



**TOWN of CENTER HARBOR
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
P.O. BOX 140
CENTER HARBOR, NH 03226**

**Tel: 603-253-4561
Fax: 603-253-8420**

INFORMATION SHEET – NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY (“NRI”)

WHAT IS A NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY?

At its simplest, an NRI is the identification, description and compilation of existing natural resources data. An NRI is a comprehensive index that lists and describes important naturally occurring resources within a given locality by using maps, documentation of mapped data, and descriptive reports. It is used as a screening tool to identify areas where more site-specific assessments may be required and provides recommendations based on the information that has been obtained.

WHY IS A NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY IMPORTANT?

New Hampshire’s Municipal Conservation Commissions are established by state statute RSA 36-A:2: “for the proper utilization and protection of natural resources and for the protection of the watershed resources of said city or town”. The law also specifically states as a basic requirement that Conservation Commissions “shall conduct research into its local land and water areas” and “shall keep an index of all open space and natural, aesthetic and ecological areas with the plan of obtaining information pertinent to the proper utilization of such areas, including lands owned by the state or lands owned by a town or city”. The index referred to in this law is a Natural Resources Inventory.

There are good reasons to prepare an NRI besides the statutory requirement. In order to protect local natural resources, they must first be located and identified. Until an NRI is conducted and the information is compiled, many communities do not have a clear picture of where resources are located, which are significant to them and why. A community that understands and values its local natural resources will likely take action to protect them.

A major accomplishment of an NRI is the provision of visual images (in the form of maps and photos), associated data tables and descriptions....along with a better understanding and appreciation of the community’s natural resources. Importantly, a comprehensive NRI provides the basis for land conservation and planning; it allows for documented natural resources information to be included in local planning and zoning activities.

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HOW CAN A NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY HELP OUR TOWN?

A Natural Resource Inventory is the first step in CONSERVATION PLANNING (the development of a vision for the future ecological health of an area). An NRI, while a substantial project, is not an end in itself, but an important tool for use in efforts to protect a community's natural resources.

It is used as a reference to prioritize areas for conservation, to review development proposals, to evaluate effects of land use and may become a very important part of a town's Master Plan. An NRI can be used as a guide in setting priorities for future land and easement acquisitions. An NRI serves as a valuable tool for public education and outreach.

Surrounding communities that currently have an NRI in place include: Meredith, New Hampton, Sandwich and Tamworth.

SUMMARY

In summary, ways that an NRI can be utilized by Town Officials, Land Use Boards, other interested Community Groups and Citizens include:

- Documentation of current conditions so that changes over time can be assessed
- Development of a "Conservation Plan"
- Education of local officials and the public about their community's natural resources
- Initiation and support of land protection efforts
- Identification and protection of habitat
- Providing a basis for land use efforts
- Development or updating the Natural Resources section of the municipal Master Plan
- Evaluation of the efforts of proposed land use and zoning changes
- Development of amendments to existing zoning ordinances
- Screening of development proposals