MEMORANDUM

TO: BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
FROM: NOEL MUSSON
SUBJECT: CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES
DATE: OCTOBER 16, 2019

The Critical Natural Resources chapter has been updated to reflect current data:

- Does the committee want to add any areas to consider for conservation at this time (page 2)?
- Does the committee want to add any areas listed for scenic value (page 4)?

Maps Needed:

- Topography Map
- Habitats and Marine Resources Map
- Shoreland Zoning Map
- Water Resources Map
- Coastal Bluff Stability Map
- Flood Zones and Flood Zones (Downtown) Map
CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Critical natural resources are integral to the environment. The purpose of this chapter is to help the City identify, manage and adequately protect its critical natural resources, and safeguard the local economy dependent on these resources. Note: for marine resources, see the Marine Resources Chapter, and for water resources, see the Water Resources Chapter. Critical Natural Resources are defined by the State as those areas in the community comprised of one or more of the following:

- Shoreland zone
- Multi-function wetlands (wetlands found to provide three or more wetland functions as depicted on the Wetlands Characterization Maps developed by the State Planning Office.)
- Essential Wildlife Habitats and Threatened, Endangered, and Special Concern Species occurrences as depicted on maps prepared by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife pursuant to the Maine Endangered Species Act
- Significant wildlife habitat as defined in 38 MRSA §480-B(10)
- Significant freshwater fisheries habitat
- Rare and exemplary natural communities, and rare plant occurrences as determined by the State’s Natural Areas Program database
- Coastal sand dune systems as defined in the Natural Resources Protection Act 38 MRSA §480-B(1)
- Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas of Ecological Significance identified by the Beginning with Habitat Program of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Fragile mountain areas as defined in 38 MRSA §480-B(3);
- Coastal bluffs and coastal landslide hazards as depicted on maps prepared by the Maine Geological Survey
- Flood plains as depicted on Federal Emergency Management Agency flood hazard identification maps
- Areas designated as a National Natural Landmark pursuant to the National Park Service’s National Natural Landmark Program (36 Code of Federal Regulation, Section 62).

A. State Goal and State Coastal Policies

1. To protect the State’s other critical natural resources, including without limitation, wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, sand dunes, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas.

B. Analyses and Key Issues

(1). Are existing regulations sufficient to protect the community’s critical natural resources threatened by development, overuse, or other activities?
Federal, State, and municipal regulations offer protection for most critical natural resources in Belfast, excluding large habitat blocks. Crucial to this protection, however, is ongoing monitoring to detect illegal activities and remediate where environmental damage has occurred. Funding at the Federal, State and municipal level is insufficient to ensure complete protection. Further regulatory protection at the municipal level may be warranted. Specifically, these areas within Belfast should be considered for additional protection through municipal regulation: areas with steep slopes (see the map titled "Topography"), forested wetlands, and select wetlands under 10 acres in size that have limited regulation by the Maine DEP. However, the use of conservation easements or purchases may be more tenable to residents and voters than regulations. As important, easements and conservation purchases almost always result in permanent protection while municipal regulations are subject to future amendments or repeal.

(2). Are local shoreland zone standards consistent with state guidelines and with the standards on adjacent shorelands in neighboring towns?

The City’s shoreland zoning ordinance provisions including waterfront districts are consistent with current State law and have been approved by the Maine DEP. The City specifically notes that it has worked cooperatively with the DEP to adopt shoreland regulations that vary from the state model regulations, including but not limited to the establishment of the Urban Residential Shoreland subdistrict, the Waterfront Development Shoreland subdistrict, the Stream Development Shoreland subdistrict and the Manufactured Housing Community Shoreland subdistrict. The above subdistricts better reflect existing development patterns in Belfast and are modeled on the premise that future development should be consistent with existing development. Also, Shoreland zoning districts of adjacent shorelands in the neighboring communities of Belmont, Morrill, Northport, Swanville and Waldo are consistent with Belfast’s provisions for these border area shorelands.

(3). What non-regulatory measures can the community take to protect critical natural resources? Are there opportunities to partner with local or regional advocacy groups?

The City can work with non-profit, local, state, and national advocacy groups to acquire property in critical areas for conservation outright or with easements. Specifically, the following areas should be considered for conservation:

- Areas along the Passagassawakeag River
- Areas within the Water Districts watershed
- Additional areas along the Little River.

Partners could include Audubon Society, Land for Maine’s Future Program (Augusta), Maine Coast Heritage Trust (Topsham, Rockport), and Coastal Mountains Land Trust (Camden), Natural Resources Council of Maine (Augusta), and Coastal Mountains Land Trust (Camden).
The City can educate residents on the value of critical natural resources through outreach programs, conservation committee efforts, and in cooperation with local schools. Programs could describe the existing resources found locally, threats from pollution, and ways in which residents can reduce their own household waste through reuse, recycling and proper disposal.

(4). *Is there current regional cooperation or planning underway to protect shared critical natural resources?*

The Maine Farmland Trust and the Coastal Mountains Land Trust have sought the preservation of critical natural areas in and around Belfast, especially along ecologically sensitive water bodies and valuable wetland habitats. The City has worked with the Coastal Mountains Land Trust in the past on preservation projects.

(5). *In what other areas will protection of critical natural resources advance comprehensive plan policies (e.g. water resources, economy, recreation, agriculture, and forestry, etc.)?*

Protecting critical natural resources goes hand in hand with several of the key policies of the following chapters of this plan: Agriculture and Forestry, Economy, Land Use, Marine Resources, Recreation, and Water Resources. See those chapters for their specific policies and strategies. More generally, the protection of one resource, like water quality, often involves the protection of other resources that occupy the same geography, like natural habitats. Similarly, conserving wetlands, which absorb water runoff and attenuate flood flows, reduces the risk of flooding in already developed areas nearby.

C. *Conditions and Trends*

Minimum data required to address state goals:

(1). The community’s Comprehensive Planning Critical Natural Resources Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Department of Environmental Protection and the Office, or their designees.

See the map titled Habitats and Marine Resources for Essential Wildlife Habitats and Threatened, Endangered, and Special Concern Species, Significant wildlife habitat, Rare and exemplary natural communities, and rare plant occurrences. See the shoreland zoning map for the location of Shoreland/Waterfront Districts and Moderate and High Value Wetland Habitats. See the map titled Water Resources for the location of wetlands. See the map titled Coastal Bluff Stability for the coastal bluffs and coastal landslide hazards. See the maps titled Flood Zones and Flood Zones (Downtown) for the location of flood plains.

In Belfast, the Rambur's Forktail (a dragonfly) is the only identified Rare Animal, with a rating of Special Concern. The American Chestnut is the only identified Rare
Plant, with a rating of Special Concern. The state identifies one of these trees on Route 1. Two more are found on Kaler Rd. Atlantic Salmon Spawning and Rearing Habitat are identified on the Passagassawakeag River near and between the Route 7/137 and the Doak Rd crossings. Belfast has no state-defined Focus Area of Ecological Significance, no state-identified significant freshwater fisheries habitat, no fragile mountain area, and no National Natural Landmark.

(2). A map or description of scenic areas and scenic views of local importance, and regional or statewide importance, if available.

Scenic views in Belfast focus principally on Belfast Harbor and Bay, as seen from public streets and public parks and landings. Other scenic areas include the upper reaches of the Passagassawakeag River, the Goose River and Upper and Lower Mason Pond, the Little River, particularly the area near Route 1 and the area near Outer Congress Street, and the numerous open fields and wooded areas that border many of the rural roads in Belfast. See the map titled Scenic Resources Scenic resources of Belfast Harbor and Bay are noted in the Marine Resources chapter of this plan as well. The Gateway 1 plan includes a scenic resources map of views from Route 1; see the map titled Belfast Detail of Gateway 1 Scenic Quality Assessment Section Four (Upper Bay and River). In the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, these areas were rated for scenic value [1-9, the higher the number the more scenic]:

- City Park [9]
- Little River Dam and Little River, looking toward the Bay [6]
- Upper Little River Dam and Brook [7]
- Route 52, at junction with Prescott Road (Greenlow Corner), looking toward Belfast [7]
- Doak Road Bridge [5]
- Head of Tide [6]
- City Point to Upper High Street [7]
- Goose River, adjacent to Swan Lake Avenue [7]
- Goose River, adjacent to Route 1 [7]
- Old (Memorial) Bridge Area [7]
- City Landing [8]
- Lower Main Street toward the Bay [7]
- Hayford Hill Area [8]
- Kirby Lake [5]
- Patterson Hill [6]
- Upper and Lower Mason Ponds [N/A]

D. Policies

(1). To conserve critical natural resources in the community.

(2). To coordinate with neighboring communities and regional and state resource agencies to protect shared critical natural resources.
E. Strategies

(1). Amend local shoreland zone standards to meet current state guidelines.

(2). Designate critical natural resources as Critical Resource Areas in the Future Land Use Plan.

(3). Through local land use ordinances, require subdivision or non-residential property developers to look for and identify critical natural resources that may be on site and to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation.

(4). Through local land use ordinances, require the planning board (or other designated review authority) to incorporate maps and information provided by the Maine Beginning with Habitat program into their review process.

(5). Adopt natural resource protection practices and standards for construction and maintenance of public roads and properties and require their implementation by the community’s officials, employees, and contractors.

(6). Initiate and/or participate in interlocal and/or regional planning, management, and/or regulatory efforts around shared critical natural resources.

(7). Pursue public/private partnerships to protect critical natural resources such as through purchase of land or easements from willing sellers.

(8). Distribute or make available information to those living in or near critical natural resources about applicable local, state, or federal regulations.

(9). Obtain scenic easements from willing property owners for the preservation of scenic views as identified in this plan and to protect water views that can be seen from rangeways.

(10). Conduct field surveys of state-mapped approximate deer winter areas and other habitats for accuracy in order to ensure appropriate regulation of these areas, as it is believed that some currently mapped habitats may be incorrect.

(11). Ensure protection and the public use of rangeways in Belfast.

(12). Encourage the construction of trails and pedestrian/bicycling improvements to provide public access to critical natural resource areas. Two key projects are the rails-to-trails project that involves the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad line which the City purchased, and development of the ‘Emerald Necklace’ trail system for Belfast.
LEGEND

MARINE RESOURCES

- Areas prone to shellfish closures (current as of 2005)
- Atlantic Salmon Spawning Habitat
- Atlantic Salmon Rearing Habitat

SIGNIFICANT WILDLIFE HABITAT

- Overboard Discharges
- Wastewater Outfalls

State roads
City roads
- Private/Undeveloped roads
- Perennial streams
- Railroad
- Water
- Railroad
- Water

Conserved lands *
Some conservation lands may not be publically accessible.

MNAP Area (American Chestnut)

MID-COAST
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Map prepared by Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Sources: MNAP, MEIFW, MDNR, CMLT and MEGIS
Map revised: January, 2010
Belfast Comprehensive Plan

Map prepared by Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Sources: NFIP/FEMA, MDOT and MEGIS
Map created: January, 2010

**FLOOD ZONES**

- An area inundated by 1% annual chance flooding for which no BFEs have been determined. (A)
- An area inundated by 1% annual chance flooding for which BFEs have been determined. (AE)
- An area inundated by 1% annual chance flooding for velocity hazard; BFEs have been determined. (VE)

BFEs denote base flow elevations. The Flood Insurance Rate (FIRM) map for Belfast was published on 5/03/90.

**LEGEND**

- State roads
- City roads
- Railroad
- Private/Undeveloped roads
- Water
- Perennial streams

Belfast Comprehensive Plan

Flood Zones (Downtown)
Belfast Comprehensive Plan

Flood Zones

Map prepared by Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Sources: NFIP/FEMA, MDOT and MEGIS
Map created: January, 2010

LEGEND

- State roads
- City roads
- Railroad
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