

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Welcome to the Town of Atkinson Land Conservation Plan

You are invited to explore the Land Conservation Plan data and maps and its recommendations for ongoing and future land and resource conservation

OVERVIEW

The Land Conservation Plan is intended to serve as a guide for future land and natural resource protection and will be updated as new information and conservation issues arise over time.

Since it was formed in 1974, the Atkinson Conservation Commission has played a major role in maintaining the Town's rural character by preserving open spaces for wildlife habitat, watershed protection, scenic beauty, and passive recreation. This, in turn, has made Atkinson a desirable place to live, and has helped to raise property values.

It is the Conservation Commission's hope that this Plan will assist the Town of Atkinson to focus on protecting those very special places in our town that are increasingly under threat from development.

This Plan was envisioned by the Conservation Commission, who secured funding from a New Hampshire Moose Plate Conservation Grant to create this document. The Plan takes stock of past conservation

achievements, considers the ongoing reasons for protecting the highest priority environmental resources, analyzes the areas of town that are most valuable to protect amidst the realities of a dwindling availability of undeveloped land, and makes recommendations for ongoing and future conservation investments and initiatives.

The Plan starts by giving renewed voice to the reasons for continuing our efforts to further conserve open spaces, and explores the methods available for conservation beyond the very expensive tradition of land ownership. It then presents an inventory of the important conservation qualities we wish to preserve, and presents maps showing where these qualities exist in town. Finally, this plan gives recommendations on concrete steps we as a Town can take to shape our environmental future.

PAST AND CURRENT CONDITIONS

Historically, land conservation was done by buying land with deeded conservation restrictions. To date, the Town has protected more than 580 acres by purchasing

and owning protected land, which represents roughly 8.7% of the buildable land in Atkinson.

At the same time, the Town has supported Innovative Land Use zoning that enables cluster developments that both preserve open space and require buffers that shield these relatively dense developments from public view. While not affording quite the same environmental value as Town-owned conservation land, nevertheless the preserved open space areas do help maintain the town’s rural character and protect its resources. To date, Atkinson’s 20 cluster developments have preserved more than 660 acres of dedicated open space, which represents roughly 9.8% of the buildable land in town.

HISTORICAL LAND USE STATISTICS

The table below reports major land use statistics from 1962 to 2015.

Land Use (acres)	1962	2005	2015
Forested	5,445	3,059	2,936
Residential	574	2,580	2,633
Industrial/Commercial	6	116	124
Active Agriculture	763	283	299

As shown by the data, residential development has increased by 2,059 acres or a 359 percent change while forested lands have decreased by 2,509 acres or a 46 percent change.

The conversion of natural landscapes to developed landscapes, including impervious surfaces and increased stormwater runoff pollution, can have significant impacts on the health and values of wildlife habitat, ecosystem services that humans rely upon, such as drinking waters sources, and the character of the community. This Plan aims to identify where strategic land conservation can help to mitigate impacts to natural resources and preserve Atkinson’s rural character.

CHALLENGES

While opportunities for further land conservation are decreasing, the cost of land is increasing, due both to its scarcity and Atkinson’s desirability as a place to live. This Land Conservation Plan is intended to consider these

realities of land conservation in Atkinson today and provide guidance to the Conservation Commission and other Town officials on where to direct conservation efforts, and how to spend the relatively modest Town land conservation fund.

The Atkinson Land Conservation Plan acknowledges challenges and emerging issues that may impact future land and resource conservation efforts:

- **Cost of Land Purchase**
- **Land Management and Stewardship**
- **Climate Change Impacts**
- **Wildlife Habitat Stressors**
- **Drought and Groundwater Recharge**

CURRENT LAND DEVELOPMENT STATISTICS

Below is a summary of the current status of developed, undeveloped and potential conservation land opportunities in Atkinson.

6,670 acres of land and 3,184 parcels
6,120 acres currently developed
550 acres remain undeveloped (+ wetlands)
14 parcels > 10 acres or more undeveloped
Current Condition = 90-95% developed lands

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The intention of this Plan is to enable the Town of Atkinson to focus on the **quality** of land conservation, not just the **quantity** of land that is protected. The data and maps contained in this Plan should be of continuing value to the Conservation Commission, Town staff and community members in their long range planning efforts and strategic investments in conservation.

The Conservation Commission welcomes participation by town staff and representatives, community members and landowners to continually update the Plan to ensure it remains a helpful resource filled with guidance, data, information, and inspiration.

**Submitted November 2022 by the
Town of Atkinson Conservation Commission**