



Alford Open Space & Recreation Plan

Prepared by

Alford Community Development Plan Advisory Committee

With assistance from

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in cooperation with

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



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River, near Route 71, Alford

*When breezes are soft and skies are fair,
I steal an hour from study and care,
And hie me away to the woodland scene,
Where wanders the stream with waters of green,
As if the bright fringe of herbs on its brink
Had given their stain to the wave they drink;
And they whose meadows it murmurs through
Have named the stream from its fair hue.*

An excerpt from Green River, by William Cullen Bryant, describing one of the author's favorite haunts. Published 1820.

Section 1. PLAN SUMMARY

Alford is in an enviable position. Unlike so many Massachusetts communities, it has not yet suffered from sprawl, insufficient water supplies, or pollution from hazardous wastes. In order to prevent such degradation and protect our town's natural resources and scenic vistas, we need to take preventative steps.

The intention of this Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) is to do just that—to plan efficiently, wisely and fairly for Alford's future. It summarizes our town's ecological, historical and recreational resources, identifies our conservation and recreation priorities and includes a realistic schedule to complete the recommended actions. The OSRP also incorporates issues such as land use, finances, and demographics, which are inherently tied to our community's development.

To help plan for our town's future, a Community Development Plan Advisory Committee was established in 2003. The committee members included more than 50 members of the Alford community; Billie Best was the chairperson. The Committee's responsibilities included addressing development, affordable housing, transportation and open space and recreation issues. To complete this OSRP, committee members worked with staff from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (Bryan Boeskin, Mark Maloy, Peter Falcier) and UMass Extension (Kasey Rolih, Laurie Sanders).

If Alford plans wisely and implements the action items recommended here, we believe that our community will be able to preserve the qualities that define the character of our town and that we all hold dear—its spectacular landscape features, its rich history, clean water, outstanding wildlife habitat, and its agricultural heritage.

*The Dunn farm on
the New York line.*



Section 2: INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Purpose

Land is one of the most precious assets our community possesses. How we use it shapes our town's character and vitality. Alford is fortunate because its rural character and scenic beauty--the qualities that appeal to so many of us—remain largely intact. Without a plan, future residential development in Alford could disrupt the fabric of our community and also harm our natural resources.

At present, approximately 13% of our town is permanently protected. Development on steep slopes and ridgelines has been regulated since our town passed the Scenic Mountain Act in 2001. Today, one of the most serious threats we face is the loss of our community's agricultural traditions. This, along with the possibility of new, out-of-place development and high-intensity recreation, are chief among residents' concerns. Without careful planning and zoning, the fabric of our community and the environment we cherish could easily be damaged.

This OSRP was developed in large part to help guide and inform the actions of our local officials. Upon approval by the State's Division of Conservation Service, it will also allow our town to apply for conservation grants. The Self-Help grants, which are administered by the MA Division of Conservation Service, can be used to reimburse the town for costs associated with land acquisition, appraisals, surveys, deed transactions, and other activities related to protecting land for conservation, water supply, or recreational purposes. For Alford, the reimbursement rate from Self Help is 52% (up to \$250,000).

B. Planning Process & Public Participation

Using funds from Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (Executive Order 418), the Alford Selectmen voted in 2003 to create an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). The plan was completed with assistance from the Community Development Plan Advisory Committee (CDPAC), Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and UMass Extension. UMass Extension provided technical assistance on issues relating to biodiversity and, with input from community leaders, was responsible for writing this document.

In April 2003, Alford's Community Development Plan Advisory Committee (CDPAC) developed a questionnaire, which was sent to each resident. The questionnaire included topics ranging from affordable housing and transportation to open space and recreation. 39 % (155/400) of residents responded to the recent questionnaire. With respect to open space and recreation, the responses clearly indicated that Alford residents care deeply about protecting the town's rural character, its agricultural traditions, scenic views, clean water, wildlife habitat and important historical and recreational resources (See Appendices 1 and 2). The survey also recognized that if the rate of residential growth continues at current levels, Alford could:

- degrade water resources and wetlands;
- lose landscape features that attract people to the area;

- face inappropriate, out-of-scale development;
- experience increased traffic;
- lose its middle-class population base, which cannot compete with the rising cost of housing and land; and
- stress town services.

Input into the plan was made possible through an extensive e-mail network and five public meetings (April 2003, July 2003, December 2003, March 2004, May 2004). Additional discussions regarding open space & recreation issues took place during regular meetings of the CDP Committee. At a meeting in December 2003, 18 members of the community participated in a discussion of the OSRP's goals and objectives and the 5-Year Action Plan; at the March meeting, 11 people participated in the correcting and amending a draft proposal; at the May meeting, 10 residents participated. Additional comments were received by e-mail. Public participation in the open space planning process was also promoted through the development of a large, glossy poster (Appendix 3), which was posted in the town hall beginning in September 2003 and the publication of an article on open space planning in the Alford Newsletter (Appendix 4). Finally, UMass Extension sought outside opinions about open space and recreation issues through conversations with staff from Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Massachusetts Department of Conservation Recreation (formerly Department of Environmental Management), and MassWildlife; these comments are incorporated into the plan.

Section 3: COMMUNITY SETTING

A. Regional Context



The town of Alford is a rural community located on the western edge of south Berkshire County. West Stockbridge lies to the north, Egremont to the south, Great Barrington to the southeast, and Hillsdale and Austerlitz, New York to the west. Alford is the smallest town in Berkshire County; covering just 7,374 acres (11.56 square miles). What makes our town so picturesque are its broad hayfields, its long fertile valleys, and its steep, forested mountains. There are no gas stations, no stores--only a single bed & breakfast.

Alford's longest valley follows Alford Brook, but a smaller valley arm extends up along Tom Ball Brook and other valleys occur along the Green River and in the southeast corner of town. To the west, Alford is flanked by the Taconic Range, while rising on the town's eastern border is the prominent forested ridgeline of Tom Ball Mountain (588 meters; ~1900 feet).

All of Alford lies in the watershed of the Green River. Celebrated by William Cullen Bryant in his poem with the same name, the Green River eventually flows into the Housatonic River in the southern portion of Great Barrington. It begins in the mountains of neighboring New York as a series of forested headwater streams. By the time it reaches Alford, the Green River is fast-flowing and rocky-bottomed. After passing below Route 71, it winds away from the highway, through the forest and into Great Barrington, where it is joined by Seekonk Brook. The Green River eventually joins the Housatonic River in the southern portion of Great Barrington.

One of the tributaries of the Seekonk is Alford Brook, the other significant waterway in town. Alford Brook begins as a series of forested wetlands in West Stockbridge and after crossing the town boundary, is fed by Scribner Brook, Tom Ball Brook and several smaller unnamed tributaries. Within Alford, the upper valley of Alford Brook is broad and open and is the site of the town's three remaining dairy operations.

At present, approximately 13% of Alford is permanently protected from development. Most of the protection occurred in 2001 when two parcels totaling more than 700 acres were protected through conservation restrictions. During the last 25 years other landowners have also preserved their properties, either through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program or by donating or selling their development rights. In addition, many of Alford's large landowners have strong ties to their land and have owned it for decades or generations. The trouble is, there is no guarantee that these properties will remain undeveloped. Economic pressures on area farms as well as the rising value of real estate threaten the future of many landscapes we cherish. New homeowners are drawn to our town for many of the same reasons that attracted long-time residents--its peaceful setting, agreeable climate, proximity to cultural activities, and of course, its scenic beauty. Town residents appreciate the town's bucolic qualities; they enjoy walking on the town's quiet roads, explore its forests, bicycle along the Valley floor, and a few residents still ply the cold, clean water's of the Green River or Alford Brook for trout. As the town's population ages, there will be a greater need for safe, level walking areas, so maintaining scenic roads and creating new paths is an important consideration. There is also interest in creating more playing fields for the town's young people. Based on a recent survey, most residents realize that protecting open space is essential to maintaining Alford's recreation opportunities, its outstanding natural resources and its small town charm. A 1999 report by DEM's Office of Water Resources identified the Green River, beginning in Alford, as a site for whitewater canoeing in spring; the town may wish to someday provide a canoe/kayak access point as a result.

B. History of the Community

The earliest European settlers came to the Alford Valley to homestead around 1750s, probably moving north from Connecticut. A large part of the southern Housatonic region had been sold to the Europeans in 1724 for 460 pounds, 3 barrels of cider and 30 quarts of rum by Chief Konkapot and members of his tribe. However, earlier transactions had sold much of this same territory to the Dutch, and the area claimed by the state of New York. The region included the land containing Alford, and in part because of the dispute, the area remained unsettled by Europeans. In 1756, another transaction, this time between the Mahican Stockbridge Indians and a small group of settlers, transferred the southern and central portions of Alford for 20 pounds.

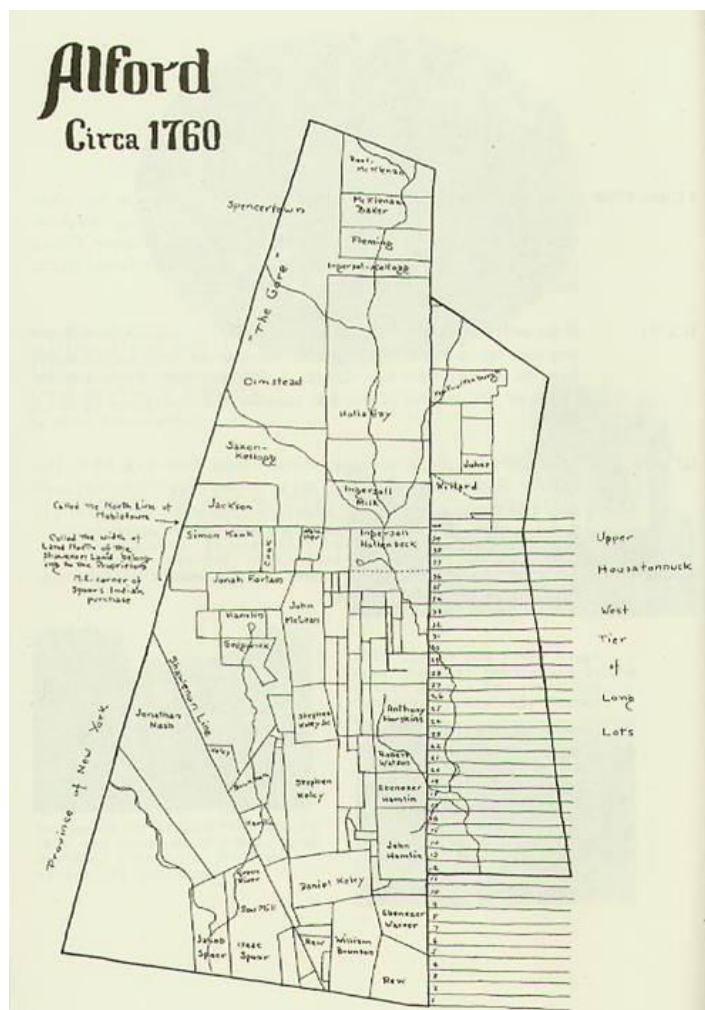
At the time of the purchase, much of what we now know as Alford was called Shawenon, from the Algonquin meaning either ‘forest’ or ‘many waters’. The eastern strip of Alford was considered part of the Great Barrington township. In 1769, several local families tried to separate Alford from Great Barrington, and in 1773, they won legislative approval. Great Barrington, however, retained long wood lots in the eastern portion of Alford until 1818. In 1847, West Stockbridge transferred land to Alford too, giving the town its current boundaries. In spite of these subsequent land transactions, Alford was officially incorporated in 1773. The name Alford has three possible sources—either a reference to a place in Scotland or England, or in honor of Colonel John Alford, a wealthy Charlestown man, who was famous at the time for his philanthropy and piety.

By the time of the American Revolution, Alford had a gristmill, a sawmill and 375 residents. By 1800, the population had soared to 600, thanks to the discovery of a rich deposit of high-grade marble in 1799 (citation). Several other rich marble deposits were found later, and between 1800 and 1872 more than a dozen quarries operated in town. The quarries were run by Sanford and Frederick Fitch, James Cook, and lastly, by the Alford Marble Works. The beauty of the marble and its soundness made it ideal for building. Among the places it can be seen are the old City Hall in New York City and the State House in Albany.

When the quarries were going full-tilt, Alford was bustling. There were blacksmith shops, tanneries, cooper shops, a reed factory, two grist mills, two sawmills, a forge with a trip hammer and a furnace for casting hollow ware. The manufacture of charcoal was also a big business during the 1800s. The Alford Meeting House (historically known as the Union Meeting House), which still stands between the Town Hall and School House, was built in 1817 and served as the gathering house for the

“The surrounding country, I feel inadequate to portray faithfully; the lovely drives over hill and dale, through beautiful valleys, up over the mountains from which bursts on the sight, the hills in all their grandeur; on one side, little villages, on the other a bank of hills with a little lake between, shining like a silver mirror.”

Anonymous, Excerpt from a letter. In The Book of Berkshire by Clark W. Bryan, c.1886



community's diverse religious needs; Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists all worshiped there.

The laying of the railroad in Great Barrington—and not in Alford—had a profound effect on the future of the town. Without a railroad, the quarries in Alford were hard pressed to compete with quarries in towns with the rail service. Increased use of cement and labor disputes led to the closing of the marble quarries, and as they folded, workers left and the other businesses closed too. Agriculture, once again, became the backbone of the local economy. But there was another change afoot. Around this same time an influx of “summer people” arrived. Many of them renovated former farmhouses and a few actually began to farm the land. In recent years many formerly seasonal visitors have retired to Alford as their permanent home. Today, the town's population includes a mix of full-time and seasonal residents.

C. Population Characteristics

Unlike most communities, Alford's population is still recovering from a high around 1800! As the quarries were abandoned in the 19th century, Alford's population declined from a high of 600 to just below 200 in the early 1940s. During the last 70 years, Alford's population has slowly and steadily crept upwards. The 1990 census showed 418 residents, by the 2000 census the figure had increased to 460. The census data indicate that the roughly half of Alford's residents have arrived since 1987. Most residents (42%) are between the ages of 45-64 (*see Figure 1*).

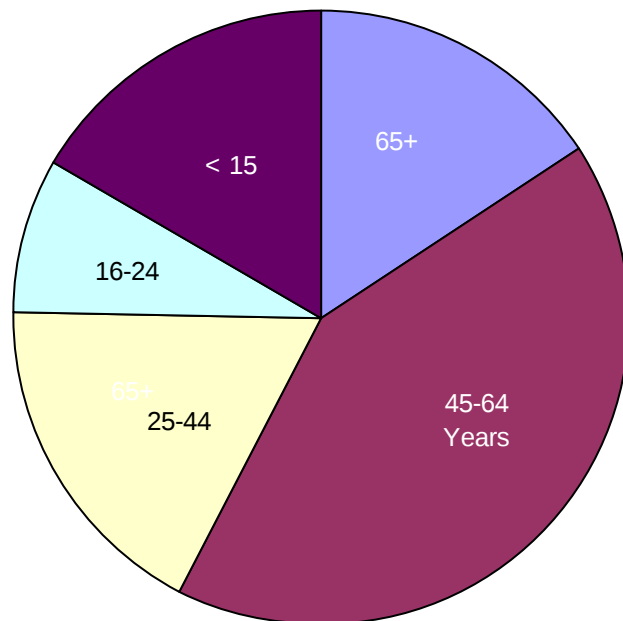


Figure 1: Population demographics for Alford based on the 2000 Federal Census.

D. Growth and Development Patterns

Patterns and Trends

Agriculture & Business

After the collapse of the quarry industry, Alford's economy shifted back to its agricultural roots. In 1874 Alford included 62 farms, a century later, only 6 farms remained. Today just three farms remain, two of which are dairy. Other land is considered agricultural, and is used for hay, pasture or row crops. In spite of the dwindling number of farms, 20% of Alford is still considered agricultural (only Sheffield (22%) and Egremont (22%) have more land devoted to agriculture in Berkshire County (Mark Maloy, BNRP, pers.comm.)) (**Map 1: Land Use**).. Maintaining the Valley's open land and farming traditions is important to residents. The farms are struggling because of the depressed market for milk, the aging farmer population, and the rising value of real estate. Other agricultural activities in town include tree related industries. Logging continues

to provide income and play a role in shaping land use patterns in Alford, and a few residents make maple syrup.

Aside from farms, the only other businesses in town are home-based operations. There are no stores or gas stations in town, so residents have to go to Great Barrington or other nearby towns to shop. Great Barrington, Pittsfield and Albany are where most Alford residents work. As there is no longer a public school in town, children attend public schools in Sheffield.

Housing

Most of the homes in Alford are single-family on large lots along existing roadways. All new homes are required to have 250 feet of road frontage and a minimum of 2 acres. Between 1999-2004, a total of 26 new homes were built (1999- 6; 2000-5; 2001-0; 2002-8; 2003-4; 2004-3). Although this number seems relatively small, when the total number of existing homes is considered (about 329 (Alford Assessor's Office, 2004) and the total population (~ 460), these new homes represent roughly an 8% increase in the total housing stock and probably a 10% increase in the seasonal/permanent population.

While a few small subdivisions exist in Alford, large (more than 4 houses) have not *yet* been proposed. They are, however, underway in neighboring Great Barrington and in Hillsdale, NY. The Great Barrington project has been designed with affordable housing units, which has enabled the developer to overcome existing zoning regulations. Alford is vulnerable to this type of large subdivision as there is presently an insufficient supply of affordable housing units to meet the state's 10% standard.

Although the pace of development is still much lower than in many communities, Alford could change dramatically in character unless additional land is protected and new zoning controls *are put in place*. Under current zoning rules, hundreds of new homes could be built along current public roads. The Scenic Mountain Act regulates our ridgelines, but the views of wooded hills and fields could easily be damaged. The Build-Out Analysis completed by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in 2000 indicates that approximately 3,395 acres (46%) of the town remains developable. If building were maximized in these areas, the Analysis estimates that Alford could expand to more than 4000 residents.

Infrastructure

a. Transportation system

No public transportation system is available in Alford. Nearby Route 41 provides easy access to the I-90 interchange in West Stockbridge, while Route 71, on the southeast side of town, connects Alford to Egremont and Great Barrington (to the south) and to Hillsdale and Austerlitz, NY (to the northwest). Besides Route 71, the most trafficked roads in town are East Road and West Road. These roads lead up the east and west sides of the valley and connect Alford with West Stockbridge to the north and Great Barrington to the southeast. Both roads are also extraordinarily popular with bicyclists. Safety is an issue for bicyclists as well as pedestrians, because many motorists exceed the speed limit along these straight, level roads.

b. Water supply systems

Alford residents rely exclusively on spring water or on private, on-site wells for their drinking water. A spring in the town's southern portion has provided water to a business in Great Barrington for many years, but it will soon go off-line as it is scheduled to be replaced by an alternate water source (Rick Larson, DEP Drinking Water Supply, pers. comm.). There are no other public drinking water suppliers in town, but a small portion of town contributes to the recharge area of Long Pond, Great Barrington's surface water reservoir. The town of Great Barrington also has a groundwater infiltration gallery near the Green River, which depends on pristine surface water and is vulnerable to contamination. Located along the Green River in Great Barrington, the infiltration gallery consists of 2 horizontal, perforated pipes (18 feet deep). The pipes collect water, which is then pumped to a storage container and sent to users via the distribution system. Because of this, the healthy quality of water in the Green River and Alford Brook play an important role in the drinking water supply of our neighboring community.

c. Wastewater systems

Alford has no municipal sewer system for waste disposal. Instead, all residents rely on private septic systems. Unfavorable conditions for septic systems (steep slopes, low percolation rates, wetland soils, bedrock) have been partially responsible for the limiting development in Alford. In recent years, however, MA DEP's Wastewater Program has approved a number of new innovative alternative designs for wastewater treatment. These new treatment designs allow septic systems to be constructed in areas where the soils were historically considered "unsuitable". The designs are still fairly expensive, both to install and maintain. As of January 1, 2004, Massachusetts' Title 5 regulations changed to allow percolation rates of 1 inch in 60 minutes; previously the rate was 1" in 30 minutes. Some boards of health in other communities are worried that this new rate will have negative impacts on groundwater and surface water quality. As a result, some of them plan to revise their local regulations to maintain the old state standard of 1" in 30 minutes.

Zoning

All of Alford is zoned Agricultural-Residential (**Map 2: Zoning**). By-right uses are limited to agricultural purposes, single family dwellings and religious or educational uses. For a single family, the minimum lot size throughout the zone is 2 acres with 250-feet of road frontage dwelling; for a two family dwelling, 4 acres with 500 feet of road frontage is required.

Long-Term Development Patterns

In 2000 the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission completed a build-out analysis. Based on Alford's current zoning regulations, land use patterns, and physical development constraints (steep slopes and wetlands areas), 1,697 new housing units could be developed at maximum build-out. This would translate to more than 4200 new residents, 407 of which would be students. The added population would require an additional 316,000 gallons per day of additional water use and generate more than 2,000 tons of municipal waste/year. While this is not a prediction, it does highlight the town's vulnerability to uncontrolled growth.

Section 4. ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

A. Geology, Soils & Topography

Bedrock Geology

About 650 million years ago rifting between the North American plate and plates that are now parts of South America began to produce a proto-Atlantic Ocean called Iapetus. The continents were located closer to the equator, and by ~520 million years ago, the land that is now western Massachusetts was the eastern shore of North America. It was a warm seashore and carbonate bank like that of present-day Florida. Geologically, the next 50 million years were peaceful. Then, ~ 470 million years before present, a long strip of land that may have been shaved off of western South America, began colliding with the North American plate. Central Massachusetts is part of this strip of land. As the plates collided, the proto-Atlantic closed and the continental crust, deep ocean sediments, sandy beaches, were compressed under intense heat and pressure. Like an accordion, the land faulted and folded. Rock slices from 20-30 miles to the east were thrust westward, the slabs of rock riding over other rock types. This period is known as the Taconic Orogeny (mountain-building event). Metamorphic processes transformed sandstones and beach deposits into quartzite (e.g. the top of Monument Mountain), limestones from corals and the marine environments became marbles, and shales, mudstones and deep ocean sediments fused into schists. These erosion-resistant schists cap the Taconic Range to the west and Tom Ball Mountain. Most are quartz-mica schists (USGS, Report 98-4234, 1999).

During a later mountain building episode (the Acadian orogeny (~390-370 million years ago), a piece of northern Africa collided with North America and became part of it. This land represents eastern Massachusetts, including the Boston basin. During this orogeny, the rocks that had been added to North America during the Taconic mountain-building period, including those in central Massachusetts, were deformed and metamorphosed. Another hundred million years later, around 290 million years ago, Europe and Africa became sutured to the Americas, and a supercontinent called Pangaea formed. Then, another relatively peaceful period ensued. Roughly 200 million years ago, the supercontinent of Pangaea began to break apart. In the Connecticut River Valley, this break-up caused massive faulting, earthquakes and volcanic activity. The mountains and valleys in Alford were relatively unaffected by this Triassic rifting event.

During the last 470 million years, the Taconics and Tom Ball Mountain, the mountain peaks have steadily eroded. The mountains we see today relatively recently uplifted and exposed rocks from these ancient orogenies. Along the valleys sides and floor are the softer, more erosion susceptible marbles and limestones created more than 500 million years ago, when the first snails and fishes appeared on earth.

Surficial Geology

The next major transformation to the New England landscape came with glaciation. During the last 2 million years, at least four continental glaciations have occurred, the last (the Wisconsin) left our region just 12,000-15,000 years ago. The last major ice sheet measured more than a mile thick, and moved NNW to SSE. The ice scraped only a few feet off the mountain tops, but it had a much greater influence on the look of the valleys and hillsides. The ice operated

like a bulldozer, scraping the land and rounding the valleys. As the ice began melting back faster than it advanced, all the material bound in the ice--the boulders, rocks, silts, sands, clays-- were re-deposited. The hilltops were the first areas to be exposed, and long tongues of ice filled the valleys. Ice dams created glacial ponds and lakes, and melt water, charged with sediment, rushed through streams and river channels. Over most of New England the sediments in the ice were deposited as an unsorted mixture known as till, but in other areas, water sorted the sediments, creating sandy outwash plains, terraces, eskers and deltas. Today these stratified deposits are among the most significant reservoirs for groundwater. In areas where glacial lakes and ponds persisted, silts and clays were laid down. These fine sediments create an almost impermeable lens; in other areas, the till was laid down and compressed, creating an ablation layer, or in the vernacular, hard pan. Glacial Lake Ashley extended between Falls Village, Connecticut and Great Barrington. Based on soil surveys, during the period of glacial retreat, portions of Alford were inundated with glacial ponds and it is likely that fingers of Glacial Lake Ashley extended up into Alford Brook Valley. In recent times, local rivers and streams have moved back and forth across the landscape. In some places our local streams are hemmed in by barriers like bedrock, but in other areas they have been able to cut through the sediments laid down by the glacier. More recent deposits that have been laid down by floods are known as recent alluvium; narrow strands of alluvium occur along the larger brooks. These deposits are important for their fertility and their ability to store groundwater.

Soils

Eighteen main soil classes have been identified in Alford. They range from steep and stony to nearly level, fertile silt loams. All of the various soil types can be lumped into two major groups: *Amenia-Pittsfield-Farmington* (glacial till derived from limestone) and *Taconic-Macomber-Lanesboro* (glacial till derived from phyllite, slate and shale). (**Map 3: Soils & Geologic Features**). Of the soil types in town, five are classified as prime farmland. These include *Amenia* silt loam (*AmA*, *AmB*, *AsB*, *AvB*), *Hero* loam (*HeA* & *HeB*), *Nellis* loam (*NsB* & *NeB*), *Pittsfield* loam (*PrB*), and *Stockbridge* gravelly silt loam (*StB*). All have a combination of qualities (moisture, slope, fertility, texture) that make them excellent for growing crops. According to the Soil Survey, most of the prime agricultural soils occur in level areas along Alford Brook and in the southern portion of Alford, along Route 71, Green River Road and along Boice Road. None are very susceptible to erosion, but all are vulnerable to development. All are level, often well-drained, and free of stones.

Alford Slopes		
% Slope	Acres	% of Town
≤ 15 %	4356	59
15 – 25 %	1755	25
25 – 50 %	1132	15
≥ 50 %	134	< 2

Slope & Topography

Slope is another important factor influencing development patterns in town (**Map 4: Slopes**). Slopes over 25% (17% of town) are considered to have "severe" limitations for most activities because of the associated economic and environmental costs. Slopes with grades between 15-25% comprise 24% of the town; these may also have severe limitations as the soils can be highly susceptible to erosion, prone to excess surface runoff, or have bedrock near the surface. In Alford erosion from the construction of a new home or logging operation in the uplands could harm a

spring that a downstream neighbor depends on for their drinking water supply. Therefore, the planning board, building inspector and if appropriate, conservation commission or state forester (if applicable) should be careful to ensure that adequate measures are taken to limit or prevent erosion.

B. Landscape Character

Alford is defined by the broad sweeping valley along Alford Brook, its rugged, forested hills, pastoral views and its historic homes and farms. The town's Center includes a church, town offices/library, a cemetery and several historic homes. Elsewhere in town, homes are scattered, sometimes widely by fields, forest or wetlands.

Although Alford has remained relatively free of sprawl, the Build-Out Analysis indicates that many changes could occur that would drastically alter our community's rural character and have long-term impacts on the health of the environment. At present, one of the chief worries is how the beauty of our Valley could be easily marred by the construction of inappropriate development. New homes that are out-of-scale, obstructing scenic views, or constructed in sensitive areas (near important wetlands, wildlife corridors, rare species habitat/areas of high biodiversity, agricultural land, ridgelines, blocking trails, or in areas of historic importance) could have a lasting negative impact on the look and feel of our town. Residents are also worried about how the decline in local farming will affect the look and feel of the town.

Another threat to the beauty and integrity of Alford's natural landscapes is the invasion of non-native plant species. Goatweed, multiflora rose, Asiatic bittersweet, barberry, Japanese Knotweed, purple loosestrife, Russian Olive (*see photo right*) and Morrow's honeysuckle—are all species that readily invade natural areas such as forests, wetlands, and the banks of rivers and streams. They all occur in town, and their uncontrolled spread will have scenic and ecological consequences.



C. Water Resources

Watersheds & Resources

Alford lies completely within the watershed of the Green River, which extends into neighboring New York (**Map 5: Water Resources**), which is a tributary to the Housatonic. By and large, the streams and rivers of Alford are in good health. The quality of their waters and the habitats they support are the focus of several area conservation groups.

- ◆ The *Housatonic River Watershed Association*, a non-profit organization based in Lenox, is involved in advocacy and education around water quality issues throughout the Housatonic drainage.

- ◆ The *Berkshire Natural Resources Council* (BNRC), which functions as a land trust and environmental advocacy organization, owns land and holds conservation easements on three parcels in town. BNRC is interested in expanding its current holdings and protecting additional open space in Alford, in particular Tom Ball Mountain.
- ◆ The *Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program* is charged with protecting the state's rare plants and animals and its important natural communities. In 2001 NHESP identified stretches of Alford Brook, wetlands near the Green River, and a large wetland in the southeastern portion of town as significant habitat for rare wildlife.
- ◆ The Alford Trout Club in West Stockbridge maintains a trout pond for its members; the pond forms the headwaters to Alford Brook.
- ◆ Along with BNRC, the *Massachusetts Division of Fish and Game* holds a Conservation Restriction on the 632-acre forested block on the western border of the town. This parcel, known as the Alford Springs Tract, falls within the federal government's Forest Legacy Program (see write-up at: www.fs.fed.us/na/durham/legacy/text/2002annual/pdf/alford.pdf)
- ◆ The corridor of forest along the town's western border and into the Taconics in New York has been designated by the federal government as a *Legacy Landscape* because it forms one of the largest blocks of forest in the Northeast. This status gives Alford greater opportunities to receive grant money when trying to protect land in this area.

Surface Water

Rivers, streams and wetlands in Alford play many different functions: they serve as habitat and corridors for wildlife, they help transport nutrients and sediments, they link ecological communities, and they contribute to the town's scenic, educational and recreational qualities. All the waters in Alford flow into the Green River Sub-basin, which consists of two principal waterways: The Green River and Alford Brook. The following provides an overview these waterways, their tributaries and the larger ponds within Alford. A few smaller ponds also are found in town, but these are all privately owned, and most were originally constructed as farm ponds.

The **Green River** is the largest waterway in town. Located in the southeast portion of town, the Green River flows roughly 20 miles, draining land in Massachusetts and neighboring New York, where its headwaters begin in the rugged, forested hills above Austerlitz and Hillsdale. By the time the Green River reaches Alford, it is fast-flowing and rocky bottomed. The floodplain of the Green River narrows as the river crosses into Alford, and just upstream from the Route 71 bridge, the channel shrinks further until the river is constricted into a shaded, bedrock ravine. The ravine includes beautiful exposures of naturally carved marble. The river bottom is a mix of cobbles, larger boulders and more commonly, smaller stones and gravels. In the spring and during periods of high precipitation, large volumes of water rush through its channel. In 2002 the bank of the Green River was stabilized along a short stretch of Route 71 (*photo right*).



Unfortunately before the site was permanently stabilized, floodwaters ripped out some of the stabilization fabrics and stone, washing them downstream. Fabric netting was still present in the river in June 2003. In this section the floodplain is dissected by two, old oxbow cut-offs.

Downstream from the Route 71 bridge, the Green River meanders out of sight, through forest. In Alford, the Green River is joined by three unnamed brooks that flow out of the hills near Green River Road. One of the tributaries includes a large beaver pond and wet meadow, which can be seen from Crooked Hill Road. Because the soils here are limier, this wetland may boast rare plants and animals.

The cold, clear waters of the Green provide habitat not only for native trout, but also for the long-nose sucker, a species of Special Concern in Massachusetts (DEM-Office of Water Resources, 1999). During springtime's higher flows, whitewater canoeists can take advantage of the small rapids and descend the river into Egremont and Great Barrington. This is the only area in town that the state has identified as an area of interest to canoeists.

Alford Brook (sometimes called Seekonk Brook) begins as a series of groundwater fed ponds and tributaries in the neighboring town of West Stockbridge. Within the brook's headwaters are two, fairly large protected parcels: Harvey Mountain (2025 feet high; 192 acres protected), on the state line is owned by the state of New York and includes portions of two of Alford Brook's unnamed tributaries; the Alford Brook Club has protected 140 acres through a conservation restriction. The Club was established in the 19th century and raises trout in its pond. The outflow from the Club is gated to prevent fish from escaping downstream.

Once in Alford, Alford Brook meanders through forestland, passing through the Scribner Brook Farm, a 170-acre APR property. This farm is at the northern end of Alford's agricultural center. The forested brook is joined by Scribner Brook, a high-gradient brook that tumbles down from New York and the Taconics before flattening out through the farm land. At this point, Alford Brook's western boundary is pasture and then it cuts across open fields and is narrowly bordered by trees. In these large pastures, Alford Brook is joined by Tom Ball Brook from the east and an unnamed stream from the west. Both pass through forest until they reach the hayfields. The unnamed stream originates in New York, and passes through the 632-acre property owned by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, with a Conservation Restriction held by the MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. It drops about 550' (180 meters) in less than a mile. As Alford Brook re-enters the forest, its waters are joined by those from Shepard Pond, a private, manmade pond. The brook then flows into a manmade pond, which was built in the 1960's when the brook was dammed. Flowing over the dam, the brook meanders south, crossing another forested parcel (the Gardner property), which is held in a conservation restriction by BNRC. The brook then flows past a hayfield and under East Road. Past the village center, Alford Brook is joined by waters from the small stream that flows behind the town hall and offices and from a second brook, which flows out of the town's largest wetland. In less than a mile, Alford Brook flows out of town and into Great Barrington, where it assumes the name Seekonk Brook. Seekonk is joined by several other tributaries, including water from Great Barrington's water supply reservoir, Long Pond. Seekonk then joins the Green River, which snakes south, ultimately joining the Housatonic River in the southern Great Barrington.

Because the majority of Alford Brook flows through forested areas, its waters remain cooler. Native brook trout reproduce in its waters. The natural vegetation along its bank and the limited number of road crossings help protect the brook's water quality. This is important to Alford residents, but also to residents of Great Barrington. A portion of Great Barrington's water supply comes from a groundwater infiltration gallery downstream from Alford Brook and the Green River. The Green River Infiltration Gallery (Great Barrington's groundwater source) definitely depends on pristine surface water quality as it is 18 feet in depth. The gallery consists of two horizontal-running, perforated pipe (8" & 12" in diameter) in the ground along the riverbank. These collect water in a tank that is pumped to the distribution system. The location and depth of the pipes make them very vulnerable to surface water quality (Rick Larson, DEP, pers. comm.).

Ponds

Nearly all the ponds in town are manmade, occurring either as groundwater fed water bodies or include dams on small streams. The largest pond is located off West Road. Many other smaller ponds are scattered across town, the bulk of them are in the southern half of Alford. These areas serve as habitat for a wide variety of wildlife—from mayflies and midges to blue-gill and bass. They also provide recreational areas for local residents (skating, swimming, fishing). All the ponds in town are privately owned; no public access is provided.

Groundwater Supplies & Recharge Areas

Supplies

Alford has ample groundwater for domestic wells, but lacks the large groundwater supplies that would be needed to support a large population or a water-demanding industry. Most of Alford is covered with till, which has low water yielding capacity. The bedrock below town, however, may have large fractures or fissures where groundwater could collect.

Recharge

The most important source of groundwater recharge is Alford's extensive open land—its forested hillsides and hayfields—and its wetlands and stream bottoms. This helps feed not only the town's brooks and rivers, but also the springs, which many homes depend upon for their drinking water supplies.

Flood Hazard Areas

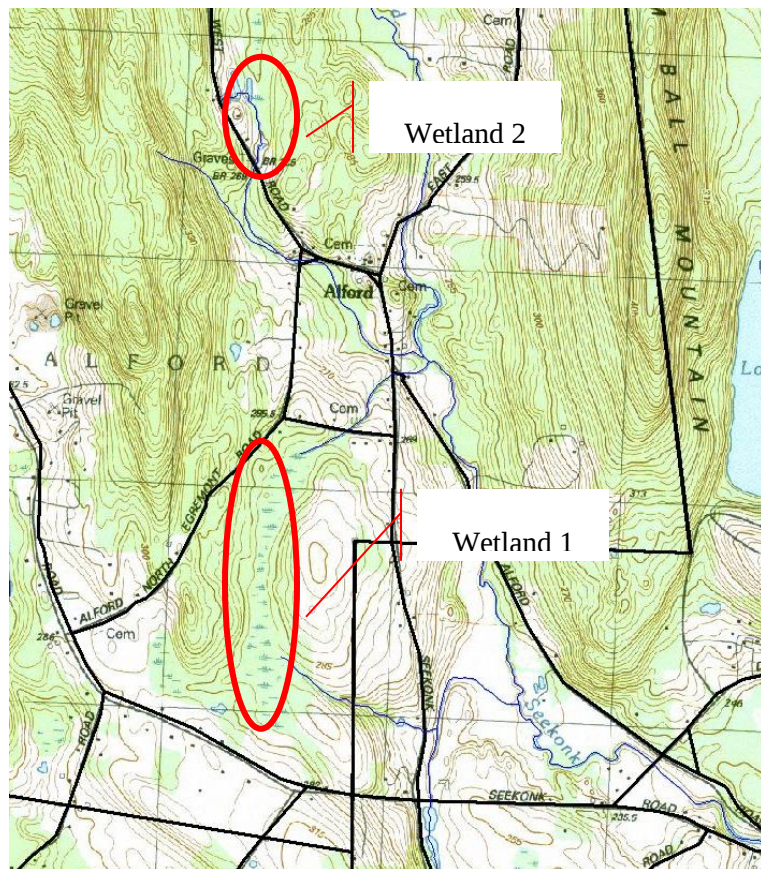
The Federal Emergency Management Agency Maps identifies the Green River throughout Alford and the entire length of Alford Brook and Scribner Brook as prone to flooding (**Map 6: Flood Hazard Areas**). The flooding along Scribner Brook poses no threat to human habitation, and with the exception of one home near the West Stockbridge line, neither does flooding on Alford Brook appear to be a threat to human health and safety. Flooding has been an issue, however, on the Green River. In 2002, Alford Highway Department and the Natural Resources & Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) stabilized an area along the Green River where erosion was threatening the integrity of Route 71.

Wetlands

Wetlands play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of water resources. They help recharge groundwater supplies, provide water for public and private drinking water supplies, temper the

damaging effects of storms, control flooding, prevent pollution by a combination of physical, chemical and biological functions, provide fish habitat, and shelter, breeding areas and food for wildlife. They also provide scenic, recreational, and educational benefits.

Overall, Alford has relatively few wetland areas (**Map 7: Wetlands**). The largest wetland (Wetland 1) is a forested swamp/marsh in the southeastern portion of town. Set back from the road, it is hidden from view and all of it is privately owned. The wetland spans a watershed divide, so some of its water drains north into Alford Brook, while the rest drains south to the Green River. This wetland, due to its size and the region's limy soils, has been designated a priority habitat by MA NHESP and a BioMap Core area. This wetland area warrants further study based on its ecological merits.



Another important wetland complex lies near the town center (Wetland 2). It includes not only the beaver-flooded wetlands immediately behind the town offices, but narrow strand of ponds and marshes set back from West Road. The West Road wetlands form part of the headwaters to the wetland behind town center, and a small portion are protected through a conservation restriction. The wetlands include at least two unusual elements: a floating liverwort known as *Ricciocarpus* and fen ants, which only occur in wetlands that are calcium-rich. These waters join another small stream, and after a mill pond, cascade over a dam into the low-lying area behind the town hall. This central wetland (*photo right*) helps mitigate flooding, improve nutrient and sediment removal from nearby roads and lawns, and



is a rich area for wildlife. In 2003 UMass Extension biologists found an uncommon beetle here. Known as the elderberry borer beetle (*Desmocerus palliatus*), it is going to be de-listed from the Massachusetts list of Rare & Endangered Species; its status will change from Special Concern to Watch List (a category with no regulatory authority). This large insect, with a gaudy orange patch on its blue-black wings, is soon to be dropped from the state's Endangered Species List, but its presence is an indication of the site's value to rare and unusual wildlife. Portions of the wetland were formerly hayed, but as water levels rose due to the beaver activity (and probably also less dredging of the brook's channel because of the passage of the Wetlands Protection Act in 1973), haying became impossible and a dense mix of woody shrubs and herbaceous plants have developed. Great blue herons, red wing blackbirds, common yellowthroats, dragonflies, frogs and a myriad of other wildlife take advantage of this area.

Another beaver pond/marsh occurs near Crooked Hill Road. Its waters flow into the Green River. This area also has limier soils and it may provide habitat for unusual plants and animals. A final wetland area in the southern portion of town is located in a horseshoe-shaped depression and adjacent to a manmade pond.

The remaining wetland areas in town are all small or narrow, the latter associated with the Green River, Tom Ball Brook or Alford Brook.

D. Vegetation

Vegetation patterns in Alford reflect the town's geologic history, hydrology and past and present land use. The presence of marble and limestone-rich till has created soils conditions that are neutral or basic (pH). Neutral soils have higher levels of calcium and magnesium, and due to the soil's chemistry, other essential nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus are more available to plants. The consequence is greater diversity of both plants and animals. In rich woods settings, sugar maple, yellow birch, basswood, striped maple, mountain

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the diversity of life at all levels of organization, from the gene to the landscape and all the interconnections that support life across levels of organization. In its broadest sense, biodiversity is the variety of life forms and environments that support that life.



What are Natural Communities?

Natural communities are natural assemblages of *abiotic* and *biotic* conditions that occur together to form a functionally and structurally distinct portion of the landscape. An example of a natural community type is a northern hardwood forest. Abiotic conditions refer to elements such as the soils, aspect, groundwater features, elevation, slope, and bedrock and surficial geology. Biotic conditions generally refer to vegetation. From an ecological perspective, natural communities represent a way of classifying and mapping the landscape into relatively discrete and recognizable units. They're also an effective way to assess biodiversity because they capture many (though not all) important elements of biodiversity, especially those 'hidden' elements that are often associated with abiotic gradients. Because of this, they can provide a practical way to assess and conserve biodiversity that is simply not possible with a species-based approach.

maple, hobblebush, and yew are common and there is a lush layer of ferns and wildflowers.

Natural Communities: Forests & Wetlands

In 2000 the University of Massachusetts-Amherst began a project to identify all the areas within the Housatonic watershed of Massachusetts that were expected to be most important for biodiversity. UMass researchers began by identifying and mapping the watershed's major natural communities (*see text box right*), consistent with the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) classification (Swain and Kearsley 2000). They accomplished this by using a combination of field survey, remote sensing data (soils, lithology, satellite images) and aerial photo interpretation. In Alford, developed land (roads, residential, dams) currently accounts for 9% of the town, while the remainder is divided into 16 different natural community types (arranged below from most common to least):

- Northern hardwood forest (27%)
- Mixed Transitional forest (20%)
- Temperate conifer forest (16%)
- Agricultural/Managed Open (10%)
- Grassland (9%)
- High-gradient Headwater (3%)
- Deciduous/mixed forested wetland (1%)
- Shrub Swamp (< 1%)
- Coniferous forested wetland (< 1%)
- Pond (< 1%)
- Old Field (< 1%)
- Streams/Rivers (< 1%)
- Rocky Summits (< 1%)
- Cliffs (< 1%)
- Emergent Marsh (< 1%)
- Vernal Pool (< 1%)

Map 8 shows the locations of the different types of natural communities in Alford. Detailed descriptions of each community type are listed in *Appendix 5*.

Agricultural Land

As in most of southern New England, over the last 150 years, many of Alford's small farms have succeeded to forests. Today forests cover 65% of the town and agricultural land makes up 20.5% (roughly 1500 acres, based on 1999 land use data compiled by UMass). Most of the agricultural land occurs along West Road (*see photo above of the Wilcox farm, photo by Michael Wilcox*), but large fields are also present along East Road, Green River Road and on Crooked Hill Road. These farms help to preserve Alford's historic



character and agrarian roots; they also provide serene views, ecological benefits, economic opportunity and food security for the region.

Dunn Farm, Green River Road

John Dunn's grandfather purchased this property in 1896, when the farm was already nearly a hundred years old. Like all farms back then, it was a mixed use farm with a variety of animals and enterprises. For many years the Dunns ran a small dairy operation and sold their milk to an Egremont creamery. They stopped producing milk for sale when raw milk was still being delivered to the creamery in cans and switched to raising heifers. Today, the 180-acre farm consists of pasture, hay fields and woodlands; roughly 162 acres lie in Alford. John Dunn continues to work his fields, and partners with other farmers to grow, harvest and store hay. Although the main house sits on the New York side of the farm, the Dunn family is part of the Alford community.

Shepard Farm, West Road

Just outside Alford's town center is the 170-acre Shepard farm. Gary and Bobbie Shepard have farmed their whole lives, and with their daughter Erin, continue to operate a dairy farm with 80 holsteins and a half-dozen beef cattle. Gary's grandparents established the farm in the early 1900s, and Gary's father, John Shepard, still lives close by. Bobbie handles dairy operations — milking, calving and artificial insemination. Gary handles growing and harvesting the feed crops for their cattle, and keeping their farm machinery in good repair. The Shepards work an additional 200 acres of crop and pastureland in and around Alford. Erin is diversifying their farm operations to include pastured beef, and supports both her parents in managing their workload. Her hope is to take over farm operations when her parents retire. The Shepard Farm includes the most tillable soils in the Alford Valley, which is otherwise stratified by bony ledge and dotted with giant fieldstones.

Wilcox Farm, West Road

The 340-acre Wilcox Farm (*photo right*) was established in 1921 by the parents of "Babe" (Raymond, Sr.) Wilcox, when he was five years old. Today the farm operations are handled by Ray's son, Ray, Jr., also known to longtime residents as "Bucko." The Wilcox family sold their dairy herd in 1997 when the price of milk was low and hiring farmhands so difficult that the family decided to get out of the milk business. Today Ray manages a haying operation and leases his pastures to his neighbors on both sides, the Shepards and Scribner Brook Farm. The future of the Wilcox Farm will play a strategic role in shaping the future of the Alford Valley. The Wilcox property includes scenic wooded uplands on the western slopes of the valley,



enormous tracts of open pasture in the center of the valley, three houses, several farm buildings, and much prime road frontage.

Scribner Brook Farm, West Road

On West Road, Morven Allen operates a grass-based dairy operation at Scribner Brook Farm. In the 1980s', the former owners, Frank and Martha Whisenant, permanently protected 170 acres of the farm from development through the MA Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. Morven Allen manages about 250 dairy cows, mostly Jerseys, and sells milk to regional creameries. The operation is expanding to include farmland outside Alford as the market for locally produced milk products increases. Grass farming is believed by some to be the future of livestock farming in New England. The region's climate and terrain are believed to be more appropriate for grazing, which is a lower-cost, less intensive farming method than grain-feeding. Henry Flint owns Scribner Brook Farm.

Springstube Farm, East Road

The Springstube farm was established in 1897 and lies near the line between Alford and West Stockbridge. Today the Springstube Farm comprises 410 acres at the southern end of West Stockbridge. John, Sr., 87, lives on the farm with his wife Eleanor, and still hays the fields. John Springstube, Jr., his wife Mershell, and their three young daughters are in the process of transitioning their farm operation from traditional dairy to a mixture of pastured animals, poultry and other farm products. The Springstube daughters are active in 4-H and the family keeps a menagerie of pet and farm animals as each girl has her own interest in rearing critters and producing everything from fresh eggs to felted wool hats. The Springstube Farm is a historic agrarian landscape that includes a trail that leads up Tom



Ball Mountain to a breathtaking view of the Berkshires (*photo right*), including Mount Greylock to the north and the Catskills to the west and south.

Farms in the Alford Valley are vulnerable to local (labor costs, property taxes, development, commodities markets) and global market pressures (rising oil prices, multinational agricultural corporations). In return for the benefits that Alford receives from its farms, citizens can take proactive steps to support a healthy local agriculture economy. The community can educate itself about the factors that impact farm viability: access to land and housing, soil quality, water availability, production costs, market access, and market prices paid to farmers for their products. Regionally, a number of farmer advocacy organizations are active: Berkshire Grown, Slow Food-Berkshire Chapter, the Regional Farm & Food Project, the New England Heritage Breeds Conservancy, and farmers' markets in Great Barrington, Sheffield and Lenox. The Alford Land Trust and the Berkshire Natural Resources Council are working to protect

farmlands with agriculture preservation restrictions and to protect wildlands with conservation restrictions. The Community Land Trust of Southern Berkshires has developed a working model for preserving affordable on-farm housing.

The emerging model for agriculture in Massachusetts is called a community-based food system, which means combining the principals of environmental sustainability, economic viability and social justice. Its an initiative that helps forge direct connections between citizens and farmers, ensuring farm viability, environmental stewardship and a healthy local food supply. Alford is prime for such a program.

At present, aside from small vegetable gardens for private homes, none of the farms grow food crops for re-sale. The farm land is currently used as pasture, feed corn or for hayfields, which in addition to producing forage for livestock, provide nesting sites for bobolinks and other grassland birds. Given the relatively large size of some fields along West Road, East Road and Green River Road, suitable nesting areas for grasshopper sparrows may also be present in town.

Rare Plant & Animal Species

During the last 25 years, several rare and uncommon plant and animal species have been observed and documented in Alford (Table 1.)

Table 1: Documented Species Protected by the MA Endangered Species Act in Alford				
Category	Scientific Name	Common Name	Status	Last Observed
Fish	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Longnose Sucker	SC	1970
Turtle	<i>Clemmys insculpta</i>	Wood Turtle	SC	1999
Beetle	<i>Desmocerus palliatus</i>	Elderberry Borer Beetle	WL	2003
Plant	<i>Amelanchier sanguinea</i>	Roundleaf Shadbush	SC	1989
	<i>Arabis laevigata</i>	Smooth Rock-Cress	T	1904
	<i>Aster prenanthoides</i>	Crooked-Stem Aster	SC	1999
	<i>Cyperus houghtonii</i>	Houghton's Flatsedge	E	1989
	<i>Eragrostis frankii</i>	Frank's Lovegrass	SC	1985
	<i>Galium labradoricum</i>	Labrador Bedstraw	SC	1984
	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>	Andrews' Bottle Gentian	E	1904
	<i>Potamogeton hillii</i>	Hill's Pondweed	SC	1976
	<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>	Culver's-Root	SC	1990
	<i>Viburnum rafinesquianum</i>	Downy Arrowwood	T	1983
E = Endangered; T= Threatened; SC= Special Concern; WL= Watch-Listed (no regulatory ranking)				

E. Fisheries & Wildlife

The diversity, size and high quality of natural areas in Alford provide excellent habitat for a range of animal species—from wide-ranging animals that requires larger tracts, such as bear, bobcat, and fishers, to creatures that have very specific habitat needs, such as trout or bobolinks. The fast flowing waters of Alford Brook and its tributaries support native brook trout, wood turtles, and longnose suckers, while warm-water ponds have conditions that meet the habitat needs of species like red-spotted newts, bluegill and large mouth bass.

Bird diversity is also high in Alford. Over the course of a year an avid birdwatcher can see ~ 200 species of birds in town. The larger hayfields serve as nesting areas for bobolinks and performance space for displaying male woodcocks. The forests hold populations of turkeys and grouse, and in recent years, ravens have nested on Tom Ball Mountain. The large blocks of relatively unfragmented forest in Alford are especially important to tropical migrants—wood thrushes, cerulean warblers, red-eyed vireos and scarlet tanagers--, all of which have declined during the last 50 years. These declines have been attributed to habitat losses in the tropics as well as habitat fragmentation on their breeding grounds, which makes their nests more vulnerable to parasitism and predation.

Of special note are the town's 14 *potential* vernal pools that were mapped by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (Burne 2001) (**Map 8: Natural Communities & Potential Vernal Pools**). The potential vernal pools were identified from 1:12,000 scale, color infrared, leaf-off aerial photographs flown between late March and Early May. Statewide coverage included photos taken in 2000 for towns in Berkshire County. Vernal pools are small bodies of water that hold water during the fall, winter and spring but dry out during the summer. Because of this lack of water, fish can't survive and over time, many species of salamanders and frogs have evolved to breed exclusively in these fish-free environments. Many other animals--fairy shrimp, fingernail clams, various beetles and many invertebrate species--also depend on vernal pools, either throughout their life cycle or during the breeding phase. Vernal pools are also used transitionally by many larger animals (wood ducks, raccoons, etc), but they are especially important for many of the state's rarest reptiles and amphibians. Because of their small size, their importance as wildlife habitat has historically been overlooked. Only during the last 20 years have biologists recognized their ecological significance. Aside from biological values, vernal pools help prevent flooding by storing water and play a role in recharging groundwater.

To help safeguard vernal pools, the state's natural heritage and endangered species program has developed a process to certify vernal pools. The pools must meet strict criteria for inclusion and all the documents are available at <http://www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/nhvernal.htm>. Of the 14 *potential* vernal pools, one near Cross Road has been certified. In 2003, UMass Extension biologists observed fish in a pond that had been marked as a potential vernal pool. Because of the presence, this pond, which is located at the intersection of Crooked Hill Road and Green River Road, does not meet the state criteria of a vernal pool.

Finally, although invertebrates are the most abundant and diverse group, few people are experts. UMass Extension biologists found an adult Elderberry Borer Beetle, a type of longhorn beetle

that is currently protected as a Special Concern species under the state's Rare & Endangered Species Act. (It is soon to be downgraded to a Watch-Listed Species, which gives it no regulatory protection). Larval elderberry borers feed on the inner tissues of elderberry. It is likely that future biological inventories of the town's natural areas will yield more rarities within the diverse group of organisms.

F. Biomap, Biodiversity Value, Living Waters & Alford

In 2001 the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program developed a map identifying areas that represent key habitat for the state's rare species. The project, known as *BioMap*, focused on areas where rare plants, animals, and natural communities have been observed during the last 25 years (Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, 2001). By incorporating landscape data (topography, wetland cover), the known habitat requirements for individual rare species and locations of high-quality natural communities, state biologists drew boundaries outlining important habitat, called Core Habitat, across Massachusetts. Supporting Natural Landscape areas were mapped to enhance Core areas. Supporting Natural Landscape is composed of buffers around Core Habitat, large patches of vegetation, and undeveloped and roadless areas around or adjacent to Core areas (**Maps 9 and 10**).

In Alford, BioMap identified the Green River and its tributaries as critically important habitat for rare species, the large wetland circumscribed by North Egremont Road, Green River Road and West Road, the mill pond near the town center, and three discreet areas along the ridgeline on Tom Ball Mountain. Supporting natural landscape coverage includes nearly all of Alford(!), and so it is a less useful tool in terms of prioritizing areas for protection. BioMap, however, is a valuable tool to help refine our town's strategy for prioritizing and protecting areas of ecological significance and identify land for conservation.

A second tool to help prioritize areas for protection of biodiversity is the UMass-Amherst Biodiversity Project's Conservation Assessment and Prioritization System (CAPS). The CAPS approach is a two-step process that begins with a landcover map of developed and undeveloped land. Undeveloped lands are natural communities consistent with the NHESP classification scheme (see Sect D, Vegetation). Produced in the Landscape Ecology Lab at UMass, natural communities were classified and mapped using a combination of techniques including extensive field work, terrain data, remote sensing, and statistical analysis to predict what natural communities are likely to be at each point on the ground. Developed lands were derived from the 1999 Land Use Map produced by the Resource Mapping Lab at UMass. Additional maps were photo-interpreted roads, potential vernal pools, and streams. All of these map layers were aggregated to create one final map of developed lands and undeveloped (natural communities) landcover types for the Housatonic watershed in Massachusetts.

The second step involves running a computer program to calculate the biodiversity value of each 30 meter square of land on the natural communities map. Every location is assigned a biodiversity value between 0 (low) and 1 (high). CAPS uses ecological measures from principles of conservation biology to highlight patches of land with the highest biodiversity value. For example, a large patch of northern hardwoods forest supports more species and intact ecosystems processes (water, nutrient, and energy flow) than a smaller patch of the same type.

Roads fragment habitat and may increase mortality for dispersing species, so a large patch of land with low road density that includes a matrix of forest types also supports more species and better functioning habitats for those species. CAPS uses a suite of 15 different metrics applied to each natural community type. The analysis considers the area of a natural community, its distance from roads, development, and water, edge effects from roads and development, and how connected a natural community type is to a similar type, among other measures. All the metrics are combined to produce a single map of biodiversity value for the entire landscape in question. The final biodiversity value reflects the unique way each community type interacts with the structure of the landscape.

CAPS produces a simplified representation, a model, of the landscape. It is a useful tool for conservation planning at a coarse scale—the town, watershed, or ecoregional level. Although the predictions of biodiversity value it calculates are likely to be true in general, some exceptions are noted. For example large intact blocks of forest may occur where many species have been lost due to past land use practices. We also know that many species are habitat generalists and some rare species thrive in small patches of certain forest types.

In Alford, the areas predicted to have the highest biodiversity include many small patches of specialized habitat as well as a few large blocks. **Map 11** shows the areas predicted through CAPS to have the highest biodiversity; **Map 12** shows the intersection of CAPs and the existing protected open space.

BioMap and CAPS as Complimentary Planning Tools

BioMap and CAPS are complimentary tools for conservation planning. BioMap Core habitat identifies estimated habitat necessary to protect known records of rare species and occurrences of exemplary natural communities: it is an excellent tool for protecting what we already know about the landscape. CAPS is based entirely on modeling of landscape structure and on ecological principles for many species and allows for the assessment of the entire landscape, including areas not yet inventoried: CAPS identifies the ‘hidden biodiversity’ of the landscape. BioMap’s Supporting Natural Landscape is a coarse-filter method generally similar in approach to CAPS, but uses a different set of metrics, is not natural community-based, and does not allow for the prioritization of areas within large blocks. For more information about CAPS visit the UMass website: <http://www.umass.edu/landeco/research/caps/caps.html>

Living Waters

In Fall 2003 the MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species program produced a datalayer identifying the state’s priorities for protecting freshwater biodiversity. Known as *Living Waters*, it highlights critical aquatic habitats for rare species and exemplary aquatic communities. It divides these into *Core Habitats*, which include lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams, and *Critical Supporting Watersheds* (CSWs) which provide important hydrologic contributions to. The boundaries of Core Habitats and CSWs were delineated by NHESP biologists using documented records from the last 25 years, GIS resources and field data.

CSWs represent areas with the highest potential to sustain or degrade Core Habitats. The CSWs were produced at a 30 x 30 m resolution using AQUALAND, a grid-based watershed model that takes into account factors such as impervious surfaces, road density, road crossings, potential point sources, agricultural intensity, dam intensity and public water withdrawals.

In Alford there only Living Waters Core Habitat occurs in a kilometer long stretch of Alford Brook at the southern end of town, but Critical Supporting Watershed includes nearly the entire watershed of Alford Brook. (**Map 13: Living Waters Core Habitats and CSW**). Some of these areas overlap with BioMap and CAPS, indicating that these areas places in town that are more ecologically significant.

By combining BioMap with the UMass Biodiversity Project gives we have the best tools available to prioritize and protect based on their ecological significance. **Map 14** shows the intersection between BioMap, CAPS, Living Waters, Vernal Pools and Protected Open Space.

G. Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

Views

Scenic roads, views and other unusual natural features contribute to Alford's rural charm and identity (**Map 15: Scenic & Recreational Resources, Historic Features & Unique Environments**). In the recent survey, respondents were not specifically asked about views, but 50 out of 155 identified "a particular parcel of land or property (they) would like to see preserved in Alford" for reasons of a scenic vista. And residents aren't the only ones who appreciate our town's scenic views. The scenic values along the Green River Valley, Alford Brook Valley and Tom Ball Mountain were identified in 1981 during MA Department of Environmental Management's Landscape Inventory Project as landscape features of statewide significance. Our views are among Berkshire County's jewels.

Scenic Roads

Scenic roads contribute to our community, not only for their aesthetic value, but also recreationally. Many people use them for walking, biking, horseback riding, skiing and jogging. In general, scenic roads are those that pass through varied landscapes, are bordered by trees and stone walls, have limited development and shifting vantage points. Among the most noteworthy are West Road, East Road, and portions of Green River Road, Rowe Road, and North Egremont Road. At present the town has not yet adopted Scenic Road legislation or a Scenic Road Overlay District. In addition, although previously the position of Tree Warden was an elected post, it is now a permanent position held by the head of the Department of Public Works. Participants at the May 2004 meeting of the Advisory Committee expressed an interest in restoring this position to an elected post.

Geologic Features

Devils Den is a cavern in the northern part of town between East and West Roads. Local lore has it that its mouth is large enough for a "load of hay" to be driven inside, but this is a bit of an exaggeration (Henry Flint, pers. comm.). Historically an altar made of boulders was inside, and the stones were naturally stained such that they looked like they were marked with sacrificial blood. Dripping water from groundwater added to the eerie atmosphere, and the legend was that local Indians had made sacrifices here.

Tom Ball Mountain forms the boundary between West Stockbridge and Alford, and is the most prominent land form in town. Its scenic ridgeline, as seen from the Valley, and the view of the Taconics and Great Barrington from the summit, is one of the region's most spectacular. Its

sheer cliffs are used by ravens and may become a nesting site for peregrine falcons in the future..

Frying Pan Spring near the Alford Marble Works is a place where water falling into the ground makes a peculiar sound of a large frying pan over a hot fire.

Adjacent Conservation Land

The neighboring communities of West Stockbridge, Egremont and Austerlitz, NY all have land in conservation that is abutting or near protected land in Alford. West Stockbridge has two nearby parcels; both are private: the Alford Brook Club (140 acres protected through a conservation restriction) and Samantha Lake's property on Tom Ball Mountain (198 acres protected through a Conservation Restriction). In Egremont, half a dozen owners near Alford's southern boundary have protected their land, either through the APR program or by conservation restriction. In Austerlitz is the 1583-acre Harvey Mountain State Forest. The state forest land follows the state line, beginning at the northwestern tip of Alford and running along the West Stockbridge town line for a few miles. The property was heavily logged in the last five or so years, just prior to its acquisition by the state of New York. This property used to include more than 3000 acres; the southern half of the original property runs along the state line from the northwestern tip of Alford to Scribner Brook, and is now owned by a private partnership. One of the partners also owns 320 abutting acres in Alford near Scribner Brook. The current owners have built a road system running the length of the property with access to Route 22 in New York; this land—including the 320-acre parcel lying in Alford—remains vulnerable to development.

Trails & Wood Roads

A trail extends to the top of Tom Ball Mountain and runs along the ridgeline. It is entirely on private land, although many people visit it. A portion of the historic Knox Trail, which includes driving roads, is also located in Alford. Other trails are known to local people, but occur on private land.

Cultural & Historic Areas

In 1975 eight structures in the town's center were included in the town's Historic District; these include:

- ◆ *Alford Town Hall*, Originally the "Alford Town Hall and Academy", built in 1855.
- ◆ *Alford Union Church*, Originally the "Union Meeting House" built in 1817 (interiors finished in 1825)
- ◆ *Alford Center School* built in 1855 at the same time as Town Hall
- ◆ *Pickett-Milligan House*, just West of Village Center Cemetery, built in 1819-1820. One of its owners, Almira Milligan (nee Husted) died in 1900 at the age of 103 and had outlived both her first husband, Roswell Picket and her second husband, William Milligan. Ergo the hyphenated house name. Almira played an integral role in funding and founding the Town Hall and Town Library.
- ◆ *Rev. J.B. Husted House*, originally built in 1826 (Source= Foundation Stone inscription) as a Parsonage just west of the Picket-Milligan House. BRPC deemed this house the "Highest Style Greek Revival building in the Alford Village". The mantelpiece in the rear of the house, which was added in 1966 came from the Old Gilbert Belcher house (demolished in the early 1960s) in Great Barrington. Belcher was convicted of counterfeiting English coin in 1773.

- ◆ *Ezra C. Ticnor Farm* built in 1790 (Source= gravestones) with its rear portion built in 1930, plus two barns south of the house and the small pond w/a dam. The house faced the Alford Town Common and now faces the beaver wetland at the Northernmost end of North Egremont Rd. Mr. Ticnor served 3 terms in the State Legislature and 40 yrs. as a Justice of the Peace. As a boy, Ezra witnessed the Parade of the Militia under Captain Isaac Tuttle and the drafting of men to march to Boston to defend to Port. The slips of marked and unmarked paper used for the draft were made in the barn of Dr. John Hurlburt and not on the Alford Town common because of a thunderstorm.
- ◆ *Charles G. Staige Federal* home on the west side of West Rd., built in 1810 and altered in 1962.
- ◆ *Hamlin-then-Tuttle Colonial Sandwich* home on the Alford Rd., built in 1845 and altered in 1935.

Other Homes & Sites of Historical Significance in Alford

More than a dozen houses in Alford date from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of them are situated along Alford Road.

- ◆ *George Darby House*, a 1.5 story Salt box/Cape Half House built in 1791. It is located on Route 71, close to the south side of the Rd., just north of the Green River crossing and west of Crooked Hill Rd. Darby served as Selectman from 1791-1810 (the year he died) and town Treasurer between 1799-1809. Commodore Oliver Perry (1785-1819) and a portion of his men stayed at the Darby house in 1813 on while on their way to Sacketts Harbor on Lake Erie. After the victory of the British at the battle of Pot-in-Bay on Sept. 10th, 1813, Commodore Perry wrote his now-famous phrase, "we have met the enemy and they are ours".
- ◆ *Williams Farm* (+barns) Gambrel roof house w/dormers added, addition to rear portion of home. The central chimney was also altered. Originally owned by Cornelius Williams and built in 1784.
- ◆ *Barrett-Millard Farm* a 1.5 story Cape w/Greek Revival Trim on the North side of Green River Rd. opposite the Boice Rd. intersection, originally owned by Eleazer Barrett and built in 1761 (Sign over door).
- ◆ *Fitch-Osborne House* a 2.5 story Federal located on the West side of No. Egremont Rd., just North of the Osborne cemetery, originally owned by Rubin Fitch and built in 1810. Victorian twin bay windows and front porch, 1.5 story north portion of the building, are among many additions. Recent renovations were also made.
- ◆ *Rev. Aaron Kinne House*, a 1.5 story Federal w/1.5 story rear of home, 5 bay front, dormers, on west side of North Egremont Rd. Originally owned by Rev. Aaron Kinne and built in 1810.
- ◆ *Hurlburt-Barnum House*, a 2.5 story, 7 window front, narrow gabled Federal style house, w/twin chimneys and a 1.5 story shed attached to the NW side of the house. House is set against a bank on the East side of West Rd. just north of the Center of town. It appears to be the oldest house on the West side of Alford Village, and the least altered. It is the only one of this narrow gable Federal style in the Village as well. Originally owned by Dr. John Hurlburt and built 1765-1773 (Source: "History of Berkshire County"). Dr. Hurlburt served on the Committee to procure men for the Continental Army and served as the Alford Town Clerk through the Revolution.
- ◆ *D. Barrett, Chair Manufacturing Factory*, a three story mill circa 1802 (Source=Maps) and rebuilt in 1882 when a turbine and drive installed. The building also contained a cider and grain mill. On Alford Rd. set on Seekonk Brook at West side of near residence, drylaid stone dam and spill way across brook (as of 1980 was concrete capped). Original owner was Asabel Gilbert , who rebuilt a circa 1764 mill that had burned and then conveyed the new mill in 1802 to Jabez Hamlin, who spent \$500 to rebuild the dam w/stone. From 1830-1856 the chair factory was owned by Capt. Daniel Barrett, who was appointed Alford's first Postmaster in 1829. Barrett also served as a representative to the General Court 1827-1828 and as captain of the Militia Company 1820-1825.
- ◆ *Stephen Kelsey House*, originally a 2.5 story Federal style Farm and Tavern circa 1751-1760

(Source=Beers History) on the East side of West Rd. just north of the Village Ctr. Original owner was Stephen Kelsey, who was the town constable at the first Alford town meeting and is buried in the Osborne Cemetery.

- ◆ *Elihu Church House*, a 2.5 story Greek Revival Farm house and barn, sheds, built in 1842-1843 (Source=Alford Vital Records, C1850) and originally owned by J.C. Merchant. Situated on the West side of West Rd. opposite Scribner Brook Farm.
- ◆ *Abner Kellogg House*, 2.5 story Federal residence, and barns to north of residence. Originally a Farm and Residence built in 1780 (Source=Child's Gazette) and owned by Abner Kellogg, currently owned by the Ranzoni family. Alterations: New (in 1980) foundation. One of two half houses in Alford. Not typical Berkshires architecture.
- ◆ *Martin L. Gleason House*, a 1.5 story Greek Revival Cape style residence and farm, built in 1848-1850 (Source=Registry of Deeds) by Chester Tobey for Martin L. Gleason. The house is on the east side of West Rd. on the Flint property. Alterations include: 1920's shutters, chimney on south side. Built on land conveyed from the Abithan ("Abithy") Fowler estate (Registry of Deeds, books 95-97).
- ◆ *Abithy Fowler House*, 2.5 story Federal, w/twin end chimneys, marble foundation and added porch. Originally part of a Farm owned by Abithy Fowler, and built in 1765 (Source=Childs Gazetteer). House is situated uphill on the East side of West Rd. just north of Flint. The oldest house in Alford, it was originally said to be situation "on the old road to the Gore between Alford and West Stockbridge". An old account of the house describes the sheathing as being vertical boards 30" or more wide. Current sheathing is clapboard.
- ◆ *Lester-Church House*, a twin end chimneyed Federal Cape w/elaborately carved festoon on a wide frieze below the cornice. Residence and farm built in 1801 (Source=Registry of Deeds) for original owner Elihu Lester located on the SW corner of the Old Barrington (Seekonk) Rd. at Cross Rd.
- ◆ *Baldwin-Ticknor House*, a 2.5 story Federal w/Greek Revival elements (trim and entry) residence and barn originally owned by Stephen M. Church "prior to 1842, Circa 1835" (Source=Registry of Deeds). House was built by Stephen M Church as a second house on the Farm he purchased from Elihu Lester and others circa 1827 and is located on the West side of the Old Barrington (Seekonk) Rd. just North of Great Barrington line.
- ◆ *Husted-Wilcox House*, a farm w/a Symmetrical 5 window Federal end-gable residence, shed and garage built by original owner, Nathaniel Husted in 1825 (Source="A Short History of Alford, Mass.") House is located on the West side of East Rd., just northeast of the Church, overlooking the Seekonk Brook. Built by Husted after he sold his former house to (the next property north on East Rd.) Norman Smith in 1824. This is the only Federal house in Alford w/a large federal fan light.
- ◆ *Norman Smith House*, originally a 2.5 story Federal residence, farm and tannery, built in 1797 as a 1.5 story structure by Nathaniel Husted and rebuilt to incorporate older structure in 1824 by original structure owner Husted and newer home's "original" owner, Norman Smith (Source: 1980 Owner, Historian Susan Anderson). Alterations include: A Shed ell connected to Rear Hall and added on to in 1850.
- ◆ *Aaron Johns House*, a five bay front, 1.5 story Federal Cape originally part of a Farm, Quarry and residence property owned by Aaron Johns and built in 1797-1800 (Source=Vital Records). On the East side of East Rd. on a knoll, with stone wall in front. Original barns to the South of the home are gone. House was built w/a central chimney. Alterations include: Cornerboards added another chimney, 1920's dormer added to front roof line, and square attic vent windows. Aaron's son William owned and operated a small quarry South of the Fitch's Works on East Rd. and a Lime Kiln near his house in 1820. William also rebuilt a Marble Sawing Mill in 1837 that was purchased by his father Aaron in 1798. This site is still called the Marble Mill and is located SW of the house on Alford Brook.

- ◆ *Frederick Fitch House*, a twin end chimney, Federal and Greek revival trimmed residence and farm, inc. 2 barns, originally owned and built by Frederick Fitch in 1840 (Source="History of Alford") located on the West side of East Rd. with a full West view of the West Rd. Farms. Alterations include: Ell on North side. Interesting Architectural note: Gingerbread porch is typical of one local builder who worked in Alford and W. Stockbridge in the 2nd quarter of the 19th century. Work is similar to the trim on the H.S. Fitch house, and McDonald Farm home on W. Center Rd. in W. Stockbridge. Frederick Fitch was a son of Sanford Fitch who settled in Alford in 1796. Frederick's daughter, Nancy (1836-1899) married John L. Milligan, and they lived across the East Rd. In 1904 W. F. Milligan owned the Frederick Fitch House.
- ◆ *Sanford Fitch House*, plus barn and forge shed, was the first of the Fitch houses to be built in Alford. The home was built in 1799 (Source=Beers Atlas and "Shirt History of Alford") by original owner Sanford Fitch. The 1.5 story Federal Cape w/a marble slab foundation w/similar slabs set on end in the ground that flank marble steps to the front door. Home was part of a Farm, residence and quarry property. It is located on the east side of East Rd. across from the Frederick Fitch House and backs onto the slope of Tom Ball Mt. Upon settling in Alford in 1799, Sanford Fitch opened a Marble Quarry on the western slope of Tom Ball Mountain. Fitch's marble works produced high quality building stone throughout the 19th century. Alford marble has been described as "Silver, Blue, Rich white, delicately clouded with light Blue and universally admired". Alford marble was used in the construction of many prominent, public buildings including the old New York City Hall.
- ◆ *H.S. Fitch House*, plus barn/garage, was a property that included a 1.5 story Greek Revival Cape residence w/marble steps and marble quarry originally owned by Horace Fitch and built in 1840 (Source="History of Alford"). Alterations include: Porch enclosed w/panels. The home is located on the East side of East Rd., on the Northwest slope of Tom Ball Mountain. In 1846, Horace reopened an abandoned (1812) marble quarry and another quarry on the property was worked by Aaron Arnold and by Sanford and Frederick Fitch from 1827-1841. In 1980 the home was owned by George Sexton.
- ◆ *Gilbert Milligan House*, a 1.5 story Federal Cape residence, plus a 1.5 story wood shed and carriage barn to the North were part of a farm and residence property originally owned and built in 1820 by Gilbert Milligan (Source="History of Alford"). Alterations include: South façade with recessed porch. Home is located on the East side of East Rd. just north of the H.S. Fitch House and south of the W. Stockbridge line. There is a marble lined spring in the front yard.
- ◆ *Alford Bridge* (historically known as "Smith Bridge" and the "Village Bridge") a steel stringer, flood bridge constructed in 1939 to replace an older bridge on the same site on East Rd. over the Alford Brook. As recently as 12/31/99 a "Bridge National Register Eligibility Opinion" was filed/ The bridge is also notable a scenic feature.
- ◆ *Alford Burial Grounds*:
 1. *East Road Cemetery*: 38 gravestones as of 1980, earliest recorded death = 1782, latest recorded death (as of 1980) = 1978. Located behind fence on East side of East Rd., just South of the W. Stockbridge line. Miner and Sperry family gravestones were cited as Architectural or Sculptural Monuments of interest.
 2. *Alford Center Cemetery* (Village Ctr.): 200 gravestones as of 1980, earliest recorded death = was that of Jane Hopkins in 1825, older stones and burials (i.e. Sophia Wilcox, dating fm. 1804) were moved to this site fm. another burial ground located northeast of the Village, latest recorded death (as of 1980) = 1979. In 1848, the cemetery was acquired by the town. It was enlarged in 1883 by 3/4 of an acre on the East. Milligan, Fenn, Tuttle, Fitch, Parrish, Lucas and Picket family grave markers/marble columns are noted as monuments of Architectural or Sculptural interest.
 3. *Osborne Cemetery*: 80 gravestones as of 1980, with earliest recorded death in 1766 and latest (as of 1980) in 1980. Cemetery is located on the West side of No. Egremont Rd.,

just north of the junction w/Green River Rd. Interesting gravestone of Elisha Tobey has an old "Sons of the American Revolution Bronze" marker, noting his rank, Capt. 2nd. Co. 14th Conn. Militia. The bas relief on the gravestone marker of the 3 Hulbert sisters and on gravestone of A. Hollenbeck. The Cemetery is enclosed by a white board fence that in 1980 retained its original hand forged hinges and hardware.

4. *Jaquins-Baker-Rue-Coliver Burial Ground*: 15-20 gravestones as of 1992 in, per filing "Overgrown field at the edge of an old field line. Several stones are down and improperly placed. In need of cleanup and uprighting of stones. Inscriptions (are) good". Site is 500' off the West side of West Rd. just north of the Scribner Brook, at about 1000' elevation. There is "cellar hole" and a "barn foundation" in the field below the cemetery. In 1938 this was on land owned by Roy Holmes. In 1992, the land was owned by Jeanette Praver. The earliest record death was that of John Jaquins in 1768. (per "History of Berkshire County, Mass." by Beers, in 1886)--but MHC surveyor's filing says year of John Jaquins death recorded on a gravestone was in the year 1760.

- ◆ *Alford Marble Quarries*. The two largest quarries were on the western base of Tom Ball Mountain and smaller ones followed a vein extending southward below the Tom Ball ridgeline.
- ◆ Charcoal mounds, the remnants of the region's once profitable charcoal industry, are scattered throughout the town's forests as are old cellar holes.

In addition, a recent windshield survey of historic structures revealed that approximately 35 additional structures on the East and West Roads and Green Rover Road to Route 71 could be added to the inventory; these include: the William C. Scott House; the Henry V. Smith House; the Charles Elliot House; the A.R. Botham House; the Ralph Giroux House; the Bradford Peck House; the Frederick Biderman House; the Samuel Merritt House; the Robert Donelan House; the Charles Staiger House; the Alfred Van Deusen house; the Firmage House; the Oldendorff House; the Ward Schoonmaker House; the Old North School; the William Milligan House; and the Tuller House. There are three cemeteries (village center, East Road, North Egremont Road), as well as several family plots. Early records indicate one Indian burial ground later incorporated into a family burial ground. The only standing mill is Case's Mill near the village, but the Marble Saw Mill site and quarry and forge site could be added as well.

For yet more details on homes and other historic features, please refer to Bud Bresciani's history of the Town of Alford; this document was printed in 2000, on occasion of the town's 250th Anniversary.

H. Environmental Challenges

At present, Alford fortunately does not have any known hazardous waste or brownfield sites, and there are no significant erosion or sedimentation problems in town. Flooding is a potential issue along Alford Brook, and in 2002 a section of bank on the Green River was stabilized due to the threat of erosion from the River.

The big challenges we face are the loss of farms and development pressure. The economic future of our local farms is uncertain, especially as land values rise. Out-of-scale homes or homes constructed in scenic viewsheds are also issues. Since 1997, more than X new homes have been built. In order to preserve the important open spaces that define our community, help retain our

town's agricultural heritage, safeguard water quality and conserve ecologically significant areas, we must make tough decisions including:

- Protecting the town's rural character by precluding changes that would damage scenic roads, views, sensitive resource areas (cultural, natural, agricultural or recreational), and water quality by implementing creative zoning techniques and conserving land;
- Protecting water quality by addressing septic system failures and educating land owners about aquifers, vegetative buffers, lawn chemicals and road runoff;
- Managing invasive species that can impair natural systems;
- Improving recreational resources by creating new trails and upgrading areas to improve bicycle safety;
- Creating incentives for agriculture; and
- Identifying, protecting and maintaining cultural/historical resources.

Section 5. INVENTORY OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION LANDS

At present roughly 13% of Alford is permanently protected (**Map 16: Existing Protected Open Space in Alford & Surrounding Communities**). This includes land that is owned by the town, conservation organizations, and privately-held properties. For instance, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council has interests in two parcels totaling more than 700 acres. Another 240 acres is protected through the state's APR program. In addition, 2424 acres are currently enrolled in the state's Chapter 61 program. Chapter 61, 61A and 61B are tax programs designed for landowners who own more than 10 acres of land that is maintained in forestry, agriculture or simply as open land. By reducing the tax rate, Chapter 61 gives larger landowners an incentive to hold on to their land and not sell it for development. However, when the property is withdrawn from the program, the owner must pay a percentage of the back taxes and give the town the right-of-first refusal. The town may transfer its right-of-refusal to a non-profit conservation organization or a state environmental agency, which will maintain the land in its natural state.

At present, Alford has no funding program or plan for acquiring new parcels. It also does not have a plan or fund for enhancing its protected holdings.

A. Private Parcels

As of March 2004, 50 parcels in Alford were enrolled in the Chapter 61 property. 12 parcels were registered in Chapter 61-Forest (total acreage: 856); 32 were enrolled in 61A-Agriculture (total acreage: 1452) and 6 parcels were enrolled in Chapter 61B-Recreation (total acreage: 116). In addition, Scribner Brook Farm (170 acres) and Round Hill Farm (Wolfe Realty Trust) (19 acres of which are in Alford) are protected through agricultural preservation restrictions. The Wolfe parcel abuts with more than 200 acres of protected land in neighboring Egremont. The 26-acre Berle property has been placed under a conservation restriction; this wooded parcel lies in

the southwestern portion of town. Not far away is the Alford Wildlife Sanctuary (acreage approximately 4.5), located on the Green River.

B. Public & Non-Profit Lands

Town of Alford owns no recreational parcels. The town does own its town offices/library, 6 cemeteries, and the old school house.

Berkshire Natural Resources Council has interests in two parcels, which together total just over 700-acres. The MA Division of Fish & Game holds the conservation restriction on an 632-acre forested parcel that abuts New York. This site has been extensively logged, and ATV use is an on-going issue on the old wood roads. BNRC also holds a conservation restriction on the 90-acre Gardner property, which includes forest, fields and a portion of Alford Brook.

Section 6: COMMUNITY VISION

Description of Process & Statement of Open Space & Recreation Goals

A questionnaire was sent to each residence in May/June 2003 by the Community Development Plan Advisory Committee to ask for input on a range of topics--from affordable housing and transportation to open space and recreation. For the roughly 39% who responded, the preservation of open space and the town's rural character were priorities. A series of public meetings was held and a poster soliciting input in the Open Space & Recreation planning process was posted at town hall. Meetings about a range of topics, including the OSP, zoning by-laws, agriculture, housing and transportation were held March, July, December 2003, and January, February, March, April and May, 2004. Attendance varied from 11-23 people at each meeting. During the December 2003 and March 2004 meetings participants discussed and modified the OSRP's goals and objectives and helped define the action items for the next five years.

The community feels strongly about preserving the town's agricultural economy and exploring new ways to ensure the viability of local farms. Responding to the questionnaire, 140 out of 155 felt "strongly that Alford should preserve its working farms and rural heritage" Establishing a new interpretive trail/viewing blind for the wetland behind the town offices is also an idea under discussion. Protecting the town's historic resources was also a priority, as was the protection of water quality and ecologically-significant landscapes. To help cover the costs of open space protection, participants at Open Space meetings felt that there would be important benefits to linking with partners (e.g. Berkshire Natural Resources Council, MA Department of Conservation & Recreation, MA Division of Fish & Game). This approach makes even more sense when one considers the amount of protected open space lying near Alford's borders but located in surrounding towns. There are several opportunities for linkages and collaborations, including on Tom Ball Mountain, which is a priority area for the town, the state and BNRC.

Section 7: ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

A. Community and Resource Protection Needs

The 2001 build-out analysis (**Map 17: Build-Out Analysis**) completed by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission demonstrated that, given current zoning and various physical constraints, nearly 1/2 of the town remains available for development. If developed, the character of Alford would change drastically. Although areas of historical significance may not be impacted, the town's water quality, recreational opportunities, aesthetic resources (vistas/scenic roads) and ecologically significant lands would be greatly altered. In particular, areas predicted by CAPS to have high biodiversity values would be affected.

Residents who responded to the recent survey the majority supported preserving open space and maintaining farmland (140/155 respondents). For areas outside of agriculture, the combined analysis of BioMap and CAPS gives Alford the best-to-date available tool for quantitatively evaluating land based on its ecological merits. This analysis can also be taken one step further. Each type of natural community can be evaluated with respect to how much is protected versus how abundant it is in town (**Table 2**). There are 969 acres of protected land in Alford, or 13% of

Table 2: Natural Communities	% in Town (x/7374 acres)	% in POS/ # Acres of Natural Community Type in Alford
Northern Hardwood forest (2042 acres)	27.7	16.0
Mixed Transitional forest (1477)	20.0	19.2
Temperate conifer forest (1203)	16.3	11.9
Agricultural Land (pasture/crop) (771)	10.5	11.8
Grassland (650)	8.8	7.2
High-gradient Headwater (250)	3.4	9.2
Deciduous/mixed forested wetland (87)	1.5	5.9
Shrub Swamp (43)	1.2	9.1
Coniferous Forested Wetland (30)	< 1	4.8
Pond (26)	< 1	3.3
Old Field (25)	< 1	29
Streams/Rivers (15)	< 1	15
Rocky Summits (13)	< 1	83
Cliffs (7)	< 1	0
Emergent Marsh (3)	< 1	63
Vernal Pool (.5)	< 1	0
<i>* Highlighted rows represent communities with less than 10% in protection</i>		

town. Of this, the majority is northern hardwoods (327 acres in protection/969 acres of northern

hardwood, or 33%). Mixed transitional forest and temperate coniferous forest are also abundant and well-protected. Table 2 suggests that the amount of protected open space for each natural community type is, overall, well-balanced, i.e. most are as well-represented in protected land as they are in town. Seven categories (grassland, high-gradient headwater, deciduous/mixed

forested wetland, shrub swamp, coniferous forested wetland) are underrepresented. Future protection efforts may want to focus on these under-represented/ rarer community types. **Map 18** shows the Action Map, which identifies areas of ecological, cultural, recreational and scenic interest. The action map was developed by layering the following datalayers: protected open space, living waters core, BioMap, CAPS Biodiversity top 30%, historic features, agricultural lands, scenic views, and potential and certified vernal pools (*Appendix 6*). Using these datalayers, large and important areas connecting existing protected open space, ecologically significant areas and lands of agricultural importance were identified.

B. Management Needs

Like all towns, Alford's management needs are multiple and varied.

Recreation:

- Maintain ballfield
- Enhance recreational opportunities for residents through the creation of new trails (pedestrian and bicycling) and playing fields.
- Create a wildlife trail/viewing blind near the wetland behind town hall.

Historic

- Maintain town-owned historic resources (cemeteries, church, bridge, buildings).
- Ensure un-protected historic features are not inadvertently destroyed.
- Inventory historic resources in town.

Water Quality

- Educate landowners about non-point source pollution (fertilizers, maintaining vegetative buffers, etc).

Agricultural

- Provide incentives for farmers to remain in farming and keep farm fields open. At the town level, we can do this through education and where possible, local tax incentives.

Ecological

- Maintain the integrity of natural areas by controlling the spread of invasive non-native species.
- Conduct biological investigations by qualified biologists to help further refine our town's conservation priorities. Certify vernal pools.

Section 8: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: To preserve and protect the natural resources, biodiversity, rural character, farms and historic assets of our community.	Objectives: 1) Preserve a variety of open space in town including open fields, agricultural lands, wetlands and wooded areas, held both publicly and privately. 2) Protect all water resources: ponds, streams, and wetlands from degradation and pollution. 3) Preserve familiar vistas, roadsides, dirt roads, gateway areas and historic sites. 4) Encourage agricultural enterprises and preserve agricultural land. 5) Develop and maintain opportunities for active and passive recreation and appreciation of nature and the environment.
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5-Year Alford Open Space Action Plan

Objective	Implementation:	Boards/Agencies Involved	Year
1. Establish Open Space Committee	a) Oversee & monitor implementation of the Open Space Plan	Select Board Conservation Commission Alford Land Trust	2004
2. Protect all water resources: ponds, streams, wetlands and sub-surface storage areas from degradation and pollution.	a) Meet with Great Barrington officials to discuss actions to safeguard the water quality and quantity of streams in Alford that are significant to public drinking water supplies	Open Space Committee Conservation Commission Board of Health	2004
	b) Work with Highway Dept for use of Best Management Practices to reduce NPS pollution by sand, salt and gravel, mitigate existing problems, and minimize salt use.	Open Space Committee Conservation Commission Select Board	2004
	c) Research changes to standards for perc tests in Title 5 (1" in 30 minutes to 1" in 60 minutes)	Open Space Committee Board of Health Conservation Commission Select Board Planning Board	2004
3. Preserve significant open space in Town including open fields and wooded areas, held both publicly and privately.	a) Evaluate and prioritize areas for action, and acquire/conservate key parcels to safeguard wildlife corridors, fields and meadows; prevent forest fragmentation and protect lands of significance within Alford and along its borders	Open Space Committee Planning Board Conservation Commission Alford Land Trust DCR (formerly DEM) Neighboring towns, local conservation organizations	2004
	b) Identify high value areas using Biomap and biodiversity models, historic, agriculture and recreation features and levels of development risk using assessor's maps and protected land data	Open Space Committee Planning Board Conservation Commission Alford Land Trust	2005
	c) Designate stumpage fees from Chapter 61B properties for maintenance of town-owned open space	Select Board Conservation Commission Open Space Committee	2005
	d) Consider strategies to protect biodiversity values (cluster housing) and property tax implications	Planning Board Select Board Open Space Committee	2005
	e) Amend subdivision control law to require the setting aside of open space as a condition of approval	Planning Board Select Board Open Space Committee	2005

	f) Convene a committee to research the Community Preservation Act	Select Board Conservation Commission Alford Land Trust	2007
	g) Survey and certify vernal pools	Conservation Commission Residents BCC & Simon's Rock students	Annual
	h) Educate landowners about conservation options and inform all stakeholders to guide impact of build-out. Host workshops with BNRC for landowners. Distribute summary sheet of conservation issues pertinent to Alford landowners, real estate agents, etc.	Open Space Committee Conservation Commission Select Board Alford Land Trust	Annual
	f) Identify, map and control invasive plant species that may threaten the integrity of sensitive natural areas	Open Space Committee Conservation Commission Alford Land Trust local conservation orgs, Project Native	Annual
	i) Get GIS/map updates from UMass Extension, BNRC and BRPC on biodiversity values, protected open space, vernal pools, etc	Open Space Committee	Annual
4. Preserve familiar vistas, roads, gateway areas and historic sites.	a) Have highway department apply Best Management Practices and identify important trees; consider Heritage Planting program	Highway Department Select Board	2004
	b) Work with the Town Tree Warden to implement timely tree cutting and trimming. Consider re-establishing the position of Tree Warden as an elected post.	Tree Warden Highway Department	2004
	c) Convene a committee to study the implementation of a scenic road overlay & investigate the Scenic By-Way program to access federal and state grants to acquire scenic easements and limit incompatible development activities	Planning Board Select Board Open Space Committee	2004
	d) Consider creating an Alford Historic Commission	Historical Commission	2005
	e) Inventory historical assets (e.g. Alford Marble Works) and develop programs that encourage appreciation/preservation of Alford history	Historical Commission	2005

5. Encourage agricultural enterprises/landscapes.	a) Allow worker housing on working farms	Planning Board Select Board	2005
	b) Publicize the farm viability program	Planning Board Select Board	2004
	c) Promote agricultural careers and apprenticeship opportunities through regional schools and town events		2005
	d) Eliminate the tax assessment on grazing animals	Tax Collector Select Board	2005
	e) Promote agricultural enterprises in town	Select Board	Annual
	f) Preserve agricultural land	Select Board Conservation Commission, Alford Land Trust APR program, other partners	Annual
6. Develop and maintain opportunities for active and passive recreation and appreciation of nature and the environment.	a) Consider development of new playing fields	Selectboard	2004
	b) Develop a wildlife management plan for the wetlands in the center of town	Alford Land Trust Conservation Commission Select Board	2005
	c) Plan a biking route in town	Select Board	2006
	d) Identify trail locations and try to secure public access	Conservation, Alford Land Trust	2005-7

Section 10: PUBLIC COMMENTS

See Appendix 7 and letters from Selectboard, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Section 11: REFERENCES

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire Results

ALFORD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN TOWN SURVEY RESULTS

May – July 2003

Total surveys mailed: approximately 400

Total responses: 155 or 39%

1. Which statement best describes your feelings about Alford?
 (1A) **50** I oppose any new development.
 (1B) **98** I like things the way they are now but I would not oppose some development.
 (1C) **1** I would like to see more housing developments.
 (1D) **2** I would like to see new commercial development, as well as more housing developments.

2. What are your concerns about Alford's future?

(2A) 92 Traffic	(2G) 130 Inappropriate development
(2B) 35 Economic development	(2H) 106 Loss of wildlife habitat
(2C) 79 Noise pollution	(2I) 60 Light pollution
(2D) 78 Water quality	(2J) 117 Loss of farmland
(2E) 35 Affordable housing	(2K) 102 Lack of planning
(2F) ☐ 9 Other	

3. Do you feel it is important for Alford to have a historic town center located where it is today, with buildings for town administration and space for community gatherings?
 (3A) **142** Yes (3B) **5** No (3C) **5** Not sure

4. Would you like to see Alford invest in developing affordable housing?
 (4A) **23** Yes (4B) **94** No (4C) **35** Not sure ☐

5. Are you a registered voter in Alford? (5A) **133** Yes (5B) **19** No

6. Which of these recreational activities do you favor/oppose in Alford?

Off-road vehicles	(6AF) 16	Favor	(6AO) 131	Oppose
Horseback riding	(6BF) 141	Favor	(6BO) 7	Oppose ☐
Cross-country skiing	(6CF) 143	Favor	(6CO) 6	Oppose
Hiking, walking, jogging	(6DF) 150	Favor	(6DO) 0	Oppose
Bicycling	(6EF) 138	Favor	(6EO) 10	Oppose
Bird watching	(6FF) 146	Favor	(6FO) 1	Oppose
Snowmobiling	(6GF) 27	Favor	(6GO) 118	Oppose
Snowshoeing	(6HF) 141	Favor	(6HO) 5	Oppose
Fishing	(6IF) 139	Favor	(6IO) 8	Oppose
Hunting	(6JF) 86	Favor	(6JO) 59	Oppose

7. Do you feel strongly that Alford should preserve its working farms and rural heritage?
 (7A) **140** Yes (7B) **6** No (7C) **4** Not sure

8. Is there a particular parcel of land or property you would like to see preserved in Alford?

(8A) 71	Farms	Name of place	40 named Wilcox, Shepard and/or Dunn farms
(8B) 52	Woodlands	Name of place	6 named Tom Ball Mt
(8C) 39	Wetlands	Name of place	3 named town center wetlands
(8D) 50	Scenic vista	Name of place	15 named the valley and/or West and East Roads

- (8E) **40** Buildings Name of place **33 named town center buildings**
 (8F) **13** Other
9. Would you be willing to help fund the preservation initiative you named in Question 8 with a direct contribution, or a donation to a non-profit land trust (for example, the Alford Land Trust)?
 (9A) **67** Yes (9B) **15** No (9C) **41** Not sure
10. Would you be willing to raise Alford property taxes to accomplish a preservation initiative that you fully supported?
 (10A) **56** Yes (10B) **35** No (10C) **59** Maybe
11. How familiar are you with the array of voluntary methods of land preservation available to you, such as forestry stewardship programs, conservation restrictions, agricultural preservation restrictions, gifts of fee, etc.?
 (11A) **16** Very familiar (11B) **77** Somewhat familiar (11C) **56** Not familiar
12. Would you consider permanently restricting development of any of your own land through a conservation restriction or agricultural preservation restriction?
 (12A) **44** Yes (12B) **35** Not sure (12C) **13** Never (12D) **55** Not applicable
13. Is there a particular parcel of land or property you would like to see developed in Alford?
Those who answered this question said NO.
14. Would you consider subdividing and developing your own land?
 (14A) **8** Yes (14B) **84** No (14C) **17** Not sure ☐ (14D) **43** Not applicable
15. Are you a fulltime or part-time resident of Alford?
 (15A) **128** Fulltime
 How long have you been a fulltime resident?
 (15FTA) **1** Less than 1 year (15FTB) **34** 1-5 Years
 (15FTC) **21** 6-10 Years (15FTD) **36** 11-25 Years
 (15FTE) **34** 26+ Years
- (15B) **23** Part-time (**note many part-timers have become fulltime residents over the years**)
 (15PTA) Number of weekends per year **26-50** or (15PTB) number of months per year **6-8**
 How long have you been a part-time resident?
 (15PTC) **2** Less than 1 year (15PTD) **4** 1-5 Years (15PTE) **4**
 6-10 Years (15PTF) **2** 11-25 Years (15PTG) **6** 26+ Years
16. How much land do you own?
 (16A) **37** Less than 3 acres (16B) **56** 3-10 Acres (16C) **24** 11-20 Acres
 (16D) **13** 21-35 Acres (16E) **7** More than 35 acres (16F) **7** More than 100 acres ☐
 (16G) **0** Not sure ☐ (16H) **6** Not applicable
17. Would you favor/oppose the development of new Alford zoning by-laws to:
 Preserve scenic roadways (17AF) **136** Favor (17AO) **7** Oppose
 Preserve historic character (17BF) **141** Favor (17BO) **5** Oppose
 Preserve open space (17CF) **141** Favor (17CO) **4** Oppose
 Encourage cluster housing* (17DF) **49** Favor (17DO) **85** Oppose
 Encourage farming (17EF) **133** Favor (17EO) **10** Oppose
 Protect water quality (17FF) **139** Favor (17FO) **6** Oppose

**Cluster housing defined as a development grouping new homes closer together within an envelope of conserved open space to minimize landscape fragmentation and driveway cuts, and maximize contiguous natural habitat.*

18. Do you have a suggestion for a parcel of land that would be appropriate for a new town cemetery?
(Favorable terms/tax incentives may apply. Call Joan Polesak at 528-9538)
(18A) **9** Yes Name of place **to be announced** (18B) **89** No
19. Do you use email at your home in Alford? (19A) **106** Yes (19B) **38** No
If yes, who is your Internet service provider: **Results to be announced.**
Do you have difficulty accessing the Internet from your telephone lines in Alford?
(19C) **45** Yes (19D) **57** No (19E) **5** Not sure ☐ (19F) **6** Use a satellite
connection ☐ (19G) **6** Not applicable
20. Is there any other issue you believe should be addressed by the town? Please explain.
There were many responses. Look for them in the next few weeks on the town website at townofalford.com.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire Analysis

This analysis was created by Alford Land Trust board member Kent Peer-Nous

What do Alford residents think of the issues affecting their town?

The results are in from the Alford Community Development Plan Town Survey. The survey was mailed to all adult Alford residents in May/June 2003 was gathered and the answers from the 155 respondents (the vast majority of whom are Alford registered voters and full time residents) were tallied with some interesting findings about the issues of greatest concern to our fellow residents. Among these are:

- The vast majority of town residents who responded (98%) appear to like Alford as it is and though most would not be opposed to some new development, others seem to be more dead set against it. In fact the most consistently raised concerns on the survey were “inappropriate development” (voiced by 84% of respondents) followed by “loss of farmland” (75% of respondents).
- Maintaining the historic character of Alford’s town center as the focus of town administration and with space for community gatherings was an important issue for 93% of respondents.
- Other major concerns included loss of wildlife habitat, lack of planning, traffic and noise.
- In terms of dealing with potential challenges to Alford’s character, zoning by-laws appear to be a mechanism favored by approximately 96% of respondents to support a variety of preservation purposes including open space, historic character and farming.
- Smaller, although still distinct majorities were willing to consider funding preservation initiatives through direct contributions and even possibly through higher property taxes.
- Slightly less than half (48%) of respondents with indicated a willingness to permanently restrict their own lands through a conservation or agricultural preservation restriction. Another 38% were unsure. These views may, or may not, be related to the relatively low percentage of respondents (only 11%) who indicated that they were “very familiar” with the array of voluntary methods of land preservation available to landowners. Another 52% indicated some familiarity while a full 37% indicated little knowledge about such programs. It appears that an education process explaining the options, advantages and disadvantages of the various programs to assist landowners in achieving financial as well as preservation goals could be of distinct value.

The results of the survey likely did not raise any new concerns that haven’t already been voiced in numerous public and private discussions in Alford and other towns like it across the country. What is perhaps most enlightening about the results in Alford however may be the surprising consistency in the viewpoints held by most respondents particularly with respect to development pressures and the importance placed upon maintaining the beautiful, historic, rural character of their hometown.

Who Responded?

Of a total of approximately 400 surveys mailed to each of the adult members of each Alford household, there were a total of 155 responses. This 39% response rate is an excellent response for any type of survey. However, given that some households (e.g. husband and wife) pooled their responses onto one survey form, the 39% response rate may in fact reflect the views of an even higher proportion of the total community and is, no doubt, an indicator of the importance that members of our community place on the issues addressed in the survey.

(Ques. 5., 15. & 16) What type of people responded to the survey? Interestingly, the vast majority of respondents (approximately 85%) are full time Alford residents and/or Alford registered voters. Approximately 65% of the landowners responding [i.e. excluding the 6 N/A’s] owned parcels of 10 or fewer acres. About 5% of respondents owned more than 100 acres.

What are the Issues of Greatest Concern?

(Ques.1.) 98% of respondents like things as they are and although many would not be opposed to some development, others are opposed to any new development. (Only 1 respondent wanted *more* housing developments while 2 respondents would like *commercial* as well as housing developments.)

(Ques. 2.) The most consistently raised concern was “inappropriate development” (cited by 84% of respondents), followed by “loss of farmland” (75% of respondents). Other concerns frequently cited by residents responding to the survey included loss of wildlife habitat, lack of planning, traffic and noise.

(Ques. 7. & 8.) When the topic of farms was again raised in subsequent questions, the vast majority (over 90%) of survey

participants indicated that they “feel strongly that Alford should preserve its working farms and rural heritage”. When asked if there are any particular parcels of land that should be preserved, again farms headed the list (at 46%) followed by woodlands (34%) scenic vistas (32%) town center and other buildings (26%) and wetlands (25%). (Ques. 13.) In an opposing vein, when asked if there is a particular parcel of land they would *like to see developed*, all the respondents who answered this question said *no*.

How Should these Concerns be Addressed?

(Ques. 17.) When asked about developing zoning by-laws to support a variety of preservation purposes including open space and farming, respondents consistently voted overwhelmingly (96% on average) in support of such by-laws. Only on the topic of “cluster housing” (defined as: grouping new homes closer together within an envelope of conserved open space) did such a proposal face significant potential opposition with 63% of respondents opposed compared to 37% in favor.

(Ques. 9. & 10.) When asked if they would be willing to help fund an initiative to preserve the landmarks they’d cited above, 54% said yes, only 12% said no while approximately 34% were not sure. When separately asked about raising property taxes specifically to finance preservation initiatives that they support, only 37% responded yes while a slightly higher percentage 39% said maybe, and only 24% said no outright.

(Ques. 11.) Given the broad range of programs available to landowners to support land preservation, the survey asked residents about their familiarity with the various land stewardship, conservation and preservation programs. Slightly over half (52%) of respondents indicated some familiarity with the various programs, only 11% indicated that they were very familiar while approximately 37% indicated no familiarity.

(Ques. 12. & 14.) Residents were also questioned about their willingness to consider permanent preservation restrictions on their own land. Of those respondents [with applicable landholdings i.e. excluding 55 N/A’s], 48% answered that they would consider such restrictions while only 14% said they would not. 38% weren’t sure. When asked about development intentions, for those [with applicable landholdings - i.e. excluding 43 N/A’s] only 7% indicated a willingness to subdivide and develop their own land while over 10 times as many (77%) of respondents indicated that they would not!

Other Issues Identified in the Survey

(Ques. 3.) The vast majority of respondents (93%) seem to be in favor of maintaining the location and historic character of Alford’s existing town center as the focus of town administration and with space for community gatherings.

(Ques. 4.) The issue of developing affordable housing appears to be somewhat less resolved in residents’ minds with 62% of respondents opposed outright while 23% are unsure. Only 15% came out directly in favor of affordable housing.

(Ques. 6.) Alford abounds in opportunities for various recreational activities. Alford residents appear to favor quieter, more pastoral activities including walking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing as well as horseback riding, bicycling and fishing and even bird watching, each cited by over 90% of respondents as favored activities. The activities opposed by most respondents: off-road vehicles (opposed by 89% of respondents) and snowmobiling (opposed by a slightly smaller 81% of respondents). On the issue of hunting, respondents appear to be split with 59% in favor and 41% opposed.

Appendix 3: Open Space Poster for Alford

Appendix 4: Open Space article

Article from the December 2003 Alford Newsletter:

By Laurie Sanders, UMass Extension

During the last year Alford has been working on several important planning documents, including a new Open Space & Development Plan. The plan is strictly an advisory document, and will summarize Alford's ecological, historical and recreational resources, identify our conservation priorities, and include a five-year action plan to help us reach our goals and objectives. Town officials can use the plan to help minimize Alford's vulnerability to development activities that are damaging to the environment and our town's character. The completed plan will also enable our town to receive state grants to buy land for conservation and recreation purposes.

For small communities like ours, preparing a plan like this from scratch can be challenging. To help us through the process, Alford is working with staff from UMass Extension's Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Program. The connection with UMass developed after Bryan Boeskin, a planner with the Berkshire Regional Planning Agency, saw a presentation on UMass's Biodiversity Project. Developed by researchers in UMass' Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Biodiversity Project uses state-of-the-art computer technology to identify areas in the Housatonic River watershed that are predicted to have the highest level of biodiversity. Biodiversity is shorthand for biological diversity, and in its broadest sense its definition encompasses all of the variety of life forms and their environments. It turns out that Alford has several areas that, thanks to their large size and connections to other natural areas, are predicted to be among the very best in all of Housatonic watershed for biodiversity. From a planning perspective, knowing where these areas are gives our town another way of identifying and prioritizing land for protection. In the past pinpointing areas of ecological importance really boiled down to a combination of educated guesses and first-hand experience. Although we generally know where important recreation lands or historical features are located, until this point it has been impossible to objectively, quantitatively and comprehensively evaluate areas for biodiversity. This is really brand new tool that has only become available thanks to the power of computers, and we're one of the first towns in the country to actually incorporate ecology into our planning process.

Many people in town have gotten a glimpse of these new ecological planning tools. UMass Extension staff presented an overview of the Biodiversity Project last spring and this summer Extension biologists Laurie Sanders and Kasey Rolih, visited town several times, getting to know our town's special natural areas and recreation lands. UMass Extension is currently developing a draft plan and will be attending the Community Development Plan meeting on December 4th. For more information, contact Billie Best. Funding for the project has come from the state through Executive Order 418.

What is "Open Space"?

- Conservation land
- Farmland
- Scenic views
- Wildlife habitat and corridors
- Ecologically significant natural areas
- Unusual geological features
- Watershed land near reservoirs
- Sites with historical importance
- Canoe and boating access points
- Ballfields, trails, swimming beaches, etc.

These special places may be open to the public or privately-held properties that, through a conservation easement, permanently protect a scenic vista, an important natural area or a valuable cultural resource.

Appendix 5: Mapped & Modeled Natural Communities

Northern hardwood forest – Upland forests dominated by any combination of sugar maple, beech, or birch and which may include several other hard species; conifers less than 25%; may include small patches of Rich Mesic Forest or Forested Seep Communities

Temperate conifer forest – upland forests dominated by any combination of hemlock, white pine, spruce, or fir but may include up to 25% hardwoods; may include the Hemlock Ravine community type.

Mixed transitional forest – upland forests dominated by one or several oak and/or hickory species but that also include other hardwoods; conifers less than 25%; may include unusual community types such as Hickory-Hop hornbeam Forest, or Yellow Oak Calcareous Forest.

Deciduous/mixed forested wetland – forested wetlands that occur on low-gradient landscapes that include a roughly 50-50 mix of hardwoods (red maple, black ash, others) and softwoods, usually hemlock or white pine, but also more rarely tamarack or spruce.

Coniferous forested wetland – conifer-dominated wetlands, including hemlock hardwood swamps, or swamps with high cover of white pine, and the more rare spruce-tamarack bogs; hardwoods not more than 25%.

Old field – open land succeeding to forest, with a mixture of grasses, shrubs, and young trees; usually found on sites that have been cleared and plowed then abandoned.

Grassland – natural or human created and maintained open community dominated by grasses; maintained by mowing or grazing; of conservation interest for grassland bird community

Rocky summits – areas of discontinuous vegetation and exposed rock, including acidic bedrock outcrops or the much rarer calcareous rock outcrop communities.

Shrub swamp – shrub-dominated wetlands on mineral or mucky soils which can be divided into several different types, including alder, button-bush, or blueberry dominated swamps; this category may also include acidic shrub fens or calcareous fens where shrubs dominate.

Emergent marsh – grass or herbaceous-dominated wetlands that are seasonally inundated and permanently saturated; this category may include cattail or phragmites dominated wetlands, but also some of the rarer types, including calcareous fens.

Streams/rivers

High-gradient headwater

Pond

Cliff

Vernal pool – potential and certified; photo interpreted

Appendix 6: Resources

In developing this open space & recreation plan, the following datalayers were used with ArcView. An * indicates availability on MassGIS.

- ◆ Roads *
- ◆ Streams & Rivers *
- ◆ Land Use *
- ◆ National Wetland Inventory map *
- ◆ Flood Hazard *
- ◆ Hazardous Waste Sites *
- ◆ Drinking Water Resources *
- ◆ Topography*
- ◆ Orthophoto *
- ◆ BioMap *
- ◆ Living Waters *
- ◆ Estimated Priority Habitat *
- ◆ Potential & Certified Vernal Pool *
- ◆ UMASS Conservation Assessment Prioritization System (CAPS) (Formerly known as the UMass Housatonic Biodiversity Project) Biodiversity Value
- ◆ Slopes (UMass)
- ◆ Soils
- ◆ Town Boundaries
- ◆ Protected Open Space *
- ◆ Scenic Views *
- ◆ Historical Resources (Generated by Berkshire Regional Planning Commission)
- ◆ Natural Communities (available from UMass)

Other Resources: Public and private organizations with conservation interests in Alford: New England Forestry Foundation, USFS Forest Legacy Program, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, MA Department of Fisheries & Wildlife.

Appendix 7: Letters of Endorsement
from Local Boards & Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
(to be inserted)