

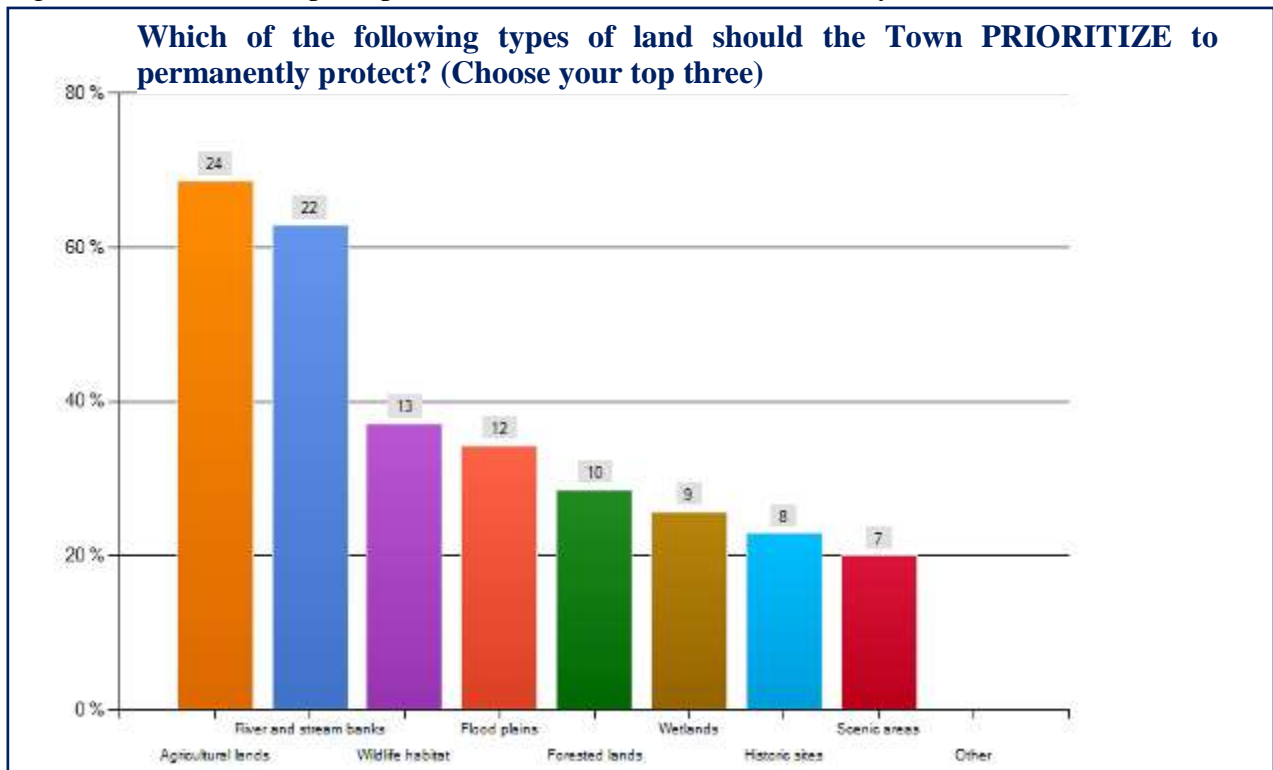
Section 7: Analysis of Needs

The Gill Open Space and Recreation Plan incorporates the inventory of all the land-based cultural, historic, scenic, natural, archeological, and natural resources that are available in town (Section 4), identifies the areas that contain these resources (Section 5), and, based on the community's general goals (Section 6), makes comparisons between the supply of resources and the demand (Section 7). In **Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs**, the most important environmental issues are highlighted. In **Summary of Community's Needs**, the recreation and open space needs of the residents are discussed. Finally, in **Management Needs**, the obstacles to the effective resolution of these needs are addressed.

Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs

The Town of Gill has an impressive number of cultural, historic, scenic, natural, archeological, and natural resources, many of which are shown in Map 4-6. Of all its resources, one in particular has been discussed repeatedly throughout the planning process. As the demand for local food continues to grow in Franklin County, and as the number of small, diversified farms continues to increase, residents of Gill identify agricultural land as one of their most valuable resources.

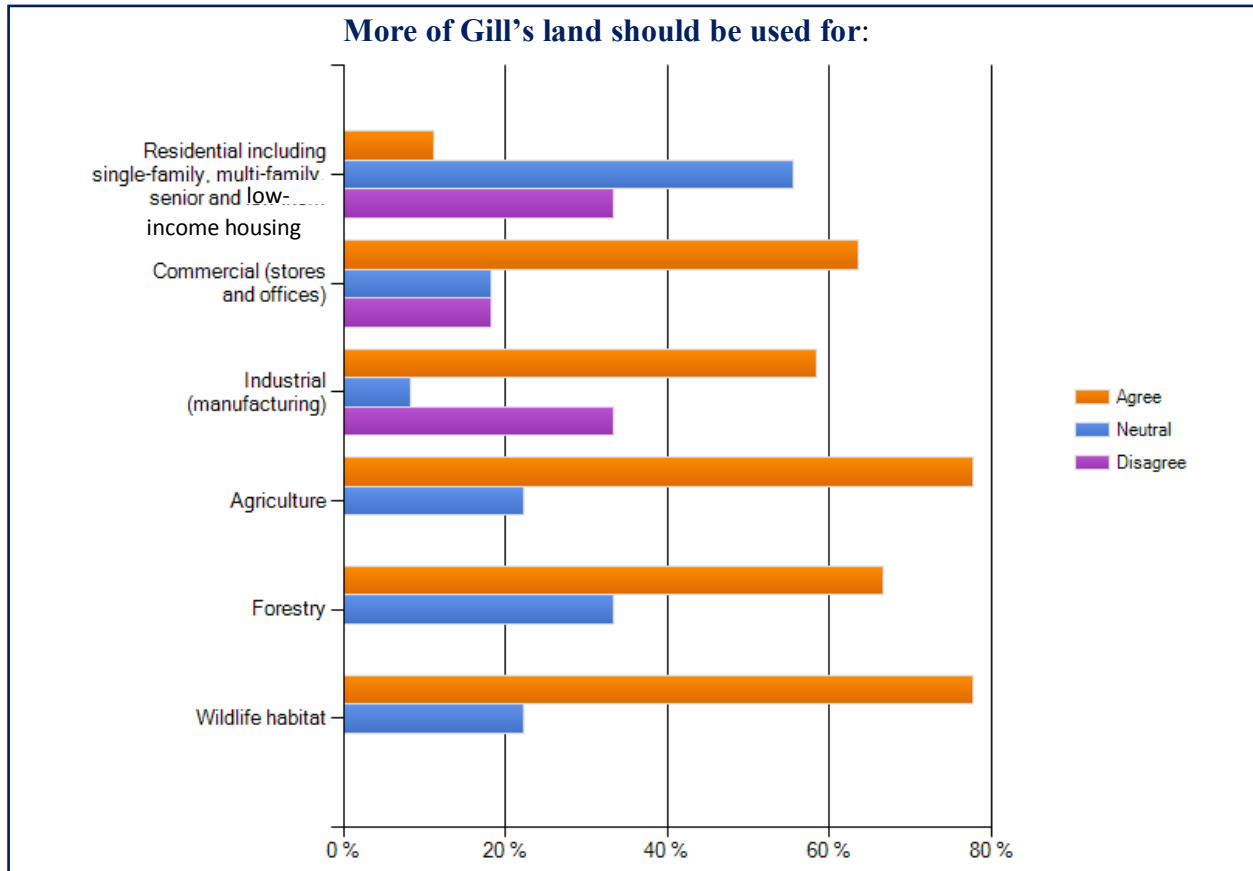
Figure 7-1: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Land Protection



As shown in Figure 7-1, when asked in the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey which types of land the Town should prioritize to protect permanently, the respondents' top choice is agricultural lands, followed closely by river and stream banks. When asked how more

of Gill's land should be used, Figure 7-2 shows the top choice is agriculture (tied with wildlife habitat).

Figure 7-2: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Land Use



Preserving Agricultural Lands

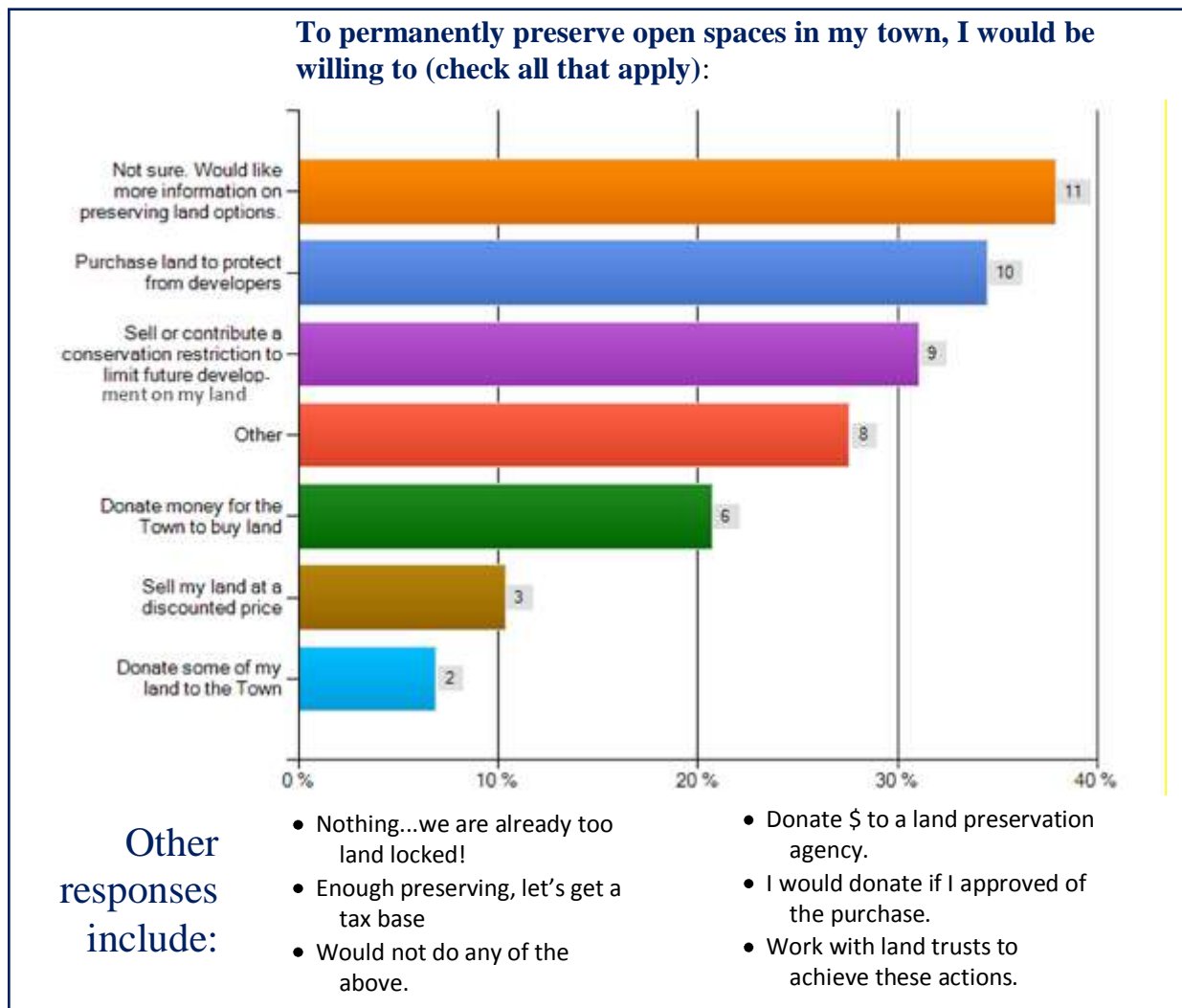
In some ways, Gill is positioned well to continue to grow its small, diversified farms and to continue to preserve agricultural land. With a modest population decline in the last 20 years (see Section 3C for population characteristics), development pressures on owners of farmland may not be as intense in Gill as in other towns in Massachusetts. With the recent depression in new residential construction, the related fall in land values has been somewhat of a boon for land trusts. Unable to sell their land for as much as they had hoped – if at all – some land owners are taking a second look at the option of putting their land into permanent protection.

Currently, nearly 800 acres of land containing prime farmlands is permanently protected and an additional 1,700 acres of agricultural land is temporarily protected under Chapter 61A. The Town of Gill should actively continue public outreach and education on land protection options and should work on developing criterion to help prioritize additional parcels for protection.

It is important to note that many residents also voiced a concern that too much land is being protected and that the focus should really be on economic development. As shown in Figure 7-3,

when asked what they would be willing to do to preserve more land, the most popular choice is “not sure” followed by “purchase land to protect from developers”. Some of the responses to “Other” in the same question indicated that Gill has preserved enough land and should work on improving its tax base. Rather than choosing one over the other, it is possible that, for Gill, agricultural preservation and economic development can go hand-in-hand. As the Town of Gill considers ways to balance land protection and economic development, careful thought should go into how farming helps Gill’s economy. Farming, farmland preservation, diversified farm products, agritourism – all these things could help fuel the engine for Gill’s economic development.

Figure 7-3: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Land Preservation



Where farming and farmland protection is concerned, one of the best resources Gill has is its active Agricultural Commission. This group of enthusiastic farmers could be encouraged to endorse some of the agricultural land protection objectives included in the Action Plan, including:

- Considering ways that the town might support agricultural operations as they would other commercial or industrial businesses in town.

- Continuing to support marketing of Gill farm and forest products.
- Exploring the options for encouraging agritourism in Gill.

Protecting Wildlife Habitat

Gill offers excellent wildlife habitat in the form of forestland, farmland, open fields, floodplains and water bodies, as discussed in Section 4. Since wildlife habitat was identified as a priority for Gill in the Survey, the Town of Gill may want to focus on continuing the good working relationships with regional land trusts for the purpose of assigning the Town's right-of-first refusal in the event that a key parcel containing excellent wildlife is put up for sale. Often land trusts are able to bring together sources of income and potential buyers of land and development rights in a shorter time frame than if the Town were to try on its own. By being prepared, Gill may be more likely to see the preservation of choice parcels of forest containing wildlife habitat and other important natural resources. Several action items address the protection of wildlife habitat, including prioritizing land to protect and continuing relationships with local land trusts.

Protecting River and Stream Banks

Protecting rivers and streams – particularly the Connecticut River – have been a priority in Gill for many years. As discussed in Section 4 in **Erosion on the Connecticut River**, ongoing riverbank stabilization projects have been conducted in Gill since the mid-1990s. Gill has had landowners serve as representatives on the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee. The Town could continue to support a representative – potentially from the Conservation Commission – to serve on the Committee.

Along with addressing erosion on the Connecticut River, Gill has been successful in protecting its floodplain. Nearly all of the land in the 100-year floodplain along the Connecticut River has been protected.

The Town of Gill could also encourage residents to participate in the annual Connecticut River Source to Sea Clean Up. Involving youth – including students from Northfield Mount Hermon – in this program could help plant a seed for good stewardship of Gill's natural resources.

Action items relating to protecting river and streambanks include joining the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee and exploring model floodplain protection bylaws.

Summary of Community Needs

Planning for a community's open space and recreation needs must satisfy the present population's desires for new facilities, spaces, and services, and also must interpret and act on the available data to prepare for the future needs of Gill residents. Although the Gill Open Space and Recreation Plan will be updated in seven (7) years, the types of actions identified in Section 9 will take into account the needs of the next generation as well.

The most important community need identified multiple times throughout the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan planning process is the desire to encourage economic development, even while protecting agricultural land, river and stream banks, and wildlife habitat. As shown in Figure 7-2, around 60% of respondents indicated they thought more land should be used for

commercial and industrial development. As already discussed, comments in Figure 7-3 indicate a desire to balance land preservation with economic development. Concern about balancing open space and recreation needs with development of new business and/or industry was a common theme expressed throughout the planning process by the public and Committee members alike.

The Town’s commitment to encouraging a permanent Open Space and Recreation Committee could be a next step in the process of achieving some of the natural resource protection and recreation needs, keeping economic development in mind. The Committee could continue the work started during this Plan update process by providing leadership to follow through on several key action items to address balancing conservation and recreation needs with some development. Some of those action items include:

- Identify priority areas to conserve based upon patterns such as contiguous forest land, corridors along rivers and streams, and locations near already conserved land.
- Identify suitable areas to pursue additional commercial or industrial businesses in Town. Revisit the 2005 Community Development Plan as a first step toward doing so.
- Identify businesses needed in town through public outreach.
- Consider conducting a cost of community services study - potentially through American Farmland Trust - to determine the fiscal contributions of residential, commercial, industrial, and farm and open land in the town.

Figure 7-4: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Recreational Use

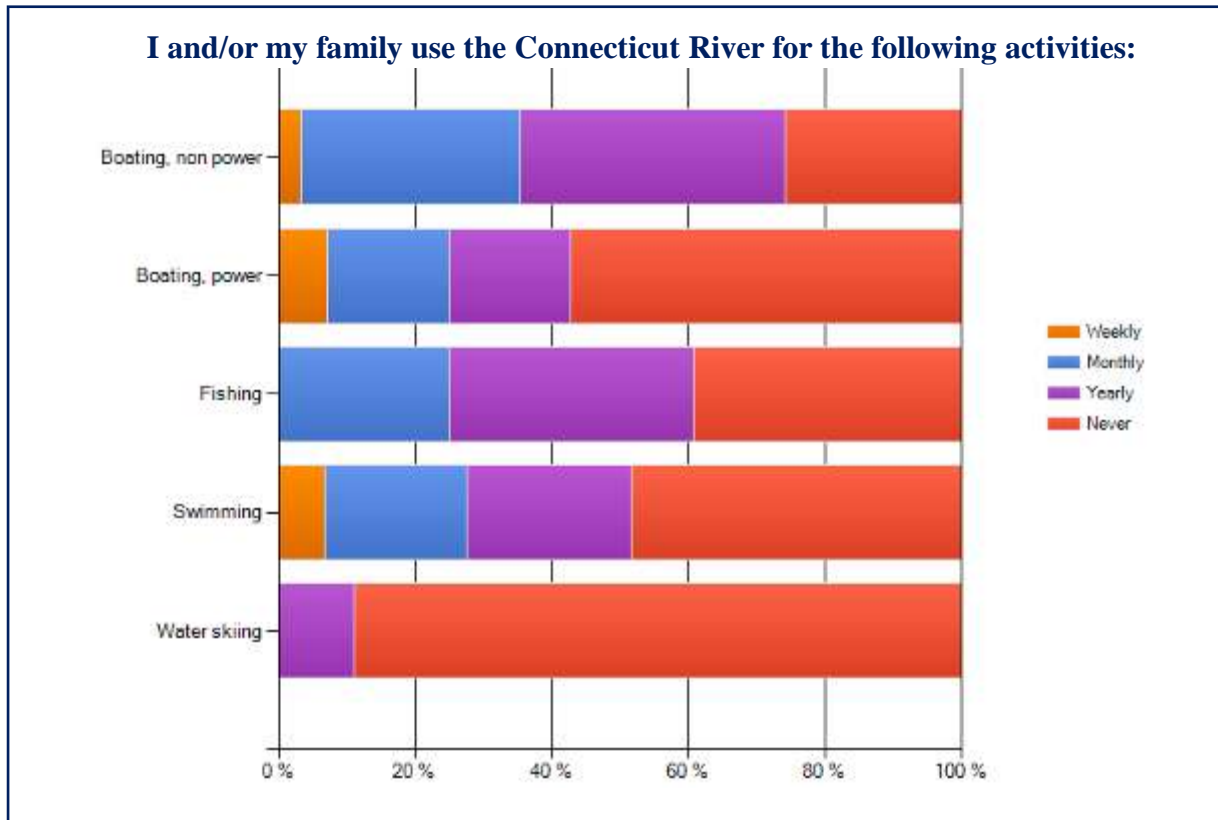




Children enjoy an unseasonable warm fall day at Gill Elementary School (left) and at the Green School.

As shown in Figure 7-4, many of Gill’s recreational facilities are infrequently used and most people recreate on their own land. However, some recreational facilities do need improvement and might be used more frequently if they were upgraded. A community need identified is better recreational options, particularly for those attending the Gill Elementary School. Presently the School does not have a gymnasium or swimming pool and the Gill Elementary School nature trail, once a source of recreation and enjoyment for schoolchildren and residents, has fallen into disrepair and is seldom used. Action items to address these deficiencies, including assessing the possibility of a new recreational facility for the school and/or community and repairing the trail, are included in the Action Plan.

Figure 7-5: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Connecticut River

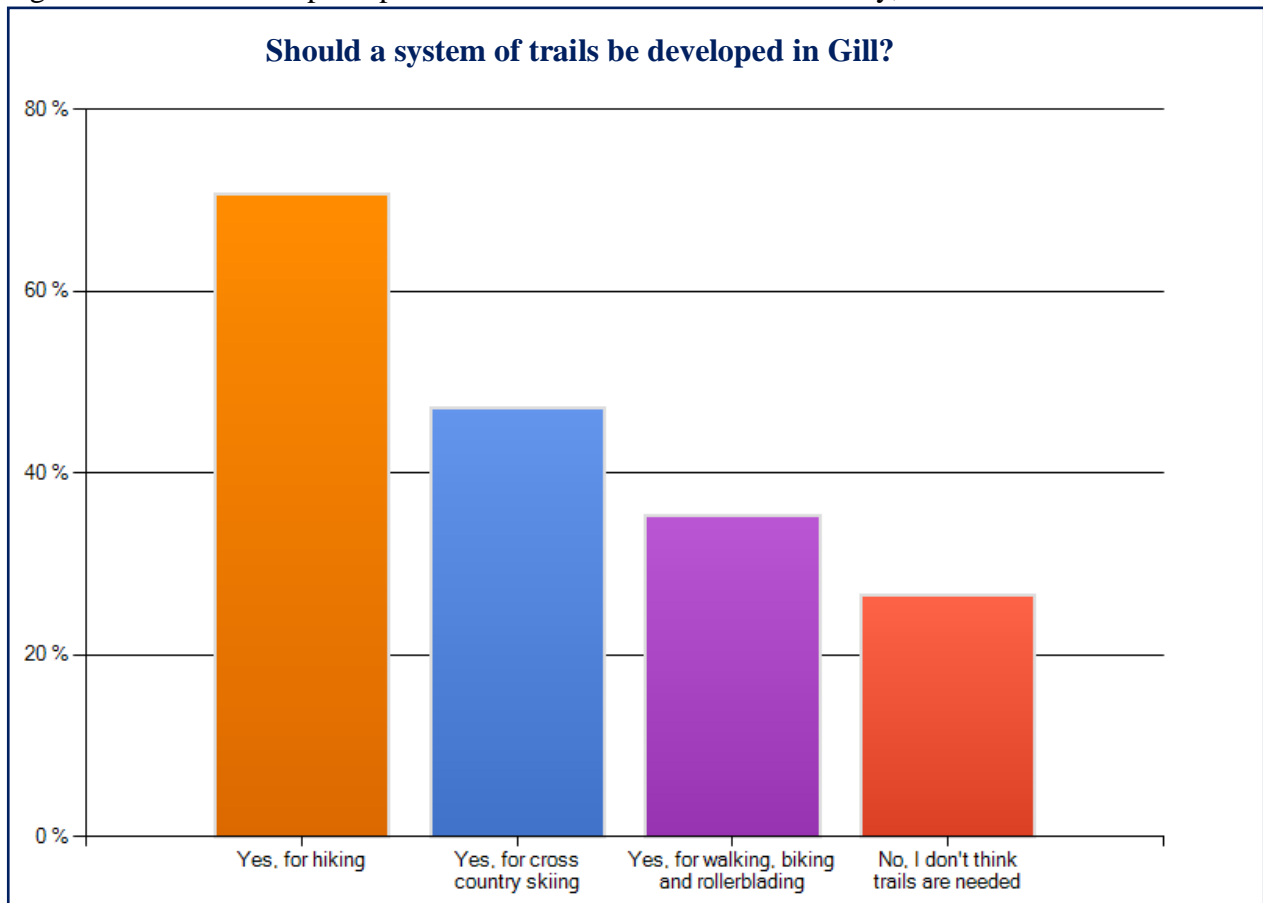


The Connecticut River is an excellent natural resource that is the focus for recreational activities for Gill residents. As shown in Figure 7-5, the most popular activity on the Connecticut River is canoeing and kayaking. Residents can access the River via the public boat launch in the Riverside area. An additional access point in town is the little-used Stacy’s Ferry, a one-acre Town-owned property. Stacy’s Ferry was identified during the Public Forum as a recreational area in need of improvement. Assessing strategies for improving Stacy’s Ferry are included in the Action Plan. Some ideas include better non-power boat access to the river, a picnic area and a park.

Summary of Management Needs

The Survey asked how well publicized recreational programs and facilities are in Town. About 45 percent say the programs are well publicized while 55 percent say they are not. The Committee discussed improving publicity by contributing a regular OSRP column to the volunteer-published Gill Newsletter and a regularly-published guide to OSRP facilities and programs. These strategies are included in the Action Plan.

Figure 7-6: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, Trails



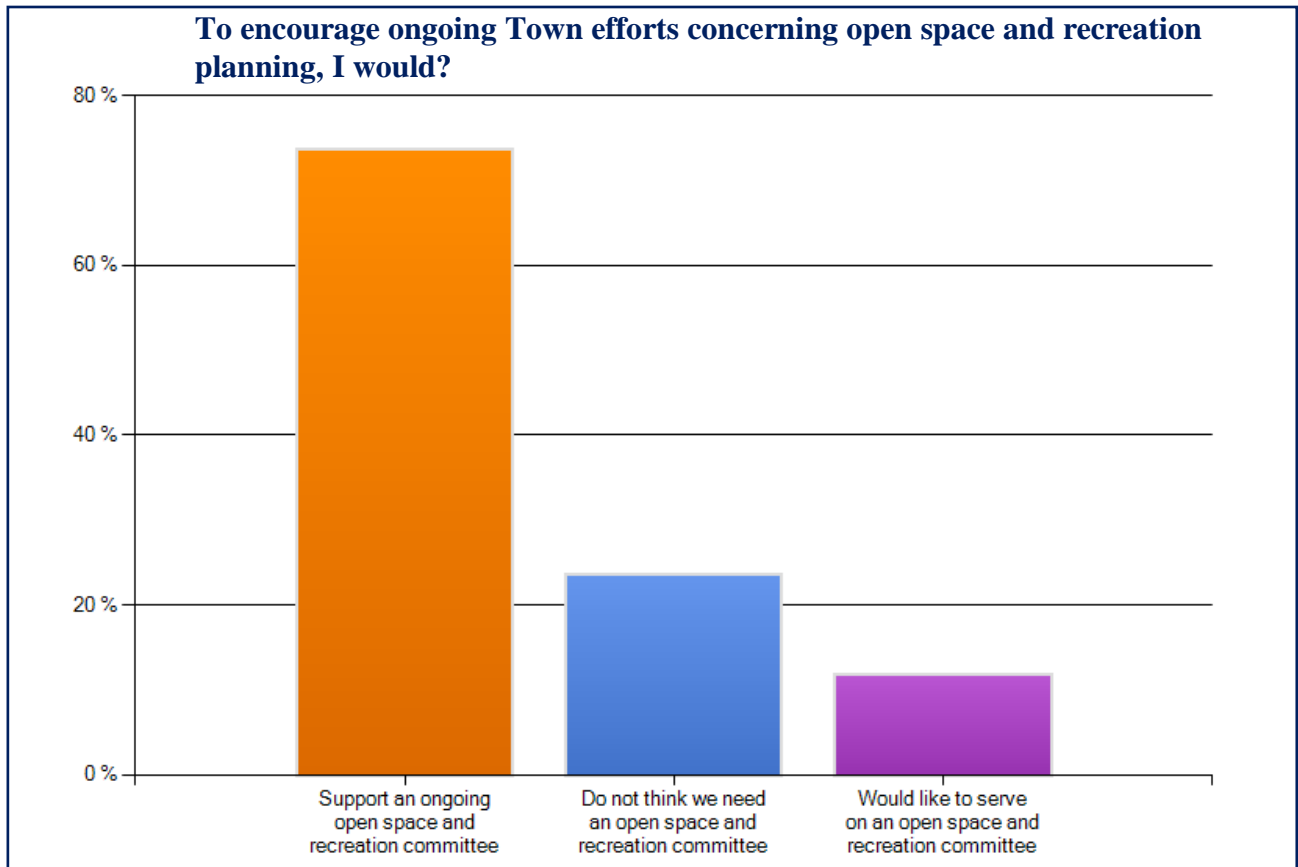
Nearly all respondents think that the recreational facilities in Gill are well-maintained. Volunteer efforts refurbished the ballfield at the Riverside Municipal Building, an important facility for Riverside residents. Some recreational needs include the addition of a Gill Elementary School recreational facility and refurbishment of the nature trail at the School. Upgrading Stacy’s Ferry

is another recreational need. Residents were also asked to list any additional recreational facilities or activities they would like to have in Town. Responses include:

- Cross country skiing and biking
- Zumba
- Gym for the Gill Elementary School...Swimming/pool area, basketball, path for walking, biking, cross country skiing or snow shoeing
- Good maps for cross-country skiing/ hiking
- Red Sox trip

About 70 percent of respondents are in favor of developing a system of trails for hiking and about 45 percent for cross country skiing, as shown in Figure 7-6. Trails is a topic that came up during Committee meetings as well. Therefore, forming a trails committee and producing a trails map are included in the Action Plan.

Figure 7-7: Gill 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Survey, OSRP Committee



About 75 percent of respondents to the Survey support an ongoing Open Space and Recreation Committee, although few are willing to serve on the committee (Figure 7-7). General comments on open space and recreation in Gill were requested as well. Responses include:

- We have enough (protected land) tied up already, NO more!
- Please have a committee to bring some business into town
- It would be good to have some formal connectors for x-country ski trails and a map.

- I do not believe more open space is needed. I strongly feel that we need more business revenue in the town.
- We have enough open space and developing trails costs money.
- Getting permission to hike through someone's corn field makes for the best hike.
- I believe the town should provide more focus on developing business in our community.
- How awesome it would be to have a booklet with everything in it. It would be nice if residents had access to the Falls River.

Implementing the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Action Plan will require the support of the community and the oversight of an active, permanent OSRP Committee. Perhaps the most pressing management need is community support, an active, ongoing OSRP committee, and the support of such entities as the Select Board, Planning Board, Recreation Committee, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, and Agricultural Commission. Strong and diplomatic leadership of the OSRP Committee will be key to good public involvement and successful implementation of the Action Plan over the coming years.

Note: Complete Public Survey results are included in the Appendix C.



Barton Cove provides a peaceful setting for a pair of fall fishermen.

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act Findings

Two Town-owned properties show promise for development as recreational areas. They are the Town Forest and Stacy's Ferry. Neither has been developed to date but, as they are, ADA access will be part of the planning process.

Park and Open Space Equity

Are open space and recreation opportunities available to all residents of Gill on a relatively equal basis? Traditional measures of park and open space equity assess whether environmental justice populations in urban areas have the same access to open space and recreation resources as others

in their community. Measuring park and open space equity is difficult in small, rural towns. In the case of Gill, no environmental justice populations are identified. These populations, as defined by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, are made up of “high minority, non-English speaking and low-income neighborhoods”.

Where Gill is concerned though, there are few established parks and other public recreation spaces. Instead, there is much open space that everyone has access to, either through ownership or through permission of friendly neighbors. And, as shown in the OSRP Public Survey, 90% of respondents indicated that their own land is the most often used “recreation area or program” in Gill. Easy access to open space is one measure of open space and recreation equity in Gill.