Natural & Cultural Resources Inventory Of Kent, CT 2009

Preface

In accord with our charge to manage the Town's natural resources, the Kent Conservation Commission is pleased to present this first edition of the Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory (NCRI). Within this document is a broad array of factual information from diverse sources, gathered for the first time in one place. The maps have been developed in collaboration with Kirk Sinclair, GIS Manager of the Housatonic Valley Association. They should be read and used to study the scope and inter-relationships of these resources.

Work began on this document in 2002. Maps showing the essential nature of Kent from a number of different vantages were our first priority. Realizing that certain relatively new analytical and spatial tools such as GIS (Geographical Information Systems) were going to be essential to the task, one of our members volunteered to go for a week of intensive training at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. Others went to regional workshops and studied existing Resource Inventories to see how towns such as ours had tackled the job.

The Town of Washington, which published its Inventory in November 2000 after five years of study and preparation, set a high standard. Since then the towns of Morris, Sherman, and Sharon have followed suit, each in distinctively different, yet admirable, ways. We are grateful for their examples and advice as we have pursued our own project.

Though Kent's Inventory is now the "finished" document you see before you, the Commission knows the job is far from done. As long as questions remain, and as new data come to light, the Kent NCRI and its digitized maps will continue to evolve—either on line or in print. The pace of this evolution—and improvement—will depend on the willingness of people within and beyond Kent who are skilled in scientific observation and/or presenting and organizing data, to contribute to the process. For the immediate future, this document is being submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission for use in its update of the Town Plan of Conservation and Development, due in 2011.

We especially hope that the NCRI will be an informative tool for those Town officers who stand on the front lines in maintaining Kent's quality of life. Just as surely, we hope that this document will serve as an educational reference for all citizens who are interested in supporting natural and cultural resource conservation. By reading about the history and character of our physical landscape and becoming aware of features that may have escaped notice before, by developing an understanding of some of the more sensitive areas that we have and why they should be preserved for the long-term health of the community, we hope to strengthen everyone's sense of stewardship.

Questions, comments, or additional information from the public and from natural resource professionals are welcome and are encouraged. Please direct your comments to the Conservation Commission Chairperson, Kent Town Hall, Kent, CT 06757.

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INTRODUCTION

A Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory is a public document prepared by a local Conservation Commission. It lists the natural and cultural resources of an area, collects the data in a usable format, and interprets the findings. It also presents recommendations for the future management of those resources. Before computers and the concept of NCRIs were introduced as essential planning tools, towns tended to gather information about themselves in a host of different, often unwieldy, ways. Forming an accurate picture at any one time was difficult. Using that information to forecast where a town might be headed and when it might get there was even more difficult.

Connecticut's towns, Kent among them, are faced with unprecedented land-use challenges today. Suburbanization has been creeping north from the large population hubs of New York City, Westchester County, the Connecticut coastline and Danbury to our south, and from Hartford, New Britain and Waterbury to the east.

Major transportation routes linking urban centers with less congested areas continue to be built and improved, making the towns of Northwest Connecticut bedroom communities for some citizens and weekend second homes for many others. Our resident population has grown from the 2,858 figure given in the U.S. *Census 2000* to an estimated 3,080 in 2005. That is a 7.8% growth, according to data from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC). CERC projects this growth to continue at a rate of 1.3% yearly with an estimated population of 3,292 by 2010.

Our town's rural character and the natural ecosystems that make up its critical parts are threatened by development that has the potential to bring irreversible changes to the quality of the life we hold dear. If Kent is to protect its rural values it must have the active engagement of its land use decision-makers and the citizens whom they represent, both in how we regulate the present and how we plan for the future.

The Role of Conservation Organizations

The Kent Conservation Commission is a late arrival on the conservation scene and a purely local one. Many other players look at Kent-related conservation issues on a regional basis and they were extremely important in getting us where we are now and in affecting where we will be in the future. Among them is the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA), currently headquartered just over the town line in Cornwall. HVA came into being in 1941 and has since worked to protect the river and its watershed from Pittsfield, MA, all the way to its mouth in Stratford, CT, on Long Island Sound.

The Housatonic River Commission (HRC) and the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut are also concerned with the river's health. The specific focus of the HRC is the regional coordination of local river management and protection efforts. The Rivers Alliance is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to promoting all the state's rivers, streams and watersheds and to educating the public about the importance of water conservation and aquatic habitats. The Litchfield Hills Greenprint Project, an initiative sponsored by The Trust for Public Land (TPL) in partnership with the HVA, assesses land conservation priorities in the area with the intention of prioritizing the most significant and vulnerable open space resources, creating new sources of funding for land protection, and ultimately increasing the acreage of protected lands in the Litchfield Hills.

The Northwest Conservation District, headquartered in Torrington, provides conservation training and documentation for local commissions and individual citizens. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) also weigh in on many issues. Locally, we have two citizen-supported land trusts—the Kent Land Trust, and the multi-town Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust—which step in at crucial times to receive private land bequests and easements or to make outright purchases of land, to protect our open spaces, environmental resources, and quality of life.

In very recent times we have seen the National Park Service enter into a partnership with a relatively new entity

known as the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area (UHVNHA) to pump additional financial resources into preserving and highlighting the area's natural and cultural riches. The UHVNHA received official Federal designation in October 2006; the authorization bill included the promise of $10 million in Federal funding to be appropriated to projects within the 29 communities embraced in this region, Kent included.

The Highlands Coalition, chiefly administered by the U.S. Forest Service with an assist from the Department of the Interior under legislation passed in 2004, is yet another player in conserving our natural resources, specifically the inland chain of forested mountains, farmlands and watersheds that fall within the four states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

About the Kent Conservation Commission

In 1961 the State of Connecticut enacted enabling legislation to create Conservation Commissions in every town in Connecticut. In the next few years dozens of towns did so, though not in many rural towns such as Kent; presumably, the natural beauty of these relatively untouched areas still seemed boundless to the towns' decision-makers. However, continuing concern led in 1972 to the passage of The Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act. This Federal act provided the impetus for the creation of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions (IWCs) throughout the state, including in Kent. In the beginning these volunteer-staffed bodies took some responsibility for forestry management and for conservation management as well as for inland wetlands. But wetlands and forestry regulation have become highly challenging responsibilities in most towns, and it became increasingly clear that conservation management was being neglected in favor of other more urgent monthly business by IWCs. In 1999, with encouragement from the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Kent set up a separate conservation commission, its members appointed by the First Selectman.

In the decade since the KCC's establishment we have grown from a very small group of three volunteers to a commission with five regular members, two alternates and two unpaid consultants whose expertise in certain areas of environmental science, data collection and management make them invaluable participants in virtually all our activities. Two members of the KCC have served since its inception; many others are now in their second terms; still others come to us having served terms on P&Z and other boards, adding other strengths to the group.

While the KCC is not a decision-making agency where land development and use are concerned, it serves as a "research agency" for Inland Wetlands commissioners in providing site-specific information and potential off-site impact studies in regard to wetlands and watersheds. The KCC also has an advisory role in working with the Planning and Zoning commissioners on identifying areas of particular conservation concern and assembling an index of open spaces with suggestions for their management. An even more important long-range task for the conservation commission is the preparation of the Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory.

In the foreword to *From Planning to Action: Biodiversity Conservation in Connecticut Towns*, authors Michael Klemens, Marjorie Shansky, and Henry Gruner declare: the most important charge of the Conservation Commission is "the accumulation of detailed natural resources data and the inclusion of those data into the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).... Within the POCD natural resources data need to be woven into all facets of the plan, in the discussions about community character, economy, recreation, and housing. The goals for a natural resources inventory include providing a town with baseline information necessary to establish the link between the policies and goals of conservation identified in a POCD and the regulations adopted by the Zoning and Inland Wetlands Commissions."

Such an inventory, the authors continue, must be well documented and of high scientific quality, must be used with consistency from application to application, and must be transparent in the sense that the data is clear, the goals of the community are clear, and the standards for the decisions arrived at in the POCD are also unambiguous.

As our present Kent landscape is, to a large extent, shaped by human actions, it is logical that we include chapters on cultural history and human resources in this report, as well.

About Our Maps

Maps are critical planning tools. The U.S. Geological Survey delivered the first full suite of topographical maps of our corner of Connecticut in the 1950s. The topography of Kent is spread across parts of four adjoining "topo" maps named

respectively *Ellsworth Quadrangle* #31 (northeastern corner of Kent); *Kent Quadrangle* #46 (southeastern corner); *Amenia Quadrangle* #30 (northwestern corner); and *Dover Plains Quadrangle* #45 (southwestern corner) The scale of these quadrangle maps is 1:24,000 (1 inch on the map=2000 feet) and contour lines are drawn to represent elevation intervals of 10 feet, the closer they lie to one another on the map the steeper the terrain represented.

The earliest USGS topo maps were developed from aerial photos with a certain amount of field checking to improve accuracy. Beginning in the late 20th century, a computer program for collecting, storing, analyzing and displaying spatial data began to transform the world of mapping.

With Geographic Information System (GIS) technology spatial features are not only represented in pictorial form, as in conventional paper maps, but as digitized information or data that can be stored in a computer and manipulated. This makes the task of mapping and resource inventory much easier and more flexible. All kinds of data layers can be combined to find correlations or areas with multiple resource values—for example, a location that combines a major aquifer and a major wildlife habitat. GIS maps and tables also have the distinct advantage of being easily updated, can be printed out at any scale and shown in a variety of formats, including on public web sites where town commissioners, citizens, students and others can study them at their convenience.

The 14 maps in our own NCRI are the work of Housatonic Valley Association's highly skilled GIS specialist, Kirk Sinclair, who has drawn on information supplied by a number of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as on information developed by commission members. To accommodate our maps to the size of our printed version of the NCRI, we have reduced each one in the book to an 11"x17" size at a scale of 1 inch=4000 feet/1:48,000. Full-sized versions, measuring 24"x36" on the same scale as the USGS topo maps, can be purchased separately from the Kent Land Use Office.

Other Data Services and Resources

From computers to remote satellites, modern technology is allowing land use planners increasingly useful tools to see "the big picture" as they grapple with change and growth. In Connecticut we have been especially fortunate in recent years in the aids provided by various governmental and private organizations. The Connecticut DEP web site www.ct.gov/dep has a great amount of natural resources information available. The University of Connecticut and its Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) maintains www.clear.uconn.edu. CLEAR uses NASA satellite-based remote sensing equipment including cameras and multispectral scanners to identify, classify and analyze changes in land cover in each of the state's 169 towns. Over a span of nearly 20 years CLEAR has tracked individual changes in the percentage of town acres that are developed, in grass, in agriculture, in wetlands, and in surface water, among other distinctions. With its sister organization, Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officers (www.nemo.uconn.edu), it aims to provide local land use decision makers with the kinds of data they need to protect natural resources, community character, and long-term economic health.http://nemo.uconn.edu/about.htm - top The Conservation Commission has made extensive use of the free DEP, NEMO and CLEAR information in developing this report.

A Starting Point Only

What follows is a picture told in words, maps, photographs, and charts of Kent as we find it. At the end of each chapter we have listed specific recommendations/actions that the Conservation Commission believes the community and/or local government may want to address in the near future. Periodic updates of this document will be essential if the NCRI is to remain relevant. The Kent Conservation Commission invites you, our readers, to comment on what you find here, to question our analyses when you differ with them and to participate actively in improving this baseline information as we continue to revise data and developments in the future.

For in the end we will conserve only what we love.
We will only love what we understand.
And we will understand only what we are taught.
Baba Dioum, Senegalese conservationist
Speech to Intl Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1968