

DESIGNATION

of the

HINSDALE FLATS WATERSHED

AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

located in portions of the
TOWNS OF DALTON, HINSDALE, PERU and WASHINGTON

WITH SUPPORTING FINDINGS

Following an extensive formal review required by the regulations of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (301 CMR 12.00) including nomination, review, on-site visits, research, public information meetings, a public hearing and written comment period, and evaluation of all public comment and assembled data, I, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, hereby designate the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area, located in portions of the Towns of Dalton, Hinsdale, Peru and Washington, as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). I take this action pursuant to the authority granted me under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 21A, Section 2(7).

I also hereby find that the wetland resource areas included in the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC are significant to the protection of groundwater supply and public and private water supplies, the prevention of pollution, flood control, the prevention of storm damage, the protection of fisheries, and the protection of wildlife habitat -- all of which are public interests defined in the Wetlands Protection Act and regulations promulgated thereunder.

In addition, with regard to the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards, 314 CMR 4.00, I make the following findings and recommendation: 1) Belmont Reservoir is currently designated Class A, Outstanding Resource Water; 2) all other waters included in the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC are currently designated Class B, High Quality Waters; and 3) current designations of these waters should be retained, except that the designation of Outstanding Resource Water should be applied to water bodies located within the Hinsdale Flats Wildlife Management Area. Further, as part of the antidegradation policy, no lowering of water quality shall be allowed that would interfere with an existing use of these waters.

I. Procedures Leading to ACEC Designation

On August 1, 1991, I received a letter of nomination signed by ten citizens of the Commonwealth pursuant to 301 CMR 12.05(1)(a). Receipt of the nomination was acknowledged in correspondence dated August 8, 1991. Additional information regarding the nomination was requested in correspondence dated August 27, 1991. This information was submitted on September 24, 1991, and the nomination was accepted for full review in correspondence dated October 4, 1991. Copies of the acceptance letter and a summary of the nomination were sent to the boards of selectmen, planning boards and conservation commissions of the communities included in the nomination, state legislators representing the area, regional and state agencies, environmental organizations and other interested parties.

Public information meetings were held on October 28, November 6 and November 25, 1991 in the Kittredge School in Hinsdale. Public notice of the November 25 public information meeting, the December 5 public hearing, a ten-day written comment period following the hearing, and summary information regarding the nomination was sent to the above parties in correspondence dated October 21, 1991. Public notice was also published in the Berkshire Eagle on October 30, 1991, and the Environmental Monitor on November 5, 1991.

At the public hearing conducted by Secretary Tierney on December 5, 1991, oral testimony was received from 51 persons representing individual residents and a variety of groups and organizations. A ten-day period for the submission of additional written comment followed the public hearing.

Written and oral testimony was received from numerous individuals, state legislators, private organizations and public agencies. Copies are on file at the offices in the DEM Division of Resource Conservation in Boston. Over 230 comments were received in the course of the public participation and review process. Additional information regarding this testimony is described below in the Discussion of the Criteria for Designation, Supporting Factors.

In the review process leading to the designation of a nominated area, the Secretary must consider the factors specified in Section 12.09 of the ACEC Regulations regarding the designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. These factors are: (1) threat to the public health through inappropriate use; (2) quality of the natural characteristics; (3) productivity; (4) uniqueness of area; (5) irreversibility of impact; (6) imminence of threat to the resource; (7) magnitude of impact; (8) economic benefits; and (9) supporting factors. Further explanation of these factors is provided at Section 12.09. The application of these factors to the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area is described below in the Discussion of the Criteria for Designation.

II. Description of the Resources of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC

The initial August 31, 1991 letter of nomination of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area as an ACEC started the review process for the nomination; extensive additional information, comment and testimony was submitted in the course of the public review. Considerable information was compiled which supports the designation of the ACEC and the boundaries as proposed by the nominating party. A summary and overview of the resources and their critical interrelationships are provided here. Information, comments and materials submitted for the review of the nomination, some of which are specifically referenced in this document, are on file with the Department of Environmental Management.

All nine of the features applicable to inland nominations listed under 301 CMR 12.06 are contained within the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC.

Surface Waters

The topography and water resources of the area serve as the starting point for describing the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area. The area serves as the headwaters of the East Branch of the Housatonic River, which flows northward, flanked on the east and west by uplands and ridges

that give rise to the tributaries and form the sub-basins that flow into the East Branch. According to correspondence submitted by Tom Keefe of the DFW, dated September 10, 1991, the level topography that characterizes the lowlands and meandering channel of the East Branch provides the area's descriptive name, the "Hinsdale Flats." The boundary of the ACEC includes the upper reaches of the East Branch and Muddy Pond in the Town of Washington and the relatively level topography that extends north to the Old Grist Mill Dam in Hinsdale.

Several tributaries flow into the East Branch from the slopes that rise to the east and west. They include Bilodeau, Kilburn, Tracy and Bennett Brooks from the east, and Cady, Russo, Welch, and Frisell Brooks to the west. Several unnamed and intermittent streams are located throughout the ACEC. The high water quality of the headwaters of the East Branch and its tributaries is one of the central features of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC.

In addition to the East Branch and its tributary streams, there are several lakes, ponds and reservoirs located within the ACEC. Near the headwaters in Washington and Hinsdale is 28-acre Muddy Pond, the sole Great Pond within the ACEC. Farther north and east in Peru is Tracy Pond, owned by the DFW; this area is a quiet, secluded and beautiful part of the Peru Wildlife Management Area.

To the northeast, the largest of these lakes and ponds is 217-acre Ashmere Lake, owned by the DEM and formed by a dam at the southeastern corner of the lake. Three reservoirs are located in the upland, northwestern portion of the ACEC: Belmont (13 acres); Fernwood (4 acres); and Plunkett (73 acres). Belmont Reservoir provides municipal drinking water for the Town of Hinsdale, and Fernwood and Plunkett Reservoirs are used for recreation. All of these streams and surface waters are part of the overall hydrology of the headwaters of the East Branch.

Comments from the Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Water Pollution Control were received in correspondence dated December 9, 1991 and address the water resources of the nominated area. These comments described current surface water quality designations.

Recommendations included raising the current High Quality designation to Outstanding Resource Water designation for water bodies within the Hinsdale Flats Wildlife Management Area, reflecting the resource value and exceptional quality of the headwaters of the East Branch.

Wetlands

There are approximately 1,482 acres of wetlands located within the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC, according to National Wetlands Inventory maps prepared by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and shown on the EOE Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping prepared for the review of the nomination (note: see description of GIS mapping below). There are also approximately 1,831 acres of floodplains, according to flood boundary maps of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), also shown on the GIS mapping. These acreage totals are derived from GIS data. Both wetlands and floodplains are critical components of the overall resource complex. The most significant and extensive wetland and floodplain area is the Hinsdale Flats, located in the lowland portion of the ACEC adjacent to Cady Brook and the East Branch. This area provides approximately 1,075 acres of natural flood storage, according to a 1974 U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service report.

According to Tom Keefe's September 10 letter regarding the nominated area, the Hinsdale Flats floodplain contains a minimum of nine inland freshwater classes, and "the large acreage involved in

the Flats floodplain increases the wetland class diversity, thus the plant diversity, and consequently the wildlife diversity." In this statement Mr. Keefe summarizes the direct and complex interrelationships of surface water, wetlands, floodplains and wildlife that occur here. In addition, many of the known rare species habitats of the ACEC are found in wetland resource areas.

Habitat Resources

Like the exceptional water quality of the East Branch and its tributaries, wildlife and the natural communities that are found in the area also serve as one of the central features of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area. The relatively undeveloped natural areas of the ACEC, the lowland flats, and the adjacent uplands provide extensive and varied wildlife habitat. The documentation and materials submitted with the nomination, testimony presented at the public hearing, and additional written comments are compelling evidence of the value and significance of habitat resources in the ACEC, and also indicate the need to undertake further research to fully document the diversity and uniqueness of these resources.

Six state-listed rare species are documented as occurring within the lowland and upland areas of the ACEC. These species are the Small Yellow Lady's-slipper (listed as endangered), Showy Lady's-slipper (special concern), Swamp Red Current (special concern), Hemlock Parsley (special concern), Woodland Millet (threatened), and the Wood Turtle (special concern).

Fishery habitat is also an important element of the ACEC and indicates the high resource quality of the area. Fish spawning areas are found in the tributary streams of the East Branch, and fish nursery areas are located in the East Branch "Flats." Species within the ACEC range from cold water Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Slimy Sculpin, to varieties of perch, bass and pickerel.

Water Supply Areas

As mentioned above, Belmont Reservoir provides municipal drinking water to the Town of Hinsdale. The reservoir is fed by both surface and groundwater sources. Groundwater also supplies drinking water directly to private wells of residents in the area. According to a 1987 report by Geomapping Associates, Ltd, "Groundwater Source Analysis for the Town of Hinsdale," groundwater from the bedrock formations underlying the upland slopes of the ACEC or from buried sand and gravel deposits in the lowlands along the East Branch are potential future water supply areas.

On a more regional scale, the ground and surface waters of the ACEC provide high quality water supplies to the operations of Crane and Company in Dalton, according to a hydrology report, "Water Resources Rationale for ACEC Nomination of Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area," dated November, 1991, and submitted at the December 5 public hearing by Dr. Ward Motts on behalf of Crane and Company. Located downstream from the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area, the aquifers that are the source of the supply wells of Crane and Company depend both upon groundwater recharge from the upper slopes of the ACEC as well as from the surface water flows of the Housatonic River.

Natural Hazard Areas

In addition to the floodplains described above under "wetlands," according to information provided by the Soil Conservation Service another natural hazard feature of the ACEC is erosion hazard

areas. For the most part, the floodplain hazard areas are located in the lowland areas. Erosion hazard areas are located throughout the ACEC, but most are located in upland areas, along the ridges to the east and west of the East Branch. Two categories of erosion hazard have been developed from the SCS information. The higher erosion soils are located on slopes of greater than 15 percent. Approximately 3,660 acres, or 25 percent, of the ACEC are high erosion hazard areas, according to GIS data. These soils are shown on the GIS map for the ACEC. The second category of lower erosion soils includes approximately 6,090 acres, according to GIS data. These soils, especially the higher erosion category, present important constraints on development due to the potential impacts of development on water, wildlife and other resources of the ACEC.

Agricultural Areas

Agricultural areas within the ACEC range from dairy and beef farms to forest lands and tree farms. Two dairy farms are located near the Hinsdale-Peru border in the vicinity of Bennet Brook; the operations of one of these farms also include agreements with DFW for the management of some open areas within the Hinsdale Flats Wildlife Management Area. Other farming includes raising beef herds in the southwestern portion of the ACEC near Ames Hill. In regard to forestry, approximately 900 acres of forest land currently are managed currently under the Chapter 132 Forest Cutting Practices Act program, and are located on both the eastern and western slopes of the ACEC. An estimated 12,000 acres or more of the ACEC are forested; these forest lands are an integral resource of the area and are critical to the long-term preservation and management of water quality, wildlife habitat, and other resource values of the area.

Historical/Archaeological Resources

According to correspondence submitted to the Secretary on December 16, 1991 by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), "there are numerous significant historical and archaeological properties within the proposed ACEC." Early historic development "focused on the water resources provided by the East Branch of the Housatonic River and its tributaries, particularly Cady Brook, Bennett Brook and Tracy Brook." Mapping submitted by MHC shows areas of historic properties or historic archaeological sites and areas with sensitivity for (i.e., a high likelihood of) prehistoric archaeological sites throughout the ACEC. According to MHC, "Due to the lack of professional surveys in the proposed ACEC only one historic archaeological site is recorded Many more, as yet unidentified, prehistoric sites are likely to be present due to the favorable environmental conditions and resources presented by the Upper Housatonic River"

Special-Use Areas

Special-use areas are another central feature of the ACEC, in addition to the water and habitat resources and their interrelationships with other significant features described above. First among the special-use areas is the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, located along the western ridge and boundary of the ACEC. The Appalachian Trail is nationally significant and renowned; in general, the trail is located in scenic, high-quality natural resource areas. The segment of the Trail within the ACEC is used by hikers and naturalists from throughout the region, and provides scenic views of the Flats below and the eastern slopes rising beyond the headwaters of the Housatonic. Two summer camps and three reservoirs (including Hinsdale's municipal water supply and potential future groundwater supplies) are located on the slopes below the Trail, as well as several streams, rare species habitats and natural communities.

Another premier special-use area is the 1,420-acre Hinsdale Flats Wildlife Management Area, located in the central portion of the ACEC, along the lower tributaries and East Branch of the Housatonic River. The importance of the Wildlife Management Area is described in Tom Keefe's correspondence referenced above. The Flats area is managed by the DFW for a wide range of recreation and natural resource protection purposes. Recreational uses include hunting, fishing and canoeing.

Other important public recreation areas within the ACEC include Plunkett Reservoir to the west of the Flats, Lake Ashmere to the northeast and Tracy Pond to the west. The location of large areas of public lands directly adjacent to the ACEC, Middlefield and Peru State Forests to the east and the City of Pittsfield watershed lands and October Mountain State Forest to the southwest, also adds to the significance of this category of features.

Most of these public recreational areas, as well as the rest of the ACEC, are undeveloped or natural areas (another subcategory of special use areas, as described under 301 CMR 12.06).

Finally, the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area as a whole can be considered a significant scenic site. The scenic views of the Flats and the western ridges of the ACEC from the Appalachian Trail are mentioned above. To quote Tom Keefe: "The Hinsdale Flats area is quite unique in another way; it affords the viewer with an extreme display of land form contrasts. The flat valley floodplain, with its 3 miles of meandering river, contrasts strongly with the adjacent hillsides. Elevations rise sharply to the east climaxing with the 2170' summit of Peru Hill and a smaller Eames Hill to the far south. The western side of the Hinsdale Flats watershed area is highlighted with the presence of the 2050' Warner Hill and the 2085' Tully Mountain. From various points within the watershed area the view of Mount Greylock, (3487'), over 16 miles to the north, makes for an interesting landscape contrast when seen as a backdrop to the table-top terrain of the Flats."

The Department of Environmental Management, in the course of administering the review of the nomination, gathered and prepared a series of maps of several categories of environmental data regarding the nominated area. This information has been mapped using the Geographic Information System (GIS) of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. This mapped information, which was used to assist in the evaluation of the nomination and determination of final boundaries, is part of the public record of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC designation, and is on file at the offices of the DEM, Division of Resource Conservation.

The EOE GIS was used to map and evaluate several categories of information: public water supplies; surface waters and surface water drainage basins; wetlands; floodplains; erosion hazard areas; rare and endangered species; and protected open space (state, municipal and nonprofit-owned conservation and recreation lands). Not all categories of information that were submitted for the review of the nomination were included on the GIS map; however, they were included in the analysis of the nomination. These categories of information include prime agricultural soils and soils of local and statewide significance; Chapter 61 forest management lands; other agricultural lands; historic and archaeological resources; and groundwater and geological information.

Additional information regarding the resources of the area is described below in the Discussion of the Criteria for Designation.

III. Boundary of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC

Upon review of the boundaries as recommended in the nomination letter and information gathered in the course of EOEa agency review, the final boundaries are largely those proposed in the nomination letter, except for two minor adjustments suggested as alternatives in the nominators' September 20, 1991 letter and accepted by my Office after full review. These two adjustments result in a final boundary that more closely approximates the surface water sub-basin boundaries of the ACEC than the original boundary proposed by the nominators. The final boundaries are shown on the attached map taken from the 1987 East Lee and 1988 Pittsfield East United States Geologic Survey (USGS), 1:25,000-scale metric topographic maps. An official map and supplemental maps noted below are on file at the offices of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, Division of Resource Conservation.

The USGS map is supplemented by the following maps:

- (1) Appalachian National Scenic Trail, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Land Acquisition Division, Segments 241, 242 and 243, dated July, 1984;
 - (2) Town of Hinsdale Composite Map, revised to January, 1991, produced in 1987 by Cartographic Assoc., Inc.; and
 - (3) Town of Hinsdale Assessors Map #102, as of January, 1992
- (note: portions of the two Hinsdale maps showing a segment of the boundary in the vicinity of the Old Grist Mill Dam are attached, in addition to the above-referenced USGS map).

The boundary generally follows streets and roads; portions of municipal boundaries; trail and utility easements; and some property lines located near the Old Grist Mill Dam in Hinsdale, and along state-owned lands. Specifically, the boundary is defined as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of State Highway Route 8 and Summit Hill Road in Washington, the ACEC boundary proceeds northerly along Route 8 to the intersection of Beach Road; thence southwest along Beach Road to Pittsfield Road; at the intersection of Beach Road and Pittsfield Road, the boundary follows the western edge of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail easement northerly, across Blotz Road, to the intersection of the trail easement with federal property owned by the National Park Service, as shown on three maps entitled "Appalachian National Scenic Trail, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS), Land Acquisition Division, Segments 241, 242 and 243, dated July, 1984"; the boundary then follows the course of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail northerly, as shown on the official USGS topographic boundary map, across property owned by the National Park Service and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), to the intersection of Grange Hall Road (note: if route changes or additions to the Appalachian Trail make boundary identification difficult or confusing, the western boundary lines of the NPS and DEM properties as shown on the July, 1984 NPS maps referenced above shall prevail as the ACEC boundary); from the intersection of the Appalachian Trail and Grange Hall Road, the boundary proceeds southeasterly along Grange Hall Road and Robinson Road to the intersection of Curtis Street and Reservoir Road; thence east along Curtis Street to the Consolidated Rail Corp. right-of-way; thence southeasterly across said right-of-way to

the northwest corner of Lot 12, as shown on the Town of Hinsdale Assessors Map #102 as of January, 1992, and the Town of Hinsdale Composite Map revised to January, 1991; thence northeasterly along the northern edge of Lot 12 to the Housatonic River; thence southeasterly along the western edge of Lot 12 to the Old Grist Mill Dam; thence northeasterly along and including the Old Grist Mill Dam, across the Housatonic River, to the southwest corner of Lot 17, as shown on the above-referenced Town of Hinsdale Maps; thence northeasterly along the eastern and northern edges of Lot 17 to Plunkett Avenue Extension; thence east along Plunkett Avenue Extension directly across Route 8 to Plunkett Avenue; thence along Plunkett Avenue to Route 8 (Maple Street); thence along Route 8 to New Windsor Road; thence north and northeast along New Windsor Road to Frank/George Schnopps Road; thence northwest along Frank/George Schnopps Road to New Windsor Road; thence along the Western Mass. Electric Co. Easement to the Hinsdale-Peru Town Line; thence south along the Hinsdale-Peru Town Line to Route 143; thence west along Route 143 to South Road; thence southerly along South Road to Middlefield Skyline Road; thence across Middlefield Skyline Road, and south and west along the eastern boundary of property owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) to the point of intersection with property owned by the DEM, Middlefield State Forest, as shown on the official USGS map; thence northwesterly along the Middlefield State Forest (MSF) boundary line to the Hinsdale-Peru Town Line; southerly along the Town Line, which coincides with the eastern boundary of the MSF boundary, to a point where the MSF boundary turns east; thence easterly along the MSF boundary to a point where the MSF boundary turns south; thence southerly along the MSF boundary to a point where the MSF boundary again turns east; thence easterly along the MSF boundary to a point where the MSF boundary again turns south; thence southerly along the MSF boundary to the Peru-Washington Town Line; easterly along the Peru-Washington Town Line to Matteau Road; southeasterly along Matteau Road to Summit Hill Road; thence southwestwardly along Summit Hill Road to the beginning point at the intersection of Summit Hill Road and Route 8.

Unless otherwise specified, the boundary described above extends to and includes the entire width of the rights-of-way of public and private streets, roads and highways, and other rights-of-way such as utility easements.

The size of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC, according to GIS data, is approximately 14,493 acres. The respective acreage located in each municipality is as follows:

Dalton	163 acres
Hinsdale	9,682 acres
Peru	2,686 acres
Washington	1,962 acres

IV. Discussion of the Criteria for Designation

In the review process leading to the designation of a nominated area, the Secretary must consider the factors specified in Section 12.09 of the ACEC Regulations regarding the designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. As stated in the regulations, the factors need not be weighed equally, nor must all of these factors be present for an area to be designated. The strong presence of even a single factor may be sufficient for designation.

Based on the information presented in the letter of nomination, at the public hearing, in written comments received throughout the public review process, and in agency research and review, I find the following factors relevant to the designated ACEC:

(1) Threat to the Public Health Through Inappropriate Use

Belmont Reservoir is the municipal water supply for the Town of Hinsdale. Groundwater investigations have documented future potential drinking supplies from the bedrock formations on the western slope of the ACEC, in the vicinity of Belmont Reservoir, as well as in the stratified drift deposits adjacent to the East Branch and tributaries in the Flats. The water quality of the East Branch of the Housatonic River and its tributaries are recognized as high quality; these high quality waters recharge groundwater supplies downstream and support regionally significant wildlife habitat. Water quality and public health are further dependent on the appropriate use of the extensive floodplain and erosion hazard areas within the ACEC. Inappropriate use would be a serious threat to public health, safety and welfare.

(2) Quality of the Natural Characteristics

The above Description of the Resources of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed ACEC and the materials compiled in the course of the review clearly document and demonstrate the outstanding quality of the resources of the ACEC, as well as the critical interrelationships between the resource systems. The primary focus of the review, and the primary basis of ACEC designation, is the quality, value, significance and interrelationships of the resources of the area. The outstanding quality of the water resources, habitat resources and special use areas of the ACEC are sufficient to support designation. Other resource features -- natural hazard areas, farmlands, forest lands, and historic and archaeological areas -- both support and are integral parts of the designated critical area.

(3) Productivity

The high diversity of wildlife, plants and natural communities located in the area and described in the nomination and supporting documentation, is another strong factor for designation. Wildlife and plant species listed, such as Indian Cucumber Root, Redback Salamander, Northern Ringneck Snake, Great Blue Heron, Dreamy Duskwing, Rainbow Trout, Bobcat and Black Bear, indicate one aspect of the diversity found within the ACEC. Testimony and information regarding alkaline seepage swamps, calcareous fens and unusual marshlands indicate other aspects. Oral testimony presented at the public hearing further expressed the value and depth of appreciation of residents for this diversity. The significance of this factor alone could support designation. Through this designation, I recognize the work of professional and amateur botanists, biologists, naturalists and ordinary citizens in exploring and studying the natural resources of this area, and encourage further field work, research and educational programs.

(4) Uniqueness of Area

The uniqueness of the area derives from its location at the headwaters of the East Branch of the Housatonic River, the high water quality of the headwaters and its tributaries, the specific wetland, floodplain and ecological values of the Flats, the land form contrasts of the area, the special-use

areas and the high diversity of wildlife described above. In short, this uniqueness is the result of a very specific combination of significant resources and their interrelationships. Further study and understanding of these resources is of unlimited educational value.

(5) Irreversibility and Magnitude of Impact, and Imminence of Threat to the Resource

The resource quality of the area, as discussed above, is based upon the high quality of its water resources and the interdependence of the various resource systems. Inappropriate alterations could have highly significant adverse impacts and irreversible consequences. Potential threats range from major development projects proposed for inappropriate locations to the incremental adverse effects of development and alterations over time. Through this designation, I encourage communities to develop local zoning and regulatory controls to encourage appropriate development and to discourage inappropriate land uses, thereby avoiding both project-specific and long-term incremental adverse effects to the resources of the ACEC.

(6) Economic Benefits

Intrinsic values of the ACEC include recreation, tourism and water supply, all of which are important to the region's economic stability and strongly support designation.

In addition to the public recreation areas described above, there are four private summer camps located within the ACEC. These camps depend upon the recreational features and resource quality of the area, and in turn generate important economic activity for the region. According to information provided by owners and operators of Camp Taconic and Camp Emerson, each summer camp annually spends or causes to be spent approximately \$500,000. Expenses include salaries, food, capital improvements, and maintenance and supplies. Camp visitors also contribute to the overall tourism economy of the Berkshires.

As described above, Belmont Reservoir is the municipal water supply for the Town of Hinsdale, and potential future water supplies are located within the ACEC. Protecting and preserving these water supplies are critical public health and economic priorities.

In addition, according to materials and testimony submitted by Crane and Company of Dalton and consultant Dr. Ward Motts, the protection of the high water quality of the East Branch and the bedrock aquifers of the ACEC is a key component to the manufacturing operations of the company. The paper manufacturing operations of Crane and Company depend upon reliable, high-quality water from wells that are fed from upstream sources. According to testimony submitted, Crane and Company is the second largest manufacturing employer in Berkshire County, and employs 1,150 people.

(7) Supporting Factors

Over 230 comments were received regarding the nomination. Testimony submitted at the public hearing strongly supported designation. Of the 51 parties that presented oral and written testimony, 47 supported designation and 2 opposed designation. One party presented a proposal to reduce the proposed boundary area, which was strongly endorsed by one of the parties opposing designation.

In addition to the written comments described below, approximately 45 letters of support for the designation were received, the majority of which were from residents from communities within the nominated area. Approximately 80 form letters from 65-70 households opposing designation were submitted, in addition to 4 individually written letters opposing designation. Most of these letters were from residents from communities outside of the nominated area. Testimony presented at the public hearing and many of the written comments submitted eloquently expressed understanding and appreciation of the intrinsic value of the nominated area.

Written or oral testimony supporting ACEC designation was received from 16 municipal boards and commissions (13 of these letters were from the 4 communities located within the ACEC); from 5 state legislators (Senator Jane Swift, and Representatives Daniel Bosley, Christopher Hodgkins, Shaun Kelly and Peter Larkin); from 13 civic, business and environmental organizations; and from 9 regional and state agencies.

The municipal boards and commissions included the Dalton Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Planning Board and Fire District; the Hinsdale Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission; the Peru Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission and Planning Board; the Washington Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Planning Board and Board of Assessors; and the Becket and Stockbridge Boards of Selectmen and the Pittsfield City Council.

The civic, environmental and business organizations supporting designation included the Appalachian Mountain Club, Appalachian Trail Conference, Ashmere Heights Association, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Crane and Company, Gun Owners' Action League, Housatonic River Watershed Association, Housatonic Valley Association, Massachusetts Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and The Trustees of Reservations.

The Alliance for America, New Hampshire Landowners Alliance and Hinsdale's O.U.R.S. submitted letters opposing designation.

Regional and state agencies supporting designation included the Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission; the Southern Berkshire Solid Waste Management District; the Commissioner of the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement; the Chairman of the Board of Fisheries and Wildlife; the Western Wildlife District of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife; and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Resource information or additional comments regarding the nominated area and the value of its resources were provided by the Department of Environmental Protection's Divisions of Water Pollution Control, Water Supply, and Wetlands and Waterways; the Department of Food and Agriculture; and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

In addition to the reasons set forth above regarding the pertinent features of the area, ACEC designation is further warranted by the fact that the resources of the ACEC are located in portions of four communities, and there is a strong need for communities to coordinate their efforts to protect and preserve the resources of this area.

In addition, as describe above in the Description of the Resources of the ACEC, large areas within the ACEC are owned by a variety of public agencies, including the Division of Fisheries and

Wildlife (Hinsdale Flats Wildlife Management Area and the Tracy Pond section of the Peru Wildlife Management Area); the Department of Environmental Management (Ashmere Lake and portions of the Appalachian Trail); the National Park Service (portions of the Appalachian Trail); the Town of Hinsdale (Belmont and Plunkett Reservoirs); and watershed lands of the City of Pittsfield. The variety and amount of publicly owned property within the ACEC reflect the public investment and environmental value of the land and resources of the ACEC. The need to further coordinate the efforts of the towns, public agencies and environmental organizations is further emphasized by the existence of large tracts of publicly owned land immediately adjacent to the ACEC -- Middlefield and Peru State Forests to the east, and the City of Pittsfield watershed lands and October Mountain State Forest to the southwest. The location of these lands is shown on the GIS map prepared by the DEM, and illustrates the unique location of the Hinsdale Flats Watershed in relationship to these lands.

Conclusion

Therefore, I am pleased to exercise the authority granted to me pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 21A, Section 2(7), to designate the Hinsdale Flats Watershed Resource Area as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The significance of this ACEC requires that the highest standards of environmental review and protection be applied to actions that may affect its resources.

(signed) Susan F. Tierney
Secretary of Environmental Affairs

January 31, 1992

[Original document reformatted for ACEC Program website, October, 2003]