

Executive Summary

Why Are We Planning for Open Space Conservation Now?

Whether it is the town's water resources, its farmlands, its wildlife habitats, its rural roads, or the Shawangunk Ridge, Gardiner residents have great appreciation for the town's resources. They provide clean drinking water. They help to bolster the local economy. They provide habitat for wildlife. They contribute to the town's scenic and rural character.

Preserving these resources for the future requires a long-term vision. The town is now in the right place for this vision. Gardiner's idyllic setting, combined with its excellent soil and water resources, is attracting new residents. Gardiner is beginning to see the type of development pressure that has substantially altered the character of communities throughout the southern stretches of the Hudson Valley. Taking steps to conserve our most important open space resources now will benefit Gardiner economically, and it will help to ensure that the town's most important resources are preserved for this and future generations.

What is This Plan About?

This plan is about the sustaining the community's aquifer resources. If the town's major aquifer recharge areas, along the route 208 corridor, the Shawangunk Kill and Wallkill River, are to be sustained for future generations, lands in the valley must be conserved. And, as we have learned from other growing communities, is easier to maintain water quality now than it is to clean it up later. For example, by conserving the Catskill and Delaware watersheds, New York City has avoided most of the \$8 billion in estimated costs to construct water treatment facilities.ⁱ

This plan is about Gardiner's fiscal health. Simply put, cows do not go to school or drive our roads. Nationwide, for every dollar that is received, farmland requires \$0.36 in services (such as schools, roads, water, sewer, police and fire services), while residential development requires \$1.16 in services (commercial development requires even less – \$0.27).ⁱⁱ More locally, a 2005 study commissioned by the Town of Rochester came to a similar conclusion: for every dollar of revenue received, the town spent \$1.17 in services for residential development, while for every dollar of revenue received for open space and for commercial development, the town spent just \$0.18.ⁱⁱⁱ

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This plan is about maintaining a sustainable local economy. Gardiner's farms provide a source for local consumption. In a country where the average produce item travels 1,500 miles before reaching our mouths, Gardiner's citizens have the option of purchasing freshly-picked produce grown on Gardiner soil for over half of the year.^{iv} Likewise, recreation and tourism are major sectors in the region that are dependent on the conservation of open space, wildlife, and agricultural resources.

What is Included in This Plan?

This plan serves as both an inventory of Gardiner's open space resources and as a strategic plan of action for conservation. It includes several key components, which are summarized below.

- **Resource Inventory and Analysis** of Gardiner's natural systems, working landscapes, and cultural and recreational landscapes (Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the resources and the inventory maps are included in Appendix A).
- **Conservation Planning Areas Map** and summary, which identifies important landscape "character areas" of the town and the resources within them (Chapter 3).
- **Priority Conservation Network Map**, which identifies the most important conservation hubs and corridors in the town (Chapter 4).
- **A Strategic Plan of Action** for achieving the conservation goals of the community (Chapter 5).
- **A Summary of Recommended Tools** to be considered in the town's future land conservation program (Chapter 6).
- **Open Space Priority Area Rating Criteria** developed to help identify the priority conservation network (Appendix A).

What Is the Priority Conservation Network?

The **Priority Conservation Network** is a system of **conservation hubs** or large, unfragmented areas of exceptional diversity and productivity for wildlife and humans (important aquifer recharge areas, farmlands and wildlife habitats); and **conservation corridors**, or connections between the conservation hubs. The **living landscape** between the hubs and corridors can also be planned and settled in a way that helps to maintain the function of the conservation network.

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The **Conservation Network** consists of eight conservation hubs and six conservation corridors. The resources associated with each of these hubs and corridors are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this plan, and the Conservation Network Map (also located in Chapter 4) illustrates these areas geographically.

Conservation “Hubs”:

- Shawangunk Ridge
- Shawangunk Kill South
- Shawangunk Kill/Wall Kill Confluence
- Galeville Grasslands
- Wallkill North
- Rt. 208 North Farmlands
- Plattekill Gorge
- Rt. 208 South Farmlands

Conservation Corridors:

- River to Ridge Corridor
- Palmaghatt Kill Corridor
- Mara Kill Corridor
- Wallkill River Corridor
- Shawangunk Kill Corridor
- Route 208 Wetland Corridor

Together, the conservation hubs total approximately 13,000 acres (or 45% of Gardiner’s land area). Approximately 4,800 acres (or 17% of Gardiner’s total land area) are currently permanently protected. However, most of this protected land is on the Shawangunk Ridge and very little of the valley is protected.

The plan recommends conservation of an additional 1,500 acres within 5 years. At least half of this 1,500 protected acres should be in the foothills and valleys, which are currently most vulnerable to development and contain lands for aquifer recharge and agriculture. **The plan’s intention is not to require landowners to conserve their lands, but rather to provide options and financing tools so that the town can work with landowners that choose to do so.**

What are the Major Recommendations of this Plan?

This plan calls for a comprehensive approach to conservation that is balanced with land-use and settlement patterns that support the town’s open space resources. It also calls for a conservation financing plan that is appropriate to Gardiner’s fiscal setting.

The three major recommendations of the plan are as follows:

I. Create a Land Conservation Program.

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The land conservation program is the primary framework for implementation of conservation projects. The town would work with willing landowners, conservation organizations, and other partners to conserve lands within the priority conservation network through conservation easements, donations, purchase and other tools.

- 2. Develop a Comprehensive Approach to Conservation and Development.**
An integrated approach for future planning in the Town of Gardiner would help to achieve land use patterns that respect and build upon the town's water resources, farmlands, and natural habitats. Future planning efforts should consider open space conservation and settlement patterns jointly, to respect the community's major needs and concerns regarding future growth, such as aquifer resources, water availability, wastewater treatment, housing affordability, traffic, schools, and overall fiscal health of the town.
- 3. Create a Fiscally-responsible Land Conservation Strategy.**
A strategic and comprehensive financing program is essential to open space program implementation. A financing program for Gardiner should be backed by a local commitment that can leverage matching funds from various sources. The financing strategy should take into consideration the costs of conservation of the priority conservation network in a fiscally-responsible manner.

How Can the Town Get Started?

The Strategic Action Plan (Chapter 5) identifies many steps that the town can take to begin implementing this open space plan. Immediately, the town can get started down this path by implementing the recommendations that follow. More detail on these and other recommendations is provided in Chapter 5.

- **USE THE PLAN DATA IN CURRENT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**
- **CREATE RECOMMENDED COMMITTEES TO OVERSEE RESPECTIVE CONSERVATION EFFORTS: CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE; AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE; AND CONSERVATION FINANCE COMMITTEE**
- **CONDUCT PILOT PROJECTS TO BUILD MOMENTUM FOR THE LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM**

Conclusion

This plan is a comprehensive inventory and analysis of Gardiner's open space resources. It is a plan that was created using the best available scientific knowledge and ecological data and balanced with community values and ideals. Conservation of a significant portion of the Priority Conservation Network would paint a future in Gardiner that most residents would like to see. It would help to protect the town's vulnerable water resources. It would lead to conservation of significant areas of working farmlands, sustaining the local economy and protecting aquifer

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resources in the process. It would lead to significant conservation of the Shawangunk Ridge, closing smaller, key gaps in important areas such as the cliff and talus slopes. It would lead to balanced conservation of other important natural areas throughout town such as the grasslands, the Plattekill Gorge, and the river greenbelts. It would lead to trail connections for people, access to the town's rivers and natural areas, and expanded opportunities to capture the town's recreational and agri-tourism potential. It would help to protect scenic views of the Shawangunk Ridge, and provide a future for the town that sustains the quality of life that Gardiner's residents have grown to love.

ⁱ Draft New York State Open Space Conservation Plan. November 2005.

ⁱⁱ American Farmland Trust. Cost of Community Services Fact Sheet.

http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27757/FS_COCS_11-02.pdf. November 2002.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bonner, Margaret and Francis Gray. Cost of Community Services Study. Town of Rochester, NY. 2005.

^{iv} Pirog, Rich. "[Checking the Food Odometer: Comparing Food Miles for Local Versus Conventional Produce Sales in Iowa Institutions.](#)" Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. July 2003.