



Every Acre Counts: the Newfound Watershed Master Plan

Why the Newfound Watershed Master Plan Is Important to You

By Boyd Smith

The economic future of towns from Bristol to Plymouth depends in large part on the good health of Newfound Lake and the environment of its 63,150-acre watershed. Hundreds of people in this region derive their livelihoods in some manner from the presence of this clean, beautiful lake. The success of the tourist, homebuilding, and services industries depends on the thousands of people who visit the lake and its environs every summer, and those fewer in number who live here year 'round or return to visit during the winter. Yet potential harm to both land and water looms on the horizon and with it the possibility of lasting damage to the local economy.

We all know Newfound Lake as one of the cleanest, clearest lakes in the Northeast. What we often don't appreciate is how connected the health of the land and forests is to water quantity and quality. In a powerful attempt to head off potential harm to our irreplaceable natural resources, the Newfound Lake Region Association (NLRA) is conducting a massive planning study – one of the largest of its kind in New Hampshire - that will soon give us the answers we need to protect our watershed.

This article is the first in a series about *Every Acre Counts: The Newfound Watershed Master Plan*. A watershed is a natural basin that directs rain and snow melt to a common discharge point. In our case, the highlands of Alexandria, Bridgewater, Bristol, Groton and Hebron, as well as parts of Danbury, Orange, Plymouth, and a speck of Dorchester form the watershed boundary, with the Newfound River receiving the runoff. While each town must choose its own policies, watershed considerations obviously transcend municipal boundaries.

The Master Plan is only that; a Plan, not official public policy. It is intended to inform the public and give local government leaders a guide to effective policy to protect the watershed. The Plan is the work of the Newfound Lake Region Association and our project partners at the University of New Hampshire, Plymouth State University, the Newfound Area School District, Jeffrey H. Taylor & Associates (an expert planning consultancy), and the NH Department of Environmental Services. The Plan will show how to balance land and water protection with natural resource use and development.

Key components of the science behind the Plan will be explained by project experts in this space over the next few months, and include:

- **Community Opinion Surveys.** Dr. Brian Eisenhauer and his colleagues from the Plymouth State University Center for the Environment surveyed almost 2,000 watershed land owners and received close to 800 responses, for an above-average response rate of 41 percent. Among the survey's many significant conclusions: protecting water quality is a top priority of local land owners.
- **Master Plan and Demographic Analyses.** Steve Whitman, Senior Planner for Jeffrey H. Taylor & Associates, has analyzed master plans, regulations, and demographic trends of the nine watershed towns. His work shows that community visions and aspirations are not supported by existing land-use regulations. With population growth projected at roughly 20 percent over the next decade, taking the steps needed to realize the vision is both critical and urgent.
- **Water Quality.** The NLRA and scientist Bob Craycraft of the UNH Center for Freshwater Biology have monitored Newfound Lake water quality for more than 20 years. Last July, Bob and his team published the results of an intensive 18-month study of tributaries entering Newfound Lake, designed to

better understand watershed hydrology and nutrient loading. Near-shore water quality, sediment sampling, and periphyton (algal) sampling was completed in 2008 and a final report is due next May. Lake and stream baseline water quality data will be critical in evaluating recommendations for actions to meet water quality objectives within Class A Newfound Lake and its many tributaries.

- **Natural Resources and Economics.** The Newfound watershed is home to some of the cleanest water, most productive forests, and highest quality wildlife habitat in New Hampshire. Contributing authors from the Forest Society, the NH Timberland Owners Association, the NH Department of Fish and Game and the NH Department of Environmental Services will describe the exemplary natural resources that the Plan is intended to protect, as well as their role in our local economy.

The Watershed Master Plan project team confers quarterly with a steering committee of residents and Planning Board members to help ensure the project meets local needs. The greatest value of this project will come from all watershed stakeholders being aware of this unique opportunity to direct their future, and taking part in making the Plan a practical, science-based document to help guide their policy choices. A draft Plan will be completed by next May and presented for public comment, with Plan completion scheduled for September 2009.

We hope that you watch for these articles over the next few months to learn more about the research behind the Watershed Master Plan. To view completed reports and presentations, as well as the draft Vision Statement and Plan outline, visit the NLRA web site (www.Newfoundlake.org) under the Watershed Master Plan tab. We hope to hear from you at public meetings or around town. You can also share your ideas with the NLRA at info@Newfoundlake.org.

Author and affiliation: Boyd Smith is the Director of the Newfound Lake Region Association, a member-supported nonprofit whose mission is to protect Newfound Lake and its watershed. The Association – through education, programs and collaboration – promotes conservation and preservation of the region’s natural, social and economic resources.



Mt. Cardigan, Bear Mtn. and Newfound Lake (courtesy Newfound Photography)