

Here is the Planning Commission's **PROPOSED DRAFT REVISION** of the '**Natural Resources**' section of the **Bethel Town Plan**. By State Statute, the Town Plan is revised every five years. The Planning Commission will hold a duly warned public hearing in mid-June on this and, depending on comments received then, will transmit it to the Select Board, which will hold a hearing at the end of July. Public comments are appreciated. Formal adoption by the Select Board is anticipated by August 13, 2006.

## **X. NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **A. BACKGROUND:**

Bethel's forested, farmed, and open land resources as well as its water and wildlife resources are key elements in defining rural character. The quality and quantity of Bethel's natural resources and the character of place they create are primary ingredients in maintaining our health and economic welfare.

It is the fundamental goal of this Plan to sustain and enhance the integrity and diversity of the natural resource system within Bethel. Therefore it is the policy of the Town to develop and implement practices that conserve natural resources and to insure that future land use activities are not detrimental to the environment.

### **B. GROUNDWATER**

Groundwater from wells is the primary water source in Bethel. Therefore, protective and preventative measures to ensure the quality and sustainability of this resource are critical. The quality of Bethel's groundwater is generally excellent. However, there is a risk for groundwater contamination from a variety of sources including hazardous waste sites, failing septic systems, old industrial sites, industrial floor drains, agricultural practices, road salt, leaking underground fuel tanks. Bethel has created an Aquifer Recharge Overlay District to assure protection of its water supply.

### **C. SURFACE WATER**

The White River and its tributaries are the major surface water bodies in Bethel. High water quality attracts users of the River and thus provides a source of income for many town residents and businesses. The White River is classified by the State as a Class B water. Class B waters are managed for aesthetic values; recreation; public water supply with treatment; high quality habitat for biota, fish and wildlife; and agricultural uses. A portion of the White River downstream of the village area is designated as a Class B "Waste Management Zone" by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to enable treated wastewater from the Bethel Sewer Plant to be lawfully discharged into the this section of the River. Within this Zone water conditions must not create a health hazard, constitute a barrier to the passage of fish, or interfere with any existing use of the River.

A resource for Bethel and its citizens is the White River Partnership whose mission is to help local communities balance the long-term cultural, economic and environmental health of the White River watershed through active citizen participation, including monitoring the river.

Now that wastewater treatment facilities have been constructed to treat point pollution sources non-point pollution sources represent the remaining primary pollution sources in the White River. Sources of non-point pollution are agricultural runoff, streambank erosion, removal of riparian vegetation, upstream impoundments, land development, and highway runoff. Future land use decisions should evaluate the probable water quality impacts associated with each development proposal and should be consistent with the water standards promulgated by the State of Vermont.

#### **D. WETLANDS**

The State of Vermont defines wetlands as areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support significant vegetation or aquatic life that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. The State regulates land use activities affecting Class 1 and Class 2 Wetlands in order to protect their values and functions and to ensure that there is no net loss of these. Class 1 and 2 Wetlands have been mapped by the State of Vermont and maps are available from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources or the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission. Wetlands of all sizes are vital components in maintaining ecological integrity. The benefits of wetlands include flood and storm water storage, sediment reduction, maintenance of surface and ground water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for fishing, hunting, and bird watching.

#### **E. WILDLIFE RESOURCES**

Bethel's forests, fields, marshes, streams, riverbanks, and ponds are homes for a variety of animals, insects and plants. There are areas in Bethel which provide critical habitats for certain animals, including white tailed deer, birds, black bear, and bobcat. Every new development in town results in an incremental loss or change to wildlife habitats. Sensitive land use planning can lessen or mitigate the impact on wildlife habitats. For example, housing development or excessive logging can have detrimental effects on deer wintering areas. If an area proposed for development encompasses a deeryard, utilizing certain planning strategies can lessen the impact on the area. Should the entire area be winter cover, clustering of homes within an area of the project site will still enable deer to retain most of their habitat. State biologists are available to work with landowners and developers interested in planning projects in ways that reduce the impact on critical wildlife habitats, rare and endangered species, and other critical natural communities.

#### **F. AIR QUALITY**

Clean air is a fundamental component of good health and a clean environment. Most air pollution comes from sources outside our region. However, within the town, large developments and fossil fuel combustion such as automobiles, diesel and 2-cycle engines and wood burning can cause air pollution. Efforts to lessen such pollution should be encouraged.

#### **G. MINERAL RESOURCES**

Maintenance of sustainable quantities of gravel, sand, rock, and other minerals are essential to development as well as for state and local highways. It is in the interest of Bethel to enable the utilization of these resources when such uses do not unduly threaten or significantly inhibit or conflict with other existing land uses or are not in conflict with other stated goals or planning principles in this Plan.

Issues incidental to mineral extraction include creation of excessive dust and noise, increased truck traffic through residential neighborhoods, surface and groundwater contamination, degradation of the site or wildlife habitat, loss of scenic character in the immediate area, and undue deterioration on state and town roads.

**[See Appendices A, B & C for ‘Goals,’ ‘Planning Principles,’ and ‘Recommendations for Action,’ respectively, specific to Natural Resources and other sections of this Town Plan.]**

---