

# Chapter 5: Preserving Our Roots

## In this Chapter:

Natural  
Resources

Open Space and  
Greenways

Historic  
Resources

Community  
Character

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

*VISION: Protection of our natural resources will contribute to the quality of life and health and well-being of our community.*

*Our citizens and businesses will take action to preserve our natural resources. The Town will capitalize on its natural assets to provide recreation opportunities and attract visitors.*

### **STRATEGIES**

PROTECT

**Our natural resources**

CONTINUE TO RESTORE & IMPROVE

**Our lakes and rivers**

PROTECT

**Ground and surface drinking water**

MINIMIZE THREATS TO

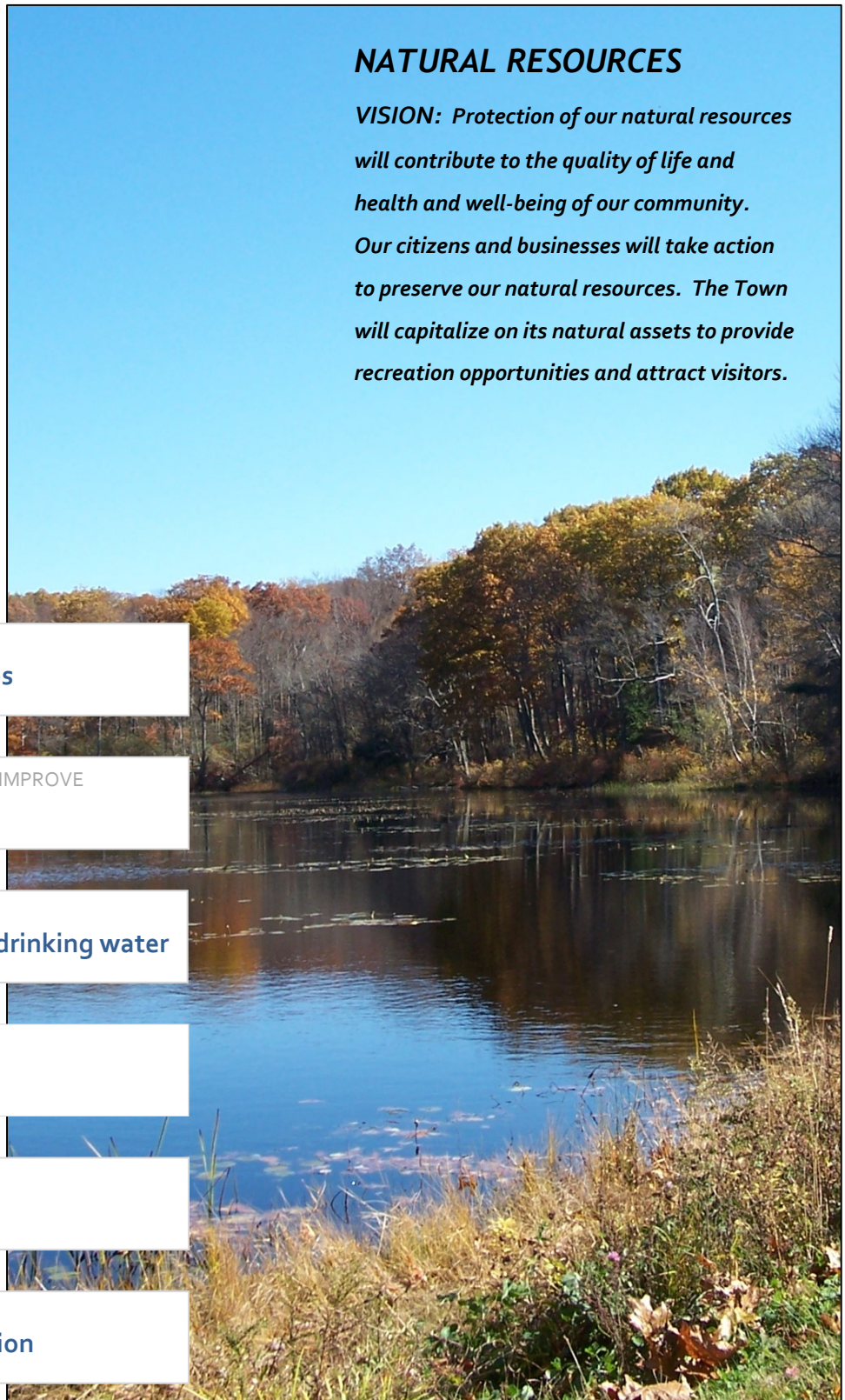
**Water quality**

REDUCE

**Storm water runoff**

PROTECT

**Habitat and vegetation**



# Natural Resources

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Our natural resources:

- Protect our health and provide us with basic needs (clean water, fresh air, energy)
- Contribute to the ecological well-being of the larger region and state
- Boost our quality of life, with its beauty and recreational opportunities
- Contribute to Vernon's unique character
- Protect our safety (e.g., floodplains)

Vernon is fortunate to have miles of flowing rivers, potable ground water, scenic lakes and ponds, and important wildlife habitat. Preserving and conserving our resources is beneficial to residents today and for future generations.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the...community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

- Aldo Leopold





### Resources to Preserve

Alterations should be avoided to the maximum extent feasible:

- 100 year floodplain
- Steep slopes (>20%)
- Watercourses
- Wetlands

### Resources to Conserve

The functions of the resources might be able to be maintained if development occurs in an environmentally sensitive manner:

- 500 year floodplain
- Aquifers
- Unique or special habitat areas (DEP Natural Diversity Database)

### Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources

For an inventory of Vernon's natural and cultural resources, see the POCD website at: [www.vernon-ct.gov/plan-of-conservation](http://www.vernon-ct.gov/plan-of-conservation)

## Protect Vernon's Natural Resources

Some natural resources are so important that they must be "preserved". Permanent preservation as open space or, if not feasible, ensuring that development is carefully regulated can be the best approach for protecting such resources.

For other natural resources, "conservation" is a key approach. Conservation means that some level of development is often acceptable, provided that the integrity of the natural resource is "conserved." Best practices to conserve such resources are contained throughout this Chapter.

An overall approach to protecting natural resources in Vernon might be:

- where feasible, preserve sensitive natural resource areas as open space (see page 44)
- where preservation is not possible, reduce densities / development intensity
- when development does occur, design sites to avoid sensitive areas (e.g., allow flexibility)

Updates to the zoning regulations can improve natural resource protection. The Zoning Regulations require a "developable acreage" (area without wetlands, floodplains or slopes over 15%) calculation for rear lots. The concept of developable acreage could be expanded to new lots in R-40 (and possibly R-27).

Allowing flexibility in lot dimensional requirements for new building lots better enables the avoidance of sensitive areas and better follows natural topography. The Town's cluster regulations, which allow a generous bonus in number of permitted units provide such flexibility. However, it requires a minimum parcel size of 10 acres and must be in areas with sewers. The Town might consider reducing or eliminating the minimum parcel size for land that is adjacent to existing open space or in areas for conservation; however, the bonus provision should be scaled back in those areas.

### Protect Vernon's Natural Resources:

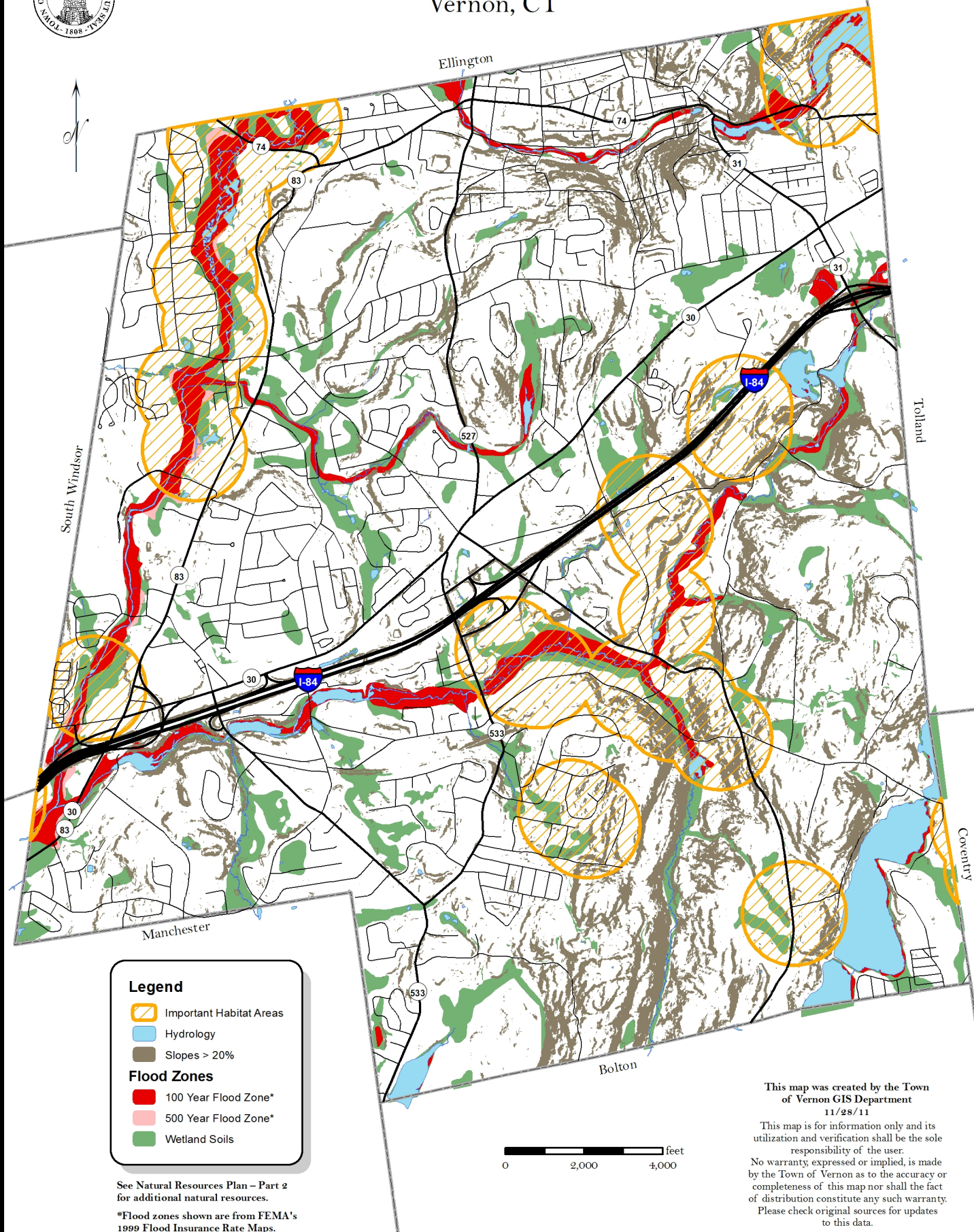
1. Make every effort possible to preserve sensitive natural resource areas.
2. Where preservation is not possible, update zoning to reduce densities / development intensity in areas with a concentration of natural resources.
  - a. Consider updating zoning regulations to expand "developable acreage" to low density zones (R-40 and possibly R-27).
3. Design sites to avoid sensitive areas.
  - a. Update zoning regulations to allow Cluster Developments on smaller parcels, as appropriate.





# Natural Resources Plan - Part 1

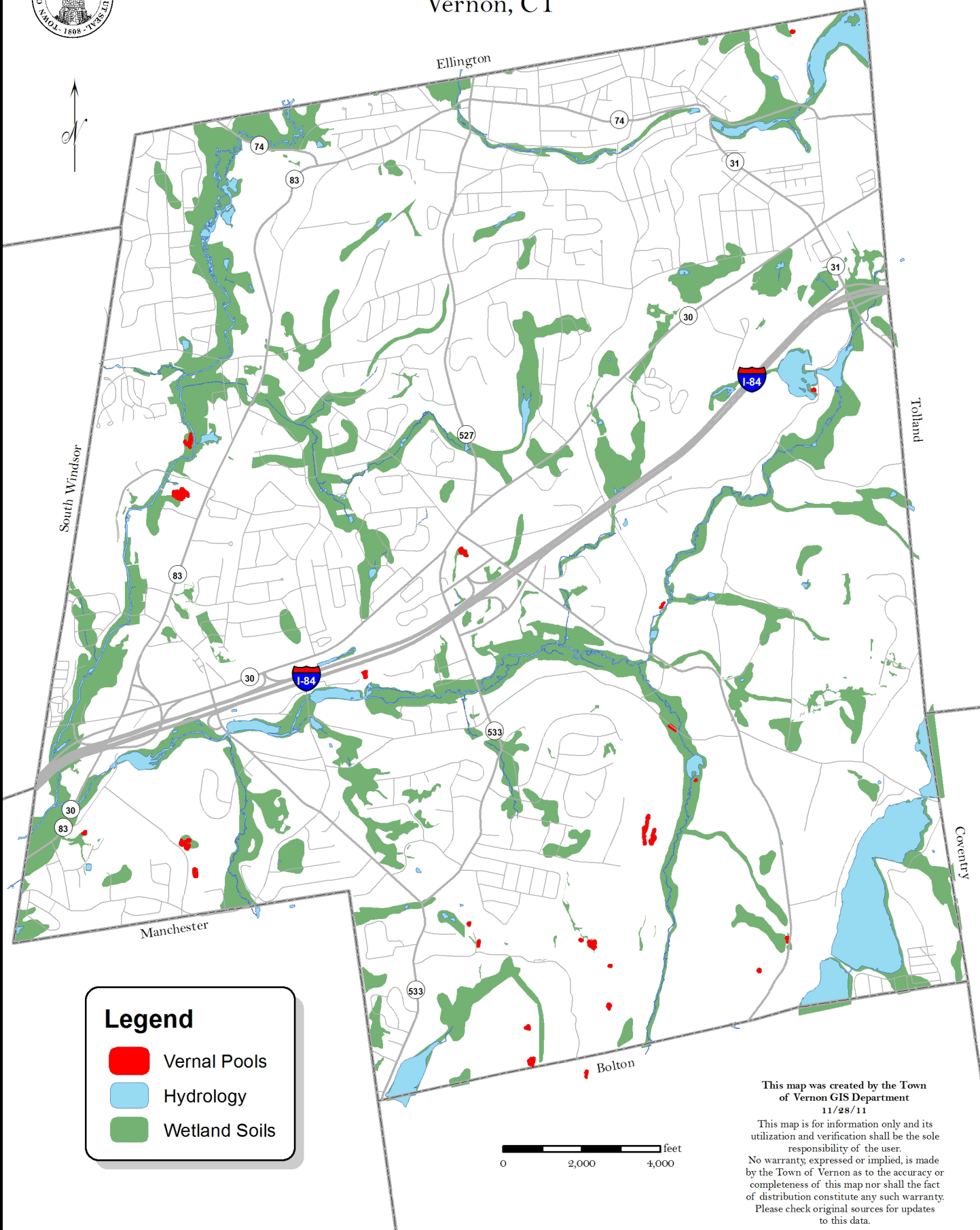
Vernon, CT





# Natural Resources Plan - Part 2

Vernon, CT



## Legend

- Vernal Pools
- Hydrology
- Wetland Soils

0 2,000 4,000 feet

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## Continue to Restore and Improve Vernon's Lakes and Rivers

Vernon is divided into three main watersheds: Hockanum River, Tankerhoosen River, and the Hop River. Both the Hockanum and Tankerhoosen rivers originate in Vernon. These rivers, along with Vernon's lakes, provide ecological and recreational benefits, and are important components of the community's identity.

**Hockanum River** – The DEP has rated its water quality as “impaired” with a goal to improve it. The recent upgrade at the Town's water treatment plant, which discharges into the river, was an important step in improving water quality. Additional efforts to upgrade the water quality of the river and Paper Mill Pond should continue.

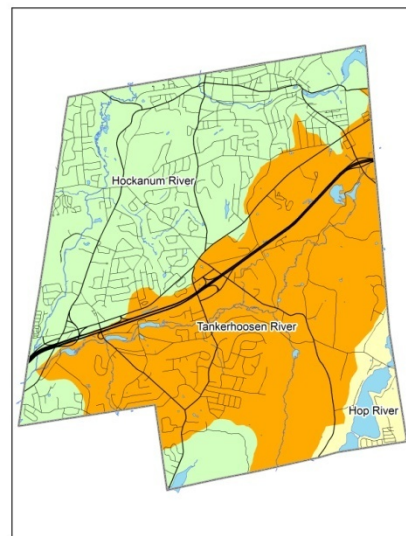
A stretch of the river in Rockville is buried under a parking area and buildings. Some have expressed a desire to uncover the river for ecological and aesthetic benefits. Daylighting the full stretch might not be feasible (financially and because it could greatly reduce Rockville's built ambiance).

Focus should continue on enhancing the uncovered parts, with additional pocket parks and vantage points, referencing the river's presence in walking guides, and providing plaques or kiosks with information. Continued implementation of the Hockanum River Linear Park Plan can help achieve these goals (see page 42).

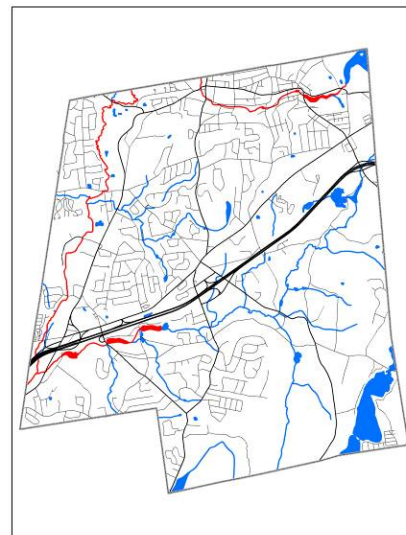
For the remainder of the river, key strategies should focus on restoring and improving water quality and continuing to implement the Linear Park plan.

**Tankerhoosen River** – The Tankerhoosen River has its headwaters at Gages Brook. The Tankerhoosen River watershed has been recognized as unique in the State, particularly for the robust native wild trout populations. Although it was once one of the cleanest rivers in the State, the westernmost stretch is considered “threatened”, with impaired water quality. East of Tankerhoosen Lake, the river maintains a higher water quality rating. Because 70% of this river's watershed is within Vernon, protective measures within the Town can have great impact on this river. Water quality measurements have established a baseline from which progress can be tracked. Such water quality assessments should continue.

Vernon's Watersheds



Surface Water Quality



### Legend

- Good / Maintain
- Impaired / Improve



Detailed strategies for restoring and protecting the river were identified in the 2009 Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan (see box). The document's recommendations are incorporated by reference into the POCD.

#### **Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan, 2009**

A collaboration of organizations concerned about the future of the river contracted an engineering consultant to create the [Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan](#) in 2009. The multi-town Plan assesses issues facing the river and watershed, reviews existing regulations, and recommends actions to restore and protect the river and watershed.

The overall watershed management goals are to: develop an affordable and effective watershed management plan; maintain and enhance water quality and ecological health; protect the upper region of the watershed from pollution; and restore and enhance water quality and ecological health.

Objectives to accomplish these goals include:

- Establish a coalition and coordinate regionally
- Enhance habitat
- Protect and restore buffers
- Address illicit discharges and encourage stream cleanups
- Advance local government, business and residential awareness
- Monitor water quality
- Manage and acquire open space
- Mitigate impacts of stormwater runoff
- Conduct additional assessments in other parts of the watershed

The Plan recommends that Vernon develop consistent stormwater management standards which would become the regulatory standards for all boards and commissions. Details on administration, applicability, enforcement, etc., would need to be worked out. Such standards should incorporate Low Impact Development / Design (LID, see page 37).

#### **Bolton Lakes (and Hop River Watershed)**

– The Bolton Lakes provide scenic value, wildlife habitat, and extensive recreational opportunities. Sewers are being extended to neighborhoods around the lakes to reduce potential pollution from failing septic systems. Sewers can spur development at densities that might not be desired in a given area. As discussed on page 111, the Town should ensure that sewer availability supports desired land use patterns rather than drive undesirable development.

Long-term, the water budget in this area should be monitored. Prior to sewers, water was cycled up from the wells and discharged back into the ground through on-site septic systems (i.e., remains in the same watershed). With sewers, the water is transferred out of the watershed and ultimately discharged into the Hockanum River in Manchester. The

Environment Impact Report prepared for the sewer project estimated a loss of 2.4% of annual flow in the watershed and considered the loss to have a negligible impact. This situation should be carefully monitored to ensure that well water levels are not affected. Efforts to increase stormwater infiltration on site can also help mitigate this water loss (see LID discussion later) along with improving water quality.

The Town should continue to work with the other communities in the watershed to reduce pollution potential, to determine optimal water levels for the lakes, and to maintain groundwater levels.

#### **Other Water Bodies –**

- The Tankerhoosen Ponds (Tankerhoosen Lake, Talcottville Pond, and Dobson Pond) have impaired water quality. Efforts to improve water quality in the

river can also help improve these water bodies. Overtime, these ponds have filled with sediment, making the ponds shallower. Shallower waters tend to have warmer waters, which thereby impact temperatures downstream. Dredging can help restore these ponds.

- Walker Reservoir's health should be maintained in order to continue to provide recreational opportunities and to ensure that the eastern stretch of the Tankerhoosen maintains its high water quality rating.
- There are many additional brooks, streams and ponds in Vernon. Many of these smaller water bodies feed into larger water resources and therefore their water quality is important.

In addition to preventing water pollution, Vernon's water bodies have been affected by the spread of invasive species which outcompete native species, often leading to their elimination. Creating a long term plan to prevent, monitor, and eradicate invasive species would help maintain the ecological health and public enjoyment of Vernon's water bodies.

**Wetlands, Flood Plains and Vernal Pools** – Wetlands and floodplains provide critical public health and safety functions and habitat. They also provide natural flood control and filter pollutants from storm water.

Flood plains are intended to convey water during times of heavy rain, so depletion of their flood conveyance capacity can impact adjacent and downstream properties. Preservation of the 100-year flood plain is of particular importance. As required by the State, activities that might impact wetlands and flood plains are regulated. The Town has further strengthened wetlands protection by extending the upland review area along certain rivers.

Protection of vernal pools is essential for species which depend upon them for survival. The Town has started to identify their locations (29 have been identified as of 2010). Additional identification should continue. The land surrounding vernal pools is critical to their proper functioning. Landowners should be encouraged to protect these areas.

#### **Continue to Restore and Improve Vernon's Lakes and Rivers:**

1. Continue to preserve open space along lakes and rivers (see Open Space discussion).
2. Better integrate the Hockanum River into Rockville's identity.
3. Implement the Tankerhoosen River Watershed Management Plan.
4. Incorporate LID into land use regulations and Town projects.
5. Continue to work with the other Bolton Lakes communities to reduce pollution potential and determine adequate water levels.
6. Monitor groundwater levels near Bolton Lakes to ensure that the diversion of water out of the watershed does not impact groundwater levels.
7. Investigate the merits and feasibility of dredging ponds to remove accumulated sediment.
8. Develop a plan to address invasive species.
9. Protect wetlands, floodplains and vernal pools through the regulatory process.

## Vernon's Aquifers

There are two types of aquifers in Vernon: stratified drift aquifers and bedrock aquifers.

The 1988 Aquifer Management Study delineated the Town's stratified drift aquifers and their recharge areas, along with subareas which are particularly favorable for providing drinking water because the saturated thickness of sand and gravel exceeds 30 feet.

## Protect Drinking Water Supplies

Protecting surface and ground water supplies in Vernon is an important local and regional public health consideration. While some surface and ground water sources are currently used for public water supply, other areas could serve as a future drinking water source. In addition to public supplies, some properties in Vernon rely upon private wells (i.e., ground water). Strategies to protect water quality can help ensure that residents have a safe supply of drinking water. The following table and accompanying map outline a leveled protection approach.

### Drinking Water Protection Plan \*

**Level 1: Current Water Supply:** Part of a public water system and warrants the highest level of protection. This includes the Connecticut Water Company's public water supply wells which are located in a stratified drift aquifer west of Vernon Center. The State requires additional mapping and the adoption of regulations for this aquifer since it provides a public water supply for more than 1,000 people.

**Level 2: Possible Future Water Supply:** Area identified in the 1988 Aquifer Management Study as one of many Favorable Aquifer Areas. DEP data does not indicate ground water pollution threats or impairments. The goal for this area should be to maintain its integrity so that the aquifer can be preserved for future use. The Town's Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone applies to this area.

**Level 3: Groundwater Improvement Area:** Remainder of stratified drift aquifers that may have a higher risk of contamination based on DEP data and existing land uses. In fact, the Connecticut Water Company has abandoned one well (in the Vernon Circle area) here due to water quality issues. The goal in this area should be to reduce additional risks by maintaining the existing Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone and incorporating other water quality practices which are discussed throughout this POCD.

\*The areas on the map are general; as more specific geologic and/or water quality data is available, some areas should be reclassified. The criteria above should be the guiding factor in classifying areas.

### Protect Drinking Water Supplies:

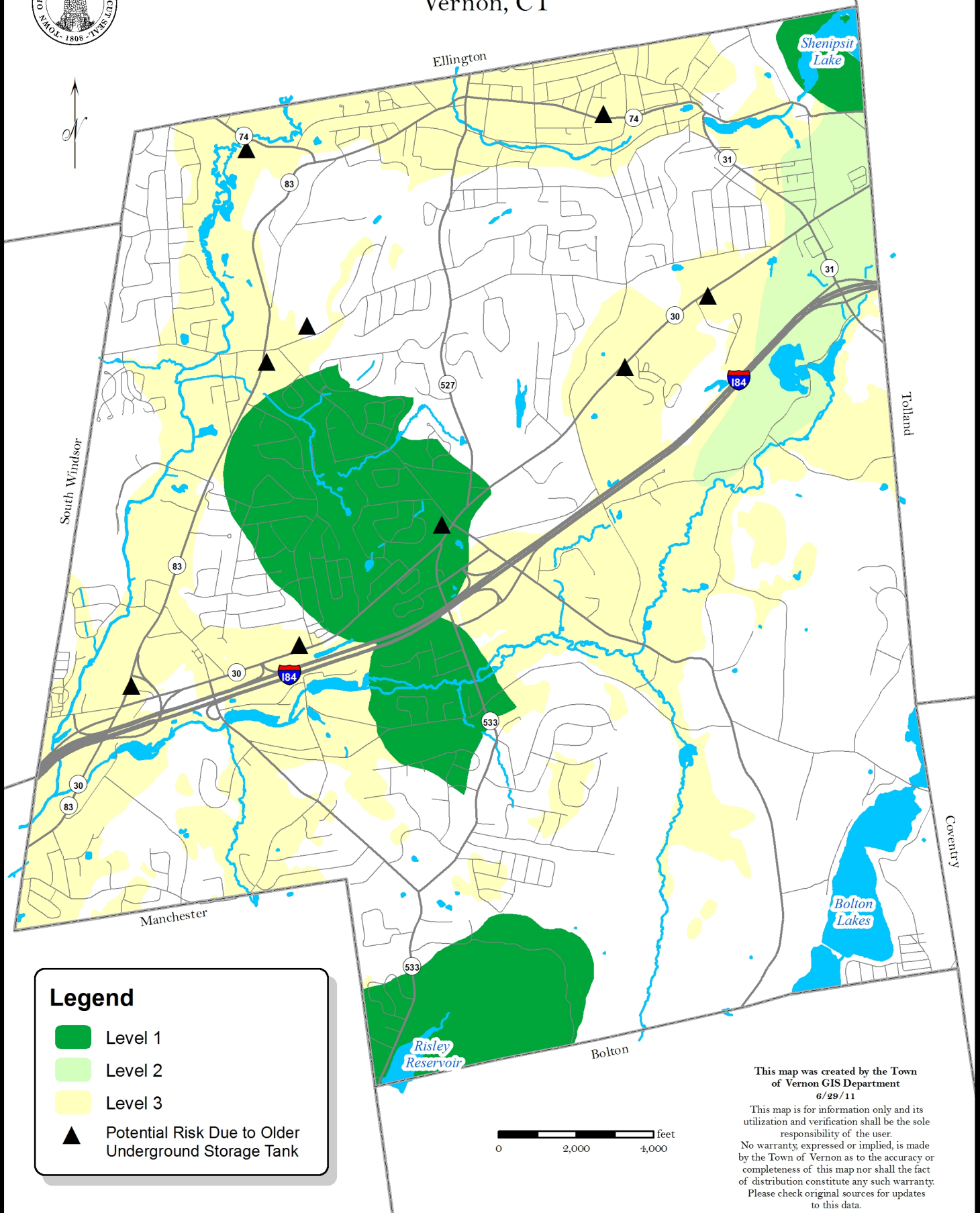
1. Preserve the water quality of existing drinking water supplies (Level 1 on map).
2. Maintain the integrity of potential future water supply aquifers in Level 2 on map.
3. Reduce pollution risks in Level 3 on map and restore water quality.





# Drinking Water Protection Plan

Vernon, CT



## Legend

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3
- Potential Risk Due to Older Underground Storage Tank

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## Minimize Threats to Water Quality

Many common practices by households and businesses contribute to water pollution (e.g., overuse of fertilizer, use of pesticides, dumping or washing cleaners into storm drains, etc.) Such pollutants may seep into groundwater or wash away into water bodies. Public education should focus on explaining the impacts of these practices and suggesting alternative approaches.

Potential contamination from underground storage tanks (USTs) is also a concern. Particularly, old residential or commercial USTs might pose a risk because they were not constructed with today's pollution prevention standards. The Drinking Water Plan map indicates areas that might be of concern because older USTs are located in areas which also support our water supplies.

Some communities prohibit installing new USTs for heating oil for 1- and 2-family houses, while others have adopted ordinances to require that USTs over a certain age be replaced. Vernon might consider regulating USTs in the areas that warrant a higher level of protection (e.g., Drinking Water Protection Areas 1 and 2).

Some stormwater pollution issues are outside of the Town's control. For example, impacts to Walkers Reservoir area (both reservoirs and Gages Brook) from DOT facilities and land use activities in upstream communities have been documented in the Tankerhoosen studies. It will be important to work with the State, the region and neighbors to address these issues.

### Minimize Threats to Water Quality

1. Educate residents and businesses on practices they can undertake to reduce water pollution.
2. Investigate the need for underground storage tank (UST) removal programs and / or regulations.
3. Work with the State to determine options for reducing pollution from state-owned facilities.

## Reduce Stormwater Runoff

The traditional approach to stormwater management practiced by most communities was to carry stormwater off site as quickly as possible, often emptying directly into water bodies with little if any treatment. LID (Low Impact Development / Design) approaches can more effectively manage and reduce stormwater runoff (see sidebar). LID in communities might include a mixture of the following approaches:

- **Education** – Educate property owners, developers and others about simple LID practices they can undertake (e.g., rain gardens, directing roof runoff to vegetated areas, reducing the amount of pavement).
- **Guidance** – Provide guidance to property owners during the development review process; provide advice to those who wish to retrofit their properties.
- **Regulatory** – Update zoning and subdivision regulations to require LID approaches; adopt a town drainage ordinance; provide incentives for reducing peak and total stormwater runoff; reduce parking requirements; require swales and non-piped drainage structure as appropriate; etc. The Tankerhoosen Watershed Plan provides specific LID-related regulatory recommendations, such as eliminating some curb requirements, reducing paving widths for new roads, reducing front setbacks to allow shorter driveways, etc.
- **Municipal Practices** – Encourage the use of LID techniques in the design of municipal projects, such as road reconstruction, repaving, facility updates, etc.

The Town has begun to introduce some LID concepts, such as allowing gravel driveways subject to review by the Town Engineer. Additional LID strategies should be explored. Also, the Inland Wetlands regulations were recently amended to increase the upland review area from 75 feet to 100 feet and to 200 feet for certain rivers and streams. Retaining a buffer along rivers and streams can promote infiltration and remove pollutants before stormwater reaches the water body.

Finally, drainage systems must be maintained in order to be effective. While some drainage systems are municipally managed, some are private. There are protocols the Town can adopt to help ensure proper maintenance of privately-managed stormwater systems, whether conventional or LID (see sidebar)

## LID

LID (Low Impact Development / Design) aims to better manage both water runoff volume and water quality. LID's goal is to use multiple on-site techniques to reduce runoff and increase the landscape's ability to detain (or reuse) rainwater and capture pollutants.

## Sample Protocols for Ensuring Maintenance of Private Drainage Facilities

The following best practices can help towns track maintenance of private drainage facilities and respond if issues occur:

- Create a database to track sites with approved Stormwater Management Plans (ultimately link to GIS)
- Require long term maintenance agreements
- Require long term bond/escrows for LID (in addition to traditional facilities) to insure proper installation and maintenance

### Reduce Stormwater Flows:

1. Educate residents and businesses about simple LID approaches they can take to reduce stormwater flow from their properties.
2. Integrate LID into land use regulations (provide guidance or require).
3. Encourage LID techniques in the design of municipal projects.
4. Ensure protocols are in place for maintenance of privately-owned drainage facilities.



## Protect Habitat and Minimize the Clearing of Vegetation

Open space protection and greenway preservation conserve habitat. This strategy is particularly important within the Tankerhoosen River watershed, as the river is home to robust native wild trout populations and the watershed contains a concentration of DEP-identified important habitat areas ("endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities"). The continued preservation of land in this watershed can help protect and link important wildlife habitats, along with other benefits that open space provides.

The Town and its conservation partners should maintain and enhance wildlife habitat by inventorying, analyzing, and developing habitat management plans for its open space. This could be conducted in conjunction with the open space management plans discussed on page 43.

Trees and vegetation provide habitat, decrease stormwater runoff, reduce erosion, remove carbon from the atmosphere, filter air pollution and add to the character of an area. Strategies to preserve vegetation include minimizing the amount of clearing during construction, employing practices during construction to prevent accidental damage to trees, ensuring that newly planted trees (as part of development approvals) are properly planted and maintained, and encouraging property owners to retain vegetation. The Commission recently updated the zoning regulations to require that site plans account for existing trees and aim to preserve them.

Similar to aquatic invasive species, terrestrial invasive species can impact native vegetation. The Town should encourage property owners to avoid planting invasive species and should maintain a program for the removal of invasive terrestrial species.

### Protect Habitat and Minimize the Clearing of Vegetation:

1. Continue preserving open space in areas with critical habitat (see Open Space discussion).
2. For existing open space, develop habitat-based management plans.
3. Continue to work with applicants to minimize the amount of vegetation cleared during construction.
4. Work with applicants to prevent accidental tree damage and to ensure that new trees are planted correctly and maintained.
5. Encourage property owners to retain vegetation, particularly mature, heritage and specimen trees.
6. Maintain a program for the removal of invasive species and educate property owners on invasive species.

## OPEN SPACE & GREENWAYS

*VISION: Vernon's open space system and greenways will form the backbone of our natural infrastructure by linking local and regional parks and other destinations, providing close-to-home recreation opportunities, buffering existing parks, protecting our natural resources and enhancing our experience as we move through the landscape.*

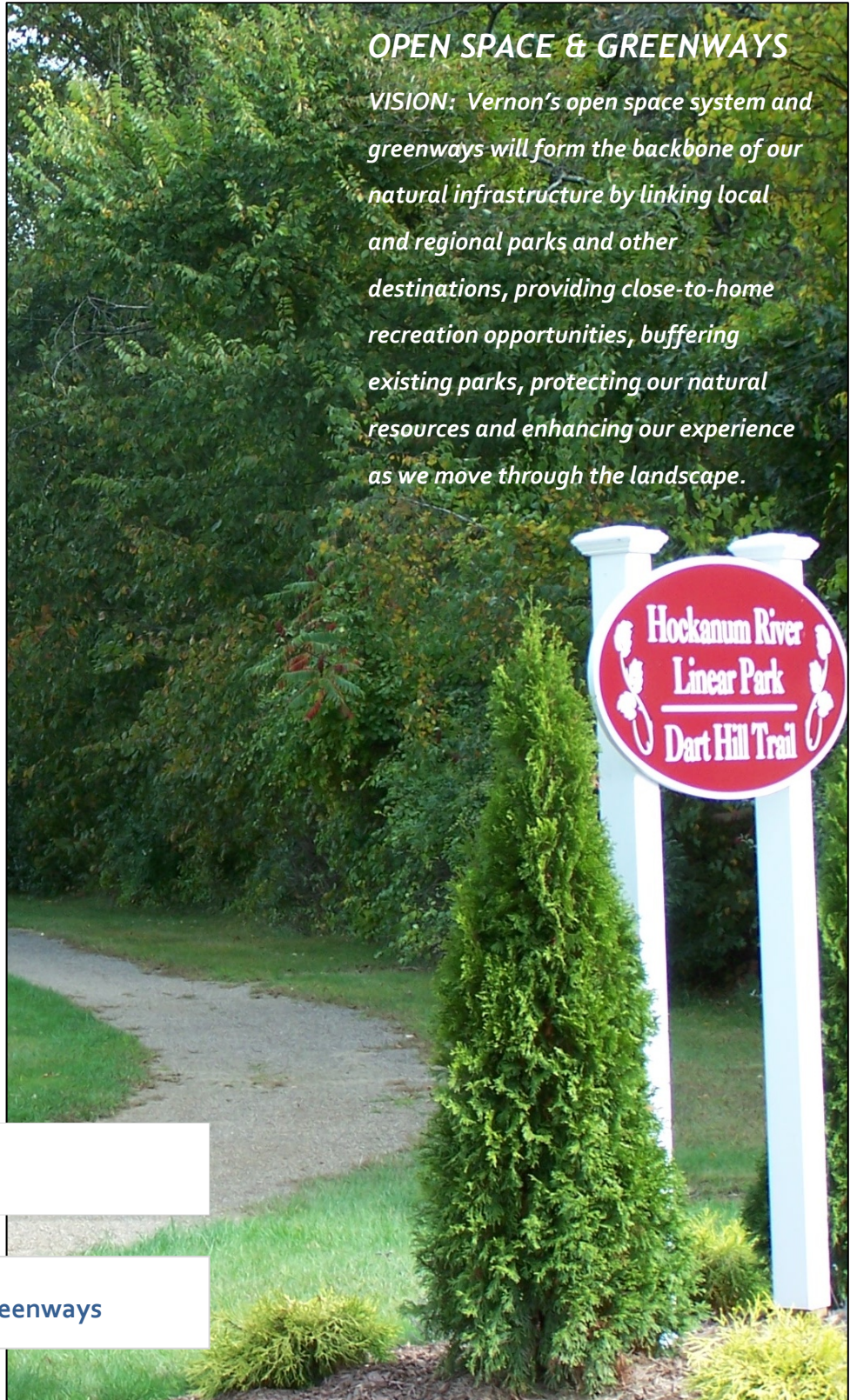
### STRATEGIES

PROMOTE & MANAGE

**Our open space**

PRESERVE

**Open space and greenways**



**Dedicated Open Space** - land or development rights intended to remain for open space purposes. For this analysis, Dedicated Open Space includes: land owned by land trusts, water bodies, cemeteries, and town-owned and state-owned lands that are intended to provide open space.

Vacant land that is under the PA 490 program (CGS 12-107a) is not included in this calculation because the program defers development; it does not permanently preserve the land. The benefits of PA 490 are discussed in the Character section.

**Managed Open Space** - land that provides open space benefits but is not protected from future development. For this analysis, Managed Open Space includes schools (fields), private open space (Fish & Game club), and town-owned or state-owned land that is vacant, but not specifically intended as open space.

# Open Space and Greenways

The quality of life in a community is greatly enhanced by the quality, quantity and distribution of its cultural and natural resources. Protection of these resources through the preservation of their supporting landscape is a key function of open space preservation. Open space preservation also provides for the community's recreation needs and the basic human needs for fresh air, sunlight, physical exercise and psychological release.

The need to preserve open space in Vernon remains strong, particularly to provide recreation opportunities and to protect natural resources. The Vernon Open Space Task Force developed an Open Space Plan as part of the 2001 POCD and has regularly updated it. The Open Space Plan establishes policies and recommendations to:

- ensure the protection of resources,
- preserve of the unique character of Vernon,
- provide adequate open space to meet recreational needs, and
- enhance the Town's quality of life.

Just over 1,900 acres (17%) of land in Vernon are currently considered Open Space. Of this amount, 1,786 acres are "dedicated open space" – i.e., land that is expected to remain as open space over the long term (see sidebar). The remaining acres are "managed open space" (land that currently provides the benefits of open space, but is not protected from future development).

Greenways are an important component of Vernon's open space system. Greenways are corridors of open space that generally follow natural land or water features and link destinations such as cultural and historical features, open space, parks and other areas. Because of efforts to create linear parks and bike trails, Vernon has a distinct greenway network already in place. Key greenways are:

- The Hockanum River Linear Park (see box on p. 42)
- The Tankerhoosen Greenway
- The Hop River Linear Rails-to-Trails
- The Rockville Linear Rails-to-Trails
- The Shenipsit Trail

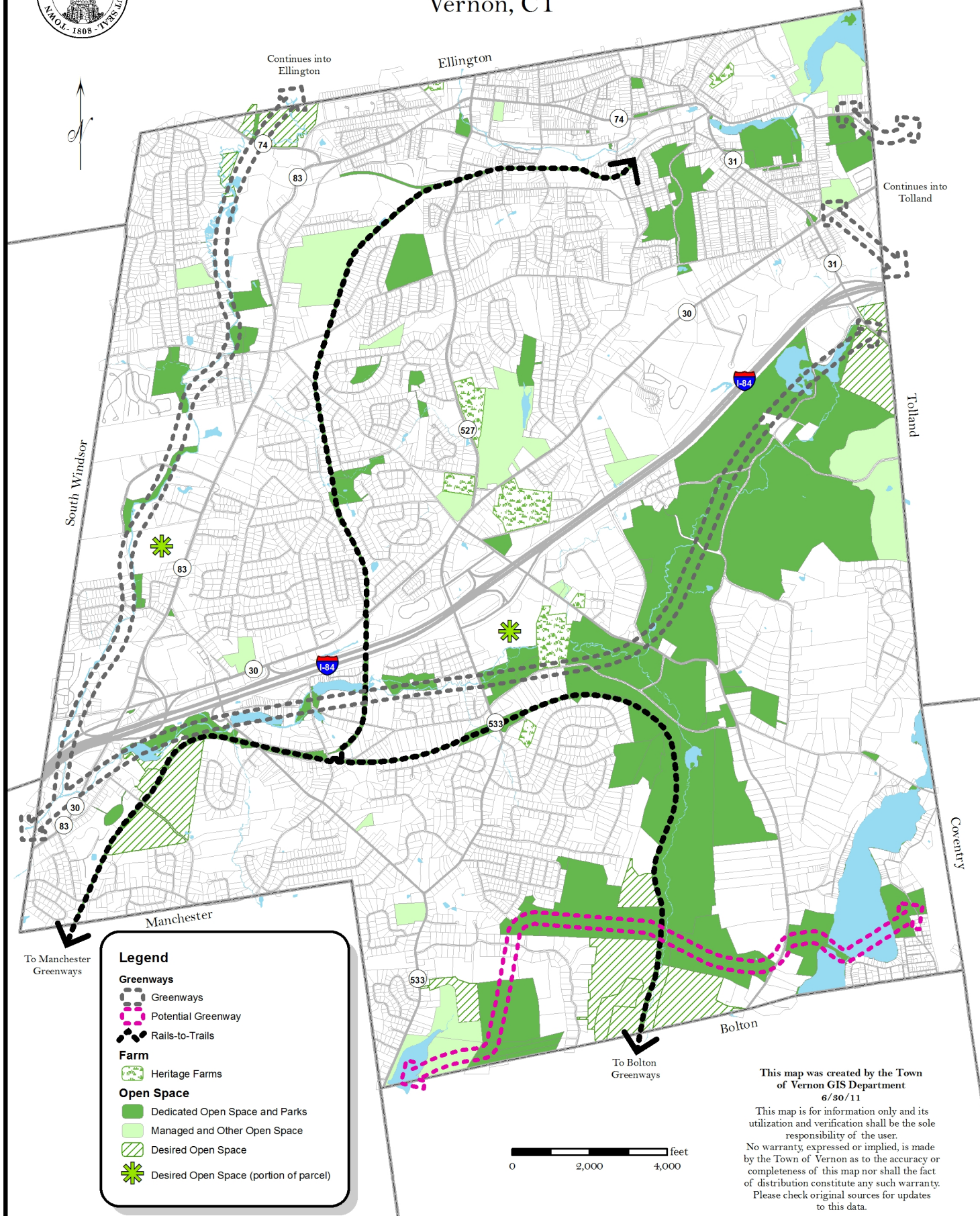
Both the Hockanum River Linear Park and the Tankerhoosen Greenway are "Officially Designated Connecticut Greenways" and included on the Connecticut Greenways map.





# Open Space Plan

## Vernon, CT



**Legend**

**Greenways**

- Greenways
- Potential Greenway
- Rails-to-Trails

**Farm**

- Heritage Farms

**Open Space**

- Dedicated Open Space and Parks
- Managed and Other Open Space
- Desired Open Space
- Desired Open Space (portion of parcel)

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### State Open Space Goal

In the late 1990's a Blue Ribbon Task Force recommended that the State establish a goal of having 21% of the State's land held as open space. The goal entailed that 10% of the State's land area would be held by the State as open space, while the remaining 11% would be held by municipalities, water companies or non-profit land conservation organizations. This goal is codified in CGS Sec. 23-8.

It is important to note that this is a state-wide goal; some communities might have greater than 21% of its land preserved as open space while other may have less. But cumulatively, the State aims to preserve 21% of land as open space.

Municipalities can set their own open space policies. This POCD recommends open space acquisition policies for Vernon.

Vernon has developed its organizational capacity to manage and pursue open space preservation by forming the Open Space Task Force and having an Open Space Plan that is updated and maintained. The Town is supported by engaged citizen groups, such as "friends of" groups. Further, the Town and these groups have prepared plans for specific components of the open space network, such as the Hockanum River Linear Park Master Plan.

### Hockanum River Linear Park – A Regional Greenway

The Hockanum River Linear Park is a planned regional riverscape and recreational park incorporating the lands along the 25 mile length of the Hockanum River, from its origin at Shenipsit Lake to its confluence with the Connecticut River. This regional plan includes the four towns through which the river flows: Vernon, Ellington, Manchester and East Hartford. Each town is responsible for developing and managing that section of the river within its borders.

The goal of the Plan is to bring people back to their river, increase public awareness and appreciation for the river and its surrounding environment, and to protect water quality by preserving riparian areas along the River.

Given the important role that the Hockanum River has played in the history of the community and the considerable watershed lands that lie along its five-mile length in Vernon, the objectives and strategies detailed in the following documents are incorporated by reference into the POCD:

- *A Plan for the Hockanum River Linear Park*, prepared for the CT DEP by Roy Mann Associates, Inc., 1981.
- *The Hockanum River Linear Park Proposal: Connecting Our Community*, prepared for the Vernon Town Council by the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee, 1989 (accepted and approved by the Town Council).
- *The Master Plan of Development*, prepared by Johnson and Richter, 1990.

## Promote and Manage Existing Open Space

Vernon's open space and trails are highly appreciated by residents; 90% of those polled said that they were satisfied with the trails in the Town (including hiking and bike trails). Continued maintenance of existing open space is important to residents.



Some parcels are presumed to be dedicated open space but do not actually have clear deed restrictions that would prevent development or conversion to other uses. Creating management plans can help reach agreement on future intentions for the land. For town-owned open space, the Town should prepare management plans that outline the intended long term use. The development of the management plans should involve the various boards, commissions and departments involved with open space preservation and municipal facilities operations and management. In cases where other entities own open space, the Town should work with them to ensure that the long term intention is to keep the land as open space.

Other issues related to existing open space include continuing to promote the enjoyment of open space. The Town should also continue to expand access to water bodies within its parks (e.g., additional river access points) in order to enhance recreation opportunities and continue to make accessibility upgrades where feasible (e.g., paths that are wheelchair accessible, expansion of the Braille trail, etc.)

### Promote and Manage Existing Open Space:

1. Maintain and update the inventory of open space and greenways.
2. Provide annual status updates to land use boards / commission.
3. Make information on open space access and amenities easily available.
4. Program events to promote use of open space and parks.
5. Encourage / provide river access for canoes, kayaks, and fishing.
6. Where feasible, improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
7. Consult with the Conservation Commission and other land use boards when municipal open space is to be sold, transferred, or exchanged.
8. Provide regular funding in the Capital Improvement Program for maintenance.
9. Continue to encourage volunteers and non-profits to aid in maintenance.
10. Prepare management plans for town-owned open space that outline intended long-term uses. Seek input from Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands Commission and other boards, commissions, agencies and departments.

## Criteria for Open Space Preservation

In addition to specific parcels identified as desirable open space, the following criteria can be used to prioritize future open space acquisition.

Land that:

- contains important natural resources, as outlined in the Natural Resources section,
- links or expands existing open space, or
- enhances close-to-home recreation opportunities for the public including small neighborhood parks in Rockville.

In addition, acquiring parcels zoned for business development for open space should be discouraged. Preserving portions (such as with a conservation easement) is supported if at least one of the above criteria are met and such preservation does not eliminate business development potential of the remainder of the parcel.

## Vernon's "Proposed Open Space System"

This POCD incorporates by reference the 1998 "Proposed Open Space System" and subsequent revisions, as prepared by the Vernon Open Space Task Force, in coordination with the Vernon Conservation Commission.

In cases of inconsistencies between this POCD and the Proposed Open Space System, the Planning and Zoning Commission will look to this POCD for guidance.

## Continue to Preserve Open Space

The telephone survey indicated that there is strong support for preserving additional open space in Vernon (80% support the concept). Even when asked if they would be willing to pay more in taxes to preserve open space, a majority (62%) still supported additional open space preservation.

The Open Space Task Force has identified key parcels for open space acquisition, should the owners wish to preserve the land. This Plan incorporates most of those parcels, except those located in business zones as it is the intention of this Plan to support additional business development, rather than land preservation in business zones. However, this Plan does support preserving portions of business-zoned land where such preservation meets open space acquisition criteria (see sidebar) and does not eliminate the ability to use the remainder of the parcel for economic development.

This Plan also supports the acquisition of other parcels not identified on the map, provided they also meet the criteria. Often the development process results in some portion of land being "unusable" and that portion is offered as open space. The Town should be strongly discouraged from acquiring such unusable pieces if those pieces do not meet any of the open space acquisition criteria. Collecting a fee-in-lieu of open space instead will help fund strategic and meaningful acquisitions.

Funding open space acquisition can be challenging, especially with competing priorities in a difficult economy. The Town has established some financial tools to enable a proactive approach should acquisition opportunities arise. However, often these funds are not sufficient to cover costs and instead are better suited to augment other funding sources. The phone survey indicated that Vernon residents might be willing to bond for open space (which requires a referendum).

In addition to Town purchases, open space acquisition by the State and non-profits will likely continue to play an important role in Vernon. The Town should continue to collaborate with these entities.

As discussed, greenways can help to tie the open space system together. The Town and its open space partners should continue to preserve greenways.





#### Continue to Preserve Open Space:

1. Work with the owners of managed open space (including state agencies) to permanently preserve their land.
2. Focus on preserving Desired Open Space parcels identified on the Open Space Plan.
3. Encourage open space preservation in other areas that meet the criteria listed on page 44.
4. Ensure that deeds for open space state that the property is to remain open space in perpetuity.
5. Pursue additional means of funding to purchase desirable parcels including:
  - a. State and federal grants
  - b. Bonding
  - c. Continued contributions to the Open Space Fund
  - d. Donations and other gift contributions
6. Encourage the creation of additional greenways.