

Section 5: Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

The previous sections have identified areas within the Town of Gill that are significant for their cultural, historical, scenic, archeological or ecological values. This information is helpful for understanding the character of Gill and for outlining issues that may be of particular interest in open space and recreation planning decisions.

What is open space?

The term “open space” is often used to refer to land types such as conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks, green buffers and any open area owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation, this according to the Mass Division of Conservation Services. Open space may also be defined as any parcel of land or water that remains either in its natural state or in agricultural use, and is otherwise free from intensive development. It can also include water bodies such as lakes and wetlands. The definition of open space can depend in part on the context of its location. In an urban area a vacant lot or a small wetland may be open space. In a town such as Gill, agricultural fields, the river’s edges and the Town Forest may be counted among its open spaces. For the purposes of this plan open space is further defined by having some level of protection from development.

Protecting open space serves not only to preserve land but also to:

- Preserve areas of cultural, historical, scenic, archeological or ecological values
- Provide space for food production and forest products
- Offer opportunities for outdoor recreation
- Protect ecological functions areas such as flood plains and estuaries (green infrastructure)
- Conserve habitat vital for endangered plant and animal species
- Allow public access and ecotourism potential
- Mitigate the impacts of natural hazard events such as flooding

Section 5 provides a detailed parcel-by-parcel inventory of existing open space land in Gill. It is organized by ownership, discussing protected privately owned lands followed by protected publicly owned lands. Information provided includes current land use, the degree of protection, as well as existing land management practices, where available. This information, especially when mapped, can help show patterns of protected land. For example, protecting land in Gill’s flood plains is important in order to preserve its vital ecological functions and to protect their adjacent water bodies. Mapping protected land in flood plains may reveal a key unprotected parcel which serves as an important link between other tracts of already protected areas. This parcel could be prioritized to protect when the opportunity becomes available.

Table 5-1 offers a summary of all types of open space in Gill, categorized by private and public ownership as well as those with permanent protection and temporary protection. In all, there are 5,473 acres of land under some level of protection in Gill. With a total land area of 9,479 acres, about 58% of all land in Gill is under some level of protection. Of this protected land, 51% is

privately owned. The Open Space and Recreation Inventory Map at the end of Section 5 shows the location of all protected open space in Town. Note: In cases where a parcel is both under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) and Chapter 61A, parcel acreage will be counted as APR only, so that no parcels are counted twice.

Table 5-1: Summary Open Space by Ownership and Level of Protection in Gill

PRIVATE PARCELS	Area in Acres	% of Total Open Space in Gill	% of Total Land Area in Gill
Privately Owned PERMANENTLY Protected Open Space			
Permanently Protected Farmland in Agricultural Preservation Restriction and Conservation Restriction: Table 5-2	797	12.13%	8.41%
Permanently Protected Forestland in Conservation Restriction: Table 5-4	490	7.46%	5.17%
Privately Owned TEMPORARILY Protected Open Space			
Temporarily Protected Farmland in Chapter 61A Agricultural Use: Table 5-3	1,731	26.34%	18.26%
Temporarily Protected Forestland in Chapter 61 Forestry Use: Table 5-5	999	15.20%	10.54%
Temporarily Protected Forestland in Chapter 61B Recreational Use: Table 5-6	493	7.50%	5.20%
Temporarily Protected Privately Owned Utility Land: Table 5-7	335	5.10%	3.53%
TOTAL PRIVATE PARCELS WITH SOME LEVEL OF PROTECTION	4,845	73.73%	51.12%
PUBLIC PARCELS	Area in Acres	% of Total Open Space in Gill	% of Total Land Area in Gill
Publicly Owned PERMANENTLY Protected Open Space			
Permanently Protected Land Owned by State: Table 5-8	239	3.64%	2.52%
Permanently Protected Land Owned by Town: Table 5-9	164	2.50%	1.73%
Permanently Protected Land Owned by Town - Cemeteries: Table 5-10	7	0.11%	0.07%
Permanently Protected Land Owned by Quasi-Public Entities: Table 5-12	176	2.68%	1.86%
Publicly Owned TEMPORARILY Protected Open Space			
Land with Limited Protection & Owned by Town: Table 5-11	42	0.64%	0.44%
TOTAL PUBLIC PARCELS WITH SOME LEVEL OF PROTECTION	628	9.56%	6.63%
TOTAL PROTECTED OPEN SPACE (Private and Public Ownership)	5,473	Acres	
TOTAL LAND IN GILL	9,479	Acres	
PERCENT TOTAL PROTECTED OPEN SPACE		58%	
TOTAL PERMANENTLY PROTECTED OPEN SPACE (Private and Public Ownership)	1,873	Acres	
PERCENT TOTAL PERMANENTLY PROTECTED OPEN SPACE		20%	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2010; 2011OSRP Committee

Privately Owned Open Space Parcels

Privately Owned Agricultural Land

There are 797 acres of permanently protected privately owned farmland, which constitute over 12 percent of the total amount of open space in Gill with some level of protection from development. This land, except for one parcel, is protected by the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. These restrictions are held by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. One parcel is under a Conservation Restriction (CR). Information on permanently protected farmland in Gill is shown in Table 5-2, including ownership, holder of the restriction, map and lot numbers, acreage and value.

Table 5-2: Privately Owned Permanently Protected Agricultural Lands (Primarily Agricultural Preservation Restrictions)

Owner/Manager	Holder of Restriction/APR* or CR*	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Value
* APR = Agricultural Preservation Restriction CR = Conservation Restriction					
Bascom Hollow, LLC	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	215	22.2, 23, 22.3	161.70	Prime Farmland Soils
Dunklee	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	203	3	92.00	Prime Farmland Soils
French	Franklin Land Trust/APR	213	4, 17	73.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Hatch	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	210	8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6	10.07	Prime Farmland Soils
Hatch	Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust/CR	214	5.1	12.10	Prime Farmland Soils
Hatch	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	211	4.1	30.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Lilly	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	213	15	43.85	Prime Farmland Soils
Podlesny	Franklin Land Trust/APR	209	8	20.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Remillard	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	215	24.1	52.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Split River	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	220	11, 13	131.80	Prime Farmland Soils
Split River	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	227	10	52.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Storrow	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	219	9	30.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Storrow	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	219	7	18.00	Prime Farmland Soils
Urgiel	Department of Agricultural Resources/APR	204	2, 6	70.68	Prime Farmland Soils
TOTAL ACRES:				797.20	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Note: Parcel shaded in blue is under more than one type of protection, but its acreage is counted only in this table.

There are 2,413 acres of temporarily protected privately owned farmland, which make up about 37 percent of the total amount of open space in Gill with some level of protection from development. Information on temporarily protected farmland in Gill is shown in Table 5-3, including ownership, map and lot numbers and acreage. This land is enrolled in Chapter 61A. In order to participate in the Chapter 61A program, a landowner must have at least 5 acres of land currently in active agriculture and must apply every year to enroll their parcel/s of land in the program. The aim of this program is to temporarily keep farmland in active agricultural production.



Many agricultural lands in Gill are temporarily protected under the Chapter 61A program.

Lands in the Chapter 61 program are considered only temporarily protected because a landowner may remove land that is enrolled in the Ch. 61 program at any time and pay any additional taxes due. If the landowner receives a formal offer from another party to purchase his/her parcel of land, which is in one of the Ch. 61 programs (61, 61A, 61B), the landowner must notify the Town. The Town has 120 days from the day the offer is made to exercise its right-of-first-refusal or transfer this right to a conservation organization. The Town would likely be much more successful in taking advantage of this opportunity if a Chapter 61 protocol is established ahead of time to outline the steps involved in the process. Ideally, the Town should also prioritize parcels or groups of parcels of conservation interest ahead of time.

Table 5-3: Privately Owned Temporarily Protected Agricultural Land (61A)

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Notes
Bascom Hollow	215	22.2, 23, 22.3	161.70	Calculated in Table 5-2
Bathory	220	10	14.00	
Berniche	216	4	77.00	
Brown	212	18	34.00	
Caron	226	21	39.00	
Cotter	203	5.2, 5.11, 5.3	95.00	

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Notes
Cutting	206	1	77.95	
Cutting	207	1.1, 1.2, 4.1, 4.2	143.60	
Dunklee	203	3	92.00	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-2
Flagg	204	8, 13.2, 14	331.00	
Flagg	211	3	5.42	
French	213	17, 4	73.00	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-2
Giknis	103	5	50.00	
Hastings	207	5, 6.1	123.00	
Hatch	211	10.1, 4.1	70.00	30 acres counted in Table 5-2, the remaining 40 acres are counted in this table
Hatch	210	8.2	10.00	
Johnson	212	15	11.00	
Keech	216	14	45.00	
Kramer	206	28.21	34.03	
Lemieux	219	10	18.00	
Lilly	213	15	43.85	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-2
McComb	208	11.1, 11.2	16.00	
Podlesny	209	13, 8	24.00	20 acres counted in Table 5-2, the remaining 4 acres are counted in this table
Remillard	215	24.1	52.00	
Schechterle	209	3.1, 3.2, 5	93.00	
Split River	220	11, 13	131.80	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-2
Split River	227	10	52.00	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-2
Storrow	219	7.1, 9	48.00	30 acres counted in Table 5-2, the remaining 18 acres are counted in this table
Urgiel	204	2, 3.1, 6	85.00	
Wallace	220	9	30.00	
Zak	211	22	43.00	
Zak	212	8, 20, 22	230.80	
Zak	213	5, 6	11.60	
TOTAL ACRES:			1,731.40	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Note: Some or all portions of parcels shaded in blue are also under CR or APR protection. Those portions of the shaded parcels under CR or APR are calculated in Tables 5-2 or Table 5-4 and are not included in this table's total acreage.

Much of the land enrolled under Chapter 61A also abuts rivers and streams. While agriculture can have negative impacts on water quality, these impacts can be reduced or avoided through the use of best management practices. When best management practices are observed, agriculture is

compatible with watershed protection because it keeps the land open, while development results in conversion of land to impervious surfaces with negative impacts on water quality.

Agricultural lands enrolled under the Chapter 61A program offer much value to the town even if the farmlands are only temporarily protected. These agricultural parcels often contain prime farmland soils that should be preserved for continuing use. These privately owned open spaces also contribute to the town’s tax base and generate revenue, employment, and food products. In addition, some landowners may allow access to their property for recreational purposes, like hiking or snowmobiling. Most Chapter 61A landowners take pride in their land and practice good stewardship. They help to define a sense of place for Gill and contribute to community stability.

Privately Owned Forested Land

Approximately 490 acres are permanently protected privately owned forestland, which constitute approximately 7½ percent of the total amount of open space in Gill with some level of protection from development. This land is protected by conservation restrictions. These restrictions are held by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. Information on permanently protected farmland in Gill is shown in Table 5-4, including ownership, holder of the restriction, map and lot numbers, and acreage.

Table 5-4: Privately Owned Permanently Protected Forested Land (Conservation Restrictions)

Owner/Holder of Conservation Restriction	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres
Brown/Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)	212	18	31.00
Flagg/Massachusetts Audubon	211	3	5.20
French/DCR	218	4	103.00
French/DCR	219	14	15.00
French/DCR	221	11.1	13.50
French/Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust	217	22	10.50
Gallagher & Bathory/Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)	220	5, 10	105.00
Jenkins/ DCR	218	5	81.30
Jenkins/ DCR	219	16, 17	5.00
Plante/The Nature Conservancy	227	13.2	2.25
Polatin/Sculley/Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust	218	2.1	88.00
Watson/Wallace/Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)	220	9	30.00
TOTAL ACRES			489.75

Source: Town of Gill Assessor’s Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Note: Parcels shaded in blue are also under Chapter 61, Table 5-5 but their acreage is counted only in Table 5-4.



Forest land in Gill includes sugar bush, which supplies sap for local maple sugaring products.

Properties with conservation restrictions may have the potential for passive recreational use or for activities such as fishing or hunting but recreational use is dependent upon the wishes of the landowner.

Privately owned forestland with temporary protection from development is shown in Tables 5-5 and 5-6. Approximately 1,278 acres are under the Chapter 61 program, which make up over 19 percent of the total amount of open space in Gill with some level of protection from development. Approximately 493 acres are under Chapter 61B, or about 7½ percent.

Table 5-5: Privately Owned Temporarily Protected Forestlands (61)

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Notes
Bascom Hollow Farm, LLC	215	22, 23	94.00	
Bathory	220	5, 10	50	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
Cowls	227	12	39.00	
Cutting	206	1	10.00	
Cutting	207	1.1, 4.1	120.00	
Diemand	210	4	20.00	
French	207	2, 3,	44.00	
French	213	4, 13	128.00	

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Notes
French	217	22	10.50	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
French	218	4	103.00	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
French	219	14	19.00	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
French	221	11.1	13.50	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
French	222	5.2, 11, 5.B	74.00	
French	227	3	17.00	
Georgian	217	37	74.00	
Hisz	222	14	81.00	
Jenkins	218	5	81.30	Total acreage counted only in Table 5-4
Krejmas	215	17, 18	67.00	
LaPointe	224	39	19.00	
Parsons	218	3.1	67.80	
Parsons	221	2.9, 2.14	40.00	
Stotz	223	7, 12	25.70	
Stotz	224	45	31.00	
Streibel	205	10	47.00	
TOTAL ACRES			998.50	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Note: Parcels shaded in blue are also under CR protection, shown in Table 5-4. The shaded parcels in this table also under CR are calculated in Table 5-4 and are not included in this table's total acreage.

Unless noted as permanently protected under an APR or CR, all the parcels in Tables 5-5 and 5-6 are temporarily protected in Chapter 61 or 61B programs. Protection of these parcels is short term. There are no public grants awarded as a result of the program. The owner agrees not to change the land's use for ten years while paying reduced property taxes during that time period. These lands are located in the Residential/Agricultural zoning district.

Privately owned forestland offers many values to the community and is an important resource for several reasons. Many forestlands are large parcels with a low degree of fragmentation, preserving wildlife and plant habitats. When these forestlands are protected from development, they help to protect and provide clean water, air, and healthy wildlife populations. Forest soils have a high infiltration capacity, absorbing moisture and permitting little surface runoff. Once absorbed, water is released gradually, reducing flooding during large rain events and maintaining streamflow during low water months. Because forest soils are absorptive, soil erosion is reduced and fish habitat is preserved.

Table 5-6: Privately Owned Temporarily Protected Forestlands (61 B)

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres
Bidwell	215	14	41.39
Boyer	215	6	20.00
Chase	227	9, 16.1	12.20
Conway	224	34, 35	16.00
Draper and Shilo	227	16.1	5.00
Giknis	221	5, 6	36.30
Giknis	222	1	26.00
Giknis	226	22	80.00
Girard	219	10, 12	48.00
Holmes	214	3.1	37.00
Kramer	210	14	19.00
Mackin	217	35, 36	40.00
Meyer	222	4	64.00
Pratt	227	17.112	7.70
Putnam	212	9	24.00
Yarmac	222	17, 18.1, 18	16.00
TOTAL ACRES:			492.59

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Chapter 61 lands are managed for forest products, which result in the employment of loggers, foresters, and local mill workers, income for landowners, and the availability of locally grown wood for flooring, furniture making, and firewood. Many forested lands also provide recreational value for Gill residents. The Chapter 61 program contributes to the preservation of forested landscapes valued by Gill residents.

Other privately owned land in Gill that has temporary protection from development is land owned by FirstLight Power Resources. FirstLight Power Resources currently has licenses to operate the Turners Falls Dam and Northfield Mountain Hydroelectric Projects on the

Connecticut River. These projects affect the Connecticut River, which borders the town of Gill. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licenses for these projects have been granted for fifty years and will expire on April 30, 2018.

The FERC license agreement requires that FirstLight Power Resources obtain flowage rights to the land bordering the river. Flowage rights are similar to land easements and allow for the impacts of a project dam including backwatering onto adjacent properties. The company is responsible for minimization and prevention of soil erosion and other adverse effects associated with hydroelectric projects within the flowage boundary. FirstLight Power Resources has implemented an erosion control plan to manage these properties. The erosion control plan outlines bank stabilization repair and erosion prevention measures that should be undertaken while FirstLight Power Resources operates the projects.

The primary purpose of the erosion control plan is riverbank stabilization and erosion control. In addition, FirstLight Power Resources has committed to provide recreational and environmental education facilities in areas impacted by the projects. These facilities serve to protect the areas scenic and historical assets as well as wildlife species habitat and are located in Gill, Northfield, and Montague.

The property owned by FirstLight Power Resources is considered temporarily protected as open space for the duration of the project license. The company owns parcels totaling about 335 acres as shown in Table 5-7, or about 5 percent of the total protected open space in Gill.

Table 5-7: Other Privately Owned Temporarily Protected Land

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	101	58, 59, 83, 84, 85, 89, 118, 119, 120	45.70
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	102	26, 31, 32, 33	3.84
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	103	17	139.70
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	203	6	26.75
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	204	7	27.50
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	219	6	21.50
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	224	43	4.00
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	228	9	28.50
Firstlight Hydro Generating Company	229	1	37.10
TOTAL ACRES			334.59

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Publicly and Quasi-Publicly Owned Open Space Parcels

Publicly owned and quasi-publicly owned protected open space make up approximately 14 percent of all of the open space that has some level of protection in town. The following inventory includes those parcels that are owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Town of Gill, and state conservation organizations.



Photo courtesy of CreativeCommons: www.city-data.com

The public can access Barton Cove via the public boat ramp or via the Barton Cove Campground and Canoe/Kayak area owned by FirstLight Power.

Publicly Owned Open Space

A total of 239 acres of permanently protected publicly owned state land are located in Gill, accounting for about 3½ percent of the total amount of open space in Gill. This land includes open space owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and by the Department of Fish and Game. These lands are described in Table 5-8.

Table 5-8: Publicly Owned Permanently Protected Land (State Owned)

Property Owner	Site Name	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Current Use
DCR	Connecticut River Greenway State Park (CRGSP)	220	4	180.00	Conservation and Recreation
DCR	CRGSP	228	1	14.20	Conservation and Recreation
Department of Fish and Game	Barton Cove Boat Ramp	102	28	3.80	State Boat Ramp
DCR	CRGSP	228	6	41.00	Conservation and Recreation
TOTAL ACRES:				239.00	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

The Town owns two parcels of permanently protected open space, consisting of 164 acres or about 2½ percent of the total open space in Gill, as shown in Table 5-9.

Table 5-9: Publicly Owned Permanently Protected Land (Town Owned)

Property Owner	Site Name	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Current Use
Town of Gill/Conservation Commission	Stacy's Ferry	227	10	0.91	Potential Boat Landing on CT River
Town of Gill/Conservation Commission	Town Forest	208	1, 7	163.00	Conservation Recreation
TOTAL ACRES:				163.91	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2010; 2011 OSRP Committee

Table 5-10 lists the cemeteries in Gill that are owned by the town or by an association and are protected from development. Most cemeteries represent well-maintained open space areas that are sometimes appropriate for walking and bird watching. These parcels total a little over 7 acres, a small percent of the overall protected open space in Town.

Table 5-10: Publicly Owned Permanently Protected Land (Cemeteries)

Owner/Property Manager	Site Name	Assessor's Lot	Assessor's Map	Acres
Riverside Cemetery Assn.	Riverside Cemetery	224	6	1.60
Riverside Cemetery Assn.	Riverside Cemetery	224	7	2.80
Town of Gill	North Cemetery	204	15	1.80
Town of Gill	Center Cemetery	212	1	0.71
Town of Gill	West Cemetery	214	11	0.47
TOTAL ACRES:				7.38

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2010; 2011 OSRP Committee

The Town of Gill also owns 42 acres of open space under limited protection, or less than 1% of the total protected open space in Gill (see Table 5-11). These parcels are under the authority of the Select Board and are considered to have limited protection from development. If residents wanted to sell Town land for development, the Select Board or a Town Meeting vote could provide the authority.



Slate Library is one of Gill’s twelve town-owned temporarily protected parcels.

Table 5-11: Publicly Owned Temporarily Protected Land (Town Owned)

Property Owner	Site Name	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres	Current Use
Town of Gill	Elementary School	211	5	12.50	Elementary School
Town of Gill	Elementary School Nature Area	211	6	6.60	Education
Town of Gill	Boyle Parcel (Center Road)	212	30	2.90	Hay field
Town of Gill	Slate Library	212	2	0.49	Library
Town of Gill	Town Hall	212	27	0.47	Administrative
Town of Gill	Common	212	26	0.32	Events
Town of Gill	Riverside Municipal Building (Old Green School)	101	14, 15	1.40	Historical Commission, Water District, Playground, Private School
Town of Gill	Riverside Sewer Pumping Station	101	117	0.12	Pumping Station
Town of Gill	Municipal Building	217	20	4.34	Highway, Police, Fire
Town of Gill	Mariamante	224	34.1, 34.2, 34.3, 34.4, 34.5, 34.6	12.00	Undeveloped Land
Town of Gill	Pisgah Mt./Route 2	226	29	0.29	Vacant
Town of Gill	Mountain Road	221	1-14.1	0.20	Vacant
TOTAL ACRES:				41.63	

Source: Town of Gill Assessor’s Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

It is not unusual for a community to set aside land for future expansion of schools, sports fields, police and fire stations, and drinking water supplies. Open space planned for these purposes might be used as open space today and placed under the authority of the Select Board. It may also be sensible to place town-owned land that clearly contains wetlands or wildlife habitat, but which does not provide for easy development, under the authority and protection of the Conservation Commission.

Quasi-Publicly Owned Open Space

There are 176 acres of quasi-publicly owned permanently protected open space accounting for about 2½ percent of the total amount of open space with some level of protection. This land is owned by The Nature Conservancy, the Connecticut River Watershed Council, or Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. Information on the parcels is shown in Table 5-12.

Table 5-12: Quasi-Publicly Owned Forested Land Protected from Development

Owner	Assessor's Map	Assessor's Lot	Acres
Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust	209	6	5.60
Ct. River Watershed Council	223	9	7.40
The Nature Conservancy	227	11, 13.1, 14, 15, 16.2	97.97
The Nature Conservancy	228	8, 10	47.70
Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust	218	4	17.00
TOTAL ACRES:			175.67

Source: Town of Gill Assessor's Maps, 2011; 2011 OSRP Committee

Opportunities for Funding Open Space and Conservation Projects in Gill¹

Opportunities for the Town of Gill to procure funding for open space projects can be a challenge. While the town has many outstanding conservation values, only private land subject to conservation restrictions is truly protected. Potential resources for funding open space and conservation projects include:

LAND Grant Program (Formerly the Self-Help Grant Program)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts offers a grant program through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, to assist municipalities with open space projects. The LAND Program (formerly the Self-Help Program) was established in 1961 to assist municipal conservation commissions acquiring land for natural resource and passive outdoor recreation purposes. Lands acquired may include wildlife habitat, trails, unique natural, historic or cultural resources, water resources, forest, and farm land. Compatible passive outdoor recreational uses such as hiking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, bird observation, and others are encouraged. Access by the general public is required. This state program pays for the acquisition of land, or a partial interest (such as a Conservation Restriction) and associated acquisition costs such as appraisal reports and closing costs.²

¹ This section and Section D, Criteria for Open Space Protection were adapted from the 2010 Warwick OSRP.

² Mass.gov Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, Grant Programs, <http://www.mass.gov>

Land Trusts

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust and Franklin Land Trust are local non-profit organizations that assist farmers and other landowners who seek to protect their land from unwanted development. A land trust does not seek to own land, but instead encourages private stewardship. Although land trusts could assist the Town of Gill in land conservation, they generally do not have funds to donate to the Town for protecting open space. Land trusts may be most helpful by serving towns on a consultant basis, by recommending funding sources, and by partnering with towns to provide public education and outreach.

Regional and Statewide Land Conservation Trusts

In addition to local land trusts, several other regional and statewide conservation organizations are available for partnership conservation projects. The New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) has a focus in conserving managed forest lands. Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS) works to protect the diversity of Massachusetts natural resources. Additional organizations include The Trustees of Reservations and The Nature Conservancy. Each of these conservation organizations has access to no-interest or low-interest loan funds to assist in the conservation of significant natural resources through the Norcross Wildlife Foundation's loan program and the Open Space Institute's Western Mass Loan Fund.

Conservation Partnership Program

This is a state grant program that is designed to help land trusts and other non-profit conservation organizations receive a 50% reimbursement for open space projects (fee or Conservation Restriction). This is a resource that could help to conserve parcels within Gill with high conservation value. However, no matter how worthy a project may be, the non-profit conservation organization will not be interested in applying for these funds unless a town can supply the other 50% .

Forest Legacy Program

This is a federal grant program administered for the purpose of conserving forestland nationwide. Participation in Forest Legacy is limited to private forest landowners. To qualify, landowners are required to prepare a multiple resource management plan as part of the conservation easement acquisition. The federal government may fund up to 75% of project costs, with at least 25% coming from private, State or local sources. In addition to gains associated with the sale or donation of property rights, many landowners also benefit from reduced taxes associated with limits placed on land use. Forest Legacy projects also tend to be large – often 100 acres or more.

As a national program, Forest Legacy funding is very competitive. For Fiscal Year 2011, there were 38 proposed Forest Legacy projects for a total of \$1.1M in funding. One drawback of this program is that it can take up to four years for landowners to receive payment for selling the fee interest in the land or a Conservation Restriction once they agree to participate in one of the grant applications. This may be a longer time than some landowners can afford to wait to receive compensation.

Community Preservation Act

The Community Preservation Act is legislation that allows cities and towns to exercise control over local planning decisions. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) provides new funding sources that can be used to address three core community concerns:

- Acquisition and preservation of open space
- Creation and support of affordable housing
- Acquisition and preservation of historic buildings and landscapes

The CPA allows communities to create a local Community Preservation Fund to raise money through a surcharge of up to 3% of the real estate tax levy on real property for open space protection, historic preservation and the provision of affordable housing. The act also creates a significant state matching fund, which serves as an incentive to communities to pass the CPA. To enact the CPA, voters must approve it at a Town-wide election.

A minimum of 10% of the annual revenues of the fund must be used for each of the three core community concerns, and up to 5% may be used for administrative expenses of the Community Preservation Committee. The remaining funds can be allocated for any combination of the allowed uses, or for land for recreational use. This gives each community the opportunity to determine its priorities, plan for its future, and have the funds to make those plans happen. Projects using CPA funds must have those funds approved by a Town Meeting vote. If residents don't feel the CPA is working as they expected, they can repeal it or change the surcharge amount.

Criteria for Open Space Protection

As part of a blueprint for conserving open space and recreation land in Gill, developing criteria to identify and prioritize land for conservation (as well as for development) could help focus Gill's efforts and could assist in applying for funding to acquire open space and recreation lands. A systematic approach, including applying criteria, enables Gill to be strategic in its allocation of program funds by giving the Town a tool to both proactively identify parcels and resources that meet the goals of the open space program; and to analyze the merits of individual parcels of land and projects as they present themselves.

Criteria for rating open space are unique to a community. The following information is presented as a stepping off point for the Open Space and Recreation Committee to use and modify to suit the Town's unique resources.

Basis for Generating Criteria

As a starting point for generating criteria, Gill could assess which parcels possess such exceptional open space and recreational values that they are worth conserving as open space as well as which parcels pose the greatest potential for development.

To generate an answer, the following should be reviewed:

1. *State-Wide Value:* Are there unprotected open spaces in Gill that are so exceptional statewide that the Town is very fortunate to possess them within its boundaries; and

therefore Gill has the incentive to preserve these open space “treasures” for the benefit of its own residents as well as for the citizens of the Commonwealth. Newly discovered rare wildlife habitat is a likely example in this category.

2. *Town-Wide Value:* Are there unprotected parcels that are particularly critical for preserving Gill’s culture, active farming community, historic landscapes, scenic views, rural economy, ecology or recreational resources. Such parcels would be beloved and meaningful to a large number of Gill residents.
3. *Neighborhood Value:* Are there parcels that are exceptionally significant to and highly used by residents of a particular section of Town (as well as by residents from other parts of Gill) that if lost to unplanned development would clearly diminish the quality of life in that neighborhood and in the Town as a whole?
4. *Future Development Value:* Is there a parcel in Town that is particularly well suited for future residential or small scale commercial development that Gill would consider purchasing so that it can plan its own development (such as senior housing); and if so, are there also accompanying open space, recreational and green corridor amenities that the Town would also like to secure to fulfill that vision of a well-planned development.

Simultaneous Highest Priorities and Open Space Protection Opportunities

Gill might include parcels of land that are high priority for open space protection in several different categories simultaneously. In this scenario, it is the availability of opportunities that will control which projects are undertaken. Open space protection can move forward only when a landowner is interested in conserving their land or when funding is available to pay full market value when critical parcels come on the open market.

Preferred Type of Open Space Protection for Gill – To Retain Private Ownership

Given concerns about keeping land on the tax rolls, the ideal form of open space protection for the future is the purchase of Conservation Restrictions and trail easements (in which private landowners agree to allow the public use of a trail that passes through their land). In this way, the land itself remains in private ownership and stays on the tax rolls. An open space and recreation budget stretches further when it is possible to purchase just a CR or trail easement, rather than having to pay for the entire parcel.

Open Space Criteria

As explained above, the open space criteria categories listed below are not necessarily listed in any particular order, given that Gill may have high priorities in different open space categories *simultaneously*. However, for discussion purposes, examples of scenarios that might occur within each category are presented. For example, under the Open Fields category, land with prime agricultural soils currently in active use might be given a higher priority than fields in Town that are being used for crops, hay or pasture, or just being faithfully mowed and maintained. The highest priorities would represent projects of such high value that the Town may want to raise funds in order to accomplish them; whereas with lower priority projects, the Town might not be willing to expend funds but would consider accepting the gift of a Conservation Restriction or trail easement if it were donated by the landowner.



Open space criteria categories include open fields, some of which have prime agricultural soils.

Open Fields

- a) Fields with Prime Agricultural Soils currently in active use
- b) Fields with soils designated Prime Agricultural Soils or Soils of Statewide Importance
- c) Fields that are adjacent to farmland preserved with an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) that are actively farmed or have the potential to be farmed
- d) Fields that have particular scenic, historic or cultural value

Unfragmented Forest Blocks

- a) In-holdings in large blocks of forest
- b) Forestland adjacent to or near already preserved forests, such as Gill Town Forest or Connecticut River Greenway State Park
- c) Forest parcels that connect existing permanently protected forested parcels for the sake of the integrity of wildlife and trail corridors

Ecological Significance

- a) A parcel, or group of parcels, that has been identified by GIS mapping as containing one or more of the following:
 - i. NHESP BioMap Core Habitats
 - ii. NHESP BioMap Supporting Landscapes
 - iii. Priority Habitats of Rare Species
 - iv. Certified Vernal Pools
- b) Ridge-line corridors – Gill has several undeveloped ridge lines; ridge tops are known to be used by large mammals with extensive territories.

Hydrological Significance

Land that abuts or contains the following:

- a) A parcel, or group of parcels, that has been identified by GIS mapping as containing all or portions of rivers, streams, lakes or ponds
- b) Aquifers or floodplains
- c) Significant upland or wetland habitat
- d) Public or private drinking water supplies

Recreation Resources

- a) Trail Corridors – Land that would contribute to the creation of a comprehensive trail network including parcels that form linkages with an existing or planned trail system
- b) Scenic Views – preserve outstanding views by fee purchase or conservation easements.
- c) Land that would provide access to water for swimming, canoe and kayak put-ins and fishing.

Scenic Resources

- a) Views Across Fields – Roadside views across fields are an important scenic amenity Gill; their scenic value reinforces the importance of protecting agricultural fields adjacent to Town roadsides.
- b) Views of Ridgelines – Gill has some undeveloped ridgelines that are an important part of the Town’s rural scenery. Maintaining undeveloped ridgelines benefits both the scenic value of the Town and the quality of the wildlife habitat. Maintaining undeveloped ridgelines could potentially become more challenging as the market for new homes rebounds.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- a) Historic Village Center District – Helping Gill Center to remain undiluted by incongruously modern construction will help preserve the Town’s historic heritage.
- b) Historic Farmsteads – Gill contains many historic farmsteads where the original farmhouse, barns and outbuildings, stonewalls, and fields are intact. Each of these is an historic artifact worthy of inventory and preservation through conservation easements.

Implementing Open Space Criteria

Once a set of criteria have been defined and adopted, the Open Space Committee could move forward with related objectives and action items in Sections 8 and 9, such as identifying and inventorying viewsheds and historic sites as well identifying and seeking funding sources for protecting that land with the highest conservation value. Additional steps could include collaborating with adjacent towns and with area land trusts to build land conservation coalitions and to create public outreach and education materials, as defined in Section 9. A public outreach brochure example is located in the Appendices of this document.

Map 5-1: Open Space Inventory Map

