

**HIGHLIGHTS
OF
CONCORD'S OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION
PLAN 2004**

**OCTOBER 2004
OPEN SPACE TASK FORCE
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION**

**TOWN OF CONCORD
MASSACHUSETTS**

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Note: All maps, boundaries and data in this report are approximate or subject to error. They should be checked against copies on file at the Natural Resources Department Office on Keyes Road or other Town records.



*Photograph by Herbert Wendell Gleason, 1900,
Courtesy of Concord Free Public Library*

Periodically Concord examines the state of its open space and recreation resources, and uses the findings to outline a vision for the Town and its residents. The *Highlights* in your hand is an abridged or short form of the 208-page *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004* for Concord, Massachusetts. As centerpieces, the Executive Summary and the Open Space Framework (Part I) are presented here in full unaltered form. In contrast, The Planning Sections (Part II) and the Appendices are all presented in abridged form.

Highlights of Concord's Open Space and Recreation Plan is designed to present...and highlight...the key points without drowning in detail. Making the material more accessible to more readers catalyzes greater understanding and broader support. The real beneficiaries, though, are Concord's open space, natural resources and recreation...for today, and for the future.

The *Highlights* should lead many readers to the complete *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004*, a goldmine of information and insight. For example, the *OSRP 2004* contains many additional maps: Rare species habitat in the Concord region; Large natural areas; Large agricultural areas; Wildlife and water-protection corridors; Sewer and septic wastewater systems; Zoning districts; Potentially developable land; Agricultural soils; Rare species habitat and vernal pools; FEMA flood zones; Density of rare-species records in the state; Properties of conservation interest; and Results of implementing recommendations.

Copies of the *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004* are minutes from where you sit, in the Concord Free Public Library, Loring Fowler Library, Concord Planning and Land Management Office, Concord Public Works Office and Concord Natural Resources Office. Also, copies will be sent to the Conservation Department in each of the 18 towns of Concord's region, to the Harvard University and University of Massachusetts libraries, and to many state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations working on open space, recreation and natural resources of the region.

In the meantime, enjoy the *Highlights*. They lead inexorably to explorations, unexpected delights, understanding and passion for Concord's remarkable, increasingly integrated, but in places threatened, open space, water, wildlife and recreational resources.

What are the features which make a township handsome? A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest, and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things, though at a considerable expense; for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education. I do not think him fit to be the founder of a state or even of a town who does not foresee the use of these things.

Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, January 3, 1861

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Section 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town periodically takes stock of its open space, those undeveloped areas around nearly every bend that give Concord its distinctive character. Like its predecessors, *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004* identifies and maps existing open space, pinpoints threats, highlights opportunities for enhancement, and identifies priorities for land protection. The plan serves as a reference for residents. It recommends steps or actions that should be taken by the Town as well as residents to protect open space. Its central objective is to plan a meaningful pattern of open space and recreational resources for the Town's future.

These open space assessments remind us that Concord's rich endowment of nature provides an array of economic benefits, recreational opportunities and other values that are too important to lose. Open space protects our drinking water and provides walking trails; forests support wildlife and provide cool shade in summer; wetlands reduce flooding and absorb our diverse chemicals; farmland provides food and welcome vistas; ponds and rivers support fish and water recreation. As a bonus, open space reduces costs, from schooling to road maintenance, for residents. Parks, fields and playgrounds provide spaces for much needed intensive recreation and sports. Walking trails and accessibility for persons with disabilities provide an important linkage to natural lands and farmlands for the wide range of active people in Town. And, not least of all, open space provides incalculable beauty.

Natural resources such as water and wildlife move constantly, crossing town boundaries and public and private land, undeveloped or developed. Nature-based recreation is commonly enriched by these flows of nature. Thus this *Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004* takes the broad perspective of open space, highlighting land patterns, water, wildlife and recreation in Town. An array of information on population and development, environmental resources, land and habitat management is given to provide a foundation for the analysis and recommendations.

This report begins by examining open space through three lenses, from broad to detailed:

- **The regional lens.** Concord regularly interacts with surrounding towns, effectively at the center of a 19-town region from Lexington to Littleton and Framingham to Chelmsford. In this region we consider large areas of natural vegetation, probable major routes for wildlife, regional trails and other key patterns. This regional perspective helps in prioritizing Concord's open spaces and identifying important opportunities for inter-town cooperation.
- **The Town-wide lens.** The *1992 Open Space Plan* established an "open space framework" to identify, compare, integrate and rank major town-wide features and smaller special sites within the Town. This conceptual framework, continued in this plan, results in clear, open-space protection priorities. Seven large areas of natural vegetation are the most important open-space resources in Town. Five large agricultural areas and 13 major vegetation corridors, which protect streams and

rivers and/or provide for wildlife movement across Town, are also of high priority importance. Together, these 25 major resources fit together into an open space framework, which provides an extensive array of ecological and water-related benefits to the Town and its natural systems. They also provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. Finally, a set of small “special sites” of open space importance are identified and superimposed on the town-wide open space framework.

- **The neighborhood lens.** People often understand and appreciate open space locally, in effect at the neighborhood level. Thus we identify and briefly describe 34 neighborhoods in Concord, primarily to highlight opportunities to enhance local open space and to encourage a strong sense of stewardship by residents and the Town.

Town leaders, residents and others make a difference for open space. In the 12 years since the last open space report, eight percent of Concord's land has been protected for future generations. The Town has impressive intact wooded and open agricultural landscapes. On a more personal level, magical places beloved by residents abound. Together, these large areas and small undeveloped pockets provide a sense of place and character; they help to create the identity of Concord.

Focusing growth and development in areas where relatively little additional environmental impact would occur can be an effective strategy for protecting the integrity of other areas of natural, recreational and historical importance. With haphazard development comes fragmentation and shrinkage of our last large natural areas, disappearance of appealing locales, ever more impervious surfaces and flood hazard, more septic effluent in our groundwater, more lawn and garden pesticides in our waters, and more barriers to walking and wildlife movement. Other challenges must be faced as well, including the many impacts of Route 2, toxic chemicals moving in the soil, and an array of impacts from surrounding towns.

Indeed, we need to read the plans of the towns in our region, and they need to read ours. With broadly overlapping databases, all the plans should begin to mesh. That should stimulate regional thinking and improve open space, natural resources and recreation for all the towns involved.

We should not take open space for granted. The open space framework of permanently protected large natural and agricultural areas connected by wildlife and water-protection corridors is clearly coming together on the land. Yet it is unfinished and still in jeopardy. A limited number of key parcels remain unprotected. These are the highest open-space priorities for establishing the future face of Concord.

We recommend 15 major actions the Town and its residents should take to preserve and manage open space more effectively. Additional detailed action items are listed in the final section of the report.

- ***Putting the plan to work.*** All Town boards and committees that deal with open space issues should be briefed about Open Space and Recreation Plan 2004. One

member of each group should be designated to be informed about and provide advice on open space issues and opportunities. The Natural Resources Commission should sponsor a meeting of interested persons in the fall to consider open space issues and opportunities.

- **Regional perspective.** The Town should join with neighboring towns to request a planning grant to examine the potential benefit of integrating open-space protection efforts in Concord's region. Town leaders should be up to date on land-use changes and protection throughout the region, with appointed representatives meeting annually with those of the other towns and reporting to the Town and residents on regional land-use changes and open-space protection issues. Neighboring towns should be familiar with and encouraged to use Concord's Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- **Large natural areas.** High priority should be given to protecting, by conservation acquisition or restriction, the remaining core parcels needed to sustain the integrity of the Town's large natural areas. Ongoing management of these areas and uses adjacent to them should be consistent with the goals of biodiversity, wildlife movement, clean groundwater, flood control and diverse compatible recreational activities.
- **Large agricultural areas.** High priority should be given to the protection of the remaining core parcels needed to sustain the integrity of the large agricultural areas. Farmers should be supported on problems such as drainage, worker housing, product outlets and ecologically and economically sustainable farming methods. An agricultural committee should be established to provide information on farm programs, regulations, best practices and other issues.
- **Wildlife & water-protection corridors.** High priority should be given to the protection, by conservation acquisition or restriction, of land in the key corridors linking large natural and agricultural areas. Landowners should manage the corridors to enhance wildlife movement, clean water and fish populations. Where possible, a route for walkers should be encouraged.
- **Neighborhood benefits.** Neighborhoods should be encouraged and supported in local land stewardship and in efforts to create common protected land conveniently accessible by walking and bicycling.
- **Sufficient clean water.** Conservation of water and the elimination or replacement of septic systems that do not meet current standards should be accelerated, as especially effective ways for residents to protect the Town's groundwater and surface-water systems. For the same reason, the Town should continue to reduce sand and salt applications to roads, increase the use of permeable rather than impermeable surfaces, and, where possible, divert stormwater flows into vegetated swales, etc. Near Town wells, these solutions should be implemented at the highest practical level and combined with continued land acquisition.
- **Wetlands & water quality.** The Town should adopt its own wetland-protection by-law with criteria and procedures, including increased minimum setbacks, which provide

effective protection of Concord's wetland resources. Comprehensive water-quality sampling programs that build on existing programs should be developed throughout the Town, and should be implemented for Concord's ponds, streams and rivers to evaluate the presence of, and establish a baseline for, pollutants that degrade the Town's aquatic ecosystems.

- **Wildlife & biodiversity.** A wildlife and biodiversity committee should be established to accumulate, make available, and highlight information on key species and their distribution in Town and its region. Collaboration with neighboring towns to maintain viable natural connections for wildlife movement across the region should be encouraged. Habitats of state-listed rare species in Town should be actively protected.
- **Route 2, walkers, and wildlife.** A sequence of carefully designed and located structures that restore frequent crossings by key wildlife, in addition to safe attractive crossings for walkers and bicyclers, should be incorporated in Route 2 planning and construction at the earliest opportunity. Solutions to reduce the propagation of road salt and traffic noise (consistent with wildlife crossing, safety and aesthetics) should be identified and incorporated in planning and construction of the highway.
- **Playing fields.** A number of small informal playing fields convenient by foot or bicycle for children and neighbors, plus a small number of regulation playing fields, should be created in locations where they do not lead to significant impacts on Concord's most important conservation areas.
- **Walking trails.** Six additional local walking trails should be developed in Town. A trails committee should be formed to evaluate and make recommendations on diverse trail patterns, issues, and policies. Planning should proceed for providing access for residents to walk or bicycle north/south across the Town and to neighboring towns and countryside in Concord's region.
- **Handicapped accessible trails.** Six existing or planned trails should be made at least seasonally accessible to wheelchair users. Also a few special trails should be designated as "Assessed" (i.e., trails offering a more rugged experience for handicapped users), and one or two trails should be made universally accessible to accommodate individuals with disabilities other than mobility impairments.
- **Land management.** The Town should invest in the management of its open-space resources by dedicating sufficient conservation-land-management funds for personnel and other needs in the annual operating budget. The Town and other interested organizations should maintain and publicize a list of diverse land management techniques and encourage their use by all landowners, which will cumulatively contribute to achievement of Concord's major open-space and stewardship objectives.
- **Funding opportunities.** The Town should pass the Community Preservation Act to create a funding source for conservation acquisitions, and should partner with land trusts, government entities, and individuals to make full use of available government

funds and programs, as well as laws and regulations, to acquire and/or protect important land parcels.

These recommendations are based on a probing analysis of Concord's open space resources and challenges. Implementing them will have a lasting and positive effect on the ecological conditions and recreational opportunities---even the quality of life---of our community. Time is against us, for as Will Rogers once said, "Land – they ain't makin' it anymore." Individuals stepping forward to enhance open space can make an enormous difference.

And we must do so now. It has been estimated that within the next decade the fate of virtually all of our remaining developable land will be determined. It will either be developed or protected. Critical jewels of open space, natural resources and recreation remain up for grabs in this rapidly closing window of opportunity. Guarding them is a tangible accomplishment for our future Town. This plan should serve as a guide for determining where and how we can work together to save our most valuable open spaces.