

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
SECTION 1 PLAN SUMMARY	3
SECTION 2 INTRODUCTION	5
A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	5
B. PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	5
SECTION 3 COMMUNITY SETTING	7
A. REGIONAL CONTEXT	7
B. HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY	7
C. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS.....	8
D. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS	8
SECTION 4 ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS	15
A. GEOLOGY, SOILS AND TOPOGRAPHY	15
B. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER	15
C. WATER RESOURCES	17
D. VEGETATION.....	23
E. FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE.....	25
F. SCENIC RESOURCES AND UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS.....	29
G. ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES	32
SECTION 5 INVENTORY OF LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST	37
A. PRIVATE PARCELS	37
B. PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT PARCELS	39
SECTION 6 COMMUNITY VISION	43
A. DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS.....	43
B. STATEMENT OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION GOALS	43
SECTION 7 ANALYSIS OF NEEDS	43
A. SUMMARY OF RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS	45
B. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY'S NEEDS	46
C. MANAGEMENT NEEDS, POTENTIAL CHANGE OF USE	47
SECTION 8 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	51
SECTION 9 FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN	53
SECTION 10 PUBLIC COMMENTS	59
SECTION 11 REFERENCES	61
APPENDICES	62

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Town of Becket would like to thank the Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee members who selflessly donated their time and vision to the development and completion of this plan. The town would especially like to thank Rita Furlong, who was involved in the development of the previous two open space and recreation plans in 1989 and 1998 and who brought continuity and an immense amount of expertise and guidance to the Committee.

The Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee wishes to acknowledge and extend its Thank You to the Highland Communities Initiative and the EOEA's Smart Growth Technical Assistance grant programs for their financial support, without which this plan could never have been completed.



SECTION 1 PLAN SUMMARY

Introduction and Background

In 1989 the Town of Becket produced its first Open Space and Recreation Plan. An update of the plan was completed in 1998, followed by an Open Space component in the 2004 Community Development Plan. The plans address issues of resource protection, conservation of lands and historic structures and future open space and recreational opportunities. The community identified open space planning as important to the protecting the character of the town. This is especially true in North Becket Village, an area of town that is experiencing a significant transition and is working to maintain its traditional village character and identity.

Need for Open Space and Recreation in Becket

According to a 2000 build-out analysis, the Town of Becket as a whole is relatively undeveloped; approximately 9.7% is considered developed. However, of the remaining acres, only 15% is permanently protected, including 22,502 acres of forestland located in October Mountain State Forest, the largest state forest in MA. Using the buildout analysis formula that considers absolute and partial protection and building constraints, approximately 45% (13,798 acres) of Becket is buildable. While it is highly unlikely that maximum buildout will occur in the near future, it is important that Becket be proactive in protecting its most valued open spaces, rural character, numerous outdoor recreation opportunities, and historic districts. Becket has two historic districts, one in North Becket Village and one in Becket Center.

Becket's most notable natural and recreational attractions are its lakes and ponds. The 1998 Open Space and Recreation Plan identified residents' needs and desires for open space and recreation, including clean water for swimming, fishing, boating and drinking. Although there are numerous lakes and ponds, and five private summer camps in town, public opportunities for local youth in all these categories are limited, and still needs to be addressed. The 1998 plan also highlighted the natural beauty and rural character as key factors to the success of the town to serve year round residents, attract visitors and second home owners, thereby adding to the town's slow but steady growth. However, it also voiced the concern of residents that continued and undirected growth could result in the loss of cherished landscapes. This sentiment underscores the need to increase the number of protected open spaces and other important environments and increase and improve recreational opportunities. The Open Space and Recreation Plan identifies the existence of numerous large, undivided, unprotected parcels that could be used to link other parcels to create wildlife corridors.

In the 1998 plan the diffusion of activity between North Becket and Becket Center was highlighted as contributing to the lack of a well-defined municipal/commercial center. This trend continues with the relocation of the Town Hall and Post Office to Becket Center, and the closing of the General Store in North Becket.

As noted in the open space section of the *Becket Community Development Plan* (BRPC, 2004), the only permanently protected land in North Becket Village is the 10 acre cemetery owned by the municipality, while other municipality-owned land in the area is only moderately protected. Yet, there are numerous sites in North Becket that are worth preserving for future generations, including land, rivers, and historic sites.

It is clear from this review of past plans that residents need to prioritize those goals that are still unmet, evaluate the success of projects already undertaken, and assess current development trends, community needs and the state of the town's treasured natural assets. This 2006 Open Space Plan provides an opportunity to do each of these important tasks.

SECTION 2 INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this updated Open Space and Recreation Plan is to revisit and assess the previous open space and recreation items in the 1998 and 2004 plans previously described. This updated plan will prioritize action items and reinvigorate the community to advance them forward.

B. Planning Process and Public Participation

In December 2005 the Town of Becket, partnering with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, received a Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant to support an update of the 1998 Open Space and Recreation Plan. To augment this effort and to support an expanded public participation process, the Town also applied for and received a grant from the Highland Communities Initiative.

With the support of these grants, the Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee was formed in the spring of 2006. The Committee was made up of representatives from various town boards and from interested citizens. Rita Furlong, who was involved in the development of the previous two open space and recreation plans in 1989 and 1998, brought continuity and an immense amount of expertise to the Committee. The complete list of Committee members is found in Table 1. BRPC planning staff aided the Committee by collecting data, facilitating public outreach, keeping the planning process of track, and creating the final plan.

Table 1. Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee

Committee Member	Interest / affiliation
Linda Bacon	Canterbury Farm
Cheryl Bean	Recreation Committee
Rita Furlong	Historical Commission, Recreation Committee
Mark Karlberg	Interested citizen
Barbara Toomey	Conservation Commission
Neil Toomey	Becket Land Trust

A public survey was distributed to every household in April of 2006. In an attempt to involve seasonal residents, the surveys were sent to the primary residence of all landowners. A self-addressed envelope was included with the survey to increase the response rate.

The survey was developed by referencing the survey conducted in 1998 for the previous Open Space and Recreation Plan and surveys from other communities. Some questions were similar to those asked in the previous plan's survey to determine and track any changes in demographics or in public opinion from the 1998 plan survey. Other questions were developed to help residents determine short- and long-term wishes and desires for open space protection and recreational opportunities.

Of the almost 1,640 surveys distributed, 329 were returned – a return rate of 20%. In addition to the mailing, the town offered residents an alternative method of completing the survey by placing it on the town's website. An additional 24 surveys were acquired in this way.

In addition to the survey, the Open Space and Recreation Committee sponsored a public forum at the Becket Town Hall on June 22, 2006, in which residents were invited to attend. The forum was advertised in the local newspaper and through flyers that were displayed in several public gathering places. The forum consisted of two basic components: 1) a presentation summarizing the existing conditions of open space, recreation and historic areas, summary results of the public survey and open space protection options available to towns and landowners, and 2) receiving resident input. Well over half of the meeting consisted of this last component, in which the attendees expressed their wishes and desires for open space protection and recreational opportunities.

Draft Goals, taken from the 1998 Master Plan, were offered for discussion at the public forum. While many of the views discussed at the public forum echoed sentiments voiced by survey respondents, some new issues and ideas emerged during this interactive period. Protection of open and scenic areas for future generations was a central theme throughout the discussion. The Community Preservation Act, which was offered as a funding option for open space and historic preservation, sparked a lengthy and interesting discussion.

Drawing upon the 1998 goals and input received through the returned surveys and the public forum, the Open Space and Recreation Committee drafted new goals, objectives and actions. These were presented to local officials and residents in November 2006.

The draft Open Space and Recreation Plan was offered for public review in December 2006. The plan was distributed to the Becket Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission and Town Administrator. A press release announced that it was available for review and comment, and copies of it were placed at Town Hall, the Becket Athenaeum and on the town website. Comments received were incorporated into the final draft plan that was subsequently submitted to the Division of Conservation Services for review. Materials generated during the public participation process can be found in Appendix A.

SECTION 3 COMMUNITY SETTING

A. Regional Context

Becket is a rural town located amidst the Berkshire hills of southwestern Massachusetts. At 48 square miles, it has the eleventh largest land area of all Massachusetts towns and cities. It lies approximately 19 miles southwest of Pittsfield and 39 miles northwest of Springfield. It is bordered by seven towns: Washington and Middlefield to the north, Otis to the south, Tyringham and Lee to the west, and Chester and Blandford to the east. Primary access to the town is via Route 20 from the east and west and via Route 8 from the north and south. Route 20 is also known as Jacob's Ladder Scenic Trail.

As a primarily residential community, Becket does not act as a destination point for neighboring communities. The elementary school in North Becket is attended by students from Washington, and junior high and high school students must travel to Dalton. Route 20 is the primary commuter route for residents of Becket traveling to points east and west for work, while Route 8 is the main north-south route.

Its mountainous terrain includes a portion of October Mountain State Forest, the largest contiguous state forest in Massachusetts, through which a section of the Appalachian Trail runs. The head waters of three different watersheds lie within its borders: the Housatonic, the Farmington, and the Westfield. The northeastern border is formed by the Westfield, the only river in Berkshire County to be designated a National Wild and Scenic River.

B. History of the Community

Plantation Number Four, known today as the Town of Becket, is in the northern section of what is considered the Southern Berkshires. The towns of Washington and Middlefield in the North, Lee and Tyringham to the West, Otis to the South and Chester to the East border it. The Town of Becket is rich in history, an ever-beautiful pastoral landscape, a small town atmosphere and the arts. Becket was one of four townships that were conveyed to the colonial government by the Stockbridge Indians in 1735. The Town of Becket was officially established and incorporated in 1765 by deed of the Royal Court of Massachusetts in the King of England's name. The first settlers and travelers to come to Becket were greeted with a craggy mountainous landscape, the cool rush of countless streams, small quiet ponds and a forest rich soil that was not very good for cultivation of agriculture. Many settlers began by harvesting the timber and farming but the shallow soils soon gave way, sending many farmers west. The town has been marked by time and the land that once was harvested has returned to a prime natural state, except for the now numerous houses that have been built by those seeking solace in the woods. The town's peaceful pride can be seen in the old stones and in the rich history of its buildings like the Mullen House. Another major attraction is the internationally renowned Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival and School. Each summer it entertains the public with the motion and rhythm of countless performers in an enchanting forested setting.

C. Population Characteristics

Becket's population has continued to rise over the years, despite the absence of new, large employers. In fact, the year round population has more than doubled in the past fifty years, rising from 755 to 1,755 people between 1950 and 2000, and remaining at this level through 2004. The population of Becket has increased by an average of 24% every decade since 1970. In contrast, during the same time period, the population of Berkshire County overall has steadily decreased by an average of approximately 3% every decade. The total number of households in Becket has increased from 514 in 1990 to 692 in 2000. Notably, more than 50% of year-round Becket residents had moved to town, or within town, since 1990. (BRPC, 2004)

The population increase has not been equal across the age spectrum. From 1990 to 2000, the Town saw a 36% increase in residents 65 years of age and older. This is higher than the county-wide increase of 30% but less than the 50% increase statewide. Individuals 55 years or older now represent 25% of the total population of the Town, raising the median age to 40.8. In contrast, the total number of children and youth ages 24 and younger declined slightly with the number of children under age 5 decreasing by 29%.

The median household income in Becket has increased from \$31,435 in 1990 to \$46,806 in 2000. This increase of 49% is higher than either the 28% increase in Berkshire County or the statewide increase of 37%. Though seemingly dramatic, the large increase in household income over the last 10 years in Becket has not been able to match the 63% increase in average housing prices that has occurred in recent years, and suggests that those with more moderately increasing incomes are being priced out of the housing market.

Summary Becket Demographic Profile

- Increase in overall population
- Decrease in household size
- Increase in older households
- No increase in children and youth
- Significant increase in median household income
- No significant change in income distribution
- 50% of year round residents have moved into their current unit in the last 10 years

D. Growth and Development Patterns

Patterns and Trends

According to MassGIS land use data, the vast majority of Becket is forested (83%). Other major land uses include residential development (7%) and water/wetlands (5%). GIS land use data between 1971 and 1999 indicates that the greatest land use changes occurred in two categories: forest and residential. According to 1999 data, approximately 1,059 acres

of forest were lost during this time, while 1,000 acres of residential acres were gained, indicating that residential development is mainly occurring on formerly forested lands. This trend has continued through 2006.

A lack of major transportation sources and the steep topography of the town prevent more industry from locating here. According to the *Farmington River Water Shed Action Plan*, "Becket soils are a prime determinant of land use. Gently sloping to very steep loamy soils on the hilltops and hillsides formed in a glacial till. Areas of rock outcrops and stone and boulders are on the surface. Soils are poorly suited to agriculture and development due to their slope, shallowness to bedrock and stoniness."

According to a housing analysis conducted for the *Becket Community Development Plan* (BRPC 2004), the Town of Becket currently has 1,607 residential housing units that are primarily single-family homes (96.5%), with a majority of them seasonal dwellings (57%). The percentage of seasonal homes in Becket is much higher than the Berkshire County average of 9%, and is higher than the 28% average for southern Berkshire County, which traditionally hosts the majority of seasonal residents. There are 614 year-round owner-occupied units comprising 38% of the stock, while only 69 (4%) of the units are year-round rental units.

Most of the residential development in Becket is concentrated in three village centers and in two large-scale subdivisions. North Becket, Becket Center and West Becket are the town's village centers; Sherwood Forest and Sherwood Greens are the two subdivisions located around Robin Hood Lake and Longbow Lake, respectively (refer to the Population Density Map for location of these areas). Recreational opportunities near the population centers varies. While there are playgrounds and playing field available in North Becket and Becket Center, there are no organized recreational fields in the vicinity of the dense subdivisions surrounding the lakes. Likewise, there are no public swimming or boating areas located in North Becket, while the properties around the lakes in Becket Center are rich in water-based recreational opportunities. A more detailed discussion of recreational needs is discussed in Section 7.

Outside of these areas, development is scattered across the town, mostly consisting of single family homes on lots greater than two acres located along existing roadways. The whole area of the Town constitutes a single, residential/agricultural zoning district which has a minimum lot size of two acres for single-family dwellings and three acres for two-family dwellings (See the Land Use Map). Many homes in Sherwood Forest pre-date this by-law and are at much higher densities on lots of 80 feet by 100 feet.

There is very little commercial development in Becket, and what businesses are located here are small, family-owned enterprises. Thus, the vast majority of year-round residents commute to work in nearby towns. Outside of town government, the major employers in town are Jacob's Pillow, the five summer camps, The Kushi Institute, Cesco Plumbing and Heating, Berkshire Berries, the two convenience stores, Conner's Welding, Canterbury Farm B & B and Skiing, Gile Real Estate, Bonny Rigg Camp Ground, Canterbury Landscaping, Sunny Banks Farm, and many independent contractors and excavating companies.

The village of North Becket has historically been the central area of commerce in the town. The post office, elementary school, Becket Arts Center, general store and other commercial entities were located here. Unfortunately, the village has recently suffered a few losses, as the general store has closed, and the post office was relocated to Becket Center. As noted in the Community Development Plan, the town would like to revive North Becket, while also encouraging growth in Becket Center, thus creating two vibrant villages. To accomplish this, the town is considering rezoning portions of the town to encourage business development here.

There are several large undeveloped parcels in the town, many of which abut lakes and ponds, which are on the real estate market or are expected to be on the market soon. The town should approach these landowners and encourage them to consider conserving at least some portion of these parcels as open space. The town should alert the landowners about the tax benefits of donating land or placing conservation restrictions on the land.

Infrastructure

Transportation system

The principal routes of travel in and out of Becket are Routes 8 and 20. There is no mass transit available to residents of Becket. The Boston-Albany Railroad which runs along the northern border of town is the busiest freight line in Massachusetts. Becket is 19 miles southeast of Pittsfield and 39 miles northwest of Springfield. State Route 8 crosses Becket's boundary near West Becket where it joins U. S. Route 20. They are the same road between West Becket and Bonny Rigg Corners where Route 8 turns north and runs through Becket Center and the Village before crossing the northern town boundary and into Washington. Route 20 runs east-west through Becket connecting it to its neighboring towns of Chester and Lee. The Massachusetts Turnpike travels 6.8 miles of highway through the southwestern corner of town but as yet has no exit in Becket. Residents commuting to work travel north on Route 8 or Washington Mountain Road, and those commuting east or west use Route 20.

Route 20 is also part of the Jacob's Ladder Scenic Trail, a state-recognized scenic byway. The Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway, Inc. is a non-profit organization that works to maintain the natural beauty and historic character. Aside from this route, the town has not designated any town roads as Scenic Roads, although many would qualify.

For year-round residents, proximity to well-maintained state highways is crucial as most need to commute to outlying areas for employment. For seasonal residents, the opposite is true. These residents value distance from the major highways of town. Currently the town maintains a small fraction of existing roads in the town; development associations take responsibility for roads within their subdivisions. When the Sherwood Forest development association was unable to maintain its roads, it asked the town to take over maintenance. A long-term debate ensued with the result being Sherwood Forest having a Road District, separate from the town, with maintenance responsibilities.

The Boston-Albany Railroad, or New England Division Main Line, runs through the West Branch of the Westfield River Valley and the Village, but it does not stop in Becket. Owned by Conrail, this is the most heavily used freight line in Massachusetts transporting approximately 6 million gross tons per year.

Becket is not served by any bus line, nor does it have any designated bikeways. Airport service is available in Great Barrington, Pittsfield, and Westfield. Bradley International Airport in Hartford, CT is less than an hour's drive. Given the transportation infrastructure, the only way to travel is by automobile which, combined with its sparse development and lack of business center, potentially makes it very difficult for children and the elderly to get about. They must rely on friends and family.

Water supply systems

Residents, businesses and institutions in Becket are supplied by private groundwater sources. There are 31 public drinking water sources in the town, which serve water to members of the public. These include the elementary school, the town hall, restaurants, Jacob's Pillow, and the various camps. In addition, there are three watershed areas that have been designated by the state as Outstanding Resource Waters. The location of the public drinking water supplies and other important water sources are illustrated on the Water Resources Map.

Wastewater systems

All residences and businesses in Becket dispose of sewage on site. All these are individual systems, with the exception of the wastewater plant that was constructed to serve the two YMCA camps, Chimney Corners and Camp Becket. While access to water supply and the ability for a site to handle septic effluent have not prevented large tracts of land from being subdivided, it has prevented many of the subdivided lots from being built on. This has not always been true as many of the small lots throughout the town had septic systems placed on them which are now failing. Approximately 25% of all Title 5 septic inspections have required repair or replacement (BRPC, 2004).

Long-term development patterns

Becket is a town that is primarily forested. The forests, which covered approximately 83% of the town in 1999, the latest land use data that we have, provide the rural and unspoiled atmosphere that residents and visitors alike cherish. Residential development is the next largest land use category, covering approximately 7% of the town in 1999. Utilizing MassGIS land use data between 1971 and 1999, we can track general land use changes that occurred during that time period. As can be seen in Table 2, the increase in residential development has occurred at a rate that coincides with the loss of forest land.

According to building permit data recently collected, from 1995 to 2000, an average of 13 new houses were constructed in the town annually. All new-unit residential construction

was for single-family homes, and of those 50-60% have been for high-end seasonal. This trend is expected to continue.

There are several areas in the town where development is anticipated. A large property on the east side of Yokum Pond was just sold, and a large parcel on Bancroft Road is being sold. A new road is being constructed in Skyline Ridge. In addition, lots in Sherwood Forest, Becket Woods, Becket Estates and Sherwood Greens continue to be developed.

Table 2. Becket Land Use changes

Land Use Category	1971 Land Use (acres)	1985 Land Use (acres)	1999 Land Use (acres)	Land Use Changes 1971-99 (acres)
Agriculture	323	320	322	-1
Commercial	39	49	54	15
Forest	26,428	26,077	25,369	-1,059
Industrial	2	2	2	0
Institutional	83	98	85	3
Mining / Waste Disposal	51	74	19	-31
Recreation	201	214	232	31
Residential	1,249	1,528	2,249	1,000
Transportation	143	143	143	0
Vacant	355	360	386	30
Water	958	964	967	9
Wetland	699	701	701	2
Total	30,531	30,531	30,531	0

Source: MassGIS.

Zoning Bylaws

Under current zoning laws, all parcels in Becket are zoned Residential-Agricultural. Other uses are only allowed under a special permit review process. Over 2,300 lots smaller than two acres remain undeveloped, as they were subdivided prior to the adoption of Becket's first zoning by-laws. The town has specific provisions in its by-laws addressing subdivisions, non-conforming lots, lot sizes, and review of site plans. In reaction to the quarter-acre-lot developments of the late 1960's, Becket adopted a two-acre minimum lot size in 1976.

Single family homes are allowed by right, but more intensive residential development, such as two- and multi-family homes require a special permit. The town has a Flexible Residential Development bylaw that allows for an increased density with a 1.5-acre minimum requirement through special permit. Any commercial or industrial use of land is only allowed through a special permit process. Becket has not established more specific controls on sites used for industrial or commercial purposes.

The Becket Planning Board has been updating the zoning bylaws to reflect the changes in land use development. In 2005-06 the town established a Right-to-Farm Committee and

adopted a Right-to-Farm bylaw. During 2006, with the support of an EOEA Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant, the Planning Board was able to retain a land use law consultant to help them evaluate the town's existing zoning bylaws, identify areas where the laws are outdated and/or conflicting with existing laws, and recommend amendments to improve them. Most recently, the Planning Board has received a second Smart Growth grant to help them develop bylaws that will be protective of the rural character and natural resources of the town. In this new initiative the Planning Board expects to focus on several subjects, including upland protections (Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act or Upland Zoning), a lakeshore protection/cottage conversion bylaw, and a wetland protection bylaw.

Subdivision Regulations

Proposed major residential developments must meet stricter zoning laws and receive a special permit from the town's Planning Board. In order to receive approval, the proposal must show the plan for development under conventional subdivision laws and a flexible development plan. Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) must be filed along with the subdivision plans. While this by-law is intended to promote cluster development, no such development has occurred to date.

The town sets forth design guidelines which are not mandatory. Included is a 50-foot buffer of natural vegetation between wetlands and surface waters and the development. The Rivers Protection Act of 1996 increases the riparian buffer to 200 feet, but not the wetlands buffer. The Floodplain Overlay District restricts building within the 100-year floodplain.

Much concern has been expressed over the condition and future of the Sherwood Forest Development between Route 20 and the Massachusetts Turnpike. The low-cost of these small cottages and the development's proximity to Route 20 make it vulnerable to becoming a community of year-round residents instead of the summer residents it has traditionally served.

Maximum Build-Out

The Southern New England Forest Consortium completed a study in 1993 which estimated a potential build-out under Becket's existing zoning by-laws. The study concluded that it was possible for 7,032 new residential units and 79 commercial and industrial structures to be added. The study used a base of 14,064 acres available for development. This excluded existing protected lands and used an estimate of 25% of the remaining acreage being environmentally constrained for development. It did not count lands in the Chapter 61 tax-abatement program as being protected open space as they could be developed at any time. While it is unlikely that development to this extent will occur, it is likely the town will see both permanent and second home construction increase as people come seeking the peace and quiet of Becket's beautiful landscape.

According to the study, 16% of Becket was protected as open space and residential development is occurring at a more rapid rate than open space protection. According to the study, however, residential development costs the town more money than those lands in open space. The study also concluded that Becket loses 2 cents on every dollar of town revenue to keep up with residential services, but saves 28 cents on every dollar of revenue

for those lands in open space, farm, and forestry. These figures are consistent with the results of Cost of Community Services studies conducted more recently in Berkshire County and across the country. In summary, residential development is a net financial loss to the town, while undeveloped land is a net financial gain to the town. This is despite the fact that more than half of the residential properties in the town are seasonal, and thus place less of a strain on services, than year-round residences.

Table 2. Results of the Cost of Community Services Analysis

Land Use	Revenues	Expenditures	Difference
Residential	83.77%	87.82%	-5.05%
Commercial	1.01%	0.86%	0.15%
Farm, Forestry, and	15.22%	11.31%	3.91%

Source: 1998 Becket Open Space & Rec. Plan, taken from S. New Engl. Forest Consortium, 1993.

According to a build-out project conducted by the BRPC in 2000, Becket experienced a steady increase in population, which had more than doubled since 1960. According to this study, 2,952 acres, or 9.7% of total area of town was developed in 2000, leaving approximately 90% of the town undeveloped. Of the undeveloped area, approximately 4,689 acres (15%) are protected from development, and include areas such as state forestlands. After taking into consideration land use, zoning and constraints to development, the study concluded that 13,798 acres, or 45% of the town, as developable. If these lands were developed to the maximum allowed by zoning, it would result in 6,945 new housing units, and would add almost 21,000 people to the population, almost 12 times the current population (BRPC 2000). These findings are similar to those noted in the 1993 study cited previously. The areas identified as developable can be seen on the Buildable Land Map. The areas on the map showing partial constraints correlate closely with the areas on the Soils Map showing excessively drained soils (often on steep slopes), poorly drained soils (those with high water tables) or hydric, wetland soils.

Intense development, such as that indicated as possible in the build out analysis, would compromise the ecological integrity and diversity of the town’s forest lands. Fragmentation of forest would interrupt the land’s ability to support wildlife. As can be seen when comparing the areas of buildable land on the Buildable Land Map (areas in purple) to those deemed most important for wildlife on the Biological Resources Map (areas in green), large tracts of core habitat areas would be developed and lost to wildlife. Also, when comparing the Buildable Land and Biological Resources maps, one can see that many potential vernal pools, which serve as necessary breeding grounds for many rare amphibians and other species, could be lost. The importance of Becket’s forests and water resources is described in more detail in the following next sections of this plan. In addition to the loss of wildlife habitat, intense development would compromise the availability of abundant and clean groundwater.

SECTION 4 ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Becket is located primarily in the Berkshire Highland ecoregion of Massachusetts. This is characterized by cooler climates that support plant communities and wildlife that are more commonly found in northern New England. Northern hardwoods and, to some extent Spruce-fir forests, dominate the landscape, while lakes and ponds are abundant.

A. *Geology, Soils and Topography*

The bedrock structure of Becket was mapped in 1974 by the U.S. Geological Survey and revealed a predominance of schist and gneiss. The major formations are the Hoosic Formation (schists), Washington Gneiss, Tyringham Gneiss, Shales Brook Limestone, and some undifferentiated gneisses. The more weather-resistant rocks are found as outcrops at higher elevations. The less resistant limestone has been eroded by glaciers and weathering and is common along the stream valleys.

The surficial sediments in Becket consist of glacial till, stratified drift, wetland deposits, and alluvium. Till usually consists of poorly sorted sediments in which different grain sizes are mixed together. Stratified drift consists of layers of silt, sand, clay and gravel. Alluvium is a mixture of sand and gravel deposited on the outwash plain of a receding glacier.

Stratified drift in Becket consists of gravel, sand, and silt deposited by streams formed from melting glacial ice. This drift was laid down in front of the glacier and underneath the glacier. In Becket, because the stratified drift is thin, ranging from 0-40 feet thick, groundwater yields from this source are moderate to poor. Becket Basin, in Becket Center, contains stratified drift at least 30 feet thick. The Basin was probably formed at the intersection of rock-shattering faults. The glacier further abraded and scoured the area creating a depression filled with gravel and sand.

Alluvium laid down by streams consists primarily of thin layers of gravel, sands, and clay or silt less than 10 feet thick and deposited since the last glacial era. Alluvium does not store water as do the sand and gravel deposits within the stratified drift, down into the subsurface. The high infiltration rate of sands and gravels places groundwater supplies at risk of contamination should subsurface oil tanks or septic tanks fail.

The glacial action left behind a lot of exposed bedrock and large boulders in the streams. The bedrock places limitations on siting homes and had to be blasted along portions of Route 20 to construct the highway. The streams in Becket are dominated by large boulders and run clear creating beautiful cascades in several areas of town as well as providing excellent spawning habitat for trout and the endangered Atlantic salmon.

It is a challenge to site septic system leach fields in much of the town due to slope, shallow depths to bedrock, to long periods of high water tables, or to excessive drainage properties. The areas of poorly drained and excessively drained soils are illustrated in the Soils Map. The agricultural suitability of almost all soils in Becket are poor due to steep slopes, high water tables, and the extremely rocky terrain.

Berkshire-Marlow Association

These extremely stony soils are characterized by steep slopes of 15-45% and as such are unsuitable for buildings or septic systems. Marlow soils were formed in glacial till derived from granite, gneiss, and schist.

Lyman-Tunbridge Association

These soils are shallow and have extremely rapid permeability, and they are often located on moderately steep slopes. Bedrock outcrops, surficial boulders and stones characterize this soil. The underlying bedrock is gneiss, schist, and granite. Lyman soils are primarily derived from glacial till and fractured mica schist. Tunbridge soils are acid glacial till derived from black mica schist.

Peru-Marlow Association

These soils cover the steep upland areas throughout town. It is a compact, stony, glacial till derived from schist and characterized by seasonally high-water tables, no more than 30 inches below the surface. Slopes range from 3-15% and on average, stones are no more than 3-20 feet apart. During the winter months a perched water table exists, but for the rest of the year the soils are moderately drained. Peru soils formed in glacial till and were derived from granite, gneiss, and schist.

Pillsbury Loam

These are level to gently sloping soils associated with glacial till uplands. Stones 5 to 20 feet apart dominate this soil type. A perched water table exists during the winter and spring months. The seasonal high water table makes areas with these soils unsuitable for buildings, roads, or septic systems.

Merrimac, Hinckley and Groton

These soils are all characterized by rapid permeability making them less suitable for septic systems. The Merrimac soils are suitable for row crops, but the soils are susceptible to droughty conditions. Groton soils are primarily derived from limestone.

Hero and Fredon

Fredon is a very deep, mostly level, poorly drained soil associated with outwash plains and stream terraces formed by shale, slate, sandstone, limestone, gneiss, and granite. A high water table from October to June does not make this a good soil for buildings, roads, agriculture, nor septic systems. Hero soils have a high water table from November through April and are not suitable for buildings, roads, nor septic systems. Hero soils consist primarily of silt and clay deposited over sand and gravel. As with Fredon, groundwater contamination could occur if the system were not designed to avoid high groundwater.

B. Landscape Character

The dominant landforms in Becket are its steep, bedrock mountain ridges which run northwest-southeast through town. The valleys between these ridges are dominated by

rich wetland areas serving as headwaters for the many streams which flow both north and south through the valleys.

Becket's elevations range from the 2,200-foot Walling Mountain in the October Mountain State Forest at its western border to approximately 800 feet where the West Branch of the Westfield River exits Becket at its northeast border with Middlefield and Chester. A series of northwest-southeast ridges are consistently more than 15% slope and are marked by large exposures of bedrock.

The glaciated valleys are predominantly narrow and are characterized by large bedrock outcroppings with medium-sized cobble boulders lining the stream bottoms and banks. The absence of organic soils near the streams allow them to run clear throughout the year.

Wetlands range in size from the 600-acre Tyne Swamp to ones less than 0.5 acres in size. Pre-settlement era Becket was dominated by wetlands of more than 100 acres in size. Many of these wetlands now are not visible due to impoundment of their waters for recreational and aesthetic purposes.

Steep slopes and wetlands limit the developable lands to the glaciated valleys. Nevertheless, steep slopes are not regulated by state or local laws. While wetlands are protected under the Wetlands Protection Act, construction of the new town hall in 1992 required the filling of some wetlands with mitigation elsewhere on site.

C. *Water Resources*

Becket's quality of life is directly united with the quantity and quality of its water resources. The numerous ponds and streams which drain the headwaters of three different watersheds are valued sources of recreation, scenic views, and drinking water. Becket's abundance of surface water resources has been attracting year-round and summer residents for over one hundred years. Because of the narrow valleys and steep gradients of the brooks, many have been impounded to allow recreational use. Swimming, boating, and fishing are popular during the summer months with ice skating and ice fishing popular during the winter months.

Approximately 10% of Becket's surface is covered by open waterbodies, which cover ~1,160 acres, or wetlands, which cover ~1,920 acres. These figures are slightly higher than the 1999 Land Use figures for open water and wetlands that were used in the previous land use patterns section. These wetland resources figures are derived from new and more accurate wetland resource mapping data developed by MassGIS; however, it should be noted that the figures are not all inclusive of the town's wetland areas. These figures do not reflect the actual on-the-ground acreage of wetlands because they do not reflect small yet important wetlands dispersed throughout the town in forests, backyards and fields.

The land within Becket's boundaries includes the headwaters of three different watersheds. Being at the headwaters of the watersheds gives Becket the opportunity to be in control of its water quality and floodplain areas. The Housatonic River watershed drains

ten percent of Becket's land toward the west. The Housatonic River is the dominant watershed in Berkshire County. The river flows in a southerly direction through the county and into Connecticut, from where it drains into Long Island Sound. The Farmington River watershed drains approximately thirty percent toward the south, while the Westfield River watershed drains about sixty percent of the land toward the north, south, and east. The Farmington and Westfield rivers are tributaries of the Connecticut River which, like the Housatonic, flows through Connecticut before discharging into Long Island Sound.

Watersheds and Surface Waterbodies

Housatonic River Watershed

Greenwater Pond is an 88-acre Great Pond sandwiched between the Massachusetts Turnpike on the south shore and Route 20 on the north shore. It is, on average, 23 feet deep with the center being about 58 feet. It currently has informal access on the west end allowing trout and bass fishing, and a dam on the west end. It is the source for Greenwater Pond Brook which runs about 1/4 mile before it enters Tyringham.

A small unnamed pond that flows into Upper Goose Pond has a few residences on the north shore and no public access. It is the source of Higley Brook which runs into the town of Lee before entering Goose Pond.

Within the Housatonic River Watershed, to the west of the Appalachian Trail, is the headwaters for Basin Pond in Lee, a state-designated Outstanding Resource Water. These waters are recognized for their outstanding ecological, recreational, socioeconomic and/or aesthetic values, and for which extra protections are in place. This entire area is located within the October Mountain State Forest, and is thus protected open space.

Farmington River Watershed

Palmer Brook Pond is over 800 acres which is privately owned and impounded on its south shore. There is no public access to this pond.

Shaw Pond is a 100-acre Great Pond with average depths of 13-19 feet. It has public access and a boat ramp in Otis just south of the town line on Route 8. It has fish populations of bullhead trout, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and chain pickerel.

Ward Pond (Mystic Isle Lake) is a secluded, natural, 25-acre pond with no public access. Its average depth is 8 feet. Its outlet, Thomas Brook, feeds Mud Pond, a 50-acre quaking bog just over the town line in Otis.

Silver Shield Lake, Robin Hood Lake, and Golden Fawn Lake are all privately owned, impounded streams and wetlands which lie within the Sherwood Forest and Sherwood Greens developments. The shores of these lakes are heavily developed primarily with summer cottages and second homes.

Three unnamed ponds lie in a north-south configuration on lands between Johnson Rd. and Otis State Forest near the Becket-Otis town line.

Shales Brook is the outlet for a 10- to 20-acre beaver pond in the Becket Wildlife Management Area. It flows northeast into Shaw Pond.

Palmer Brook flows from Palmer Brook Pond south until it is impounded in the Sherwood Greens development as part of a golf course. It then flows into the impounded Mystic Isle Lake before making its way into Otis and Thomas Pond. It becomes Thomas Brook after it leaves Thomas Pond and makes a brief reentry into Becket before making a rapid descent into Hayden Pond.

Tyne Brook drains the 600-acre Tyne Swamp, crosses under Plumb Road, and then enters Palmer Brook.

The West Branch of the Farmington River forms a brief boundary between Becket and Otis before it flows into Hayden Pond in Otis. Not too long after it flows into Connecticut, a section of the river is designated a National Wild and Scenic River, the only one in the entire state of Connecticut.

Westfield River Watershed

Within the Westfield River Watershed there are three subwatersheds that support state-designated Outstanding Resource Waters. The first two are the subwatersheds that feed Horn Pond and the Austin Brook Reservoir in neighboring Blandford. The third is a small headwaters section that flows south into Otis. The Austin Brook Reservoir is owned by the town of Chester and can be considered protected open space as long as the reservoir is used by the town.

Buckley Dunton Reservoir is the largest body of water in Becket at 195 acres. It lies mostly within the October Mountain State Forest and has public access and a boat ramp at the southern end via Yokum Pond Road. The 1989 plan suggested identifying this impounded lake as a Class A water resource, reserving it as a possible future source for public water.

Yokum Pond is a 109-acre artificial Great Pond which is managed for chain pickerel, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, and largemouth bass. It averages 7-10 feet deep and is accessible to the public via a boat launch off Leonhardt Rd. It has heavy recreational use during the summer and winter.

Rudd Pond is an artificial, 80-acre pond owned by the Chimney Corners/YMCA camp. Access to this pond is with permission of the camp only.

Center Pond is a 125-acre artificial Great Pond averaging 8-14 feet deep. It is the most heavily used recreational pond in Becket. Camp Wahtitoh is located on its northern shore, and Camp Greylock on its eastern shore. The southern end has three beaches each over 100 feet long. The town owns a 2-acre public beach area and parking lot at the southern end. Fishing for smallmouth and largemouth bass is common.

Crystal Pond is a 10-acre, artificial pond located across the road and to the south of the Town Hall. There is no public access to this pond.

Horn Pond is a 30-acre, natural, Great Pond located just south of Mount Gobble in northeastern Becket. Although previous reports indicated it is owned by the town of Chester for its water supply, property maps show that the entire shoreline abuts private lands.

Robin Hood Lake is the largest impounded lake at 70 acres. It is privately owned and is heavily developed with small cottages on all shores.

Several other smaller ponds lie within the Westfield River Watershed: Walker Brook Pond, Spark Brook Pond, Chimney Corners Pond (Hamilton Brook Pond), Little Robin Lake, Lancelot Lake, two unnamed ponds off Carter Rd. in North Becket, and off County Rd. in the northwestern corner of the town, and the abandoned quarry behind Bonny Rigg Hill.

Rudd Pond Brook flows north from Rudd Pond before joining Yokum Brook. Yokum Brook makes a steep descent from its headwaters in the October Mountain Forest and follows Yokum Pond Rd. and Route 8 before it runs through North Becket village on its way to join the West Branch of the Westfield River.

Several streams in the Westfield River Watershed are considered by Mass Fisheries & Wildlife to be cold water fisheries because of their ability to sustain reproducing wild trout populations. These include the Shaker Mill, Yokum and Walker brooks. This designation does not have the level of protection as the designation of cold water fisheries by the Mass. DEP. However, Fisheries & Wildlife are recommending that these waters, along with the West Branch Westfield, attain DEP-designated cold water fisheries status, which will afford some protection from inappropriate discharges that could negatively impact the temperature of the water and its ability to sustain wild trout.

Shaker Mill Brook crosses into Becket from Washington to the north and then cascades through a ravine adjacent to Brooker Hill Road before descending into North Becket village and joining the West Branch of the Westfield River. The ravine was mentioned as one of the unique resources of Massachusetts in a 1929 Natural Areas Survey by noted landscape architect Charles Eliot. The Town of Becket has been acquiring the land along the south side of the ravine in anticipation of creating a greenway along it.

Depot Brook follows the Conrail railway into North Becket village from Washington before it joins with Shaker Mill Brook and Yokum Pond Brook to form the West Branch of the Westfield River.

Center Pond Brook and Mountain Pasture Brook are two other south-flowing streams which join the West Branch of the Westfield River below North Becket village. Mountain Pasture Brook joins at the hamlet of Bancroft.

The West Branch of the Westfield River forms the primary boundary between Middlefield and Becket. This river is the longest free-flowing river in the state of Massachusetts. The Westfield River and its main tributaries in Becket have been designated as a National Wild

and Scenic River. Steep slopes on both sides of the valley have prohibited most development, making this one of the most scenic spots in the Berkshire foothills. When the water is high enough, the river becomes a challenging class IV run for many area kayakers.

Hamilton Brook flows south out of Rudd Pond and into Chimney Corners Pond in the YMCA camp before it enters Walker Brook downstream.

Walker Brook has the second largest volume of flowing water within the town after the West Branch of the Westfield. The West Branch of Walker Brook first flows south, generally paralleling Fred Snow Rd. before it empties into Robin Hood Lake. It then winds northeast to Bonny Rigg Corners where it meets the main stem and flows east along Route 20. The main branch begins just west of the Town Hall at a small pond and wetlands south of Center Pond. Brown trout and brook trout are plentiful in the main stem. The main branch is also a class IV kayaking run when the water is high enough. Much of Walker Brook follows the Jacob's Ladder Scenic Trail. Not too far over the Becket-Chester town line, Walker Brook joins the National Wild and Scenic West Branch of the Westfield River.

Spark Brook starts in Otis State Forest before it empties into Spark Brook Pond in the Indian Lakes Estates development. It then flows north through Becket State Forest before joining Walker Brook at Walker Brook Pond.

Cushman Brook drains the mountains in the southeast corner of Becket around Quarry Rd. and flows north before entering Walker Brook less than a mile before the Becket-Chester town line. Its waters support brown and brook trout populations.

Austin Brook's source is the water shedding from Mt. Gobble and lies entirely within lands owned by Chester and has no public access. Aquifer recharge areas

Groundwater is mostly replenished through precipitation, and to a lesser extent from inflow of adjacent groundwater and natural infiltration from streams. It is important to understand that groundwater, however, is not separate from surface water. The cracks in the bedrock allow for interchange of water resources from bedrock to surface waters.

Situated at the headwaters of three watersheds, Becket's drinking water supply comes entirely from precipitation. Any decline in water quality within its borders is a result of activities occurring within its borders. Taking steps to protect its own water supplies will also mean cleaner water for those communities downstream.

The one medium-yield aquifer, near Greenwater Pond, is not a likely drinking water resource for most of Becket as water would have to be pumped uphill to where the majority of Becket's population lives. Road salting also puts this aquifer at great risk as it lies in between the Massachusetts Turnpike, the state's main east-west artery for commercial and tourist traffic, and Route 20, a major regional road.

Flood hazard area

There are approximately 2,623 acres of 100-year floodplain in Becket, which is 8.6% of the town's total acreage. Approximately 129 acres of floodplain are developed, which is 5% of the total floodplain acreage (BRPC, 2005).

Lands along the principal streams in Becket Walker Brook, Palmer Brook, Center Pond Brook, Yokum Brook, West Branch of the Westfield are subject to flooding. Much of these areas are designated as Flood Hazard Areas by the National Flood Insurance Program. This program delineates the 100-year flood elevations which statistically have a 1% chance of being reached in any given year. Floods could reach areas not shown on the map and reach higher elevations.

It has been over 50 years since a flood has reached or exceeded the 100-year flood elevation. It is not uncommon for waters to reach these levels more than once over the 100-year period.

Low-lying areas adjacent to the many impounded ponds and wetlands are also susceptible to flooding. This would include areas around Center Pond, Rudd Pond, Ward Pond, Shaw Pond, Greenwater Pond, Yokum Pond, Horn Pond and Buckley-Dunton Reservoir. The current impoundments were constructed for aesthetic and recreation reasons, and were not meant to act as flood control structures.

While impoundments offer some security for flood control, Becket had a tragic experience in 1927 when an impoundment below Rudd Pond collapsed and ravaged North Becket Village, destroying homes, businesses, and killing one person. Factors which contribute to the intensity of a flood are the amount of impervious surfaces (pavement), disruption of vegetative cover, and loss of flood storage areas (natural floodplains and wetlands). Becket's remaining wetlands and unbuilt floodplains continue to provide this valuable function. Protecting the headwaters of these basins would provide an important function for Becket and all towns downstream.

Becket has adopted a Floodplain Zoning Overlay which requires any proposal for building within the Flood Hazard Areas be reviewed by the Conservation Commission and Planning Board. As development increases within these stream basin areas, the flood elevation accuracy decreases due to the increase in disruption of vegetative cover, soil movement, and the addition of impervious surfaces.

Wetlands

Wetlands in Becket vary in size from 600-acres (Tyne Swamp) to smaller than one-half acre. Their functions include filtering pollutants, storing flood waters, and providing critical habitat for diverse wildlife species. They also provide many acres of open space. The wetlands in Becket lie mainly in the northwest-southeast oriented valleys left by the scouring action of the glaciers thousands of years ago. They are the sources for the many brooks and rivers originating in Becket. Wetlands provide very valuable functions for the

communities near them, including flood water storage, pollutant filtration, beautiful open spaces, scenic views and wildlife habitat.

Several large wetlands have been impounded over the years in order to create recreational ponds. The most significant of these were the headwaters of Palmer Brook and the several impoundments in the Sherwood Forest and Sherwood Greens developments. While these water bodies now provide valuable recreational and aesthetic qualities, the remaining wetlands continue to perform important and irreplaceable functions.

The Wetlands Protection Act, as amended by the 1996 Rivers Protection Act, gives some protection to the wetlands and rivers of the state. The goals of the act are to preserve water quality, maintain drinking water quality and quantity, provide recharge through infiltration, retain natural flood storage, sustain fisheries, and protect wildlife habitat. To attain these goals, development within 100 feet of wetlands and 200 feet of rivers is regulated by the Becket Conservation Commission. Becket does not have any additional regulations which affect activities near or around its wetlands.

D. Vegetation

General Inventory

Approximately 83% of Becket's land is covered by forest. It consists primarily of an oak-maple hardwoods community, spruce-pine softwoods community, and hemlock-beech-mixed community. The other land uses of note in the town are residential homes and yards (7%) and water and wetlands (5%). There are very few open agricultural fields in the town (~1%).

Forest Land

Forests dominate the landscape of the town, providing residents with a rural atmosphere and wildlife with large tracts of land for habitat. Successional forests are dominated by colonizing species such as poplar, grey birch and white pine. The more mature forests are typified by sugar maple, ash, red oak, yellow birch, beech, spruce and hemlock.

Although large tracts of forest were cleared in the 18th century, it is suspected that much of the town was reforested as early as the 1830s, which is unusual for much of Berkshire County. According to data collected by the Harvard Forest (Hall et al, 2002), approximately 38% of the town had become reforested by that time. With the exception of the Sherwood Forest area, most the areas forested in 1830 is still forested today. These areas are possible Primary Forests. These forests are not Old Growth, but they probably retain a greater native biodiversity within the undergrowth. These forests occur on untilled soil and, although they were usually woodlots that were cut repeatedly and occasionally pastured, they occurred in a patch-worked pattern. This allowed for the return of a diverse native plant and animal communities to recolonize the areas as they grew once again back into forest. The areas thought to be forested in 1830 can be seen on the Biological Resources Map. The field work to verify if and where Primary Forests occur in Becket has

not been done, but it should be considered. Areas adjacent to protected open space lands, such as state or town lands, and areas that are not fragmented by roads or development should be the focus of field work and possible acquisition or protection strategies.

Agricultural Land

Traditional open agricultural lands cover 1% of Becket. These consist of farm fields, corrals and farm yards, which are scattered across the town. The soils, steep slope and shallowness to bedrock inhibit agricultural activities. There are no traditional agricultural operations of a significant size, but there are several small but important operations working off the land. There are several maple sugar-producing operations in the town. In addition, Canterbury Farm is a plant nursery, Neil Toomey owns a tree farm, Sunny Bank Farm is a horse riding stable, and Berkshire Berries produce jams from the blueberries grown on the property.

Wetland Vegetation

Although the MassGIS land use data indicates that only 2% of the town is covered by wetlands, this figure is misleading. Although this land use data is fairly reliable in identifying man-made uses such as buildings, yards and roads, it is unreliable in identifying all but the largest open wetlands. Other wetland types are often overlooked. Forested wetlands, for example, are often categorized as forest, and areas along streams and ponds that are subject to frequent flooding are totally overlooked.

Rare, threatened and endangered species

According to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP), botanists appear to have been collecting and studying plants in Becket as early as the early 19th century. As can be seen in Table 4, many of the rare plants found historically have not been documented for over a century. The town should consider inventorying habitats that could support these rare species, as they may be surviving and even thriving in local forests and wetlands. Grass-pink grows in bogs, ginseng is found in rich mesic forests (especially sugar maple dominated mesic forests) and dwarf mistletoe grows on black spruce.

Table 4. Rare Plant Species in Becket

Scientific Name	Common Name	State Rank	Federal Rank	Most Recent Observation
<i>Arceuthobium pusillum</i>	Dwarf Mistletoe	SC	None	1904
<i>Arethusa bulbosa</i>	Grass-pink	T	None	1904
<i>Carex livida var. radicaulis</i>	Glaucous Sedge	E	None	1826
<i>Carex pauciflora</i>	Few-flowered Sedge	E	None	1904
<i>Lygodium palmatum</i>	Climbing Fern	SC	None	1829
<i>Panax quinquefolius</i>	Ginseng	SC	None	1916
<i>Sisyrinchium mucronatum</i>	Slender Blue-eyed Grass	E	None	2001

Source: NHESP correspondence, <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/townb.htm#Becket>

Unique Natural Resources

The NHESP does not have any documentation indicating that there are priority natural plant communities within Becket. However, the NHESP believes that, given the plant species known to historically inhabit the town, there are or were occurrences of Spruce-tamarack bogs and Rich Mesic Forests. The climate, geology and soils of the town are typical of the Berkshire Plateau, somewhat cooler than much of the rest of the state, with the prevailing forest types that are typically found in the more northern areas of New England. Bogs and other peatlands become well developed in such cool, acidic conditions. Rich Mesic Forests are a subset of the typical northern hardwood forests of the area, living in conditions that moist and exceptionally rich in nutrients. These forests are known to support a rich and diverse understory of spring wildflowers, known as ephemerals, under a canopy of deciduous species such as sugar maples, white ash and occasionally basswood.

There are two occurrences of unusual wetland plant communities that exist just south of the town border in Otis. Although the main sections of the wetlands do not lie in Becket, the surrounding forest provides habitat for wildlife that rely on the wetlands and act as a buffer from human intrusion.

The first is an Acidic Graminoid Fen, which are populated mainly with sedges and sphagnum mosses. Shrubs that do exist here are in clumps, with some sparse tree species such as red maple. Because they typically have standing water most of the year, these wetlands are important amphibian breeding sites, with many serving as vernal pools.

The second wetland plant community that is on the Otis town line is a Level bog. This bog is considered by the NHESP to be the best Level bog in Berkshire County, and is the third most important one in the state. These wetlands are characterized by dwarf shrub peatlands, generally with pronounced hummock and hollow formations. These peatlands are the areas most acidic and nutrient-poor because they received almost all of their water from precipitation, with little input from overland or groundwater flow. Materials relating to rare and unique plants and animals can be found in Appendix B.

E. Fisheries and Wildlife

Inventory

Becket is rich in forests, and lakes, ponds and streams are sprinkled across the entire area. This mix of water and upland provide habitat to a wide array of wildlife, including rare and endangered species. Wildlife is abundant in the town, including large mammals such as black bear, whitetail deer and the occasional moose. Predators such as coyote, bobcat, fishers and red and grey fox are also abundant, indicating that the overall health of the ecosystem is healthy. Bald eagles have been seen on Yokum and Buckley Dunton ponds, but there are no known nesting sites in town. Ospreys, great blue herons and owls are known to inhabit the area; and snowy owls occasionally visit Becket in the winter.

There are a variety of opportunities for fishing in Becket, which is endowed with cold water streams and several lakes and ponds. MassWildlife annually stocks trout in Yokum Brook, Walker Brook, the Westfield River and Greenwater Pond. The Silk Mill Dam on Yokum Brook was removed in 2003, and plans to breach the Ballou Dam on the West Branch Westfield are underway to facilitate movement of trout and other fish within the watershed. In addition, Center Pond is noted for its large and abundant perch population, while Buckley Dunton Reservoir, Center Pond and Greenwater Pond are notes for smallmouth bass.

MassWildlife, in partnership with Trout Unlimited, stocks Atlantic salmon in the Westfield River and some of its tributaries. To increase awareness and interest in this effort, some stocking is done by children at the Becket Elementary School. Most recently the children stocked approximately 400 fry into the river and Yokum Brook. Some of the fry are being raised at the school, in which the children are directly responsible for taking care of the fishes' everyday needs, from daily water temperature monitoring, to feedings and aquarium cleaning.

Hunting is allowed in all the state lands in Becket. In addition, many private landowners allow hunting on their properties with permission. Hunting seasons exist for several mammal and bird species, the most popular of which are whitetail deer, turkey and bear.

Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are ephemeral wetlands which fill annually from snowmelt, rain and the rising groundwaters of spring and early summer. Most years the pools completely dry out by mid-to-late summer (Kenny & Burne, 2000). The wet-dry cycle prohibits fish from becoming established, but it can support an array of small creatures with a seasonal home. Many woodland amphibians and reptiles need both aquatic and terrestrial habitats to complete their lifestyles, and numerous species have evolved life cycles that exploit the temporary nature of this wetland without the predation of fish. For instance, many frogs and salamanders are hatched and live the first weeks of their lives in water. They then move onto land, migrating up to ¼ mile away from the pool, to spend most of their lives in the forest, living in the dampness of the forest floor, under logs and leaf litter (Feder, 2006). They return to the same pool in which they were born to breed and lay their eggs, starting a new generation of forest-dwelling amphibians. In many upland areas, where the nearest wetland or other waterbody is thousands of feet away, vernal pools are the only aquatic breeding grounds in the area. Some of the state's rarest amphibians are completely dependent upon vernal pools for their breeding grounds, including the mole salamanders (Jefferson, spotted, marbled salamanders) and some species of freshwater snails, clams and other invertebrates.

Vernal pools are indispensable to biodiversity, both locally and globally. For a species with a narrow or small distribution, a specific vernal pool may be the only place in the region or on earth that the creature is found. If that pool is destroyed, that specific population of creatures could become locally extinct. Examples exist in the scientific literature of a species identified from one vernal pool, but not found again after the destruction of that pool (Kenney & Burnes, 2000). Because many of the region's rarest amphibians rely

completely on vernal pools, it is important to identify vernal pools and prioritize those known to support rare species for protection.

Vernal pools that are associated with Wetland Resources are afforded some protection of the Mass. Wetland Protection Act. However, small isolated pools not associated with a Wetland Resource are not protected. According to the Barbour et al. (1998), before wetland-associated vernal pools were incorporated into the WPA in 1987, many of them were filled in for development. Because of the strong bond between amphibians and their natal pools, many animals that were dependent on those pools were unable to breed, and the local populations became extinct.

The most effective way to protect vernal pools is to study and certify them. The certification gives the pools and their surrounding area some protection from development. Vernal pools are most often found in the Berkshire Region in woodland areas, where evaporation from sunlight is limited due to the forest canopy. There are six certified vernal pools in Becket, and there are 51 potential sites in the town that have been identified as possible vernal pools. Although a few vernal pools are located on permanently protected lands, and thus protected from development, the vast majority of them are on private property. Those that are in clusters and in the most easily developed areas, such as long roadways, should be targeted for study. Once such cluster could be the group of potential pools in the vicinity of Bonnie Rigg Corner, where Routes 20 and 8 intersect. Potential vernal pools are displayed on the Biological Resources Map

There are six certified vernal pools in Becket. Only two of these pools, within the Becket Quarry Forest, are protected from development. There are 51 sites that have been identified by the NHESP as being potential vernal pools. Only a few of these sites are located on protected open land; all others are on private, unprotected lands (refer to the Biological Resources and Open Space maps for locations). Some of the potential vernal pools occur in clusters. These areas are especially valuable in that if a particular pool dries up or becomes unsuitable for breeding, a neighboring pool could serve as an alternate breeding ground.

Rare, threatened and endangered species

Becket's large tracts of forest and its abundant water resources support a number of rare animal species. The areas where rare species are known to exist can be seen on the Biological Resources Map. In general, these areas tend to be along streams, rivers and wetlands. Areas of note are the stream and wetlands north of Shaw Pond, Palmer Brook, Rudd Pond Brook, Center Pond Brook and the other major tributaries to the Westfield River. The stream and wetland complex that flow into Shaw Pond, which is situated between the Mass Turnpike and Route 20, is vulnerable to runoff pollutants generated by vehicles and road sand and salt.

According to the NHESP, there are multiple records of Wood Turtles, which require a mix of stream, wetland and neighboring upland habitats. The Wood Turtle is found in the area around Palmer Brook off Plumb Road. In addition, the American Bittern is known to inhabit sites within the town. This secretive bird breeds and nests in dense marshlands, deep

within the protective cover of tall sedges, reeds and shrubs. The streams and wetlands also support other water birds, including the regal Great Blue Heron. All of these animals need wetlands, but also need some terrestrial lands for some part of their life cycles. Therefore, it is best to conserve not only the wetlands, but the surrounding area, which can provide the needed uplands, but can also act as a buffer from development and human intrusion.

In addition to large animals, Becket supports two rare fishes and is part of part of a contiguous forest that supports several rare insects. The Bridle Shiner is a fish of special concern in Massachusetts, because its populations have been declining or have been extirpated in much of the region. The population in Shaw Pond is one of only six known populations in the Farmington River Watershed. This fish lives in well-vegetated, quiet waters, and is an important part of the freshwater ecosystems as prey for larger fish. The Brindle Shiner is also found in Shales Brook which feeds into Shaw Pond. The Lake Chub is found in sections of the Westfield River. Like native trout, the Lake Chub requires moderate- to fast-flowing cold, clear streams with gravel and rubble substrates. Excessive sediments from roads or other development can degrade the clean gravel needed for spawning and proper egg development. Protecting habitat along the Westfield will help to ensure the excellent quality of water that supports rare fish, native trout and other aquatic wildlife.

The Core Habitat area in the northwest section of Becket is known to support the rare Eastern Veined White Butterfly (*Pieris oleracea*) and the Beaver Pond Clubtail dragonfly (*Gomphus borealis*). The large core habitat, which reaches beyond Becket's borders, is largely undeveloped and unfragmented northern hardwood forest, with sunny openings that provide habitat for the Eastern Veined White butterfly. The wetlands and numerous small ponds that reside in this area, north and northeast of the town, provide habitat for the dragonfly. While these two insects have not definitively been identified in Becket, the contiguous forest cover and the ponds and wetlands in this section of the town probably provide habitat and allows for dispersal of the rare insect populations known to exist in the area.

The Core Habitat area along the Westfield River is known to support the rare Ocellated Darner dragonfly. This site is within dispersal distance of another Core Habitat for this species in neighboring Chester, which allows for movement of the darners between these two areas. While some of the habitat in these two areas are located within the October Mountain SF and Walnut Hill WMA, conserving more land within these areas, to increase the amount of contiguous forest and riverine habitats, is desirable for the long-term health of these insect populations. Materials discussing rare species and ecosystems can be found in Appendix B.

Table 5. Rare Animal Species in Becket

Taxonomic Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	State Rank	Federal Rank	Most Recent Observation
Bird	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	American Bittern	E	None	1991
Dragonfly/Damselfly	<i>Boyeria grafiana</i>	Ocellated Darner	SC	None	2004
Dragonfly/Damselfly	<i>Somatochlora forcipata</i>	Forcinate Emerald	SC	None	1973
Fish	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Longnose Sucker	SC	None	1979
Fish	<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Bridle Shiner	SC	None	1994
Reptile	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Wood Turtle	SC	None	1997

Source: NHESP, <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/townb.htm#Becket>

Corridors

Becket is a relatively large town with large tracts of unfragmented forest interspersed with streams, ponds and wetlands. These forests can provide cover and travel corridors not only for rare species such as the butterflies and dragonflies discussed previously, but also for a wide variety of animals. As noted previously, many species that have been historically documented in Becket have not been documented in decades, or even centuries. In order to maintain current wildlife populations and to limit further rare species loss, large contiguous and interconnecting tracts of land should be targeted for protection. Natural resource corridors across Becket, along with those extending across town borders, should be the focus of conservation efforts (see the Action Map).

F. Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

Scenic landscapes

Westfield Wild & Scenic River

The West Branch of the Westfield River, along with its tributaries the Shaker Mill Brook and Center Pond Brook, has been federally designated as a Wild & Scenic River. Besides the scenic, ecological and historic features within this watershed, the area is noted as one of the largest roadless areas remaining in Massachusetts. The federal designation is intended to encourage landowners, public officials and citizen to act as stewards of the river by protecting and promoting it. Conservation of the river and its aesthetic and ecological attributes are the central theme of the designation. The designation also affords the river and its tributaries some additional protections against inappropriate development, and makes the river eligible for additional funding programs.

\

Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway

Jacob's Ladder Trail (Route 20) is a state-designated scenic byway, extending the 35 miles between the towns of Lee to the West, through Becket, and ending in Russell to the east. Historically, it was a major trading route from the Connecticut to the Hudson Rivers. It was also used during the revolutionary war as a main supply route for troops from Boston to Fort Ticonderoga in New York.

The five towns located along the byway have retained much of their small, rural atmosphere, including scenic fields and mountains, and historic structures. Like the intent of the Wild & Scenic River program, the National Scenic Byway program recognizes the unique resources along the byway corridor and strives to protect these resources through local stewardship efforts.

During the scenic assessment that was conducted as part of the Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan, four section of the byway were noted as being of High or Excellent scenic quality. The one segment that was noted as being of excellent scenic quality is that in the vicinity of Jacob's Pillow. This segment of the road rises from marshes on the western end to the coniferous forests of the eastern end. Having the world-famous dance festival within this segment brings in a cultural aspect to this road segment. The other three segments, traveling from west to east, include the Becket-Greenwater Pond, West Becket, and Palmer Brook segments. The old golf course and the historic farm buildings along the Palmer Brook segment was noted as important scenic features.

Cultural, archeological and historic areas

North Becket Village has been designated as a National Historic District. The Mullen House and Becket Arts Center are included within this district. Other National Historic Districts include the Middlefield-Becket Stone Arch Railroad Bridge District and the Becket Center Rural Historic District, the first rural historic district designation in the state.

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

Jacob's Pillow, the home of America's first and longest-running dance festival, celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2007. In 2003, the federal government named Jacob's Pillow a National Historic Landmark for its importance in America's culture and history, distinguishing the Pillow as the country's first and only Landmark dance institution. The property has a historic significance past its dance credentials, as it served as a station on the Underground Railroad in the 1800s. Jacob's Pillow provides local residents with world-class dance performances, including many educational programs and performances that are offered free of charge.

Keystone Arches

A series of historic keystone arch bridges are located along the Westfield River. These granite keystone bridges, built in 1830, were the first keystone arch railroad bridges built in America. They are wholly dry laid, range in height to 70 feet. The examples here are still in use, carrying trains heavier than they were designed for. The arches bypassed in the line relocation of 1912 have stood for more than 90 years with no maintenance whatsoever.

Following the West Branch of the Westfield River gave the railroad builders the lowest altitude crossing of the Berkshire Range (1,458 ft.). According to information provided on the Keystone Arches web page, the relatively high percent curvature, at 52%, makes the run through this area tricky for locomotive engineers. The steepest, or 'ruling grade' is on the western side of the range, where the summit is reached in six miles, as opposed to the ten miles it takes from the eastern slope. The Keystone Arch Bridge Trail, following the river in Middlefield and Chester, provide access to the bridges.

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) is a passive recreation footpath that runs more than 2,000 miles between Springer Mountain in Georgia and Mount Katahdin in Maine. Approximately 90 miles of the trail travels through Massachusetts, all of it in Berkshire County. Residents and visitors can easily access the famous and historic trail at a new parking facility located on Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway (Rt. 20). For thru-hikers and those hiking a section of the AT, rustic accommodations and tent platforms can be found nearby at the Upper Goose Pond cabin.

Becket Land Trust Quarry

The former Hudson-Chester Quarry was once one of the largest of several in the area, extracting granite and shipping it by railroad for polishing to nearby Chester and Hudson, N.Y. Gravestones and monuments were the main products. The quarry opened in the 1850s and closed in the 1960s. In 1999 The Labrie Stone Products proposed purchasing the abandoned quarry and reopening operations there.

The Historic Quarry and Forest is the result of an extraordinary community fund-raising campaign to save a 300-acre parcel of land from industrial development. To prevent the potential detrimental impacts of a reactivated quarry operation on the community, including noise, dust and truck traffic, local citizens donated money to enable the Becket Land Trust to purchase the property and open the site to the public for recreational enjoyment.

According to information provided on the Becket Land Trust website, parts of the quarry were last mined in the 1940s. It is one of the most intact historic quarry landscapes in Massachusetts, with a blacksmith shop, standing derrick, and experimental air-drill testing tunnel. The old quarry operation sits like a sunken vessel, a living museum with rusted artifacts left behind when the Hudson-Chester Granite Company suddenly folded. When it was abandoned it was as if the men just walked away for lunch and never came back, and that's what makes it a wonderful museum. There are trucks, drills, and derricks (booms to

hoist granite) throughout the site. Apparently mismanagement and lack of money for necessary improvements led to the abandonment.

Camps

Becket is fortunate in that its rural landscape supports five overnight camps and one campground. These entities provide an opportunity for hundreds of people to come here and enjoy the great outdoors, while they also bring a source of work and customers to local businesses. The camps and campground own well over a thousand acres between them, and maintaining their lands in an undeveloped state contributes to the rural and wilderness character of the town.

Kushi Institute

The Kushi Institute is a wellness retreat and is the leading macrobiotic educational center in the world. As stated on its website, students from around the globe attend residential-style programs on the macrobiotic approach to health and healing. Visitors to the institute reside in the 100-year-old manor house or stay in local establishments. Like the area camps, this retreat offers the serenity that Becket's landscape provide.

G. Environmental Challenges

Water Quality

Becket's most pressing environmental problem is that of the quality of its water resources. Residents of Becket are justifiably concerned about the quality of their water. Failing septic systems are the primary cause of this concern. Soils with seasonal high water tables and rapid permeability contribute to this possibility. The risk of private drinking water wells becoming contaminated by a failed septic system is great. This is especially a problem when there are large concentrations of homes around some of the lakes.

Water is important to residents of Becket not only for drinking but for its recreational and aesthetic value. Invasive plants can be found in many of the town's lakes and wetlands. Some of the lake associations use herbicides to control the plants, while others are hand-pulling them. Some plants, such as Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) have colonized large areas of wetlands and lake and pond shorelines, while others, such as Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) have invaded the shallow waters of many lakes and ponds. There is also a concern that new invasive species, such as water chestnut or zebra mussels, could invade Becket's waterbodies. It is important not only to control established populations of invasive species, but to be on the look out for new invaders.

Recreation at Robin Hood Lake, like many of the man-made impoundments, is compromised by emergent weedy vegetation. As a result, homeowner lake associations conduct weed management activities at many of the lakes. Herbicide applications have occurred in Sherwood Forest, Center Pond and Shaw Pond. In addition, hand-pulling of noxious vegetation is occurring at Center Pond, Greenwater Pond, Yokum Pond, and draw-downs are occurring at Greenwater and Palmer ponds. The Becket Conservation

Commission, concerned that the associations are relying too heavily on herbicidal application, is now requiring that comprehensive, long-range weed control programs be developed and that they contain a variety of control methods.

Hazardous waste sites

There are no 21E Hazardous Waste sites in Becket. However, according to DEP Reportable Release Reports, 23 hazardous waste spills have occurred in the town since 1993. Most of these spill along the roadways or on private property. Roadway spills that occur adjacent to streams, ponds and wetlands have the potential to severely contaminate those resource areas. Of special concern are those wetland resources that support rare species, such as the Westfield River and its tributaries and Shaw Pond. Other concerns are where contaminant spills occur in densely developed areas, such as Sherwood Forest. One leaking oil tank has the potential to contaminate the drinking water supplies for several neighboring properties.

Residents at the public forum noted that the General Store is again closed and the building is for sale. This is a prominent building in the village and an important business to residents and tourists. An old oil tank and resulting contamination is the main concern and the major reason that the property is empty.

Landfills

The old Becket landfill is closed. The municipal transfer station is at the site. There are no privately-run landfills in the town.

Erosion

Shaker Mill Brook flows through a steep ravine. The road bed under Brooker Hill Road, which is a connecting route between Washington Mountain Road and Washington Road, is eroding. A portion of the northern lane has collapsed, and the rest of the road is literally falling down the ravine. To protect the brook and public safety, the town will be stabilizing the streambank and repairing the road. This expensive endeavor is supported by a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The streambank along Yokum Brook is eroding, threatening the integrity of the war memorial monuments. The streambank should be stabilized to ensure the long-term preservation of these historic structures.

Development Impacts

The intense development that has historically occurred around some of Becket's lakes has diminished their use for wildlife, and development continues to occur along the shorelines. Development introduces new sources of nonpoint pollution into the lakes, and motorized watercraft has facilitated the introduction of invasive aquatic vegetation. Traditional home construction includes the removal of trees and other shoreline vegetation, and the planting

of lawns down to the water's edge. Removing pre-construction vegetation removes the water quality and habitat benefits that native vegetation provided.

The negative impacts of traditional development patterns should serve as a warning for future development around the town's undeveloped lakes. There are large tracts of land around a few select lakes that have recently been sold or are expected to be sold. The town should strive to guide development so that impacts to wildlife and water quality are minimized to the extent possible. This should include minimal clearing on new lots and a requirement to maintain shoreline vegetation. The creation of a pathway through the buffer will allow homeowners access to the water. Vista pruning of a few lower tree branches will provide a framed view of the water. The use of lawn chemical applications should be discouraged or closely monitored.

Motorized Recreational Vehicles

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are prohibited in most state forests and parks, and they are prohibited on all state wildlife management areas. Motorized vehicles can disturb and tear away vegetation, exposing bare earth to the forces of erosion, thus leading to sedimentation of nearby waterways. They can also run over rare plant and animal species. This is most acute where motorized vehicles leave established trails and "bushwhack" through streams, wetlands and fields. ATVs are allowed in October Mountain State Forest only.

Some private property owners allow ATVs on their land with permission. Unfortunately, ATVs often cross over property boundaries and trespass on neighboring properties illegally. ATV clubs educate their members on the proper and appropriate use of the machines, but most ATV users do not belong to established clubs and hence are not sensitized to landowner concerns and rights.

The recent public survey indicates that there are user conflicts regarding ATVs and, to some extent, snowmobiles. Many residents have expressed a concern with improper ATV/snowmobile use on private lands and along roadways. Private roads are often used by ATV drivers as if they were trails, and conflicts have arisen amongst neighbors who ride and those who are bothered by the noise and inappropriate hours that they are driven. Conflicts have also arisen between ATV drivers and the police who try to maintain peace and keep the ATVs off the roads.

The survey also indicates that there are user conflicts regarding personal watercraft such as jet skis, and power boats. Like ATVs, the vehicles are noisy and interfere with the serenity of the area. They can also create inordinately high wakes, increasing the potential for bank erosion and, as with all motorized water craft, there is a concern that gasoline and oil spills will degrade water quality.

Water craft use is a common issue across the country. Some towns and lake districts have divided their lakes into zones, allowing jet skis in some zones, while prohibiting them in others. Criteria for determining allowed uses include wildlife habitat (important breeding, nesting or spawning areas), proximity to public swimming areas, water depth and severely

eroded shoreline areas. Some towns and lake districts have prohibited personal watercraft and power boats altogether.

Salt Intrusion

Salinization of fresh water can damage plants and can have sublethal and lethal effects on aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates. It can also render drinking water unpotable in high concentrations. Most vulnerable are drinking wells and waterways located down slope and in close proximity to the roadways, which are salted during the winter. The only medium-yield aquifer that could be considered a potential drinking water supply for the town is located immediately west and adjacent to Greenwater Pond. However, it is sandwiched between Route 20 and the Massachusetts Turnpike, both of which are salted heavily during the winter months. The salt is also a cause of concern for residents along those routes whose wells can be contaminated.

The Becket DPW applies a mix of sand and salt to the town's roads, while MassHighway applies pure salt to Routes 20 and 8, which it maintains. To protect water resources along the Rudd Pond Brook, a tributary of the Westfield River, a stretch of upper Main Street (Route 8) has already been designated as a Low Salt Area. The Becket DPW facility is situated at the confluence of the Shaker Mill and Depot brooks, which are tributaries of the Westfield River. The town is interested in relocating the facility to move it away from the waterways to ensure that they are not impacted by the salt being stored and used on the site

SECTION 5 INVENTORY OF LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST

Approximately 4,973 acres of land within Becket are permanently protected open space, which is 16% of the land, leaving the vast majority of land in town unprotected. The bulk of these lands (3,910 acres) is state-owned and include the October Mountain State Forest, Becket State Forest, Otis State Forest and Becket Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Walnut Hill WMA. The National Park Service owns land along the Appalachian Trail. In addition, the Becket Land Trust owns the Becket Historic Quarry and Forest, which is 282 acres. The Town of Chester owns 694 acres. The state, federal and Becket Land Trust lands can be considered permanently protected open space.

There are differing levels of protection that are involved in open space and recreation lands. Most federal and state lands maintained for conservation and recreation can be regarded as permanently protected lands. Most conservation lands owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, and to remove protection status of these lands for development would require an act of the state legislature. Although such a scenario could occur, the action would undoubtedly be contentious.

Other lands that can be considered permanently protected are private lands upon which a conservation restriction (CR) or easement has been placed. The CR is a legal agreement between a landowner and another entity in which the owner agrees to restrict the use of the land. Activities such as farming, forest or wildlife management, recreation and other land uses that the property owner wishes to pursue continue to be allowed. The landowner continues to own the property, but if the land is sold, the new owners must comply with the provisions of the CR, which has been placed on the deed and is transferred. CRs are typically held by governmental agencies (Agricultural Preservation Restrictions [APRs] and Forest Legacy Programs are examples), land trusts, environmental organizations and municipalities (Conservation Commissions often accept CRs). There are several deed-restricted conservation lands in Lanesborough, including working farms with APRs, and conservation lands owned by Berkshire Natural Resources Council and Crane & Co.

It is believed that none of the lands owned by the Town of Becket are protected by CRs. These lands are not deed restricted and thus could be vulnerable to change. Although it is unlikely that Becket would sell public open space lands for development, there could arise a situation in which the public benefits of the land transfer would outweigh the cost of losing open land.

A. *Private Parcels*

The vast majority of undeveloped land in Becket is privately owned. Some of these lands are owned by businesses or organizations, such as the summer camps, while others are owned by private individuals. A few large, unprotected parcels in town that were noted at

the June 22nd public forum as being on the real estate market include large parcels along Yokum Pond and Palmer Brook Pond. Also on the market is the Kelly property in North Becket Village, just beyond the school. Attendees at the public forum suggested that the town do something with the property, as it would be a good site for an additional playing field. It also might be a good place for a treatment plant. The town needs to plan ahead for a wastewater treatment plant that may be needed in the future. This is a large project and plans should begin well before a need arises.

Agricultural lands

There are no agricultural operations of a significant size in Becket. Working landscapes include Canterbury Farm, Sunny Bank Farm, Berkshire Berries and Neil Toomey Tree Farm.

Cultural Land

The Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival is located on 162 acres. The property is a mix of woodlands, open fields, parking lots and various performance and service buildings. Jacob's Pillow is an important component to the town's character and economy, while it also provides cultural experiences for residents of all ages.

Priority Areas for protection of rare species and natural communities

The YMCA Camp Becket / Chimney Corners is located on 1,464 acres of land in the center of Becket. Rudd Pond, Rudd Pond Brook and Hamilton Brook all support rare species. The camp owns much of the watershed lands that feed these streams. There are not conservation protections on these parcels of land, and they are not enrolled in any of the Chapter 61 tax abatement programs.

Private Recreation Lands of Interest

Becket is fortunate in that private recreational enterprises offer outdoor experiences. Some lands, such as the Becket Historic Quarry and Forest, are open to the public free of charge, while others, such as Canterbury Farm and Sunny Bank Farm, provide recreation for a small fee. Private camps are major landowners in Becket. These lands are used only seasonal, but provide a mix of open land and forest cover for wildlife year-round. The Kushi Institute also owns a substantial parcel of land.

The Becket Historic Quarry and Forest, owned and maintained by the Becket Land Trust, is open to the public for hiking and mountain biking. The property is maintained as a recreation and educational area. A kiosk and self-guided tours are available at the property site, and the land trust offers educational programs about the historic quarry to schools and social. Approximately 282 acres of the more than 300 acres owned by the land trust are located in Becket, with the remainder in Otis.

Canterbury Farm has 12 miles of groomed trails for cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. The property abuts the YMCA Camp Becket / Chimney Corners property. Equipment

rentals, hot food drinks and snacks are available. Sunny Banks Ranch offers horseback riding along its extensive trail system.

Berkshire Fishing Club is a private club that owns 850 acres in and around Palmer Brook Pond. The club offers low density fishing and canoeing on the pond and hiking on its four miles of trails is available. The club recently closed and the future of the land is uncertain.

With the exception of Canterbury Farm, none of the privately owned lands discussed in this section are enrolled in any of the Chapter 61 tax abatement programs. These programs have been designed to lighten the tax burden on owners of open space lands. It is not known why the owners of large parcels of land are not enrolling their properties in the Chapter 61 programs.

B. Public Lands

Public conservation and recreation resources

A significant portion of Becket is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and includes state forests and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). State-owned lands total 3,910 acres, or 13% of Becket's total land area. The largest of these forests, the October Mountain Forest, spans four adjacent communities and is the largest area under single ownership in the town of Becket. The Becket Land Trust owns and manages for public recreation the Becket Historic Quarry and Forest, in the southwest corner of the town. In addition to these lands, there are four ponds at which residents have public access: Greenwater Pond, Center Pond, Yokum Pond, and Buckley-Dunton Reservoir. The Town of Chester also owns a large tract of land that is the watershed for their municipal drinking water supply.

Table 6. Major Public Open Space Lands

Name	Owner-ship	Acreage	Protection Level	Open to Public?	Activities
October Mt. State Forest	Commonwealth of Mass.	2,502	High	Yes	Camping, hiking, snowshoeing/x-country skiing, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, ATV use
Appalachian Corridor	Commonwealth of Mass.	9	High	Yes	Hiking, snowshoeing
Becket State Forest	Commonwealth of Mass.	638	High	Yes	Hunting, fishing, no established trail system
Otis State Forest	Commonwealth of Mass.	205	High	Yes	Hunting, fishing, no established trail system
Walnut Hill Wildlife Man. Area WMA)	Commonwealth of Mass.	86	High	Yes	Hunting, fishing, no established trail system
Farmington River WMA	Commonwealth of Mass.	207	High	Yes	Hunting, fishing
Becket WMA	Commonwealth of Mass.	263	High	Yes	Hunting, fishing
Becket Historic Quarry and Forest	Becket Land Trust	282	High	Yes	Hiking, snowshoeing, historic museum
Appalachian Trail buffer	National Park Service	87	High	Yes	Hiking, snowshoeing
Chester Watershed land	Town of Chester	694	Moderate	No	Drinking water supply; human intrusion discouraged
Total Acres		4,973			

Source: BRPC. Acreage has been calculated using MassGIS and Becket parcel data.

The Town of Becket owns several small parcels of land that are of conservation and/or recreational value. In general, the Becket Parks Committee is responsible for maintenance and facility improvements, while the Becket Recreation Committee is responsible for programs held at the facilities. The town owns four cemeteries, including Becket Center Cemetery (7.5 acres), West Becket Cemetery (2.5 acres), North Becket Cemetery (10 acres) and Yokum Burial Ground (.1 acres). These are listed in Table 7 and can be found on the Open Space Map.

Table 7. Open Space Land Owned by the Town of Becket

Name of Land	Acreage	Management Agency	Potential Uses	Condition
Becket Arts Center	0.33	Board of Directors	Art, Drama, Lectures, Lessons	Good
Becket Washington School & Tennis Court	3	Parks and Rec. Committees	Lessons & Practice	Court recently resurfaced
North Becket Village Park	1.4	Parks and Rec. Committees	T-ball, Track, Fitness, Soccer, Picnicking	Good-mowed by School
Town Beach	2.8	Parks and Rec. Committees	Swimming, Fishing, Boating	Excellent
Bidwell Park	7.5	Parks Committee	Brookside green space, Fishing	Good
Ballou Park	0.71	Parks Committee	War Memorials, Memorial Day Ceremony	Good
North Becket Fire Station Pavilion	<.5	Volunteer Firemen's Assoc.	Picnics & Dances	Excellent
Colonial Parade Ground	1.9	Parks Committee	Revolutionary War Training Ground, National Historic District	Good
Becket Center Town Park and Pavilion	6.94	Parks and Rec. Committees	Baseball, Soccer, Skateboarding, Picnics, Playground, Horseshoes	Good
Landlocked Parcel	19	Town of Becket	Undeveloped	Undeveloped
Tax Title Lands	67+	Town of Becket	Undeveloped	Undeveloped
Becket Center Cemetery	4.9	Cemetery Commissioners	History, Solitude	Good
West Becket Cemetery	0.63	Cem. Comm.	History, Solitude	Good
North Becket Cemetery	10	Cem. Comm.	History, Solitude	Good
Yokum Burial Ground	< .5	Privately maintained	History, Solitude	Good
Old Town Pound	< .5	Parks Committee	Historical Site	Good
Mullen House Ed. Center	0.24	Board of Directors	Educational Activities	Fair
Ravine & Waterfall	3.71	Parks Committee	Undeveloped	Undeveloped
Transfer Station	4.7	Town of Becket	Gathering Spot	Good
Fire Station #1	2.8	Town of Becket	Meetings, Practice Sessions, Basketball court	Good
Fire Station #2	0.77	Town of Becket	Meetings, Practice	Good
Highway Garage, Salt Shed, Parking Area	2.16	Town of Becket	Gathering Spot	Fair
High Street Bridge Area	0.66	Town of Becket	Possible Planting Area	Undeveloped
Silk Mill Dam Site	0.94	Town of Becket	Fishing	Dam removed
Sherwood Forest Beach	0.27	S.F. Assoc. Board	Swimming, fishing	Undeveloped
Jacob's Well Lane	99.6	Town of Becket	Undeveloped, but possible site of new Highway Garage & Police Station	Undeveloped

SECTION 6 COMMUNITY VISION

A. Description of Process

In the spring of 2006, the Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee was formed to steer the efforts to update town's 1998 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The open space goals developed for the 1998 plan were used as a foundation upon which to form new goals. The Committee, armed with data collected by the BRPC, and with information derived from the public survey and the public forum, subsequently formed the updated Goals and Objectives found in this plan.

B. Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

Residents have stated in the public survey and at the public forums that the reasons that they live in Becket are its rural character and the quality of its many lakes and ponds. The survey asked respondents to identify the top five reasons that they live in Becket. The most popular reason was the Natural Landscape of the town. Regarding conservation of open space, the public survey asked respondent to check five resources that the town should make efforts to protect. Of the 13 resources listed, "Lakes and Ponds" was by far the most often cited resource in need of protection. "Drinking Water" and "Wildlife Habitat" were also often cited as resources in need of protection. The four Goals that have emerged during the development of this plan are summarized below.

Goal 1: Water quality is of a dependable high quality for drinking, swimming, and fishing.

Goal 2: Becket's rural landscape consists of forests and farms amidst ponds, streams, and mountains.

Goal 3: Becket's recreational opportunities serve all ages, conditions, and interests of residents.

Goal 4: Becket's diverse natural resources provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.

SECTION 7 ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

A. Summary of Resource Protection Needs

As stated in earlier sections, the vast majority of land in Becket is privately owned, and very little is permanently protected open space. The town's forest cover, mixed with the rugged terrain, provide residents with a feeling that they are living in a rural and wild place. Forests also provide habitat for wildlife, including rare species that reside in or travel through the area. These forests may also be harboring rare species that have never been documented or have not been documented for decades.

Becket's largely unfragmented forests support a vast array of wildlife, including rare species. The town should encourage developers to minimize intrusions into forest lands and to limit the amount of clearing that occurs for roads, buildings and driveways. Low Impact Development techniques, which seek to maintain existing topography and vegetation, should be promoted.

Given the town's limited resources, it may be most productive to partner with state agencies and focus protection measures in areas where rare species are known to exist or where they can reasonably be expected to exist. Efforts should also include investigating whether rare species, which were documented as existing decades or centuries before, are surviving in remote areas. As recommended by NHESP, the town should actively work with the DCR and F&W to expand state-owned land around October Mountain State Forest and the Westfield River / Walnut Hill WMA. Both of these areas are habitat for rare insects, while the river is habitat for a rare fish and is known for its native trout. Additionally, large tracts of land are believed to have been forested in the 1830, and may have been somewhat continuously forested to the present. This indicates that the forests in these areas may be Primary Forest and may be better suited to sustain a complex and diverse ecosystem.

There is known rare species habitat along the waterways and wetlands associated with Rudd Pond. The town should work with the YMCA Camp and other landowners within this corridor to create a protective undeveloped buffer around these water resources to provide suitable habitat for the rare animal species that inhabit this area.

The town should also focus water quality and habitat protection efforts on the wetland areas associated with Shaw Pond, most especially the wetlands north of the pond. These wetlands are known to support an endangered bird that is shy and sensitive and should be protected from human intrusion. In addition, the town and the lake association should continue to work with MassHighway to limit the impacts of road salt, which can impair the pond's ability to sustain aquatic life and contaminate drinking water wells.

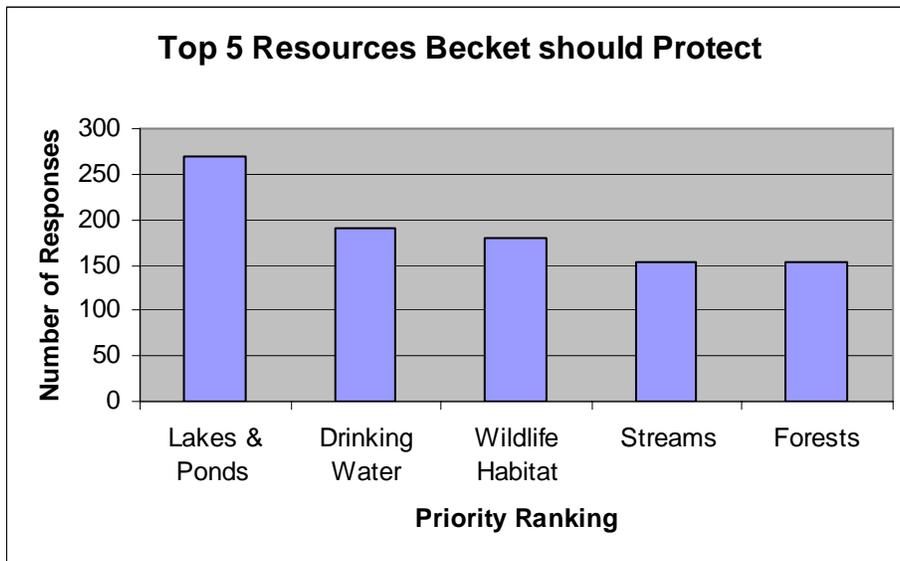
Intensive residential development around the lakes, ponds and streams degrade water quality, removes valuable wildlife habitat, diminishes recreational and property values, and threaten the rural character of the town. Historic patterns of development, allowing development that is too dense and/or too close to the shoreline, must no longer be allowed. The town should investigate measures to protect its waterbodies through

regulation and landowner education. The town should consider adopting a Lake Protection Overlay District which would encompass the lakes most vulnerable to future development. The town should also consider developing a wetland bylaw that would extend the jurisdictional boundaries of the Conservation Commission (i.e. extending buffer zone areas outward to 150 or 200 feet) and prohibiting removal of shoreline vegetation.

B. Summary of Community’s Needs

In April 2006, the Becket Open Space and Recreation Committee distributed a town-side survey asking residents for their needs and desires regarding open space protection, recreational opportunities and new development. Of the 1,640 surveys that were distributed, 20% of the surveys were returned. Of these, 154 year-round residents (47%) and 169 seasonal residents (51%).

The survey asked respondents to identify the top five reasons that they live in Becket. The most popular reason was the Natural Landscape of the town. This category received not only the most votes overall (194 votes), but received the most votes as the number one reason for living here (75 #1 votes). The other two most often cited reasons were the Lakes & Ponds and the Forests & Mountains. Regarding conservation of open space, the survey asked respondent to check five resources that the town should make efforts to protect. Of the 13 resources listed, “Lakes and Ponds” was by far the most often cited resource, with a total of 292 votes. More details of the survey can be viewed in Appendix A.



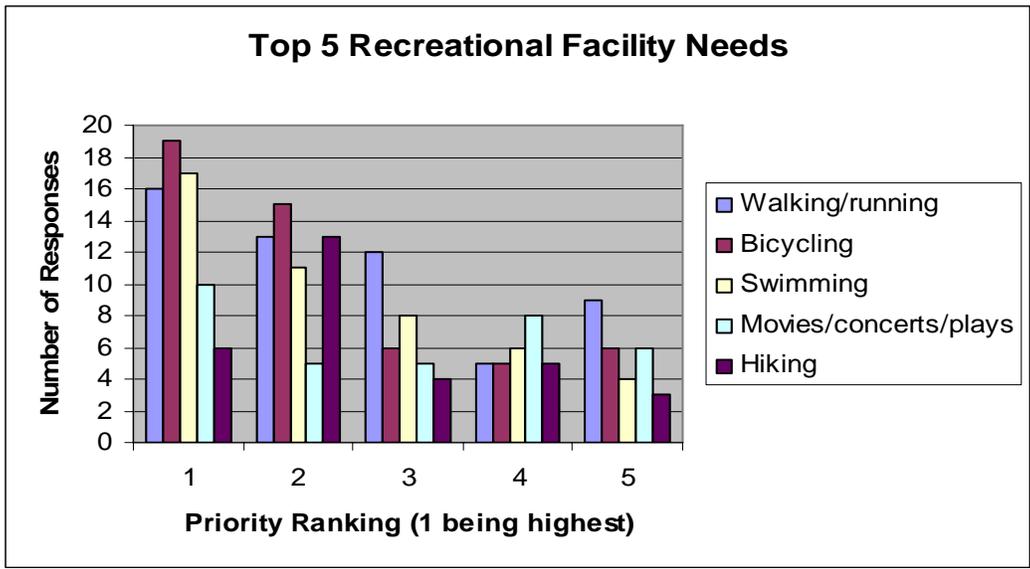
Residents were asked in the survey what types of activities they engage in. The list of 23 activities included both outdoor and indoor activities. By far the most popular activities cited were walking/running (282 votes) and swimming (241 votes) and hiking (195 votes). These results are consistent with the findings of the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Also popular was movies/concerts/plays (208 votes). Other popular activities included wildlife viewing,

canoe/kayak/boating, and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing (see Appendix B for more details).

Residents were also asked if the existing recreational opportunities were adequate for specific age groups. Although respondents generally feel that the opportunities are adequate for adults, they most often cited that recreational opportunities for teens was not adequate. Many stated that there are few activities for teens to engage in and no place for them to gather to socialize. Opportunities for young children and seniors should also be improved.

Residents were asked which to rank the top five recreational facility improvements that are needed in the town (with 1 being the greatest need). As can be seen, the top five recreational facilities most in need of improvement are for bicycling, walking/running, and swimming. Many respondents cited a need to provide safe bicycling facilities. There currently are no bicycle lanes nor bicycle paths in Becket. It was suggested at the June 22nd public forum that the old railroad corridor along the Westfield River would be a great site for a rail trail, as it is one of the few areas in town that is relatively flat. It would also be away from roads and vehicles. Similarly, one could be located along the old Huckleberry Line in West Becket. Some bridges are missing and would have to be replaced, but bikers/hikers need only smaller bridges.

Although Becket is a town endowed with several lakes and ponds, some of the lakes are privately owned and closed to the public. There is only one small public beach area. Many survey respondents mentioned a need to expand public swimming opportunities in the town. This desire to have greater access to the town’s lakes and ponds is consistent with the findings of the Massachusetts SCORP.



Most of the returned surveys included additional comments from their respondents. There are several issues that were raised and often repeated in the comments. These were the issues / recommendations that were provided:

- Improve walking / biking safety along the town’s roadways. Improving road shoulders or creating trails were often cited as remedies.
- Improve public access to the lakes for swimming and boating.
- The long-lasting draw-down of Greenwater Pond must be addressed. It is damaging the aquatic ecosystem and diminishing property values.
- Becket should establish a gathering place to hold socials, including teens.
- Control development in Becket so that it remains a small rural town and does not turn into suburbia or a city.
- Becket Arts Center is a beloved asset. Continue to expand activities at this facility.
- The General Store is sorely missed.
- There are obvious conflicts between advocates of passive recreation (e.g. hiking, swimming, kayaking) and motorized vehicles and watercraft.

C. Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

Residents were asked for their views about population changes in Becket in the town-wide survey. Of the five options, 52% stated that they cited that they would like to see development increase modestly, while another 35% stated that they would like to see it stay the same. Following, the survey asked respondents to choose the types of development that they would support for the town. “Vacation/retirement homes” received the greatest number of votes (125 votes), followed closely by “Very little development” (116) and “Year-round residential homes” (108). These responses indicate that while residents feel that some new development is appropriate, the town should remain largely residential.

The vast majority of land in Becket is privately owned and, as noted earlier, there are several large parcels in town. There are several options available to landowners who may be willing to consider conserving their land as open and undeveloped space. As the survey indicates, most landowners in Becket are unaware of the various open space protection and tax reduction options available to them. The vast majority of responders to the survey stated, by a 3-to-1 margin, that they would attend an informational meeting about open space protection options. The town should consider holding informational meetings and promoting land protection options, especially to those landowners who own or control large tracts of land around lakes and ponds, and those supporting rare species.

The survey also indicated that residents are largely unaware of the Scenic Mountains Act, which could guide development in the higher elevations of the town, and the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which could fund open space protection and historic preservation initiatives. The only open space protection mechanism that was known to respondents was the local land trust. This indicates that future open space protection efforts by the town may be well received when conducted in partnership with the Becket Land Trust or other land trust.

Open space protection, recreational improvements and historic preservation were cited as needs by respondents to the public survey and by attendees of the public forum. Locating the funds to finance these desirable goals and objectives is always a concern. Adopting the CPA is one mechanism by which to fund community projects. The CPA was a very

popular subject at the public June 22nd public forum, generating a lively and lengthy discussion. The town should investigate this opportunity to bring together a mix of local and state funds that could support community projects.

During the public forum preserve historic buildings was cited as a need. These buildings are part of the town's history. Perhaps a Historic Overlay District would be appropriate for the North Becket Village to encourage development, but ensure that it is consistent with the historic character of the area. Regarding commercial development, perhaps an overlay district would also be appropriate for the town center to draw new businesses to that area.

The Scenic Mountain Act was discussed. Default elevations for Becket would include 1500 feet for the Housatonic and Farmington river watersheds and 1600 feet for the Westfield watershed. Much of the town is above these elevations, so a map should be developed showing exactly which areas of town would be impacted.

All terrain vehicles (ATVs) were often cited an issue in the comment sections of the public survey. Many respondents stated that they want to see ATVs banned throughout the town. Conversely, some respondents indicated that the town too often regulates ATV use in privately owned communities, such as Sherwood Forest. Banning or limiting the use of motorized water craft, such as jet-skis, was often repeated throughout the comment sections. It would be in the town's best interest to work with opposing advocacy groups to address these use conflicts. As a compromise between user groups, some communities have been successful in limiting the use of motorized vehicles or watercraft to certain areas within a town or a lake. This avoids an outright ban on motorized vehicles or watercraft, while providing some quiet space for more passive recreation, such as hiking, swimming and kayaking.

There are several large parcels of land, some along lakeshores that contribute to the rural character of the town but are vulnerable to development. There are also several historic properties and structures that contribute to the New England village appearance of the town. Town officials would like to preserve these attributes from inappropriate development, but its resources are limited. The town should investigate the financial benefits of the Community Preservation Act. Funds acquired through this mechanism, including a substantial state match, would provide the resources needed to acquire valuable open lands and preserve historic structures.

Guiding development on unprotected private lands can be facilitated through local regulations such as zoning bylaws. The Becket Planning Board is currently involved in updating and amending the town's zoning bylaws. The focus of new amendments is on protecting the town's rural character and natural resources. It is important that town officials involved in permitting and enforcement, including the Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Building Inspector, be involved in the development of the zoning amendments so that their implementation will be successful. It is also important that residents are thoroughly informed of the benefits of the zoning amendments so that they receive the proper support at Town Meeting.

Accessibility for all Residents

Becket is a rural town, and some of its recreational facilities are rustic, making them difficult to access for people with disabilities. In an effort to evaluate the accessibility of the facilities owned by the town, Catherine Carchedi, Program Manager for the AdLib Center for Independent Living in Pittsfield, conducted a survey to determine if the town was in compliance with AAB or ADA codes. The resulting report, the *Town of Becket Accessibility Report*, cited areas where accessibility improvements were needed. A prioritized list of actions from the report includes the following:

Parks:

- Widen ramp to pavilion at Becket Center Park
- Add rails
- Add handicapped picnic table
- Remove unused grills that are not handicapped accessible
- Designate one handicapped parking place , including a sign
- Create hard packed walkway to ball field and playground areas

Beach:

- Designate a handicapped parking space, including a sign
- Widen hard packed path to the picnic area
- Create a hark packed walkway to allow access to the beach area

SECTION 8 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives for this plan were developed with input from the town-wide survey and the two public forums. Goals and objectives are stated here as though they have been achieved.

Goal 1: Water quality is of a dependable high quality for drinking, swimming, and fishing.

Objective A: Surface waters are protected through acquisition and regulation.

Objective B: Development does not impair surface or groundwater supplies.

Objective C: Wetland resources are adequately buffered from neighboring uses.

Objective D: Point and nonpoint source pollution is controlled and treated so that it does not degrade water quality.

Goal 2: Becket's rural landscape consists of forests and farms amidst ponds, streams, and mountains.

Objective A: Roadsides provide glimpses and panoramas of a beautiful countryside.

Objective B: Farms, forests, wetlands, and other open space remain the dominant characteristic of Becket.

Objective C: Zoning by-laws guide orderly growth and development.

Objective D: Development does not fragment forests and other open space areas.

Objective E: Invasive species are controlled so that they do not become established.

Goal 3: Becket's recreational opportunities serve all ages, conditions, and interests of residents.

Objective A: A great variety and number of outdoor recreation facilities are distributed throughout town.

Objective B: An extensive network of hiking, skiing, biking, horse riding, and snowmobiling trails are available.

Objective C: An indoor community recreation center is available for after-school use and winter recreation.

Objective D: All public recreation opportunities are known and used by residents and visitors alike.

Goal 4: Becket's diverse natural resources provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Objective A: Rare species habitat is protected.

Objective B: The shorelines of the town's lakes, ponds and waterways are vegetated and serve as valuable wildlife habitat.

Objective C: Large tracts of undeveloped land connect and provide corridors for wildlife to move from one important habitat area to another.

Objective D: All vernal pools are certified.

Objective E: Rare species continue to be found, documented and protected.

SECTION 9 FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN

Goal 1: Water quality is of a dependable high quality for drinking, swimming, and fishing.

Objectives	Actions	Timing	Responsible Parties	Possible Funding
Surface waters are protected through acquisition and regulation.	Identify important parcels for protective acquisition	2007-08	Becket Land Trust (BLT), Watershed Associations (Watershed Assocs), Conservation Commission (Cons Com), The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	Self-help, Town funds
	Adopt Community Preservation Act as acquisition funding source	2007-08	Select Bd, Cons Com	None needed
	Establish Shoreline / Cottage Conversion bylaw	2007-08	Planning Board (Plann Bd)	Highland Community Initiative grant (HCI), Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant (SGTAG)
Development does not impair surface or groundwater supplies.	Encourage owners of small lots to purchase neighboring undeveloped lots when possible	Ongoing	Bd of Assessors, Lake Associations (Lake Assocs)	None needed
	Establish group pump-outs for septic systems in an effort to increase pump-outs and get reduced rates	2008-09	Bd of Health, Lake Assocs	None needed
	Identify locations of future wastewater treatment plants to accommodate growth	2007-08	Select Bd, Bd of Health, Town Administrator	Community Preservation Act funds (CPA)

Wetland resources are adequately buffered from neighboring uses.	Develop local wetland protection bylaw that extends jurisdictional boundaries and prohibits the removal of shoreline vegetation	2007-08	Cons Com	HCI, SGTAG
	Create brochure to educate property owners about how their activities affect water quality; mail the brochure to all residents with tax bill	2008	Cons Com, Lake Assocs	HCI, Cons Com funds
Point and nonpoint source pollution is controlled and treated so that it does not degrade water quality.	Encourage existing lakefront property owners to plant vegetated buffers	2007-08	Cons Com Lake Assocs	None needed
	Develop erosion control bylaw	2008-09	Plann Bd	SGTAG
	Require use of stormwater best management practices for all new development	Ongoing	Plann Bd, Cons Com	None needed
	Work with Becket DPW and MassHighway to ensure proper salt applications in Low Salt Areas	2007-08	DPW, MassHighway, Watershed Assocs, Cons Com	None needed
Invasive species are controlled so that they do not become established	Make sure that all boat launches have signage encouraging boat owners to inspect boats prior to launching	2007-08	Lake Assocs, DCR Lakes & Ponds Program, Cons Com	DCR Lakes & Ponds Grant

Goal 2: Becket's rural landscape consists of forests and farms amidst ponds, streams, and mountains.

Objectives	Actions	Timing	Responsible Parties	
Roadsides provide glimpses and panoramas of a beautiful countryside.	Adopt Scenic Mountain Act or Upland Zoning bylaw	2007-08	Cons Com, Plann Bd, Select Bd	HCI, SGTAG
	Designate segments of town roads for as local scenic roads	2008-09	Plann Bd, DPW	None needed
	Protect the most important scenic views along the Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway through acquisition or conservation restrictions	Ongoing	Select Bd, Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway, Inc., BLT	National Scenic Byway Grant, CPA
	Require the preservation of roadside vegetation to screen new development	2008-09	Plann Bd	None needed
	Develop wind energy conversion bylaw	2007-08	Plann Bd	SGTAG
Farms, forests, wetlands, and other open space remain the dominant characteristic of Becket.	Educate private landowners about the tax benefits of donating land or deed restrictions		BLT, TNC, Highland Community Initiative (HCI)	HCI
	Approach large landowners to encourage them to donate land or place conservation restrictions on at least some portion of their land		Select Bd, BLT, TNC	BLT funds, HCI
	Encourage landowners of large lots to enter the Chapter 61 program to ease their tax burden		Bd of Assessors, BLT, TNC	BLT, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)

Zoning by-laws guide orderly growth and development.	Control the amount of lot clearing through zoning amendment	2008-09	Plann Bd	None needed
	Support the Planning Board's efforts to upgrade the town's bylaws	Ongoing	Plann Bd, other boards	None needed
Development does not fragment forests and other open space areas.	Encourage new development to be located in areas already developed	Ongoing	Plann Bd, Cons Com	SGTAG

Goal 3: Becket's recreational opportunities serve all ages, conditions, and interests of residents.

Objectives	Actions	Timing	Responsible Parties	
A great variety and number of outdoor recreation facilities are distributed throughout town.	Expand the town beach or create an additional beach	2008-09	Recreation Committee (Rec Comm)	CPA
An extensive network of hiking, skiing, biking, horse riding, and snowmobiling trails connect streams, ponds, and recreation fields.	Investigate feasibility of restoring rail grades on the old Huckleberry Line and Becket-Chester Line for creation of trails	2007-10	Rec Com., BLT, Select Bd	CPA, DCR Recreational Trails Grant
	Create a greenway along the Shaker Mill Brook	2007-10	Rec Comm, Select Bd	DCR Recreational Trails, AmeriCorps, CPA
	Approach CSX about creating a rail trail in the existing right-of-way	2007-08	Rec Comm, Select Bd	None needed
	Work with the DCR to create a trail system within Becket State Forest	2008-09	Rec Comm, DCR	DCR Recreational Trails, AmeriCorps

	Work with conflicting motorized and non-motorized groups to identify places for each to use	2007	Select Bd, Lake Assocs, Becket Police	None needed
An indoor community recreation center is available for after-school use and winter recreation.	Identify possible sites for a community center	2007-08	Rec Comm	CPA
All public recreation opportunities are known and used by residents and visitors alike.	Promote the use of under-utilized parks and lakes	2007-09	Cons Com, DCR, Rec Comm	HCI, Rec Comm.
	Highlight public beaches, boat launches and parks on the town's website	2008-09	Rec Comm	None needed

Goal 4: Becket's diverse natural resources provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Objectives	Actions	Timing	Responsible Parties	
Rare species habitat is protected.	Make sure all town permitting authorities are aware of the location of rare species habitat	Ongoing	Cons Com	Berkshire Environmental Education (BEE) grant
	Investigate potential vernal pools and apply for certification where eligible	2007-10	Cons Com, Natural Heritage & Endangered Species (NHESP), TNC	BEE grant
	Continue to search for opportunities to remove dams and facilitate fish movement	2007-10	Cons Com, Trout Unlimited (TU), Fisheries & Wildlife (F&W), Westfield River Watershed Assoc. (Westfld RWA)	Riverways Program

	Continue to educate local children about the importance of protecting rare species and other wildlife	Ongoing	Cons Com, Becket Elem School, Audubon, TU, F&W	BEE grant
The shorelines of the town's lakes and ponds are vegetated and serve as valuable wildlife habitat.	Educate waterfront property owners about the water quality and wildlife habitat benefits of vegetated buffers	2007-10	Cons Com, Lake Assocs	BEE grant, Town funds
	Provide copies of Mass. Buffer Manual to lake associations	2007	Cons Com, DCR Lakes & Ponds Program, Berk. Regional Planning Commission	HCI, Lakes and Ponds Program
Large tracts of undeveloped land connect and provide corridors for wildlife to move from one important habitat area to another.	Require open space preservation in future subdivisions or other large development projects	2008-09	Plann Bd	None needed
	Work with state agencies to purchase lands that will connect existing protected open space lands	Ongoing	Select Bd, Cons Com, BLT, DCR, F&W	Self-help, Becket Land Trust, Fed. Land and Water Conservation Fund, Conservation Partnership Grant
Rare species continue to be found, documented and protected.	Conduct field surveys in favorable habitats to see if rare species can be found	2007-10	Cons Com, F&W, Audubon, Watershed Assocs, TNC	HCI, BEE, TNC
	If rare species are found, contact Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program	As needed	Cons Com, NHESP	None needed

SECTION 10 PUBLIC COMMENTS

The *Draft Becket Open Space and Recreation Plan* was distributed to the Becket Select Board, Planning Board, ZBA, Conservation Commission and Town Administrator. The availability of the plan for public review and comment was noticed in local press releases, and the plan was made available at the Town Hall, Becket Athenaeum and the town website. As of December 31, 2006, the Open Space and Recreation Committee has received comments from the Town Administrator and the Planning Board. Formal comments from the boards are anticipated in early 2008. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission was involved in the development of the draft plan, and will provide comments to the final plan.

Public comments and input received during the public survey, the public forum and the public review period are included in Appendix A

SECTION 11 REFERENCES

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), 2000. *Report on Potential Buildout of Becket, Mass.*, Pittsfield, MA.

BRPC, 1996. *Farmington River Watershed Action Plan*, Pittsfield, MA.

BRPC, 2004. *Becket Community Development Plan*, Pittsfield, MA.

BRPC, 2005. *Berkshire Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan*, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

BRPC, 2006. "Berkshire County Building Permit Analysis," *Common Ground*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, Pittsfield, MA.

Hall, B., G. Motzkin, D. R. Foster, M. Syfert, and J. Burk. 2002. *Three hundred years of forest and land-use change in Massachusetts, USA*. *Journal of Biogeography* 129: 1319-1135.

Higgins, Brian; Holmes, Dan; Freisem, Peter; Becket Open Space Committee, 1998. *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, Becket, MA.

Mass. Exec. Office of Env. Affairs, 2000. *Mass. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*, 251 Causeway St., Boston, MA.

National Park Service, 2002. *Draft Westfield River Wild and Scenic River Evaluation*, Northeast Region, Boston, MA.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), 2004. *BioMap and Living Waters, Guiding Land Conservation for Biodiversity in Mass., Core Habitats of Becket*, Mass. Div. of Fisheries and Wildlife, Westborough, MA.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, 2006. *Westfield River Five Year Watershed Action Plan*, West Springfield, MA.

Swain, Patricia, C., 2006. Letter and map from NHESP describing rare and unique communities in the Town of Becket, dated March 10, 2006.

www.becketlandtrust.org. – Becket Land Trust website.

www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfwbass.htm - MassWildlife's Best Bets for Bass.

www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfw_trout_waters.htm - Mass. Trout Stocked Waters 2006.

www.jacobspillow.org/archives/history.asp - Brief history of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

<http://keystonearches.org/history/> - Summary and history of the Westfield River Keystone Arches.

APPENDIX A: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MATERIALS

APPENDIX B: NATURAL HERITAGE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM MATERIALS

APPENDIX C: PUBLICATIONS SUMMARIZING STATE ENVIRONMENTAL GRANT AND LOAN PROGRAMS