

COMMONWEALTH CONNECTIONS

A greenway vision for Massachusetts



Department of Environmental Management



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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A Green Vision for Our Future



The Blackstone River Bikeway in Millville. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

Imagine the Massachusetts countryside laced with ribbons of green threading together parks, scenic landscapes, natural areas, and important community landmarks, or cities sprinkled with green space and trails, providing opportunities to enjoy the outdoors close to home. Now imagine that all of these “green corridors” were somehow linked together, creating a network of greenways, trails and protected open spaces throughout Massachusetts.

This idea or “vision” is one that many Massachusetts citizens are working toward — protecting a key parcel of land along a river, planning a bikeway that links one town with the next, or clearing and blazing another mile of trail. But often people are working without knowing about similar efforts in a neighboring town or region, and especially without knowing about what is happening across the state.

Commonwealth Connections attempts to pull the pieces together, and creates a vision for the future of greenways and trails in Massachusetts. It incorporates the detailed input and creativity of hundreds of grassroots activists, and representatives from state and federal agencies, municipalities, various user groups, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. It is hoped that this vision will serve as a framework for the many greenway and trail efforts underway in Massachusetts, help focus efforts on critical areas, and energize support for implementing greenway and trail projects throughout the state.

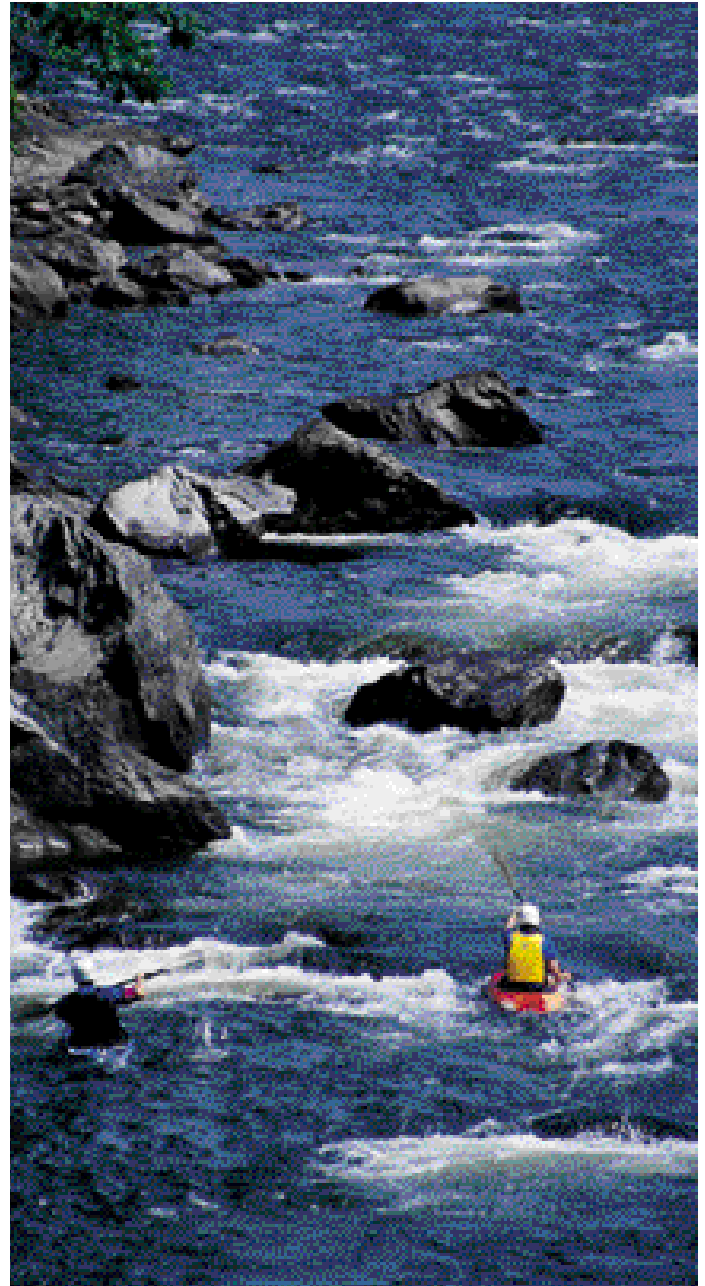
‘Corridors of green’

When landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., first introduced a plan for using green space to link parks in Boston, he unfurled a grand vision of conservation and public recreation that today reaches far beyond the city. Some of the nation’s best preserved “corridors of green” traverse Massachusetts, defining and honoring our past while setting a high standard of natural resource protection and public

recreation for the future. Greenways and trails — and the open spaces they connect — improve our quality of life in ways that are difficult to measure.

Massachusetts greenways and trails provide vital links between the built environment, natural areas and native habitats of our state. They enhance the economies of our communities, protect wildlife habitat and reconnect our increasingly fragmented landscape. Trails can also be used as alternative transportation corridors, helping to reduce pollution and congestion. Yet greenways and trails connect more than places. They provide unique opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors. They link people within communities and communities to each other. In a social context where communities are too often narrowly defined, greenways create a common ground for civic identity and pride, creating truly tangible evidence of what our “Commonwealth” is all about.

In 1999, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) launched an effort to develop a modern day greenway vision for Massachusetts. DEM and its partners worked to identify opportunities for expanding existing greenways and trails and for connecting them with each other, with special places across the state and with the people of Massachusetts. Commonwealth Connections is the result of this work. It reflects the priorities of the Massachusetts greenways and trails community and paints a unified picture for the future. It also provides a detailed strategy for bringing that picture to life. Commonwealth Connections calls for a coordinated network of connected open lands, rivers, and trails crisscrossing the state, protecting important landscapes, bridging communities, and linking important destinations. To achieve this ambitious goal, a strong commitment must be made at the state, regional, and local levels to provide the resources — technical, financial and human — necessary to achieve this great vision.



Kayaking on the Deerfield River. Creating greenways along river corridors protects valuable water resources and forges connections between our communities and the surrounding landscapes. (Marny Ashburne)

LEARNING BY LISTENING



A Greenway Vision workshop in Amherst. (Colin M.J. Novick)

How the greenway plan was created

In developing Commonwealth Connections, DEM went directly to the people who know the issues and challenges best: the professional and volunteer trail and greenway leaders who are spear-

heading projects throughout Massachusetts. Just as greenways themselves link different communities and landscapes, this document weaves together many grassroots and statewide initiatives into a common vision for the future.

DEM, which owns and manages many greenways and trails in the state and works with private groups on many others, teamed up with the Appalachian Mountain Club, the nation's oldest conservation and outdoor recreation organization, and the National Park Service to lead the effort. Most of the information for this project was gathered through a series of interactive workshops, questionnaires and interviews involving hundreds of planners, land managers, grassroots activists, greenway and trail users, non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies and interested citizens. Participants were asked to share their knowledge of existing greenways and trails, to identify critical corridors for conservation and recreation and to work together to develop a broad vision for each region and ultimately for the state. Based on this detailed input and later analysis, DEM and its partners developed a set of recommendations that reflect the major themes and priorities heard across Massachusetts.

In the end, the information gathered gave shape to three components of the plan:

- A statewide greenway vision map;
- Seven statewide recommendations and strategies for achieving this vision; and
- Regional recommendations and priorities.

Commonwealth Connections articulates a vision for the future of greenways in Massachusetts that is based on the hard work and ideas of the greenways and trails community. It acknowledges existing efforts, points out new possibilities, and offers a blueprint — or even a greenprint — for action at the state, regional and local levels.

The stakes are high. Population and communities are growing rapidly and critical landscapes throughout Massachusetts are becoming increasingly fragmented. Opportunities for creating continuous corridors are being lost. If we do not soon take the decisive steps outlined in this plan, we may lose forever the chance to realize the bold — but still attainable — vision. Fortunately, a strong base of devoted citizen leaders and professionals have laid the groundwork for this endeavor. The support for greenways and trails by a broad cross-section of the public is formidable. We must harness this collective energy and work together to connect our Commonwealth.



Accessible, well preserved rivers and trails are integral to the greenway vision — and to the quality of life in Massachusetts. (Paul David Mozell)

A Call to Action

Seven recommendations for securing the Massachusetts Greenway Vision

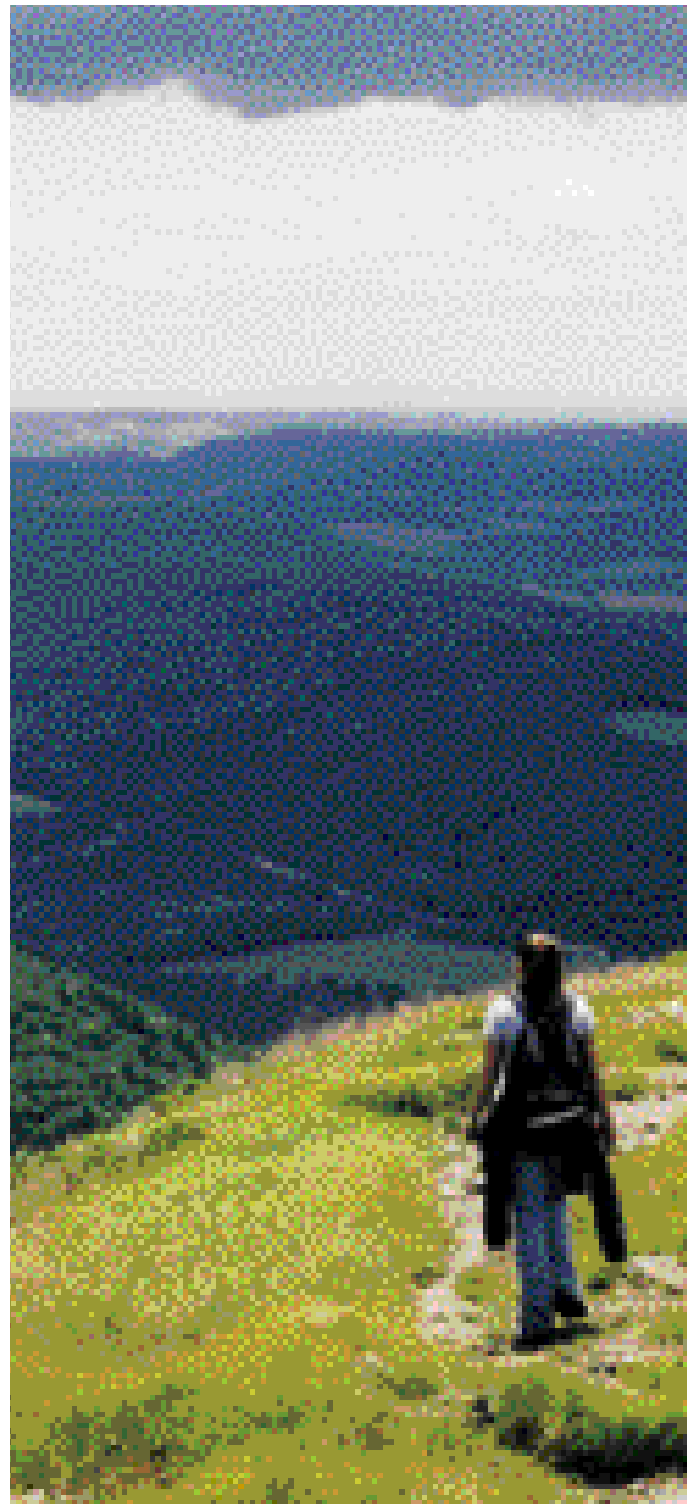
The vision set forth in this plan is ambitious. To make it a reality will require a committed and collaborative effort on the part of our citizens, our communities and our lawmakers.

The following recommendations reflect the themes and priorities repeated most often by greenway and trail leaders involved in this planning process. Each recommendation is followed by a series of specific strategies for implementation, and together form the heart of this Plan. DEM and its partners in this effort feel that these recommendations, when acted upon, will strengthen existing efforts, protect and enhance priority greenways and trails, and ultimately create a unified greenway network throughout Massachusetts for generations to come.

1

Protect and promote long-distance trail corridors as primary spines of the Massachusetts Greenway and Trail System.

The Taconic, Appalachian, Mahican-Mohawk, Metacomet-Monadnock, Midstate, Warner and Bay Circuit trails are the most widely known and popular long-distance trails in Massachusetts. Still, it may surprise many people to learn that only the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is permanently protected. All of these other long distance trails — approximately 600 trail miles in all — are in real danger of fragmentation as unprotected segments within these trail corridors and surrounding lands are lost to development or closed to public use. Before these important trails can truly form the backbone of a statewide network, they must be formally secured. Protecting these and other long distance trails in perpetuity will require the cooperative efforts of state and municipal government, land trusts, trail



The view from Alander Mountain on the South Taconic Trail. (Rebecca Barnes)

GREENWAYS AND THEIR BENEFITS



Greenways create opportunities for recreation and non-motorized transportation. (Jennifer Howard)

Greenways are corridors of land and water that protect and link a wide range of natural, cultural and recreational resources. They include numerous types of trails and walkways, river corridors, bicycle paths, wildlife corridors, linear parks and open lands linked by trails. The Connecticut River Greenway State Park, the Shining Sea Bikeway, the Nashua River Greenway, the Bay Circuit, the Midstate Trail and the Merrimack River Trail are just a few examples of Massachusetts Greenways. Most greenways involve a mix of public and private land and are often created through partnerships between private landowners, greenway advocates, municipalities and regional and state agencies. Their specific purposes are as diverse as the many forms they take on the ground, and can range from protecting riparian corridors and revitalizing downtowns, to creating recreational and non-motorized transportation opportunities close to peoples' homes. There are many types of greenways, but they all share a common vital purpose: to protect the special places in our communities and, most importantly, to link these special places together.

Whether a lone hiker trekking Mt. Greylock on a late autumn afternoon, a family paddling down the Deerfield River, or an urban dweller commuting on foot or by bike to work along Boston's Charles River Esplanade, greenway experiences are intensely personal. Greenways and trails provide far more than a chance for people to experience nature, interact with neighbors and learn about their native environments. These corridors of green also help conserve the integrity of the natural systems on which healthy plant, wildlife and human populations depend. They preserve the quality and abundance of drinking water, connect habitat areas, help preserve biological diversity and can save energy by providing opportunities for non-motorized transportation.

Greenways are also good for business. They help to enhance real estate values and create new markets for tourism. In a recent DEM survey of businesses along the Cape Cod Rail Trail, 24 percent of owners said the existence of the trail was a factor in their decision to launch operations; 53 percent noted that trail users accounted for more than 10 percent of total annual sales revenues.

Greenways are corridors of land and water that protect and link a wide range of natural, cultural and recreational resources. They include numerous types of trails and walkways, river corridors, bicycle paths, wildlife corridors, linear parks and open lands linked by trails. The Connecticut River Greenway State Park, the Shining



A wood turtle, one of 424 state-listed rare species. Greenways can prevent fragmentation of critical habitat by linking open spaces and creating "green corridors" where animals and plants can thrive. (Terry Blunt)

organizations and private individuals working together through a variety of land protection and landowner incentive programs.

STRATEGIES

- Designate a long-distance trail system as the backbone of the state greenway network and make it a priority for state and federal funding.
- Permanently protect 200 miles of these priority trails by 2010 through outright acquisition, easements, and formal agreements, thus making them more accessible to the public.
- Introduce legislation creating tax incentives to encourage private landowners to keep segments of trail corridors that cross their property open to the public.



Advocates recommend permanently protecting 200 miles of long-distance hiking trails by the year 2010. With nearly 600 miles threatened by growth and fragmentation, securing these priority trail corridors will be critical to realizing the greenway vision. (Kathy Sferra)

2

Protect critical river corridors and their tributaries statewide.

It is imperative to support and build on river conservation efforts of the last two decades, efforts that have rejuvenated once-neglected river systems throughout Massachusetts.

Thanks to this work, many of our most cherished rivers such as the Merrimack, the Nashua, the Connecticut and the Blackstone rivers have been rediscovered as unique sites for recreation, environmental education, and for the critical

habitat they provide to thousands of species of plants and wildlife. Throughout Massachusetts, local and regional land trusts, watershed associations, private landowners, and municipal, state, and federal agencies are working to create greenways along more than 1,600 miles of priority river corridors identified in this Plan in an effort to protect these critical resources and, where appropriate, to provide public access to them.

STRATEGIES

- Make land protection along river corridors identified in this Plan a priority for state and federal funding.
- Improve enforcement of the Rivers Protection Law and other similar measures through education, outreach and grants.
- Identify and protect key public access sites to rivers and support the creation of new access points and riverwalks where appropriate.
- Encourage local zoning regulations to protect land along rivers and to provide public access to these rivers where appropriate.

3 Strategically link important natural and human communities.

Greenways serve to connect people and places. They connect natural areas to each other and to the places people live. By “assembling” greenway corridors that follow linear natural features and incorporate unique ecological and historic resources, we can at once protect these special places and weave them into a unified greenway system. Together, these networks have far greater ecological value than the individual resource areas, and are often more interesting and accessible for public recreation. These connections, in turn, can help build a larger greenway constituency committed to the protection and stewardship of our natural and cultural resources.



This car-top access site on the Millers River in Orange was created by the state Public Access Board in partnership with the town. This and many other similar sites are part of a stepped up effort by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and the Public Access Board to increase paddling access to Massachusetts rivers where appropriate. (Russ Cohen)



An historic rail mile marker located along the Mass Central Rail Trail. (Colleen Abrams)

STRATEGIES

- Integrate and link ecologically significant areas into the state greenway network, incorporating priority areas identified in the state's BioMap where appropriate.
- Support research to more accurately identify the locations of priority corridors and to identify and evaluate critical gaps in the system.
- Make critical greenway corridors identified in this plan a priority for land acquisition, landowner outreach, and funding.
- Develop a competitive grant program to support regional initiatives that connect population centers to the Massachusetts greenway and trail network.

4

Create a cross-state multi-use trail reaching from Boston to the Berkshires.

Most of the established long-distance trails in Massachusetts run north-to-south with only a handful running east-to-west. Over the past several years, there have been a wide range of local and regional efforts to create a cross-state multi-use trail along the Central Massachusetts rail line reaching from Boston to the Connecticut River Valley and perhaps, beyond. Being able to walk or ride a bike along a continuous trail reaching from Boston to the Berkshires is an idea that captures the imagination of many people and one that is gradually becoming a reality.

Given the length of the proposed cross-state trail and the complexity of issues surrounding the funding of such an endeavor, it is critical to remain focused and provide support and encouragement to the many organizations and efforts forging the way for this trail.

STRATEGIES

- Designate the cross-state trail as a statewide initiative and secure key segments for trail use by 2003.
- Make state, municipal and grassroots efforts along the cross-state trail a priority for state grant funds and technical assistance.

- Create a Cross-State Trail Partnership to coordinate activities of key groups, to explore opportunities for trail connections from Boston to the Berkshires and to develop a strategy for completing and maintaining the trail.

5

‘Trail bank’ unused rail corridors and work to gain public access to utility corridors.

The existing network of rail and utility corridors represents a significant opportunity for greenway and trail protection in Massachusetts. In light of increasing development pressure, declining availability of open space, the difficulty of assembling continuous linear tracts, and the ever-increasing costs of acquiring new lands, it is absolutely critical to prevent fragmentation and protect key rail and utility corridors as part of the state’s greenway network.

STRATEGIES

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory of all rail and utility corridors by 2004 to identify and prioritize their potential value as trails and greenways.
- Urge the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to fully implement the recently enacted policy of transferring surplus corridors to municipalities at no cost for use as trails, including developing a standard notification process to alert municipalities when rail corridors are declared surplus, streamlining the transfer process, addressing encroachment and hazardous waste liability issues, and improving communications with municipalities.
- Establish a clearinghouse for information about available rail and utility corridors, and provide technical assistance to municipalities, regional and state greenway organizations and state agencies interested in “trail banking.”
- Work with rail and utility companies to address liability concerns and insurance issues associated with shared use of rights-of-way.
- Create a state emergency loan fund for municipal acquisition of abandoned, privately owned rail corridors that have been identified as trail priorities.



Young entrepreneurs on the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway, a converted rail corridor. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

Assist the greenways and trails community with technical support and funding needed to establish a coordinated statewide greenway system.

There are hundreds of committed individuals and groups working to create greenways and trails in Massachusetts. However, there currently is no efficient mechanism for bringing these groups together to share information and ideas on a regular basis. There also are many untapped human, technical and financial resources that must be brought to the table to further the greenway vision. Many organizations, including local chambers of commerce, professional trade organizations, public health agencies and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, that are promoting our native industries and environmental and health benefits of greenways have expertise and additional resources that will make them invaluable partners.

STRATEGIES

- Establish and support the Massachusetts Greenway and Trail Partnership as a central clearinghouse and advocacy organization for the state's greenway vision.
- Support and build on existing state greenway programs by providing funding and dedicated staff to coordinate greenway protection, to support outreach efforts to landowners and municipalities and to build partnerships for greenway and trail stewardship.
- Develop and utilize a full range of communication tools including web sites, newsletters, training, technical information, data development and mapping to ensure a consistent flow of information between and among different organizations in the greenway and trail community, including government agencies and programs involved in greenway and trail work.
- Establish a link to local, regional and statewide organizations and government agencies that promote the Massachusetts tourism industry.



Mass Central Rail Trail volunteers in Rutland. Greenway and trail advocates look to the Legislature, state government and private corporations to realize the greenway vision.

(Colleen Abrams)

7 Increase funding for greenways and trails.

Funding is typically the greatest challenge facing greenway and trail protection and development efforts. Massachusetts' strength lies in the experience, initiative and leadership of its greenways and trails constituency, as well as in the wealth of natural and cultural resources. Securing additional funding is critical for leveraging these assets and making Commonwealth Connections a reality.

STRATEGIES

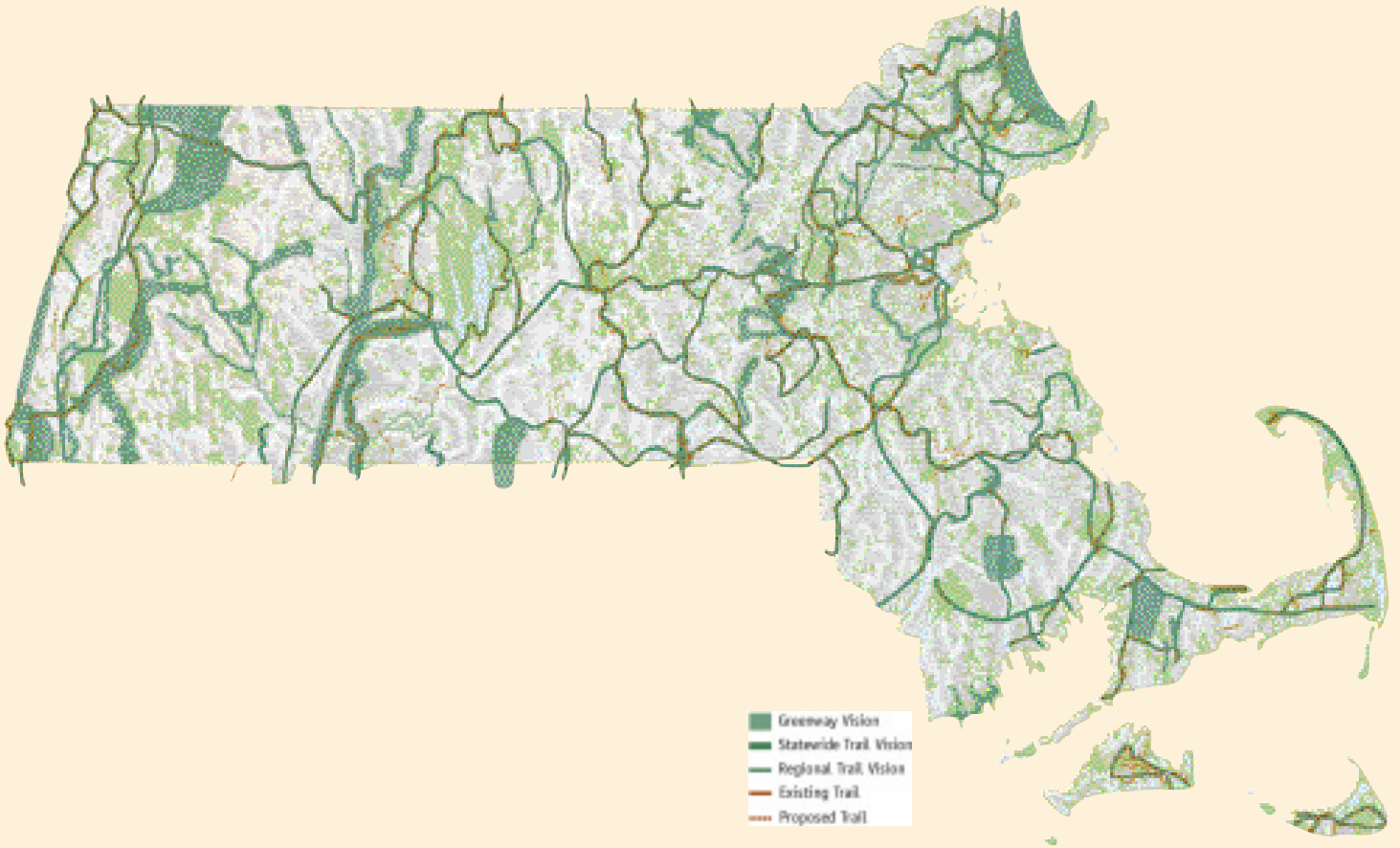
- Establish a dedicated greenway and trail bond authorization to enable state and local acquisition of priority corridors, to provide stable and adequate funding for DEM's greenway grants program and to support research, data development, technical assistance and greenway and trail maintenance.
- Work with the Massachusetts Legislature to explore innovative funding mechanisms for greenways and trails, including a rail-trail emergency loan fund to enable municipalities to respond quickly when surplus corridors go on the market; a matching fund for trail and greenway stewardship; and a landowner liability fund to cover potential legal costs as an assurance to private landowners who allow regular public use of their property.
- Increase federal transportation enhancements spending to authorized levels in the state and recognize greenways and trails as priorities for that funding.
- Dedicate funds to complete all trail construction projects currently in progress by 2005.
- Score multi-community greenways and priority initiatives identified in this Plan higher for competitive grant programs such as the state administered Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Self-Help and Urban Self-Help programs.



Allens Pond near Horseneck Beach State Reservation is part of a growing complex of protected lands. State agencies and state and local land trusts are working in partnership to conserve sensitive coastal resources, and to protect and link critical habitat areas. (Jon Crispin)

A Grand Vision

From the Ground Up



Regional greenway and trail priorities

The success of the Massachusetts Greenway Vision rests squarely on the shoulders of the people, organizations, communities and agencies that have and will continue to champion and work toward each new link in the greenway system.

In developing the Massachusetts Greenway Vision, DEM worked directly with local advocates, and representatives

from non-profit organizations, regional planning agencies, and state and federal agencies to identify greenway and trail priorities, ideas and concerns. Six regional workshops were held across Massachusetts. While many participants voiced alarm over development trends in recent years, the majority acknowledged that now is a time of unparalleled opportunity. Many participants have watched as open

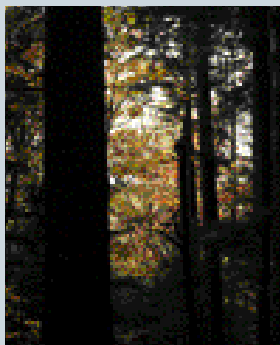
land has been fragmented or lost to development. Seeing this threat firsthand, they expressed the critical need to act now to preserve the resources and quality of life we cherish.

The following section outlines the major greenway and trail priorities identified in each region. It also highlights the current direction of a number of notable projects. Vision maps for each region graphically illustrate these and additional priorities and projects. Separately, each region has its own story. When considered together, they remind us of the richness and diversity of the Massachusetts landscape we are striving to protect and connect.



At work on the Great Barrington Riverwalk. Volunteers across the state are working to create and maintain trails and greenways. (Jennifer Howard)

Vanishing opportunities



Greenways can help protect irreplaceable resources, like this old growth forest in the Deerfield Valley. (Lauren Stephens)

Thirty years ago, only 15 percent of the land in Massachusetts was developed. Today, approximately one-quarter of the state's acreage is developed and 16,000 more acres are developed every year. Between 1950 and 1990, when our population grew by 28

percent, developed land in the state increased by 200 percent. These accelerated patterns of development are putting some of our greatest natural treasures at risk.

Forests, marshlands, farms, coastline, ridgelines, meadows, rivers and lakes — the diverse and beautiful web of nature that we often take for granted — is becoming increasingly fragmented and overwhelmed by ever-expanding cities, suburbs, strip development and malls. Today more than 2.4 million acres of the state — 46 percent of its total mass — remain unprotected. Much of these unprotected lands include bicycle and walking paths and hundreds of acres of natural areas throughout the state that local advocates want to see conserved as trails and greenways.

Without a serious effort on the part of the Massachusetts Legislature, the state administration, the federal government and continued commitments from local advocates and the land trust community, these opportunities to preserve a green legacy for our children and for their children will vanish. The time to act is now.

Sources: *Losing Ground*, Massachusetts Audubon Society;
Conserving Our Commonwealth, The Trustees of Reservations

The Berkshires



Majestic mountains, scenic wildlands, working landscapes, and an intricate network of five river systems have for years brought tourists from New England and beyond to the Berkshires to enjoy its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. The state's highest peak, Mt. Greylock, along with a number of other summits in the Berkshire Mountain range, attracts hikers and outdoor enthusiasts year-round. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail, that traverses Massachusetts along the ridgeline of the Berkshire and Taconic mountains, is only one of three major long-distance trails in this region. Though somewhat lesser known, the Taconic Trails system and the historically noteworthy Mahican-Mohawk Trail are also invaluable resources for the region and for the state.

The region's river corridors and unfragmented forestland provide important wildlife habitat and have helped to define the character and economies of many communities throughout the Berkshires. Winding through hundreds of acres of public and private property, these long-distance trails and river corridors enable people to experience some of the most spectacular natural areas in the Commonwealth. Protecting these greenway resources, creating new corridors to link forest and park lands, and establishing a bike path system from Vermont to Connecticut are all essential to efforts in this region. Specifically, advocates want to see the following steps taken:

Permanently protect, secure and buffer the region's major long-distance trails.

Of the three major long-distance trails in this region, only the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is fully protected.

Approximately 50 percent of the 72-mile Taconic Trail system, and 15 percent of the 100-mile Mahican-Mohawk Trail are permanently protected. These trails provide recreation and health

benefits, and create vital connections to surrounding forests, parks and open lands. They also offer extraordinary views and encompass fragile native habitats. Workshop participants felt it critical to permanently protect and buffer these trail corridors as the spines of a regional trail network. The main goals are to protect the critical ridgelines these trails traverse, and to ensure continuous public access and long-term preservation of scenic views.

Create links between the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Taconic Trail System.

Trail links in the north, south and central parts of the region will create unparalleled recreational and scenic viewing opportunities by establishing loop trails and increasing access to the Taconic and Berkshire mountain ranges.



View from Mt. Greylock. The Appalachian Trail passes over this well-known mountain, the highest peak in Massachusetts. (Marny Ashburne)



The Great Barrington Riverwalk. (Jennifer Howard)



Learning to bike on the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. (Allison Lasso)

Create greenway corridors that strategically link protected open spaces.

The proposed Berkshire Forest Belt, roughly following the Appalachian Trail Corridor, would link East Mountain, Beartown, and October Mountain State Forests, and reach eastward, connecting with Peru State Forest and the Westfield River Greenway system. The Northern Berkshire Green Mountain Greenway is envisioned as a corridor that would connect several large state land holdings, protect the Hoosac Mountain Range and ultimately link with the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. Creating these and other priority corridors would benefit wildlife and expand recreational opportunities for the public year round. It will require a significant amount of research and outreach to determine the most appropriate and feasible routes. Like most “big picture” greenways, they will be implemented one step at a time, through partnerships between land trusts, and municipal, state, and federal governments.

Create and protect the Housatonic River Greenway.

Twelve years ago, communities along the Housatonic River launched an effort to clean up one of the state’s most polluted waterways and raise public awareness of the river as a community asset. It is critical to continue support of these community-based efforts that include plans for riverside trails, protection of riparian lands, creation of canoe and kayak access points, and restoration of the river system.

Complete the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and support efforts to create a north-south bikeway from Vermont to Connecticut.

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is the first and only bikeway in this region. When complete it will extend 11 miles from the Pittsfield/Lanesborough town line to Adams. The southern five miles opened in the summer of 2001. State and local advocates including DEM, the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC), MassHighway and the Berkshire Bike Path Council are committed to completing the trail, and are working to secure funding and support to extend it as part of a long-distance bike trail network envisioned for the county.

Create a protected greenway corridor along the Westfield River.

The Westfield River is one of two federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in Massachusetts. It is a priority to protect this gem of a river through land acquisition, forest stewardship and zoning, as well as through landowner outreach and education. In addition, local advocates have called for greater coordination, support and public awareness among river communities. They are also working to identify trails within the greenway corridor, with the goal of connecting existing trails and potentially linking the three branches of the river.



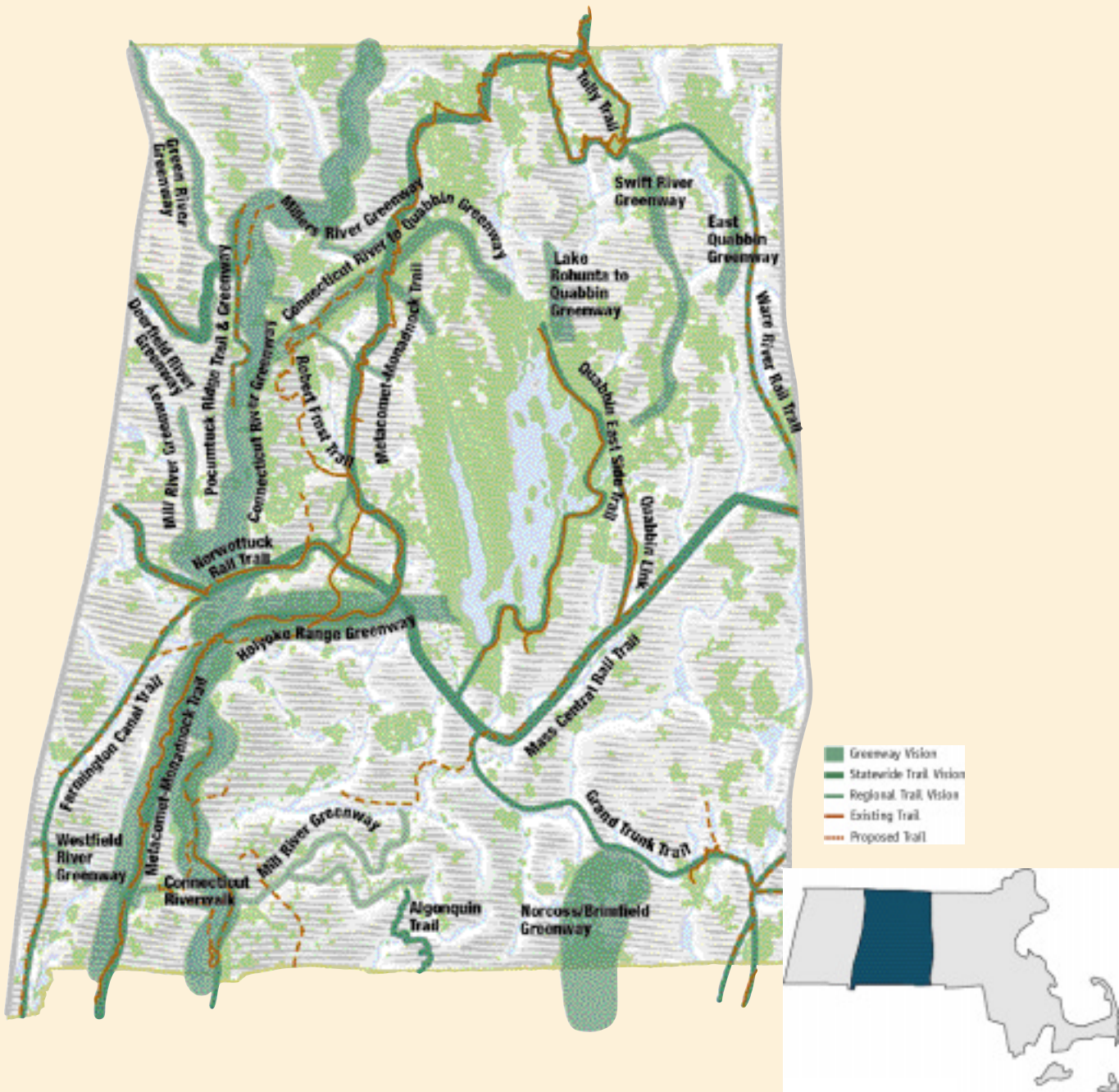
Young hiker at Pine Cobble on the Appalachian Trail in Williamstown. (William C. Madden)

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

As the state's only fully protected, long-distance hiking trail, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) in many ways represents the pinnacle of greenway and trail protection. Yet, even here, there is more work to be done to secure this public treasure.

After decades of acquisition of land adjacent to the existing trail corridor or of lands connected to nearby state forests and parks, the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC) has now shifted its efforts to protecting the trail's imperiled viewshed. As in other southern New England and Mid-Atlantic States, heightened development pressures in the Berkshires have had a detrimental effect on the trail experience for day and through hikers. The construction of cell towers along the ridgeline and other activities that are fragmenting the surrounding landscape are of particular concern. The land trust unit of the ATC is working with the industry to suggest alternatives to cell tower development that will help reduce impacts on the viewshed. Another challenge facing AT advocates is the need to raise public awareness of the importance of buffer zones as a means for protecting the natural and scenic values surrounding the trail that hikers often take for granted.

Connecticut River Valley



The Connecticut River, flowing north to south through Massachusetts for almost 70 miles, helps to define this region and serves as the centerpiece of an active land conservation community. The river and the rich floodplain along its banks support several species of rare plants and animals and give rise to the scenic summits of the Mt. Holyoke and Pocumtuck ranges, Mt. Toby and Mt. Tom. In between lies some of the most fertile farmland in the country. Further east, the Quabbin Reservoir and hundreds of acres of unfragmented forestland provide clean water, wildlife habitat and opportunities for a variety of recreational pursuits. The combination of remarkable natural features, recreational assets, agricultural lands, rural villages and small cities make this region one of the more ecologically significant regions of the state and a desirable place to live and visit.



The Westfield River. Protecting major tributaries of the Connecticut River is a priority. (Terry Blunt)

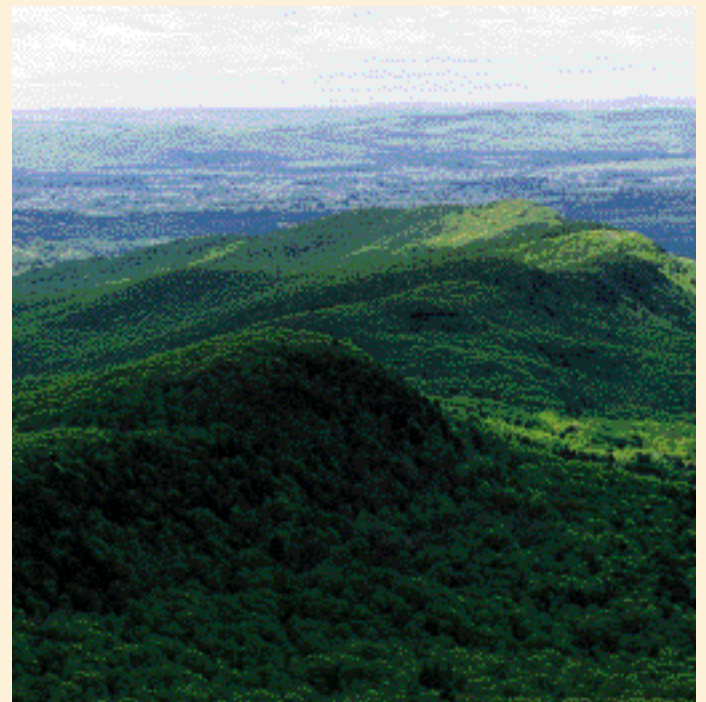
While work to establish the 3,900-acre Connecticut River Greenway State Park has been very visible, many other local and regional greenway and trail efforts are underway. The hallmark of these diverse efforts is the participation of an equally diverse group of organizations including land trusts, trail groups, regional planning agencies, and municipal, state and federal governments. Greenway partners in this region identified the following priorities:

Protect the Connecticut River corridor and its tributaries.

The Connecticut River is one of the most ecologically rich greenway resources in the state. It is imperative to provide financial and technical support to the ongoing efforts to protect the river and its network of tributaries including the Deerfield, Westfield and Millers rivers. While much has been accomplished to date, development pressures in the valley are increasing, as is the urgency to act now.

Protect significant mountain ranges in the region, and strategically link them with the Connecticut River.

The Mt. Holyoke Range and Mt. Tom were identified as priorities for protection. A unique geological formation, the Mt. Holyoke Range provides outstanding views of the valley, supports several rare amphibian and plant species and offers numerous trail opportunities. The Pocumtuck Range, another defining natural feature, is also a priority for protection. These ridgetops and the floodplains below provide critical plant and wildlife habitat. Protecting these ecosystems and securing connections between them will create wildlife corridors, conserve scenic views and create diverse recreational and interpretive opportunities. Support for these efforts is especially important now, as riverfront and mountaintop home sites are increasingly attractive and marketable.



View of the Mt. Holyoke Range looking west. This mountain range, known for its scenic beauty, habitat value, and hiking opportunities, is a priority in the region. (Terry Blunt)



Mt. Tom, one of the gems along the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail. (Terry Blunt)

Protect and secure long-distance trails as spines of a regional trail network.

The Metacomet-Monadnock (M & M) Trail traverses the region and links with trails in New Hampshire and Connecticut. Yet today, less than half of this 95-mile trail is permanently protected. Other priority trails in the region include the 20-mile Tully Trail and the 42-mile Robert Frost Trail that link with the M & M Trail, and the 15-mile Pocumtuck Ridge Trail that could connect with the Mahican-Mohawk Trail. All of these trails need additional protection and support if they are to serve as anchors for local trail-making efforts and to ensure their accessibility over the long-term.

Support the creation of a regional rail-trail network as part of the cross-state trail.

The popular Norwottuck Rail Trail, owned and managed by DEM, is a rail-trail focal point for the region. A number of other nearby and connecting rail-trails — including the Northampton Bikepath, the Manhan Rail Trail, the Amherst Bikeway and trail segments being considered in Ware, Hardwick and Williamsburg — are in varying stages of design and development. These efforts require additional support and funding to ensure their success. When complete, this network of rail-trails will expand recreational opportunities, create valuable commuter links within and between surrounding communities, and help to advance the larger vision of a cross-state trail.

Create greenways linking unique natural features to protect biodiversity and to create recreational opportunities.

One priority corridor in this region is a greenway-in-progress connecting the Connecticut River to Mt. Toby and Wendell State Forest, with further potential to link with the Quabbin Reservoir. In the North Quabbin area advocates are working with state agencies to create a large-scale greenway north and east of the reservoir. Targeted priorities in this area include lands within the Tully Trail, linking the reservoir with the Millers River and with Tully Lake along the Swift River, and linking Lake Dennison Recreation Area with Otter River State Forest.



Hikers at Royalston Falls on the Tully Trail. The trail is the centerpiece of the Tully Valley Private Forest Lands Initiative, a landmark conservation effort to protect one of the largest contiguous tracts of private forestland in southern New England. Through state acquisition of conservation restrictions, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, in partnership with DEM, Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Environmental Law Enforcement, and Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust recently conserved over 4,200 acres of private forestland in the Tully River Valley. This landscape-scale conservation effort encourages sustainable forest management, links existing state holdings, protects the viewshed of the Tully Trail, and provides deep woods habitat for large mammals like moose, bear, coyote, and bobcat, and many species of songbirds. (R. Check)

Create a Circum-Quabbin Trail.

A large loop trail through outlying areas surrounding Quabbin Reservoir will connect many existing and proposed trails, including the M & M Trail, the Ware River Rail Trail and the envisioned cross-state trail. This network will link important green space, expand recreational opportunities and connect the communities through which it runs.

Protecting the Connecticut River Greenway — A partnership approach

The Connecticut River is the largest river in New England, and the corridor of land that surrounds it is



Farmland along the Connecticut River.
(Terry Blunt)

one of Massachusetts' most beautiful and historic landscapes. The working landscape of farms and woodlots link seamlessly with parks, natural areas, scenic vistas and many sites of ecological, historic

and archeological significance.

Recognizing the importance of this landscape and the forces threatening it, a coalition of land trusts and state and federal agencies recently launched an effort to identify the key areas along the river and in the surrounding valley still in need of protection. The group has identified 14 areas where they urgently recommend special protection measures and, in many cases, speedy action. These "critical landscapes" include the Mt. Holyoke Range and Mt. Tom, key tracts of agricultural land, and sections of the floodplain that provide important habitat for several state and globally listed rare species. As development pressures in this region increase, so does the urgent need for a concerted effort to protect these lands. The group believes that it will take a partnership approach, seeking support and financial assistance on all fronts, to truly protect the valley's natural integrity and viability.

Central Massachusetts



View of the Blackstone River from Lookout Rock. In this region, increasing development pressures are threatening critical resource areas.
(John Pelczarski)

From the summit of Mt. Watatic to the floodplain of the Blackstone River, this diverse region encompasses rich agricultural lands, an abundance of rivers, ponds and man-made waterways, historic villages and the urban centers of Worcester, Leominster and Gardner. Amidst a patchwork of publicly held lands, unique natural features such as Wachusett Mountain, Wallum Lake and the Blackstone and Nashua rivers help to define the character of the region. Equally important is the region's heritage as a major industrial center.

In recent years, westward expansion of suburban Boston has driven land prices up and fragmented open landscapes many residents previously took for granted. Greenway and trail priorities here reflect concerns about dwindling availability of open space and the impact this will have on the natural resources, community character and quality of life. Advocates have called for protection and development of existing trails as “spines” of a region-wide trail network and for making these trails more accessible by linking them with population centers. They also have called for greenways along critical river corridors and ridgelines. Interest in developing rail-trails throughout the region is high, with a focus on creating a cross-state, multi-use trail along the Central Massachusetts rail line. Specific priorities for the region include:

Secure and protect the Midstate Trail.

The 92-mile Midstate Trail links a variety of public lands and provides hikers with spectacular views along the way. It runs from Rhode Island in the south to the New Hampshire border where it links with the Wapack Trail just north of Mt. Watatic. Currently only about 50 percent of the trail is permanently

protected. Once fully secured, the Midstate Trail will serve as the central trail spine in the region, with the potential for connecting with local and interstate trail networks.

Create and extend the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Many community-based efforts to create a multi-use trail along the Central Massachusetts rail line are well underway. Some sections are complete, some are being designed, while others are in the conceptual stage. Together, the pieces form a regional trail and a critical segment of the proposed cross-state trail and the East Coast Greenway. Efforts from Berlin to the east are part of the proposed Wayside Trail that will run almost 25 miles along the rail corridor owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Sections in West Boylston and Rutland have already been constructed, thanks to the efforts of Wachusett Greenways, a regional greenway organization. Recognition of this project as a statewide priority will be critical to garner the support and funding needed to protect the corridor and develop the proposed trail within this region and beyond.

Trails and greenways provide recreational opportunities year round. Cross country skiing on the Mass Central Rail Trail near West Boylston. (Colleen Abrams)





Greenways help preserve an understanding of and appreciation for the past. A old railway bridge over the Nashua River near Fitchburg. (Nashua River Watershed Association)

Provide support and funding for a variety of priority rail-trail efforts in the region.

There are many important rail-trail efforts underway in this region. Each holds the potential to provide recreational and non-motorized transportation opportunities to residents and visitors. The Nashua River Rail Trail, an 11-mile multi-use trail along a former rail corridor now owned by DEM, is currently under construction. When built, it will extend from the MBTA commuter rail station in downtown Ayer through Groton, Pepperell and Dunstable to the New Hampshire border.

Another important initiative is the Blackstone River Bikeway, a multi-state project that will eventually connect Worcester to Providence, Rhode Island, linking roughly 1,000 acres of parkland and securing a key section of the East Coast Greenway.

Additional priority rail-trails, including the Upper Charles Trail, the Assabet River Rail Trail, the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT), the Grand Trunk Trail and the North

Central Pathway are in varying stages of design and development. Each project has its own challenges. All need further support and funding for completion and to make them safe and accessible to the public.

Create river greenways throughout the region to protect natural resources, water quality and to provide recreation and educational opportunities.

Priority rivers corridors include the Blackstone River, one of two American Heritage Rivers in the state, the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord rivers (SuAsCo), portions of which were recently designated federal Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the Nashua River, where a successful protection effort began more than 30 years ago emphasizing the role of greenways in river restoration. While significant acreage has been protected along these rivers, focused attention is needed to secure critical gaps and create vital greenway connections while conservation opportunities still exist.

Greenway advocates in Central Massachusetts expressed a sense of urgency and have joined forces to take advantage of many greenway and trail opportunities throughout the region. Two efforts underway that reflect this rallying of community support include the Lake Manchaug Greenway and Wildlife Corridor, a multi-town effort to link the Douglas and Sutton state forests, and an initiative to create the Squannassit Regional Preserve, a biological preserve along the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit rivers.



The Blackstone Canal and historic towpath in Uxbridge. (Paul Meleski)

Worcester Trails — Blazing urban trails

In Worcester, a number of paths and walkways lead to historic sites, scenic views and a rich variety of park



View of Worcester skyline from the East Side Trail. (Colin M.J. Novick)

lands, including Elm Park the nation's oldest public park. While these urban gems are a source of pride for the city, many are viewed as neighborhood rather than regional resources.

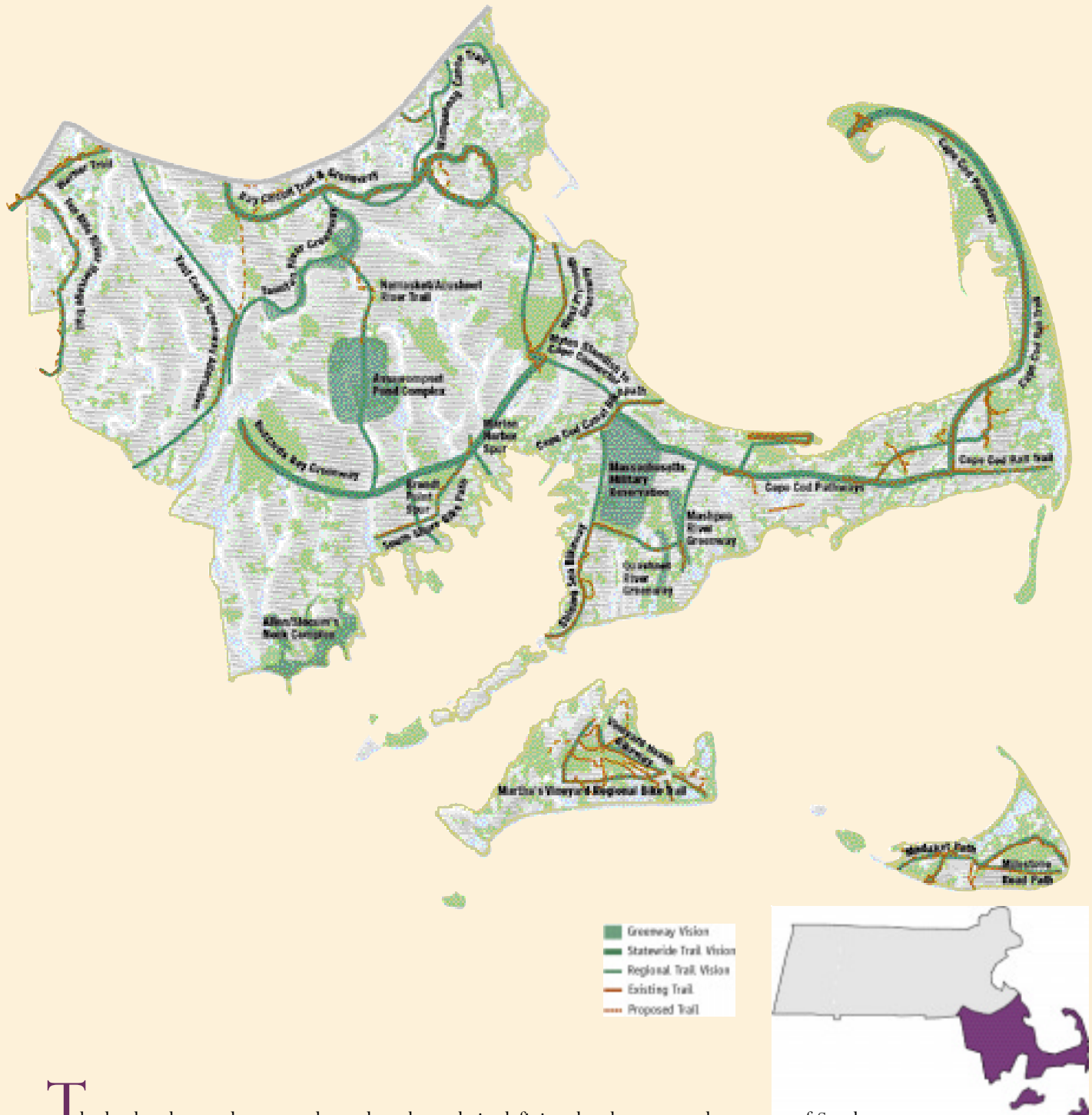
The Regional Environmental Council

(REC), in partnership with the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Greater Worcester Land Trust, private landowners, educational institutions and volunteers, hopes to change this perception.

Starting with existing paths that feature one or more of the city's parks, the REC is mapping and blazing paths and greenways with a consistent symbol to visually connect each to the next. The East Side Trail, a 3.5 mile section of this proposed network, leads hikers past Bell Pond, a unique glacial feature, through blueberry thickets, an oak savanna, open fields, and past the shores of Lake Quinsigamond. The trail also connects places of historical significance, including the remnants of an abandoned coal mine shaft where 19th century entrepreneurs once attempted to launch a local coal producing industry.

Worcester Trails supporters hope to expand the system of trail blazes to city streets and sidewalks throughout the city and beyond.

Southeastern Massachusetts



The land and natural resource base play a key role in defining the character and economy of Southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the Islands. Sandy beaches, tidal marshes, cranberry bogs, pine barrens, rural villages, urban centers, scenic rivers and a growing network of walking and bicycle paths make this region a popular place to live and play. This landscape also supports the highest density of rare and endangered species in New England, and includes globally rare coastal plain ponds. The North River, the only state designated Scenic River, and the Taunton River are natural treasures with rich history. The Bay Circuit, one of the state's oldest and grandest greenways, the Warner Trail and the Cape Cod Rail Trail provide recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike.



The Taunton River north of Route 44. Advocates are working to create a water trail and increase public awareness of this underappreciated natural treasure. (Kathy Sferra)

However, unplanned growth is fragmenting the very landscape which makes this region an appealing destination. Open land is being converted to residential and commercial uses, threatening the integrity of fragile natural systems and putting tourism and agriculture — two major land-based industries — at risk. Citizens are working hard to protect key natural features and to secure a meaningful greenway network within a developing landscape while it is still possible. Priority actions are outlined below:

Create greenways along priority river corridors for resource and habitat protection, public education and as community ‘connectors.’

The Taunton River Greenway is one priority where advocates are working to conserve land along the river and increase public awareness of its natural and archeological significance. Efforts are underway to create an on-river “water trail,” enabling the public to experience and learn about the river first hand. This water trail is part of the Wampanoag Canoe Passage,

a 70-mile canoe trail that tracks the historic route of the Wampanoag Indians from Massachusetts Bay to Narragansett Bay, and connects the North and Taunton rivers. Preserving this pre-colonial passage and the rivers it connects is another regional priority.

Link protected open spaces and parks for conservation and recreation.

Stretching from Fall River to Plymouth, the Buzzards Bay Greenway is envisioned as an open space corridor and walking trail that will link the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioserve, Freetown Fall River State Forest, the Acushnet Cedar Swamp, Haskell Swamp Wildlife Management Area and Myles Standish State Forest with a number of smaller conservation areas in the region. When complete, this major east-west greenway will connect 10 communities, protect important resources and anchor many local greenway efforts including trail spurs to the coast. While well underway, much is yet to be done to achieve these ambitious goals.



The Shining Sea Bikeway in Falmouth. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

Protect and expand existing trail corridors and networks.

A top priority is to complete the southern section of the 200-mile Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway to protect trail continuity and the natural and cultural resources along its route. Although 150 miles have been permanently protected, significant gaps remain. Enlisting the support of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is essential to securing the segments it controls, and to creating connections between the greenway network and the mass transit system — also a regional priority.

The popular Cape Cod Rail Trail is another priority. Here DEM is working to make vitally important improvements to the existing trail. Advocates are working to expand the rail-trail from Harwich through Chatham, and to identify a potential route through Dennis, Yarmouth, where the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) has provided a portion of the right-of-way, and Barnstable.

A fourth priority is to permanently protect the Warner Trail, a 35-mile hiking trail from Canton to Rhode Island's Diamond Hill State Park. Currently, only 11 miles of this critical corridor are protected. The remainder must be secured to ensure its continuity and firmly establish it as a “spine” of the regional trail network.

Cape Cod Pathways, the Ten Mile River Heritage Trail, and a multi-town municipal bikeway effort on the south shore were also identified as priority trail efforts, each with its own challenges and in need of additional support.

Develop information and technical support for greenway and trail efforts.

Better data and technical information are needed to effectively plan and protect critical greenways and trails. Advocates recommended creating a “greenway clearinghouse” and requested a staff position to coordinate region-wide greenway efforts.

This region offers many other unique greenway opportunities. Efforts to open up portions of the 8,000-acre Assawompset Pond Complex for passive recreation would create a key link between the Taunton River and Buzzards Bay greenways. Advocates also envision connecting the Bay Circuit with Cape Cod Pathways through Myles Standish State Forest, linking over 300 miles of trails and over 15,000 acres of open space. On the same scale, a recent management plan for the reuse of 15,000 acres of the Massachusetts Military Reservation calls for large scale conservation, and considers the possibility of a trail network which could eventually link the reservation with Cape Cod Pathways and beyond. These large scale projects underscore the value of creating linkages and exemplify the synergistic effect creating greenway networks can have.



An American Bald Eagle. The Assawompset Pond Complex is one of the only year round nesting sites in Massachusetts for this endangered bird. (Terry Blunt)

Cape Cod Pathways — Connecting people and places

The proposed 100-mile Cape Cod Pathways network is an excellent example of cooperation among federal, state, town and tribal officials, non-profit organizations and private land and business owners. The result is a network of walking trails that, when complete, will protect and showcase the diverse natural scenery and cultural treasures of the 15 Cape Cod communities. The proposed Pathways network links several existing local trails once considered assets only for the host community.

A project of Barnstable County, coordinated by the Cape Cod Commission in cooperation with The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts and the National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program, the coalition-based effort first envisioned a system of pathways traveling across the Cape, and then identified gaps needing protection. In 1995, an eight-day hike of the proposed cross-Cape trail

network attracted significant public support. That support has continued to grow thanks to annual “Walking Weekends” sponsored by nonprofit organizations working with the Commission, municipalities, and the National Park Service. With 50 to 60 miles of dedicated trail on the ground, the Pathways network is within reach.



The Cape Cod Rail Trail. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)



Hikers explore the Outer Cliffs during a Cape Cod Pathways “Walking Weekend.” (Kathy Sferra)

Metropolitan Boston



Greater Boston's historic sites, classic architecture and distinctive natural features such as the Boston Harbor Islands present exciting challenges and opportunities for creating greenways and trails. Three important rivers — the Charles, the Mystic, and the Neponset — run through the metropolitan area and converge in Boston Harbor. The Boston Common, Walden Pond State Reservation, the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway, Blue Hills State Reservation and the Charles River Greenway are just a few of the public open spaces providing opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.



A trailside business in Bedford on the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway. (Danny O'Brien)

Because much of the landscape is already developed advocates recognize the critical need to secure a “green infrastructure” that connects remaining open space, protects natural resources, and accommodates recreation and non-motorized transportation. In addition, increased development pressures and skyrocketing land values severely limit opportunities for assembling new greenway corridors. As a result, priorities in this region focus on completing and connecting trail and greenway initiatives currently underway. In many cases, inactive rail corridors throughout the region present ready-made opportunities for linking communities, providing accessible trails and creating alternative transportation routes. Specific priority actions include the following:

Create a network of bike paths and trails throughout the region.

Priority corridors identified for this region include portions of the 25-mile Wayside Trail along the Central Massachusetts rail line and the Bike to the Sea Trail that travels nine miles from Everett to Lynn. Both proposed trails are key segments of the East Coast Greenway. Another priority is the Tri-Community Bikeway connecting Woburn, Winchester and Stoneham. The

MBTA, which currently owns many of the corridors targeted for protection, has recently adopted a policy of transferring surplus corridors at no cost to municipalities for trail use.

Implementing this policy and developing these and other multi-use trails will take continued cooperation among communities, trail groups, and state and federal agencies.

Create greenways along critical river corridors for resource protection, recreation, and education.

Mother Brook, and the Charles, Neponset and Mystic rivers are priorities for protection in this region. Partners are working to create greenways along these rivers to conserve riparian resources, raise public awareness, and gain better public access for recreation and environmental education. Expanding protection of the Sudbury and Concord rivers around the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is also a priority.



The Charles River Reservation. There are many pockets of natural beauty in the heavily populated area of Boston, Cambridge and the surrounding communities. (Dan Driscoll)



Hikers on the Warner Trail. Long distance trails provide opportunities for day hikers as well as those in for the long haul. (Jim Goyea)

Complete the Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway.

In addition to closing the remaining gaps along this priority trail, efforts also are focusing on securing a wider greenway corridor through this heavily developed landscape.

Permanently protect the Warner Trail and link it to the Blue Hills Reservation.

The Blue Hills Reservation, over 7,000 acres of protected land in Milton, Quincy and surrounding towns, features an extensive trail network, and is easily accessible from Boston and many other metropolitan area communities. Expanding the Warner Trail and linking it with the reservation will create an ideal northern terminus for this important long distance trail and further expand public recreation opportunities.

Support efforts to create the Boston Harborwalk and the East Boston Greenway.

The Boston Harborwalk provides pedestrian access to the waterfront and highlights historic sites in the port of Boston. The East Boston Greenway, a proposed three-mile linear park

from Piers Park in Boston Harbor to Belle Isle Marsh in East Boston, will create opportunities for walking, bicycling, and exploring many parks, natural areas and coastal environments along the way. Both efforts enjoy broad local support and have played a key role in community building. Continued support and funding are needed to secure additional lands and to create a coordinated system of bike and pedestrian opportunities.

Workshop participants recognized the high costs associated with completing many priority greenway and trail projects in this region. Land costs for most of these projects will be formidable, and the conversion of abandoned rail lines into operable rail trails will require significant investments for design and construction.

It will be essential to identify new funding sources and to work closely with the Massachusetts Highway Department and other state agencies to gain better access to existing funds, such as TEA-21 monies, federal dollars available for transportation-related greenway and trail projects. Experience also demonstrates that none of these projects will reach fruition without a significant level of community “investment” of time and good will. With this in mind, advocates are working to develop public education and awareness efforts to spread the good word about greenways and their benefits to urban and suburban living.



Two generations stroll along the Charles River. (Dan Driscoll)



Bike to the Sea Trail in Malden, part of the East Coast Greenway. (Karen M. Votava)

East Coast Greenway — A trail connecting cities

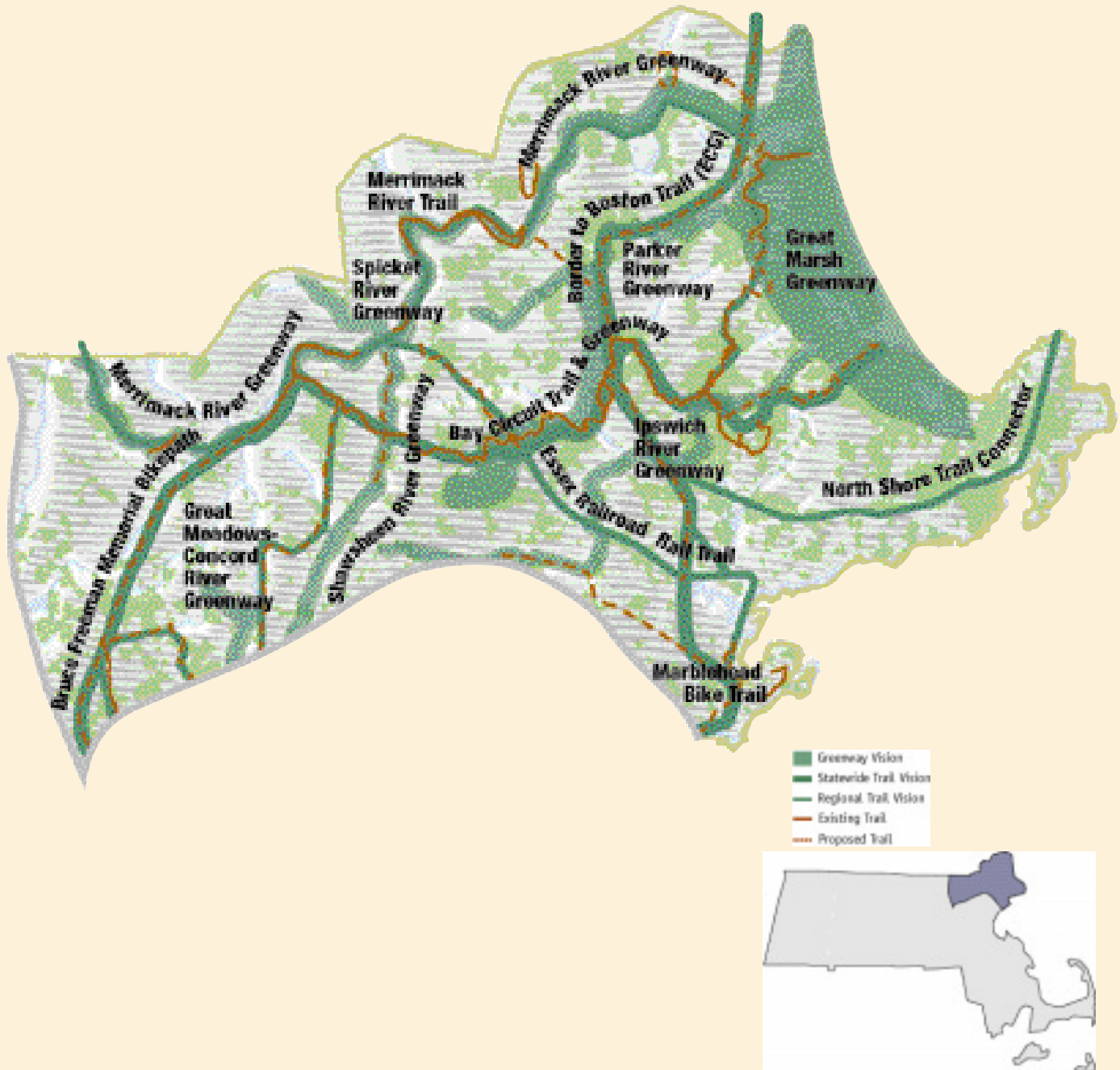
Dubbed the “urban alternative” to the Appalachian Trail, the East Coast Greenway (ECG) is taking shape as the nation's first long-distance, city to city multi-use trail spanning 2,600 miles from Key West, Florida, to Calais, Maine.

In Massachusetts, the proposed route extends north from Rhode Island along the proposed Blackstone River Bikeway, then east to Boston along the proposed Mass Central Rail Trail and the Charles River Bikepath, and north to the New Hampshire border along the proposed Bike to the Sea and Border-to-Boston trails. Today, only about one-third of the 143 miles envisioned for the ECG in Massachusetts is the focus of active designation, design or construction activities.

Like most greenways, the ECG is being assembled segment by segment. The East Coast Greenway Alliance, the multi-state non-profit organization that coordinates trail efforts in the participating states, is working with municipalities and trail groups to designate existing trails within the route and to develop connecting trails to close the gaps.

Stepping up efforts to complete the ECG and the priority trails it connects in Massachusetts will require even more grassroots support and cooperation among communities, trail groups and state agencies. Of particular importance will be a coordinated effort with the MBTA to protect several of the targeted corridors, including the Wayside Trail, a critical link in both the ECG and the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Northeastern Massachusetts



Town Landing on the Essex River in the Great Marsh.

(Katie Busse)

More than five rivers carve their way through the coastal plains of the north shore and Merrimack Valley. The rivers eventually meet at the Great Marsh, which at 10,000 acres is New England's largest salt marsh. The Great Marsh, combined with a multitude of barrier beaches, dunes, islands and adjacent uplands, provides critical habitat and breeding grounds for a variety of avian and marine life. Further south, rocky headlands, beaches and working harbors line the coast, and together with riverine and forested habitat help to define the region.



Haying in the Great Marsh. Advocates are working to protect this unique salt marsh through conservation, stewardship and education. (Katie Busse)

Just as water dominates much of the landscape, it has also helped shape the region's greenway priorities. Efforts are underway to protect the area's watersheds, coastal habitats and cultural resources, as well as a move to stimulate downtown revitalization through the creation of riverwalks and riverbank restoration. Many historic mill sites and surrounding lands are now in public ownership, creating opportunities to create linear parks like the Merrimack River Trail, which features the river and many natural and cultural treasures along its banks.

Several inactive rail lines currently owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) weave through the region's inland and coastal communities, presenting excellent trail and non-motorized transportation opportunities. Specific priorities for the region include:

Create a system of river greenways to protect natural and cultural resources, water quality and to provide recreational and educational opportunities.

The region's major rivers — the Merrimack, Spickett, Shawsheen, Ipswich and Parker — are all targeted as priorities for protection. Another priority is to complete the Merrimack

River Trail, a proposed riverfront path following the entire river. While segments in Haverhill, Lawrence and other river communities are already well underway, more work is needed to achieve the vision of a continuous riverfront pathway and linear park.

Secure key MBTA corridors and target them for future rail-trail development.

Many proposed rail-trail projects in this region may require use and development of corridors currently owned by the MBTA. Two priority trails are the Border-to-Boston Trail, the Northshore leg of the proposed East Coast Greenway, and the Essex Railroad Rail Trail that spans the region from Salem to the Merrimack River. It is critical to protect these and other corridors from fragmentation or conversion to other uses. Much progress in working with the MBTA has been made to date. However, greenway advocates need additional support to secure these corridors, and need assistance negotiating with private railroad companies and the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) regarding rails-with-trails projects and important liability questions. Local organizations also have requested technical assistance in securing "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)" funding for priority initiatives.

Create and protect the Great Marsh Coastal Greenway.

This proposed greenway will link the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and Crane Beach. It also will help protect the integrity of the Great Marsh ecosystem and create numerous recreational opportunities. A large portion of this area has been designated by the state as the Parker River/Essex Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and greenway advocates again have identified it as a priority for protection and stewardship.



Creating new rail-trails and bicycle routes are priorities for this region.

(Colleen Abrams)

Complete the Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway.

In this region, the 200-mile Bay Circuit Trail is nearly complete and is a widely used local and regional asset. The Bruce Freeman Memorial Bikepath, a seven-mile rail trail from Lowell to Westford is currently under construction and will form an important link in the Bay Circuit Trail. The remaining gaps have been targeted for protection in order to complete the trail, protect its continuity and make it fully accessible to the public. Broadening the corridor and solidifying the greenway surrounding the trail was also identified as a priority.

Support creation of the Six Community Trail and Bicycle Route.

This priority trail project will create safe bicycling and pedestrian opportunities along Routes 22 and 133, linking the communities of Wenham, Hamilton, Manchester, Beverly, Essex and Ipswich to scenic and natural areas throughout the communities and along the coast.

As in other regions, advocates in the Northeast have requested state support — training, technical assistance and coordination — for grassroots greenway efforts. They also recognized the need to explore a variety of tools to leverage the protection of greenways and trails through the municipal planning and development process. Examples include adopting the Community Preservation Act, developing local greenway plans and incorporating them into municipal zoning through overlay districts, and requiring trail set-asides as part of the local permitting process.



*A wooden bridge on the Bay Circuit Trail. While nearly three-quarters of the 200-mile trail have been secured, there is still work to be done to complete the historic greenway.
(DEM)*

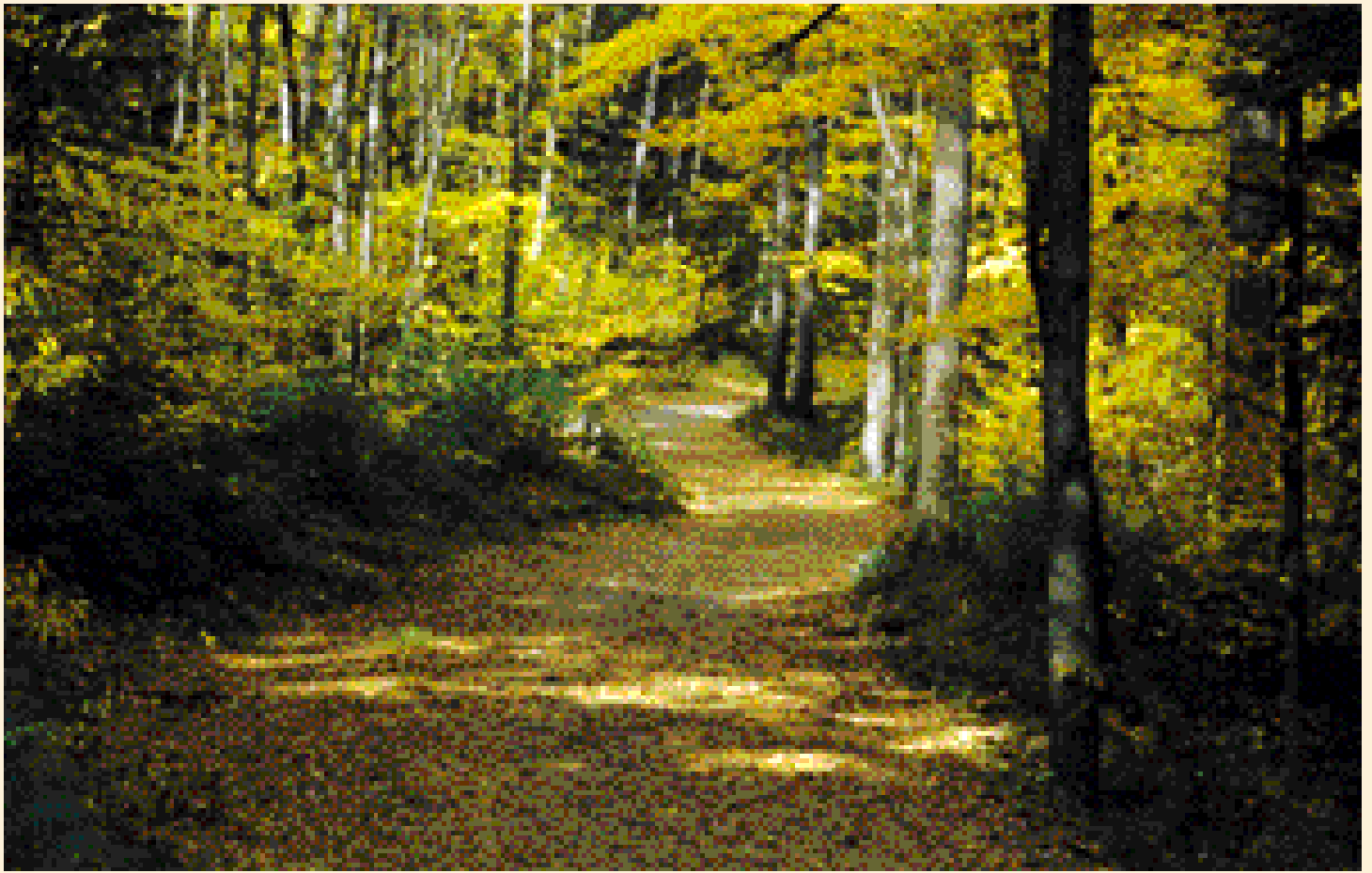
Bay Circuit Trail — Realizing the vision

Appalachian Trail visionary Benton McKaye and Frederick Law Olmsted contemporary Charles Eliot II launched the legendary Bay Circuit in 1929 as a grand experiment in open space protection. They were among a group of influential Bostonians worried about the rapid expansion of the city into surrounding rural areas. More than 70 years later, the Bay Circuit has become an increasingly popular hiking trail. Stretching 200 miles from Bay Farm in Duxbury to Plum Island in Newburyport, it connects more than 80 parks and open spaces and highlights a diversity of natural and cultural features along the way.

During the past decade, the Bay Circuit Alliance and its partners have made great progress. Efforts have focused on community trail building, securing key segments, and on constituency building. Public awareness has played a key role, and every year since 1990 Bay Circuit enthusiasts have turned out to hike the 200-mile trail and renew their support for this long-term greenway effort.

The northern section of the Bay Circuit is almost complete. Here, as in other areas, efforts are focused on protecting the remaining gaps and linking existing trail segments. Advocates also are working to broaden the greenway corridor to buffer the trail and protect important green space along the entire route. Today, with more than 150 miles of trail on the ground, the pioneering greenway vision is within reach.

A Greenway Legacy



Hiking trail on watershed land, West Hatfield. (Terry Blunt)

Commonwealth Connections is truly about connections — connecting the places that make Massachusetts unique, connecting the many efforts underway, connecting us to the land, to our history and to our neighbors. It calls for a coordinated network of greenways and trails that will help conserve our natural heritage, provide recreational opportunities close to home, and link communities throughout the state.

Commonwealth Connections would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts, hard work, and creativity of hundreds of greenway and trail enthusiasts who came together to create this grand greenway vision. The resulting recommen-

dations and strategies outline decisive steps that need to be taken to make this vision a reality, and set a formidable agenda to guide future efforts. Foremost we need to recognize the value of greenways and further strengthen and empower the partnerships at work in our communities now, building trails and laying the groundwork for the greenways and trails of the future. We also must build diverse new coalitions and bring a broad base of resources to the table to move this agenda forward and achieve the far-reaching vision before us.

The time to act is now, before the opportunities to secure priority corridors are forever lost. We must embrace this collective vision, identify where we can make a difference and work together to connect our Commonwealth.