

## LAND PROTECTION

*Addressed by 10 management objectives, 26 action plans*

Protection of critical habitat and large contiguous blocks of conservation land can help to safeguard water resources, critical species and landscape connections. In the Piscataqua Region, land protection efforts have been robust. By the end of 2008, over 76,000 acres of land in the Region (11.3% of total area) were protected from development. Significant parcels have been protected around Great Bay, in the Mount Agamenticus region, the Great Works River watershed, and in the Pawtuckaway area.

Regional land protection planning efforts have established conservation focus areas (CFAs) at the coastal watershed scale. The Land Conservation Plan for New Hampshire's Coastal Watersheds, completed in 2006, was partially funded by PREP and identifies 75 CFAs. The Land Conservation Plan for Maine's Piscataqua Region Watershed is a similar effort in 10 Maine communities in the Region that identified 15 CFAs. At this time, 25% of the 167,000 acres that comprise these CFAs has been protected.

National, regional and local land protection organizations and municipalities have been active in land protection efforts in the Region. The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, a coalition of nine agencies and conservation organizations, has successfully secured conservation easements and acquired lands in critical areas around Great Bay. The Mount Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative has collaborated to protect substantial areas of its conservation focus area. Successful in protecting large habitat blocks as part of their conservation efforts, local and regional land trusts and conservation organizations include the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, Strafford Rivers Conservancy, Moose Mountains Regional Greenways, Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, Bear-Paw Regional Greenways, Three Rivers Land Trust, Great Works Regional Land Trust, Kittery Land Trust, and the York Land Trust. Citizens in watershed cities and towns have voted for sizeable land protection bonds to assist with these regional conservation efforts. In New Hampshire, 69% of the Region communities allocate some or all of the Land Use Change Tax to a conservation fund.

PREP currently supports land conservation efforts by funding and participating in regional land pro-

tection planning, supporting natural resource inventories and conservation on a local level and providing grants to fund transaction costs associated with permanent land protection projects. Continued support of land protection organizations and municipalities to keep pace with changing legal requirements and other technical training is needed. With more lands under conservation, resources and training are needed to ensure proper stewardship. Coordinated land management practices are important to ensure that the watershed network of protected lands provide critical ecological services.

Additionally, both Maine and New Hampshire have completed Wildlife Action Plans that identify critical habits and species for protection. The New Hampshire Audubon and the NH Fish and Game Department (NHFGD) have also developed a habitat connectivity model, which helps to identify least-cost connectivity paths for wildlife movement between protected lands. Maine's Beginning with Habitat (BwH) program has developed a similar connectivity model. NHFGD and BwH are encouraging communities to work together to incorporate Wildlife Action Plan goals into natural resource inventories and local and regional land protection priorities.

Since water demand is growing in the Region, protection of current and future water supply lands and associated watersheds is critical to preserve water quality and replenish both groundwater and surface water sources. Where water supplies cross town boundaries, regional watershed protection approaches are needed. Evaluation of the potential for saltwater intrusion into freshwater aquifers from sea level rise and groundwater extraction may also be required.

Activities needed to address land protection include:

- Increasing land protection through compact development and innovative land use development practices and controls
- Protecting Piscataqua Region conservation focus areas
- Protecting wetland, riparian zone and shoreland
- Identifying and protecting state species of concern and their habitat
- Assessing current and future water supply land protection

*"THE OVERARCHING GOAL ... IS TO FOCUS CONSERVATION ON THOSE LANDS AND WATERS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR CONSERVING LIVING RESOURCES - NATIVE PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES - AND WATER QUALITY IN THE COASTAL WATERSHEDS."*

*-THE LAND CONSERVATION PLAN FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE'S COASTAL WATERSHEDS, 2006*