
Natural, Scenic, Historical and Cultural Resources

Goals:

- > *To identify, protect and preserve natural resources, natural areas, fragile areas and scenic resources such as scenic roads, waterways, landscapes and views, farmlands and open meadows.*
- > *To plan for and protect land, water, air and wildlife resources.*
- *To prevent the potential adverse impacts of earth resource extraction or processing activities.*
- *To identify, protect and preserve important historic and cultural resources.*

Natural Resources Background:

Weston has an abundance and variety of valuable natural resources. The importance of these resources is discussed below. Conservation of natural resources is of continuing public benefit.

Topography:

Weston lies within the Green Mountains and, as a result, has terrain that presents an extreme contrast of form and elevation. The West River Valley, part of the Connecticut River watershed, runs north-south through the central part of the town. Elevations range from 1,200 to 2,200 feet above sea level. Enclosing the West River Valley are several dominant ridgelines. To the west are Peabody Hill and Holt Mountain, to the east Markham and Terrible Mountains. Much of Weston's lands have critical or serious limitations for development where steep slopes, shallow soils and high-water table conditions occur.

Forest Lands:

There are significant public and private woodlands in Weston that support commercial activities such as logging and sugaring and provide natural areas and recreational resources. In addition, forest lands contribute to the scenic beauty and rural character of Weston, including

Public forest lands include close to 10,000 acres of Green Mountain National Forest and several hundred acres of Okemo State Forest. National Forest and State Forest lands account for approximately 44% of the total land area in Weston.

The U.S. Forest Service has developed land and resource management goals for the different management areas within the Green Mountain National Forest. The majority of federal land in Weston is classified as Diverse Forest Use Management Area. The goal for these areas is to support the sustainable production of high quality sawtimber and other timber products, and to provide a mix of wildlife habitats. Public uses include motorized and non-motorized trails, dispersed campsites, and developed campgrounds. The Robert T. Stafford White Rocks National Recreation Area extends into the northwest corner of Weston. In this area, timber management is restricted to maintaining or enhancing wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, or recreational resources. Public uses are limited to non-motorized trails and snowmobile use in the winter.

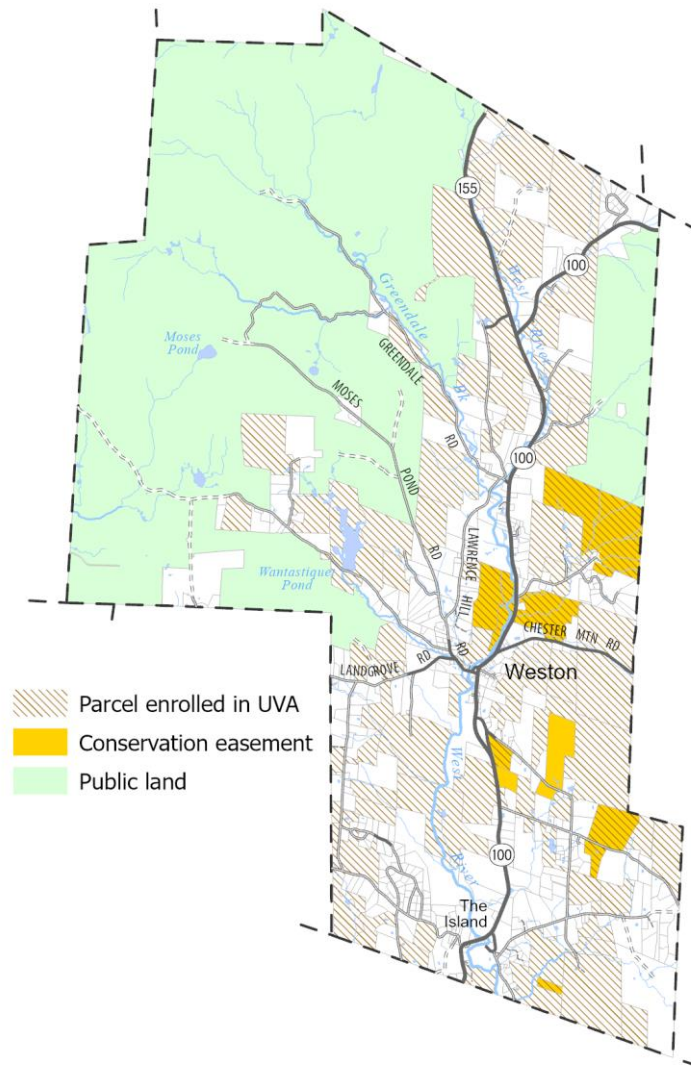
According to the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC), there were 2,028 acres of private land in Weston classified as woodland as of 2020. This is a decline from 2,434 acres in 2010. During this same period the amount of residential land increased from 7,696 acres to 8,129 acres. It is important to note that residential land can still have valuable forest land present, but it does mean that there is likely a house on the property and associated improvements. Logging and sugaring are potential resources of commercial value.

Vermont's Use Value Appraisal program (commonly referred to as "Current Use") provides a strong incentive for maintaining large blocks of forest land. To provide greater tax equity for forest landowners, and to encourage the long-term productivity of forest land, the program allows these parcels to be taxed on their resource production rather than their value for development purposes. Forest parcels

must be a minimum of 25 contiguous acres to enroll in the program (not counting the required 2 acres surrounding a dwelling) and must have a 10-year forest management plan.

The map below shows parcels currently enrolled in the Use Value Appraisal (UVA) program in Weston. These include both forest and eligible agricultural parcels. Approximately 6,349 acres or 28% of the total land area in Weston is enrolled in the UVA program. While enrollment in UVA offers a level of protection, these parcels can be taken out of the program and a property owner may be assessed a Land Use Change tax. The map also depicts public lands in the Green Mountain National Forest and Okemo State Forest and parcels with conservation easements that restrict future development. After accounting for these different areas, only approximately 27% of land in Weston is either not enrolled in UVA, under conservation easement, or public land.

Figure X-X: Town of Weston Current Use, Conservation Easement, and Public Conserved Lands



Source: Windham Regional Commission, February 2024

Natural Areas and Wildlife:

Natural areas are landscape features which have ecological, educational, scenic, and contemplative value as well as being important to the wildlife and the natural heritage of the Town. These areas provide ecological preserves of relatively unaltered environments and can provide habitats for threatened or endangered species. Protecting the critical habitats and corridors for large, roaming species helps to ensure the protection of habitat for other large and

smaller species alike, thus protecting important ecosystems within the Town.

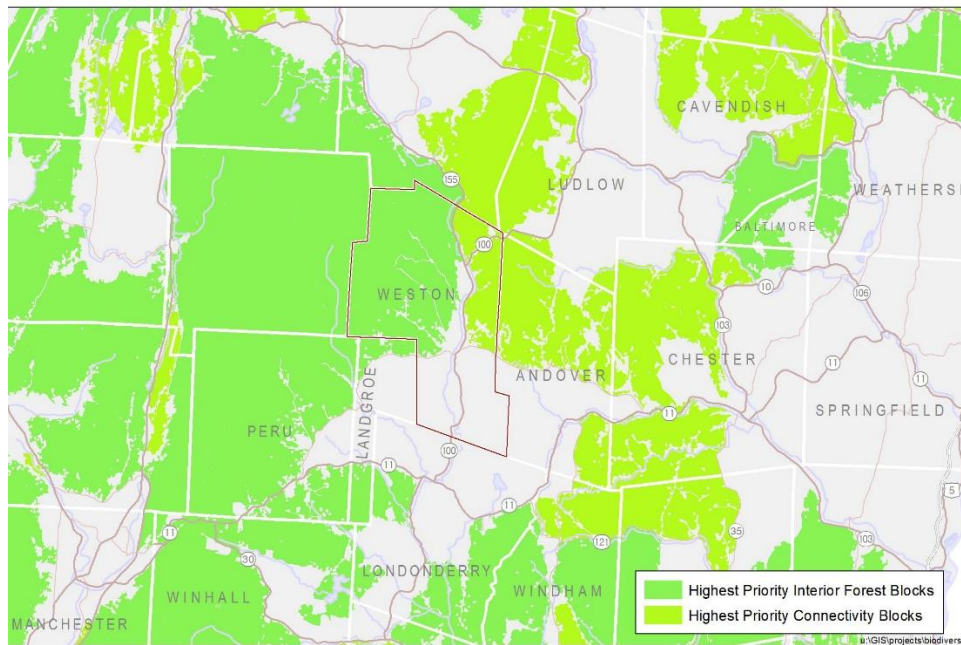
The forested landscape is the primary habitat for large mammals, including black bear, moose, deer, bobcat, fisher, coyote, otter, and beaver. —Also in this ecosystem are the smaller mammals, reptiles, amphibians, game birds, raptors, and many valued songbirds and insects which are dependent on diverse forest species.

Maintaining large tracts of connected forestland for the promotion and support of these species is critical. For example: deer wintering areas and bear habitat are necessary for the animals to continue to thrive within that area. For wintering deer, low-lying softwood stands with southern exposures provide critical shelter from deep snow and cold temperatures. Stands of mature beech and oaks and newly regenerated soft mast areas provide important feeding habitats for black bear. Road and housing construction and other forms of development, as well as outbreaks of tree disease and insect infestation, reduce both the quantity and quality of deer wintering areas. Bear travel corridors, especially along Terrible and Markham Mountain, supply a necessary link between feeding and breeding areas. These areas are particularly important since food sources and supplies vary from season to season and from year to year.

Act 171 was enacted in 2016 and requires that Town Plans identify significant forest blocks and habitat connectors and develop policies on how to reduce forest fragmentation, enhance forest health, and support ecological functions. Forest blocks refer to a large contiguous area of forest in any stage of succession not currently developed for non-forest uses. Habitat connectors are land or water that link wildlife habitats, allowing the movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants and the functioning of ecological processes.

The maps below show the Highest Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectivity Blocks in Town based on mapping completed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The Forest Block on the western and northern side of Weston largely corresponds with the lands in the Green Mountain National Forest. The Habitat Connectivity Block on the eastern side of town includes the Okemo State Forest lands and several large private parcels in the area along and between Route 100 and Route 155 on the north end of town. The first map depicts the larger region and highlights the importance of habitat connectivity at the regional scale. For example, the Okemo State Forest lands in Weston are part of an important habitat link through Andover and Chester that connects large interior forest blocks in Windham and Grafton with the Green Mountain National Forest.

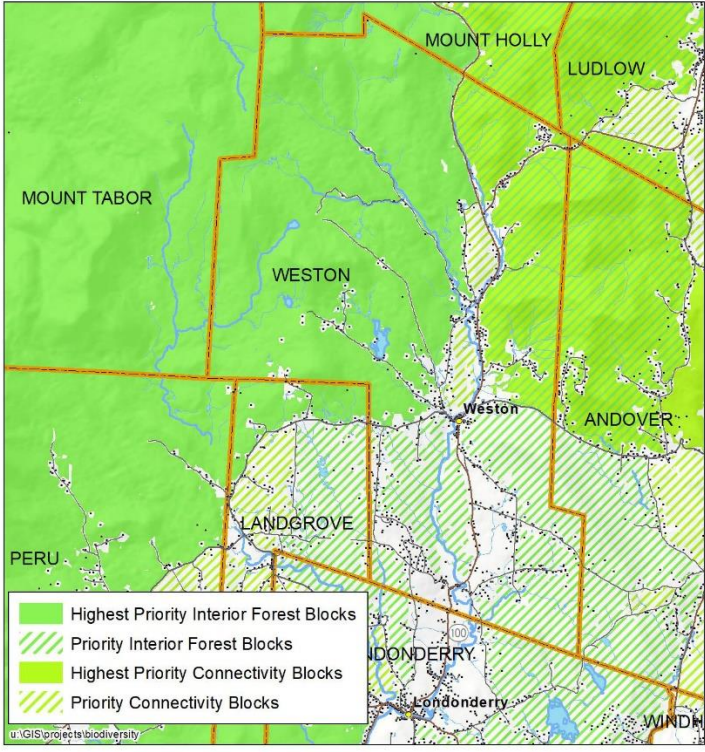
Figure X-X: VT ANR Regional Highest Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectivity Blocks



Source: Windham Regional Commission, January 2024

Habitat connections are also critical at the local level. The map below depicts Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectivity Blocks in Weston along with the local road network and existing buildings represented with black dots. Roads and more densely settled areas can present challenges for the movement and migration of animals. Route 100 and Route 155 are likely important wildlife crossing areas as they separate Okemo State Forest and Green Mountain National Forest lands.

Figure X-X: VT ANR Weston Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectivity Blocks



Source: Windham Regional Commission, January 2024

Water Resources and Quality:

Weston contains a rich variety of water resources. The most visible of these are the West River, Wantastiquet Pond and several smaller streams. These bodies of water are important fisheries, provide a critical habitat component for many wildlife species, offer opportunities for swimming and other recreational activities, and are critical to the area’s aesthetic appeal. They also supply clean water to larger waterways. Weston provides much of the headwaters of the West River. It is critical that these water resources remain free of pollution and the stream banks and riparian vegetation not be damaged.

The 2022 Vermont water quality report shows that the vast majority of waters in Weston are in good condition. The only impaired surface water is Moses Pond, located in the Green Mountain National Forest, due to acidification. The State has adopted a basin planning approach to protecting, restoring, and enhancing water resources. Lands within Weston drain into the West River Watershed (Basin 11). The Basin 11 Plan was last updated in 2021 and inventories problems that impact water quality and plans for addressing them. Relevant strategies for Weston include stormwater management planning for Town roads, requiring stormwater management and erosion control for private development, encouraging best practices for agricultural activities in proximity to waterways, and providing information and resources to property owners with on-site septic systems in proximity to water resources.

The Basin 11 Plan also recommends evaluating the removal of the Old Mill Dam to improve

habitat connectivity and the natural course and flow of the West River. The Old Mill Dam is owned and maintained by the Weston Community Association, a non-profit organization, and is an important historical resource in the village center. The Town will be completing a geomorphic study that will evaluate the impacts of the dam on upstream flooding.

Shoreland areas border waters with high scenic, resource and recreational value. Wantastiquet Pond is the primary shoreland area in the Town. The Land Use Chapter includes the Shoreland District that covers Wantastiquet Pond and a buffer around the pond and provides specific policies to preserve the pond's shoreland.

Weston's residents and businesses depend upon ground water wells for their potable water supply and disposal needs. Protecting these water resources from pollution is critical to maintaining adequate water supplies for area businesses and residents. Private and public on-site wells are regulated and permitted by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.

Surface waters are predominant landscape features throughout the Town and have often determined the location and form of settlement in Town. High surface water quality is a valuable resource, which supplies rivers that provide fish and wildlife habitat and recharge the riverine aquifers, from which a significant portion of the Town's drinking water is derived. Methods for protecting the quality of the Town's water supplies from various forms of pollution should be a priority.

Wetlands and other surface waters provide specialized habitats for fish, reptiles, and migratory birds while adding to the scenic quality of the Town. These areas, which are protected by State and Federal regulations, can provide important habitats for threatened or endangered species.

Air Quality:

Air quality is very good in the Town. Threats to air quality include combustion by-products from wood stoves, industry and manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and waste management practices. The main locally generated cause of air pollution is from vehicle emissions; however, not all of the pollutants are from sources within the Town. The topography, prevailing wind and weather system patterns result in air pollution traveling from other states and other regions of the State. One recent example of this is wildfire smoke originating in Canada that impacted local air quality in Summer 2023. Due to the transport of air pollutants, it is difficult to control all air quality at a local level. The Town is dependent upon federal and state regulations to regulate both imported and locally generated air pollution.

Soils Resources:

Soils characteristics can create opportunities for, or physical site limitations to, a variety of land uses such as: farming, forestry, and mineral extraction and land development. Prime agricultural soils are soils that are rated high for crop production potential. Weston's primary soils are limited and generally located in the river valleys, in particular along the West River north of the village. Since most primary agricultural soils are flat and well drained, these soils are also very developable. Development in the Town has traditionally been encouraged on soils suitable for in-ground sewage disposal systems.

Mineral Resources:

There are a number of resources located underground in the Town of Weston, including gravel and sand in the West River valley. Currently, underground mineral extraction does not provide a significant economic resource in Weston. In the Windham Region, sand and gravel operations are the only extractive resource that has not declined. Sand and gravel deposits will continue to be important for building foundations, fill, erosion control, road maintenance and construction needs. In recent years, there has been a decline in the accessibility of gravel and sand resources in the Windham Region for road maintenance, which has contributed to increased costs for municipalities.

Earth resource extraction and/or processing activities can have a particularly high potential for having an adverse impact to the area where such activities are located. Potential impacts

include noise, dust, increased truck traffic, air pollution, radiation, surface and groundwater pollution, siltation of streams, increased stormwater runoff, erosion and sedimentation, despoliation of the landscape, and limited utility for subsequent use of the site. For this reason, ~~in Weston,~~ gravel and sand extraction is regulated as a conditional use in Weston so that sites can be reclaimed and the quality of the environment protected.

~~Many negative factors are associated with resource extraction. Among these are noise, dust, air pollution, radiation, surface and groundwater pollution, siltation of streams, increased storm water runoff, erosion and sedimentation, despoliation of the landscape and limited utility for subsequent use of the site. The perception of the public is that extractive processes may reduce property values because of primary or secondary impacts of the proposed extractive operations such as increased traffic of large transport vehicles. Additionally, earth resource extraction or processing operations tend to be expansive and land-intensive activities that often begin to grow completely out of scale with past or existing development activity within a town. All of these factors, singly or together, may act to substantially depreciate land values in the immediate vicinity of such activities, as well as in the Town in general.~~

Scenic Resources - Landscapes and Views:

Weston's scenic landscape including: scenic roads, open lands, the West River, other waterways and water bodies, mountains, ridge tops and forests, is widely appreciated by residents and visitors and is a valuable natural and economic resource. These scenic resources provide a unique visual experience for residents and attract the significant tourism that is so important to the local economy. Conservation of scenic resources should be an important consideration in the planning and design of development, -for example as the Town considers its future needs for housing, commercial services, and community facilities.- Maintaining scenic qualities requires coordination within the Town, neighboring towns, the region and the State.

The scenic quality of Weston is derived from two major visual components: landscape form and landscape pattern.

Landscape form is the shape or topography of land, which reflects the underlying bedrock formations and past modification by glacial action. The important landscape forms in Weston are: 1) steep slopes, 2) valley floors, 3) intermediate slopes, 4) ridgelines and 5) mountain peaks and hilltops. Each of these forms has an influence on settlement and its impact on scenic quality. For example, settlement generally in each of these areas other than intermediate slopes could be extremely visible from other areas.

Landscape pattern, the other major visual component affecting scenic quality, is the distribution and relationship of features on the land related to nature or the activities of man. The important features of the landscape pattern in Weston are: 1) open fields and woodlands, 2) surface water, 3) farms, 4) scenic views, 5) scenic back roads, and 7) the village center.

The most apparent visual aspect of the Town's landscape is the contrast between open fields and the woodlands that enclose them. The fields are extremely visible and therefore vulnerable to settlement, while woodlands are better able to absorb settlement with less visual impact if tree cover is conserved.

Outside of the village center Weston's landscape pattern has evolved primarily as a result of agricultural pursuits. The isolated groupings of farm dwellings and buildings are characteristic of these activities and provide focal points of scenic and historic interest. More recently, as agricultural use has declined, second home construction has had a segmenting impact on formerlyformally open land.

There are numerous views with high scenic appeal that exist along the roads within Weston, including panoramic views to Peabody Hill, Holt Mountain and Markham Mountain. Such views also include Terrible Mountain in Andover and views to distant mountains (Stratton, Glebe, Bromley and Styles Peak), ridgelines, and along the valley of the West River. Another integral element of the scenic countryside is the network of narrow, gravel back roads comprising the town's highway system.

The village center also has high scenic appeal with its attractive village green, historic buildings and small scale. Preservation of the character of the village has been identified as a key concern of Weston residents.

Light pollution or “sky glow” is a cumulative problem. Light projecting upwards from the Town produces a glow, which diminishes the natural quality of the nighttime landscape and night sky. Special consideration should be given to lighting design in order to minimize this cumulative adverse effect of light pollution.

Historic Resources:

There are a number of structures and locations within Weston that have historical value, including sites of significant events in the history of the Town, ruins and remains of the Town’s economic history, remainders of the Town’s settlement and transportation pattern as well as stone walls and open fields.

Weston has continued to attract both residents and tourists through its compatible relationship of architecture and environment, and the character of the village center, which has been consciously maintained by past and present generations of residents. Weston’s village center, comprised of many structures of historic value, represents a significant development pattern during an important period in American history. The National Register of Historic Sites and Structures identifies the Village Center in its inventory of Historic Districts. The Weston Village Historic District (1985) is composed of 67 principal structures most of which line Route 100. The preservation of the character of the village center is very important to the people, community and economy of Weston.

The July 2023 floods had a significant impact on a number of historical properties in the village center. Past flood events have also impacted many of these same properties. Protecting these historical resources should be an additional consideration as the Town works towards improving its resiliency from future flood events.

In addition to the village, there are many structures and sites scattered throughout Weston with historical value, including unique barns and, old mill sites, all of which help to contribute to maintaining the social fabric of the community and establishing a sense of continuity between generations of citizens. Each structure, regardless of architectural style, reflects the values and standard of the period from whence it came.

Cultural Resources:

Weston is fortunate to have a large number of and strong tradition of cultural resources for a town of its size. For example, the Weston ~~Playhouse~~ Theatre Company, which was organized by a group of local residents, is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2016 has operated the Weston Playhouse on the Village Green since 1937. In 2017, the Theater Company opened a second venue at Walker Farm just north of the village center that provides a modern space for year-round theatrical productions, live music, and other special events.-

Another example is the Kinhaven Music School located on Lawrence Hill Road, which opened in 1952. Kinhaven offers summer music workshops and sessions for youth and adults. The school also hosts public concerts during the summer months.

Weston is also home to the Old Mill Museum, the Farrar-Mansur House Museum, Kinhaven Music School, two museums, the Wilder Memorial Library a 100 year old library, Old Parish Church, the Church on the Hill, New Thought Vermont, two churches and the Weston Priory, which each year draws thousands of visitors from around the world.

Weston’s cultural resources play an important part in the lives of its residents. Many people who settle in Weston come for the cultural aspects as well as the natural and built beauty of the Town. In addition, these cultural resources help attract thousands of visitors to Weston every year and contribute significantly to the vitality of the local economy. Preserving and supporting these resources should continue to be a high priority.

The July 2023 flood significantly impacted three riverfront properties on Park Street, including the Weston Playhouse, as well as other cultural facilities in the village center. As a result of the flood,

the Weston Theater Company was forced to cancel performances and move performances to the smaller Walker Farm theater. The Playhouse also sustained significant flood damage as a result of Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. Planning for flood resiliency in the village is critical for preserving these cultural resources and the quality of life and economic activity they support.

Natural Resource Land Use Policies

1. Require that land capability be an important factor in deciding how the lands of Weston will be used.
2. Require that development be discouraged and strictly regulated within the ecological zone above 2,000 feet.
3. Encourage the Town to consider acquiring open land suitable for public use and encourage gifts of land to the Town for the purposes of resource use and conservation so long as the benefits of such gifts outweigh the costs to the Town.
4. Encourage the Town to cooperate with organizations and property owners engaged in the conservation and preservation of land.
5. Require that developers of large projects incorporate open space in their projects for the purposes of recreation and resource conservation.
6. Protect the scenic and aesthetic value of the approaches to the village center, including Routes 100 and 155, Chester Mountain Road and the Landgrove Road.
7. Work to maintain the environmental, scenic and recreational value and quality of stream and riverbanks.
8. Require that development and expansion of public utility facilities and services occur within the highway or existing public utility rights-of-way corridors in order to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve greater efficiency in the expenditure of public funds.
9. Efforts shall be made to influence public utility companies and developers to bury utility lines in areas of scenic or historic value, the village center and residential subdivisions.
10. Discourage the highly visible development and extensive clearing of vegetation that could spoil the natural beauty of the ridge tops in Weston.
11. Encourage ~~the evaluation efforts to continue the preservation of~~ the impacts of the Old Mill Dam on flooding upstream.
12. Support maintaining rivers and streams in a natural state and retain existing public access.
13. Discourage development in areas where rare or threatened species are located. _
14. Settlement on lands of resource value for woodlands shall occur in patterns and densities that will not substantially reduce the area or woodland productivity of those lands. Fragmentation of forest blocks and habitat connectors should be avoided.
- 14.15. Encourage property owners to enroll in the Vermont Land Use Appraisal program for forest and agricultural lands.

Groundwater Policies:

1. Require the regulation of development within the following areas:

- Areas above 2,000 feet.
 - Drainage areas (watersheds) of upland streams.
 - Areas supplying large amounts of recharge waters to aquifers.
 - Areas characterized by steep slopes (20 per cent or more).
2. Require that any builder or developer must give proper assurances that any new water supply system or waste disposal system shall not deplete, contaminate or change the quality of any existing water supply system.

Surface Water, Wetland, Watercourses and Shoreline Policies:

1. Require that significant wetlands, watercourses and shorelines be protected by appropriate setback and frontage requirements as well as all other development standards that apply. Shorelines and stream banks shall be retained in a natural state and protected from uses and settlement that would cause erosion, prohibit public access, and reduce scenic qualities of surface waters.
2. Encourage the protection of wetlands and watercourses, in accordance with federal and state regulations, for the provision of wildlife habitats, retention areas for surface runoff, recreation and scientific value.
- 2-3. Discourage development in flood hazard areas and river corridors.

Wildlife Policies:

1. Require that development within or adjacent to areas of significant wildlife habitat as identified on Town plan maps be regulated to preserve such habitats.
2. Prohibit the development in habitats that support endangered or rare species.

Topography and Soil Policies:

1. Prohibit development in areas where the topography and soil conditions are such that development may cause contamination of surface or subsurface waters, soils, erosion or failure of waste disposal systems. Recommend restriction of development in areas with significant water storage potential for fire protection, recreation, or wildlife purposes. The Weston Town maps and the U. S. Soil Conservation Soils maps and interpretation sheets shall be utilized in determining where development can satisfactorily be located.

Mineral Resources Policies:

1. Require that the extraction or processing of resources located underground in the Town must not be permitted to impose an adverse impact upon the residents of Weston. The public interest shall be protected by regulations assuring that ~~both = the present and future~~ effects of such extraction or processing operations are not unduly adverse to the public health, safety, or welfare. ~~comfort or convenience~~ or unreasonably damaging to the value of surrounding properties.
2. Require that the following factors be considered in order to avoid undue adverse impact on the Town or its residents with the extraction or processing of earth resources:
- Noise, dust and air pollution;
 - Surface and groundwater pollution, siltation or radiation;
 - Storage and disposal of waste materials, both solid and liquid;
 - Increased storm water runoff, erosion and sedimentation;
 - Despoliation of the landscape and limited utility for subsequent use of the site;
 - Decreased highways safety and increased municipal costs due to increased traffic and accelerated deterioration of highways and bridges attributable to transportation

- activities generated by the earth resources operations;
 - Reduced property values because of primary or secondary impacts of the proposed earth resources operations.
3. Require that no new earth resource extraction or processing operation, expansion of an existing operation, or resumption of an inactive operation be permitted until a full examination of the proposed operation has shown that there will not be an unreasonable detrimental impact on the Town. Any extraction or processing proposal of earth resources shall include a plan, acceptable to the ~~Planning Commission~~Development Review Board, for the rehabilitation of the site and guarantees should be received to ensure the rehabilitation at the operators' expense. ~~State law (24 V.S.A. Section 4407(8)) permits local zoning regulations to require financial guarantees.~~
 4. ~~Prohibit~~Require that earth resource extraction or processing operations ~~, which will~~ involve no more than five acres of land at any one time.

Historic and Cultural Policies:

- ~~1.~~ ~~Strengthen the role of cultural and artistic disciplines in public education.~~
- ~~2.1.~~ Encourage community-based facilities and organizations that support cultural needs.
- ~~3.2.~~ Protect places of outstanding educational, aesthetic, archeological, cultural, or historical value from development that unreasonably impairs their character and quality.
- ~~4.3.~~ Discourage development which would adversely affect cultural resources, including their destruction or alteration, alteration of surroundings, or the introduction of non-harmonious visual, audible, or atmospheric elements.
- ~~5.4.~~ Require that publicly owned, architecturally and historically significant structures be kept as visual and cultural assets. Seek public uses and/or ownership to preserve significant historic sites or structures.
- ~~6.5.~~ Encourage rehabilitation of significant historic sites and structures. Whenever feasible, structures of historical significance shall be converted to new uses which would maintain their architectural or cultural value to the community.
- ~~7.6.~~ Encourage development which preserves the historic and architectural character of the Town, village center and rural landscape.
- ~~8.~~ Require that lands adjacent to or including historic places listed in the National Register and any local historical surveys, or areas of historical educational, cultural, scientific, architectural or archeological value be used in a manner that will be compatible with the character of their neighborhood.

Recommendations for Action:

1. In cooperation with the Weston Conservation Commission and local land trusts, identify and catalog significant natural sites that may need protection, including important wetlands and wildlife habitats, important farm and forestland parcels.
2. In cooperation with the Weston Conservation Commission and ~~the local land trust the~~ Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, identify significant wetlands and watercourses.
3. In cooperation with the Weston Historical Society, identify and catalog historic sites and structures and archeological sites within the Town and assess the need for further protective measures.

4. In cooperation with the Weston Historical Society and the Preservation Trust of Vermont, assist property owners to identify, preserve, and protect historic sites, foundations, stonewalls, and ruins located on their property.
- ~~5. The Planning Commission should consider whether there should be an~~ historical overlay district in for the village center as part of the Zoning Bylaws.
- ~~6. Consider updates to the Zoning Bylaws to reduce the fragmentation of forest blocks and habitat connectors.~~
- ~~7. Consider the adoption of River Corridor regulations as part of the Zoning Bylaws.~~
- ~~8. Ensure that flood resiliency planning for the Town take into consideration the protection of historical and cultural resources, in particular for properties in the village center.~~

~~5.~~