



# Town of Ashby Massachusetts



## Open Space & Recreation Plan

January 2010 - January 2015



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## SECTION 1 - PLAN SUMMARY

### Overview

Ashby is located in the far northwest corner of Middlesex County, 49 miles west of Boston and 32 miles north of Worcester. Once an outpost of Lunenburg, Ashby was incorporated on March 5, 1767. The town is characterized by rugged, hilly terrain interspersed with gently rolling open fields, woodlands, stream corridors, and wetlands. Most of the town is in the Nashua River watershed with a small portion of the northwest corner in the Souhegan watershed. The town was originally agrarian, but in the mid-19th century began to harness its fast flowing streams for water powered manufacturing. Although agriculture has declined over the years as it has throughout New England, the residents of Ashby still look to their agricultural roots as part of the definition of the town.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan seeks to lay out a comprehensive description of the town as it stands today, still securely attached to its rural past and wanting to protect itself from drowning in sprawl and suburbanization. The Open Space and Recreation Committee hopes this plan, developed with input from town boards and residents, will serve as a guide to the direction and pace of development as Ashby continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Section 3 & 4 of the Open Space and Recreation Plan provide background information on the physical, biotic, and cultural aspect of the Town of Ashby. Section 3 describes the community in its regional and historical context, demographics, population, population density, and historic and modern development patterns. Section 4 provides an environmental analysis of the characteristics of the town, including its geology, topography, landscape character and scenic resources, water resources, vegetation, fish and wildlife.

Section 5 of the Open Space and Recreation Plan includes a very detailed inventory of lands of conservation and recreation interest. The inventory documents lands under public control, lands whether private or public protected in perpetuity, lands under non-profit organization ownership, and lands under special taxation programs (Chap 61 and the like).

Section 6 of the Open Space and Recreation Plan summarizes the broad goals of the Plan as have been defined based on the community input and the committee's research. The overall open space vision for Ashby is to improve and enhance the Town's open space system in order to preserve rural character, protect natural resources, and expand recreational opportunities.

- Preserve rural character – Ashby is fortunate to have large tracts of as yet undeveloped fields and forests. Along with the historic Town center and other heritage landscapes, these large fields and forests give Ashby the quaint, rural feeling and scenic views desired by its citizens.
- Protect natural resources – Ashby has tremendous natural resources including hills, mountains, rivers, water bodies, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and wind. These resources are important to the community and the region.
- Expand recreational opportunities – As desired by its citizens, Ashby has great potential to expand, locally and regionally, its passive recreational system while maintaining safe active recreational opportunities.

Sections 7 through 9 of the Open Space and Recreation Plan describe in detail the resource protection, community and management needs, the specific objectives in order to achieve the broad goals, and a five year action plan. These sections form the specifics that will serve as the active portion of the Plan over the next five years and as a reference for communication on open space and recreation between town officials, board members, and citizens.

We would like to note that this plan was done in the way things are done in Ashby - by a group of mostly volunteers who decided that putting the open space and recreation needs of the community into a Plan was important to them and to their town. We are proud of our effort and its result, and offer it to our community in hopes that it will serve us all well.

## SECTION 2 - INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Purpose

This document is to serve as a guide to the future direction, conservation, and expansion of the Open Space and Recreational assets of Ashby. The Plan, an update to the first plan created in 1999, provides a set of tangible goals and objectives as well as an action plan for the next five years.

The Ashby citizens set great store by the qualities of small town living. We value open spaces, privacy, stargazing in the center of town, the moose walking down South Road, informality, socializing at the Post Office, quirky town politics, clean air and water, band concerts on the Common, the July 3<sup>rd</sup> bonfire, and the terrible tennis courts. Ashby wishes to protect our rural character, our natural resources, and expand our recreational opportunities.

Since the first formal Open Space and Recreation Plan in 1999, Ashby has been extremely active in the preservation of land, enacting bylaws and policies that preserve rural character & protect farmers and forests, and educating and encouraging citizens to be involved in the open space efforts. In the past ten years, suburban sprawl has continued to impact Ashby and despite the current housing market, we expect the development pressure to continue. Therefore, we set forth a new Open Space and Recreation Plan that address the needs of the community in order to preserve the sense of place we value.

### Planning Process and Public Participation

Ashby's town officials and landowners have been made great strides in the actions laid out by the 1999 Plan and wanted to update the Plan to establish new goals and objectives and hear if the community wished to change direction with the open space and recreational planning efforts. In the fall of 2007, the Planning Board met with members of the Conservation Commission, Board of Health, and Ashby Land Trust to form a working group committed to producing an update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan. The original members of the Open Space and Recreation working committee were Andrew Leonard, Alan Pease, Roberta Flashman, and Cathy Kristofferson. Interested citizens and board members include Alan Ewald, Chuck Perna, Sue Chapman, Cedwyn Morgan, Jeanie Lindquist, Wayne Stacy, and Paula Packard.

Over the next 18 months, this core group began work on updating the database of the Town, researching, communicating with interested citizens, and planning. The process consisted of mostly volunteer efforts, planning charrettes, and a significant improvement to the database of information for planning purposes.

We held our first public meeting on June 15, 2009 to reach as many townspeople as we could and garner input on the planning effort. We presented a draft update to the Selectmen in a televised meeting on October 28, 2009. We also **posted a draft Plan on the Town Website and held a second public hearing on November 15, 2009** to hear additional comments from the community.

A final draft was prepared and submitted to the Selectmen, municipal boards, and the regional planning agency for review. The Committee intends submit a final plan to Ashby's Annual Town Meeting and to the Division of Conservation Services for approval.

## SECTION 3 - COMMUNITY SETTING

### Context

Ashby is located in the extreme northwestern part of Middlesex County, 60 miles west of Boston and 32 miles north of Worcester. Ashby covers 23.66 square miles of land along the border between Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Our immediate neighbors in Massachusetts are the towns of Townsend, Ashburnham, Lunenburg, and the city of Fitchburg. Ashby is bounded on the north by the towns of New Ipswich and Mason, New Hampshire.

The topography is hilly with rock outcroppings on some of the steeper slopes and relatively little flat land. The soils are primarily glacial tills with pockets of sand & gravel and small amounts of floodplain alluvium. Mount Watatic rises to a height of 1600 feet along the western border of town; its summit of 1832 feet is in Ashburnham. Most of the land in the town is flourishing with second growth forest of mixed deciduous and coniferous species. A number of hay fields and miles of stone walls provide a pastoral landscape reminiscent of our agricultural past.

Most of Ashby is in the Nashua River watershed. A small portion of the northwest corner is in the Souhegan River watershed. A number of brooks and streams originate in Ashby. There are two bodies of water classified as Great Ponds: Upper Wright's Pond and Lower Wright's Ponds. A third large body of water, Watatic Pond, is shared with Ashburnham. Ashby contains a number of wetland and vernal pools, including the important habitat, Great Meadow along Trap Fall Brook.

Townpeople in Ashby rely on private wells for their water needs. The forests on our undeveloped land maintain our clean water. The Nashua River Watershed Association produced a guide in December 1995 called the *2020 Vision for the Nashua River Watershed*. The authors describe it this way. "Runoff and infiltration from forested land produce the best quality water. A watershed whose open spaces become less than its developed lands can no longer supply itself with drinking water."

We also provide water for two neighboring towns, Fitchburg and Townsend. Fitchburg controls two reservoirs on the southern side of Ashby, one of which provides potable water to the city. Townsend's municipal water wells in West Townsend are supplied in part by the aquifer under eastern Ashby. To date, no research has been done to locate other potential aquifers within the borders of Ashby.

Two state highways carrying commuter and commercial traffic traverse the town. Route 31 runs north-south providing access to Route 2, thirty minutes to the south.

Route 119 runs east-west giving access to Route 495, 40 minutes to the east. The heaviest growth in Ashby occurs near the intersection of these two routes in the southeast part of town and just off Route 31 in the northeast part of Ashby. There is no public transportation. Rail service to metro-Boston is accessible in Fitchburg about ten miles away. Ashby is a member of the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MRTA).

Ashby saw a large increase in population in the late 1940's and 1950's as the automobile provided access to employment outside of town. Most new residents at that time were employed in the mills of Fitchburg or the plastic industry of Leominster. In the 1970s, industry declined in the region and the population growth began to slow. The town is now primarily a residential community with a very small commercial base of **approximately 156 home based businesses**. A series of family farms still operate but serve as mostly secondary income to the farmers. At this time, Ashby has one of the lowest population densities in Massachusetts at 140 residents per square mile.

### History of Ashby

Prior to European contact, Ashby was an upland hunting and gathering area for Native Americans. It is believed that there were no permanent native settlements in the town. However, at least one location, Indian Caves, is believed to have been a seasonal hunting camp. Indian Caves is a natural rock shelter overlooking the surrounding forest in the area of Caton Hill and Jones Hill. Pre-contact occupation of the site is indicated by soot deposits on the roof of the shelter and by an occasional arrowhead found in the area. Fort Hill and Rattlesnake Hill have also produced native artifacts but no shelters are known. Native Americans inhabited this area until they were pushed out in the late-eighteenth century.

Originally part of Lunenburg, Ashby was incorporated on March 5, 1767. In 1768, forty-three families were listed on the town's roster. The first place of worship was started in 1769 and was ready to occupy in 1774. Moneys were set aside for four district schools in the 1780's. Ashby's first town moderator, John Fitch, occupied one of three garrisons in town. He and his family were captured by Indians taken on foot to Canada, and later ransomed by friends.

Ashby was originally agrarian like most New England towns. By the mid-eighteenth century the town began to harness its fast flowing streams for water-powered manufacturing. There were twenty-three water powered mill sites here in Ashby. The first gristmill was built in 1750. Other manufacturing included sawmills, a wood turning mill, wool carding, and several food-processing mills. In 1831, the Lawrence brothers and Martin Allen made the first wooden tubs and pails in Massachusetts

which were turned on a lathe driven by a water wheel. In the early 20th century, waterpower brought electricity to parts of town. Three noted clock makers, Abraham Edwards and the Willard brothers, Alexander and Philander, worked in Ashby. They made the large-standing, eight-day clocks that were the type of timepiece "that dudes and people of mawkish sentimentality are so anxious to possess." Jonas Prescott Whitney, a former carpenter, became very adept at fashioning church organs. He made every part from the bellows to the keys with power from a windmill mounted on the roof of his house. A unique cottage industry was the braided palm-leaf hats made by women in Ashby. Approximately 60,000 of these hats were made in 1837 and sold south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Milk and butter were first retailed in Fitchburg and later in Boston. Apples were a cash crop. Fruit not fit for market was turned into cider.

But by the turn of the twentieth century, most of the mills were gone. Ashby discouraged industrialization by voting against having a railroad in town. Although agriculture has declined over the years, Ashby maintained two large dairy farms until the federal dairy herd buy-out of the last decade ended full-time farming in the town. The residents of Ashby see farming as part of the definition of the town. Suburbanization is encroaching on this definition.

An historic district was voted by Town Meeting in 1997. The district, centered around Ashby's Town Common, includes the Wyman Tavern built in 1780 (now reconstructed as offices and the Town post office), the First Parish Church, built on the site of the first meeting house, the Grange Hall, the Congregational Church, the Ashby Free Public Library, Engine House #1 (currently home to the Ashby Historical Society), Ashby Market, the First Parish Cemetery, and several private residences. Much of the turn-of-the-century look remains today in the Ashby Historic District.

Another area of historical significance is South Village. The ruins of the water-powered mills are still to be found along the banks of Willard Brook. South Village has no historic protection at this time but is somewhat isolated and in a zoning district that does not allow commercial use. The mills themselves receive protection from acts designed to protect waterways, specifically, the Wetlands Protection Act and the Rivers Protection Act. South Village may be an area for a future extension of the Ashby Historic District.

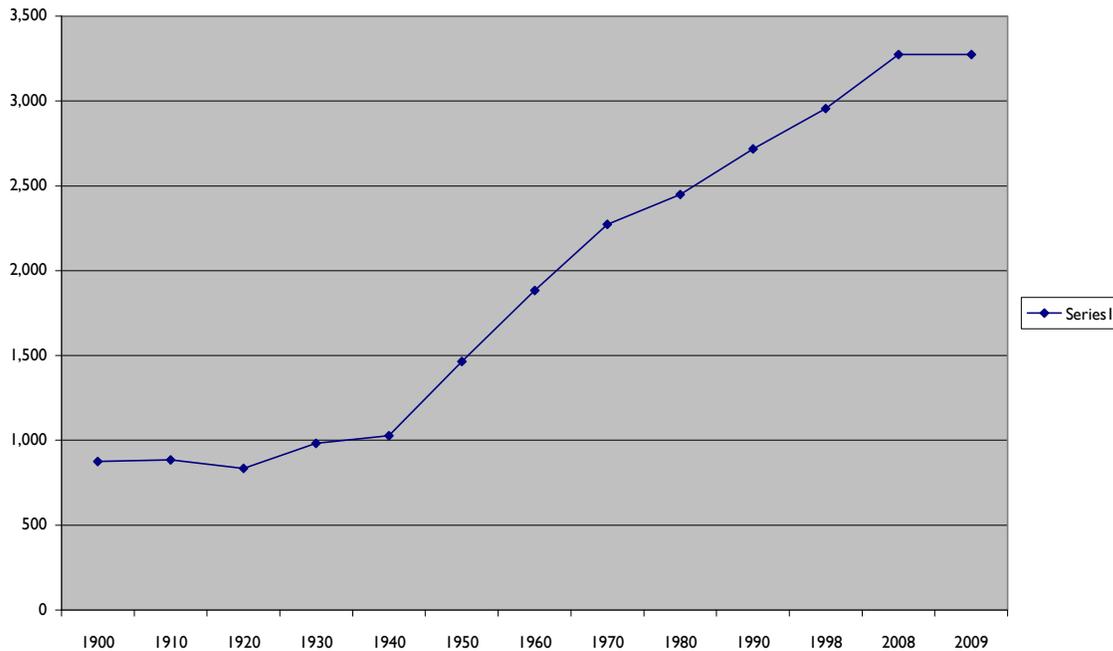
## Population Characteristics

### Population Trends

Ashby’s population was 2311 in 1980, 2717 in 1990, 2964 in 1998, and 3275 in 2008. The population grew at a rate of 8% between 1970 and 1980, 11% from 1980 to 1990, 8% from 1990 to 1999, and 11% from 2000 to 2009. Projections by Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) indicate a growth rate of 11% through 2020. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission noted that between 1995 and 2009 Ashby was the seventh fastest growing town in the fifteen towns covered in the Montachusett area. MRPC also projected the Ashby population to 3350 by 2020.

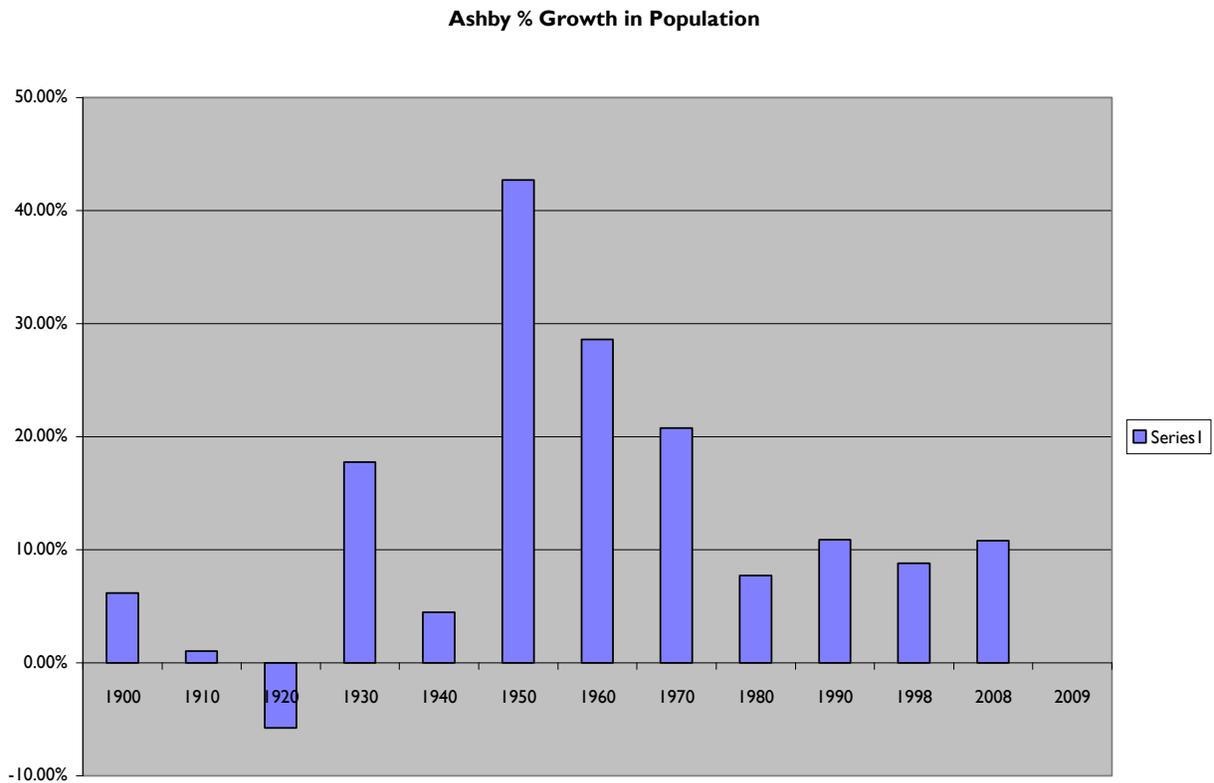
Ashby’s population is 98% white with small number of persons identifying themselves as of other races or mixed-race.

Ashby Population Chart



The last 20 years have seen a reduction in the number of young families and children per household. This reflects national figures showing a reduced birth rate. In 1990, 26% of Ashby’s population was under 15 years of age while 41% was between the ages of 20 and 44. By 2000, 23% of the population was under age 15 and 35% was between the

ages of 20 and 44. During the same period the number of people age 45-55 increased from 9% to 17% of the population. Although we do not have more recent census data, we expect the population composition to be more similar to 2000.

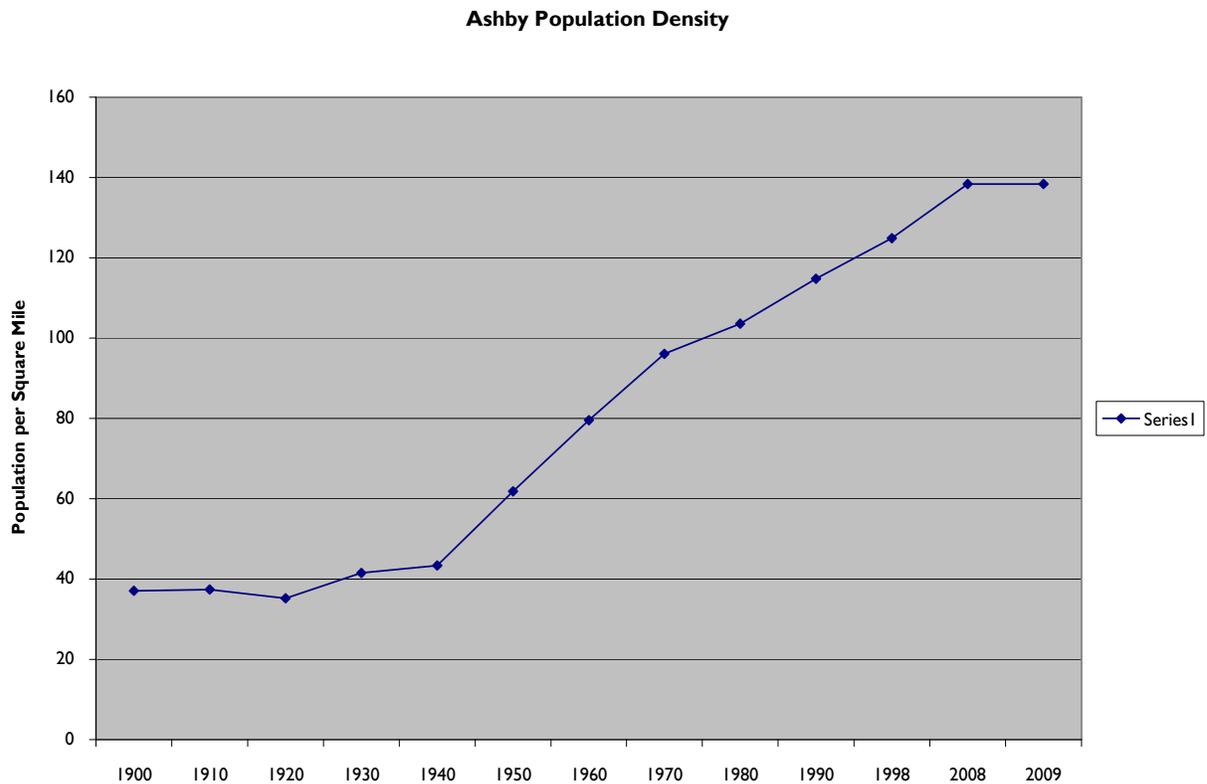


## Population Density

From 1970 to 1980 housing units grew at a rate of 22%, between 1980 and 1990 housing units grew at a rate of 20%, and from 1998 to 2008 housing unit grew at a rate of 11%. From 2007 – current, like most of the state and country, the new housing unit market has virtually disappeared. Therefore, from 2000 – 2006, Ashby had continued on the approximately 20% growth rate per decade.

While the trend of housing growth is 20% growth per decade, the population density growth trend has been between 8% and 11% per decade. Until 2007, a major cause of this disparity between housing growth and population growth appears to be the reduction in the number of persons per household. In 1970, Ashby averaged 3.5 persons per household. In 1990 the average was 2.8 persons per household. However, the average per household is rising to 2.9 persons.

This information indicates that population density is not parallel to the impact of development on open space particularly in a town with large lot zoning and few multifamily dwellings. The information also shows that persons per household and the quantity of new housing units closely follow the economic cycle. Thus, Ashby should expect development and population density pressures to increase during the next economic upturn.



The 1987 Future Growth Study Committee's report noted that there were about 7,600 acres of developable land in the town. Current assessor's data indicates this number is lower at 7,000 acres. This amounts to just under one half the land in the Town. If all this acreage were completely developed under current zoning regulations, an additional 4,500 dwellings would be constructed. This would be more than four times the number of houses that exist today. Such a build-out would result in population of 15,400 if the number of persons per household remains the same. Increased commercial development can be expected to accompany such a build-out but will continue to be limited by highway access – making the majority of the development residential. Ashby would become a suburban bedroom community. The majority of respondents to the Future Growth Committee survey considered below 4,000 (a density of 169 persons per square mile) to be the "ideal" population for Ashby.

## Economic Overview

### **Employment Trends**

**There are about 156 businesses in Ashby.** All the businesses are small and most are based in homes. Approximately 50 of them have one or more employees. With the closing of the only large manufacturing facility in town in 1998, the town became the largest employer. The town of Ashby employs about 27 persons; the largest private employer has six employees. The top categories of employment are government, trade, and service. The 2008 Department of Employment Training (DET) figures show that, out of a total labor force of 1,581, only 188 people are employed within the town itself. Most people travel to jobs out of town. The 2000 census showed that all commuting is done via automobile. Ashby is one of the few communities in the state that has no resident using public transportation.

Economic development has taken lagged behind population growth. DET data shows no increase in workforce size or number of employed individuals between 2000 and 2008. This reflects the lack of public transportation, limited availability of commercial sites, a soft jobs market, and the increasing age of the population of Ashby. The lack of highway access, a public water supply, or wastewater treatment adds to the disincentive for businesses to locate in Ashby. Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner will probably continue to be the main commercial centers while businesses in Ashby cater to local or niche markets.

**A major component of the business community is the home based business that constitutes 69% of the businesses in the town.** At this time there are no known plans to improve the transportation system in the area. One area of commercial activity that could be increased without additional building development is tourism. For this to be successful some forms of passive public recreation would have to be promoted. To date neither the town nor the business community has chosen to do so.

An area of economic activity that could impact Ashby is telecommunications. The prospect is that "telecommuting" will become a reality in Ashby. If this is the case, there will be no transportation barrier to residential and commercial development. Although no hard numbers are available, this trend bears watching as both business and residents make increasing use of advances in communications technology.

## **Family Income**

Ashby has traditionally been considered the poorest of the towns in this area. According to the City Data in 2007, Ashby has a median household income of \$ 74,920 versus the state average of \$ 62,365. However, according to the City Data in 2007, Ashby has a median home value of \$ 266,393 versus the state average of \$ 366,400. The reduction in persons per household, the aging of the population, and the relatively high income for the area indicate a hard working community with comparatively low property value, long commutes to work, and a desire to live in a rural community.

Increasing emphasis is being placed on recreation and open space with group sports for children and individual recreation among adults on the increase. Anecdotal information indicates that there are more walkers, joggers and bicyclists on the roads. Equestrian trail riding, hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling are the more popular off-road activities.

## Growth and Development Patterns

### **Patterns and Trends**

The patterns and trends of growth and development in Ashby follow two distinct lines: the village center with outlying farms (resource based) and the suburban zoning model. From its incorporation until the 1960's, Ashby followed a resource based form of development. The growth and development occurred where the appropriate natural or cultural resource was available, i.e. mills along rivers, town center near the church, market and main roads, farm on best agricultural soils, etc. The result of this model is still visible today with the historic town center, village-like clusters of higher density housing, and outlying larger parcels around the villages. The cultural significance of the feel created by this form of growth can not be underestimated.

The second type of growth and development in Ashby is the suburban zoning model. In the 1960's, Ashby adopted the zoning in place today and as shown on the zoning map. The zoning created an arbitrary, non-resource based definition of a parcel based along the two main vehicular routes. The impact of the zoning model has been a simple process for subdivision (ANR) and a "chopped-up" suburban appearance of new houses.

Ashby is trending toward a desire to preserve and restore the historic model of development and growth while trying to maintain personal property values and mitigate the impacts of the ANR, suburban zoning model.

## **Infrastructure**

Ashby has limited public infrastructure beyond the roads. All water and sewer systems are private per property systems. All utilities are providing by private companies. Ashby has no public transportation opportunities.

The road infrastructure is based off three levels of traffic: the main route (Route 119 and Route 31), the collector roads (i.e. New Ipswich Road, West Road, and South Road), and country road (all other tertiary roads). The main routes as maintain by the Commonwealth are in good shape and provide important access for Ashby's daily commuters. The collector roads are in varying levels of condition from good to passable and will require proper paving and drainage work within the next five years. The tertiary, country roads are generally in poor condition with poor drainage. Ashby does not have enough funds to pave more than 1 mile of road per year - an unsustainable policy.

With its off the beaten path location and residential level infrastructure, Ashby is unlikely to provide commercial or industrial opportunities beyond the home-based business, small retail / service, or small office level.

## **Long Term Development Patterns**

All of Ashby, with the exception of one small industrial zone, is zoned for residential use. Most of the town is zoned for two-acre lots. However, two small residential/commercial zones, one in the town center and one on Route 31 leading to Fitchburg, allow one-acre lots. The only provision for multi-family housing is to allow one accessory apartment per dwelling. Since accessory apartments have been approved there has been an average of two permits per year granted for them. Single family, two-acre lot development is the way the town has developed. For the foreseeable future it will continue that way.

Most development in Ashby has taken place along existing roads through the Approval Not Required (ANR) process because this is the least expensive and quickest approach for developers. Since 1988, when the first subdivision was approved, there have been five subdivisions developed. Only one is larger than ten units. Whether through subdivision control or ANR, developers are limited by frontage, not acreage. This usually means that dwellings are spaced 200 feet apart along the road. Eventually, houses will use up frontage until Ashby has a suburban look. The existing zoning by-laws give both the town and developers little choice in the matter. Ashby has passed an Open Space Residential Development bylaw to provide an avenue for developers to create subdivisions with open space and proper land use in mind. However, with the

ANR process being far less expensive, the Planning Board has seen no subdivision control plans in the past seven years. A further review of zoning bylaws would give the residents an opportunity to impact the suburbanization of Ashby.

Until now Ashby's active, more visible agricultural lands have avoided development. Development has taken place on farms that have ceased operation raising concerns for the future of farms across the Town. Ashby's primary crop is hay. The hay fields add to the scenic beauty as well as to the bio-diversity of the town. Hay does not require large amounts of fertilizer or pesticides and does not have the adverse impact on the environment that more intensive farming does. The increasing resources of some of the residents has brought more horse back riding to the town. Horses plus Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requirements for silt barriers at construction sites have created a ready market for the hay crop.

Farmers indicate that hay would not support a farm if the land had to be purchased at today's prices. The decline in farming in the area indicates that this is in fact the case. Developers are the only other parties in the market for large pieces of land. Developers will look to farms more and more as a source of buildable land as existing road frontage becomes increasingly scarce. With some forethought, like the Open Space Residential Development bylaw, and support for farming, Ashby might be able to allow some development on land owned by farmers while encouraging continued agricultural use of the prime farmland.

With 50% of the land area available for residential use, residential development will have the largest impact on the town and available open space for the foreseeable future. If, as has been seen in the past, the economy recovers, Ashby will a renewed development pattern in the suburban sprawl model. If allowed to continue under the current ANR zoning, the model will have a negative impact on agricultural lands, open space, and the rural character of the community. If we assume an average lot size of three acres and a return to an average housing market, then the town can expect to lose about 500 acres of open space over the next ten years.

## Future

There appears to be a 15-year shrinking window of opportunity for Ashby to address open space needs. A two-part approach in the coming years must be taken to preserve the quality of life and the rural character of the town for the next generation.

First, Ashby must commit itself to encouraging local economic uses of open space. For the foreseeable future, most available open space will remain in private hands. Encouraging and supporting activities such as farming, forestry, and open space

recreation will reduce the amount of land released for development while providing income or tax relief for landowners. This approach requires a long-term commitment and does not produce quantifiable results. However, it can produce the strongest cooperation between the community and the private landowners.

Second, Ashby must strengthen its public and private commitment to preserving open space through purchase, donation, conservation easements, agricultural protection restrictions, and deed restrictions. Commitments like these have the advantage of insuring open space protection in perpetuity. Results are measurable. The financial burden can be shared by having town agencies work with state organizations and land trusts. Joint efforts have the benefit of allowing large projects to be considered as well as increasing coordination and cooperation between various groups.

Encouraging and preserving local economic use while pursuing the public or private conservation of land will produce the greatest results. In the process, residents will become more aware of and educated about open space issues. A combined approach is the most likely to succeed as the basis for an open space plan that can work well into the future.

## SECTION 4 - ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

### Geology, Soils and Topography

Ashby is characterized by rugged, hilly terrain interspersed with gently rolling open fields, woodlands, stream corridors, and wetlands. The topography and resulting landscape of the town is controlled by the underlying bedrock and surficial (unconsolidated) geologic units.

#### **Bedrock geology**

The bedrock in Ashby is comprised of members of three major geologic units, the metamorphic Littleton and Paxton Formations, and the Fitchburg Plutonic (igneous) Complex. The metamorphic bedrock types are gray-weathering feldspathic and sulfidic schists. The sulfidic schist is responsible for the "rotten egg" sulfur smell emanating from the water from many bedrock wells in town. The metamorphic bedrock was intruded by granites and tonalite, which was also deformed somewhat by later metamorphism. The more resistant of these rock types are responsible for the bedrock hills and outcrops in the town.

Steep slopes, shallow water tables and hilly terrain used to be impediments to building. However, with the introduction of Title 5 septic regulations, many parcels that were considered undevelopable in the past are now being developed by the introduction of new technologies and/or large amounts of fill to provide offset to groundwater. Septic outbreaks on these slopes may become more prevalent as building continues. These previously undevelopable areas are becoming increasingly threatened as the demand for undeveloped land increases and the desire for breathtaking views from Ashby's hillsides override the increase in costs of this development.

#### **Surficial Geology**

The last glacial episode in this region, the Wisconsin Ice Age, ended approximately 15,000 years ago. The resulting glacial deposits determine in large part whether land is well drained and easily developable or is poorly drained, wet, and not as suitable for development.

There are three main classes of unconsolidated deposits in Ashby: glacial till, stratified drift and alluvium. Most of the town is covered by glacial till. Stratified drift deposits, where present in pockets, are abundant and have been considerably exploited.

Glacial till is a dense, heterogeneous, poorly sorted mixture of sand, silt, clay and angular rocks and boulders that was plastered down beneath the glacier in a thin veneer over the bedrock. Glacial till transmits water very slowly (technically, has a low hydraulic conductivity or permeability) and tends to be poorly drained. Seasonal high water tables and wetland areas are common in soils formed over till.

Stratified drift deposits are sorted, layered material deposited by glacial meltwater streams. Fine-grained deposits are deposited by low energy, slower-moving streams, and are generally carried farther from the glacier. Coarse gravels and sands are deposited by higher energy, fast-flowing water. Most of the gravel pits in town were formed as kames or kame terraces or plains, having been deposited between the melting glacier and a stagnant ice lobe or ice-dammed stream.

Sand and gravel deposits have great aquifer-bearing and aquifer-recharge potential. Typically, bedrock valleys covered by large deposits of sand and gravel (known as buried valleys) provide the greatest potential drinking water resource. No studies have been completed to determine if such a resource exists. A need for this kind of study would arise if Ashby's growth or if widespread ground water contamination necessitated a municipal drinking water supply. Development of potentially precious aquifer-bearing land prior to such a study would be a great loss of the town's resources. It is evident from the surficial geology map that sand-and-gravel areas are limited in town.

## **Soils**

Soils reflect the underlying unconsolidated deposits. The most common soil type in Ashby is probably the Woodbridge Sandy Loam, consisting of deep soils formed on compact glacial till with a seasonal high water table at 18 to 24 inches. Other common soil types that share these characteristics (wetness, low permeability) are the Scituate fine sand loam, the Ridgebury fine sandy loam, the Whitman loams, and the Birchwood fine sandy loam. Poorly-drained till soils are also found intermingled with bedrock outcrops.

Low-permeability till-based soils without characteristic high water tables are also found in town, although less frequently. These include the Paxton and Montauk fine sandy loams. Sandier, more permeable till soils without high water tables are much less prevalent, and include Canton and Charleton fine sandy loams.

River valleys often contain muck soils or sandy, permeable soils with characteristic high water tables. Well-drained soils formed on sand and gravel outwash are limited to the areas of sand and gravel shown on the soils and geologic features map.

## Landscape Character

Ashby retains many features of its geologic and cultural history. As residents of the town, we are proud and protective of the natural beauty and heritage passed down to us.

The rural character of the town is characterized by such features as the well hidden but exquisite two-mile drive along Route 119 in the Willard Brook State Forest. In the spring, Willard Brook rushes snakelike through boulder-sided mini-chasms and under manmade arched bridges. Along the two-mile journey, it drops 500 feet, forms Damon Pond, the popular swimming pond with its own waterfall, and then merges with Trapfall Brook. The sides of the hills bloom with flowering rhododendron and mountain laurel.

Many of our public ways still have long stretches of woods and fields outlined by hand built stone walls. It is this rural view from the roadway that helps to distinguish Ashby from its more developed neighbors. Maintaining this look is one of the priorities of the townspeople. The rural character that is so important to residents is generally defined by the following elements:

### **The Nine Hills**

Ashby is a hill town, abutting the New Hampshire border at an average elevation of 1000 feet above sea level. The bold features of the town derive from its distinctively named hills.

Mount Watatic	Blood Hill
Jones Hill	Spring Hill
Juniper Hill	Rattlesnake Hill
Jewell Hill	Fort Hill
Caton Hill	

Granite topped, historic Mount Watatic with its trails and Indian traditions is a regional treasure, hiked regularly by hundreds of people. The Wapack Trail starts in Ashby at the foot of Mount Watatic and runs over a number of ridges to the summit of North Pack Monadnock in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Until the mid-1980s, Mount Watatic supported a popular local ski area with two T-bar lifts and two rope tows. The State Department of Fisheries and Wildlife has acquired significant portions of the

Mountain in both Ashby and Ashburnham, and Ashby supports their continued efforts to protect this resource.

### **The Fields and Farms**

Although agriculture as an occupation has declined in Ashby as in many towns in Massachusetts, the fields, farms, and orchards that remain speak eloquently about our rural way of life. Ashby still has two farms that provide the primary income to their owners. The major crop is hay. The Lyman and McLatchy fields (24 acres just south of the center of town) are still hayed and contribute to the unique openness in the center of town. The Ashby Stock Farm includes 238 acres of forest and field to the northwest of the center. The Stock Farm and the Crocker farm are the two largest farms to remain intact. Five orchards, owned by the Fitzgeralds, the Saaris, the Quatralles, and the Town of Ashby (formerly the Gullivers), encompass over 200 acres. There are three active Christmas tree farms owned by the Pernaas, the Hansons, and the Arnolds. And every spring, when the sap rises, the Pernaas on South Road tap the sugar maples and fire up the sugarhouse to make syrup. Town residents appreciate and wish to support the farms so they remain viable and open as shown through the passage of a Right to Farm bylaw and an active summer farmers' market at the weekly band concerts.

### **The Brooks**

In the valleys formed between the flanks of the hillsides are the fast flowing streams that are so closely linked to Ashby's history of water powered mills. With the exception of Locke Brook, all these brooks have their headwaters in Ashby.

Trapfall Brook	Willard Brook
South Branch of the Souhegan	Locke Brook
Pearl Hill Brook	Fallulah Brook

### **The Ponds and Reservoirs**

The major bodies of water in Ashby are the Fitchburg Reservoir (owned by the city of Fitchburg), the Ashby Compensating Reservoir, Upper Wright's Pond, Lower Wright's Ponds, and Watatic Pond.

## Heritage Landscapes

Recently, with the assistance of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Ashby has identified 52 heritage landscapes and 9 priority landscapes as part of the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program. The nine Priority Landscapes (as described below and shown on the Landscape Character Map) are critical to the landscape character of Ashby. These unique features should be protected and preserved as the base of the cultural fabric of the community.

- **Ashby Stock Farm** - a large (200 acre), active farm located along Route 119 provides a visual, agricultural anchor to the community.
- **Cemeteries** (First Parish Burial Ground, Glenwood, West) - these historic cemeteries capture the history of the townspeople
- **Gazebo on the Common** - the gazebo serves as a cultural hub for events, tourists, and a landmark
- **Jewett Hill Caves** - Indian caves on traditional hunting grounds
- **Loveland Grist and Saw Mills** - a mill building structure and series of foundations expressing the only industrial phase in the history of Ashby
- **Route 119** - the scenic highway through Willard Brook State Park, the historic Town Center, and the Watatic Mountain area
- **Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge** - a historic and attractive stone arch bridge over Trap Falls Brook.

## Water Resources

Water resources in Ashby consist of various forms of surface and subsurface water: ponds, rivers, brooks, wetlands, aquifers, and other groundwater sources. Ashby's water drains through two watersheds, the Nashua River watershed and the Souhegan River watershed, into the Merrimack River.

### Watersheds

The Nashua River watershed covers an area of 538 square miles within 31 communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Locke Brook, one of the New Hampshire sources of the Nashua River passes through Ashby. Willard Brook and Trapfall Brook begin in Ashby and feed into the Squannacook River watershed, then into the main stem of the Nashua River. Falulah Brook is its own small watershed that feeds into the North Nashua River.

The South Branch of the Souhegan starts in the northwest corner of Ashby and the northeastern parts of Ashburnham and then flows north into New Ipswich, New Hampshire on its way towards the Merrimack River.

### **Surface Water & Wetlands**

All of Ashby's water is listed as outstanding resource water. Ashby provides water not only to its own residents through private wells, but also to Fitchburg, through the Fitchburg Reservoir, and Townsend, through its streams and aquifers which feed well fields in West Townsend.

Because of Ashby's relatively high altitude in relation to its neighboring towns, most of its streams are fast flowing and well-oxygenated traveling along stony riverbeds with steep banks and little flood plain. Ashby's streams are home to many species of fish, the most notable being native brook trout. This is a direct result of the highly oxygenated waters and the cool temperature of the water. Ashby's waters maintain their cooler temperatures due to the heavily forested areas. Ashby itself has a cooler climate than surrounding towns (10 to 15 degrees lower) due, in part, to the higher altitude of the town. Most ponds in Ashby have been artificially created either by beavers or people.

The scattered wetland areas that intersect the slower sections of many of Ashby's streams have become home to many beavers. These wetland areas act as baffles during periods of high water run-off, spring melts, and 25-, 50-, and 100-year storm events. These areas provide the potential for aquifer recharge. They protect downstream properties and streambeds from water damage and flooding.

All of Ashby's streams are home for two to five families of beavers, with one pond per family. The beavers have dammed the streams and created numerous ponds and wetlands throughout town. Although a great number of these ponds are located away from direct contact with people, they have created havoc where they have been near homes. Septic systems have been flooded, Giardia counts have to be monitored closely at swimming ponds, and people have watched their trees and shrubs disappear in the water.

Another unique pond feature in Ashby is the fire pond. Damming streams has created some of these ponds. Others have been created through the capture of ground waters. The town has no public water system and relies on these ponds for fire protection. These very same ponds also provide recreational opportunities: fishing, swimming, ice skating, and wild life attraction.

Ashby's high water quality has been taken for granted. Relatively little testing or monitoring has taken place on the streams. However, with the cooperation and support of the Nashua River Watershed Association, some water testing and discussion of low impact development best management practices have begun.

### **Aquifer Recharge Areas**

No official studies have been performed on the breadth of aquifers under Ashby or the extent or ability of Ashby's soils to recharge aquifers. The only noted aquifer recharge locations are along the eastern border with Townsend serving the wells in West Townsend. Ashby has some pockets of sand and gravel deposits within its generally glacial till soils. It is suspected that these areas would provide the highest quality aquifer recharge within Ashby.

### **Flood Hazard Areas**

By viewing the recently updated Flood Hazard Boundary maps for Ashby, it is evident that there are not many areas in town subject to flooding. For the most part, this is due to the high slopes of the town. Wherever there is level land along a stream, there is a flood hazard zone. Two of the more notable areas prone to flooding are the Great Meadow, between Mason Road, Foster Road and Main Street, and a large wet meadow situated downstream from Lower Wright's Pond. Other flood hazard areas have, in the past, been filled in and had homes built upon them. This is most obvious along the southern stretch of Route 31 heading into Fitchburg.

## Vegetation

### **General Inventory**

Ashby was reputedly named for the abundance and quality of white ash (*Fraxinus americana*) found in the area by early settlers. Numerous fine specimens of white ash are still found along roadsides in town.

There is a wide range of natural vegetative communities in Ashby, including hardwood and pine forest, red maple swamps, cattail marshes, wet meadows, and quaking (sphagnum) bogs. Lady slippers are common in some pine and oak forest areas. The town contains fertile farmland, tree farms, orchards, and hay fields. Many of the large forest tracts in town are managed for cordwood and lumber.

## Forest Land

Ashby is generally located in the white pine-hemlock-northern hardwood forest. White pine (*Pinus strobus*) is the dominant conifer, growing especially in (but not limited to) areas with fast-draining sandy soils. Large white pines are common. Hemlock (*Thuja canadensis*) groves grow in valleys and wet areas. Hillside forests tend to be stands of mixed hardwoods, including beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), white or paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), sugar maples and red maples (*Acer saccharum* and *Acer rubrum*), oaks (*Quercus*), white & green ash, and hickories (*Carya*). Old growth oaks have been noted on private lands.

Common forest understory plants include mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), green or striped maple (*A. pennsylvanicum*), and hobblebush viburnum (*V. alnifolium*). "Laurel hells," almost impenetrable thickets of laurel, are occasionally found. The summit of Mount Watatic has a relatively large expanse of low bush blueberry, providing a popular hiking destination for families.

In December 2008, Ashby was hit with a devastating ice storm causing significant damage and stress to the upland, deciduous forest including topping a majority maple and ash trees and uprooting oak trees. Although the extent of damage has not been quantified, the impact of the storm to the forests will be felt for years to come in terms of forest management, wildlife habitat, and threat of fire from the downed trees and limbs.

Since 1900, a variety of diseases have limited the diversity of our woodlands. Chestnut blight eliminated the American chestnut; American elms have succumbed to Dutch Elm disease; white ash trees are now dying of Ash Decline. This lack of diversity has implications for replanting efforts on the Town Common and elsewhere. To address this problem the Parks Department is investigating disease resistant trees for replanting.

## Agricultural Land

Ashby is fortunate that there are still a number of large tracts maintained as open fields, generally for hay production and some grazing. Notable examples are the Ashby Stock Farm, the Crocker Farm on Jewell Hill, and the Perna property on South Road.

Despite the large tracts still maintained as fields, the general decline in agriculture in Ashby has led to vegetative succession on once open land. Recently overgrown fields commonly contain sumac, poplars (*Populus tremuloides*), and white birch.

## Wetland Vegetation

Ashby has a variety of wetland types and wetland vegetation including stream banks, beaver ponds, wet meadows, border vegetated wetlands, and open water. **The Great Meadow is a significant wet meadow habitat along Trap Falls Brook containing ...** Speckled alder (*Alnus rugosa*) and highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) are common in wet areas.

## Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Vegetative Species

Ashby is home to *Rhodea* (dogbane), a rare flowering plant that lives off dead and decaying matter. The locations of these plants have been noted by the Conservation Commission but are not publicized to protect their fragile habitat. Steps are being taken to ensure that these locations and species are registered with the National Heritage Foundation so that they receive the protection they deserve.

## Fisheries and Wildlife

### General Inventory

Wetlands, forest, mountainous areas, and open fields are unique habitat supporting diverse populations of organisms. Wetlands are by far the most important of all the habitats due to the large number of vertebrates, invertebrates, and plants that live there. Vernal pools are equally as important for similar reasons and should be protected where possible. The generally small, non-game species found in wetland habitats very often cannot migrate to other more suitable areas as a response to habitat destruction. Therefore, it is imperative that these types of habitat be carefully monitored.

Wooded and mountainous areas should be considered the second most important habitats when considering which land to preserve. A few of the organisms found here include both large and small mammals, countless varieties of trees, shrubs, mosses, and lichen, insects, birds, salamanders, toads, and frogs. Larger animals like fisher, deer, bobcats, and bears can easily move as forests are disturbed, however, nesting birds, small organisms (both vertebrate, invertebrate), and less mobile animals have little choice as to where they can go.

Fields and open spaces, while providing habitat for fewer species, are also very important. Ermine, voles, moles, and some shrews depend on open areas as do numerous birds, insects, and grazing or browsing animals. Small mammals native to the fields provide a ready food source for migrating and resident raptors. Fields left to grow to wildflowers encourage birds, butterfly, and bee populations. Deer feed on

grasses and shrubs. Dense underbrush at the edge of a field is important cover for rabbits, mice and birds. Fields should be strategically managed so as not to create a monoculture (one or a few species of grasses) but to encourage a great diversity of plant species that are attractive to many organisms. Mowing should be carefully timed to decrease disruption of nesting birds and feeding insects.

White-tailed deer, fisher cats, porcupines, red and gray squirrels, coyote, and fox inhabit wooded areas in Ashby. Black bears travel through our woods although there are no resident populations. Meadow voles, ermine, rabbits, and many birds live and reproduce in meadows and where dense underbrush is found. Beaver, moose, muskrats, otters, mink, and waterfowl use our marshes, streams, and ponds.

Ideally, wetland, forest, mountain, and fields should remain contiguous so organisms may seek food, solitude, shelter, and the safety they desire in the particular habitat suitable for them. This would be aesthetically pleasing to most people who enjoy wild life viewing. This would also supply recreational areas to those who chose to use them. It is also important for these areas to be contiguous because the largest numbers of wildlife are found where one habitat borders another.

Ashby is fortunate to have within its boundaries numerous tracts of land where many species of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and insects flourish. Diverse habitats are necessary to sustain these various species since most animals have specific requirements and are therefore restricted by their dependence on the surrounding vegetation, shelter, territory requirements, and nutrient availability. By protecting our fields, meadows, forests, wetlands, brooks and ponds through conservation efforts, we encourage wildlife habitation as we enrich the quality of our own lives.

Residential developments threaten these relationships by fragmenting and destroying valuable habitat. To ensure the survival of each species, efforts, like smart growth principles and conservation, must be made to reduce the human impact on our existing wildlife. The townspeople will gain recreational and rural character preservation benefits from such conservation efforts. Those who enjoy hunting, fishing, and bird watching will still have an opportunity to do so. Open spaces impart a feeling of well being and relaxation to many of us. Foresight and proper management of open spaces will ensure an abundance of native wildlife for Ashby residents to enjoy for many years to come.

## Vernal Pools

Fortunately, the Ashby Conservation Commission has been active in identifying and cataloging the vernal pools in Ashby. We currently have 28 certified vernal pools. With cooperation from private property owners, Ashby has been able to identify vernal pools on private lands, not just on public or conserved land. The Town will continue to identify and protect these valuable habitats.

## Corridors of Migration

The Mount Watatic area is home to numerous species of birds such as blue birds, hawks, warblers, and sparrows. Large numbers of raptors can be observed passing over the mountain as they follow their yearly migration cycles. The rocky outcroppings are preferred as den sites by gray fox, fisher, porcupine, and bobcat. Smaller mammals, especially bats, seek shelter in caves or under overhangs.

## Rare Species

With its diverse habitats, Ashby has four NHES Priority Habitat Designations and environmental important Mount Watatic area.

The Great Meadow is a wet meadow habitat unique to Ashby is its size and diversity of species.

The Fitchburg Reservoir is home to loon nesting sites and

The South Branch of the Souhegan in the northwest corner of Ashby has a rare species along its river banks.

Mount Watatic possibly has an extremely rare species of shrew which prefers rocky recesses or talus slopes. This shrew, known as the long-tailed or rock shrew (*Sorex dispar*), has rarely been seen.

It is questionable as to whether or not we are in mountain lion range. If we are, the chances are good that they would inhabit the areas such as those found on or around Watatic Mountain.

## Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

The town of Ashby is replete with scenic beauty. *Sawtelle's History of Ashby, Massachusetts* speaks of Ashby in glowing terms, "The surface is hilly and diversified. The outlines of the landscape are majestic and grand. Many of the elevations are bold and rough, while others are gracefully rounded and some of the elevated swells of land are fertile to the summit." For those fortunate enough to live in Ashby in 2009, it is a joy that Ashby has retained the scenic beauty that Sawtelle spoke about over 100 years ago.

Ashby enjoys abundant wooded areas including Willard Brook State Park, a treasure of thickly forested woodlands with clear flowing streams. Damon Pond, nestled in the State Park, provides a lovely, tranquil setting for a refreshing swim on a hot summer day. The hike along Valley Road is easily accessible for young children because it is relatively flat and is a wonderful place to go cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, or horseback riding. The hand-built arched bridge is beautiful. The Trap Falls stone bridge on Route 31 is a fine example of the particular historic building style. It has been rescued from demolition once already when Route 31 was widened and repaved in the 1970s. Keeping the bridges repaired and maintained as scenic/historic sites would be a special gift to future generations.

Our many hills afford unparalleled views of Ashby's surroundings. From atop Blood Hill, located in the west part of town, or Caton Hill located near the center of town, one can look eastward and see the skyscrapers of Boston. Pine Hill and Battery Hill along Ashby's eastern border overlook the valley around the Squannacook River. Mount Watatic views are lovely and tranquil in all directions. Jones Hill, a little west of the center of town, Jewell Hill in the southwest part of town and Caton Hill are primarily open and agricultural. All provide grand views of Mount Watatic and the Monadnock Range that stretches north into New Hampshire.

The Indian Caves, found in the West Road and Jewett Hill area adjacent to the Ashby Stock Farm are an important remnant of Ashby's past and should be preserved for future generations. Rattlesnake Hill and Fort Hill are two more areas where Native American artifacts, such as arrowheads, have been found.

Throughout town you can find large parcels of land that provide corridors for wildlife migration. Beavers have been busy in several locations creating larger wetland areas where wildlife is abundant. Great Meadow, located off Foster Road, is a beautiful beaver-flooded field that is home for a variety of plants and animals as well as a place for migrating waterfowl to feed. These wetland areas help to recharge our water supply and serve as a holding area that moderates the effects of high and low water seasons downstream.

Ashby's natural beauty provides the perfect backdrop for her picturesque village green. The Town Common was recently named among a list of "perfect village greens" by a writer for the *Sentinel & Enterprise* newspaper. "The Common has a fine green surrounded by two churches, a burial ground and a weathered old Grange Hall. On the green itself is a gazebo, an old hand pump, monuments to the early settlers and Ashby's war veterans, and a couple of ancient gnarled maples." The town pump is still available to folks when their wells run dry. Band concerts have been held on the Common on Wednesday nights in the summer since 1897. The town of Ashby flows in all directions from the Town Common and has many beautiful historic homes set against the backdrop of her rural landscape.

Ashby has an active Historical Society. There is a collection of local artifacts housed in the refurbished Fire Station located in the Ashby Historic District. Among other historically significant buildings in Ashby, there are still many large barns, both attached and detached, which help maintain the rural feel of the town. Our Historical Society recently hosted a well-attended barn tour. Many people again expressed their interest in preserving the rural charm and character of the town.

### Environmental Problems

Although Ashby is both rural and sparsely populated, it has not escaped the scourges of modern life. The points of vulnerability are groundwater contamination, erosion, and loss of open space.

#### **Ground Water Contamination**

The town is served solely by private wells. There is no remedy, other than point-of-use treatment, for degraded water quality.

Ashby is served entirely by private water supply wells and private septic systems. In many areas of Ashby the overburden deposits are thin and contaminants can easily enter the bedrock aquifer. Gradual deterioration of water quality from long-term septic associated with development poses the most serious town-wide threat to Ashby's water supply. Zoning build-out analyses typically demonstrate that septic inputs on numerous contiguous lots of 1.5 acres to 2 acres will, over time, result in nitrate concentrations approaching or exceeding the drinking water standard.

To reduce the potential groundwater contamination of large farm animals, the Ashby Board of Health issued a series of regulations regarding the waste of housed and pastured large farm animals.

## **Hazardous Materials**

Ashby has little industrial and commercial property use which helps limit the potential for hazardous materials contamination. The worst known incidence of ground water contamination by hazardous materials is at the Mr. Mike's gasoline filling station at the corner of Erickson Road and Route 119. At that site there was a gasoline release which contaminated a number of private drinking water wells along Main Street. Point-of-use treatment systems were placed on the contaminated wells in the 1980s. Due to a failure of the regulatory system and intransigence on the part of the party responsible for the spill, no additional progress was made until 1994, when the Board of Health and citizens petitioned the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to designate the contamination site a Public Involvement Site. Although progress has continued to be slow, the point-of-use systems have been upgraded. Remediation of ground water in the source area has begun.

The other threat is home-based disposal of hazardous waste. In the past ten years, there have been only a couple of hazardous waste disposal days for residents to safely discard of paints, turpentine, antifreeze, and other harmful household chemicals. Too often the septic system, backyard, or nearby wetland has been used for disposal. The town needs to be far more proactive in this area.

## **Road Salt & Sedimentation**

Due to cold, snowy winters and its hilly roads, Ashby uses large amounts of road sand / salt mix. With tight budgets, much of the sand / salt mix remains on the roads in the spring. Over the spring and summer, stormwater runoff pulls the sediment into the nearby wetlands, forests, and fields. This sedimentation is gradually filling in swales and wet areas while increasing the salt content of the soil, negatively impacting vegetation. With development occurring increasingly on steeper slopes, erosion and sedimentation of lower elevations will become a issue of great concern for the future.

## **Surface Water**

Several ponds in town have various residences on their shores. Many of the houses were built as camps but are increasingly being used as full-time residences. Ground water near these residences may become enriched in nutrients and then discharge to the ponds, resulting in eutrophication. In addition, sedimentation of surface waters from road runoff is a constant threat to surface waters.

## **Solid Waste**

Ashby has been forced to close our landfill to comply with the DEP's solid waste master plan, which makes little sense for small rural towns. To pay for the DEP-mandated closure, the town decided to sell available airspace in the landfill for construction and

demolition debris. The result is that a landfill that would have lasted the town for decades has instead been filled in one and an half years. The town is now grappling with how to maintain its curbside pickup and recycling programs in the face of the increased disposal costs resulting from the use of a transfer station for disposal of trash out of town.

The landfill is also surrounded on two sides by wetlands. The great weight of trash being dumped is squeezing the wastewater out of the landfill, potentially into abutting wetlands. One of these areas feeds into Trapfall Brook that supplies water to Townsend.

### **Subdivision and Loss of Open Space**

Over the past several years, a large percentage of available lots with road frontage have been built out, and developers have started to purchase and subdivide larger parcels. This trend will have a marked impact on wildlife. It will impact human perception of the environmental quality of the town as the large, interconnected parcels of woods and fields start to disappear.

### **Poor Quality Logging**

Numerous large parcels have been logged over the past several years. The environmental impact of logging varies from minimal to extensive. The worst of these operations have had severe impacts on wetlands, with skidder roads cut perpendicularly up and down slopes and through wetlands in muddy conditions. These operations have often preceded sale, and in some cases subdivision, of the land. Supervision of the logging operations by the state forestry office could be improved with more state funding instead of the trend towards less funding. The foresters could also be helped by the active participation of town residents as additional eyes and ears.

### **Off-Road Vehicle Impacts**

Many trails, logging roads, and old byways experience moderate to heavy use by dirt bikes, 4-wheelers and other off-road vehicles. The erosion from this use is occasionally severe. Notable examples include Mount Watatic and the road up Blood Hill.

## SECTION 5 – INVENTORY OF LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST

The term open space as used in this Plan denotes any large parcel, or cluster of parcels, of undeveloped land; and all land, whether developed or not, that primarily used for conservation or recreation purposes. Although Ashby has large amounts of open space, very little of the open space is truly protected. Ashby has open space under five levels of classification.

- Protected - open space protected whether private or public in perpetuity by a deed restriction for the purpose of conservation, watershed protection, or recreation.
- Government Owned – government owned land, whether it be a local, state or federal offices, with the intended and operating use as conservation or recreation. Since these lands are not restricted, the use however unlikely could change
- Chapter 61 – private land with a temporary restriction against use changes in exchange for special tax considerations. Towns gain first right of refusal for the acquisition of the land when a use change is proposed. A use change could occur at any time.
- Non-Profit Organizations – private land, held by non-profit groups with the intended purposes of conservation and recreation
- Private land – no restrictions

Open space makes a significant impact of the rural character and quality of life in Ashby. Large forest and farm lands provide a bucolic setting for the citizens and their families, places for wildlife, protection of our water and air, and recreational opportunities. Open space is the key to future economic development within the community as a draw for tourists and hikers.

Traditionally, Ashby has been, for the most part, considered too remote for vast development allowing residents to falsely assume that the open space they enjoy today will always be available. Ashby is now on the border of the danger zone for suburban sprawl. The aim of this section is to inventory the lands to gain a true understanding of Ashby's open space and as the first step for a plan of protection and/or acquisition of open space.

## Protected Parcels

<u>Owner</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
Private Land	247.22
City of Fitchburg	540.97
Town of Ashby	<u>185.5</u>
	973.69

Ashby contains a relatively small portion of the Town as protected open space. The protected land is comprised of three groups: private land owner, the City of Fitchburg, and the Town of Ashby. These parcels are protected by conservation restriction placed on the deed preventing development from occurring on the land in perpetuity.

The City of Fitchburg has placed on their properties surrounding the Fitchburg Reservoir under a conservation restriction for the purpose of watershed protection. The city of Fitchburg holds 541 acres around the Fitchburg Reservoir. This land helps protect the water quality in the reservoir. The 130 acres immediately surrounding the reservoir are posted against trespassing, but the remainder has no restrictions keeping people off. The Fitchburg land, while contributing to open space and water protection, has no recognized trails and does not contribute to the recreation needs of Ashby. However, it is home to an endangered species and provides stunning views across its waters.

The Town of Ashby has three protected parcels totaling 185.5 acres: Blood Hill – the Wiita Conservation Area, a field on South Road, and a wetland along Route 119. The Wiita Conservation Area is a popular short hike with beautiful view atop Blood Hill. The field on South Road is actively maintained as a hay field and carefully managed as a bird habitat.

## Public Parcels

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns 2,510 acres in Ashby with an assessed value of \$ 12,750,300 (see attached list)**

**The Town of Ashby owns 328.5 acres with no deed restrictions with an assessed value of \$ 7,554,400 (see attached list)**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns land throughout Ashby but 75% of their holdings are in Willard Brook State Park. The park, shared by Ashby and Townsend, has 1,880 acres in Ashby. Willard Brook State Park provides protection for the lower portion of Willard Brook, Trapfall Brook and the surrounding upland area. The park provides swimming, picnicking, and fishing. About two miles of trail in Ashby and several abandoned roads provide hiking opportunities. Over 15 miles of less charted trails exist and are used by horseback riders and more adventurous hikers. The park is popular with residents of the region and can be quite crowded in the summer.

The Commonwealth's remaining 669 acres are in two major areas with several parcels scattered throughout the town. The State owns 302 acres around and including Mount Watatic. This land is accessible from the road but is undeveloped for recreation on the Ashby side of Mount Watatic. Close by another 321-acre tract fronts West Road and Pillsbury Road just north of Route 119. There are two other parcels owned by the Commonwealth. One is located along the western bank of Upper Wright's Pond. This parcel abuts city of Fitchburg land and a 53-acre parcel owned by the Fitchburg Rod and Gun Club. Together these three parcels surround 80% of the shoreline of the pond. The State land has no frontage on the road. The last state parcel straddles Harris Road. This parcel is also unmarked and abuts a 200-acre farm that is in Chapter 61.

Town of Ashby owns 328.50 acres with no deed restrictions. The majority of this land is developed for various municipal needs. Allen Field, the Town's primary active recreation area, is located on 16 acres on West Road. The Town owns a parcel with access to Locke Brook and an orchard both recently received through tax title. There is one 13-acre undeveloped parcel on the east boundary of Ashby. It has no access from a road.

On first glance Ashby appears to have adequate open space. However, while the acreage is substantial, nearly all the public land in the town is allocated to state or water supply protection needs rather than the needs of the residents of Ashby. In fact, several important town recreation and open space needs identified in succeeding sections are not being met.

## PUBLIC LANDS

AS OF OCTOBER 2009

Parcel Id	Owner	Street No	Street	Use Code	Acreage	Valuation
012/010.0-0024-0001.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	ALLEN ROAD	903	2.74	\$11,000
012/010.0-0037-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: GLENWOOD CEMETERY	0	ALLEN ROAD	903	11.83	\$134,900
012/001.0-0018-0002.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	BENNETT ROAD	911	1.1	\$1,100
012/001.0-0014-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	BENNETT ROAD	911	128.25	\$373,500
012/001.0-0016-0008.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	BENNETT ROAD	911	4.57	\$15,300
012/007.0-0010-0002.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	BREED ROAD	903	6.1	\$112,200
012/007.0-0011-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	92	BREED ROAD	903	16.4	\$235,300
012/009.0-0010-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	COMMON ROAD	903	0.5	\$3,800
012/008.0-0047-0001.0	UNKNOWN OWNER	0	ERICKSON ROAD	903	0.1	\$1,000
012/008.0-0007-0001.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: MAJA HALL	47	ERICKSON ROAD	903	3.6	\$145,400
012/007.0-0039-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FLINT ROAD	901	6.997	\$115,400
012/007.0-0038-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FLINT ROAD	901	1	\$1,000
012/011.0-0126-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	903	0.47	\$1,900
012/011.0-0125-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	903	0.44	\$2,200
012/011.0-0122-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	903	0.23	\$1,000
012/011.0-0121-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	903	0.5	\$2,000
012/011.0-0127-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	910	0.75	\$2,500
012/011.0-0128-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	910	118	\$544,800
012/011.0-0119-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	910	1	\$3,400
012/011.0-0120-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	FORT HILL ROAD	910	0.84	\$2,800
012/011.0-0117-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	208	FORT HILL ROAD	910	5.83	\$110,700
012/005.0-0045-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	FOSTER ROAD	903	49.56	\$209,700
012/005.0-0028-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: LANDFILL	1140	GREENVILLE ROAD	903	90.44	\$576,800
012/011.0-0011-0002.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	GREENVILLE ROAD	910	0.17	\$800
012/006.0-0019-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	HARRIS ROAD	911	13.1	\$403,800
012/006.0-0019-0001.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	HARRIS ROAD	911	9.4	\$207,600
012/011.0-0011-0005.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	HOSMER ROAD	910	2.2	\$96,400
012/011.0-0076-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	189	HOSMER ROAD	910	19	\$508,900
012/002.0-0020-0014.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	JEWETT HILL ROAD	903	1.11	\$4,400
012/003.0-0006-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	JONES HILL ROAD	903	25.01	\$98,000

TOWN OF ASHBY OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

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012/003.0-0039-0001.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 JONES HILL ROAD	910	22.88	\$179,400
012/014.0-0023-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LOWER WRIGHT POND	903	0.15	\$3,200
012/014.0-0025-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LOWER WRIGHT POND	903	0.19	\$1,000
012/014.0-0033-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LOWER WRIGHT POND	903	0.28	\$1,000
012/008.0-0031-0004.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LUKE ROAD	903	0.558	\$3,800
012/008.0-0031-0005.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LUKE ROAD	903	0.013	\$1,000
012/008.0-0031-0002.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LUKE ROAD	903	169.998	\$767,800
012/008.0-0031-0003.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 LUKE ROAD	903	0.978	\$3,900
012/015.0-0077-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 LUNENBURG TOWN LINI	910	86.21	\$887,600
012/006.0-0046-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	13	\$31,000
012/009.0-0002-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	3.93	\$15,700
012/009.0-0011-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	1.25	\$95,000
012/009.0-0011-0001.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	0.06	\$1,000
012/009.0-0012-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	0.57	\$2,300
012/010.0-0003-0002.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 MAIN STREET	903	0.03	\$1,000
012/010.0-0030-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	812 MAIN STREET	903	2.86	\$947,000
012/010.0-0003-0001.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: HISTORIC SOCIETY	846 MAIN STREET	903	0.2	\$81,800
012/009.0-0003-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: LYMAN BLDG, PD, AES	911 MAIN STREET	903	10.68	\$2,701,800
012/006.0-0016-0002.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	1093 MAIN STREET	903	34.4	\$304,100
012/009.0-0014-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	903	0.02	\$39,200
012/009.0-0008-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF: WELL	3 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	903	1.25	\$95,000
012/003.0-0013-0002.0	UNKNOWN OWNER	0 NH LINE	903	3.2	\$12,800
012/001.0-0023-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 PILLSBURY ROAD	911	46	\$444,300
012/001.0-0016-0002.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 PILLSBURY ROAD	911	73.1	\$907,300
012/015.0-0074-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 RATTLESNAKE HILL	910	12	\$40,300
012/014.0-0063-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	102 RICHARDSON ROAD	903	3.8	\$101,200
012/007.0-0010-0003.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 RINDGE ROAD	911	50	\$190,100
012/011.0-0011-0001.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 ROUTE 119	911	39.97	\$840,000
012/011.0-0011-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 ROUTE 31	910	220	\$739,200
012/012.0-0066-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 SOUTH ROAD	903	0.53	\$2,100
012/010.0-0024-0003.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0 SOUTH ROAD	903	12.5	\$167,400
012/011.0-0129-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 TOWNSEND LINE	910	42.19	\$141,800
012/015.0-0076-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 TOWNSEND LINE	910	14	\$47,000
012/011.0-0011-0004.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0 TOWNSEND ROAD	910	345	\$931,900

TOWN OF ASHBY OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

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012/011.0-0114-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	TURNPIKE ROAD	903	8.7	\$35,800
012/005.0-0089-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	TURNPIKE ROAD	903	0.3	\$1,000
012/005.0-0088-0000.0	FOOTE CONSTRUCTION CO	0	TURNPIKE ROAD	903	0.9	\$3,600
012/005.0-0070-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	TURNPIKE ROAD	903	0.5	\$1,000
012/011.0-0011-0003.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	TURNPIKE ROAD	910	52	\$174,700
012/014.0-0048-0001.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	UPPER WRIGHT POND	910	29.72	\$118,900
012/015.0-0073-0023.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WARES ROAD	903	1	\$4,000
012/015.0-0073-0026.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WARES ROAD	903	0.33	\$1,300
012/011.0-0131-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WARES ROAD	910	10.6	\$42,400
012/015.0-0075-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WARES ROAD	910	189	\$1,080,100
012/001.0-0002-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF: 1	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	901	235.07	\$1,286,200
012/001.0-0004-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	903	0.56	\$2,200
012/001.0-0018-0003.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	911	37	\$143,600
012/001.0-0009-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	911	20.45	\$81,000
012/001.0-0008-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	911	56.32	\$223,000
012/001.0-0003-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WATATIC MT ROAD	911	11.05	\$43,800
012/002.0-0018-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WEST ROAD	903	2.09	\$96,200
012/007.0-0010-0001.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST ROAD	911	160	\$891,200
012/007.0-0040-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	901	35.5	\$139,200
012/007.0-0043-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	901	23.49	\$268,100
012/007.0-0032-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	901	10	\$215,200
012/007.0-0042-0000.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	901	12	\$11,800
012/007.0-0033-0001.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	903	2.01	\$95,400
012/007.0-0007-0005.0	MASSACHUSETTS, COMMONWEALTH OF	0	WEST STATE ROAD	911	105.7	\$414,300
012/005.0-0034-0009.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WHEELER ROAD	903	22.97	\$164,700
012/005.0-0030-0000.0	ASHBY, TOWN OF	0	WHEELER ROAD	903	5.4	\$109,400
					2765.694	\$20,304,700.00

## Private Parcels – Chapter 61

### **Chapter 61 Land**

**Ashby has 3,449.38 acres with a total assessed value of \$23,098,500 under Chapter 61, Chapter 61A, and Chapter 61B tax status – see following list.**

Chapter 61, Chapter 61A and Chapter 61B tax status provides an important tax incentive for an owner to keep land in large pieces. Selling large parcels for development is often seen as the highest economic use of the land. Under the Chapter program, landowners are offered significant local tax benefits as long as they are willing to make a long-term commitment to forestry, agriculture, or recreation. This has allowed landowners reduce their tax burden and thus relieve the pressure on them to sell all or part of their land. Because part of the purpose of the Chapter 61 program is to preserve large tracts of land, there are penalties assessed when land is taken out of the program.

Chapter 61 provides a reduced assessment for forestlands. The program requires a ten-year plan for the harvesting of trees for timber or firewood. The town receives 8% of the stumpage value at the time of the sale. Timber sales are an important source of income from large parcels and help offset the costs of maintaining the land. Ashby has large forested areas and this program helps preserve them.

Chapter 61A provides protection from development and relief from taxes for agricultural land. Under 61A the assessment is reduced depending on what crops are grown rather than on the fair market value of the land. The qualifications require agricultural land to earn at least \$500.00 annually for the preceding two years. Chapter 61A encourages farmers to stay in the business thereby helping preserve prime farmland at least for the present. Ashby could augment this program with agricultural preservation zoning and education about agricultural preservation restrictions that protect farmland in perpetuity.

Chapter 61B reduces the assessment for property classified for recreational use. In this program the parcel must be maintained in a substantially natural state and be open to the public or members of a non-profit organization.

While beneficial in its own right, Chapter status does not provide permanent protection for land. Owners may leave the program at will as long as they pay the tax penalties incurred. Ashby can strengthen the Chapter 61 program by allowing uses through an overlay district that would not require the owner to remove the entire parcel from the program in order to gain economic benefit from the land.

## CHAPTER 61 LANDS

AS OF OCTOBER 2009

Parcel Id	Street No	Street	Use Code	Acreage	Valuation
012/011.0-0106-0000.0	0	COUNTY ROAD	803	3	\$21,000
012/011.0-0116-0000.0	663	COUNTY ROAD	16	30.63	\$377,800
012/013.0-0012-0004.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	713	45	\$8,000
012/013.0-0012-0001.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	713	32	\$5,700
012/013.0-0014-0000.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	713	29	\$5,100
012/013.0-0012-0003.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	713	16	\$2,800
012/013.0-0012-0005.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	712	0.12	\$1,000
012/013.0-0011-0000.0	0	CROCKER ROAD	713	10.4	\$1,800
012/013.0-0012-0000.0	298	CROCKER ROAD	17	32	\$319,600
012/013.0-0012-0002.0	511	CROCKER ROAD	17	15	\$519,300
012/011.0-0057-0000.0	320	DAMON ROAD	16	34.56	\$383,100
012/004.0-0042-0000.0	0	DAVIS ROAD	16	64.8	\$233,300
012/004.0-0033-0000.0	39	DAVIS ROAD	386	20.16	\$232,500
012/003.0-0013-0003.0	0	ELLIOTT ROAD	17	144.98	\$539,300
012/008.0-0039-0001.0	0	ERICKSON ROAD	713	3.1	\$300
012/008.0-0039-0000.0	632	ERICKSON ROAD	17	26	\$201,500
012/014.0-0053-0000.0	0	FITCHBURG CITY LINE	601	1.4	\$5,000
012/007.0-0041-0000.0	0	FLINT ROAD	601	15.3	\$128,500
012/005.0-0023-0000.0	0	FOSTER ROAD	602	29.997	\$152,100
012/005.0-0008-0001.0	0	FOSTER ROAD	602	5.8	\$94,300
012/005.0-0008-0000.0	0	FOSTER ROAD	601	15	\$127,400
012/005.0-0010-0000.0	453	FOSTER ROAD	16	36.137	\$480,800
012/005.0-0026-0000.0	470	FOSTER ROAD	17	7.8	\$193,900
012/005.0-0056-0000.0	0	GREENVILLE ROAD	601	6.511	\$96,800
012/005.0-0027-0000.0	0	GREENVILLE ROAD	714	74	\$55,200
012/011.0-0105-0000.0	0	GREENVILLE ROAD	803	2.917	\$21,000
012/004.0-0045-0000.0	0	GREENVILLE ROAD	601	1	\$3,600
012/011.0-0077-0000.0	213	GREENVILLE ROAD	16	24.49	\$411,400
012/004.0-0020-0000.0	1590	GREENVILLE ROAD	17	36	\$303,200
012/004.0-0043-0000.0	1601	GREENVILLE ROAD	16	53.664	\$313,400
012/003.0-0007-0000.0	320	HARRIS ROAD	16	13.5	\$160,800
012/011.0-0010-0000.0	120	INGERSON ROAD	16	33.93	\$265,000
012/002.0-0030-0000.0	377	JEWETT HILL ROAD	18	36	\$309,600
012/003.0-0001-0004.0	0	JONES HILL ROAD	803	99.18	\$107,600
012/002.0-0003-0000.0	0	JONES HILL ROAD	601	35	\$89,600
012/003.0-0009-0001.0	0	JONES HILL ROAD	16	31.1	\$167,700
012/003.0-0009-0000.0	227	JONES HILL ROAD	16	68.822	\$458,300
012/003.0-0004-0000.0	590	JONES HILL ROAD	16	67	\$432,500
012/003.0-0001-0000.0	675	JONES HILL ROAD	18	26.26	\$233,400
012/011.0-0014-0000.0	205	KENDALL HILL ROAD	16	26.178	\$373,700
012/015.0-0006-0000.0	75	LOG CABIN ROAD	18	19	\$132,200

## TOWN OF ASHBY OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

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012/008.0-0057-0000.0	0 MAIN STREET	803	24	\$21,600
012/006.0-0016-0001.0	0 MAIN STREET	601	45.4	\$163,400
012/006.0-0017-0001.0	0 MAIN STREET	713	6.5	\$700
012/006.0-0017-0002.0	0 MAIN STREET	713	3	\$300
012/006.0-0017-0000.0	0 MAIN STREET	601	164	\$590,400
012/006.0-0017-0003.0	0 MAIN STREET	713	19	\$2,400
012/008.0-0062-0000.0	0 MAIN STREET	717	7.5	\$27,000
012/008.0-0058-0002.0	1128 MAIN STREET	17	31	\$409,100
012/006.0-0017-0004.0	1155 MAIN STREET	17	8.5	\$1,993,800
012/004.0-0001-0000.0	0 MASON ROAD	803	33	\$8,300
012/015.0-0082-0000.0	164 MILL CREEK ROAD	18	26.894	\$390,200
012/003.0-0017-0000.0	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	718	2	\$400
012/006.0-0029-0005.0	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	16	37.38	\$208,000
012/009.0-0021-0000.0	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	601	7	\$98,600
012/003.0-0027-0001.0	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	713	1.66	\$200
012/006.0-0029-0002.0	0 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	131	13.32	\$121,300
012/009.0-0001-0000.0	114 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	16	20.3	\$381,800
012/006.0-0032-0000.0	218 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	16	12.24	\$198,100
012/003.0-0014-0000.0	1166 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	18	25	\$230,600
012/003.0-0015-0000.0	1238 NEW IPSWICH ROAD	17	19	\$212,600
012/001.0-0016-0001.0	0 PILLSBURY ROAD	803	6.09	\$23,800
012/001.0-0021-0000.0	0 PILLSBURY ROAD	803	15	\$31,800
012/008.0-0065-0001.0	0 PIPER ROAD	713	5.47	\$1,000
012/008.0-0061-0000.0	0 PIPER ROAD	601	15.97	\$130,900
012/008.0-0060-0002.0	0 PIPER ROAD	601	3.1	\$11,200
012/008.0-0060-0001.0	0 PIPER ROAD	601	2.8	\$10,100
012/008.0-0063-0000.0	0 PIPER ROAD	601	62.998	\$300,200
012/012.0-0026-0000.0	0 PIPER ROAD	601	30.9	\$187,600
012/008.0-0066-0000.0	259 PIPER ROAD	17	11.72	\$372,300
012/008.0-0065-0000.0	274 PIPER ROAD	16	19.497	\$364,600
012/014.0-0054-0000.0	0 RICHARDSON ROAD	601	79	\$79,000
012/015.0-0004-0000.0	0 RICHARDSON ROAD	601	32	\$55,800
012/014.0-0041-0000.0	0 RICHARDSON ROAD	601	4	\$14,400
012/012.0-0036-0000.0	0 RICHARDSON ROAD	722	27	\$37,900
012/012.0-0036-0001.0	345 RICHARDSON ROAD	17	4	\$172,300
012/012.0-0118-0006.0	570 RICHARDSON ROAD	16	48.5	\$198,100
012/014.0-0055-0000.0	985 RICHARDSON ROAD	385	53	\$341,100
012/014.0-0057-0000.0	1149 RICHARDSON ROAD	16	39.2	\$437,200
012/015.0-0005-0000.0	1300 RICHARDSON ROAD	16	69	\$441,000
012/015.0-0008-0001.0	1342 RICHARDSON ROAD	17	15.9	\$237,800
012/013.0-0019-0000.0	0 RINDGE ROAD	803	42	\$37,800
012/003.0-0027-0000.0	0 SIMONDS ROAD	713	17.76	\$2,000
012/003.0-0021-0001.0	70 SIMONDS ROAD	18	133	\$560,600
012/012.0-0072-0003.0	0 SOUTH ROAD	718	9.26	\$1,100

## TOWN OF ASHBY OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

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012/012.0-0072-0000.0	0 SOUTH ROAD	601	110.87	\$471,100
012/005.0-0016-0001.0	126 TURNPIKE ROAD	16	80.957	\$567,000
012/014.0-0055-0001.0	0 UPPER WRIGHT POND	601	4	\$14,400
012/011.0-0012-0000.0	0 VALLEY ROAD	601	34.5	\$124,200
012/011.0-0013-0000.0	0 VALLEY ROAD	602	156	\$561,600
012/015.0-0072-0000.0	0 WARES ROAD	803	8	\$22,800
012/006.0-0001-0007.0	0 WEST ROAD	601	42.167	\$151,800
012/002.0-0001-0000.0	0 WEST ROAD	713	14.5	\$1,500
012/007.0-0010-0005.0	0 WEST ROAD	713	5.8	\$1,000
012/006.0-0001-0002.0	179 WEST ROAD	16	81.364	\$819,100
012/007.0-0010-0004.0	590 WEST ROAD	17	5.3	\$319,900
012/007.0-0008-0000.0	2306 WEST STATE ROAD	16	35.9	\$378,600
012/004.0-0057-0003.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	718	18	\$2,100
012/005.0-0054-0000.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	601	35.1	\$126,400
012/004.0-0057-0001.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	718	5.8	\$700
012/004.0-0057-0002.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	718	0.8	\$100
012/005.0-0041-0001.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	720	5	\$400
012/005.0-0029-0000.0	0 WHEELER ROAD	601	45.76	\$238,100
012/004.0-0057-0000.0	54 WHEELER ROAD	17	29.6	\$242,500
012/005.0-0048-0000.0	471 WHEELER ROAD	18	16.994	\$181,800
012/005.0-0040-0000.0	495 WHEELER ROAD	17	10.17	\$401,300
012/005.0-0041-0000.0	603 WHEELER ROAD	17	24.2	\$288,000
012/007.0-0046-0000.0	0 WHITNEY ROAD	601	37.54	\$208,500
012/008.0-0030-0000.0	224 WHITNEY ROAD	18	89.71	\$534,700
012/012.0-0028-0006.0	50 WOOD DRIVE	18	24.75	\$363,400
			3449.377	\$23,098,500

Non-profit/Charitable Parcels

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
Camp Middlesex	75.20
Camp Lapham	88.61
All Others	<u>23.61</u>
TOTAL	187.42 acres

There are a number of small parcels held by non-profit or charitable organizations such as the Boy Scouts or churches. There are two significant parcels in this category owned by private camps. Middlesex County 4-H Camp holds 75 acres of rolling hills and riverside environment along Willard Brook. The eastern boundary of this land abuts Willard Brook State Park. Camp Lapham is a fifth of a mile west of Camp Middlesex and is comprised of 90 acres of varied upland, wetland, and shore property along the Ashby Reservoir. Camp Lapham abuts 4,000 feet (45%) of the shoreline creating a significant barrier to development around the reservoir. Camp Lapham land also fronts on 4,300 feet of town road reducing development in that area as well. These two camps, along with the Fitchburg water supply area and Willard Brook State Park, provide a significant amount of protection for Willard Brook and its associated bodies of water. However, both the camps and the school are owned privately and could be sold or put to other uses as their organizations see fit. Again, there is no formal protection for the land. The town is fortunate that the parcels have remained in the hands of organizations that continue to protect them. However these organizations should be informed about ways to permanently protect their land.

## Private Parcels – Unprotected

Ashby has xxxx 50+ acre parcels total xxxx acres with no protection. These parcels, especially ones with significant frontage, are prime candidates for development. Ashby officials should maintain a log of these parcels, note the relationship to the Open Space Plan goals, and discuss with the landowners conservation options.

A parcel of significance is currently for sale, the former Shackleton School property. It is a 70-acre parcel about three fifths of a mile west of Camp Lapham and adjacent to the Wiita Conservation Area, on the summit of Spring Hill, known for its views of the surrounding countryside. The property occurs along and adjacent to a desired trail line, has significant infrastructure in place, and has elevation consistent with wind energy. As part of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, Ashby should consider the acquisition of the parcel.

## Inventory of Recreation Interests

Ashby has several active recreation facilities. Allen Field, operated by the Town, has a playground, three little league baseball fields, and a softball field that are used regularly in the summer. Soccer has been a recent addition, currently being played in the outfield of one of the baseball fields. It also has a bandstand that is used occasionally and a horseback riding rink that has fallen into disrepair. Allen Field is home to the July 3<sup>rd</sup> bonfire celebration, a traditional community event.

The Town Common is used as a picnic and tourist spot and hosts the very popular weekly band concerts in the summer. Nearby at the elementary school in the center of town, there are tennis courts and a basketball court. Both suffer from lack of maintenance. The school playground is available for use after school and during the summer.

Unfortunately, the Ashby is more heavily populated on the east requiring most residents to travel some distance to use the available facilities. Our survey results and on-going conversations show a strong interest in children's playgrounds. These should be located close to the growing areas of Ashby and could be part of future subdivisions.

Another area of strong recreational interest was public access to lakes or ponds for boating or swimming. Swimming areas, in particular, require safety and maintenance issues be addressed. The Parks Department will have to have greater support to successfully manage a swimming area. Ashby's lakes are fairly shallow and are not suitable for powerboats or sailboats. This fact has actually kept most of Ashby's ponds relatively free of invasive aquatic plants. Only Little Watatic Pond has become choked with millfoil and other exotic water plants to the point of becoming disturbing enough

to residents for them to fund chemical weed control. The main use of a boat ramp would be for fishing. The primary costs would be in acquiring land access and parking.

Willard Brook State Park has a swimming area, Damon Pond, but it becomes quite crowded on summer weekends. Most Ashby residents do not use Damon Pond except on weekdays. A town swimming area would relieve some of the pressure on the State Park and be accessible all day.

Increased popularity of soccer has generated interest in having a soccer field in town. Currently there are none. Other than that, the existing playing fields appear to be adequate for the current needs of residents. There was some interest expressed in tennis courts. The town currently has two tennis courts, but they are in such poor condition that they are rarely used. The courts could be put to use if they were resurfaced and maintained regularly. The little league fields are enough for now, but maintenance of the ball fields is done voluntarily by the Little League Association. The Parks Department must develop a plan to upgrade and maintain sports fields, or they will fall into such disrepair be that they will be unusable.

Passive recreation continues to receive the most support from residents. Interest is typically in more informal, individual recreation opportunities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing. These all call for trail systems. Lands owned by the State are managed with wildlife conservation in mind and no formal trails system has been developed on these holdings. The town owns no land devoted to passive recreation. Most informal trails use old cart roads over public or private land. On private land there is no public right to use the trails, and they may be closed at the discretion of the landowner. Given the history of maintenance of the existing active recreation facilities, a firm plan would have to be in place to ensure that trails are adequately maintained. It is worth noting that a fair number of residents felt that some trails should be handicapped accessible.

Residents also give strong support to conservation areas. When the elementary school was asked what the town could provide in the way of recreation, the top priority given was nature trails accessible to students. At this time, there is no group or agency within the town that addresses this issue in a systematic way. If the need for passive recreation is to be fulfilled, the town will have to work with the State and with private landowners to initiate and maintain trail systems.

## General Organized Activities and Organizations in Ashby

Organizations for youth include Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Townsend-Ashby Youth Soccer Association, Little League and T-ball, Children's Story Hour at the library, private horseback riding instruction, Camp Lapham, and Camp Middlesex.

Activities for adults include coed volleyball, basketball, and badminton, The Fitchburg Rod and Gun Club, Ashby Garden Club, Historic Society, Senior Citizens, the Grange, and Ashby Land Trust.

Residents of all ages enjoy Ashby's Memorial Day ceremonies, July 3<sup>rd</sup> celebration and bonfire, Wednesday night band concerts in July and August, Pumpkin Festival in October, Halloween on Main Street, Congregational church flea market, First Parish Church summer sales, Broadway night, Cultural activities sponsored by the Public Library, The Friends of the Ashby Library Book Sale, Barn Tour, sugar supper, pizza nights, pancake breakfasts, corned beef and turkey suppers, auctions, and more!

The town will have to take a proactive approach towards addressing recreation needs. This will require a strong Parks Department and some new ways of approaching passive recreation issues.

## SECTION 6 – COMMUNITY GOALS

### **Description of Process**

In 2007, the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Selectmen agreed that based on the achievements made since the 1999 Open Space and Recreation, it was time to create this Open Space and Recreation Plan with updated goals, objectives, and community input. Consequently, a small group of people (approximately 20), including town officials and citizens, met to determine how to proceed.

We reviewed our actions since the 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan, assessed our updated technology, and work diligently for a couple of years to improve our planning database. Advertised widely through local press and word of mouth, we held an initial public hearing in order to gather interested people, discuss an updated meaning of open space to the community, new goals, and the these goals may tie-in with other planning and zoning efforts while meeting the open space needs of the community.

Based on the results of the public hearing, a draft update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan was create, including updates to our community setting, the environmental analysis, new goals and objectives, and new maps expressing the understanding and plans for Ashby's open space.

The draft of the Open Space and Recreation Plan was posted on the official Town of Ashby Web Site for 1 month to gather comments. A second public hearing was advertised and held to discuss the draft, propose edits, and address omissions. Based on the results of the second public hearing, a final document was produced and distributed for the review and approval of the Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Board of Health, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, and the Commonwealth. We have been fortunate to have a number of knowledgeable and technically skilled people working on the committee. We are proud that our Open Space and Recreation Plan has been created entirely 'at home.'

## Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

The overall open space vision for Ashby is to improve and enhance the Town's open space system in order to preserve rural character, protect natural resources, and expand recreational opportunities.

- Preserve rural character – Ashby is fortunate to have large tracts of as yet undeveloped fields and forests. Along with the historic Town center and other heritage landscapes, these large fields and forests give Ashby the quaint, rural feeling and scenic views desired by its citizens.
- Protect natural resources – Ashby has tremendous natural resources including hills, mountains, rivers, water bodies, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and wind. These resources are important to the community and the region.
- Expand recreational opportunities – As desired by its citizens, Ashby has great potential to expand, locally and regionally, its passive recreational system while maintaining safe active recreational opportunities.

Survey results and anecdotal information continue to strongly shown that townspeople wish to retain the small town character of Ashby and to preserve our natural resources. The 1999 Survey Results continue to be relevant to the open space and recreation desires of the Town of Ashby.

In order to accomplish these goals, the town must continue the multifaceted approach to preserving open space enacted over the past 10 years. This strategy includes “smart growth” changes to zoning and land development regulations, providing information about the advantages of various land preservation strategies to landowners, supporting local agriculture, supporting the acquisition of land by the town and by state agencies, and supporting the conservation efforts of private land trusts and landowners to maximize the open space benefits for the community. This approach will require members of the local government and the residents of Ashby to work together, educate themselves about open space, and appreciate the wonderful natural and cultural characteristics of the community.

We envision a sustainable, rural community with an historic Town center, clustered villages, large tracts of functioning agriculture, large corridors of conserved forest, clean air, clean water, and recreational opportunities while maintaining our strong sense of community. As a rural community threatened by the spread of suburban development, we believe our open space and recreation aspirations are a reflection and reiteration of the smart growth practices the Town has been and continues to encourage.

## SECTION 7 – ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

### **Summary of Resource Protection Needs**

Despite the progress made by the town of Ashby since its first Open Space and Recreation Plan, we continue to have needs in the area of protecting our natural and cultural resources. These resource protection needs focus on achieving our community goals of preservation of our rural character and our natural resources.

With the conservation of the Watatic Mountain area, Blood Hill, Jewell Hill, and the Fitchburg Reservoir area, Ashby has an opportunity to create a green corridor, a “western spine,” from Watatic Mountain to the Fitchburg Reservoir including potential connections in Ashburnham, the Ashburnham State Forest, and the Midstate Trail. To accomplish this, we would need some private land parcels to place conservation restrictions or easements and cooperation from the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

A second need involves obtaining conservative and/or agricultural restrictions along an existing agricultural corridor from the New Hampshire border to the Ashby Stock Farm along Route 119 and a significant farm in the south east corner of Ashby. This public / private partnership effort would accomplish three goals - protection of forests, wildlife corridors, and active farms. In completed, Ashby would have a significant anchor to the agricultural network protected from development.

Ashby has an important series of wetlands and waterways contributing to drinking water, healthy ecosystems, and rare species habitats. Two of these surface water features are of particular interest - The South Branch of the Souhegan and the Great Meadow. The protection of these wetlands and buffer zones would prevent development on these water resources.

Ashby is proud of its cultural heritage and is looking to preserve this heritage for future generations. In particular, Ashby has nine priority heritage landscapes in need of protection from development or deterioration including the Ashby Stock Farm, the three Town cemeteries, the Gazebo on the Common, the Jewett Hill Caves, the Loveland Grist and Saw mills, the scenic Route 119, and the Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge.

## **Summary of Community's Needs**

An area of focus for Ashby's Open Space and Recreation Plan is on community drive needs for active recreation, passive recreation, access to water bodies, and energy independence.

The recreation needs most often cited in the survey and the anecdotal conversations are the desires for more passive recreation options, specifically hiking and cross-country skiing trails, and public access to lakes for boating/fishing. The passive recreational opportunities would be focused on the western spine public lands including improve trails, expanded trails, and connections to Ashburnham. Recreational opportunities for senior citizens are becoming increasingly important; mandating accessibility to facilities and lends weight to the desire for a universal accessible nature trail.

Ashby is a small community and our active recreation facilities are limited. The primary need at this time is to better maintain and enhance what we have in the fields at the school and Allen Field including playgrounds, baseball & softball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, and open fields for multi-use of soccer, lacrosse, or informal active recreation. Citizens have indicated that there was a need for more sports fields or tennis courts.

Townspeople clearly value the open space our town affords and wish to retain as much of it as possible. Ashby citizens are protective of their land ownership and do not like people telling them what to do with their land. We will be more effective in accomplishing the Ashby Open Space and Recreation Plan if we also implement an active public education program about the financial value of open space. There is much information available to help inform residents about their land preservation options; the need for such information is clear.

In these times of energy uncertainty, with the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the environment, and with recent failure of the power grid during the December ice storm, Ashby has tremendous natural resource – wind. Ashby is interested in the allocation of lands for future capitalization on the wind power resources of Ashby while minimizing disturbance to forests, wildlife corridors, and scenic views.

### **Summary of Management Needs**

We have a need to expand our base of people willing and able to help do the work of developing and managing open space and recreation areas. We currently have the Highway Department staff providing maintenance when available and local interested groups of volunteers organizing clean-ups on their own. We need a Parks and Trails Manager to provide on-going maintenance and better organize volunteer/private efforts in clean-ups, grant writing, signage and blazing, and capital improvements to the active recreation facilities.

Our town boards enjoy cordial working relationships with each other but would do well to coordinate more effectively in the areas of development policy. Improving the distribution of information between boards will provide a better ability to mitigate the impacts of development on the vision of the community. We also need more policies and regulations promoting the type of development in keeping with the rural character and precious natural resources of the Town.

## SECTION 8 - GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following list provides concrete objectives to meet the general goals identified in Section 6 of this Plan – preserve rural character, protect natural resources, and expand recreational opportunities. Most of the objectives are applicable to multiple goals.

### **1: Unite a Western Spine and Connect to Ashburnham, the Midstate Trail, & Willard Brook State Forest**

Starting with the lands of public ownership Watatic Mountain, Department of Fish and Wildlife Land, Blood Hill, and the Fitchburg Reservoir, create a connected greenway, “a western spine,” from north to south while connecting the greenway east to Willard Brook State Park and west to Ashburnham.

- Communicate and coordinate with regional communities
- Analysis and plan the best route and greenway access
- Consider acquisition of anchor parcels currently for sale
- Work with private landowners and funding sources to create easements or restrictions as needed to create the greenway

### **2: Preserve Contiguous Farms and Forests**

Starting with the lands in the northern agricultural corridor and significant farms in the southeast corner of Ashby, promote and actively protect, through restrictions or acquisition, contiguous sections of farms and forest lands. Where possible, prioritize the preservation of the lands actively forested and farmed; thus protecting both land uses with one effort.

- Communicate and coordinate with the Ashby Land Trust and potential funding sources
- A number of residents have approached members of the Open Space and Recreation Committee and the Ashby Land Trust about placing a Forest Legacy conservation restriction on their land at no cost to the Ashby citizen.
- Work with other private landowners to create corridors from contiguous parcels

### **3: Protect the Critical Natural Water Systems & Habitats**

Ashby's natural water systems are vital to the environmental health of the local ecosystem and regional water supply. Some of these natural water systems are also important habitats for a variety of wildlife including rare species. Ashby is looking to increase the protection of areas that are both important water systems and habitats.

- Protect the Great Meadow – a wet meadow along Trap Falls Brook in the eastern part of Town
- Protect the headwaters of the South Branch of the Souhegan River located in the northwest corner of Ashby
- Work with private landowners and funding sources to create easements or restrictions to protect other water systems & habitats

### **4: Protect the Priority Heritage Landscapes**

In 2007, Ashby, with assistance from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, identified heritage landscapes with cultural or historical importance including nine priorities determined to be critical to the fabric of the community. These priorities landscapes are: Ashby Stock Farm, the three Town cemeteries, the Gazebo on the Common, the Jewett Hill Caves, the Loveland Grist and Saw mills, the scenic Route 119, and the Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge.

- Consider policies to protect these resources
- Work with town officials, private landowners, and funding sources to maintain and preserve the landscapes

### **5: Maintain and Enhance Active and Passive Recreation Opportunities**

Ashby has limited active recreational opportunities and public passive recreational opportunities. Citizens are interested in expanding opportunities while maintaining the existing facilities.

- Maintain and enhance the existing school and Allen Field fields and courts
- Re-establish and expand public access trails
- Create access points to water bodies for non-motorized craft

## **6: Educate Citizens on the Financial, Ecological, and Personal Value of Open Space**

Townspople clearly value the open space our town affords and wish to retain as much of it as possible. Understanding the supportive nature of the citizens and the importance of private property to the landowners, implement an active public education program about the financial value of open space in order to create a strong public / private partnership in the open space and recreation efforts.

- Provide information to the community on the value of open space
- Provide information on programs and funding sources for private landowners to conserve their own land
- Keep Open Space and Recreation Plan active and available on-line

## **7: Promote Renewable Energy Resources: Wind**

Based on recent power issues during the December 2008 ice storm, lack of power redundancy, the dependence on greenhouse gas producing fossil fuels and the volatility of fossil fuel costs, study the renewable energy opportunities with Ashby's wind resources.

- Communicate and coordinate with Ashburham regarding wind power
- Consider acquisition of parcels currently for sale
- Work with private landowners and funding sources to create wind turbines as needed to provide wind energy opportunities

## SECTION 9 - Five Year Action Plan

**OBJECTIVE 1: UNITE THE WESTERN SPINE & CONNECT TO ASHBURNHAM & THE MIDSTATE TRAIL**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Explore land acquisition alternatives of parcels for sale including discussions with potential funding sources	Ashby Land Trust					
Communicate with Ashburnham and develop a working planning relationship	Planning Board					
Communicate with Fitchburg Water Department and develop a working planning relationship	Planning Board					
Communicate with Commonwealth and develop a working planning relationship	Planning Board					
Communicate with citizens / abutters regarding economic, recreational, and cultural value of the greenway	Planning Board					
conservation	Ashby Land Trust					
Discuss Deed Restrictions and Easements with interested abutters	Ashby Land Trust					
Coordinate Grant Writing & Planning with Ashburnham & Fitchburg	Planning Board					
Discuss and enact the creation of a stewardship fund for lands under Town control or supervision	Selectmen & Cons. Commission					
Prepare documentation for restrictions or easements being enacted	Conservation Commission					
Create trails within acquired or lands with conservation restrictions including signage and/or blazing	Conservation Commission					

**OBJECTIVE 2: PRESERVE CONTIGUOUS FARMS AND FORESTS**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Support the protection of open fields and managed forests	All Parties					
Support the current Forest Legacy conservation activities on a series of forests & farm parcels	Selectman & Cons. Commission					
Maintain a working relationship with the Commonwealth regarding agricultural & open space preservation programs	A.L.T. & Cons. Commission					
Prepare agricultural and recreational overlay district to assist farmers and large property owners maintain their properties without selling for development	Planning Board					
Communicate with citizens / abutters regarding economic, recreational, and cultural value of the greenway	Ashby Land Trust					
Maintain a log and accurate mapping of all lands under Chapter 61, 61a, & 61B	Planning Board					
Analysis and rate parcels for potential united trail system	Planning Board					
Discuss with landowners the advantages of the Chapter 61 laws	Ashby Land Trust					
Discuss with landowners the programs and options available for conservation	Ashby Land Trust					
Discuss Deed Restrictions and Easements with interested abutters	Ashby Land Trust					
Support conservation restriction, easement, and land acquisition activities that serve to protect forests & farm parcels	Selectman					

**OBJECTIVE 2: PRESERVE CONTIGUOUS FARMS AND FORESTS (continued)**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Prepare documentation for restrictions or easements being enacted	Conservation Commission					
Discuss and enact the creation of land stewardship policies and a stewardship fund for lands under Town control or supervision	Selectmen & Cons. Commission					
Analysis and identify lands with prime agricultural soils with assistance from NRCS	Ashby Land Trust					
Analysis, rate, and explore land acquisition alternatives of parcels for sale including discussions with potential funding sources	Ashby Land Trust					
Identify and develop means of funding the Ashby Land Trust in preparation for land acquisition of parcel for sale or being removed from Chapter 61 designation	Ashby Land Trust					

**OBJECTIVE 3: PROTECT CRITICAL NATURAL WATER SYSTEMS AND HABITATS**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Work with the City of Fitchburg to protect the loon nesting sites on Fitchburg Reservoir	Conservation Commission					
Develop a working relationship with the Commonwealth regarding wetland and water protection programs	Conservation Commission					
River Watershed Associations regarding watershed protection programs	Conservation Commission					
Educate abutters on the programs and options available for conservation	Conservation Commission					
Discuss Deed Restrictions and Easements with interested abutters	Conservation Commission					
Continue to protect these water systems as allowed through the Wetlands Protection Act and Rivers Protection Act	Conservation Commission					
Work with local and regional agencies to indentify potential aquifer sites	Conservation Commission					
Conitue efforts to identify and certify vernal pools	Conservation Commission	1 pool				
Conitue efforts to inventory and water test all streams in Ashby - obtain assistance and training from the Nashua River Watershed Association as necessary	Conservation Commission	1 stream				
Prepare and present a low impact development or resource protection bylaw to mitigate development impacts on natural resources	Planning Board					



**OBJECTIVE 5: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE ACTIVE & PASSIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Work with the North Middlesex school system to develop a survey for the prioritization of active recreation repairs, improvements, and expansion	Selectmen & Planning Board					
Commonwealth regarding maintenance of the passive recreation opportunities on state land (Watatic Mountain, Willard Brook State Park, Fish & Wildlife land)	Selectmen					
Ashburnham regarding the passive recreation connection opportunities	Selectmen & Planning Board					
Establish trails committee under the direction of the Conservation Commission to cut and maintain trails on public land	Conservation Commission		1 trail	1 trail	1 trail	1 trail
Identify and rate water bodies for public access of non-motorized craft	Conservation Commission					
Improve public access to water bodies including the potential obtaining of an easement or acquisition of land	Conservation Commission				1 access pt	1 access pt
Clean-up & improve active recreation facilities based on the priorities established by the survey	Selectmen & Planning Board			1 project		1 project
Analysis and rate potential sites for the expansion of active recreational facilities	Planning Board					
Evaluate the ability of volunteers to maintain parks & trails and discuss the role of a Parks & Trails Manager	Selectmen					

**OBJECTIVE 5: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE ACTIVE & PASSIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES (continued)**

TASK	TASK LEAD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Encourage developers to set aside land for recreation and maintenance of existing trails	Planning Board					





## SECTION 10 – Public Comments

Letters of Review from

Board of Selectmen

Planning Board

MRPC

Conservation Commission

Board of Health

DCS

## SECTION 11 - References

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## MAMMALS ENDEMIC TO ASHBY, MASSACHUSETTS

beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*)

black bear (*Ursus americanus*)

norwat rat (*Rattus norvehicus*)

bobcat (*Felis rufus*)

porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)

coyote (*Canis latrans*)

raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)

red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*)

eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

eastern mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) (questionable)

red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

eastern pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus subflavus*)

river otter (*Lutra canadensis*)

ermine (*Mustela erminea*)

short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*)

fisher (*Martes pennanti*)

silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*)

gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

smoky shrew (*Sorex fumeus*)

gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*)

hairy-tailed mole (*Parascalops breweri*)

southern bog lemming (*Synaptomys cooperi*)

hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*)

southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*)

house mouse (*Musculus*)

southern red-backed vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*)

Indiana myotis (*Myotis sodalis*)

star-nosed mole (*Condylura cuestata*)

Keen's myotis (*Myotis keenii*)

striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*)

Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*)

water shrew (*Sorex pallustris*)

masked shrew (*Sorex cinereus*)

white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*)

meadow jumping mouse (*Microtus*)

white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*)

woodchuck (*Marmota monax*)

mink (*Mustela vison*)

woodland (Pine) vole (*Microtus pinetorum*)

moose (*Alces alces*)

woodland jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*)

muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

## BIRDS ENDEMIC TO ASHBY, MASSACHUSETTS

alder flycatcher

merlin

American black duck

morning dove

American crow

northern rough-winged swallow

American goldfinch

Nashville warbler

American kestrel

northern bobwhite

American redstart

northern cardinal

American robin

northern flicker

American tree sparrow

northern goshawk

American woodcock

northern harrier

bald eagle

northern mockingbird

bank swallow

northern oriole

barn swallow

northern parula

barred owl

northern saw-whet owl

bay-breasted warbler

northern shrike

bellied kingfisher

northern waterthrush

bellied kingfisher

olive-sided flycatcher

black-and-white warbler

osprey

black-billed cuckoo

oven bird

black-throated green warbler

palm warbler

black-throated blue warbler

pileated woodpecker

blackburnian warbler

pine grosbeak

black-capped chickadee

pine siskin

blackpoll warbler

pine warbler

blue jay

prairie warbler

blue-crowned gnat catcher

purple finch

blue-winged warbler

purple martin

bobolink

red crossbill

broad-winged hawk

red shouldered hawk

brown creeper

red-breasted nuthatch

brown thrasher

red-tailed hawk

brown-headed blackbird

red-winged blackbird

Canada goose

ring-billed gull

Canada warbler

ringed-neck pheasant

Cape May warbler

rock dove

cedar waxwing

rose-breasted grosbeak

chestnut-sided warbler

ruby-crowned kinglet

chimney swift

ruby-throated hummingbird

chipping sparrow

ruffed grouse

cliff swallow

rufous-sided towhee

common grackle

rusty blackbird

common night hawk

Savannah sparrow

common raven

scarlet tanager

common redpoll

sharp shinned hawk

common snipe

snow bunting

common yellowthroat

snow goose

Coopers hawk

solitary sandpiper

dark-eyed junco

solitary vireo

downy woodpecker

solitary vireo

eastern bluebird

song sparrow

eastern kingbird

spotted sandpiper

eastern meadowlark

Swainson's thrush

eastern phoebe

swamp sparrow

eastern screech owl

Tennessee warbler

European starling

tree swallow

evening grosbeak

tufted titmouse

field sparrow

turkey vulture

fox sparrow

veery

golden-crowned kinglet

warbling vireo

gray catbird

wax thrush

great blue heron

whip-poor-will

great crested flycatcher

white-breasted nuthatch

great horned owl

white-crowned sparrow

green-backed heron

white-throated sparrow

hairy woodpecker

wide-winged crossbill

hermit thrush

wild turkey

hooded merganser

willow flycatcher

house finch

Wilson's warbler

house sparrow

winter wren

house wren

wood duck

indigo bunting

yellow-throated vireo

killdeer

yellow warbler

least flycatcher

yellow-bellied flycatcher

Lincoln sparrow

yellow-bellied sapsucker

Louisiana waterthrush

yellow-billed cuckoo

magnolia warbler

yellow-rumped warbler

mallard

## 1999 Survey Results (considered still representational)

There were 123 surveys returned.

### 1. How important do you feel it is to preserve.... **Ranked in order of importance:**

low high Ave Score

open space for water conservation needs 1 2 3 4 5 4.42

farmlands and agriculture 1 2 3 4 5 4.34

open space for hiking/snowshoeing/birdwatching 1 2 3 4 5 4.27

sites with historic value 1 2 3 4 5 4.15

scenic views and vistas 1 2 3 4 5 4.08

open space for hunting 1 2 3 4 5 2.63

### 2. To preserve open space, would you... **Ranked in order of importance**

1. 108 Vote for town purchase of land?
2. 61 Help fund raise or work in some other voluntary capacity?
3. 45 Limit use of your land through a deed restriction?
4. 37 Donate money to buy land?
5. 31 Sell land to the town at market value?
6. 9 Donate land to the town?
7. 9 Sell land to the town at below market value?

3. Which of the following recreational facilities do you feel Ashby needs more of?

**(Check top five)**

45 bike trails

46 children's play areas

11 golf course

25 sports fields (soccer, baseball, football)

76 hiking and cross-country ski trails

66 public access to lakes for boating/ fishing

29 bridle paths

22 jogging/running track

10 riding ring

74 conservation areas

36 family picnic areas

35 public swimming areas

21 tennis courts

27 neighborhood park areas

16 ATV accessible trails

22 wheelchair accessible nature trail

other (specify) dog exercise area indoor basketball

indoor track skateboard course

snowmobile trails hunting areas

downhill skiing

4. What specific scenic, natural and recreational areas do you feel are unique to Ashby and/or need protection? (For instance, the Stock Farm, Great Meadow, Keystone Bridge, Mt. Watatic, the Squannacook watershed, agricultural fields, etc)

**(Please note your top three choices, if you list more than three)**

<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>First Choice</u>	<u>Second Choice</u>	<u>Third Choice</u>	<u>Specific Area</u>
73	59	46	23	4	Mount Watatic
41	33	21	15	5	Stock Farm
25	20	6	9	10	Squannacook watershed
20	16	7	5	8	Great Meadow
15	12	0	8	7	Farm Fields

5. How many people does this questionnaire represent?

Would you describe your household as:

53: family with children at home

39 family without children at home

20 single adult

16 senior