

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jess.tabolt@hotmail.com

Title: Natural Resource Inventory

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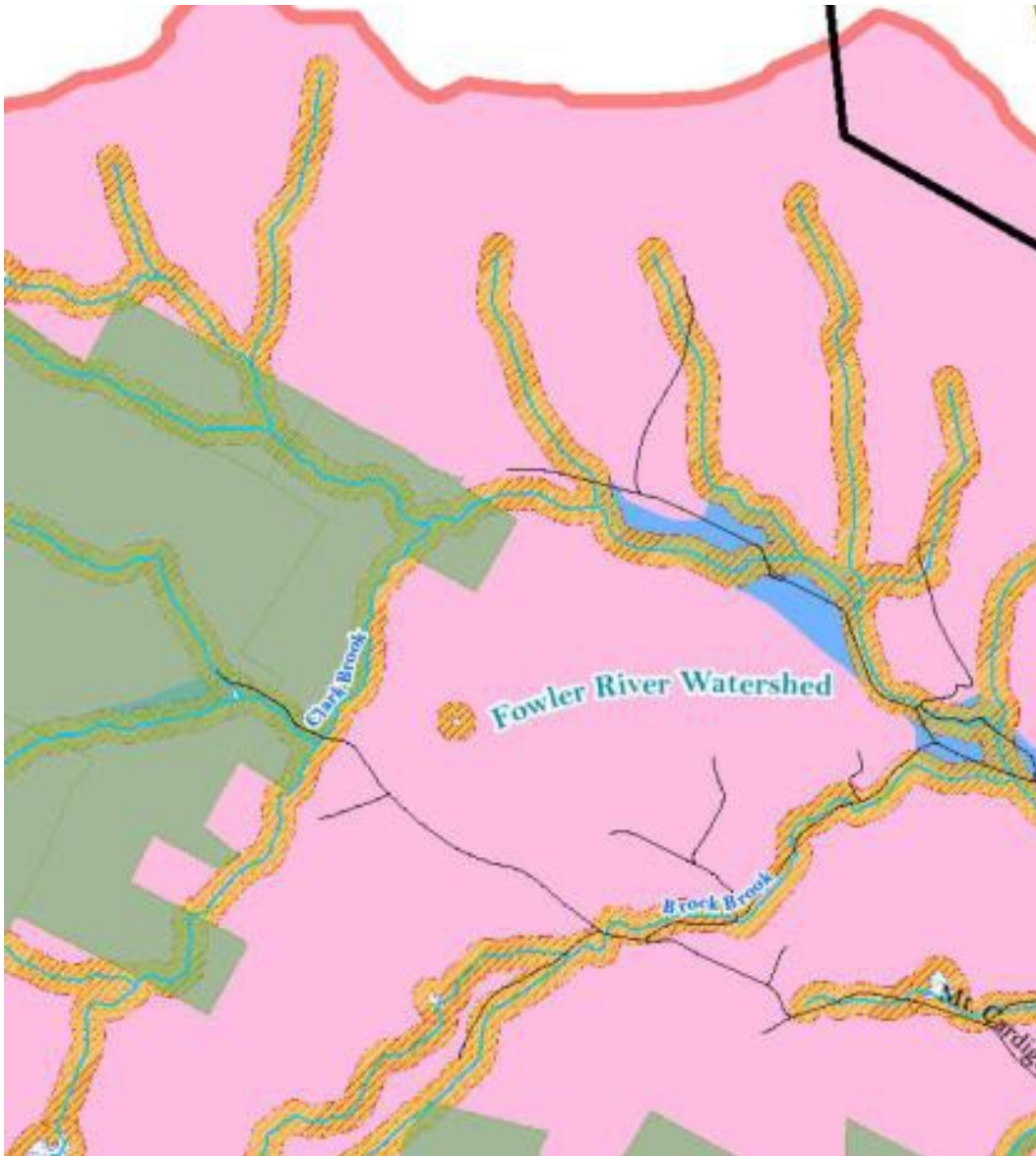
New Hampshire's growth and development is placing an increased strain on our state's natural resources, and unless properly managed, many of the resources could be depleted to the point of extinction. One of the first steps in planning for growth and development in a community is to develop a natural resources inventory (NRI). New Hampshire statutes mandate that communities create an NRI. This is generally the responsibility of the Conservation Commission in towns with active commissions. The NRI can be created using existing data sources such as studies previously done by the New Hampshire Fish & Game or the Audubon Society, or from field-based observations and assessments to better reflect the current status of natural resources within a community. Inventories can include such elements as topography, wetlands, aquifers, ponds, rivers, forests, plants, soils, and wildlife. A NRI creates a picture that helps to better understand what natural resources are within a town, where they are located, and their relationship to each other. Because there is a cost associated with creating a NRI, often funded from the town's Conservation Fund which itself may have limited funding resources; and because NRIs can be very detailed and require considerable time to complete, some communities may elect to develop their inventories in segments focusing on one specific area of interest at a time, with the ultimate objective of eventually inventorying the entire community and tying it all together. This approach does not dilute the content of the NRI; however, a segmented approach will not necessarily reflect the composition of the entire community until all segments are completed, and all the data brought together and summarized.

Natural Resource Inventories often contain detailed, color coded maps clearly defining areas of particular interest and illustrate the interrelationships of land characteristics contain within those areas. The NRI, when used in combination with the community's Master Plan, is a valuable tool in aiding in the planning and development process and helps the town manage development and growth in an orderly fashion in concert with the existing resources. It can serve as the basis for developing innovative land use planning that can be adopted to help protect various critical resources, such as wetlands and wildlife habitat. Topographical information is helpful in determining sensitive areas with respect to erosion control requirements and adhering to "best use" practices when it comes to development. Identification and protection of wetlands and buffer zones is crucial to protect water quality. Planning for the conservation of natural resources and biological diversity is not a new concept; it has helped to identify and protect critical wildlife habitats

within our state for the past four decades. The need for this type of informed land use planning is becoming more evident as exploitation and misuse of natural resources has altered and scared the landscape and led to a decline in several species, some to the point of extinction from the area altogether.

A Natural Resource Inventory is also a very useful guide for residents and visitors to the area. Town residents can use it to simply learn more about their community or just enhance their enjoyment of the outdoors and appreciation of the local environment. Visitors can reference the NRI to locate various habitats, and learn about the local biological diversity of plants and wildlife within these habitats. NRIs often include suggested areas where you can expect to view specific species of birds, animals, reptiles, and flora. Property owners can use this information to identify the specific characteristics and resources found on their own land and learn how to manage and protect them.

If you are not familiar with the Natural Resource Inventory for your city or town, it's worth a call to your Conservation Commission or the Mayor/Selectmen's office to find out where you can view a copy; you may be surprised at the treasures quietly tucked away within your own community.



Example of typical NRI map: Small section of Alexandria NRI Water Resource Map

Area shown is a section of the upper portion of the Fowler River Watershed. The actual NRI maps are color coded to illustrate areas of co-occurrence (areas where multiple conditions of concern exist, for example steep slopes and unfragmented land, thus magnifying the impact any disturbance in the area may have). The 'fuzzy' gray areas either side of the streams indicate the protection buffer area along waterways; the darker, solid- gray area to the left identifies conserved land. The narrow, light- black lines indicate roadways for use as reference points.