

CHAPTER 4: ACTION PLAN

Introduction

Fulfilling the Natural Heritage Vision for Marbletown is not a simple task. It requires long-term commitment and must be integrated into the town's planning and economic development activities to be successful. It is not enough to purchase or place an easement on a parcel of land. Conservation is a long-term partnership with private landowners, conservation organizations and others who continue to steward the land. The following pages discuss the actions recommended in the near future. A summary chart on the following page further outlines the recommended actions, with a timeframe, responsible parties, and relative cost. Also included in this chapter is a section which outlines private-sector conservation opportunities.

Since this plan is based on voluntary landowner participation, with the goal of creating financial incentives for landowners to do so, it charges the town's governing bodies with reviewing legislation and considering tax incentives for the encouragement of land conservation.

While this is a plan for the town, in many cases, preserving shared resources such as forests, watersheds and stream corridors, can be more efficiently addressed through intermunicipal or regional cooperation. Every opportunity to partner with communities and organizations in the region working towards similar efforts should be explored. For many of the recommendations listed in this chapter, there are opportunities to collaborate with Ulster County and other communities in the region to implement goals shared between the Ulster County Open Space Plan and local plans. Marbletown has already pioneered a pilot project, through Ulster County Information Services to create a web-based application, hosted on their servers and updated by their technical staff, for all GIS data. This system will serve as a model that can be duplicated throughout the county.

The recommendations in this action plan are divided into the following six major categories:

- Continue to Develop a Local Land Conservation Program
- Support Sustainable Land Uses
- Plan for Development and Economic Growth
- Continue to Advance Research, Management, and Stewardship Efforts
- Continue to Expand Natural Heritage Awareness in the Community
- Expand Options for Conservation Financing

Continue to Develop a Local Land Conservation Program

The local land conservation program is one of the tools for implementing Marbletown's natural heritage vision. Through a local land conservation program, a process for financing, selecting, and implementing conservation projects is established. Program administration includes a dedicated committee/board to evaluate projects and make funding recommendations. It might also include professional or land trust assistance with tasks such as landowner outreach and resource-specific conservation plans, or other technical tasks such as appraisals, drafting of legislation for tax incentives, or writing grant applications. It is important that the work of the committee or board is integrated into the town's overall planning agenda.

To implement the local land conservation program, the town's committee or board would work on a voluntary basis with landowners and other partners such as nonprofit conservation organizations in a proactive manner to conserve a system of priority lands through a variety of means, such as conservation easements, tax incentives and other tools (see a listing below). The town has established the Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission for this purpose. Town conservation funds should be focused on priority areas identified in the natural heritage plan and those that are most significant, under the most pressure, and provide the community with the most benefits. Grant funding criteria will also be factored into any project selection decisions to accomplish the town's goal of leveraging local funds to the highest extent.

Conservation Tools (see glossary for more information)

- Term Easement or other Local Tax Incentive
- Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)
- Estate Planning for Landowners (would include options such as Installment Purchase Agreements, limited development plans, life estate)
- Fee Simple Purchase of Land
- Zoning Incentives for Resource/Land Conservation

Immediate Actions:

1. Continue to **develop selection criteria** and a process for conservation projects under the town's land conservation program. Develop a working set of land conservation tools such as conservation easements, term easements, and estate planning options. The land conservation tools will be used by landowners and the conservation selection criteria will be used by the Conservation Board and Town Board to review potential applications. Continue to work with neighboring communities towards these efforts. Outreach to the community on program materials.

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Adjacent communities
- Land trusts
- Ulster County Planning Department

Land Trusts Working in Marbletown

Open Space Institute (OSI)

<http://www.osiny.org>

The Open Space Institute's mission is "to protect scenic, natural and historic landscapes to ensure public enjoyment, conserve habitats and sustain community character. OSI achieves its goals through land acquisition, conservation easements, special loan programs, and creative partnerships." The Open Space Institute has protected approximately 100,000 acres in New York State. The Open Space Conservancy is the "land acquisition affiliate" of the OSI.

Mohonk Preserve

<http://www.mohonkpreserve.org>

The Mohonk Preserve's mission is "to protect the Shawangunk Mountains by inspiring people to care for, enjoy, and explore the natural world." With approximately 6,600 acres in the region, the Mohonk Preserve is one of the largest owners of conservation lands, and arguably the most visible land trust due to its history, the visibility of the preserve, and the success of its environmental and outreach programs, including opportunities to learn about the Shawangunk Mountains at the Mohonk Preserve Visitor Center.

The Nature Conservancy

<http://www.nature.org>

The Nature Conservancy works in all 50 states and 30 countries across the world. "The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive." The Nature Conservancy coordinates the work of the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership, including the Green Assets Program, which is discussed in other portions of this plan.

Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy (RELC)

<http://www.relandconservancy.org>

The Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy has been working since 1987 to protect "land in Ulster County, particularly along the Esopus and Rondout Creeks and other areas in the Towns of Marbletown, Rochester, and Olive." The land trust focuses on protection of "open space, forested lands, wetlands, stream corridors, and pasture land."

Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

<http://www.catskillcenter.org>

"The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development is a member-supported, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization serving the Catskill Mountain region of New York State. The Catskill Center stimulates, conducts, and supports integrated actions to protect vital ecosystems and unique landscapes, to enhance economic opportunities for all the region's residents, to preserve cultural and historic assets and to further a regional vision and spirit."

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Ongoing Actions:

2. **Continue to meet with area land trusts** and conservation organizations to review this plan; determine common goals; and identify any potential partnership opportunities towards implementation of the town's natural heritage plan. This action is part of the town's continuing efforts to work in partnership with regional conservation organizations. Land trusts may help to fund conservation projects, hold and monitor easements, and assist with landowner outreach. They may also have other roles such as helping with research and outreach efforts.

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission/Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Partners:

- Open Space Institute, Mohonk Preserve, Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy, Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, The Nature Conservancy, Shawangunk Mountains Regional Partnership and Shawangunk Mountains Biodiversity Partnership

3. **Conduct parcel evaluation** to identify parcels that meet the selection criteria within each of the natural heritage areas identified in this plan. This will likely include zooming in to each of the natural heritage areas in the plan to identify parcels that would be the most ideal candidates for conservation. The prioritization process has already been completed through this planning process; however, the projects will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as funding opportunities are identified. Identification of priority parcels will serve as a focus for landowner outreach efforts by the Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission.

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission

Short-Term:

4. **Develop conservation projects.** A conservation project might constitute the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement on a farm; the purchase of a conservation easement on priority aquifer lands; or the creation of a new park through acquisition of land. Identifying and developing conservation projects will include conducting landowner outreach, advancing projects with willing landowners, (conducting appraisals, developing easement language, etc.) and identifying and applying for matching grants.

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission and/or Consultant

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Potential Partners:

- Land Trusts: Open Space Institute, Mohonk Preserve, Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy, Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, The Nature Conservancy, Shawangunk Mountains Regional Partnership and Shawangunk Mountains Biodiversity Partnership
- Landowners
- Ulster County Planning Department

Major Funding Sources for Land Acquisition, Park Development and Purchase of Conservation Easements

Hudson River Estuary Grant Program, administered by NYS DEC

Offers grants for Open Space Planning, Inventory and Acquisition; Community-based Habitat Conservation or Stewardship; Watershed Planning and Implementation; and Hudson River Access: Boating, Fishing, Swimming, Hunting, Hiking or River-watching.

Website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/environmentdec/33071.html>

Grants Available Through NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

The NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation administers grants through the state Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for land acquisition, as well as for park development.

Website: <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/grants>

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Protection Program

“Offers matching grants protection implementation activities described in agricultural and farmland protection plans that have been developed by counties and municipalities...The purpose of these programs is to fund local initiatives that are intended to maintain the economic viability of the State's agricultural industry and its supporting land base and to protect the environmental and landscape preservation values associated with agriculture.” The program's matching funds support the purchase of development rights of qualifying agricultural properties.

Website: <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/RFPS.html>

Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

“The Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value of the conservation easement.”

Website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp>

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Long-Term:

5. Regularly conduct a **program evaluation** to ensure that the land conservation program is meeting the goals set forth in this plan (Chapter 3 summarizes the acreage goals). As an example, the Town of Clifton Park (Saratoga County, NY) recently published an open space report card that highlighted success towards achieving the town's goals as set forth in its 2001 open space plan (this is included in Appendix C).

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission and/or Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Funding Source:

- Private fundraising efforts such as those already completed by the ECC

Support Sustainable Land Uses

Support and promote sustainable, landscape-friendly land uses, such as low-impact outdoor recreation activities (hunting, fishing, hiking), agriculture, forestry, and associated tourism. Provide incentives and support landowners towards this end.

Ongoing:

1. **Audit the town's zoning** to ensure that it is forest and farm-friendly and make necessary changes. For example, allowed uses in forested rural districts (such as A3 and A4) should allow support activities for forestry and agriculture, they should also allow wood product manufacturing and furniture. Involve landowners in this review. **This may also be completed through local farmland protection or forest planning initiatives (see #2 and #3 on the next page).**

Lead:

- Consultants with Marbletown Planning and Zoning Committee and Marbletown Town Board

Potential Partners:

- Landowners and Residents of Marbletown
- Marbletown Planning Board
- Ulster County Planning
- Organizations such as the Rondout Valley Growers Association and the Marbletown Landowner Association and Rondout Valley Business Association
- Ulster County Planning Department

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Short-term:

2. Develop a **local farmland protection plan**. Develop a local plan to identify priority agricultural resources, identify opportunities to expand economic development initiatives within the town, and ensure that local regulations are supportive for farmers. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets currently provides grants for local farmland protection plans.

Lead:

- Town Board with consultant and designated committee

Potential Partners:

- Farmers, landowners, and agricultural business owners
- Marbletown Planning Board
- Ulster County Planning Department and County Farm Board
- Organizations such as the Rondout Valley Growers Association, American Farmland Trust, and Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Land trusts

Long-Term:

3. Develop a **local or regional forest plan**. Conduct research and outreach and make long-term recommendations on forest preservation, management, economic development, education, and other initiatives. This plan should explore U.S. and international models for private landowner conservation, such as the Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative and Costa Rica's Payment for Environmental Services (PES) program. The Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative is a forest landowner cooperative with that follows principles of sustainable forestry and works together to process and market their materials (see Appendix C for more information of the Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative). This type of landowner-sponsored cooperative would require leadership from landowners in order to be initiated, and represents a private-sector conservation solution. Costa Rica's PES program pays landowners, primarily through a tax on fuel consumption, for the environmental services that the forests provide. The direct payments to landowners support conservation, stewardship and

"The Mission of the Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative:

Founded with the purpose of sustaining the working forests of the region, our business maintains high standards of responsible management on member properties, purchases its members' logs at harvest time, and coordinates value-added processing by local businesses. We then market our finished wood products throughout the region as **HomeGrown Wood™**."

Source: Website of **Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative**,
<http://www.masswoodlands.coop>

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

reforestation. While the funding and administration of such as program at the town level raises many questions, the concept of the PES program could be indirectly applied through tax benefits such as a term easement program rather than through payments for services.

There are many excellent publications available to help forest landowners sustainably manage their lands for a variety of purposes. As a more immediate action, a few of these reference documents could be purchased and distributed to town landowners, or provided for reference in the library at town hall. Sources for these references are identified in the following section.

Lead:

- Environmental Conservation Commission with Consultant

Potential Partners:

- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Landowners, Residents and Businesses of Marbletown
- Regional Sportsmen's Clubs
- Regional Foresters and Consultants
- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Land Trusts
- Ulster County Planning Department and Ulster County Development Corporation

References:

- Massachusetts Woodland Cooperative:
<http://www.masswoodlands.coop/>
- New York Forest Owners Association:
<http://www.nyfoa.org/>
- The Natural Resource, Agriculture and Engineering Service:
<http://www.nraes.org/>

Useful publications for sale:

- *Forest Resource Management: A Landowner's Guide to Getting Started*
- *Forest Landowner's Guide to Evaluating and Choosing a Natural Resource-Based Enterprise*
- *The Woods in Your Backyard: Learning to Create and Enhance Natural Areas around Your Home*

4. Research the potential for a **local term easement/tax abatement program** for small farms and forests (those that do not meet requirements for the state Agricultural Districts or 480a program). This incentive would provide participating landowners with tax incentives if they agree to place a term easement on their

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

land which adheres to sustainable principles for use and management of the land. Term easements would be voluntary and the landowner could receive a tax benefit (through reduction of taxes); easements could not be purchased. Term easements can be coupled with a right of first refusal for the town, should the property go up for sale. Sustainable use of the land may be as simple as leaving the land “as-is” or it may be more complex, depending on the goals of the landowner and the state of the land. Also research the potential for a term easement for lands that provide recreational opportunities such as hunting or fishing. The fiscal implications of these programs should be explored before any programs are developed.

Examples of local term easement programs in New York include the Town of Perinton, Monroe County and Town of Clifton Park, Saratoga County. As of 2006, the Town of Clifton Park had about 2,500 acres enrolled in a term easement program. Clifton Park’s term easement legislation is provided as an example in Appendix C.

Lead:

- Marbletown Town Board with consultant

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission
- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission
- Landowners
- DEC and other forest resource experts

Plan for Development and Economic Growth

Identify locations for, and promote appropriate growth and economic development in Marbletown. Supplement existing land use tools, such as the town’s conservation subdivision regulations, with guidelines to create development that respects and complements natural heritage.

Immediate:

1. **Integrate the Natural Heritage Plan data** and recommendations into the town’s development review process.
 - Update the town’s GIS database and make it available to landowners and developers for planning purposes.
 - Provide additional guidance within the existing conservation subdivision guidelines that outlines the data layers and resources that should be discussed and mapped for each project. This should be reviewed early in the development process with applicants so that the town’s guidelines are clear. This saves the landowner or developer time and money in the long run.

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

- Conduct orientation sessions with the planning board, planning administrative staff, town planners and any others involved in development review. Orientation should introduce them to the natural heritage data and interpretation of the data for review of development projects. Conducting the training at the start of an existing project would be an ideal way to do this and would also help to identify any areas that would be strengthened through the process.

Lead:

- Marbletown Planning and Zoning Office

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Marbletown Planning Board
- Town Staff

Ongoing:

2. **Identify acceptable growth areas** in Marbletown and ensure that benefits and costs of conservation and development are equitably distributed throughout landowners. This can be done in a number of ways, from project specific efforts (such as “cooperative planning” with landowners and developers) to a town-wide growth and economic development planning effort such as a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS). This process would help to identify impacts of the build-out of the town and create measures to mitigate such impacts.

This goal of equitably distributing conservation and development benefits can be accomplished through area-wide planning (for example, a developer can purchase conservation lands to support aquifer/watershed protection associated with a project) or through incentive zoning or transfer of development rights.

Lead:

- Consultant working with Marbletown Planning and Zoning Committee and Marbletown Town Board

Potential Partners:

- Landowners, Residents and Businesses of Marbletown
- Marbletown Planning Board
- Ulster County Planning Department and Ulster County Development Corporation

Potential Funding Source:

- Quality Communities Grant Program of New York State
Website: <http://www.qualitycommunities.org/index.asp>

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

3. Provide **landowner consulting** services in: creating conservation development; following best development/management practices; and for identifying conservation and stewardship options. This could be done in a similar manner to the town's current pre-application review period, where a town planner reviews options with a landowner or developer before a project is fully established. These services could also be provided to developers and their consultants (surveyors, engineers).

Lead:

- Marbletown Planning and Zoning Office (consultant may also be needed to assist with larger projects)

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Marbletown Planning Board
- Landowners and developers

Long-Term:

4. **Create best practices for development/resource management** within the town's natural landscape (forests, farms, floodplains/aquifer recharge areas, wetlands and streams). Guidelines can discuss site planning issues such as laying out lots, roads or driveways, as well as topics related to the built environment such as clearing and grading, planting, and surface treatments. Guidelines can also address management issues such as landscape planting or the creation of streamside buffers. Guidelines can be used by homeowners and developers for new development as well as improvements.

Because many of the landscape features are shared across the town's borders, this project should be conducted in partnership with other communities in the region. Guidebooks can also be used by the reviewing board as a reference document to help ensure the quality of these natural resources are sustained. There are several guidebooks available over the internet toward this end, some of which are referenced on the following page.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Partners:

- Rondout Creek Watershed Council

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County (sponsored the Upper Esopus Creek Management Plan – for the portion of the creek above the Ashokan Reservoir).

Sources for Best Management Practices

- *Landscaping for Water Quality* by Cornell Cooperative Extension

Available online at:

<http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/onondaga/document/pdf/envi/landscaping%20for%20water%20quality.pdf>

- *Town of Clinton, Recommended Model Development Principles* by the Center for Watershed Protection, Dutchess County and other partners

Available online at:

<http://www.townofclinton.com/pdf/ClintonBSDrev8.pdf>

- *Forestry Habitat Management Guidelines for Vernal Pool Wildlife* by the Metropolitan Conservation Alliance (MCA Technical Paper Series: No. 6)

Available online at:

http://www.maine.gov/doc/mfs/pubs/pdf/vernal_pool_hmg.pdf

- *Best Development Practices: Conserving Pool-Breeding Amphibians in Residential and Commercial Developments in Northeastern United States* by the Metropolitan Conservation Alliance (MCA Technical Paper Series: No. 5)

Available from the Wildlife Conservation Society:

<http://www.wcs.org/international/northamerica/mca/publications#>

- *Better Site Design: A Handbook for Changing Development Rules in Your Community*, Center for Watershed Protection

Available online at: <http://www.cwp.org/PublicationStore/bsd.htm>

Continue to Advance Research, Management and Stewardship Efforts

This plan is a living document, with data that change as natural communities evolve, and as land use and settlement patterns change. Preserving natural heritage will require continued adaptation, as data change and as science and management practices increase our understanding of resource and species needs. The following short-term activities are recommended:

Ongoing:

1. Complete the **biodiversity assessment/mapping process** for the town and update or refine the priorities herein based on this process. The mapping project should identify specific habitats and areas that are important so that conservation efforts can be focused. The data should be compiled into a GIS that can be used by the town boards. As communities adjacent to Marbletown begin to map habitats, this data should also be evaluated for intermunicipal and regional opportunities. This data can be used by landowners, developers, the Marbletown Planning Board and the Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission to assess conservation priorities and by the Planning Board to identify opportunities for conservation development.

Lead:

Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Partners:

- Town Board/Town Planner; Hudsonia Ltd.

Potential Funding Source:

- Hudson River Estuary Grant Program: offers grants for open space planning; community based conservation and stewardship; watershed planning; and Hudson River Access for communities within the Hudson River Estuary boundaries.

Website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/environmentdec/33071.html>

2. **Coordinate with regional planning efforts for invasive species.** This effort might best be accomplished through town participation in the Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) efforts. These efforts should be coordinated with forest inventory and planning efforts where there is overlap. Mapping of species populations can also help with these efforts. Develop educational materials and work with landowners towards early detection and removal of invasive species.

Lead:

Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission or Regional PRISMs (see below partners)

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Highway Department
- Lower Hudson PRISM
- Catskill PRISM

Funding Sources:

- New York State DEC, Aquatic Invasive Species Eradication Grant Program: offers grants to municipalities and not-for-profits to eradicate invasive species within water bodies and wetlands.

Website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/32861.html>

- New York State DEC, Terrestrial Invasive Species Eradication Grant Program: offers grants to municipalities and not-for-profits to eradicate terrestrial invasive species.

Website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/33358.html>

New York State Plant and Invasive Species References

- Catskill Streams Website:
<http://www.catskillstreams.org/>

Information for streamside landowners in the Catskills.

- New York Flora Atlas Website:
<http://atlas.nyflora.org/>

Searchable atlas of plants in New York (identifies status as native or not native).

- *Final Report of the New York Invasive Species Task Force, Fall 2005*

Online at: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/istfreport1105.pdf

3. **Continue to update the town GIS database, maps, and other information sources** as new data are available and as existing data are revised. Print and publish map updates in the town hall and other public places so that information is available to landowners and developers to guide project development. This information can be used by the planning board in the review of projects.

Lead:

- Marbletown Planning and Zoning Office with Town Board (and consultant as necessary)

Continue to Expand Natural Heritage Awareness in the Community

Schools, landowners, community groups, conservation organizations, and businesses all have a role in preserving natural heritage. They can all benefit from preserving the town's natural heritage. Many organizations and groups are currently working on outreach of particular topics related to natural heritage in the town and region, including (but by no means limited to) the Mohonk Preserve, the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy, Rondout Valley Growers Association, Shawangunk Mountains Regional Partnership, Shawangunk Mountains Biodiversity Partnership, and many local schools and youth groups. The town should continue to partner with these existing organizations, and others, towards these goals.

Short-Term:

1. Create **landowner outreach materials** providing information on existing conservation opportunities such as state and federal tax incentives for conservation easements, the state 480a program, town conservation fund, and available grants and cost-share programs. Work with area realtors and other appropriate businesses to distribute informational materials to landowners and developers. Appendix C includes information on some of these landowner tools.

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission (with Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission)

Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Regional Land Trusts
- Realtors
- Businesses

Ongoing:

2. **Promote and support workshops or training for builders and developers** to provide background on conservation development. The town can support these efforts by participating in workshops, as well as promotion of events.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission and Marbletown Planning and Zoning Office

Potential Partners:

- Developers, builders and others in the construction industry
- Realtors
- Architects and landscape architects
- Interested landowners

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

3. **Integrate Marbletown's natural heritage information into the region's school curriculum** and other venues for youth. Efforts towards this end are already underway and should continue to be supported.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Partners:

- Teachers, Students and School Administrations
- Land Trusts and Other Conservation Organizations

Long-term:

4. Increase public awareness of resources by **developing signs and interpretive information** about the town's natural heritage that can be placed in highly-visual locations (such as at stream crossings on major roads, in hamlets, and at the town park). This could be done jointly with the above recommendation, working with schools on developing the sign information and locations.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

Potential Partners:

- Teachers, students and school administrations
- Land trusts and other conservation organizations
- Residents, businesses, and other interested individuals

Expand Options for Conservation Financing

Currently, there are very few tools available for the town to finance conservation efforts. The town has a two million dollar conservation fund that was approved by voters in November 2006. Other than this fund, the town can apply for state, federal and private grants to support conservation efforts. These grant funds are limited, and in many cases stretched thin across the state and nation. Private donations and fund-raising events have also been conducted in Marbletown and help to support planning and outreach efforts. Additional local financing sources will be needed in order for the town to proactively conserve lands and support additional planning and stewardship activities. The Environmental Conservation Commission and the Preservation and Investment Commission should continue to work with the Town Board and other related partners towards this end. Recommended financing actions include the following:

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Immediate:

1. Urge lawmakers to **support the Community Preservation Act**. This would allow municipalities in New York State the option of creating a voter-approved community preservation fund by imposing a real estate transfer tax of up to 2 percent of the purchase price above the median home value in the county. The Community Preservation Act would authorize towns to do so without further approval from the Legislature. If necessary, the town could ask for individual approval from the State Legislature to submit such a referendum.

Lead:

- Marbletown Town Board and the Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission

Potential Partners:

- Land Trusts
- Ulster County and other Regional Organizations

2. Create a **working database of grants and funding sources**. In order to be successful in state and federal grants, it is important to keep up to date on projects so that when new grant application deadlines are announced, projects are ready to go. This means being ahead of the curve in working with landowners to develop projects, matching funds and conservation partners. Keeping an up-to-date log of potential grant sources and their criteria and expected application dates helps towards this end. See the text box on page 51 for web links to some of the major sources of grant funding available to Marbletown.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission and/or Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission

Potential Partners:

- Land Trusts
- Ulster County
- Adjacent Municipalities

Short-Term:

3. **Conduct a recreation needs assessment** and set appropriate recreation fees for development in Marbletown. Under state law, communities are authorized to collect a recreation fee in lieu of parkland or recreational amenities, which can be placed in a fund used to advance the town's park and recreational goals. An assessment of the town's needs (based on current and future growth) should be conducted in order to develop the recreation fees. A survey of fees collected by other communities in the area would also be useful.

Lead:

- Consultant or Marbletown Youth and Recreation Commission

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission
- Town Youth and Recreation Clubs, Organizations and Schools

Example:

A Recreational Needs Assessment for the Town of Dryden Recreation Commission (Town of Dryden, NY)

Available Online: <http://www.dryden.ny.us/DRCNeedsAssessment.pdf>

4. **Identify local financing needs.** Once a land conservation program has been established, priority parcels identified, and landowner outreach conducted, the town will have a better idea of the level of interest in conservation. At this time, a more detailed financing plan should be developed to guide conservation actions. This financing plan should strive to find creative sources of funding to match the funds the town taxpayers have already contributed.

Lead:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Town Board
- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

5. **Conduct private fundraising.** Great strides have already been made towards private fundraising. The most recent “Stand for the Land” campaign raised significant funds to match the Environmental Conservation Commission’s education and outreach efforts. Private fundraising should continue to be explored to support the town’s conservation efforts.

Lead:

- Stand for Land

Potential Partners:

- Marbletown Preservation and Investment Commission
- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission
- Regional Land Trusts and Conservation Organizations

6. **Funding needs for the conservation program should continuously be evaluated and augmented as necessary** to meet program goals. Conservation does not end with the purchase of land or easements. Long-term stewardship is required in order to preserve our natural heritage. Town-owned parks and open space areas

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

should also have plans for management of their conservation values. Funding sources to support these activities should be explored.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission

Opportunities for the Private Sector

As discussed in the Introduction to the plan, the town's fiscal capacity to support conservation is limited. Concerns about the redistribution of a limited supply of town tax base have also been raised. While this plan is primarily focused on town-level recommendations for conservation as a guide for the town boards and residents, there are also many opportunities for private sector involvement. Some of the potential projects and opportunities that have been discussed through this process are highlighted below. The participation and leadership of town residents, businesses, institutions, and organizations is critical for the long-term success of the Natural Heritage Program.

Adopt-A-Roadside or Adopt-A-Stream Programs

Adopt-a-roadside or adopt-a-stream programs are often sponsored by institutions, businesses, or other community development organizations. In Marbletown, these programs could be established to conduct invasive species removal along roadsides or work with landowners to plant or restore stream buffers. Local businesses can be solicited for plant materials and equipment donations. Development of such a program could be coordinated by the Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission, although the activities would be sponsored and conducted by the private sector.

Landowner-Sponsored Forest Management Planning

Managing a small forest for values such as timber harvest or wildlife management can be difficult for the small parcel owner. Also, for those property owners interested in realizing the financial benefits of a timber harvest, it may be difficult to attract sufficient interest in the timber sale if the parcel is isolated and not of sufficient size to attract a competitive purchase offer.

For landowners who are interested, a more comprehensive approach to timber management can yield mutual benefits. A coordinated initiative by forest land owners to develop cooperative timber management plans for their properties can set the stage for larger, more attractive timber sales and reduce the costs and impacts of logging roads by coordinating skid roads and landings. Further opportunities can be explored for additional mutually beneficial activities such as coordinating leases for sportsman's groups, exploration of conservation easement options in partnership with conservation organizations, and for other cooperative initiatives.

In addition to the DEC, which has several forest-related programs and support staff, for interested forest landowners, there are several non-profit support networks available. One example is the master forest owners (MFO) program. All MFOs are graduates of a 4-day training program, where they learn about sawtimber and wildlife management, forest economics, and ecology. The MFOs continue to receive information updates, attend refresher classes and maintain contact with natural resource managers from private, public, and academic organizations (see <http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/index.htm>). The New York Forest Owners

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Association (www.nyfoa.org) is a state-wide group dedicated to promote sustainable forestry practices and improved stewardship on privately owned woodlands.

Market Research on Sustainable Forest Products

There may be a need for market research on forest product related economic development, such as value-added products, alternative energy and green building materials in the region. This type of market research could be sponsored by private landowners, businesses, forestry groups or other foundations to address the specific opportunities and needs of the landowners.

Natural Resource Apprentice Program

There are many residents of Marbletown who have extensive knowledge of the town's natural heritage. These local experts could provide training services to interested residents on a number of topics, such as plant and animal identification, sustainable forest resource management, or invasive species identification and removal. This will help to maintain the town's natural heritage into the future. This group could also develop articles that highlight topics of interest related to natural heritage for distribution in the town's newsletter.

Realtor-Sponsored Conservation Information Services

Local realtors can help to advance the town's goals by distributing information and brochures developed by the town to new residents of Marbletown. Realtors are often the first point of contact for new residents and can help provide future landowners with useful information about land management and conservation.

Marbletown Natural Heritage Plan

Next Steps

To accomplish the goals of this plan, the following “next-step” short-term actions are recommended for immediate follow-up:

- Conduct a workshop with town boards to review the recommendations in this report and develop a working plan of action. Identify a party to complete each task and establish necessary protocols for coordination. This plan makes recommendations on the lead party for each recommendation. The boards should meet together to discuss these recommendations in light of their existing priorities. They should refine the recommendations as necessary, and develop timelines and strategies for advancing each recommendation. The summary chart in this plan can be used as a starting point for this conversation.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission
- Develop a summary brochure that synthesizes this plan’s goals with the outreach efforts of the Preservation and Investment Committee. The Natural Heritage Vision Map might be on one side, with a list of tools for landowners on the other. One of these tools will be the town’s land conservation program. The state 480a program and a local term easement program (if established) are tools available for forest land owners. There are also grants and financial incentives for landowners interested in conservation and agricultural economic development. Many of these tools are summarized in Appendix C.

Lead:

- Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission
- Conduct preliminary research on developing a local term easement program. Explore term easement options and commitments with landowners:
 - What size parcel could apply?
 - What would be required of the landowner?
 - Terms of the easement?
 - What amount of tax abatement could be supported fiscally? (fiscal impacts to town taxpayers).

Lead:

- Marbletown Town Board/Consultant
- Seek funding to identify priority development/growth areas in Marbletown. The identification of priority growth areas should be coupled with a build-out analysis. Additional research on the capacity of the town’s aquifers to support compact growth, and the fiscal costs and benefits associated with growth and potential municipal water supply should also be conducted.

Lead:

- Marbletown Planning and Zoning Committee

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a plan of action for the town to advance its Natural Heritage Vision. Fulfilling this plan of action will require leadership and partnership among town boards, landowners, conservation organizations, businesses, and many others – in order to be successful. The action plan calls for investment in planning for conservation, as well as in embracing resource-friendly development, economic development activities and private-sector solutions. Accomplishing the goals of this plan will help the town to further resource conservation goals in balance with economic development.