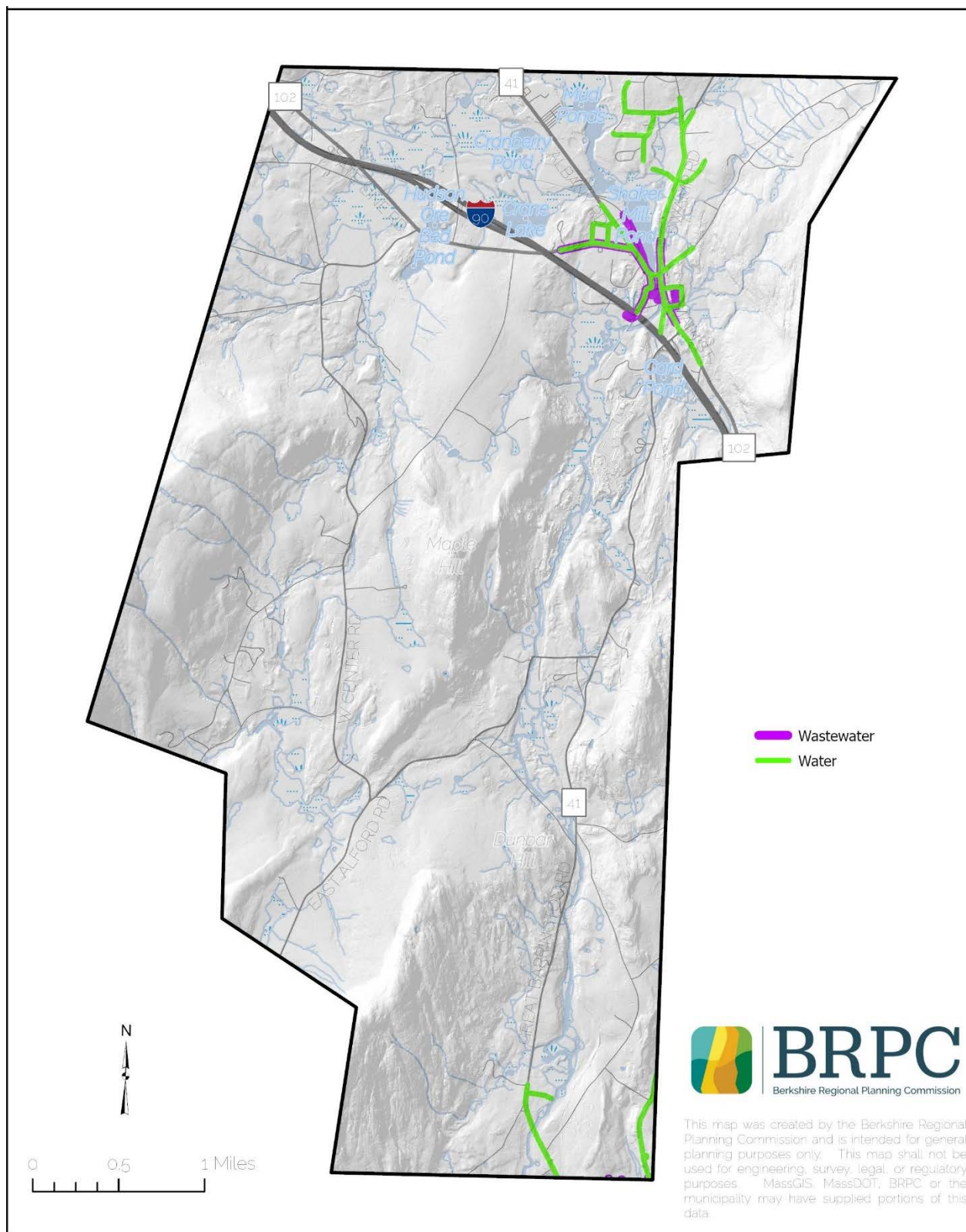
A favorite bicycling route is a loop that includes West Center Road and Route 102. This is popular because West Center Road is one of the most scenic landscapes in West Stockbridge and because it is on bike route for the John Billings RunAground, an annual 38-mile biking/paddle/running triathlon that draws approximately 500 teams from the Northeast and beyond. This road has no shoulders, but traffic is less than on the Town's commercial routes.

There is no bus or other public transportation routes through West Stockbridge. The nearest route travels north/south through the neighboring towns of Lenox, Stockbridge and Great Barrington. The Boston and Albany / CSX Railroad is a very heavily traveled route for freight, with several long trains traveling this route each day and night. However, there is no siding for local business use and there is no passenger stop in West Stockbridge.

The West Stockbridge Public Water System serves the downtown area from a well system that is located off of Swamp Road. There is a primary and back-up well, both located on a Town-owned 12-acre site that serves as the Zone II area. Water is pumped and stored in a 150,000-gallon tank located upgradient of the well site on Lenox Mountain. In addition to equalizing pressure throughout the system, the tank provides a three-day emergency supply of safe drinking water in the event of an emergency. The system serves 227 customers, including a large proportion of the resident population, along with the restaurants, businesses and government buildings that make the downtown so vibrant. The system also serves the residential neighborhoods off Swamp Road north of the wells and Crane Lake Camp. All other homes and businesses are served by individual private well systems.

The wastewater system is less extensive than the public drinking water system. There are 157 connections, which includes 30% of the residences in West Stockbridge. The system also serves the majority of businesses in Town, which are concentrated in the downtown area. It also serves the Crane Lake Camp which, when the overnight camp is operating during the summer, is the Town's largest single customer. The system runs at approximately 45-50% capacity during the summer months, when the camp and downtown businesses are running at full volume.

Fig. 3.4. Municipal Water and Sewer Infrastructure



Long-term Development Patterns

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, of the Town's 872 total housing units, 787 (91%) are single-family homes. Most of the residential development in the town is single-family houses along existing roadways. Of total housing units, 251 (29%) are seasonal homes.

West Stockbridge currently has ten zoning districts, including three overlay districts: Village Core Overlay District, Marijuana Retail Overlay District, and Photovoltaic Overlay District. The other districts are One-Acre Residence, Three-Acre Residence, Residence, Commercial, Manufacturing, Floodplain Districts, and Wetland Resources.

The Town has adopted the Berkshire Scenic Mountains Act (SMA), which allows it to protect scenic views and watersheds. The SMA requires any construction over 1,500 feet in elevation not be visible above the ridge line and it controls run-off and erosion created by development. The Conservation Commission is the permitting authority for the Act. The Town submitted proposed bylaw regulations to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which reviews and approves local regulations that allow enforcement of the Act. The DCR reviewed the Town's draft regulations and requested that some modifications be made. As of February 2022, the DCR is reviewing the Town's revised and resubmitted proposed regulations.

The Town of West Stockbridge consists of three residential zoning districts (R1, R3, RD), one commercial zoning district (C) the one manufacturing zoning district (M). The location of these zones can be seen on the Zoning Map. The R-1 District has a one-acre minimum lot size for single family and a two-acre minimum for two-family development. The R-3 district allows for a three-acre minimum lot size for singly family and a six-acre minimum for two-family. The RD district, located in and around the main village center, allows for more dense development with a ½ acre minimum lot size. Multi-family dwellings are not allowed in any of the R districts. West Stockbridge has a Floodplain Overlay District (FOD) with regulations that require a special permit for development in flood hazard areas. As of April 2022, the Planning Board is working with the Commonwealth to update its FOD, with the intent to comply with the version that is being encouraged by the DCR and Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

A Wetlands Area Overlay District requires a special permit for development within 100 feet of a few select wetlands. The Wetlands Protections Bylaw/Ordinance restates the authority of the

Conservation Commission to prohibit, permit and/or condition work within wetland resources areas as defined in the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act. The Town's Bylaw is slightly stricter than the state's regulations in that it is designed to better protect vernal pools, presuming that all vernal pools, including the adjacent areas around them, perform essential habitat functions, and are thus under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. It further states that all vernal pools, even those not certified, are protected under the bylaw. The state's regulations protect only those vernal pools that are found to be within or adjacent to wetland resources, and those outside wetland areas that are certified by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. The Town's bylaw also clearly states that costs associated with review of wetland permits, including the cost of the Town hiring a consultant, will be borne by the project applicant.

West Stockbridge values its farming heritage and is a Right-to-Farm Community. The Farming Bylaw is a general bylaw that encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protects farmlands within the Town by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and Town agencies. This bylaw applies to all jurisdictional areas within the Town of West Stockbridge.

The Town's bylaws do have some language to protect natural resource areas. The town has Site Plan Review regulations, but the Master Plan Steering Committee has determined that there is a need to update and formalize the Site Plan Review process. The need for a professional staff person to facilitate the process has become evident in the planning process.

Development in West Stockbridge over the past few decades has consisted mostly of single family second homes. These homes were constructed along the major roadways in town or along subdivision roads, such as the Iron Mine Road neighborhood. More recently large residential development has occurred on large lots along subdivision roads, such as the development on the former Camp Kingsmont property. The town currently allows shared driveways for lots that meet other zoning requirements. However, there are no provisions for flexible development that might allow housing to be clustered in such a way that would encourage denser development while protecting open space. As of April 2022, the Planning Board is considering bylaw revisions that would allow this type of development.

Fig. 3.5. Zoning

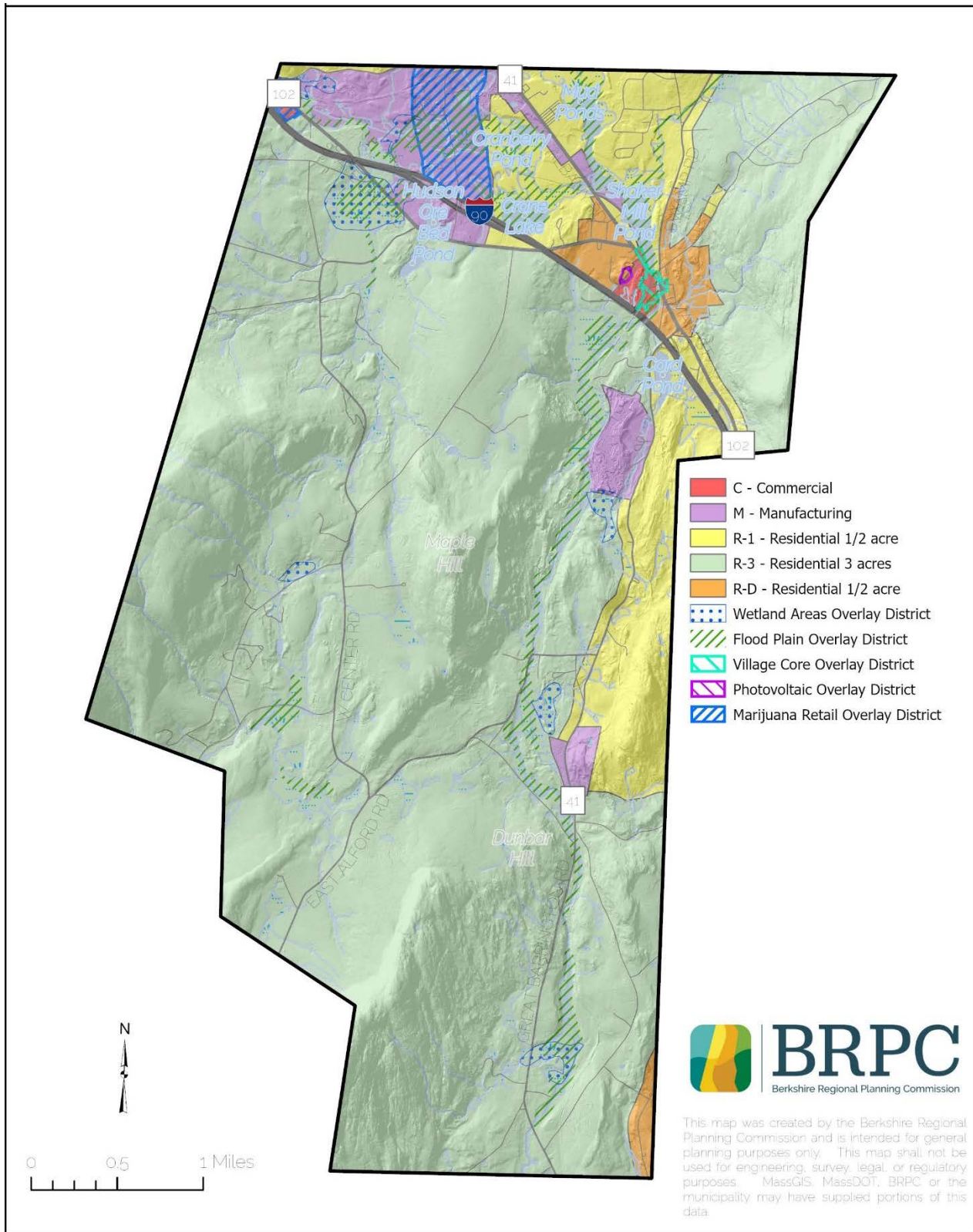
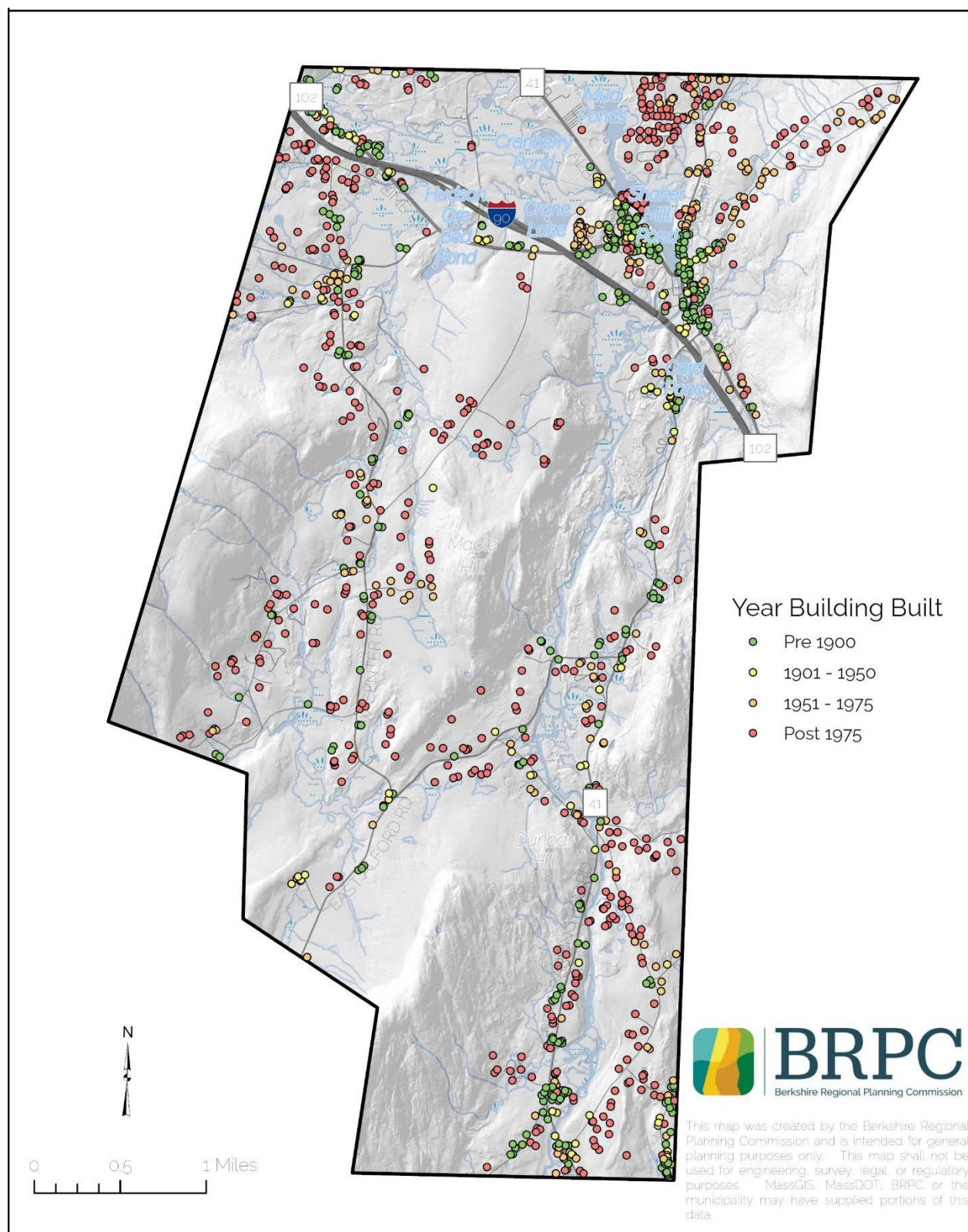


Fig.3.6. Development Trends



A buildout analysis was prepared for West Stockbridge in the spring of 2021, as part of the Town's master planning process. The intent of the analysis was to provide a broad-brush view on the scale of development that could occur under current zoning. The results of this analysis were intended to aid the Town in identifying policies and zoning amendments that should be considered to allow development to occur in a sustainable and appropriate manner.

The analysis used 2016 land use GIS data to identify land that was undeveloped but potentially developable according to current zoning. Lands that were considered undevelopable due to existing conditions were removed from the analysis, such as being already developed, land under permanent conservation, or those that had environmental constraints such as slopes greater than 25% or were wetland resources as defined by the state Wetlands Protection Act. The minimum subdivision right-of-way width used to calculate additional roadways at buildout is 50 feet. According to the analysis there are approximately 5,000 acres of potentially developable land, which is 41% of the total area of the West Stockbridge. If this land were developed to the maximum allowed by zoning, it would result in 1,874 new housing units. This would create a dramatically altered landscape than what the Town has today, with little open space lands remaining. At maximum buildout, the population of West Stockbridge would be 5,799, nearly four times the current population.

It should be noted that the methodology used to conduct the analysis has limited capacity for accuracy. It was beyond the scope of this analysis to consider development potential on a parcel by parcel level, which would be needed to accurately calculate the potential maximum buildout. Also, the methodology assumed that all new development would be either served by town water and sewer or innovative septic treatment systems that would allow for development to the density allowed by zoning, and this is currently not the case.

Subdivisions requiring approval under the Subdivision Control Law have not been a significant factor in the town. There has only been one dense subdivision developed in West Stockbridge, in the Iron Mine Road area, in the past 50 years. Residential development continues to be single-family homes on large lots along existing roadways or small cul-du-sacs. However, it would not require development anywhere near maximum buildout to have significant impacts on the community and the environment.

A more likely possibility is that continued Approval Not Required (ANR) development would eventually use up the existing buildable frontage in West Stockbridge and create “land-locked” areas of potentially developable land with no access. This could seriously limit access to the forests and streams for hunting, fishing and recreation. The lack of permanently protected open space in town should be cause for concern.

DRAFT

4. Environmental Inventory and Analysis

4.1 Geology, Soils, and Topography

West Stockbridge is a classic Berkshire hill town in its features of geology, soils, and topography. It is a landscape of high-forested hills with heights over 1,900 feet, open fields, lakes, and ponds. Tom Harvey Mountain is 2,057 feet and Tom Ball Mountain is 1,930 feet. The vast majority of the Town is located within the Western New England Marble Valley, one of 13 distinct ecological regions within Massachusetts. The marble and limestone substrate provides a calcium-rich soil that harbors calcareous wetland plant communities found nowhere else in the state.

It is also the reason that limestone and marble mining operations were so successful here. Limestone bedrock is readily seen from Card Pond beach, where blasting of rock was done to construct the Massachusetts Turnpike (Fig. ____).

The Harvey Mountain region of West Stockbridge Town belongs to the Taconic Mountains ecoregion, part of a larger geological region that extends along the Massachusetts/New York State border. Metamorphic bedrock here is more resistant to weathering than the marble/limestone found elsewhere in the Town.

About 85% of the geographic area of West Stockbridge is in the general soil association of Amenia-Pittsfield-Farmington soil classification. The remainder of the land is associated with Harvey Mountain and is in Taconic-Macomber-Lanesboro type soils. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Survey describes the association as follows:

Fig. ____ Former Marble Quarry, located within Turnpark Artspace.



Source: Bob Salerno, W. Stockbridge Historical Society.

Amenia-Pittsfield-Farmington - This soil has characteristics that incorporate both very deep areas and shallow ones. It is moderately drained and somewhat excessively drained. The lay of the land usually is flat to very steep. These upland loamy soils are formed in glacial till derived from limestone.

Taconic-Macomber-Lanesboro - This soil is moderately deep to very deep being somewhat excessively drained and well drained. It is found on uplands where land is gently sloping to very steep. The soils are loamy and are formed by glacial till derived from phyllite, slate, and shale.⁶ The Soils map illustrates that the soils of much of West Stockbridge are excessively drained. These soils tend to be shallow and are located along steeply sloped areas along the hills that line the eastern border, along the Maple Hill complex in the middle to town, and along the hills that line the western border. The land use on most of these areas is forest cover, which currently minimizes the potential for serious erosion problems. Fortunately, much of the steeply sloped lands along Harvey, Maple Hill and Tom Ball Mountains are permanently protected from development, but the highlands along the Town's northern and eastern are less protected. Any trail systems that are proposed for steep slopes will need to be carefully sighted and designed to avoid erosion and sedimentation into streams and other wetland resources.

Slopes that are 25% or greater create some real limitations to most activities mostly because of the heavy economic and environmental costs. Slopes with grades between 15-25% also pose limitations, for the soils can be highly susceptible to erosion, prone to excess surface runoff, or have bedrock that lies near the surface. Much harm can be done to springs and streams that neighbors could be relying on for water when new construction of a new home or a logging operation is done in West Stockbridge. Laying hiking or biking trails on steep slope require careful planning, design and maintenance to avoid erosion and sedimentation of downgradient wetland resources and other sensitive habitats. For development or other disturbances that will be proposed on lands that are higher than 1,500 feet in elevation will need to be reviewed and permitting under the Town's Berkshire Scenic Mountains Act regulations.

⁶ *Soil Survey of Berkshire County MA 1988*

Vast expanses of poorly drained, hydric soils exist in the Baldwin Brook wetland complex that is located in the northern section of the town, and along the Williams River. These mostly exist where there is a large amount of wetland and flowing water. These

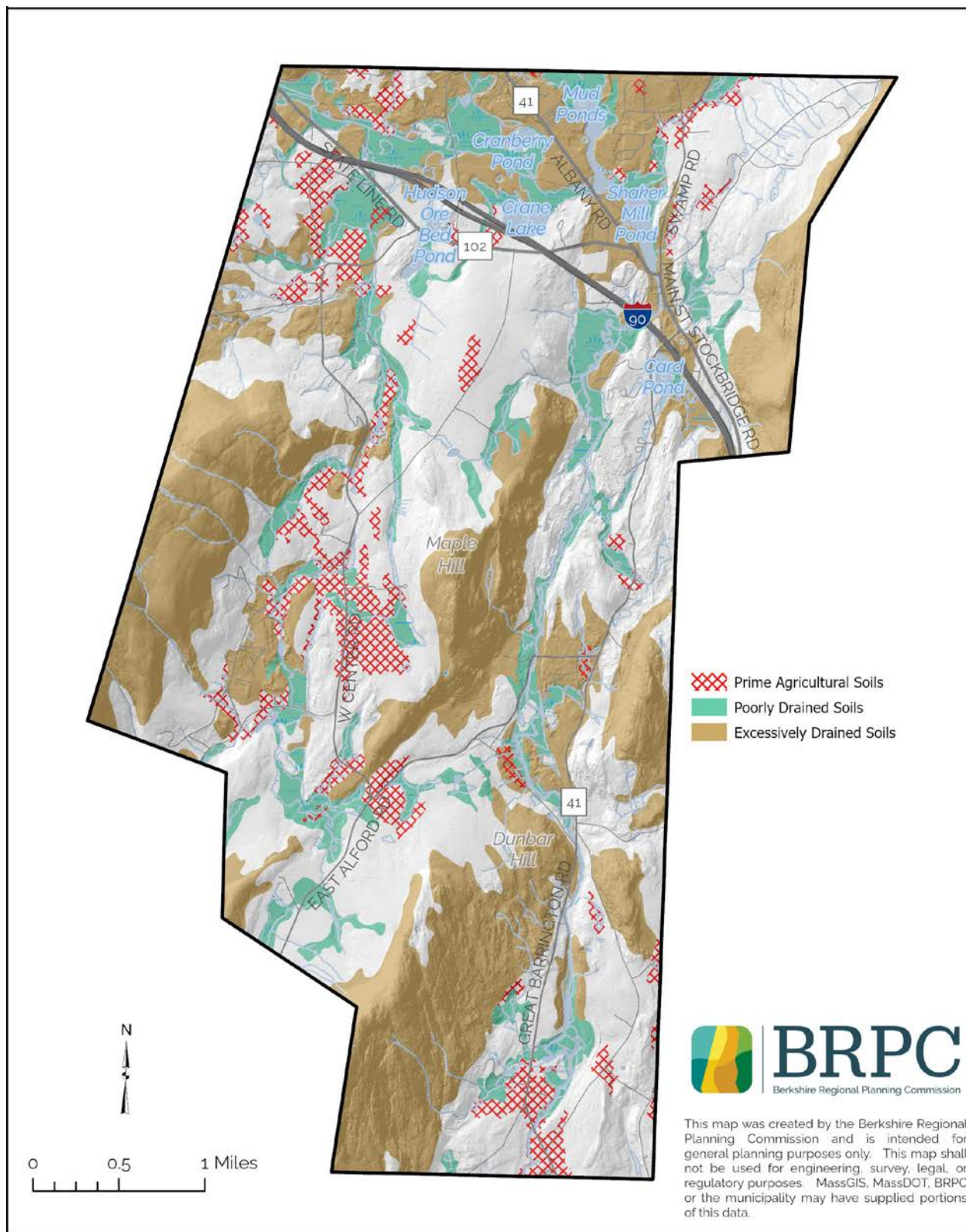
The Town also hosts some prime agricultural soils and today the remaining farms in the town remain in some of these areas. Prime agricultural soils are those that have been determined to have combination of physical and chemical characteristics for economically producing sustained high yields of food, feed, forage, and crops, when managed according to acceptable farming methods. Development should be directed away from areas with these underlying soils so that agricultural production can be maintained or expanded for use by future generations.

French Cave, also known as Eldon's Cave, is the longest cave in New England and, according to a 1974 publication, the second longest cave in the United States. At 950 feet long, the cave is a national and regional geologic treasure. The cave is located on private land and visitation is not welcome.

West Stockbridge has a long history of mining. An inventory of mining operations in 1956 listed a number of mines and quarries in the town, including five iron ore mines and two marble quarries. Today, the only quarry still in operation is the John S. Lane quarry, a large open gravel operation which produces crushed stone and gravel products for commercial construction.

DRAFT

Fig. 4.1. Soils



4.2 Landscape Character

West Stockbridge is a pastoral community with open rolling hills, forested valleys, cool waters, and rugged mountains. Several mountain summits reach to over 1,800 feet. Harvey Mountain is 2,057 feet in elevation, Tom Ball Mountain is 1,930 feet and Stockbridge Mountain is 1,826 feet. The lowest points average 930 feet in the north and 760 feet in the south. Such a wide variety of landscape elevations and the difficulty in developing the landscape provides for widespread biological and ecological resources. The restricted access to West Stockbridge has kept the town exceptionally rural and sparsely populated.

- Lowest point – 748' at the Town line with Great Barrington on Williams River
- Highest Point – 2,057' at the NY state line on Harvey Mountain.
- Old Forest data – 5,153 acres of forested land in 1840's around Harvey Mountain, Tom Ball Mountain, Maple Hill, West Stockbridge Mountain, and a scattering of smaller sites.

4.3 Water Resources

Watersheds

All of West Stockbridge is located within the Housatonic River Watershed. The majority of the Town lies within two main watersheds. The majority of the town, approximately 8,277 acres (69% of the Town), lies within the Williams River watershed. Many of the headwaters begin in Richmond, with the exception of Baldwin Brook, which flows north and east, through a series of wetlands and through Shaker Mill Pond, to join the Williams River. The Williams River eventually joins the Housatonic River in Great Barrington. The headwaters of the Alford Brook, which flows into the Green River, begin in a valley between Harvey Mountain and Maple Hill, in the southwest of the town. This subwatershed consists of 2,470 acres (21% of the Town). Water flowing eastward off West Stockbridge Mountain eventually joins the Upper Mainstem of the Housatonic River in Great Barrington.

Surface Water

Numerous first and second order streams drain the West Stockbridge landscape. Baldwin Brook, Furnace Brook, and Cone Brook are tributaries of the Williams River. Scribner Brook and Tom Ball Brook are tributaries of Alford Brook, which drain into the Green River. As shown on the

Water Features map, many of these are Cold Water Fisheries. Cone Brook and the Williams River are stocked each spring with trout.

There are several ponds located throughout West Stockbridge. Many of these are open waters associated with wetland complexes, and some are old farm ponds. These ponds are found in the Williams River and Alford Brook watersheds. A series of larger ponds are located in the northern portion of the town and are within the Williams River watershed. These ponds are listed below. Three of the ponds are ore bed ponds.

Table 4.1 - Bodies of Water

Water Body	Approx. Size in Acres	Ownership	Public Access
Crane Lake	28	State	Y
Cranberry Pond	20	State	Y
Shaker Mill Pond	20	State	Y
Cone Brook Pond	20	Private	N
Mud Pond (aka Richmond Ore Bed Pond)	19	State	Y
Card Pond	12	Town	Y
Leet Ore Bed Pond	7	Private	N
Hudson Ore Bed Pond	5	Private	N

Source: CDP, 2004, updated BRPC.

There are two medium yield aquifers (100-300 gallons per minute) in West Stockbridge. One exists under Cranberry Pond and Mud Pond and is 300.9 acres and other is under the downtown area and is 35.5 acres. The Town drinking water supply does not directly withdraw water from this aquifer, as the wells are 40-foot-deep gravel-pack wells. There are no water resources in West Stockbridge that have been designated by the state as Outstanding Waters.

The downtown area receives its drinking water supply from the West Stockbridge Public Water System (PWS ID # 1326000), which is served by a system that include a primary well and back-up well. This system serves the residents and businesses in the densely developed core downtown area, as well as Crane Lake Camp.

Drinking water for most of the town is supplied through individual groundwater wells. A portion of the most densely developed surrounding the downtown area is served by a municipal well system (refer to the Existing Infrastructure map).

Floodplain flood hazard areas comprise 1,049 acres of land along the Williams River, Alford Brook, Cone Brook, Furnace Brook, Baldwin Brook, and Flat Brook. Large floodplain areas surround the wetland complexes that are located along Baldwin Brook and the associated ponds that all flow into the Williams River in the Mud Pond / Shaker Mill Pond area in the northern section of the Town. The 100-year floodplain along Shaker Mill Pond and the Williams River is of concern in the downtown area, although no known significant flood damages are known to have occurred, certainly none within recent decades.

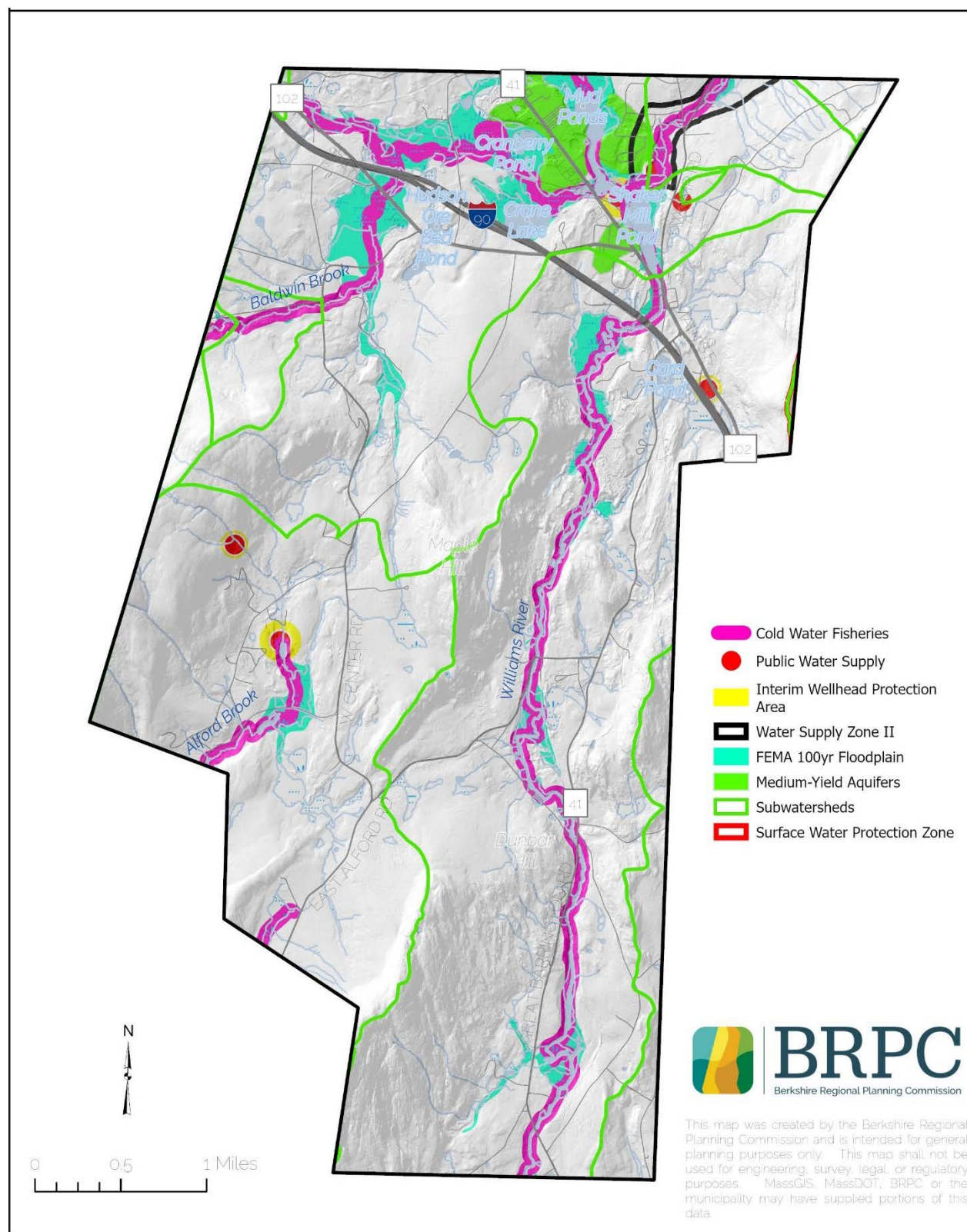
There are 18 Certified Vernal Pools and 30 Potential Vernal Pools in West Stockbridge. Vernal pools are small, shallow, temporary bodies of freshwater characterized by a lack of fish and annual or semi-annual periods of dryness. They are critical habitat for many vertebrate and invertebrate wildlife species. Most vernal pools are filled with water from early spring to mid-summer, being totally dry by late summer. Some rare insects and amphibians rely on the pool as a breeding ground and nursery. Most of these animals are terrestrial, living most of their lives in the duff of the forest floor. Adult amphibians migrate to the pool for a few days or weeks to breed and lay eggs. The young hatch and live in the pool for several weeks, hoping to complete their aquatic development before the pool dries up. Once developed they leave the pool to live a terrestrial life. Forest dwelling frogs (wood frogs, spring peepers) and salamanders (spotted, Jefferson, red-spotted and others) are typical species that rely on vernal pools to complete their life cycles. Many individuals are fiercely loyal to their natal pool, returning to and relying exclusively on the vernal pools in which they were born to breed.

Due to development, habitat alteration and forest fragmentation, the species that rely on a dwindling number of vernal pools are becoming isolated and their gene pool is becoming less diverse, making them more vulnerable to disease and life-threatening deformities. To maintain viable rare animal populations dependent on vernal pool distribution, protection of these habitats is crucial. The locations of certified and potential vernal pools are found on the Fisheries, Wildlife and Sensitive Habitats map.

Certification of a vernal pool, which involves identification and verification of the existence of certain species, can afford a certain layer of protection for the area of the vernal pool. Often the species documented as using the vernal pool are rare or endangered, thus extending rare/endangered species status over the site and the area surrounding it. Certified vernal pools are afforded some protection under the Mass. Wetland Protection Act (when located adjacent to a wetland resource area), Title 5 of the Mass. Environmental Code, Section 401 under the Federal Clean Water Act, the Mass. surface Water Quality Standards which relate to Section 401, the Mass. Forest Cutting Practices Act, and the Mass. Endangered Species Act (when a rare species is documented). Uncertified vernal pools have no protection from development.

DRAFT

Fig. 4.2. Watersheds and Water Features



Wetlands

Wetlands exist in various pockets along the Williams River. Wetland complexes also exist in the Alford Brook subwatershed, in the Baldwin Brook subwatershed and along Mud and Shaker Mill ponds. Wetlands perform important functions for wildlife and people. Wetlands are the most productive ecosystems on earth when measured by the amount of biomass or living biological tissue they support and produce. Valuable ecosystem services provided by wetlands include plant and animal habitat, flood storage and control, water purification and shoreline stabilization. The wetland complexes, nestled between forested hillsides and long open fields, help to provide a diverse range of habitats for wildlife. Because the GIS data only recognizes large wetland areas, the actual acreage of wetlands is undoubtedly higher, so the data should be used only as a rough guide. As always, wetlands can only truly be identified and quantified on the ground by a person knowledgeable in the field.

Table 4.2. - Wetlands

Classification	Acreage
Deep marsh	118.18
Open water	173.08
Shallow marsh meadow or fen	101.33
Shrub swamp	410.79
Wooded swamp coniferous	3.38
Wooded swamp deciduous	176.15
Wooded swamp mixed trees	64.63
Total	1,047.54

Source: MassGIS MassDEP Wetlands 2017

4.4 Vegetation

Forest cover is the most dominant land use within West Stockbridge, covering approximately 8,933 acres, which is 73% of the Town. The deciduous forests cover 44% of the town and are generally composed of northern hardwood trees, including birch, beech, and maple. Evergreen forest communities tend to be found along the ridgelines and steeper slopes of Harvey, Maple Hill and Tom Ball Mountains. **INSERT PUBLIC SHADE TREES HERE**

Approximately 1,048 acres of land (9% of total area) within the Town are wetlands, some of which are open water and some of which are forested wetlands. Plants within the open water, marshes and swamps are generally a mix of submergent and emergent plants, including a mix of cattails and various shrubs, such as red osier dogwood and willows. The openness and plant variety provide a diverse habitat and source of food for local wildlife. Wetland areas, because of their openness and wet soils, often provide the first green growth of spring, an important source of food for wildlife after a long hard winter.

West Stockbridge is located within the Western New England Marble Valleys ecological region of Massachusetts. This is one of the most distinct and biologically rich ecosystems in the Northeast, supporting high a high percentage of the Massachusetts' state-listed species and Priority Natural Communities, some of which are not found outside this region. Areas of Rich Mesic Forests, a forest with moist soils and abundant nutrients, often supporting rare plant species.

Rare and Exemplary Plants

As noted in NHESP's document *Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts, West Stockbridge* (2011), West Stockbridge forests hosts three types of state-designated Exemplary Natural Communities and three types of state-designated Priority Natural Communities (see Table 4.3.). Exemplary Natural Communities are those plant communities that represent the best examples documented of relatively common natural plant communities. The Exemplary communities in West Stockbridge tend to be located on mountain ridgetops or in steep ravines. Priority Natural Communities are those plant communities with limited distribution, or relatively few occurrences, and/or low acreages in Massachusetts. Vulnerable plant communities have 21-100 sites or limited acreage across Massachusetts. Imperiled communities typically have 6-20 sites or few remaining acres left in the state. Both Exemplary and Priority plant communities are found in areas within West Stockbridge that have been designated as BioMap2 Core Habitat (see hatched areas on the Vegetative Cover Map).

Table 4.3. Exemplary and Priority Natural Communities

Community Type	Designation	Vulnerability
Acidic Rocky Summit/Rock Outcrop	Exemplary Natural Community	Secure
Ridgetop Chestnut Oak Forest/Woodland	Exemplary Natural Community	Secure
Hemlock Ravine	Exemplary Natural Community	Secure
Hickory Hop Hornbeam Forest/Woodland	Priority Natural Community	Imperiled
Rich, Mesic Forest (Priority)	Priority Natural Community	Vulnerable
Ridgetop Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak Community	Priority Natural Community	Imperiled

Source: MassGIS NHESP Natural Communities 2016; NHESP 2011.

The Tom Ball Mountain region is an area especially rich in unusual natural plant communities of interest, hosting all three Exemplary Natural Communities as well as an Imperiled Ridgetop Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak Community. The Harvey Mountain region hosts an Imperiled Hickory Hop Hornbeam Forest/Woodland Community. The Williams River Valley supports a Vulnerable Rich, Mesic Forest Community, where moist, nutrient-rich soils support diverse herbaceous plants along the forest floor. This community is recovering and thriving from past logging disturbance.

In addition to hosting uncommon plant communities, 32 species of rare and uncommon plant species have been documented to live in West Stockbridge. State-listed species are those that are listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act and its accompanying regulations. Both plants and animal rare are categorized as:

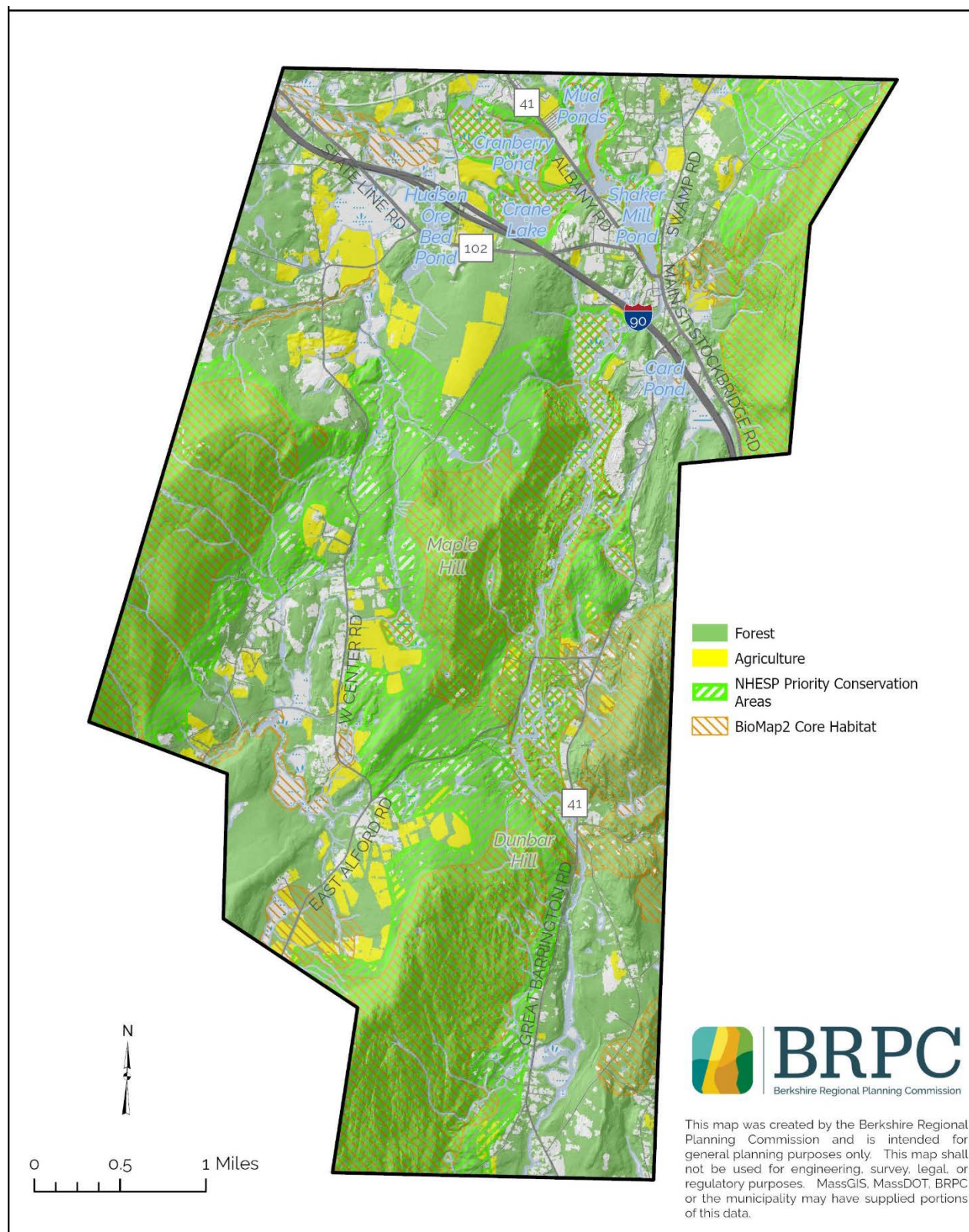
- Endangered – species that are in danger of extinction through all or a significant portion of their range or are in danger of extirpation from Massachusetts.
- Threatened – species likely to become Endangered in the state in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.
- Special Concern – species that meet the criteria for listing under the Mass. Endangered Species Act, as well as those that do not meet this criteria for listing but are considered to be of conservation concern within Massachusetts.

Table 4.4. State-listed Plant Species Documented in West Stockbridge

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Observation
Arborvitae	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020
Autumn Coral-root	<i>Corallorhiza odontorhiza</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1980
Bristly Black Currant	<i>Ribes lacustre</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2009
Bristly Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus pensylvanicus</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1919
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1919
Climbing Fumitory	<i>Adlumia fungosa</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019
Clustered Sanicle	<i>Sanicula odorata</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1989
Crep	<i>Crepidomames intricatum</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019
Dioecious Sedge	<i>Carex sterilis</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	2003
Downy Arrow-wood	<i>Viburnum rafinesqueanum</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2009
Downy Wood-mint	<i>Blephilia ciliata</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2016
Fen Cuckoo-flower	<i>Cardamine dentata</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1919
Fen Sedge	<i>Carex tetanica</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2010
Fries' Pondweed	<i>Potamogeton friesii</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2005
Gattinger's Panic-grass	<i>Panicum philadelphicum</i> ssp. <i>gattingeri</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1919
Hairy Beard-tongue	<i>Penstemon hirsutus</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1902
Hairy Wood-mint	<i>Blephilia hirsuta</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2017
Hemlock-parsley	<i>Conioselinum chinense</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019
Hill's Pondweed	<i>Potamogeton hillii</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2005
Hitchcock's Sedge	<i>Carex hitchcockiana</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1986
Labrador Bedstraw	<i>Galium labradoricum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1999
Long-leaved Bluet	<i>Houstonia longifolia</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2010
Lyre-leaved Rock-cress	<i>Arabidopsis lyrata</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2009
Matted Spike-sedge	<i>Eleocharis intermedia</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1985
Nodding Chickweed	<i>Cerastium nutans</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1919
Purple Clematis	<i>Clematis occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2016
Round-leaved Shadbush	<i>Amelanchier sanguinea</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1987
Schweinitz's Sedge	<i>Carex schweinitzii</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1980
Slender Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum gracile</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1990
Smooth Rock-cress	<i>Boechera laevigata</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019
Wild Senna	<i>Senna hebecarpa</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1916
Woodland Millet	<i>Milium effusum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	2008

Source: NHESP, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>; downloaded 3-12-22

Fig. 4.3. Vegetative Cover and Priority Conservation Areas



Public Shade Trees

Mature trees along West Stockbridge roadways and in parks and cemeteries contribute to the Town's rural character, adding complexity and depth to private and commercial properties. Additionally, they provide cooling shade for pedestrians.

Long-time residents remember when large mature elm trees were featured in the downtown area. Fig. shows the north end of Main Street, with a signature elm tree on the west side and a mix of trees on the east side of the road. Some of the large shade trees at the Town Offices building must be at least 80 years old, as older residents remember them as young trees when the building served as the Town's school in the late 1940s.

Fig. __. View of the North section of Main Street



Source: Cover of the Annual Report of the Town Officers of the Town of West Stockbridge, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2021.

Red maples on Main Street – becoming weakened. WHO oversaw a project to trim the branches back and rebuild the area round the root system to promote long-term health.

INSERT TREE WALK HERE

Public shade trees are defined as trees located along the roadways within the public right of way and are regulated by Massachusetts General Law Chapter 87. This law outlines the authorities of the Town's Tree Warden, establishes procedures for cutting or removing public shade trees, and sets penalties for violations. The cutting and maintenance of trees along town-owned roads can only occur by first holding a public hearing, or gaining approval from the Town's Select Board, or in the case of locally designated Scenic Roads, the Town's Planning Board. At this time there are no local Scenic Roads West Stockbridge. Trees located along state highways are the jurisdiction of MassDOT, and do not require a public hearing to be cut, unless the cutting is part of a large improvement project.

4.5 Fisheries and Wildlife

Rural West Stockbridge is home to a wide variety of rare, uncommon and common wildlife species. Popular game species such as white-tailed deer, black bear, and many waterfowl species are commonly found throughout the Town. Viewing wildlife can be done for most residents in their backyard or just a short walking distance away. Several West Stockbridge streams are designated as Cold-water Fisheries, including the Williams River and Alford, Cone, Furnace, Baldwin, and Flat Brooks. Cold water fisheries are a particular category of streams, rivers and lakes that provide habitat for aquatic species that require cold water temperatures, of which our Brook trout is the most well-known. Brook trout become stressed and may die when water temperatures rise even a few degrees. Maintaining shaded forest cover along stream corridors is essential to maintaining colder temperatures. The Williams River supports wild trout populations and is also stocked with trout by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) in the spring.

BioMap2 is a state-wide biodiversity conservation plan developed by the NHESP and The Nature Conservancy. It was developed to help state and local conservation efforts by focusing land protection and stewardship efforts on the areas most critical to the long-term survival of rare and other native species and their habitats, exemplary natural communities, and a diversity of ecosystems. Using *BioMap2* as a background, NHESP created a report for each town in the Commonwealth to be used as stand-alone documents containing all the necessary information to understand the biodiversity of each individual town.

Additional *BioMap2* planning reports were generated for towns within the Housatonic River Watershed, including West Stockbridge. Intensive and comprehensive ecological field studies were undertaken, focusing on state-listed species and priority natural communities then known to occur throughout the watershed. Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) were delineated based on the findings of this effort and each town's plan included priorities and recommendations for habitat protection in each town within the Housatonic River Watershed.

As noted in NHESP's BioMap2 document *Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts, West Stockbridge*, (2011), the Town is known to harbor several rare and uncommon wildlife species, many linked to the calcareous marshlands along Flat Brook and the floodplain forests along the Williams River. These areas provide habitat and breeding areas for the elusive American Bittern, the Wood Turtle and the rare Jefferson Salamander.

There are 11 state-listed animal species that have documented to occur in West Stockbridge. Most of the species rely on aquatic or wetland habitats, which makes the protection of these habitats a high priority. Fortunately, many of these water resources are located within the state-protected Flat Brook, Maple Hill and Williams River Wildlife Management Areas, which protects their immediate uplands from being developed. However, the lands along the southern portion of the Williams River where it flows along the eastern portion of Great Barrington Road (Rt. 41), is not protected. Strict adherence to the Wetlands Protection Act during development can help to minimize impacts to water quality and wildlife habitat. Additionally, the Town can develop policies to encourage developers to minimize land disturbance at new construction sites.

Table 4.5. State-listed Animal Species Documented in West Stockbridge

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Observation
Little Brown Bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Mammal	Endangered	2000
Northern Long-eared Bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Mammal	Endangered	2000
Tricolored Bat	<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>	Mammal	Endangered	1986
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Bird	Endangered	2008
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	Bird	Endangered	1973
Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Reptile	Special Concern	2013
Jefferson Salamander (complex)	<i>Ambystoma jeffersonianum</i>	Amphibian	Special Concern	2010
Bridle Shiner	<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Fish	Special Concern	2014
Longnose Sucker	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Fish	Special Concern	1980
Creeper	<i>Strophitus undulatus</i>	Mussel	Special Concern	1999
Harpoon Clubtail	<i>Phanogomphus descriptus</i>	Dragonfly/Damselfly	Endangered	2018

Source: NHESP, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>; downloaded 3-12-22

There are two categories of rare species habitat. Development that occurs within these two categories must undergo a higher degree of local and state review than development occurring elsewhere.

Priority Habitat is the delineated habitats for rare plants and animals protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. These areas indicate the approximate extent of rare species habitat based on records in the NHESP database. As can be seen in the Unique Features map, the areas where rare species have been documented tend to be in the lowlands and wetland areas, particularly surrounding the ponds in the northern portion of West Stockbridge and along the Williams River valley. Large wetland habitat areas are protected within the Flat Brook and Maple Hill Wildlife Management Areas, but as can be seen on the map, large expanses of rare species habitat along the Williams River corridor and along Great Barrington Road (Rt. 41) are unprotected from development. Rare species are also documented along the ridgelines of West Stockbridge Mountain and the mountains along the West Stockbridge/Stockbridge town boundary. Priority Habitat maps should be used in conjunction with the rare species threshold under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) regulations [301 CMR 11.03(2)]. For MEPA review, all project occurring in Priority Habitat on a site of two acres or greater should be sent to NHESP for review of rare species impacts.

Estimated Habitat delineates the approximate geographical extend of habitats of state protected rare animals (not plants) and indicate approximate locations of certified vernal pools for use with the Wetland Protection Act (310 CMR 10.00) regulations and the Forest Cutting Practices Act (304 CMR 11.00). If a development project requires the filing of a Notice of Intent (NOI) and falls within an Estimated Habitat, the NOI must be received by NHESP within two days of the filing of the NOI to the local Conservation Commission. Project developers are strongly encouraged to conduct wildlife habitat evaluations, conducted by qualified biologists, to aid NHESP in their permit decisions.

The identity of the rare and endangered species within each habitat location area is not publicized in order to protect the individual plants and animals living there. Wild species

collectors have been known to hunt for rare species where their specific locations have been publicized.

The Massachusetts Endangered Species Act prohibits the "taking" of any rare plant or animal species listed as Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern by the state Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. "Taking" is defined under the act as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, hound, kill, trap, capture, collect, process, disrupt the nesting, breeding, feeding or migratory activity of an animal or to collect, pick, kill, transplant, cut or process a plant. Permits for taking rare species for scientific, educational conservation, or management purposes can be granted through the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Permits for taking rare species during development projects can also be granted, but only after the developer has proven to NHESP that there is no feasible way that the development can be changed to accommodate the plant or animal involved.

The DFW has documented a Northern Long-eared Bat Winter Hibernaculum site along the Williams River corridor. Hibernacula are caves and old mines where the bats hibernate during the winter. This bat species is listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. Federal and state regulations prohibit the taking of these bats, including prohibiting any incidental take that results from tree removal if the project occurs within 1/4 -mile radius of known northern long-eared bat hibernacula sites.

Corridors

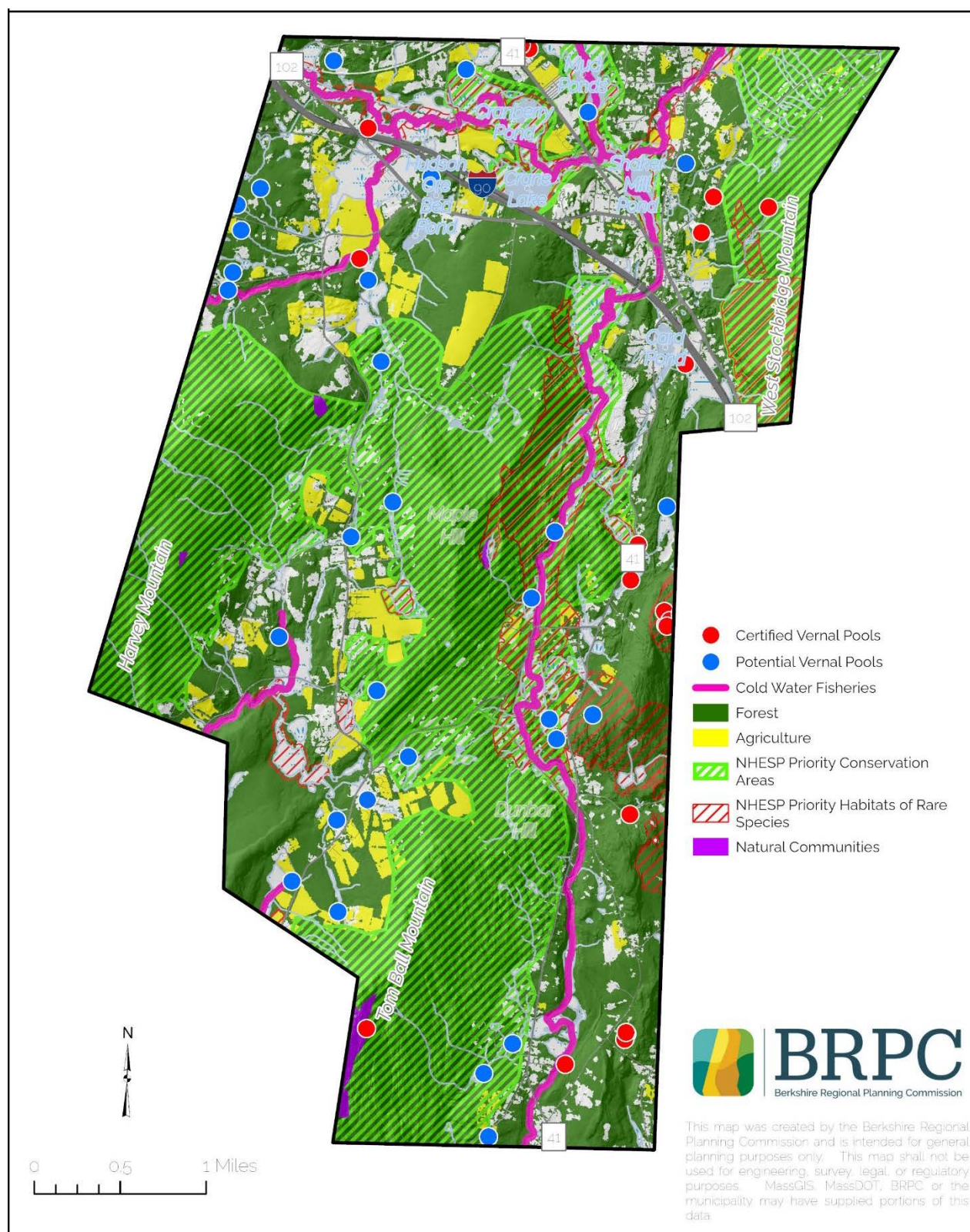
Corridors between habitat areas are important for maintaining biodiversity within the many ecosystems within West Stockbridge. While much of the land is undeveloped and undoubtedly provide habitat and cover for movement for many wildlife species, it is important that corridors between habitats are protected to ensure the richness of biota for future generations. The most important corridors should be those that connect rare species habitat and vernal pools in close proximity.

As can be seen in the Fisheries, Wildlife and Sensitive Habitats map, large undeveloped portions of West Stockbridge are categorized by NHESP as Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). These

areas have been determined as important to the survival of the rare species that live in core habitat. It may be unrealistic to protect all the lands highlighted as PCAs, so it may be more important to identify and protect buffer zones around key habitat areas and vernal pools and create corridors that link those sensitive habitats. For instance, a realistic approach may be to investigate potential vernal pool sites, determine which harbor rare species, and investigate opportunities to create protective buffer zones and corridors between them and neighboring rare species habitats. The tributary stream that runs to the east of West Center Road into Baldwin Brook is known rare species habitat. It also has several sites that have been identified as potential vernal pools. In addition, this area is one of the most scenic areas within the town.

In addition, the core habitat abuts and could connect to land managed by DFW. Pursuing some type of protection from development for this area would serve many interests, including protection of rare species, preservation of agricultural landscapes, and increase the public's opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Fig. 4.4. Fisheries, Wildlife and Sensitive Habitats



4.6 Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

Scenic Landscapes

The process of assessing scenic quality is inherently subjective. Several factors are considered when assessing the scenic qualities of a long-range vista or a roadway corridor. Long-range vistas are more breathtaking when they contain both an expansive field of view and depth of view. The field of view is the horizontal width of the view, while the depth of view is how far away one can see. Contrast and focal points are elements that add interest to what is being seen. Contrast is the differences seen in the vista, such as landscape differences seen when light green and yellow farm fields lay at the foot of darker green forested mountains. Focal points are elements in the landscape that draw the eye. They can be visually enhancing, such as a red barn nestled amid farm fields, or they can be visually intrusive, such as out-of-scale residential development set amidst an otherwise rural setting.

West Center Road is arguably the most scenic corridor in town. The road travels north-south along gentle hills through a mix of open farm fields and forest. Dominant local mountains line the corridor, with Harvey Mountain to the west and Maple Hill and Tom Ball Mountain to the east. The fields along the roadside cut into the forest, opening up panoramic views that stretch for miles. Often, the landscape that opens is a mix of farm fields, farm ponds and wetlands, set against a backdrop of dark forested hillsides. Long-range views of distant peaks, such as West Stockbridge and Lenox mountains, loom behind the local foothills. The farm fields along the roadside remind us of West Stockbridge's agricultural past, and provide us with light green fields, mixed with the yellow, whites and pinks of wildflowers, set against the darker greens and dark blues of the forested hillsides. The ponds and wetlands dot the fields below us, and the shrubs and reeds associated with these waterbodies add variety and color to our view. Our eyes are drawn the most to the white farmhouses and red barns, as they are the center of this picture, this live painting. This corridor was noted in a state-wide landscape inventory conducted in 1981. This inventory focused on the "finest, most intact regions of scenic quality" in the Commonwealth. Scenic features such as landform, vegetation, surface water bodies and land use were used to rank scenic vistas as Distinctive, Noteworthy and Common. The scenery along West Center Road was ranked as either Distinctive or Noteworthy.

The scenic open viewsheds are a glimpse into the past, where pastoral scenes such as these were once the staple of the New England landscape. However, this historic landscape is threatened with development. Residential housing is already occurring along this corridor, interrupting the countryside with large homes. The real estate market for second homes in the Berkshires will continue to boom, the Town's close proximity to affluent populations in the New York metro area and the relatively inexpensive price of land (as compared to land in more urbanized areas of the Northeast). The demand for rural lands is expected to remain high as long as the economy and the stock market remain in flux.

Some of the lands that characterize the West Center Road corridor are protected from development, particularly those of the Baldwin and Fadding Farms which are protected by Agricultural Preservation Restrictions. Other large expanses of agricultural lands are enrolled in the Chapter 61 tax abatement programs, which offer limited protection from immediate development. Although development of these lands would include the paying of back taxes saved on the lands which in the Chapter 61 program, the high price and demand for rural residential sites means that these lands are still attractive sites for high-end residential development.

Another place with outstanding views is along Baker Street. The openness of fields and expansive wetlands allows for country scenery along the roadway while allowing long-range views of distant hills.

Unique Environments

West Stockbridge has a variety of landscapes, including rolling hills and lush valleys. The undulating terrain and the hillside farm fields provide panoramic views of the wetland-dotted valleys and the forested peaks of nearby mountains.

West Stockbridge has a large amount of undeveloped land and a diverse natural landscape. As a result, the town has many unique natural environments that support a wide variety of wildlife, including rare plant and animal species. Approximately 2,696 acres, (24%) of the town is classified by the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as Core Habitat and 5,465 acres (49%) as Supporting Natural Landscape. Core Habitats are areas that are known to support rare species and to provide important suitable soil conditions, cover, food, and breeding

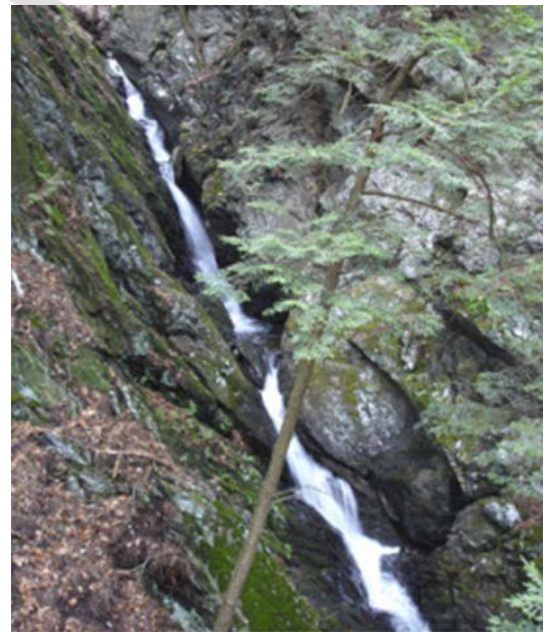
areas. These areas represent the highest priority areas for biodiversity conservation and protection. Supporting Natural Landscapes are areas in contiguous or in close proximity to Core Habitats. These landscapes can buffer Core Habitat and provide adequate land mass and connecting corridors to allow rare species to migrate or disperse as needed for the survival of the species. These landscapes are important in that they may contain rare species populations not yet recorded.

Core Habitat tends to be located along the Williams River and Baldwin Brook, and these areas coincide with identified rare species habitat. Core habitat is also found in the large wetland complex west of north of the turnpike, near the wetland southwest of Maple Hill. Core Habitat also exists on many of the highest elevations, including along the hills east of the Rockdale Cemetery and Tom Ball Mountain, and on ridgelines in Harvey Mountain. Refer to the Fisheries, Wildlife and Sensitive Habitats map for more precise locations. Supporting natural landscapes cover much of the town, surrounding and connecting known rare species habitat areas existing along the Williams River, Maple Hill and Harvey Mountain.

There are 20 Certified Vernal Pools and 30 Potential Vernal Pools in West Stockbridge. Vernal pools are small, shallow ponds characterized by a lack of fish and annual or semi-annual periods of dryness. Vernal pool habitats are extremely important to a variety of wildlife species, including some amphibians that breed exclusively in vernal pools, and other organisms that spend their entire life cycles confined to such locales.

Stevens Glen is a jagged cleft of gray-green rock through which Lenox Mountain Brook cascades through crags and pitches to the level landscape far below. Trees grow tenaciously out of the sides of the ravine. Here are glades that are deep with large, old trees. A constructed viewing platform allow visitors to safely enjoy this little waterfall hidden deep in a dark forest setting.

Fig. Waterfall in Stevens Glenn

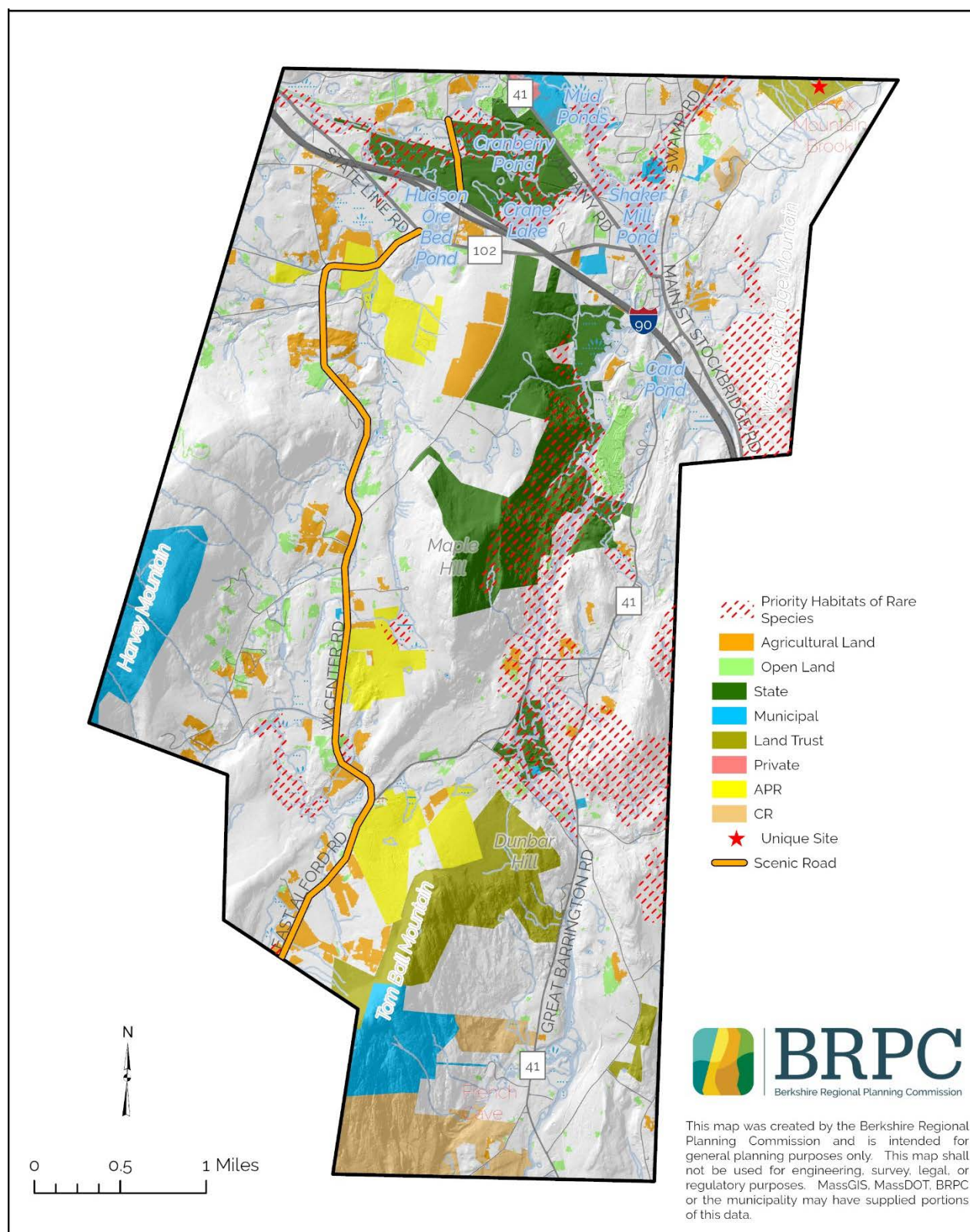


Source: BNRC, 2022.

French Cave, also known as Eldon's Cave, is the longest cave in New England and, according to a 1974 publication, the second longest cave in the United States. The cave is located in the southern portion of the Town on private land and visitation is discouraged. The cave may offer bat habitat, and due to White Nose Syndrome the populations of most bats have been decimated. All bat species in the state are listed as endangered, which makes this site under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. For these reasons the location of the cave is not shown on the Unique Features Map.

DRAFT

Fig. 4.5. Unique Features



4.7 Environmental Challenges

Hazardous Waste Sites

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) keeps track of hazardous waste sites, which range in scope from simple spills that happen during a fuel oil delivery to complex Superfund sites. The most commonly triggered notification criterion is the sudden spill of more than 10 gallons of a petroleum product. According to the DEP, there are no federal hazardous waste sites in West Stockbridge. However, since 1987 there have been 41 Reportable Releases of hazardous chemicals, many of which consist of oil spills. According to the DEP database, at all these sites remedial work has been completed or is within the administrative oversight process. Nineteen of the sites were along the Massachusetts Turnpike or at the interchange, most likely involving accidents in which there was a petroleum spill. The complete list of these sites can be found at <https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/portal#!/search/wastesite>. There are no Tier-classified hazardous waste sites in West Stockbridge.⁷

Groundwater Pollution

Approximately 70% of residents in West Stockbridge are served by their own private septic systems. Improperly functioning septic systems can contaminate groundwater sources, including nearby well systems, as well as surface waters. Under state Title 5 regulations septic systems must be inspected and functioning properly during real estate sales. The Commonwealth offers tax credits (maximum \$6,000) for primary residences and low interest loans through a few select local banks.

In its annual letter to residents in the 2021-2022 West Stockbridge Annual Report, the Health Department states that Title 5 septic system percolation tests were failing at a higher rate than any previous year. Also, again this year nearly 75% of the systems inspected failed with most installed in the 1980's or earlier. The letter reminded residents with on-site septic systems to have their septic tanks pumped out every two to three years, regardless of age. Also, voluntary inspections are recommended for older systems to reveal their condition and present the

⁷ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-massdep-tier-classified-oil-and-or-hazardous-material-sites-mgl-c-21e>

opportunity to take corrective action before costly replacement becomes necessary. At this time there have been no reports of drinking water supplies or wetland resources being degraded by failing septic systems.

Landfills

The Massachusetts DEP tracks solid waste diversion and disposal (landfills). There are two landfills in West Stockbridge. One is the West Stockbridge Transfer Station on Day Farm Road and the other is the West Stockbridge Landfill on Oak Street. The West Stockbridge Landfill property, approximately five acres in size. The capped but unlined landfill area, approximately one acre in size, is occasionally mowed to keep it in a grassed or meadow condition. The landfill is inactive.

Chronic Flooding

The Town currently drafted its first Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, and in that plan it was noted that some parts of the densely-developed downtown mixed-use area is within 100-year floodplain. Fortunately, no significant flood damages have struck this area within the 20th or 21st century. There are approximately 2.5 miles of Town roadways within the 100-year floodplain.

In 2021 the Town of West Stockbridge retained the services of the Housatonic Valley Association to inventory and assess all of its a road-stream crossings to identify barriers to fish and wildlife passage and flood risk. Data collected was in partnership with the Northeast Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative and the University of Connecticut's Civil and Environmental Engineering Department. The results of their study found the top five road stream crossings at risk for flooding were located on Great Barrington Road (2), Cobb Road, West Alford Road, and Baker Street. In addition, their study highlighted nine areas for the Town to prioritize: Wilson Road, Baker Street, Smith Road, West Alford Road (2), Cross Road, Great Barrington Road, Lenox Road, and West Center Road. Causes of flood risk included beaver activity, flooding issues, culvert size, erosion, and stormwater issues. The inventory represented the first step towards developing a comprehensive road-stream crossing management plan that will improve stream habitat connectivity and reduce flood risk. It is being used as a tool in capital planning and budgeting, ranking maintenance priorities and grant opportunities, and outlining flood recovery operations.

The road-stream crossing on Baker Street over Flat Brook floods periodically and is a barrier to aquatic wildlife movement. Improving this site would have great ecological benefits, as this stream connects the vast wetlands and rare species habitats on both sides of the road. As of 2022 Trout Unlimited is providing technical assistance to better understand the issues at this site and provide options for improving aquatic connectivity and reducing flood risk.

According to the draft Hazard Mitigation Plan, there are no private properties that have filed repetitive flood damage claims with the National Flood Insurance Program.

Erosion and Sedimentation

According to the recently FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan and Town officials, there are no areas within West Stockbridge where severe erosion of streambank or riverbank occurs. Some erosion occurs along the Towns along its road system during severe storm events, finding catastrophic rainfall events to be the most challenging. A source of sedimentation are unpaved roadways, particularly those on steeply sloped areas, which the Town repair on an as-needed basis.

Development Impact

The rural character of West Stockbridge has not given way to large-scale development. Commercial development in the last decade has been minor in scale. Residential development is scattered along roadways and the Town has little control due to state Approval Not Required policies. As noted in Section 3, the majority of new development has been in the form of second homes located on large lots. While these homes are not numerous, they tend to have larger footprints and are more recently being built in areas of steep slope. They are also often set far back from the road with large lawns, disrupting wildlife habitat and corridors by fragmenting forest coverage. The Town has adopted the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act, which will give it more discretion in how development occurs in higher elevations.

Because vernal pools are only prominently noticeable part of the year when they hold water, these vital habitats are extremely vulnerable to being destroyed by and development. Much of the development in the Berkshires, is occurring by clearing forest lands. The most effective way to protect vernal pools is to identify and certify them. The certification affords the pools and

their surrounding area some protection from development. Vernal pools that are associated with Wetland Resources, such as riverfront or forested wetlands, are afforded some protection by the Mass. Wetland Protection Act. However, small, isolated pools not associated with a Wetland Resource are not protected by the Act.

Aquatic habitats and their surrounding riparian and floodplain areas are some of our most biologically productive areas, hosting a disproportionately higher number of rare species than corresponding uplands. They provide breeding habitat for reptiles and amphibians who need both water and land to fulfill their life cycles and provide resiliency against the impacts of climate change. Yet only 13% of the Housatonic River's riparian area in Berkshire County is permanently protected from development (BRPC, 2014). A large percentage of riparian habitat has already been developed over past centuries for agricultural, industrial, and residential uses. The Wetlands Protection Act provides some protection from development within 200 feet of streams and rivers, but development is not prohibited entirely from this area.

As noted on the Fisheries, Wildlife and Sensitive Habitats and Unique Feathers maps, Priority Habitats of Rare Species is found along the Williams River corridor and the land upgradient of it. Although the Maple Hill Wildlife Management Area protects a good portion of the contributing upper watershed from development, there is clearly a lot of rare species habitat that remains unprotected. Conservation efforts should focus on expanding protections along the north-south river corridor and creating conserved habitats for east-west wildlife movement. The maps and guidance developed by NHESP showing known rare species locations can be helpful in prioritizing key areas.

Surface water pollution (point and nonpoint)

Long-time residents remember a time when decades ago pipes discharged raw sewage directly into the Williams River from homes and businesses in downtown area. A group of local conservationists, the Friends of the Williams River, conducted water quality sampling and documented bacterial contamination due to these pipes and a few failing septic systems. This effort led to improvements that reduced the contamination and made the river safer for human activity.

Nonpoint source pollution is the number one threat to water quality in the US, according to the EPA. Stormwater runoff is generated from developed sites that have removed natural vegetative cover without proper controls and from roadways.

Stormwater drainage at the town beach at Card Pond may be impacting the water quality of the outlet stream from the pond. Stormwater runoff from Great Barrington Road and from the beach parking lot is channeled untreated into a storm drain located below the spillway at the outlet. The paved swales are lined with sand, leaves and mud. The leaves are so thick that they are currently clogging the storm grate. Pollution from the road and parking lot can adhere to the sediment and leaf debris, and this sediment can be a major conduit for phosphorus, bacteria, petrochemicals, and some heavy metals. To minimize road and parking lot pollution, the swales and storm drain should be cleaned out early each spring. If this area is improved in the future, some type of treatment, at a minimum deep sump catch basins, should be installed.

Impaired Water Bodies

None of the streams, rivers or ponds in West Stockbridge are listed as Impaired in the DEP's Draft Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act, 2018-2020 Reporting Cycle. No shut down of the Card Pond Beach has occurred due to bacterial contamination in recent years.

Invasive Species

The forest, fields and wetland resource areas are susceptible to damage from a variety of conditions, including severe weather events, drought and infestations of invasive species and pests. A relatively new but devastating threat to West Stockbridge forests is that of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a pest that is expected to ravage ash trees in the same manner that Dutch Elm Disease killed our stately elm trees. The EAB was first discovered in Massachusetts in Dalton, in 2012, and since that time it has spread to every community in Berkshire County. Infestations of the borer result in a very high mortality rate. Weakened and dead trees will become safety hazards, especially along streets, utility lines and near homes

Damages under-bark and D-shaped holes from EAB



and other structures. Coordination between the Highway Department and National Grid has improved in recent years, and most the dying ash that have been identified along the public roads have been taken down. Ash trees that were once common in the cemeteries are also being monitored and taken down to protect gravestones and visitors. It may be prudent for the Town to develop plans for planting young trees to replace those lost across West Stockbridge, particularly in the cemeteries and parks where trees provide shade and add character.

Invasive aquatic species are found in Card, Mud and Shaker Mill Ponds. The Town of Stockbridge has undertaken pond management programs on Card and Shaker Mill Ponds to control excessive plant growth and retain open water conditions. According to a 2011 NHESP publication, Card Pond supports one rare plant species and the waters that include Mud and Shaker Mill Ponds support three state-listed aquatic and semi-aquatic plant species and one rare marsh bird. Pond management programs that aim to control invasive species in these waters will need to identify and protect the rare species that inhabit these waters.

The Town contracted with the Solitude Lake Management consulting firm to inventory and treat excessive plant growth in these waterbodies, with an emphasis to target invasive aquatic species. The inventories of aquatic plant species included pre-treatment visual surveys to identify the distribution and density of target vegetation, both invasive and nuisance, and to determine the range and timing of treatment. Post-treatment plant surveys were conducted to determine the efficacy of the treatment. The firm conducted visual surveys of plant growth in these ponds and conducted lake management controls during 2017-2020.

According to a Solitude report dated December 2020, pre-treatment surveys of Card Pond conducted in 2020 observed sparse densities of invasive Curly-leaf pondweed and trace-to-sparse abundances of native species such as Common waterweed and various lilies. Post-treatment surveys found a moderate amount of Common waterweed, sparse amounts of Spiny naiad and algae, moderate-to-dense abundance of Stonewort, sparse abundances of lilies, and trace-to-sparse abundances of invasive Common reed were observed. No evidence of Curly-leaf pondweed was found, indicating that treatment proved successful in controlling this targeted species. The report recommended ongoing monitoring and herbicide treatments to control both invasive species and floating leaf lilies. Herbicide treatments are planned for 2022.

According to the December 2020 Solitude report, pre-treatment plant surveys of Shaker Mill Pond conducted in 2020 observed trace abundances of invasive Curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian milfoil. Moderate-to-dense abundances of Large-leaf pondweed species, Common waterweed, Ribbon-leaf pondweed, Bladderwort, and Coontail were also observed. Herbicide treatments targeting the invasive plants species was deemed successful as not evidence of Curly-leaf pondweed or Eurasian milfoil was found. Herbicides were not applied to control floating leaf plants due to very low water levels that summer. The report recommended ongoing monitoring and herbicide treatments for targeted invasive species and native species that grow to nuisance levels. Solitude also restated its recommendations that the Town consider additional management techniques in the future: survey and hand-pulling of Water chestnut and hydro-raking of lily rhizomes to control nuisance growth of floating vegetation. As of spring 2022, further herbicide applications to Shaker Mill Pond are on hold in order to conduct more detailed plant surveys in order to document and protect rare species.

5. Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

As noted in *America's Great Outdoors, A Promise to Future Generations*, outdoor recreation provides American's physical and emotional rejuvenation and promotes respect for our natural heritage. Research indicates that regular exposure to nature lowers stress, cultivates creativity, and builds self-confidence among young people. Heritage landscapes, which provide us with a sense of our cultural and agricultural past. Revenue from farms and forests support local families, some of whom have worked the land for generations. Local farms, such as Holiday Farm, also provide fresh produce and meat, while forests provide wood products, heating fuel and maple syrup.

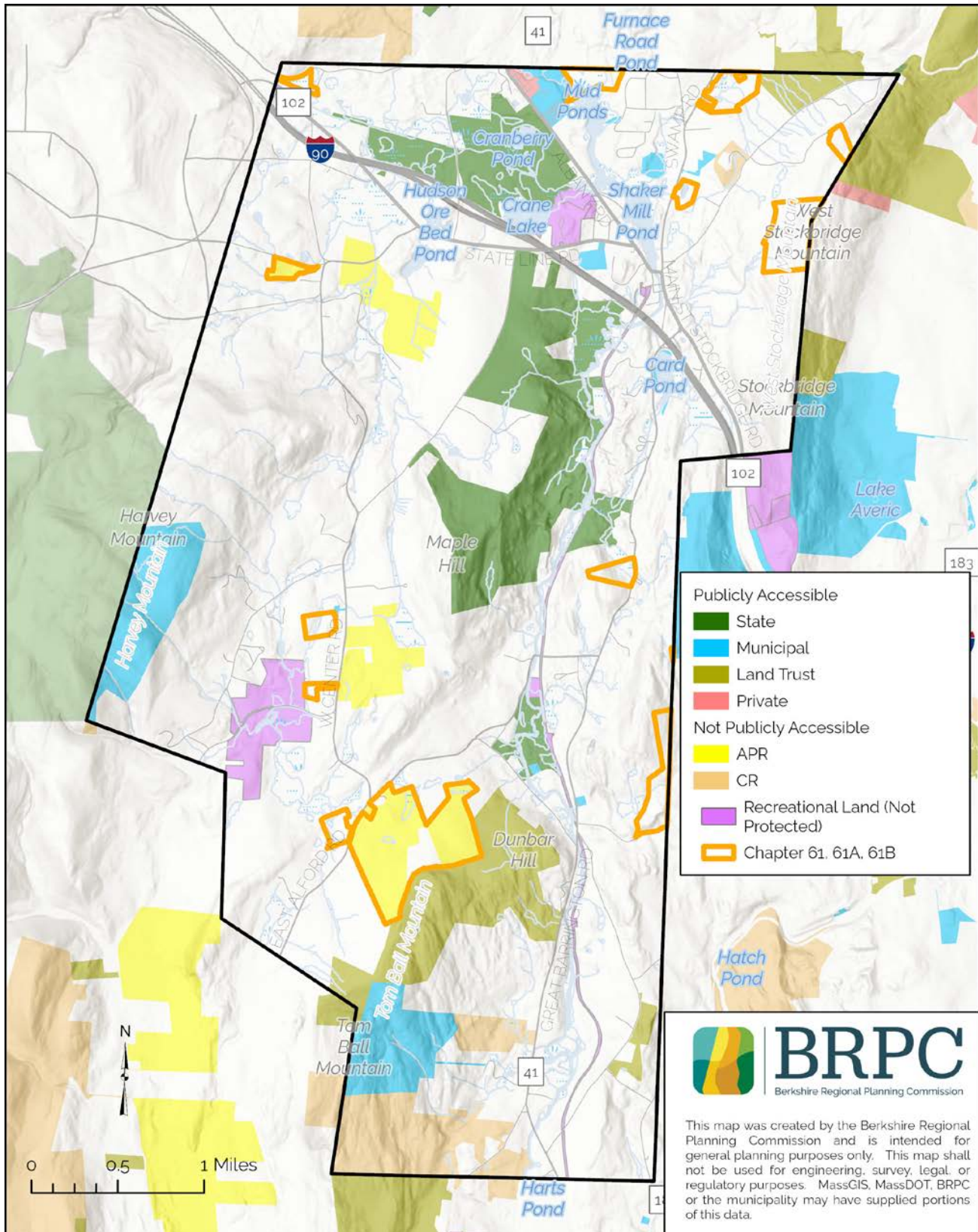
Undeveloped natural lands serve many natural and social functions, including wildlife habitat and corridors, water quality protection, flood control and, with the growing impacts of climate change, carbon sequestration. Conserved undeveloped lands offer residents to enter a fresh and quiet environment and to reconnect with nature. Outdoor recreation is increasingly seen as a way to increase peoples' activity level and combat health issues such as high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

The Town of West Stockbridge has a mixture of open space and recreational areas that add to the quality of life and enjoyed by its residents. For the purposes of this plan, approximately 2,274 acres of the land in West Stockbridge (19% of total) is being considered permanently protected from development, being owned by the Department of Fish and Game, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC), or the Town, or by having private non-development deed restrictions placed on them. Of this acreage, some small parcels that are owned by the Town may not be permanently protected as open space. These parcels would include the WWTP, Town Hall and park, which could conceivably be sold by the Town for development in the future. Another 596 acres of land open space lands are enrolled in the state's Chapter 61 tax abatement

programs. These areas are under both public and private ownership, and they hold various levels of protection and various amounts of exposure to the possibility of future development, which may limit the level of public enjoyment they offer in the future. The size of the properties open to public recreation vary greatly in size, from the 660 acres of lowlands and highlands in the Maple Hill Management Area (WMA) to the smaller Town-owned lands owned on Card Lake and at the Town Offices Park.

DRAFT

Fig. Open Space Lands of Interest



5.1 Private Parcels

Chapter 61 Tax Program Lands

There are 12 property owners that have placed all or a portion of their lands into one of the Massachusetts Chapter 61 Tax Abatement Programs. Chapter 61 is a tax abatement program that offers a 95% tax savings to forest landowners. The intent of the program is to protect and enhance the state's timber-producing capacity. To qualify for Chapter 61, landowners must have a minimum of 10 acres that are suitable for timber production. Additionally, the landowner must develop a plan to maintain the forest for timber production. Maintaining actively productive timber stands provide the landowner with income while providing the residents with large expanses of undeveloped forests, helping to maintain the rural character of the town. Working forests can also provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

Like Chapter 61, Chapter 61A is a voluntary enrollment program for preferential tax assessment based on current agricultural use of the land. Chapter 61A requires a 5-acre minimum of agricultural land which must produce a minimum number of agricultural products.

Chapter 61B is a recreational land classification program designed to encourage the preservation of open space and promote recreational uses. To qualify for Chapter 61B the landowner's property must consist of at least 5 acres that are suitable for recreational purposes. Wahconah Country Club golf course is enrolled in the program. The program offers a 75% tax savings.

The Chapter 61 tax programs are of interest to municipalities for two main reasons. First, lands that are managed for forest, agricultural or recreational uses remain open and scenic, helping communities maintain their historically rural roots. Second, if a property that is enrolled in any of the Chapter 61 programs is placed on the real estate market for a change of use, the Town has a 120-day right of first refusal to purchase the property at fair market value. For example, if a farm purchased for the development of a subdivision or a commercial use, which is different from its current agricultural use, then the Town has the right to purchase that property before anyone else. This gives the community some control over the destiny of its rural character. If the Town does not acquire the land and it does change use, the tax savings that had

accumulated during the land's enrollment in the Chapter 61 program must be paid back in full prior to the land use taking place.

There are 596 acres of land in West Stockbridge that are enrolled in the Chapter 61s tax programs. Of these, land on East Alford Road and Red Rock Road are also protected by an agricultural preservation restriction, making them permanently protected from development. This leaves a total of 580 acres of land temporarily protected by only the Chapter 61 tax programs.

Table 5.1.1 - Chapter 61 Properties

Site Name or Area	Owner	Acres	Public Access?	Level of Protection
Red Rock Rd.	Baldwin Family Farm LLC	13	N	Low
W. Center Rd.	Dubos	11	N	Low
94 Gt. Barrington Rd.	Ecklund	18	N	Low
W. Center Rd.	Fadding	15	N	Low
Gt. Barrington Rd.	JDMRSM Inc.	115	N	Low
Deer Hill Rd.	Kopperl, Paul Trustee	11	N	Low
Furnace Rd.	Liston	28	N	Low
Cross. Rd.	Paul	9	N	Low
83 East. Alford Rd.	Springstube	163	N	Low
Swamp Rd., Lenox Rd.	Stannard	111	N	Low
Cobb Rd.	Sternschein	57	N	Low
Glendale Rd.	Stowe, Charles R.B. Tr	45	N	Low
Total		596		

Source: MassGIS Parcel Data 2020

There are 206 acres of private, non-protected land that are considered open space lands by the Town. The Alford Brook Club is a private recreation area that is accessible to only club members. While the majority of the property is wooded, it also includes a clubhouse located in a historic brick house and a small pond that serves as a fishing spot. The club is listed with the state as a private non-profit corporation.

Crane Lake Camp is a Jewish summer overnight camp that hosts approximately 350 children per camping session. The camp is located along Crane Lake and is not open for public use.

TurnPark Art Space is an open park that features outdoor sculptures and hosts live music and theater performances. The park is located on a former quarry and located within the downtown area. As stated in its website, the park offers hills, meadows, a lake, and a 65-foot vertical drop offering breath-taking views of the surrounding landscape. It also hosts an outdoor amphitheater in which the performances take place. The park is open to the public for a suggested donation fee, with children under 12 allowed to enter for free.

There is an informal, unpaved path running along the former New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad corridor, which originally traveled 10 miles through West Stockbridge. Since 1964, the southern 6.2 miles of the old railroad right-of-way, from downtown Stockbridge to the Great Barrington border, has been owned by the National Grid. The corridor appears on the Town of West Stockbridge Assessor's Map today as a single 40-acre parcel running from the municipal parking area at Harris Street in downtown south along the Williams River to the Great Barrington town line. The right-of-way continues into Great Barrington where a 3.5-mile stretch is open to the public and is known as the Williams River Trail or Housie Rail Trail, terminating at Van Deusenville Road in the Village of Housatonic. Portions of the corridor in West Stockbridge are informally used by local residents for walking and biking.

In the early 2000s, enthusiasts from the Williams River Trail Association actively pursued the creation of a public multi-use trail along the National Grid corridor. They collected more than 600 signatures of people in support of such a trail, including the names of 75% of abutters along the corridor. The 25% of abutters who opposed a multi-use trail banded together and established a campaign to oppose any Town action. A public survey conducted in 2003-04 asked residents to give their preferences for walking and biking routes. Seventy-two percent of respondents stated that they would like the Town to pursue development of the corridor into a multi-use recreational trail. When asked to choose which of two bicycling improvements the town should prioritize, 65% chose development of a multi-use trail along the Williams River over

32% who chose bike/ped enhancements on existing roadways.⁸ This corridor in West Stockbridge and Great Barrington is listed in the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's inventory of potential bicycle facilities, named in the inventory as the Williams River Rail Trail.

Due to abutter opposition, the development of a multi-use path along this corridor has not moved forward. Many abutting landowners have voiced their concerns that inviting the public to a trail next to their properties would invade their privacy and bring an influx of loitering, vandalism and trespassing near their homes. Similar concerns have been raised about creating or extending multi-use paths in other parts of Berkshire County. Today the path is informally used by walkers, hikers and bikers from West Stockbridge and beyond. It is featured and rated on several recreational trail sites on the internet. Informal parking at trailheads and access areas can become crowded and problematic.

Table 5.1.2 - Non-protected Recreation Land

Site Name	Owner	Acres	Public Access?	Level of Protection
Alford Brook Club	Alford Brook Club	144	N	None
Crane Lake Camp	Union of American Hebrew Congregations	33	N	None
TurnPark Art Space	Turnpark Realty LLC	15	Yes, Fee	None
Former RR corridor	National Grid	40	N, unofficial use	None
Total		232		

Source: MassGIS Parcel Data 2020

Deed Restricted Lands

West Stockbridge has an agricultural past and is fortunate that two of its farming families, the Baldwins and Faddings, have enrolled large parcels of their land into permanent agricultural preservation restriction (APR) programs. Although the property owners retain ownership of the land, they have sold the development rights and, as such, the land must remain undeveloped and/or in agricultural use in perpetuity. The open fields of these farmlands provide a scenic foreground behind which lie forested hillsides. The Baldwins offer a farmstand at their farm.

⁸ BRPC, 2004. *Town of West Stockbridge Community Development Plan*

Maintaining the working farms in West Stockbridge helps to maintain the Town's historic and rural character and provides local farm products to residents in the area.

Additionally, other landowners have placed conservation restrictions (CRs) on their land. Like the APRs, the CRs are deed restrictions that largely prohibits development on the land in perpetuity. In West Stockbridge, all the CRs are currently held by the BNRC. The land remains privately owned and public access is not offered on these properties.

Table 5.1.3 – Permanently Protected Non-Recreational Land

Site Name	Owner	Acres in West Stockbridge	Public Access?	Level of Protection
Baldwin Family Farm	Baldwin Family Farm LLC	131	N	High - APR
Fadding APR	Fadding	107	N	High - APR
Murdock CR*	Somerville & Kidder w/ Trustees of Murdock Long Pond Realty Trust	235	N	High - CR
Perry*	Perry	17	N	High - CR
Tom Ball*	Piasecki and Gratz	53	N	High - CR
Wohl CR*	Wohl	19	N	High - CR
Total Acres		562		

*CR held by Berk. Nat. Resources Council

Source: MassGIS Parcel Data 2020.

5.2 Public and Nonprofit Parcels

Public (state- and Town-owned) and non-profit conservation and recreation lands total 1,712 acres within the Town of West Stockbridge. State lands are shown on the Open Space Lands of Interest map in green and Town-owned lands are shown in blue.

In general, most water supply protection and municipal conservation and recreational lands are protected under Massachusetts Article 97 if they were acquired with conservation and/or recreation in mind. Article 97 expressly states that Massachusetts citizens have a Right to a Clean Environment. This authorizes local and the state governments to utilize their traditional Police Powers (public health, safety, welfare and morals) to protect and promote the environment in general. Article 97 requires a two-thirds roll call vote of each house of the state

legislature in order to dispose of or change the use of certain local, county or state lands taken or acquired for natural resources purposes, which is broadly defined.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) owns three wildlife management areas (WMA) that encompass almost 1,000 acres in the Town of West Stockbridge (shown in dark green in the map). In the northern part of Town and as described by DFW, the Flat Brook WMA is comprised of an extensive wetland complex, managed fields, and intermittent patches of forested swamp. The slow-flowing Flat Brook winds through the property from west to east. Extensive marshes and shrub swamps are created in backwater areas and altered by beaver presence. The flowing waters include connections between Cranberry Pond and Crane Lake eventually flowing off the property towards Shaker Mill Pond. This WMA is best experienced by canoe, kayak, or small boat. The upland areas are dominated by old agricultural fields which are mowed annually for habitat and recreational use. The shrubby wetlands are thick and provide excellent wildlife habitat. The site harbors native brook trout and is stocked with pheasants in the fall.

The Maple Hill WMA land are located along the Maple Hill ridgeline complex and valley in the middle of Town. The land is steep sloping hillside with elevation ranging from 825 to 1,600 feet, but there are some sections of lowland wetlands. The upland portions of this property support a superb example of rich mesic woodland habitat dominated by hardwoods such as sugar maple, white ash, basswood, red oak, and yellow birch. The wetlands are primarily open shallow marsh and shrub swamp. The Williams River supports a wild trout population, and DFW also stocks the river with trout in the spring.

The Williams River WMA provides access to the Williams River and is located downstream of the Maple Hill WMA property. The purchase of much of DFW's lands was championed by the Friends of the Williams River (FWR), a volunteer group of local conservationists who recognized the river as a great trout fishing resource and its greater watershed as a beautiful wildlife area and ecological gem. These lands were acquired relatively recently, during starting in the 1990s and

continuing through the 2020s⁹. West Stockbridge's own John Masiero, a founding member of FWR and Chairman of the Conservation Commission, was a key partner in this long-standing effort to protect wildlife habitat.

Table 5.2.1 - State-owned Land

Site Name	Owner	Acres in West Stockbridge	Public Access?	Level of Protection
Flat Brook WMA	Dept. Fish and Game	276	Y	High
Maple Hill WMA	Dept. Fish and Game	660	Y	High
Williams River Access	Dept. Fish and Game	54	Y	High
Total		990		

Source: MassGIS Parcel Data 2020

Permanent Non-Profit Conservation and Recreation Lands

The Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) is a land trust organization that owns over 11,000 acres of publicly-accessible conservation land across Berkshire County. In addition to the lands that it owns outright, it also holds conservation deed restrictions on lands across the county, including several parcels in West Stockbridge. In general, BNRC allows public access that includes passive recreation, fishing and hunting on the lands that they own (the public may not always be welcome on private lands that they hold CRs on). The sites on which public the public is allowed in West Stockbridge include Stevens Glen, the Seitz Reserve and Tom Ball Mountain.

Table 5.2.2 - Permanent Conservation Land

⁹ Chague, Gene, 2019. "Berkshire Woods and Waters: Good things happening with the Williams River," *Berkshire Eagle*, 8-10-19, Pittsfield, MA.

Site Name	Owner	Acres in West Stockbridge	Public Access?	Level of Protection
Tom Ball Mountain	BNRC	173	Y	High
Stevens Glen	BNRC	51	Y	High
Seitz Reserve	BNRC	27	Y	High
Total		251		

Source: MassGIS Parcel Data 2020

Tom Ball Mountain is a ridgeline that is located in the southern portion of West Stockbridge and extends southward into Alford and Great Barrington. The BNRC's Tom Ball Mountain property is conservation land that is open to wilderness hiking and hunting, but there is no public access to this site from a public way. Terrain in this property is rated by the owner as Difficult. The site abuts the Town-owned land and private deed-restricted conservation land. Between the four properties, approximately 625 acres of land here is permanently protected from development. On paper there is access to this site through a town-owned right-of-way off of Samantha Lane, a privately-owned road. However, this right-of-way is not walkable, ending in a sheer, inaccessible cliff.

Stevens Glen is a property that straddles the West Stockbridge / Richmond border. The trailhead to a looping trail is located on Lenox West Stockbridge Road. The gem of this site is Lenox Mountain Brook, which cascades down a steep rocky ravine, which is viewable from an observation deck. This site is 129 acres, of which 51 are in West Stockbridge. A small pullover 1.5 miles from the downtown offers the trailhead to the 1.4-mile loop hiking trail. Nearby is Olivia's Overlook, a property that is located just outside the West Stockbridge town borders, straddling the Lenox/Richmond/Stockbridge town borders. Although not located within West Stockbridge, the site is a local favorite. When residents filled out the open space public survey, Olivia's Overlook is the site that received the most votes for parks that residents visit Frequently or Very Frequently.



The Seitze Reserve is conservation land open to wilderness hiking and hunting. This property does not have any trails. Terrain is steep and difficult but hosts hemlocks and tall stately red oaks.

Town Owned Land

The Town of West Stockbridge owns 471 acres of land, most of which is open to public recreation. These vary in size from the small West Center and Rock Dale Cemeteries to the vast acreages of Harvey and Tom Ball Mountains. While most of the smaller parcels are easy to access, the Harvey and Tom Ball Mountain sites, which comprise of 79% of Town-owned lands, are relatively inaccessible.

The Harvey Mountain property, at 192 acres, is the largest Town-owned property. The site, upgradient of the former Kingsmont, is land-locked with no legal public access. Former camp owners quietly allowed the public to access to this property via a series of old trails and camp roads. However, new landownership has not extended this offer.

This property abuts the 2,007-acre Harvey Mountain State Forest in New York State. Access to the Town's property can be through this site. This state forest is managed for multiple uses, including recreation, timber production, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat. The summit of Harvey Mountain, which is on the Massachusetts/New York line, is the highest elevation in Columbia County at 2,065 feet. The fire tower at the summit is open to the public and provides beautiful scenery from the top. Blueberry bushes here offer a summer treat. Adjacent to this state forest in New York State is the 2,018-acre Beebe Hill Multiple Use Area, and together the two properties offer 30 miles of trails. These forests offer habitat and cover for east-west wildlife movement across New York and Massachusetts.

The Town owns 179 acres of the Tom Ball Mountain range. The Town's land links conservation land that is owned outright by the BNRC or protected by deed restrictions owned by them. The property is difficult to access except via a narrow right-of-way that the Town owns off Samantha Way on the east side of the property, which dead-ends at a cliff which prohibits access. BNRC is in the process of finalizing an easement on private property located on East Alford Road. Once the easement is established, BNRC has proposed creating a public trail system on the west side of the mountain that will start at a trailhead on East Alford Road and travel through Tom Ball

properties owned by the Town of West Stockbridge and BNRC. As of April 2022, the Select Board indicated support for this endeavor.

The Town owns 19 acres of land along Card Pond, including a public swimming area, restrooms and a small beach and picnic area. The Town has been successful in recently adding and improving sidewalks that now connect Card Pond to downtown West Stockbridge. This trail is located between the back side of homes and businesses and the Massachusetts Turnpike. The route was created in partnership and with financing from MassDOT, including \$140,000 in funding from the Complete Streets Program. The Town continues to search for funding to create more pedestrian ways, including the anticipated development of a Tier 2 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan in 2022.

The Town Hall Park conveniently located near the densely-developed downtown area, offers a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. The property, which formerly housed the elementary school, offers athletic fields, tennis courts, a playground and a skate park. The playground equipment is new, paid for from Town funds. The skate park was cleverly built by using cast-off concrete forms donated by Unistress Corporation. Mature trees offer shade for the picnic tables and grills that offer family outings. The building itself includes a gym, library and meeting space for public gatherings. There is a long-term vision of creating a walking track around the perimeter of the lawned area and an off-road walking path that would link the property to downtown.

Other Town-owned lands within the downtown area have the possibility of being developed with outdoor recreation in mind. In spring of 2022 National Grid gave the Town a long-term easement on two acres of land at the junction of Harris Street and Moscow Road in the downtown. Part of this area already hosts a parking lot and seasonal restroom building, but obtaining legal use of the two acres will allow the Town to formally improve this site as a public greenspace that will serve residents, visitors and local businesses.

The Village Cemetery properties, with almost 39 acres, hosts not only the cemetery, but large open fields, woodlands, wetlands and access to Furnace Brook, the inlet to Mud Pond. The open fields are nestled between the Town's cemetery and the St. Patrick's cemetery, providing a large contiguous open space area. In the past, these fields hosted fenced-in community garden plots

that local residents tended for fresh produce. The non-cemetery component of this site could be developed for a variety of future recreational amenities, such as a walking trail that would wind around the field and through the woodlands, a dog park, and/or a public gathering place with a pavilion. The site has in the past been considered to host a future Emergency Services facility. A study of the site and its feasibility to host future public options should be considered to ensure a future use that is most beneficial to the community.

The Town owns several smaller lands which offer links to woodlands and waterways. The Town-owned capped landfill on Oak Street is currently maintained as meadow. The site could be managed as a wildflower garden to attract pollinators and act as a nature's classroom. The Town-owned right-of-way off Iron Mine Road provides access to Mud Pond. The terrain here is often wet and muddy, limiting access to the pond, but because of the marsh and open water habitat, the site offers an opportunity for birdwatching. Another Town-owned, two-acre site is nestled within the Williams River Access WMA. It was originally purchased by the Town for creation of another cemetery, but this never materialized. A bridge that connected the site to Cobb Road is no longer there.

Table 5.2.3 - Town-owned Conservation and Recreation Lands

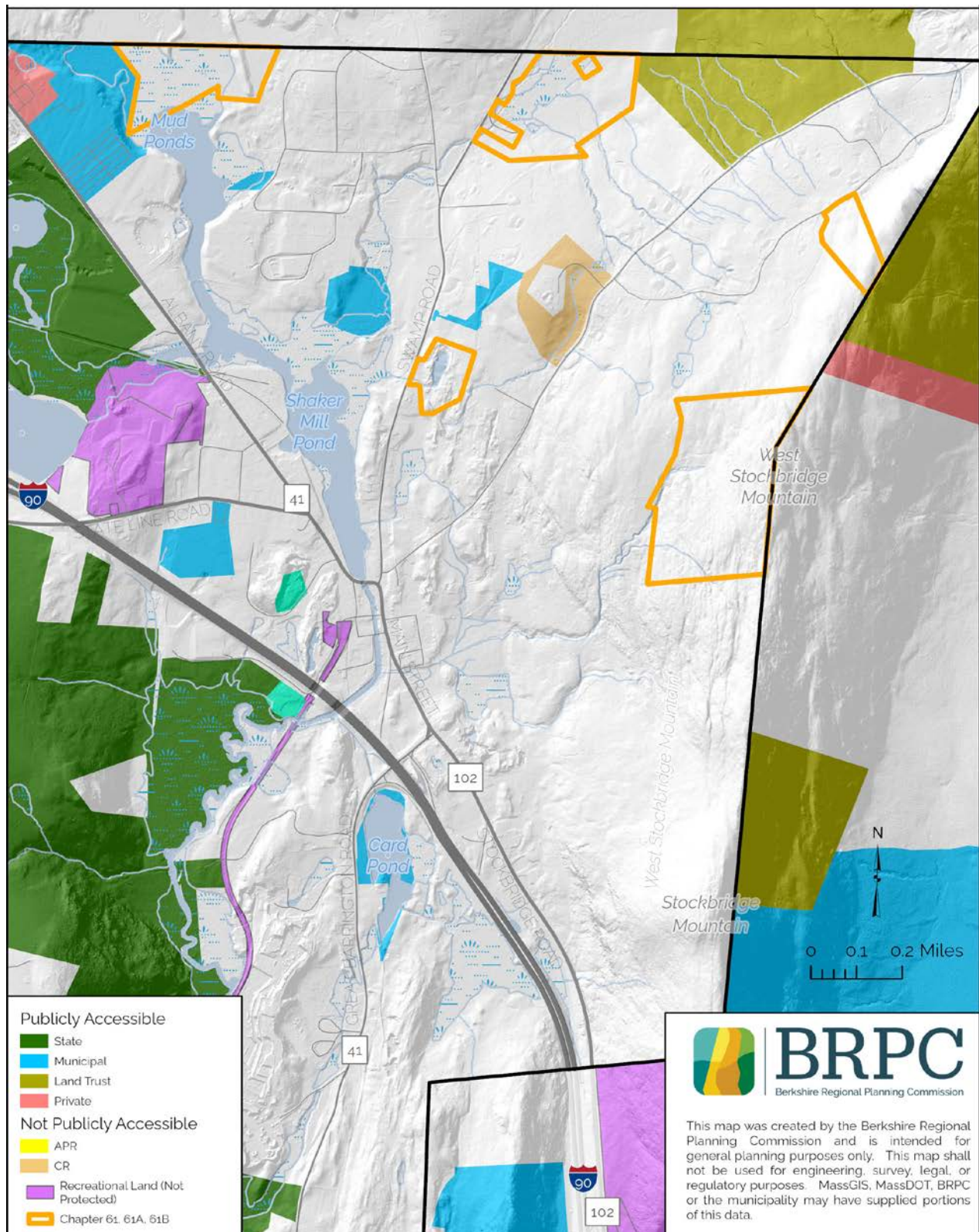
Site Name	Acres	Management	Condition	Current Uses	Rec. Potential	Public Access?	Level of Protection	Zoning
Village Cemetery Fields	30.68	Cemetery Commission		Mowed field, quiet solitude, walking, birdwatching, fishing?, boat access?	Walking path, nature trail, water access, other?	Yes	High	R-1
Village Cemetery	6.21	Cemetery Commission		Quiet Solitude, Walking, birdwatching	None	Yes	High	R-1
Iron Mine Road Mud Pond Access	3.99			Nature watching	Kayak launch?	Yes	Medium	R-1
Public Water Supply Land	16.47			Public Water Supply	None	Yes	High	R-3
Town Hall and Park	11.38			Playing fields, tennis, skate park, playground	Walking track, other?	Yes	Low	R-D
Landfill	2.77			Mowed field	Picnic area, walking path	Yes	High	R-D
National Grid Greenway Easement	2.0	SB		Picnics, bathrooms	Improved park and amenities, walking loop destination			
WWTP	3.04			Treatment plant	River access?	??	Low	R-3
Card Pond	18.72			Public beach, swimming, boating, walking, picnics	Walking trail/board walk, other?	Yes	High	R-1
Williams River Access	1.92			Wilderness experience	None	Yes	Low	R-3

Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Open Space & Recreation Plan

Rock Dale Cemetery	1.68			Quiet solitude, walking, birdwatching	None	Yes	High	R-3
Tom Ball Mountain	179.45			Wilderness experience, hunting	Trails for improved access	Yes	High	R-3
West Center Cemetery	1.0	Cemetery Commission		Quiet solitude, walking, birdwatching	None	Yes	High	R-3
Harvey Mountain	192.03			Wilderness experience, hunting	None – no access from MA public way	Yes	High	R-3
Total Acres	471.34							

Source: BRPC 2021, using MassGIS Protected and Recreational Open Space 2020

Fig. Open Space Lands of Interest



6. Community Vision

6.1 Description of Process

The West Stockbridge OSRP Working Group drafted a set of goals and actions that reflect the importance of protecting the rural and natural resources of the Town while also providing outdoor recreational opportunities for West Stockbridge residents. In developing goals and actions for this Open Space Plan, the OSRP Working Group revisited the recommended actions that were drafted in the 2004 *Community Development Plan*. Many of the goals, objectives and actions from that plan remain relevant today and have been adapted to meet current needs and desires. The Working Group also incorporated actions that residents themselves voiced throughout the planning process: during the public survey and public forum, and through comments submitted during the public review period for the draft plan.

6.2 Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

Open Space & Recreation Vision and Goals

During the development of this plan, the Open Space & Recreation Working Group adopted one overarching goal, adopted from the West Stockbridge Vision Committee's Mission Statement:

The town of West Stockbridge is defined by a rich history, scenic beauty, and industrious work ethic. We aspire to further develop our foundation of craftsmanship, entrepreneurship, and the arts, while continuing to beautify our landscapes and architecture, preserve our natural resources, and build, advance, and diversify our community.

With a focus on protecting the Town's natural resources and providing outdoor recreational opportunities, three goal were developed to meet the overall vision.

Goal #1: West Stockbridge's rural and natural landscape is protected and maintained; careful development does not impair this landscape.

Goal #2: West Stockbridge's water resources are protected and of high quality.

Goal #3: Residents of all abilities have access to outdoor recreational opportunities, while respecting and maintaining the natural landscape in which these are set.

DRAFT

7. Analysis of Needs

The Town of West Stockbridge developed this Open Space and Recreation Plan concurrently with the development of an updated Master Plan. During the development of the Master Plan, residents expressed what they valued most about the Town. Small-town character was the most singly valued aspect of living in West Stockbridge, rated far above 16 other aspects. Other highly valued aspects were low crime rate, open spaces and access to highways. Loss of small-town character and lack of affordable housing, brought on by the tourism economy and the demand for seasonal homes, were cited as greatest concerns by residents.

7.1 Summary of Resources Protection Needs

BioMap2 is a statewide mapping project that combines 30 years of rare species and natural community data from the NHESP with wildlife species and habitat assessments. Additionally, BioMap2 data integrates the Nature Conservancy's assessment of large, connected, and intact ecosystems across the state to determine areas most suited for the long-term protection of biodiversity in the state. BioMap2 identifies two complementary spatial layers, Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes. Core Habitat identifies key areas that are critical for the long-term persistence of rare species as well as a wide diversity of natural communities and intact ecosystems. Critical Natural Landscapes identifies large landscape blocks that are minimally impacted by development or fragmentation. If protected, these areas will provide habitat for wide-ranging native species, support intact ecological processes, maintain connectivity among habitats and enhance ecological resilience to disturbances in a changing world.

Taking these analyses one step further, NHESP prioritized areas in each town in the Housatonic River Watershed to help communities and local conservation organizations focus their land protection and stewardship efforts. These areas are termed Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs), of which five have been delineated in West Stockbridge. The results of this effort are found in the NHESP's *Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts, West Stockbridge* (2011).

- PCA 1: This area in the central area of Town is along the Williams River and stretches westward across Maple Hill. Rich, Mesic Forests are found here, along with rare reptile and bird species that live and breed in this area.

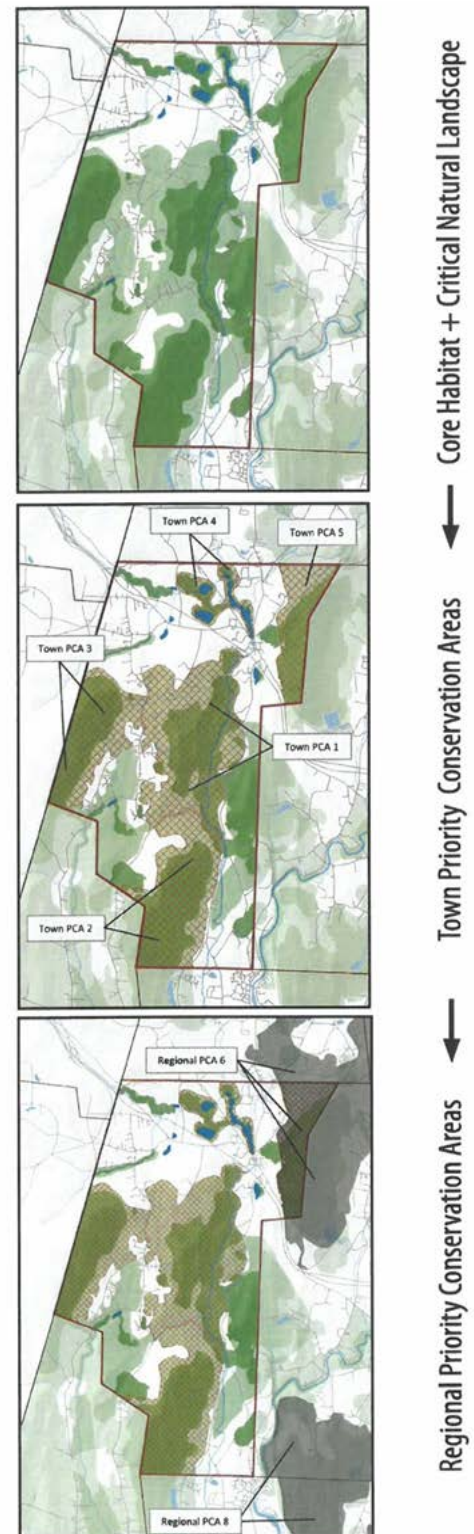
- PCA 2: This area includes a large Forest Core along the southern portion of the Williams River watershed in the Town. Rare state-listed salamanders are found here along with a 25-acre patch of a Ridgertop Chestnut Oak Forest/Woodland community.

- PCA 3: This area is found along the Harvey Mountain hills complex, with forests that extend westward along the Taconic Mountain range. A rare salamander and two unusual natural communities, the Hickory-Hop Hornbeam Forest and the Acidic Rock Summit/Rock Outcrop are found in this area.

- PCA 4: This area includes the ponds and wetlands found in the northern section of the Town. Found here are several species of aquatic and semi-aquatic plants that support the feeding and nesting for an endangered marshland bird.

- PCA 5: This is a large area that extends far beyond the Town boundary into Lenox and Richmond and is known to harbor several state-listed plant species and a rare salamander. Coordinated conservation efforts with these neighboring towns and regional organizations may be warranted.

Fig. Priority Conservation Areas



Source: NHESP, 2011.

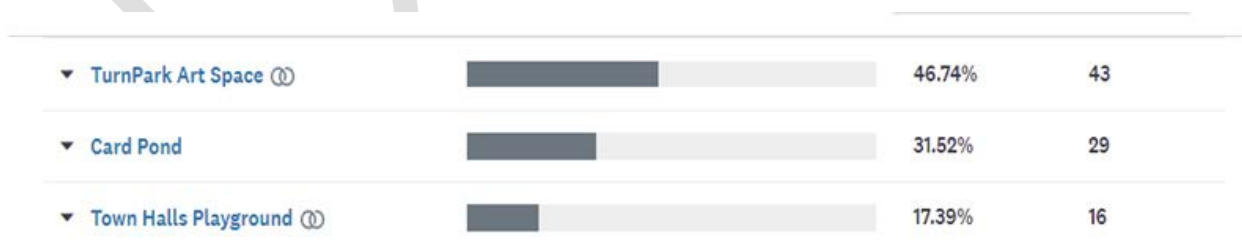
7.2 Summary of West Stockbridge's Recreational Needs

The Town issued a public survey to gauge residents' current outdoor recreational activities and ask their opinions on what additional recreational activities were needed in West Stockbridge. The 146 surveys that were filled out represented a total of 218 people. Of these, 97 people were 60 years of age or older, representing 44% of the total number of people represented. Twenty percent of people represented were aged 19 or under (12% were under 10 and 8% were ages 10-19).

When asked what outdoor activities they currently enjoy doing, 82% percent of survey respondents stated that they walked/hiked, the activity that was by far the most popular. The other top activities that respondents engaged in were gardening (69%), bicycling (51%), swimming (50%), bird watching (43%), and boating/canoeing/kayaking and playgrounds/swings/slides at 42% each.

The survey endeavored to understand the visitorship and use of three key park lands in West Stockbridge: TurnPark Art Space (a new privately-owned park and art space), Card Pond (which includes the town beach and a playground), and the Town Hall Playground site (which includes fields, tennis courts and a skate park). Results indicated that the site used Very Frequently or Frequently by respondents was the Town Hall Playground site, closely followed by the TurnPark Art Space. However, when asked which of these three sites was they favorite, 43 respondents (47%) chose TurnPark as their favorite, with Card Pond coming in second with 29 respondents (32%)

Fig. 7.2. Respondents choose their favorite of three parklands



Source: Survey Monkey, W. Stockbridge OSRP Questionnaire 2021.

West Stockbridge has several publicly-accessible conservation and recreation lands. However, the vast majority of these lands are in a natural state, with very few trails or parking areas to facilitate visitation. Many of these lands cover steeply sloped hills, such as Harvey Mountain, Maple Hill WMA and Tom Ball Mountain. All three of the Fish & Game WMAs host vast acreages of river floodplain, wetlands and a few ponds. These lands are perfect for those who enjoy the wilderness experience, feel comfortable being alone in dense woodlands and can physically maneuver steep woodlands and ford streams. For those who would rather enjoy nature by hiking/walking along a trail system, there is very little formal opportunity in West Stockbridge to do so. It is telling that the favorite open space recreational land that received the most votes in the public survey was Olivia's Overlook, which has a trail system and stunning scenic views – even though the site is just outside of Town. This site received 43 votes (46%), far above the second-place and popular Town-owned site of Card Pond (18 votes / 19%). For residents who need trails on gentle terrain, there are no such sites in West Stockbridge.

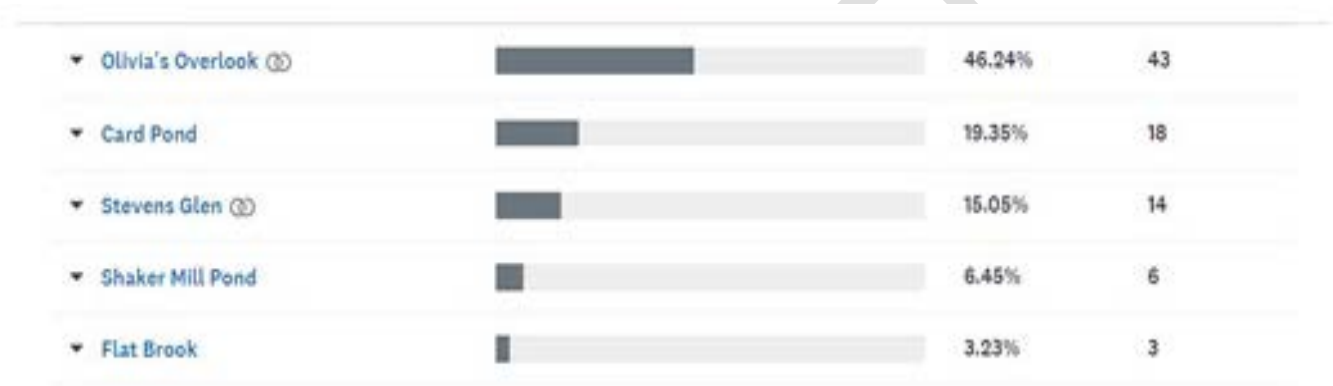
The open space public survey asked residents to identify who in West Stockbridge needs more recreational opportunities. Forty-seven percent of respondents cited a need for opportunities for Adults, which may reflect the high number of adults represented in the households who responded to the survey (80% of people within respondent households were aged 20 or older and more than half of that were aged 60 years or older). The Town lacks any trails where walking and hiking are available in level terrain that seniors could traverse.

In an open-ended questions, the public survey asked respondents to list what additional recreational opportunities they would like to see, 20 answers specifically called for walking and more accessible trails and routes. Additionally, 20 specifically requested bike accommodations, with most asking for an off-road bike path. Forty-two percent of respondents cited a need for Youth. Thirty-four percent of respondents answered that they Don't Know or were Neutral as to the Town's needs. This significant number may indicate that the recreational areas in West Stockbridge are not well known and/or that respondents did not feel qualified to answer this question.

The survey endeavored to understand residents' use of outdoor conservation / recreational lands in West Stockbridge, listing the nine sites that are open to the general public. Of the nine,

Olivia's Overlook is by far the one that is most visited, with 50 respondents saying that they visited the site Very Frequently or Frequently. The other two sites that were cited as being visited Very Frequently or Frequently were Shaker Mill Pond (37 votes) and Card Pond (32 votes). When asked which one of the nine were they favorite site, Olivia's Overlook again received the most votes.

Fig. 7.3. Respondents choose their favorite open space site



Source: Survey Monkey, W. Stockbridge OSRP Questionnaire 2021.

The full survey responses are presented in Appendix ____.

7.3 Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

Residents indicated that Card Pond and Shaker Mill Pond are widely known and beloved water resources. Card Pond rated highly as a favorite spot in West Stockbridge. Twenty-two percent of respondents to the public survey stated that they visited Town-owned Card Pond Frequently or Very Frequently, and another 36% stated that they visited the pond occasionally (a few times a year). Shaker Mill Pond was also often cited as a place that residents visited with 25% of respondents stating that they visited it Frequently or Very Frequently, and 28% stating that they visited it Occasionally.

Respondents were given an open-ended question, asking them what improvements they would suggest for their favorite open space lands. Both Card and Shaker Mill Pond were mentioned very specifically. Twenty percent of respondents who listed a specific site stated the need for improved maintenance at Card Pond, with many citing the need to control excessive aquatic

vegetation and goose droppings. Other respondents cited the need to improve the parking lot and add amenities such as a walking trail and some type of shading. Public enjoyment of this favorite spot is diminished by heavy Canada goose visitation, which leaves the beach, dock and water littered with feces.

The West Stockbridge Parks and Recreation Committee is the local body that oversees the Town's parks and conducts community events and activities. This volunteer committee works cooperatively with the Highway Department and the Town Administrator to maintain and improve the properties. Funds for capital improvements (such as playground equipment) and community activities (i.e. parades, festivals, Halloween and Santa events) come from budget items appropriated through Town Meeting. Through coordinated effort, the Town has conducted several projects that benefit the use of Card Pond, including herbicide applications to reduce aquatic plant cover, goose control measures in an effort to keep the birds off publicly used areas, and creating a complete sidewalk connection between the downtown area and the pond.

Ongoing aquatic plant management and goose control measures will need to be undertaken to continue safe swimming conditions. At the April 13, 2022 public forum, residents were asked to vote for draft actions that they believed should be prioritized for implementation. Actions calling for creating more of a park-like atmosphere on the property and developing a long-term pond management plan were voted as the second and third highest priorities respectively. Only pursuing an off-road walking/biking trail received more votes.

The Committee and Town envisions a Card Pond property that is even further improved. Initial designs have been drafted that include a walking trail along the pond, parking lot improvements, and lighting and shading amenities. The walking trail would provide a route on gentle terrain, which is needed. Additional improvements to maximize the use of the open field next to the parking lot are being considered. A grant was submitted to the Winter Shared Streets programs but was not successful. The Town plans to continue to pursue funding opportunities to design and complete the improvements.

The Parks and Recreation Committee would like to expand the recreational opportunities at the Town Hall Playground site and transform the site into a recreational hub. The site currently includes a playing field, tennis courts, skate park, playground and picnic area. The parking lot

is currently ample for the use the site receives. Some residents informally walk the perimeter of the open, mowed area, and there is a desire to create a more formal, fully accessible walking track or path here. This would provide an accessible off-road walking track people of all abilities. A long-term goal of the Town is to also create an off-road walking route that would link this property and the downtown. The amenities that are available at both ends of the loop, including restrooms, picnic tables and benches, make this route favorable for seniors and families with children.

A one-mile walking loop from the Town Hall site to downtown is currently available along State Line Road, Albany Road and around the downtown commercial blocks. The loop starts at Town Hall, which has ample parking, and follows Albany Road, Main Street, Center Street, Depot Street and back along Albany Road to Town Hall. Crosswalks in the downtown are well marked. Although the traffic along Albany Road make this route less desirable than an off-road route, the picnic tables and benches located both at Town Hall and in the downtown area offer places to rest and visit. The shortcoming of this loop is the lack of a sidewalk for approximately 1,000 feet along the west side of Albany Road. There is a sidewalk on the eastern side of the road, but having to cross Albany Road is undesirable due to the high volume and speed of commercial and commuter traffic. Bridging the sidewalk gap would provide a one-mile accessible walking route along paved gentle terrain without having to cross the road. A second walking loop extending from the downtown to Card Lake provides another half-mile route with picnic and resting amenities found at each end of this route.

Another site which could offer walking on level terrain is the open field area nestled between the Town Cemetery and the St. Patrick's Cemetery. Creating a walking loop here could wind through the fields and go through the woodlands located at the rear of the property. This would provide a more varied landscape for those who would like to walk through a mix of field and forest.

The Highway Department manages the old town landfill on Oak Street, which may have habitat and recreational potential. This site is currently kept in a meadow condition and might be a good site to create a native wildflower pollinator meadow. Creation of a pathway with interpretive signage to explain the importance of pollinators could provide an educational

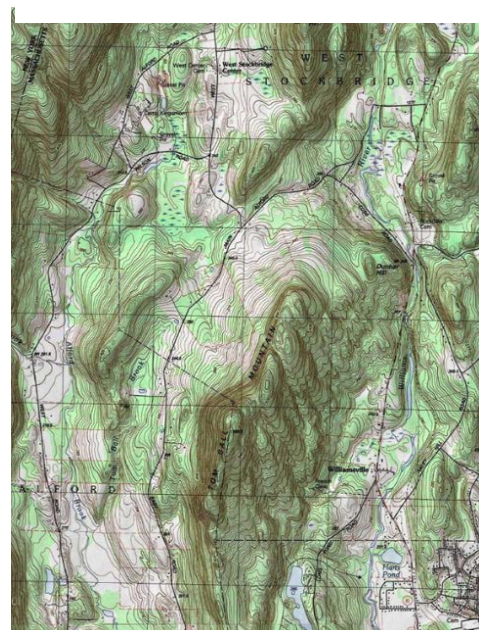
experience for residents and visitors alike. Creating a picnic area would expand the enjoyment of this site and possibly offer a place for residents and visitors to enjoy take-out food from the nearby restaurants. This site could be a spot along a future off-road walking path between Town Hall and the downtown area.

Twenty-one percent of respondents specifically cited the need to improve access to and add amenities at Shaker Mill Pond. Several respondents offered very specific improvements that would make these waterbodies more enjoyable. However, at this time the land surrounding the pond is privately owned, and public accessibility is limited to a small site near the dam.

When asked what additional recreational opportunities were needed, 30% of respondents indicated a need to have more hiking, walking and biking trails, with many citing a need for easy walking trails linking the downtown to other recreational areas. There are currently no off-road walking trails in West Stockbridge that are on gentle terrain. The only hiking trails are at Stevens Glen, which involve steep slopes and a very steep stairway. Creating walking loops between the Town Hall and downtown would meet this need. Creating a walking loop on the field next to the Town cemetery would partially meet this need, but there is no sidewalk linking this property to the downtown.

There is currently no trail to access Tom Ball Mountain, because the public access off Samantha Lane ends at the face of a sheer cliff. The Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) is in the process of securing an easement on private land so that the public can access Tom Ball Mountain from East Alford Road. BNRC owns large parcels of land adjacent to that owned by West Stockbridge, and this new access will provide an opportunity to create a large new trail system in Town. The hiking trails would undoubtedly be on steep terrain, but the slopes on this western side of the mountain are less steep than those on the eastern side, making it accessible to people of various abilities. The Town

Fig. 7.4. Steep Terrain of Tom Ball Mountain



and BNRC will need to create safe and ample parking at the trailhead to avoid impacts to neighbors and traffic.

Twenty-two percent of respondents specifically mentioned their desire for safer ways to bicycle in West Stockbridge. Local bicyclists have stated that biking on Albany / Great Barrington Road (Rt 41) is dangerous due to lack of consistent shoulders and heavy speeding truck and car traffic. A 2004 bicycle study ranked biking enhancements for this road as a high priority. This would likely require widening the road corridor to accommodate wider shoulders, an endeavor which would be costly. The other main route, along Stockbridge Road (Rt. 102), has more consistent shoulders, but it also carries heavy speeding truck and cars. Enhancements for several other main travel routes were also highlighted as needed.

Many of the survey respondents that cited a need for safer biking stated a desire to create a walking/biking trail along the old railroad corridor that parallels the Williams River and Great Barrington Road (Route 41). This need was restated by residents during a public forum held in April 2022, a hybrid meeting held in person and via zoom technology. Attendees of the forum was presented with a list of draft actions that had been drafted as a result of the open space and recreation planning process. Attendees of this forum were allowed to vote for the highest priority actions that they thought the Town should pursue. The draft action that was resoundingly favored and received the most votes was this - "Continue conversations with property owners along the old RR/National Grid Corridor" – receiving a total of 26 votes.

The corridor is currently used by local residents in an informal way, with general public use not sanctioned by the Town or National Grid, the latter of which is the landowner. The condition of the corridor, from the Great Barrington Road / Pixley Hill Road intersection south to the town border is in good shape and seems to be used fairly heavily. There is no formal trailhead parking, so the site can become crowded with cars. Creation of a pull-off within the old railroad corridor may alleviate this issue.

A movement to create a walking/biking trail along the old railroad corridor was undertaken several years ago. The route would follow along the corridor National Grid currently owns, extending northward from the West Stockbridge/Great Barrington town boundary, where the Housie Rail Trail currently ends, to the downtown area. This trail would provide approximately

six miles of trail on easy terrain. If this trail were developed, it would provide approximately nine miles of trail that would link downtown West Stockbridge to the Village of Housatonic. National Grid has indicated that it would offer the use of the corridor to the Town if it wished to pursue development of a bike/pedestrian trail.

However, many landowners abutting the corridor oppose the creation of a formal, publicly accessible trail, citing concerns over potential loss of privacy and the encouragement of trespassing, nuisance and crime. The most ardent opposition appear to be from abutters who live north of the Great Barrington Road intersection. As such, efforts to develop the walking/biking trail along this corridor has stalled.

The same concerns were raised by abutters of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, a 13-mile multi-use rail trail traveling from Lanesborough to Adams. The first 11 miles of the trail was constructed by 2004. In 2014 a survey of abutting landowners was conducted to determine what impacts the rail trail has had on their property and privacy. Eighty percent of survey respondents stated that they were satisfied with the rail trail as a neighbor. When asked if living near the trail was better or worse than they expected, 45% said it was better than expected and another 44% said it was the same. The majority of respondents (86%) owned their property prior to the Trail being built, so they provide a good perspective of pre- and post-trail conditions.

During the planning process for this plan, some residents suggested that bicycle safety improvements be undertaken on several fronts, both on-road and off-road. If there were several safe bicycling options for bicyclists to use, then perhaps no one route would become over-used. This may alleviate some of abutters concerns that an off-road bike path would become crowded.

There were several additional suggestions made during the public survey, with many respondents mentioning the desire to promote and improve access to the state's natural areas, including directional signage to existing properties, parking and trails. Others expressed a desire to connect more public open space lands to the downtown area. Others cited a need, during the survey and at the public forum for a dog park, which would not only benefit local dogs but also create a way for neighbors to meet and socialize.

The Town of West Stockbridge has recently acquired a long-term easement on a two-acre portion of the National Grid corridor in the downtown area that is located on the corner of Moscow Road and Harris Street. The Town would like to create a greenspace here that will provide public outdoor space for visiting and to complement the shops and restaurants in the area. Picnicking and resting amenities in this area would further support downtown as key stop within a walking loop that has Town Hall on one end and Card Pond on the other end.

During the public open space survey, a significant number of respondents indicated that they had never heard of many of the open space lands listed. The DFW-owned properties received the most votes for not being heard of, with 42% of respondents citing that they had never heard of Flat Brook WMA, 42% had never heard of Cranberry Pond, and 33% had never heard of Maple Hill WMA. Many respondents stated that they might visit these areas if they know where they were located and how to access them. Additionally, 22% of respondents had never heard of Tom Ball Mountain.

The mission of DFW is to protect and preserve natural habitat areas without creating new roads or trails through its properties. As such, their lands are best enjoyed by those who prefer a wilderness experience. Those who prefer walking or hiking on trail systems tend not to utilize these lands. There is only one formal pull-off to the Maple Hill WMA, located in the very northern portion of the property off State Line Road. Two other informal pull-offs are located along Maple Hill Road. Access to this WMA would be increased if the old railroad / National Grid corridor was formally open to the public.

One way for people to better access the Flat Brook WMA may be through improved canoe/kayak access. Staff at the Western Region of DFW indicated that it may be possible to paddle from Cranberry Pond, along Flat Brook and on to Mud Pond / Shaker Mill Pond. This would offer better access to Shaker Mill Pond, which has been cited as a need. This “water trail” would consist of paddling open waterbodies, a stretch of forest stream and a stretch of open, small river corridor. The varied habitats provide paddlers with an opportunity view and enjoy a wide array of wildlife. Field work would need to be conducted to identify any possible safety hazards (such as buried logs) and to document water levels to ensure that there is a route that can be paddled most of the year. Beavers are known to be active in these waters and have created a

few dams, so field work would also be needed to assess if dams will create barriers and require portage at key sites. There is already a car-top parking to Cranberry Lake, which is within DFW lands.

Another option to improve access to Flat Brook WMA would be to construct a pedestrian bridge over Flat Brook using the old railroad bridge abutments. The old railroad corridor associated with the abutments already provides a walking route through the site.

To aid Town officials in understanding how dedicated residents would be to financially support open space and recreation initiatives, the final question on the public survey asked residents to choose what improvements the Town should spend its limited open space /recreation funds on. Respondents were asked to choose up to three categories. The choice hiking/biking received the most votes (63 votes), closely followed by preserve wildlife corridors and habitat (61 votes) and preserve open space (59 votes).

West Stockbridge adopted the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act (CPA) in June 2020. The Town adopted a surtax of 2% on real estate taxes, with exemptions on low-income resident and the first \$100,000 valuation of residential real estate. The Town is in the process of creating a Community Preservation Act Committee and developing its operating procedures for use of the funds, and so no funds have yet been distributed. As of February 2022, the Town's total revenue available for distribution was \$110,781.

The West Stockbridge Planning Board is considering conducting a comprehensive review of its zoning bylaws to facilitate economic development while also considering ways to encourage open space conservation. Development in recent decades have mostly been construction of large homes on large lots, which leads to larger residential footprints and deeper forest fragmentation. The Town would like to identify ways to encourage overall smaller footprints with dedicated open space conservation. For guidance, the Commonwealth has created the Smart Growth Toolkit and the Green Neighborhoods Alliance, formed by Mass Audubon and other groups, has developed model Open Space Residential Development bylaws and regulations that are being utilized successfully by many communities.

8. Goals & Actions

The goals and actions herein reflect the findings and recommendations that were developed during the concurrent drafting of two municipal plans: the *Open Space & Recreation Plan* and the *Master Plan*.

Goal #1: West Stockbridge's rural and natural landscape is protected and maintained; careful development does not impair this landscape.

- Finalize regulations and procedures so the Town can implement the Berkshire Scenic Mountains Act bylaw.
- Finalize procedures so the Town can consider grant applications to protect natural and cultural open space lands and expand outdoor recreation opportunities using Community Preservation Act funds.
- Support the Planning Board efforts to update the Town's zoning bylaws, encouraging strengthening of existing bylaws and drafting of new ones that conserve key wildlife habitat and cultural and scenic landscapes.
- Consider conveyance of the small Town-owned parcel within Williams River Access WMA to Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW).

Goal #2: West Stockbridge's water resources are protected and of high quality.

- Develop a long-term pond management plan for Card Pond, with a focus on measures to control invasive aquatic plant growth and reduce goose visitation at the Town beach.
- Conduct a detailed survey to map the extent and densities of native and invasive plant communities within Shaker Mill Pond and along its shoreline; work with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) to develop a pond management plan for the pond that addresses invasive plant species while also being protective of the rare species that inhabit the pond.
- Protect aquatic habitat connectivity and reduce erosion and sedimentation in streams by conducting stream-road crossing improvements recommended in the Town's Hazard

Mitigation Plan and Road-Stream Crossing Inventory. The stream-road crossing at Baker Road is a high priority.

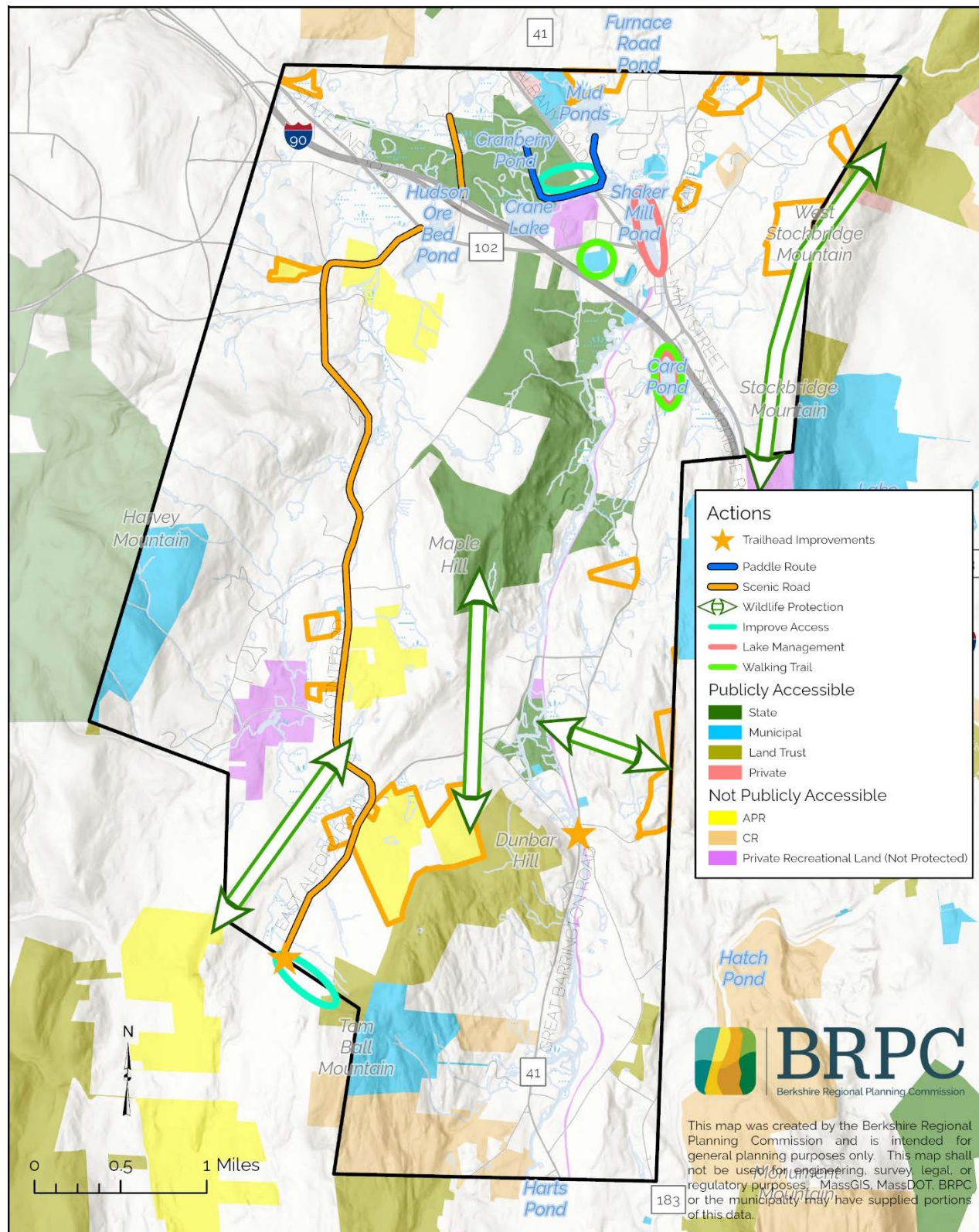
Goal #3: Residents of all abilities have access to outdoor recreational opportunities, while respecting and maintaining the natural landscape in which these are set.

- Develop a long-term Site Plan for the Town Hall property to serve as a recreational hub and other potential future uses, such as senior housing and/or emergency services. Favored recreation items would be an accessible walking track around the perimeter of the Town Hall fields, a pavilion at the site to provide shade and cover, and off-road walking route to the downtown area.
- Create more of a park-like atmosphere at Card Pond:
 - Develop a walking loop around Card Pond; if a loop not feasible, create an in & out trail
 - Improve the parking lot
 - Consider ways to create a gathering place in the field next to the parking lot
 - Install a pavilion and/or other structures for shade and cover
- Develop a long-term Site Plan for the fields at the Village Cemetery site, considering uses such as a field/forest walking trail, dog park and/or an emergency services facility.
- Support Berkshire Natural Resources Council's (BNRC) efforts to create a trail system leading from East Alford Road to the public lands on Tom Ball Mountain; this will include trailhead parking.
- Support BNRC's long-term goal of creating a High Roads route that would link the downtown area to the Yokun Ridge Trail system, which reaches north to Bousquet Mountain in Pittsfield.
- Investigate opportunities to utilize the open fields of the Town's capped landfill on Oak Street; ideas could include a public picnic area and a wildflower/pollinator meadow with an interpretive trail.
- Pursue greenspace improvements to the Town's new acreage on Moscow Road / Harris Street.
- Work with DFW to improve access and use of the Flat Brook WMA, considering ideas such as:

- Investigate the feasibility of creating a “water trail” that would connect Cranberry Pond, Crane Lake, Mud Pond, Shaker Mill Pond.
- Investigate the feasibility of installing a pedestrian bridge at the former railroad crossing to improve access to the interior of the property, using the existing abutments if possible.
- Create safer biking routes across West Stockbridge, both on-road and off-road.
 - Complete a Tier II Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, using the 2004 Community Development Plan as a reference.
 - Continue investigating off-road routes, including having conversations with property owners along the old railroad / National Grid corridor.

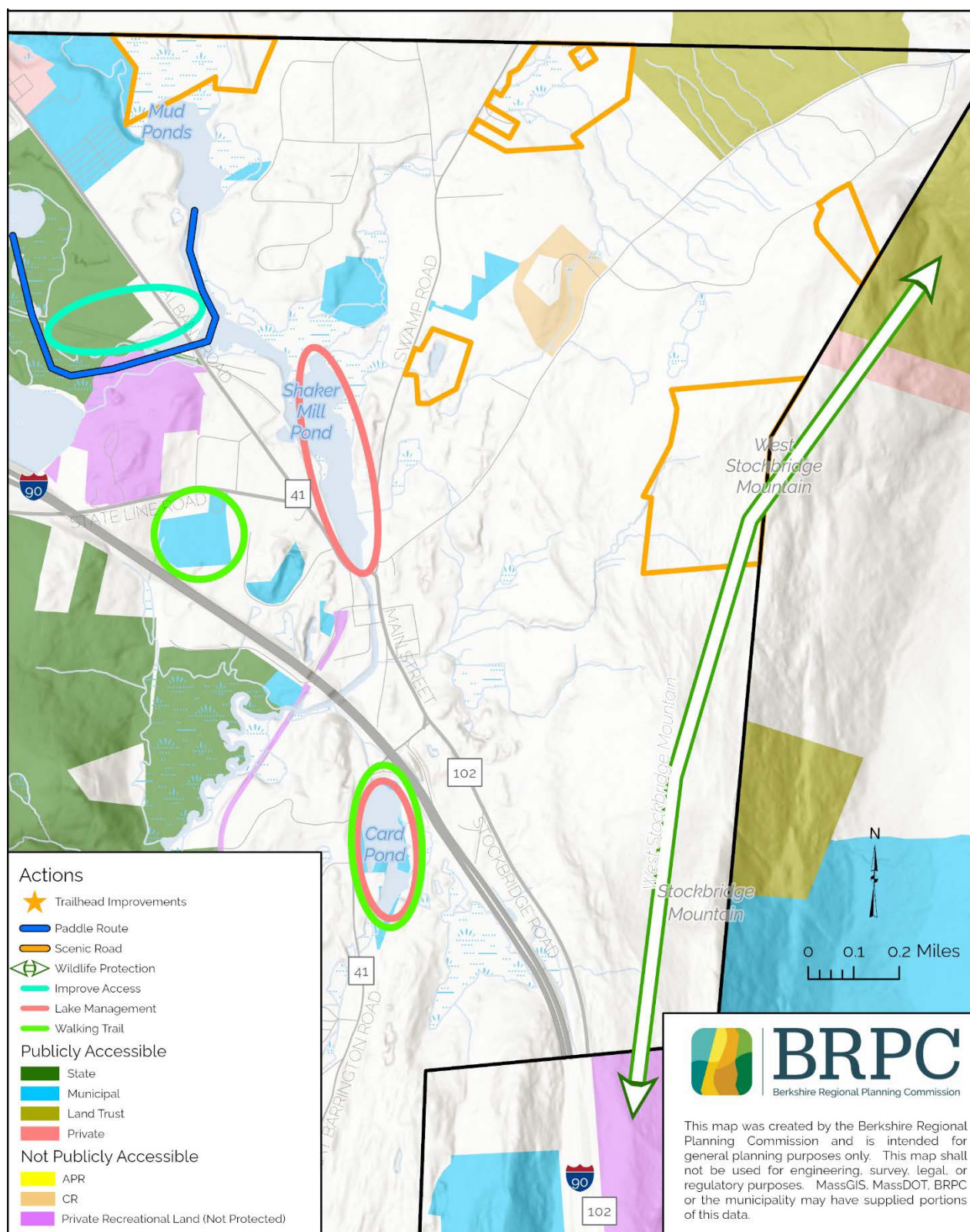
DRAFT

Fig. __. Action Map



DRAFT

Fig. __ Action Map Village Center Inset



9. Seven-Year Action Plan

Actions	Responsible Party or Lead	Priority / Timeline 2023-2028	Potential Funding
<i>Goal #1: West Stockbridge's rural and natural landscape is protected and maintained; careful development does not impair this landscape.</i>			
Finalize regulations and procedures so the Town can implement the Berkshire Scenic Mountains Act bylaw.	Conservation Commission (CC), Dept. of Conservation & Recreation	High / 2023-25	Town, District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA)
Finalize procedures so the Town can consider grant applications to protect natural and cultural open space lands and expand outdoor recreation opportunities using Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds.	Select Board (SB), future Community Preservation Committee (CPC)	High / 2023	Town
Support Planning Board efforts to update the Town's zoning bylaws, strengthening existing bylaws and drafting new ones that conserve key wildlife habitat and cultural and scenic landscapes.	Planning Board (PB)	High / 2023-28	Town, DLTA, MA Planning grants
Consider conveyance of the small Town-owned parcel within Williams River Access WMA to Div. of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW).	SB, DFW	Low / 2025-28	Town
<i>Goal #2: West Stockbridge's water resources are protected and of high quality.</i>			
Develop a long-term pond management plan for Card Pond, with a focus on measures to control invasive aquatic plant growth and reduce goose visitation at the Town beach.	Parks & Recreation Committee (P&R), CC	High / 2024-27	Town, CPA

Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Open Space & Recreation Plan

Conduct a detailed survey to map the extent and densities of native and invasive plant communities within Shaker Mill Pond and along its shoreline; work with the Mass. Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to develop a management plan that addresses invasive plant species while also being protective of rare species.	P&R, CC	High / 2023-27	Town, CPA
Protect aquatic habitat connectivity and reduce erosion and sedimentation in streams by conducting stream-road crossing improvements recommended in the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan and Road-Stream Crossing Inventory; crossing at Baker Road is a high priority.	Highway, CC, SB	Medium / 2023-28	Town, Trout Unlimited, Housatonic Valley Assoc. Grant, Dept. Environmental Restoration
<i>Goal #3: Residents of all abilities have access to outdoor recreational opportunities, while respecting and maintaining the natural landscape in which these are set.</i>			
Develop a long-term Site Plan for the Town Hall property to serve as a recreational hub and other potential future uses, such as senior housing and/or emergency services; favored recreation items: accessible walking track, a pavilion, off-road walking route to the downtown area.	P&R, Highway, SB, PB, Council on Aging, Emergency Management Director	Medium / 2023-28	Town, Div. of Conservation Services (DCS) Grant, CPA
Create more of a park-like atmosphere at Card Pond: walking loop, parking lot improvements, gathering place, pavilion or other structure for shade/cover.	Pks & Rec, Highway	High / 2023-28	DCS, DOT, Town, CPA
Develop a long-term Site Plan for the fields at the Village Cemetery site; consider uses such as a field/forest walking trail, dog park and/or an emergency services facility.	P&R, Highway, SB, PB, Council on Aging, Emergency Management Director	Low / 2025-28	Town, CPA, DCS, MassTrails

Town of West Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Open Space & Recreation Plan

Support Berkshire Natural Resources Council's (BNRC) efforts to create a trail system leading from East Alford Road to the publicly open lands on Tom Ball Mountain, including trailhead parking.	BB, P&R, Highway, Volunteer hikers	High / 2023-28	BNRC, CPA, Highway, MassTrails
Support BNRC's long-term goal of creating a High Roads route that would link the Town Center to the Olivia's Overlook/Yokun Ridge Trail system.	SB, P&R, Volunteer hikers	Medium / 2028	BNRC, CPA, Highway
Investigate opportunities to utilize the open fields of the Town's capped landfill on Oak Street; ideas could include a public picnic area and a wildflower/pollinator meadow with an interpretive trail.	P&R, Highway	Low / 2025-28	Downtown group? Chamber Comm?
Pursue greenspace improvements to the Town's new acreage on Moscow Road / Harris Street.	SB, PB, Highway	High /2023-28	Downtown group? Chamber Comm?
Work with DFW to improve access and use of the Flat Brook WMA: create a "water trail" connecting Cranberry Pond to Shaker Mill Pond; install a pedestrian bridge at the former railroad crossing.	DFW, CC, Volunteer kayakers, Volunteer hikers	Low / 2025-28	Unknown
Improve safe biking routes across West Stockbridge, both on-road and off-road: Tier II Complete Streets Prioritization Plan; continue conversations with property owners along old RR/National Grid corridor.	Highway, P&R, Volunteer bikers & hikers	High / 2023-28	Highway, DOT, PARC, CPA

10. Public Comments

As part of a community engagement process, the West Stockbridge Steering Committee and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission offered a public survey using SurveyMonkey.com technology. The survey was live from the beginning of July 2021 to late September 2021. The survey received responses from 146 households. The needs as reflected in the survey are discussed in Section 7 of this plan and the complete survey results are found in Appendix ____.

SUMMARIZE OTHER PUBLIC COMMENTS VIA PUBLIC PRESENTATION OR PUBLIC POSTING OF
DRAFT PLAN HERE

SUMMARIZE COMMENTS IF ANY FROM PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

References

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), 2004. *Community Development Plan, Town of West Stockbridge*, Pittsfield, MA.

BRPC, 2014. *Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Abutter Survey, Autumn 2014*, Pittsfield, MA.

Housatonic Valley Assoc., 2021. *Town of West Stockbridge Road-Stream Crossing Inventory*, Lee, MA.

MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP), 2011. *BioMap2, Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Massachusetts, West Stockbridge*, Westborough, MA

MA NHESP, The Nature Conservancy, 2012. *BioMap2, Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World, West Stockbridge*, Westborough, MA.

Town of West Stockbridge and Foresight Land Services, 2021. *Draft Town of West Stockbridge Hazard Mitigation Plan*, Pittsfield, MA.

West Stockbridge Master Plan Advisory Committee and BRPC, 2022. *Draft Master Plan*, West Stockbridge, MA.

U.S Census and American Community Survey, 2021. 2018 five-year estimates were used for demographic information.

11. Appendices

BIOMAP REPORTs

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MATERIALS

- Full public survey results
- Powerpoint presentation
- Screenshot of public announcements, flyers, etc.
- Example Yokel article

OTHERS?