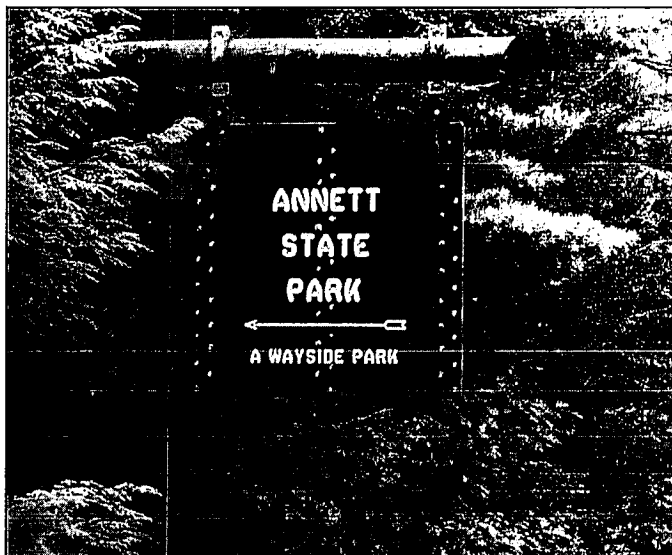


Sustain Our Natural Resources



The entrance to Annett State Park, which is one of Rindge's protected natural areas.

Many individuals who call Rindge home are deeply attached to its natural beauty—its wooded hills, extensive wetlands, and clear, clean ponds and lakes. Residents are justly proud of locations like the Cathedral of the Pines, known the world over, as well as locally recognized, natural jewels like Annett State Forest. The story behind this protected parcel of land involves generosity and a sense of responsibility to the land itself. In 1922, Albert Annett, a conservationist, member of the Governor's Council, and owner of a box company, gave the State of New Hampshire the 1300 acres which formed the core of the State Forest now named after him. Much of this land, which included a large portion of the Hubbard Pond shoreline, is now crisscrossed with trails and stocked with trees.

Seven of these acres, originally called Camp Annett, today form a beautiful wooded picnic area in a natural amphitheater. The camp once housed the 118th Company of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), an organization set up during the Great Depression to provide employment for young men. Two hundred men living in barracks each earned \$30 a month working to construct roads, build fire trails, and plant over one million tree seedlings. CCC members assisted in the recovery efforts following the flood in 1936, and then returned to Camp Annett in 1938 to clear trails and construct fire lanes following the Great Hurricane. Another section of the Forest, Camp Quinapoxet, provided a summer home for more than 100,000 Boy Scouts during its forty years of operation. Today, the Annett State Forest encompasses 1,494 acres of woodlands and water resources, including Tophet Swamp, the Black Reservoir, sections of the Gridley River, and Hubbard Pond. These lands are protected permanently and open to all who appreciate the outdoors.

Many Rindge residents cite natural beauty as the number one reason they chose to live in town. The town is currently over 70% forested although, according to Society for the Protection of NH Forests, only about 12% of usable land in Rindge is permanently protected from future development. Another 19% of Rindge is wetland, which also cannot be developed, and almost 7% is covered by lakes and ponds. Environmentalists like Brian Donahue recommend that towns in New England work to permanently protect 40% of their usable land.

Today there are healthy populations of deer, moose, black bear, fishers, coyotes, bobcats, and otters in Rindge. But concerned citizens point to the construction of Route 202 to Winchendon—and the shopping centers that have sprung up along the way—as evidence that urban sprawl is creeping in this direction. In addition, summer residents are becoming full time residents. The town's population has

increased by more than 60% in the last 20 years and, as Figure 4 on page 5 indicates, building permits have tripled in the past five years. Lakeshore development is also an issue in Rindge. Leaking septic systems, lawn chemicals, shoreline erosion and timber cutting next to ponds can increase pollution. Proponents of this approach worry that too much of the remaining land will be developed, which would cause the town to lose its scenery, recreation, tourism, forestry, clean water, and wildlife.

Land protection makes sense for economic as well as environmental reasons. According to the American Farmland Trust, which developed a process for analyzing land use costs based on community services, in the long run protected land costs a town less than land used for residential development. This type of analysis has been used in eight towns in New Hampshire to compare residential, commercial/industrial, and open-space land use categories. In almost every community assessed, residential land use costs more than it generates in revenue, whereas open space lands provide a net asset in terms of tax revenues. For example, in Peterborough researchers found that on average residential development cost the town \$1.08 per dollar of income. Open space cost Peterborough \$0.54 per dollar of income, and commercial/industrial development cost the town \$0.31 per dollar of income. In every New Hampshire town studied so far, open space protection ends up being less expensive than residential development per dollar of income (see Figure 7).

Undeveloped forests and wetlands prevent pollution from entering into underground aquifers, lakes, and streams. Wetlands in particular are valuable for removing pollution. Marshes and swamps have plants, soils and bacteria that filter out harmful chemicals and sediments. Road salt, chemical or oil spills, fertilizer use, underground storage tanks, and leaking septic systems are some of the likely sources of groundwater pollution. The protection of undeveloped land and clean water can be accomplished through restrictive zoning, land conservation and acquisition efforts, enforcement of laws and regulations designed to protect our natural resources, and public education.

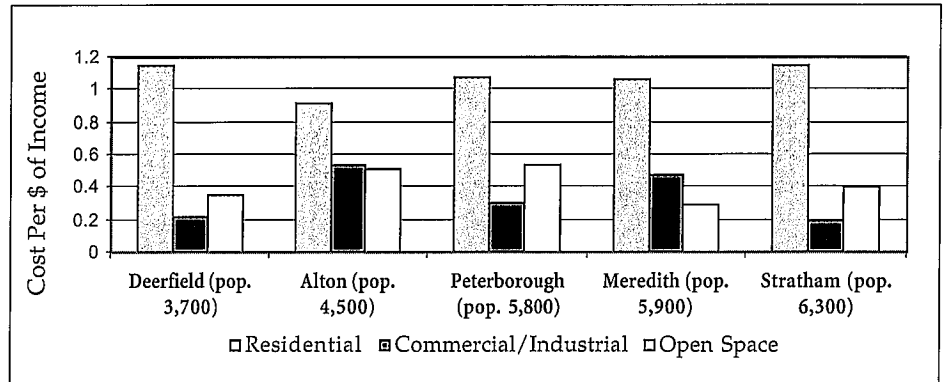


Figure 7. Comparison of Costs for Community Services by Type of Land Use in New Hampshire Towns

Consider a Moratorium on New Residential Construction

Rindge led the Monadnock region in new housing starts in 2001-02. This pace of construction challenges the town's ability to make well-researched long term natural resource planning decisions. Proponents of this approach encourage town officials to consider a temporary ban on residential development until residents and officials can decide how much growth they want. State law allows towns to pass an ordinance for a one-year moratorium on development under RSA 674.23. According to Christopher Northrop, a principal planner working for the state, "The whole idea of this ordinance is to slow things down to allow the town time to catch up. Then elected officials will be able to provide whatever it is they need to provide for the amount of growth they are having in their community." Supporters of this approach believe the planning board needs to schedule a series of public hearings in 2003 to gather and assess public opinion about a proposed moratorium before it votes on whether to impose a one-year halt on residential development.

While residents are considering the question of a moratorium on residential development, town officials need to accelerate their efforts to revise and rewrite a comprehensive Open Space Protection Plan. Updating this chapter of the town's Master Plan will help identify areas and landscape conditions that are important for ecological and social values. An up-to-date Open Space Plan is the foundation for long-term regulatory measures, municipal land acquisition, and any other public policy issue involving conservation.

Protect Land through Public and Private Efforts

Supporters of this approach believe that Rindge should permanently protect more of its undeveloped land from future development. This can be done through both public and private efforts. The town could acquire land by creating a Capital Reserve Fund, appropriating town monies into this fund, and directing the Conservation Commission to purchase parcels targeted for conservation directly from willing sellers. Private landowners interested in protecting land can do so temporarily through current use taxation or permanently through conservation easements. Current use taxation means that the land would be assessed at a lower value as long as the landowner agrees to keep the land undeveloped. A conservation easement provides landowners with a more permanent way to protect land, but still live on it and use it for forestry or agriculture. Models for creating easements have been developed by the Society for the Protection of NH Forests and are available through the NH Department of Environmental Services. Assistance for landowners interested in land conservation is available locally through the Monadnock Conservancy.

Rindge is scheduled to adopt a Water Resources Management and Protection Plan in the fall of 2002. The plan calls for a Groundwater Protection Program and stepped-up efforts to protect future drinking water supplies. The areas targeted in the Protection Plan include the Hubbard Pond and Converse Meadows stratified drift aquifers. Stratified drift deposits are layers of sand and gravel that were deposited by running water from melting glaciers 40,000 years ago. They make very good aquifers because they typically have abundant space between the gravel and sand where water can flow freely. These two areas are especially important because of the large size of their watersheds, the low density of nearby development, and the high yield of stratified drift deposits located there. New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage Program (LCHIP) and the NH Source Water Protection program help towns to purchase easements on land to protect sources of future drinking water.

Support Fair and Consistent Enforcement Efforts

Environmental laws and town codes are only as good as their enforcement, and supporters of this approach argue that enforcement efforts need to be implemented fairly and consistently. As a result of complaints received about excessive cutting in wetland areas, the Rindge Selectmen have recently hired a code enforcement officer. This official is charged with enforcing wetlands, zoning, and sign codes, ordinances and regulations. The position is currently funded at 20 hours per week. Supporters see this new position as a step in the right direction.

The activities of the enforcement officer and citizen response to enforcement efforts need to be closely monitored, especially during the initial phases of education and enforcement. Violations of town rules and the collection of fines should be well documented. In addition, the roles and activities of similar officials—such as the building inspector and health officer—should be monitored and assessed in conjunction with this new position.

The enforcement of laws and codes that relate to environmental protection, clean water standards, and residential and commercial construction need to be assessed in a careful and comprehensive manner by a committee of elected officials and interested volunteers.

Strengthen Efforts to Educate Residents

Groups of residents, in consultation with the Conservation Commission and the Recreation Department, need to design effective ways of educating citizens about our public lands. Facilitating meetings between hunters, hikers, snowmobile riders, and bird watchers would help people become more environmentally aware. In addition, residents need to have clear information about town, state, and federal regulations related to natural resource protection. Sometimes a pamphlet or newsletter may provide sufficient information. In other situations, workshops or field training exercises may be needed. Maps, brochures, and kiosks could be used to help local residents and visitors learn more about the outdoor opportunities that are available and the regulations that ensure the appropriate use of our natural resources.