

NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORIES

A GUIDE FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE COMMUNITIES AND CONSERVATION GROUPS



Tools for Conservation in Your Community



What is a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI)?

A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) compiles information on important, naturally occurring resources within a given locality (e.g., municipality, watershed, or region), such as forests, farmlands, streams, lakes, wetlands, and rocky ridges. Cultural resources, such as historic, scenic, and recreational assets are often included in an inventory. NRIs are comprised of maps, data, and a report that describes the resources, project goals and recommendations for next steps. As well as being a stand-alone product, the NRI can also be integrated into a master plan, conservation plan or watershed plan.

By visualizing an area's resources—where they occur and how they relate to each other, their surroundings, and existing development—a NRI provides a strong foundation for informed land-use planning and decision-making. NRIs also serve as the basis for identifying conservation priorities and other strategies, such as local regulations to protect natural resources, and identify the need for more detailed studies such as wildlife habitat assessment or wetland evaluation.

Determining the goals and scope of a NRI

Defining short- and long-term goals at the outset of a NRI will help to determine the appropriate approach and scope of the project. Community priorities, staff or volunteer time, technical capacity, and available budget are also important factors. Key questions to consider include:

- Why do you want to develop or update a NRI?
- Are there specific priorities you want to address?
- What are the community's needs and concerns?
- How will the NRI be used?

What to include in a NRI

A Basic NRI includes readily available data that can be used to describe and assess the current status of known natural resources – and no field work is required for a Basic NRI. Once completed, the need for additional data or more detailed studies can be determined. *The Natural Resources Inventory Guide* suggests components to include in a Basic NRI and provides information about publicly available data sources. The guidebook also presents options for conducting Detailed



Inventory Studies to supplement existing data and enhance the NRI. This may include collecting field data. Additional data sets often exist at the local level. Be sure to check with your municipal offices, regional planning commissions and local and regional land trusts to find out about available data at the start of the NRI project.

Putting the NRI to work

The results of the NRI should be available for use by all municipal boards, interested community, watershed and conservation groups, and local residents. Some applications of an NRI include:

- Public education
- Identification of conservation priorities
- Land conservation planning
- Environmental review of development proposals
- Master Plan updates
- Zoning and subdivision regulation updates
- Watershed assessment and planning

Local Examples of NRI Approaches

New Hampshire communities and conservation groups have approached the NRI process in a variety of different ways. For example, in the towns Bath, Campton and Jefferson volunteers on the conservation commission worked on creating their NRIs. Several other communities, such as Pembroke, Washington, Jaffrey, Somersworth and Epping hired natural resources consultants or regional planning commissions to complete their NRIs. Inventories that span multiple municipalities are often completed for regional plans, for example, Bear-Paw Regional Greenways (a regional land trust in southeastern NH) incorporated the NRI as part of their conservation plan. The Newfound Lands Region Watershed Master Plan includes a comprehensive inventory of natural resources in the municipalities in the Newfound Lake watershed.

SUGGESTED NRI COMPONENTS

Water Resources

- Rivers, streams, lakes and ponds
- Groundwater and aquifers
- Floodplains
- Wetlands
- Shorelands

Wildlife and Habitats

- Includes species of greatest conservation need and associated habitats (see NH Wildlife Action Plan), rare plant and animal species and significant natural communities

Farmlands

Forest Resources

Unique Geologic Resources

Unfragmented Habitat Blocks

Cultural Resources

- Historic resources
- Scenic resources
- Recreation resources

Conservation Lands and Land Use

- Conservation and public lands
- Zoning and tax maps

Climate Conditions and Projections

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other components relevant to your community or region that you would like to add.

WHERE TO GET HELP:

UNH Cooperative Extension's Natural Resources program provides assistance and guidance to communities and conservation groups getting started on a Natural Resources Inventory. For more information, contact:

Amanda Stone

Natural Resources and Land Conservation Specialist
UNH Cooperative Extension, Durham, NH
amanda.stone@unh.edu

