

Watershed Master Plan – Why Should We Have One?

By Boyd Smith, May 2009

For the past few weeks, since completion of the first draft of *Every Acre Counts: The Newfound Watershed Master Plan*, I have been meeting with local Select and Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions to present the Plan and answer questions. The most consistent question is, “Why do we need a watershed master plan for the Newfound Region”?

Imagine my surprise to hear this after working on the project for nearly three years! Then it hit me – just because I am immersed in something doesn’t mean everyone else is (duh). This basic question must be answered convincingly for the ideas of *Every Acre Counts* to take root. So here’s my answer to “Why?” boiled down for quick consumption:

- **Shared Vision and Resources.** The Master Plans of all nine watershed towns, as well as the results of a recent watershed-wide community survey by Plymouth State University, clearly show that residents place high value on their healthy forests, clean water and rural communities. In short, people overwhelmingly love the area for what it is. In addition, the economic vitality of our region depends on preserving a healthy environment. Declines in water quality and scenery could result in millions of dollars of lost revenue and hundreds of lost jobs.
- **Threats are Real.** With the increasing rain and flooding of the past few years predicted to continue due to climate change, water quality and quantity are both threatened. The best way to prevent flooding and protect water quality is to maintain healthy forests and suitable woodland buffers between any development (houses, roads, parking lots, lawns etc.) and surface water. Growth projections of an additional 500 homes built in the watershed over the next 10 years will test our ability to preserve precious natural resources.
- **Land Use Controls are Inadequate and Uncoordinated.** “Zoning” can be a hot-button issue, as everyone who owns land is affected. The main purpose for zoning is to guide growth and land use to meet the vision of a town’s Master Plan. Unfortunately, between weaknesses in existing land use regulations and even greater weakness in enforcement, there is currently a large gap between rising threats on our land and water and outdated protections currently in place. In addition, for the health of our environment and our economy to last into the future, towns need to cooperate and take a coordinated, watershed-wide approach to land use planning.
- **Every Person Counts.** Because we each have an impact on the land, the most personal answer to “Why?” is that each and every one of us has an important role and responsibility to shape our future.

Every Acre Counts is a science-based natural resource planning document designed to protect our water quality and preserve our healthy forests and wildlife habitat by giving

towns the tools they need to make sound policy decisions. These tools are necessary to accommodate future growth in a way that preserves the character of the land and water that we all value so highly.

A **working draft** of *Every Acre Counts* will be available by **May 22d** on the NLRA Web site (<http://www.newfoundlake.org/watershedmasterplan.html>). There will be a **public presentation and discussion** on the draft on **June 15th from 6 – 8 pm** at the Bridgewater Town Hall on Rte. 3A in Bridgewater. Revisions will be made during July and August, with the final Plan released, with electronic and printed copies to all the watershed towns, in September.

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